The Only Way Forward

MICHAEL REED

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishdiss

Part of the Fiction Commons, and the Poetry Commons
The Only Way Forward

Michael Reed

Master’s Thesis

April 3, 2018
Finding my Way

I am walking through the maze of vendors, not knowing where I am going, or where I am at, but also not having a care in the world. I look around and see so many faces, all different than my own. I finally feel like an outsider for once. I am the one everyone is staring at. I find my way pointing at a breakfast wrap that I have been watching this guy make for a couple of minutes now, I hold up my finger and say “one, I want one of those,” knowing too well he does not understand what I am saying, but hopefully knows what I mean. When we exchange the money, and I take my first bite, I am in heaven, it is the best thing I have tasted in a long time walking through the market that will be awake all night. A sudden feeling of sadness crosses my mind, and I think about tomorrow, knowing I am going to have to leave this great country of Taiwan. But I push the thought out of my mind, as I continue walking, enjoying every single moment.

Talking about my poetry since I came into the program, I wanted to describe how my journey began. I wrote poetry in school growing up, but never really as a habit until my junior year of my undergraduate degree. I had a professor that engaged with me on a more personal level that got me interested in pursuing my emotions and experiences in a poetic way. I began writing poetry and enjoyed it, so I pursued my poetry into a masters degree to try to learn and grow as a poet.

Charles Bukowski is one of my all time favorite poets. I learned about him in my first undergraduate poetry class. He is one of the reasons I love poetry so much. He taught me that I
can write about whatever I want. I can write about the crazy things if I so desire. He once said, “An intellectual says a simple thing in a hard way. An artist says a hard thing in a simple way.” This made so much sense to me and how I like to take the hard things in life and write them in a simple poem that can hold so much meaning.

I never understand the poets who wrote things that never make any sense. The poets who write to try to confuse people, where the readers just find the information “interesting” because it is hard to understand what the poet is trying to say. I never write like that because I want the readers to understand what I am saying. I want them to think, but I don’t want them to not understand what I am saying so they move on and forget about the poem seconds later.

I learned so much from the poets here at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Kwame Dawes was one of the first professors and poets I was able to engage with once I started my master’s degree. I was terrified. He was one of the smartest and well-written poets I have ever encountered. I learned so many little things about not only writing poetry, but also about my own poetry when taking classes with him. The next poet I was able to encounter here was Grace Bauer. She taught me so much, especially within the topics of form and types of poetry. She was able to encourage me to experiment with my own poetry, even though some of the poems I wrote were complete failures. There were so many poets that I worked with as my peers that I was able to learn and grow from that I loved and am thankful for every moment.

“One doesn’t sit down to write poetry; it emerges. But one does sit down to work up a poem, which is a specific composition, written in response to a long tradition of examples and laws and instincts. It is a peculiar kind of verbal contraption, with all sorts of pulleys and wires and mirrors, fueled by both delight and wisdom,” J.D. McClatchy says. This is one quote I absolutely love regarding the process of writing poetry.
One amazing thing I was able to learn from during my undergraduate degree, was a program every semester for both poets and fiction writers, where the authors would come in and read and discuss their work and you were able to interact with them, and ask questions, and learn from them. I found this extremely beneficial in my growth as a poet and fiction writer.

One thing that I struggle with is detail. I struggled with putting detail into my poetry, and I feel like now that I know that, I am consciously able to write knowing I need to do that. I think have been working on that, and my poetry has gotten better because of this. I love all of the comments of my peers and am able to learn from their comments and their own work as well. I think every single student I have worked with had something good to add to the conversation, and I was not only able to learn from the professor, but also the students as well. There were many of my peers who have influenced me, but one student stands out in particular. Her name was Daniele Pringle. She came into the master’s program with me and started with minimal experience like me, she befriended me and helped me feel confident in my own writing. I always loved the thoughts and ideas she had for me and my work and I always loved reading hers. I hope to stay in touch with her since she is such an amazing poet.

Over the course of my time here at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, I have learned so much regarding to the types, forms, and ways to write poetry. I have learned so much and I have experimented many times in my own poetry, stretching the boundaries.

When it comes to fiction writing, I have less experience in the art of writing fiction, as I have taken many more poetry classes, participated in many poetry workshops and slams, and talked to many more poets than I have ever done for fiction.
I started writing fiction when I was in elementary school. I would write short stories, and I would also start on longer stories, that I worked on for years to come. I did not start writing legitimate stories to further my degree until I was working on my English degree for my undergraduate work.

I have only ever written short fiction and nonfiction stories and only recently have started working towards writing a novel. This last semester I learned so much in writing with a novel as the end goal. Jonis Agee was my professor that I was able to learn so much from, as well as work on my stories in class. I learned more about character development and introductions and so many more things that are not present in poetry. She was able to open my mind about so many things I did not think about before.

I tend to write young adult fiction when it comes to writing my novel. With this being said, many of my favorite authors are young adult authors that capture my attention, and keep me interested throughout the entire book. They are inspirations to me, so I can aspire to be a published young adult author one day.

Rick Riordan once said, “It’s not easy. I got lots of rejections when I first started out. If you want to write, you have to believe in yourself and not give up. You have to do your best to practice and get better.” He is one of my favorite young adult authors that made me realize that even the best-selling authors started out with rejections at first and made me realize that I just have to keep writing. All of my professors say the same thing, and it is something that I have taken to heart now: Just Keep Writing.

I absolutely love fiction writing and I think that there are many authors and mentors that have influenced my writing over time. They have also influenced my reading skills to not only
read for pleasure or knowledge, but also to read as a writer, which I did not really learn how to do until recently when my writing took off.

Why do I write is a question that I want to go into more detail with. I want to explain my reasoning behind it and why I chose to start, and why I will continue to write in the future. I started writing in elementary school, just like everyone else, learning my letters, practicing and getting better at it throughout elementary school. In about 3rd grade, I got my first journal and that was when I took off writing. I wrote in my journal every single day for the next five years. I didn’t really write about a whole lot, but I wrote. Once high school hit, I didn’t write everyday anymore, but only here and there when I had time between my busy days and nights as an active student.

I did start learning how to write research and analytical papers in place of my creative side of my writing, and sadly it over took my creative side until my poetry class at Wayne State College with Professor Chad Christenson who piqued my interest again in my creative writing side and I wanted to pursue more creative writing than the analytical writing again and I made that happen.

Still writing the analytical papers, I was able to write for pleasure again and find joy in it, being able to express my emotions on paper, and bring joy to those who read my work. The biggest reason I write today is so I can put my emotions and feelings and struggles down on paper. It is a form of therapy for me. Of course, I want to be a published author someday, but I also want to always have the joy in writing, even if I am the only person to ever read the poem or story I write.
I learn through classes how to become a better writer creatively and that is a big reason why I joined the master’s program, so I could take more classes and become a better writer, by being taught by writers themselves. Writing is something I have done for almost 20 years now. It is something I have done every day of my life, and it is something that most people do every day, whether it be for work, school, or a simple text message. Like one of my favorite authors and also almost every professor I’ve had have said, Just Keep Writing!

Below I have my introductory poem for my creative writing thesis. It is a poem that I wrote in one of my first poetry classes. It is a poem where we were given a list of words and we had to write a poem with every single word listed in the poem. I found this exercise fun and entertaining, but still holding a lot of meaning in it as well and that is something I want to emphasizing my writing statement. Authors should write what they want to write about and have fun while doing it. I write with meaning behind every single piece of work I do, whether the reader gets my meaning or not, is something I do not mind, but it is something I do to stay true to myself as an author. Beyond this poem, I have included two chapbooks I have worked on over the years and also a short introductory piece of a novel I have recently been working on. This thesis shows my love for both poetry and fiction writing.

That Church

There he was
    The hippy priest

He was looking very dapper
But also very gilded

There was talk of a scandal
That he was a part of
The pandemonium of the church one Sunday
Was very abhor to the traditions of the church.

The infatuation of the church
Brought lumber-sexual men forward
To lick the moist, yet radiant flesh of the dead rapstars

The men of the church were very facetious
Yet illuminati of the church itself

The kids played fetch with the dogs of the church
They always had radiant smiles on their faces
But always had a dumb-beaver look on their faces

The priest always talked about the hypothalamus
And how it thought of monophonic music
During the service that thought to be communist like

With the undoubtedly euphoria in the room
Turducken was served with a side of hippocampus
It always had a supple feeling

In retrospect, the words “cool-beans”
Always made everyone think of
  That one priest
  In that one church