

Example 1

REFLECTION ESSAY

As I sit down to reflect on my time in the English major at Berry, I'm roughly three months removed from my last English class. At the moment, I'm in the middle of a semester-long student teaching experience at Armuchee High School, finishing out my Secondary Education minor and preparing for the "real world" of teaching that awaits me after May 10th. At this point, I've got some well-needed temporal, as well as practical, distance between myself and the English classes that were a staple of my time at Berry. Truth be told, I miss them. On a more relevant note, I'm thankful for them. In combination with my own extensive extracurricular studies of literature – e.g. my annual summer reading and research projects with books like *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *Infinite Jest* – my English studies at Berry have not only given me knowledge that I am using right now in the high school classroom but also made me an overall better, more critical reader and writer. The discussions I've had (or rather, given my introverted nature, mostly observed) in class have shown me how to engage with others in good intellectual discussion and how a single text can be approached and analyzed from a variety of angles. The connections I've made with professors, both in and out of the classroom, have shown me much the same while giving me intellectual and personal role models to look up to. In short, my experience as an English major at Berry has been an enriching one, one that has prepared me both professionally and personally for the years after graduation.

Coming to Berry in the fall of 2010, I knew from the start that I was going to be an English major and Secondary Education minor. It wasn't until the spring of 2012, though, that I

was able to start taking “real” English classes: classes that were more a part of the major than of the general education curriculum. One such class, Western Literary Tradition (ENG 337), gave me a thorough understanding of the texts that formed the basis of the literary canon, which is essential to understanding the interaction between texts that makes up Western literature as a whole. Taken at the same time, Introduction to Literary Studies (ENG 240) gave me a solid foundation in the varying critical perspectives that make up literary criticism while also exposing me to a great number of varying literary works, which has been especially helpful as I begin to choose the material I teach to my high school students. Both classes in combination with each other allowed me to enter the critical conversation myself and forced me into a deeper understanding of the works themselves by engaging with literary criticism from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

One can see this explicitly in the literature review done for ENG 240 on Joyce Carol Oates’ “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” It is part of the three main essays at the beginning of this portfolio. As with most of the work done for ENG 240, this writing assignment allowed me to thoroughly examine a story that I had never encountered before. By reading numerous critical pieces, I became more aware of the vast critical conversation that can take place around even a single short story. By having to synthesize those pieces into one whole, I engaged more deeply with the story itself, judging the persuasive arguments of the literary criticism I was reading against my own personal thoughts about the story and reconciling the two through my writing.

My final essay for Western Literary Tradition, written as the literature review and included in the portfolio appendix, forced me to look at a conversation separate from criticism:

the conversation between fictional texts throughout history. By examining the ever-changing nature of narrative in major texts separated by hundreds of years, I was able to see how a text responds to the others that came before it, whether that response is conscious – e.g. the invocation of the epic journey, as in *Don Quixote*, Dante's *Inferno*, and *The Aeneid*, going all the way back to *The Odyssey* – or unconscious, e.g. how the figure of the hero changes from *The Aeneid* through Mann's *Death in Venice* and Kundera's *Immortality*. Seeing this “conversation” between texts that makes up the canon was very important for me to encounter at the start of my time in the English major, and it's an idea that I worked with continually throughout the next few years.

In the fall of 2012, I enrolled in Studies in Southern Literature: Southern Women Writers (ENG 432), which was a major turning point in my studies. While the other classes I was in – either previously or concurrently with ENG 432 – had challenged me and exposed me to literature I was unfamiliar with, ENG 432 was by far the most challenging and most rewarding class that I took as an English major at Berry. The material we read engaged directly with my burgeoning interest in Southern literature: I had read Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* that summer, as well as McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (which sort of counts). Our readings in the class – including novels like *The Color Purple*, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and the short stories of Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty – gave me the chance to thoroughly explore not just the concept of Southern identity but how that identity is intertwined with concepts of Southern femininity, race, and economics. The writing-intensive nature of the course was ultimately what made those “explorations” so thorough and rewarding. Dr. Watkins required daily responses in email form from each of us regarding the day's reading, as well as

longer response papers every few weeks, three of which are included in the portfolio appendix. Such response papers were nothing new for me: I did several each semester for other classes, and they were always helpful in forcing me to engage with the text on a critical level. However, the frequency of the responses required for ENG 432 made me engage with the material on a critical level *almost every day*, which helped me in my critical reading. It also made me write a *lot*, formally and informally, which strengthened my writing abilities and reinforced the engagement I was having with the material on a daily basis.

This class was also the reason why I ended up presenting at the Southern Writers Southern Writing (SWSW) graduate conference several months later in July 2013. For my term paper, I wrote on the connection between Flannery O'Connor and James Joyce through their use of epiphany as a key component of their short stories. With this paper, one can see my continued reflection on the conversation between texts and writers that was so important in Western Literary Tradition from the past semester. I believe the paper speaks for itself: it was, I thought at the time, my first "major" piece of writing and, further, my first piece of writing to show some actual *insight*, small as it may have been. With encouragement from Dr. Watkins and some revision and editing, I submitted it to the SWSW conference. It was accepted. And so I found myself in Oxford, Mississippi – home of William Faulkner – in July. This experience was crucial for me as an actual student of literature and as a general bibliophile. Regarding the former, it was my introduction to a wider world of academia, specifically graduate studies, and showed me that it was a world I could possibly do somewhat well in. Regarding the latter, I found myself emotionally and intellectually moved throughout the time there, as we visited Faulkner's grave, his home at Rowan Oak, and other noteworthy places like the famous Square

Books. Being in a place where some of my all-time favorite novels were written and actually standing at the literal places mentioned in them was both surreal and exciting. Our explorations and journeys out into places like the Mississippi Delta only further excited me, emotionally and intellectually, by giving me a broader idea of The South as a whole and the people that live there and by causing me to reflect on it all is reflected in the writings that make up Southern literature.

2013 in general was a good year, including my classes in both semesters. In spring, I took Dr. Dasher's Young Adult Literature class, which exposed me to many new YA books and made me revisit those I had read already. The class also helped me start to think about the practicalities of teaching literature in a high school setting. How will I teach certain books? Will I even *be able* to teach certain books? How do I deal with students from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of issues? These are basic questions, of course, but Dr. Dasher's writing prompts and in-class discussion, in combination with the field experience I was doing at Rome High School at the time, made it all seem a lot more real at that point. In addition, my writing at that time had started to get out of hand, stylistically: it started to consist more of long, over-written, and unwieldy sentences than ones that got my point across in an understandable but thorough way. To be honest, I have struggled with that tendency for the past four years and still do. The comments I received from Dr. Dasher in YA Lit. helped me pin down some of the worst characteristics of my writing and prompted me to try to improve my writing in the areas it needed most. The essay I wrote on John Green's work, included as part of the three main essays in the portfolio, admittedly shows some of those characteristics, although I am still proud of the critical readings done for that piece.

So, with that and the SWSW conference in my mind, I entered my final semester of English classes wanting to put forth my best writing and best analytical work. My time in Dr. Taylor's Shakespeare class gave me several different assignments that addressed different areas of Shakespeare studies, all of which were quite fun. My personal favorite – an edited edition of a selection from *Hamlet*, including appendices and editing rationale – is included in the portfolio appendix. My other class, Dr. Bucher's Gay and Lesbian Literature, reminded me very much of my time in Southern Women Writers. Both classes required daily responses to the material, and my daily writing for Dr. Bucher had the same effect on me as it did in Southern Women Writers, forcing me to engage with the material on a deeper level on a daily basis. As in Southern Women Writers, Gay and Lesbian Literature also challenged me to look at big concepts – such as gender roles, the homosexual experience in a heteronormative society, the historical treatment of homosexuality in America and elsewhere– through a literary lens. Much of the writing done for the class was from a specific theoretical viewpoint, including my final term paper on performativity in *Angels in America*.

By the fall semester of 2013, I was an experienced critical reader that was consciously trying to better my writing in many ways. During that semester, I felt that my work for Gay and Lesbian Literature was the best writing I had produced up until that point. I still feel that way, and the term paper I wrote, which is included as one of my three main essays in the portfolio, is possibly the essay I am most proud of. It was not only one of my few attempts at writing from a specific theoretical viewpoint but also a close reading that I felt was actually insightful – something I've really only felt once before, as mentioned. Again, the process of engaging critically with the readings on a daily basis helped me with both my analytical reading skills and

my ability to put those analyses into words in a clear way. All of this, including the discussions in class and Dr. Bucher's perceptive comments, helped me produce my favorite and best work.

So, that brings me, for the most part, to the present. Have I grown as a reader and writer? Yes, that is for certain. Am I prepared for the professional realities of high school teaching? Yes, that is certain as well. My English classes at Berry have made me a well-rounded student of literature and given me knowledge that I will call upon daily as a high school teacher. My professors and classes, most of which aren't even mentioned here, have been flexible enough to adapt to my pre-existing interests while also showing me new areas and subjects to explore and become passionate about. I am not sure what the next few years hold: whether I will continue to teach high school or go on to graduate school to study literature. However, the education I have received at Berry and the personal support I have received from my English professors assures me that I will be successful, no matter which I choose. And while the former is certainly important, it's the latter – the relationships I've made with the faculty here, the discussions we've had, and the support I've received – that will stick with me. My time as an English major at Berry has allowed me to hone my skills and explore my interests in a way that has always been both intellectually challenging and an immense pleasure.

Thank you.

Example 2

REFLECTION ESSAY

Four years of English classes at Berry College total thirty-six credit hours. Now I am asked to compose this reflective essay to answer the question: How does “36” translate into writing development? My development as a writer has followed a natural progression. Initially, my writing always took a very safe route. I only tackled topics I comprehended fully. Through my time at Berry, I have been challenged to write about things I did not understand. Sitting down to write an assignment began to take much longer. I could not sit down with an idea and compose freely. Progressively, I would begin an assignment and draft something shallow, but the initial composition triggered thoughts that would develop after I shut my computer down for the night. Revelations would occur in the moments between sleep and awake, between rinse and repeat, between stir and heat. Some of these mind-blowing thoughts would slip away before I could jot them down; others began foundational pieces of my work. Overall, Berry’s English department has been not only a venue for me to grow and develop as a writer, but it has also been a supplier of endless food for thought and frustration, but, many times, joy.

It might be relevant to explain that my first English professor at Berry was Dr. Troy Gregory in a class dedicated to the study of literature of carnival and rebellion. Half way through the semester, Gregory asked students to compose an attack on him (p.51). We were challenged to criticize as many aspects of his character as possible in a personal address. This task was difficult in the beginning, but it was not for lack of material. There is plenty to say about Gregory, but this is not the kind of writing with which I was familiar. This assignment forced me out of the safe comfortable shell I had wrote in through high school. The personal attack started the movement, but Dr. Gregory required us to continue the momentum and write about topics I had never

considered. Reading “Midsummer Night’s Dream” was a completely different experience with Dr. Gregory. I was enlightened to the fact that, to quote Dr. Dasher, “all literature is about sex and death.” The entire course culminated in the paper “The Autonomous Woman” after I was advised to watch *Dangerous Beauty*. The movie follows the scandalous life of a courtesan who values the power and education her position lends, but desires a monogamous relationship with her courtly lover. It is a rebellious movie in many aspects, to say the least. In my final paper, I synthesized the movie and all of the course’s reading material. Though I have always been a thorough synthesizer, “The Autonomous Woman” turbulently connects all the pieces we read. It is not smooth, but the various connections, somewhat ineffectively articulated, demonstrate the passion found in relating so many interesting texts. This paper was the first of many at Berry that, when I got into the passionate heat of writing, I wished I had more time to devote to my work. Had I the chance to resubmit the paper, it may have had a clearer flow. One paper I was given the opportunity and drive to improve was an analysis of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (p.38) in Dr. Dasher’s class. This paper I expanded and enhanced into a presentation, complete with prezi, for the student symposium of 2014. These assignments I credit with opening my mind and breaking me out of thinking within a safe conservative bubble of thought.

Through the next couple classes I grew in my skills to communicate the connections in my mind into more eloquently composed sentences, paragraphs, and papers. Then, in English 240, the class lived up to its name. In the “Introduction to Literary Studies,” I learned of the different approaches to analyzing literature. Jumping into many of the perspectives is impossible. Dr. Trolander’s assignment (p.16) to understand literature through a psychological perspective taught me the extensive research required in this type of writing. Significant research must be performed in the specific field while also relating back to the literature. The literature review (p.7) I conducted for Dr. Whelan’s 240 class is the start for any good paper. After diving into the

literature on a text in a specific field, one can begin to construct their own analysis and subsequent claim. From this assignment, I learned the time-consuming bookwork it takes to truly build a foundation of understanding behind one's thesis and supports. As the student coming out of Dr. Gregory's rebellious class, I was provided with the literature other researchers and writers have done before and my new wild streak called all of it into question. The authoritative voice of a published researcher no longer held 100% in my mind. In my work, I began to question others' ideas and pose alternative ones rather than simply restating the conclusions to which they had arrived. My writing became more than it had been before – more than the safe affirmation of another's thoughts simply with a personal eloquence added. I took chances and made statements I could not fully support, but I felt they were true.

Although this portion of my writing development is not the most impressive, it was an important part of the writing I would later come to produce. I understood my theories were not well supported. However, I still yearned to write out of the safe zone. Understanding the writing process through Dr. Diller's Principles of Writing Pedagogy gave me the permission to use writing for what I had always needed and had recently begun to do. I began to use writing to discover my own thoughts and to piece together parts of my own theories that I was initially been unable to articulate. Using writing to discover was an amazing tool. Too many times in high school I was under the impression that good ideas would come from knowledge and thought, but that they did not require writing to be sorted out. In college, professors explained this, but I was too set in my way to understand exactly what they were encouraging me to do. Finally driven to the process facing abstract ideas, I could no longer get by in writing the simple ideas that first came to me. Dr. Tenger's assignment (p.28) to synthesize three texts from widely different times and places is a prime example of when I used writing to discover. Beginning the paper, I had no clear direction. I started with an outline that identified thin similarities and worked from there. In

assignments like this, writing became more than a way to publish and present knowledge; for me it has become a manner in which to process and gain new knowledge. In this way I find writing more useful for the individual.

Often, however, writing is not meant for the liberation of an individual mind, but it is meant to be shared with others for their benefit as well. The track my mind follows when writing to discover is nowhere near what a member of the audience would need in order to follow points logically. Today, I write to discover then rewrite to present. Although my plans for the future are to be a teacher, the skill to clearly articulate personal logic in a way others can understand is extremely important. Dr. Diller's teaching portfolio assignment (p.53) required me to consider my concept of the classroom from my students' perspective. Not only did this help me create a document I can use in my job search, it also helped me to write to discover and clarify my own thoughts in regards to how I would conduct my classroom. Additionally, I hope to get my Masters in the Art of Teaching and my Specialists degree. The course work for these degrees will require much writing and I will be able to use the foundation Berry has given me to move forward in my career. Lastly, I plan to engage in Educational Leadership through professional organizations and professional development initiatives. I plan to read and apply research in my classroom, but I would also like to contribute to the field as well by publishing my own work.

Overall, these four years have been a journey in so many ways. I have grown as a person, as a think, and also as a writer. Berry has truly inspired me to be a lifelong learner. For me, as an English major from our department, to be a lifelong learner would not be complete without the reading to encounter new information and ideas and also the writing in which to engage, muddle through, digest, and recreate everything in my own understanding.

Example 3

REFLECTION ESSAY

Becoming an English major requires a certain patience with having one's life choices questioned. Fielding interrogations from friends, family, and random strangers is just part of the literary life, creating the kind of quick wit and evasive verbal maneuvering skills useful for navigating the world. Yet the questions are valuable in and of themselves too, as answering unanswerable questions is the fundamental project of the humanities. So when confronted with an uncle (and everyone has that uncle) wanting to know, "What is it you English majors do, precisely?" it pays to think deeply about the answer. Finding my own explanation for the what and why of literary study has structured my journey as an English major and a scholar, a journey I hope to continue for the rest of my life. And while there is no definitive answer to the question of purpose, working to find one has developed me as a reader, writer, and person in ways impossible to achieve otherwise.

Entering college, at least for me, was less a triumphant progress than an unceremonious reminder of just how much I had to learn in the next four years. I came to Berry College already passionate about writing and reading but too steeped in the high school five-paragraph essay to be an impressive scholar. I had to relearn writing by breaking out of my old patterns and finding something new. Surprisingly, the classes outside my major started this process. My status as an Honors student brought me into contact with two excellent thinkers, Dr. Brian Carroll and Dean Thomas Kennedy, within my first semester at Berry. While it was a trial by fire to survive their rigorous classes, these two professors forced me to think deeply about the structure and content of my writing. In weekly assignments for Dr. Carroll, I learned to avoid vague language while also producing work on a consistent basis. Meanwhile, Dean Kennedy's essays required attention

to detail, argumentative clarity, and the effective synthesis of important issues. In rising to the expectations of these two professors, my once formulaic and vague essays became sharper and freer at the same time as my mind did. Though both these courses were outside my academic specialty, they paved the way for growth within my major by shattering mental barriers left over from high school.

Releasing my old writing habits was only the beginning, however. My next lessons, learned in my first English and Rhetoric classes, involved the definitive English major skills: research and interpretation. Judging literature based upon surface-level characteristics or personal opinion was no longer considered sufficient basis for an argument, as it had been in high school. Thus, in writing my first essays within my major, I had to wend my way through the jungle of literary criticism, theoretical frameworks, and research databases and make my own judgements about what I found there. My preliminary attempts seem somewhat juvenile now; expecting to find a definitive “truth” in the library, as I then hoped, was an exercise in futility. However, my forays into research did transform my understandings of reading, writing, and learning. Rather than passively receiving knowledge, I had search for it, wrestle with it, and condense it into intelligible form. Perhaps my best production from this time period is the included literature review of critical responses to William Faulkner’s short story “A Rose for Emily”. I was confused by the story’s hints of necrophilia and social subversion and so I hoped to find its “true” meaning with the help of the critics I analyzed. But the critics had no definitive interpretation of “A Rose,” forcing me to reconcile various perspectives with my own understanding of the story. I had to trust my own judgement in the end, which was both terrifying and liberating. More to the point, this project provided an experience of fundamental aspects of literary study, an experience which enthralled me infinitely more than I expected.

After discovering the infinite possibilities of literary interpretation, my confidence and interest in literary studies developed by leaps and bounds. I realized I enjoyed scholarship for its own sake; writing about writing in this way helped clarify the world I lived in and connected me to others miles and centuries away. My discovery of feminist critical perspectives in my early years at Berry fueled this attitude. Some of my best work in my first two years of college drew heavily upon feminist thought, as feminist explanations of the world seemed close to the definitive “truth” I had always longed for. However, as my close reading skills improved and I read outside the canon of “classic” novels in my various English courses, I found my narrow focus on a universal experience of gender was far from accurate. In particular, the modernist and postmodernist works I encountered in junior year seemed too multivocal to analyze with simple binaries of male power versus female oppression. Reality, even fictional reality, could not be contained within the simplistic personal theory I’d built for myself. Again, I had to find something new, a way to embrace the variety of identities and possibilities both within and outside of literature. So I paid more attention to other elements: class, race, sexuality, and the infinite other permutations which shaped depictions of gender. I also began acknowledging the importance of genre, structure, and historical context in interpreting literary works, an understanding which enriched my analysis by taking me deeper into the works I read. I still accessed the world through literature, but that world had expanded.

Close contact with professors inside and outside class particularly encouraged this expansion. Once I expressed interest in scholarship for its own sake, I found faculty willing to serve as mentors and support my evolving academic work. The most notable of these were Dr. Zeynep Tenger, who first exposed me to feminist theory; Dr. Thomas Dasher, who encouraged my reading outside the canon and advised me through numerous crises; Dr. Mark Taylor, who introduced me to the beauties of structure and genre; and Dr. Christina Bucher, whose incisive

editing and nuanced reading perspectives were inspirational. Yet the entire English department contributed to my academic evolution, supporting me as I cobbled together new critical perspectives from the ashes of my simplistic understanding of feminism.

The first product of this growth spurt was the included analysis of Frank Norris's naturalist novel, *Mcteaugh*. Though the novel's scientific racism and complicated attitude toward human agency first caught my eye, I found connections between the structure of the work and the science supporting it which deepened my understanding without distracting from the novel. Rather than diminishing the role either historical context or the work itself, I could think of the two as intertwined. For once, I had assembled a holistic theory of my own which actually worked. From then on, I became a more careful reader of both literature and literary criticism. Instead of reading only the surface matter of plot or social context, I searched for the connections between structure and society to find deeper layers of meaning. My growth as a scholar accelerated after this point; I produced work I'm still proud of by following my new trajectory. The most recent example of this is the attached paper on Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's *Purple Hibiscus*. Reading the book's structure as an essential reflection of the themes helped me go beyond the plot and understand how the lessons of *Purple Hibiscus* revealed complex truths about the colonized world. I had a similar experience with the included essay on Henry James' *The Bostonians*. While the literary value of the novel an important part of this paper, the connections I found between *The Bostonians* and gender ideology in the society which produced it added exponentially to my understanding. These papers not only encouraged increasingly nuanced theoretical perspectives; they also furthered my original project of connecting with others through literature. By addressing both the social and structural details of the works I read, I found I could forge deeper links between life and art than possible otherwise.

Looking back on these experiences leads me to consider my next steps. All the transitions and discoveries which marked my undergraduate years have taken me in a new direction career-wise. Though I originally intended to become a librarian, living the life of the mind for four years was a revelation to me. The joys and frustrations of literary scholarship gave me such fulfillment that I can't bear the thought of leaving them behind. Thus, I've come to the conclusion academia is the niche for me. The way I see it, reading and writing can make a real difference by showing students the world is more complex and beautiful than everyday life would indicate. I feel teaching literature on the collegiate level will provide both a fulfilling career and way to spread my personal delight in learning to others. To that end, I have applied to eight English literature Ph.D programs and hope to start the next phase of my education in the fall. The writing, reading, and thinking skills I learned at Berry will be crucial here, as academics will literally become my life in the years to come. However, I feel much more prepared for life in general than I did four years ago. Not only have I gained new perspectives on literature and writing, I have also learned an enormous amount about myself and my capabilities. Perhaps most important of all, I have learned truth is too complex to hold within a single theory or even a single book. And in this, I suppose I have an answer to that starting question: "What is it English majors do?" We look for truth, and it is in the search itself that we find it.

Example 4

Reflection Essay

I entered Berry College undecided upon a major and open to exploring opportunities in every department. During my sophomore year, I declared a biology major and creative writing minor, as I had received a creative writing scholarship that required me to major or minor in English or creative writing, yet I was interested in pursuing a degree in infectious disease epidemiology. However, I was still unhappy – I dreaded looking ahead at the difficult and frankly uninteresting physics and chemistry courses necessary for a biology major’s graduation. Thankfully, I met with Dr. Dasher and Dr. Meek not long after my declaration, and their combined effort ushered me into my first English and creative writing courses at Berry.

In college, not just one door but an entire hallway opened, a coliseum of portals into other dimensions of learning crossed over and melted into one another, leading me to the realization that my interests – creative writing and the biological sciences – could not and would not be kept separate. Berry College’s liberal arts general education requirements kept me moving through disciplines. While initially torn between my first love and a “useful” major which would appease my parents, I declared both worlds as a creative writing major and biology minor.

My entry into the world of creative writing was a rather rough start. This course introduced me to four major literary genres – poetry, short stories, creative nonfiction, and the ten-minute play – and outlined the basics of writing within each. The pieces I produced in each genre were image-rich but not nearly grounded enough for the reader to full comprehend exactly what was taking place. The short story, titled “The Girl in Black” and included in the attached appendix (p. 73-75), presented a surrealistic world where anthropomorphic animals interact with the protagonist, a girl, aflame, in dark clothing. Though intriguing, the plot was nonexistent and

left the reader vexed. I also produced a poem in a similar manner. Until this point, I had only written short stories, and the very thought of writing a poem made my hands shake. “July 5th” (p. 76-77) recounted my summers of working at a giant fireworks store in Tennessee and perpetually missing Independence Day celebrations with family and friends. Again, the piece lacks enough grounding information to tether the reader to its reality, so the world of the poem is difficult to imagine. However, the poem is brimming with literary techniques learned in ENG 250. For example, the lines “Elbows flush / against glass counters, home to a web / of cracks, opposite alabaster / smiles plastered...” possesses examples of strong line breaks, enjambment, alliteration, assonance, and consonance.

It was in ENG 301, Intermediate Creative Writing: Poetry, that I began taking poetry seriously, as both a literary genre and one in which I might could work. I wrote our first exercise, “The Hill” (p. 80) and shocked myself (as well as Dr. Meek, I think) with what I composed. My success with this prose poem was likely the catalyst in my becoming a poet. I produced several other good poems in this course, focusing intently on consistent imagery, different styles of poetry within the genre (persona, prose, narrative, etc.), and continuing to acquire knowledge about the craft of the line. My favorite poem written during this course was a stream of consciousness narrative poem entitled “A Hundred Confined and Sweaty Stormclouds” (p. 13-14). It was during the freewriting stages of this piece that I experienced the illusive “flow” so coveted by creative writers. The piece possesses just two end-stopped lines in the speaker’s rambling, heavily-enjambed account of intolerance at a Tampa amusement park. The piece is woven with references to Florida weather, wildlife, and food, which creates an experience of place for the reader as he or she moves through the poem. I have also included “Concerning Our Grandmother” (p. 15-16) and “Draco” (p. 17-18), which both experiment with white space and enjambed stanzas in a way I feared before taking this course. It was also during this course in the

Spring of 2015 that one of these poems was selected for the Gordon Barber Memorial poetry award. I, as a sophomore, was among several very talented senior creative writing majors awarded at the annual Honors Convocation.

Dr. Donnelly's ENG 302: Intermediate Creative Writing: Fiction course proved to be a challenging course, as my prose writing had not had a chance to develop since taking ENG 250. Many of the pieces I produced missed full story arcs or seemed parts of larger stories waiting within the recesses of my mind; however, one piece stands out as exemplary of my grasp of crafting compelling dialogue. "Only Man" (p. 19-25) is a surrealistic short story in which the protagonist journeys across a desert to discover an elderly man living in the hollowed-out head of an ancient, fallen statue. The paragraphs of summary in the piece are purposefully jarring and perplexing, as the intent was to fully iterate the intensity of the environment in which the protagonist resides. Consequently, there must be some concise dialogue to balance the overwhelming description in the piece. "Only Man" demonstrates my understanding of this balance and exemplifies this concept.

In the Advanced Creative Writing courses, ENG 470 and 471, I produced some of my best work yet. Dr. Meek's advanced poetry course provided exercises and writing prompts very useful for generating ideas; however, they were less restrictive in their criteria than those in ENG 301, so I and my peers had more freedom to explore the concepts to which we were being introduced. In this course, I entered the world of quite difficult hybrid poetry. I learned to take that which I poem is saying for what it is, in the world of the poem, rather than to try and make sense of it in my own world. The poets we read experimented with found poetry, extreme condensing, and white space, and I was inspired to use these techniques in some of my own writing. My favorite poem I have written to date, "Anuyoga" (p. 26-27), was the last poem I wrote for this course. Again, I experienced the illusory "flow" so envied by countless writers,

and produced a poem requiring little revision after line breaks. This piece went on to win first prize in the 2016 Southern Literary Festival's poetry competition and was published in the festival chapbook.

ENG 470 also required students to do a response project (p.107-114) on a hybrid poet by doing a close reading of many of his or her poems, attempting to imitate his or her style, and finally using techniques learned from the poet in our own writing. I selected Rae Armantrout, of whom I was not a fan before my investigation of her work, and was schooled by the female master of condensed poetry. Her poems, often only a few lines long, pack a powerful punch in their double meanings and use of negative space. The knowledge I gained is evident in "Anuyoga"'s condensed lines and stanzas and straightforward language. These techniques are contradictory to my past poems, which often contained longer lines with much "filler" language – my attempt at achieving the heightened language I thought poetry ought to contain. Another example piece is "Discovered," included in the appendix on page 106, a highly-condensed and rather disturbing found poem produced from an exercise assigned by Dr. Meek. At the time of writing, I did not fully understand the message behind the words I had chosen nor the negative space used, but there was some divine feeling that the piece was completed. After analyzing the piece further in class, my peers and Dr. Meek aided me in understanding the significance of, at first, not understanding my own piece – sometimes, the muse directs and the poet simply must listen and learn.

ENG 471 extended my understanding of theme, tone, and character development in short stories. Though prose is still not what I consider my strong point, I produced "On High" (p. 36-44), of which I am extremely proud. The reader is able to experience the full arc of the relationship between the protagonist and her hippie lover, which is a difficulty I had with plot in the past. Additionally, I allowed my poetic voice to flourish once again in the paragraphs of

summary and scene, yet it was restrained enough to leave the reader grounded and concise descriptions without becoming too bland. This piece is set to be published in the Sigma Tau Delta *Rectangle*, an international creative writing journal, at the end of March 2017.

The capstone creative writing courses, ENG 475 and 495, challenged me to integrate that which I learned in my biology courses. Writing and Community and Writing About Place, which I took in the spring and fall of 2016, respectively, though partly workshop based, were especially relevant to my career interests, as they provided me with not only knowledge about but also firsthand experience with organizing informal creative writing workshops and intensive research and writing about specific locations. In ENG 475, less focus was placed on writing creatively than how writing can be used to help communities. It was during this course that I participated in the facilitation of Utterances, an informal creative writing workshop for high school students of Rome, Georgia, held weekly at the Sarah Hightower Memorial Library in downtown Rome.

In ENG 495, Writing About Place, my writing turned out to be more creative prose than I anticipated. However, I think it was in this course that I solidified my prose voice. The voice is poetic, yet unlike the voice in poems, which can change depending upon from which perspective I speak, this prose voice is consistent throughout the works I produced. It is eloquent, lilting, and occasionally overwhelming, which is something I plan to restrain in future works. It was in this course that I produced my exemplary work (and my most favorite work so far).

Included in the portfolio is an exercise, “Apertures” and “Dearth” (p. 45-51), and my final course project, called “Succession” (p. 52-64). In “Succession,” I examined various disturbed spaces, either because of natural disaster or human intervention, which I have experienced personally. Place has been a theme in many of my past writings, but this course allowed me to delve deeper into the experience of place and how that may be translated from person to person through art, specifically creative writing, in order to convey a larger message

about the place (or places) in question. “Apertures” makes an appearance later in “Succession,” which is the reason I thought to include it before the longer work. “Succession,” in accordance with the title, examines several disrupted landscapes and what came after the disturbances, a culmination of heightened, poetic language, extensive research of place, and autobiographical elements.

I will continue writing through graduate school and once I begin my career, and I will use that writing to benefit the communities I visit while working with infectious diseases. I have always wanted to travel, though I have never had the privilege, and working outside the country as an epidemiologist will undoubtedly inspire much creative prose and poetry about the places and people with whom I speak and work. I am particularly interested in working in Hispanic countries, where I will improve upon my knowledge of Spanish language and the variety of Hispanic cultures in Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean. Informal creative writing or oral storytelling workshops will help participants process emotions and cope in tumultuous times. For example, in the aftermath of an epidemic, workshop participants will enjoy recalling positive memories of lost loved ones while working through emotions felt during the epidemic. My creative writing major has equipped me with the skills and knowledge necessary to generate my own writing, create workshops and exercises for afflicted populations, and most importantly, to connect on a much deeper level with those whom I am helping than a student in the hard sciences likely would.

The Global Health programs at the graduate schools to which I am applying are the culmination of my career interests: to work with a global focus, allowing me both to employ and further cultivate the ethical intelligence and interdisciplinary knowledge I have accumulated during my undergraduate studies, to be culturally aware and become familiar with the people with whom I work, and to write about and with those people, helping them cope with disease in

more ways than can halting an epidemic or administering vaccines alone. I am particularly interested in exploring opportunities to cooperate with programs and nonprofit organizations in the surrounding communities, as well as with global partners of the university, as part of my professional enhancement, and these programs' proximity to and direct involvement with organizations such as these will supply me with the opportunity to do so.