

Abstract

In an attempt to weave the academic voice with the creative, *Breaking the Manacles: Finding, Claiming, and Shaping Self* is a autoethnographic study of the author's creative process with poetry. Through this highly personalized and reflective approach, the author is able to chronicle their process in the creation of both past work and work produced during the current 2018 year. This paper attempts to explore the ways in which digital and new media tools can affect one's own creative process, as well as discuss the construction of voice and identity in relation to the creative process. With an emphasized concept of boundedness, this open resource can potentially assist in an understanding of how to maneuver feelings of boundedness situated around writing.

How much does racially and socially constructed identity affect one's process? How does one find/claim voice in an oppressive social context? These are the kinds of questions that I was interested in. Further, with tremendous support of open networked environments, digital and new media tools become important; while new media tools have significantly impacted how digital content is curated and published, there is still uncertainty in how it affects creative process. The digital poetry project accompanying this paper extends the life of the author's creative work in hopes to establish community and inspire other writers to know that their voice matters.

Introduction

It's funny how often one tries to justify the things in life not understood. There is a human need to know and pinpoint an exact reason for why something is done. For me, it was the call to my mother when I was still a music major at the University of New Haven in West Haven, Connecticut. Standing in a sparsely furnished lounge area of Bethel Hall with the sun hanging on the right half of my face, I stared at a tree and told her that I wanted to change my major to English. Although I had been thinking about it for a while, I couldn't really explain to her what prompted this decision; I couldn't explain it to myself, but I just knew that it was the choice that I had to make, and that one decision changed my entire life as I knew it.

As I continued through school, transferred, and moved back home, I began to notice that I read less; I stopped writing my stories and my poetry suffered. It wasn't until I was in my first semester at Kean University as a graduate student that I had enough courage to fully admit two things: 1. I am absolutely a writer no matter what anyone else says and 2. I wanted my creative drive and edge back more than anything else in the world. Those two things alone led to the creation of a digital poetry project titled [Breaking the Manacles](#) that I curated in my Introduction to Electronic Literature course.

From doing that project, I had learned that I wanted to dig deeper into who I am as a person culturally, personally, and even spiritually. In trying to come back to myself reborn, I want to look at the ways that I work and cope with the world situated around me. I think it is important to know the self before relaying information or advice unto others, and I feel like I have accomplished that by getting more in tune with myself and my creative process. In this paper, I provide a highly personalized account of my creative process as writer. I walk through

the creation of my poetry, and reflect on what it was like for me to produce the work that I did under varying circumstances.

Not only did I want to chronicle my process, but considering this digital-born age, I was also curious as to how digital and new media tools impacted/affected my process as I tried to visualize my work online. While new media tools have significantly impacted how digital content is curated and published, there is still some uncertainty in how it affects creative process. Being able to transfer a poem from the page to the screen is not always an easy thing to do, and I wanted to take note of how that impacted my work. All of my updated and current work can be found on my official thesis website at richondafegins.com.

Further, over time there has been a plethora of other poets, scholars, and writers that have influenced me from Maya Angelou and August Wilson to Nayyirah Waheed and Yrsa Daley Ward. What would it be like to have a lens that focused on my influences and the impact that they have had on me, my voice, and my identity? I attempt, towards the end of this paper, to discuss how my identity and voice has been constructed and has shaped the network of ancestors, poets, and other scholars that I have come to know or have been influenced by in my life. How, then, does my voice and identity play a role in my writing? How does one find/claim voice in an oppressive social context?

I intend to look at the work that I had already curated, and also look at the work that I produced before this current year. Within that, my thesis was shaping up to be this fascinating discovery of the similarities and differences that could occur when reflecting on my process and on work already done (sometimes years prior) with work that was fresh, exciting, and new.

With an autoethnographic approach, and centered around the idea of boundedness, I am able to explore how I maneuver through my craft as a black female poet. With this thesis, I am

able to delve into what I am passionate about, and I hope to help others believe that what they do, and what they have to offer this world with their writing is absolutely necessary. *There is no one in the world that can provide what is uniquely yours to give.* This is a piece of advice that I constantly give to myself, and hope to spread to those still struggling to work through what may be getting in the way of their craft.

Rationale

I want to preface this section by letting my readers know that in no way do I intend to provide a very formal literature review. I *do* intend, however, to more so walk through the resources, documents, and references that have made this feat much easier for me to understand and partake in. I received a great deal from the ideas, words and stories that these authors shared in their work, and I hope to be able to relay that in this section. I eagerly attempted to approach my aforementioned pursuits with the most logical choice in my eyes, which was autoethnography. In “Easier Said than Done: Writing an Ethnography”, Sarah Wall simply expressed autoethnography to be a “promising qualitative method” that “offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding” (39). My attempt to add to the maturation of human society required me to be my own subject of study, and I must say that I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

I have a strong sense that the autoethnographic approach intrigued other scholars when introduced to it as well. Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner who wrote “Autoethnography: An Overview” note that “autoethnography eschew[s] rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research” (par. 4). No longer are we in an age where traditional norms and methods are the only ways to approach scholarly work. I wanted my work be laced with personal experience so that it could be yet another legitimate academic wave to rock the boat of boxes and categories that determine what research is. I wanted my work to live online and be on an open digital platform to further defy the traditional ways in which we are taught to write academically.

I intended to make sure that what I was creating was a very intimate and personal encounter displaying the deepest sides of who I am as a person for any reader (or navigator) to be able to relate to and with me; I wanted readers to be able to feel like they have come along with me on the journey of self-discovery through my creative process. Much like Wall stated in her article, “it is important that those working with [autoethnography] reflect on the use of the method and share their experiences with others” (40); her exact sentiments are why I have pursued this approach for my thesis. There may be so many

others grappling with aspects and facets of not only themselves, but their writing. Thus, I would like my work to be a resource for them to look into and reflect on when they are struggling (as I did) to figure out the effects and impacts that the world around them yields when it comes to creative endeavors and discovering who they are as writers.

Now, it would be utter nonsense to think there wouldn't be pushback regarding the ethnographic approach. Wall explained that "unless data about personal experience [is] collected and somehow transformed by another researcher, [it] fail[s] to qualify as legitimate" (45). This idea seemed to be implied in the responses and reactions to her use of memory as data in her work. Andrew Sparkes in "Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflection on Criteria in Action" makes his stance clear in relaying the message that "although there may be good stories, these by themselves do not, and cannot, constitute good scholarship" (24). It seems as though Sparkes was trying to allude to the fact that he felt these stories needed to be backed with evidence and pushed forward with original inquiry.

I am not going to say that I disagree with Sparkes, but I will turn to Dave Lieber who began one of his TED Talks with an anecdote. After capturing the audience's attention, it was Lieber who said that "the brain is set up to listen to a story" and it is in fact "the power of the story" that can "change the world" ("The Power of Storytelling", 00:03:08- 00:03:26). It is only my hope that my story, who I am, and my accounts of my creative process can be of benefit to all who have the chance to read my work.

When this thesis is uploaded/posted, and probably printed out, my initial vision was to accompany my text with a digital component. My brain thought up ideas much larger than my tiny being could handle, and so that "digital component" ended up being more or less an enhanced official website. The bags under my eyes and the kink in my neck tell me that that is okay; I've embraced the changes that sit before me. When I came into Kean's master's program, I wasn't using terms or phrases like "new media" believe it or not. Quite frankly, the digital humanities was somewhat new to me. It was one of those instances where one knows much more than they think they do, but didn't have the "proper" terminology for it all. Well, my introduction to electronic literature course is what actually inspired this

thesis. Motivation crept up in me from the moment I had produced my first simple hypertext poetry site, but the ideas of what I thought I was going to produce during my time in the program has changed.

I am a millennial so that means I have grown up in what I know to be a born-digital age. My entire childhood had some kind of technology, even if I wasn't introduced to certain things until my parents thought that I was old enough (like having a cell phone). While my old soul has an undying love for just pen and paper, and all that this world welcomed before desktops, laptops, tablets, and phones, I have to say that I am also a person who appreciates the advantages that those technological advancements have provided. I not only have the ability and opportunity to challenge notions that exist in relation to traditional methods, but I also want to acknowledge that I feel I can build community around my work simply because of the vast medium that I chose.

If I am breaking down my creative process with poetry written in the past and present, I must consider the ways that technology can play a role when it comes to how that work manifests on the web. How does the work change? Will the meaning of the piece be altered by the way that I break the poem up on a web page? With "Digitizing Craft: Creative Writing Studies and New Media: A Proposal", Adam Koehler points out that "digital environments provide immersive multimodality and worlding features that are dependent on an affective ambient world of integrated sound, image, and text..." (386-387). Koehler goes on to say that the digital twenty-first century:

ask[s] imaginative writers to begin examining and imagining writing beyond the sensation provided by lines of language on the page and examining how participation with a variety of sensations may provide new ways of understanding craft as a synthesis of readers' affect and participation in an unfolding narrative. (387)

It is imperative to understand that the reader and/or navigator of my work is going to be a part of the work as much as I. The reader has the ability to continuously alter, re-invent, and creatively interpret what I have laid out thus bringing me back to one of my goals of establishing community.

Of course not all take too kindly to the switch of reading in a digital age. I actually really dislike e-books, and even though I grew up with technology, I wasn't entirely used to such a huge immersion

into doing everything online. For some, they wonder how I didn't have those experiences. I was still very used to the old textbook and notebook from elementary through high school, and it wasn't until my freshman year of college that I really started to pay attention to how much of a turn was being taken in the way of putting so much of our educational experiences online. I didn't like it. In his book *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, Sven Birkerts wasn't too fond of the electronic age either, and boldly pointed out that "many educators say that our students are less and less able to read, or analyze, or write with clarity and purpose" (119). If there are students who perform perfectly fine amidst this era, though, might there be other factors as to why certain students aren't excelling at the same rate?

Birkerts' continued sentiments came to no surprise as he expressed, "for where a field is that vast all schemes must be seen as provisional. We depend far less on memory..." (72). Despite my sincere understanding of where Birkerts was coming from, and while I used to have my own reservations about my technologically savvy existence, I am a firm believer like Richard Lanham who wrote *The Electronic Word* that "electronic expression has come not to destroy the Western arts and letters, but to fulfill them" (xiii).

The internet, like Birkerts pointed out, is vast... sometimes too vast. It can be difficult to understand how to maneuver through such an immense resource, and even more so, find where one's own voice lies beneath, on top of, or in between so many others. I mean, I grew up writing all of the time... just as much as I read and breathed probably. Still, I didn't necessarily grasp the whole "having a voice" concept until much later in my still very young life. At one point, I grappled with questions like: how can anyone be original or unique when everything has been said and/or done before? What I failed to realize at that time was the fact that as people, we are always in collaboration with other ideas, concepts, and voices of those who have inspired us. Originality has nothing to do with the fact that an idea has been expressed before, but rather has everything to do with the way one uniquely interprets and re-visualizes an idea themselves.

Much like life, voice is ever changing, ever growing, and ever evolving. In *Voice as Process*, Lizbeth A. Bryant encourages people to think of voice as a process in which "voices are constantly

constructed and reconstructed as they interact with their environment” (6). This could be as if to say that no person is going to ever really have one set voice forever; as circumstances, environments and ideas of the self-change, so will the individual’s voice to fit. My voice is not fully developed yet, and that is okay, but part of the reason why I fell in love with the idea of doing an autoethnography was because I felt that it was about time I actually put my voice (in progress) out there. I have spent most of my life finding ways to keep my voice mostly to myself because I didn’t want to humiliate myself if I said something wrong, made a mistake, or even talked confidently about who I am and what I do.

I then wondered who was going to tell my story if I didn’t? Was I going to stand by forever and never put my foot into the conversation because I was afraid? Jaqueline Jones Royster’s words rang in my ear from “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own” explaining, “voicing actually sets in motion multiple systems, prominent among them are systems for speaking but present also are the systems for hearing” (38). To have something to say and to have others listen is a powerful step toward inciting real change. The change that I would like to see is settled in other women and men who may be struggling with facets of themselves and their writing that do not know where to begin to get back to themselves.

However, before I focused on someone else, I had to start with the self. Sarah Wall, in “An Autoethnography on Learning About Autoethnography” reminded me that “an individual is best suited to describe his or her own experience more accurately than anyone else” (148). My sentiments fall in line with Royster as she argues, “that when the subject matter is me and the voice is not mine, my sense of order and rightness is disrupted” (31). So, this is my voice and so far I like how it sounds.

Related to the construction of my voice is my identity because my voice is a part of that... it makes up a part of who I am as a person. It is still important, though, to single out identity and break that down. When I talk about identity or identities, I am talking about myself as a black American woman, a black female poet, an academic/scholar etc. I employ multiple identities on a daily basis in different settings. According to Na’ilah Suad Nasir, author of *Racialized Identities*, “students’ constructions of themselves racially and academically are deeply and profoundly influenced by the multiple settings that

students negotiate daily...” (3). This concept in turn impacts my writing as I try to find a way to make sense of my multiple selves.

It was important for me to include this topic into my thesis, and it was crucial for me to at least attempt the start of getting in touch with the deepest facets of my being here to hopefully, then, begin to understand myself as a creative, what affects/impacts my process and why. Nasir made it clear that for African Americans (used by Nasir interchangeably with the word “black”), “education... means emancipation” (15). Growing up, it was always “go to school and get an education.”, “people can take every last thing you’ve got, but they can’t take your knowledge.” Education wasn’t an option, it was survival and I was always told to work harder than everyone else; I had to worry about things like whether or not my name, look and hair was professional enough (meaning as far away from what constitutes as characteristically black).

How I identify and situate myself impacted my creative work greatly and still does until this day. When I was a tad bit younger, though, I thought that my blackness was going to be a problem for my success as a writer, or anything else for that matter. My skin was already a burden; it already told my story for me, so not only did I feel like I wouldn’t have anything to say, but I felt even more the question of “who would listen?” rumbling behind me. My mother brought the wars of this world to my attention when it came to being a woman. She didn’t like airheads (by that I just mean people with no common sense), and she warned me to walk tall. The walk wasn’t just solely about showing others I meant business, but it was so that I wouldn’t get stepped on.

A woman is a pretty thing to look at, but a conundrum when she speaks of doing great things. Because of my mother, I knew that I was great already, but this world sure will try to rock you. I am trying not to let it. I take pride in who I am. To quote a classmate from a class discussion one day, “all the best parts of me are black.” However, as Nasir pointed out, “racial identity was more complex...” (67) because there is a wide variety of blackness, but when it came to the glue that made us stick, Nasir turns to the idea of a “collective struggle” (140). After reading this, I immediately began to notice how this played a role in my creative work.

As I grew in my craft, I started to have doubts, I felt that I wouldn't have anything to say in my poetry if I wasn't struggling. I realized how much harder it was for me to write about joyous events /moments. When the concepts are involved with pain or emotion, my images come across much clearer. Further, that struggle... the concept in general lives on a moving scale because, yes, my black is beautiful, but my black is different from my neighbor's and my best friend's. I am hoping that the best parts of me can shine through as the rest of this paper progresses. So, please, take a look further and get to know me a little better.

Methodology

Autoethnography

The most unique aspect of my thesis was the approach that I chose, which was autoethnography. To my knowledge, and from what I had learned during my junior year of undergrad, was that an ethnography involved the researcher more intimately than other studies; with ethnography, the researcher is a part of whatever community or culture is being studied. I learned that I was technically doing an ethnographic study when I had chosen to study Kean University's Writing Center (my place of work) as a discourse community. I remember that assignment being hard work, but also fun because I was able to include myself, which is not something that is often done in traditional academic work.

The idea for me to do an autoethnography actually came from my thesis seminar professor. When I was struggling to touch down on a clear idea and scope for my thesis, he had uttered something genius. He said: *maybe you could even look at some of your work now in comparison to work you've previously written*. Simple. Right then and there, I knew that that was going to be a part of what I did. I had currently been writing poetry, but I knew that I had so many other poems that were already written and waiting to be put to use. It wasn't until a little later that I realized that the highly personalized approach that I chose had a name.

Well, in order to pull the method off, I had to first learn what I could about autoethnography (apart from what I already knew). I had some help in this department from my supervisor at the writing center who actually happened to do an ethnography herself. I couldn't have been more grateful for all of the source information that she gave me. Most of the sources were similar in their general comments about autoethnography, and defined it pretty similarly as well. Most of them have some sort of an informal approach when it came to the language used to

talk about the respective topic. I couldn't help but notice, though, that in all of my research there weren't any sources that I could find where someone was doing what I was doing. I felt like there *must* be something out there right? Well, so far, I haven't been able to find it. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't looking for the magical nonexistent source that had everything all rolled into one, but I *was* looking for a few sources that might touch on different elements of what I was doing, or come close in the sense that there was a writer breaking down the process of the creation of their work. That was very hard to come by on my end.

The next obstacle I had to face was figuring out how to go about this autoethnography thing. I had ideas coming to me left and right from my classmates, professors, and even notable writers and scholars in my field like Barbara Ganley. Barbara Ganley suggested activities like coming up with metaphors as I went through my process. She asked, if you were describe your thesis as a color, what would it be? There was one day where I followed suit and I wrote a blog post about how I was feeling orange that day. I had done some research on the color orange, and felt that it fit perfectly in that particular moment. I would envision my thesis, most times, as a thunderstorm because there was an overflow of rain, but constant and beautiful light rippling in between the rain and the noise. I actually happen to love thunderstorms, so it's a positive thing I promise.

More than just metaphors, I took to jotting things down more, and staying really alert when it came to the decisions that I would make. A lot of this close watch business was to track my progress as I started actively creating again, as well as revising and editing older poetry. However, I also took note of things in my everyday life and in my research as well. I would come across weird quirks like only being able to feel at my best writing if I was using a skinny pen that fit well into my hand. I liked dim lit places, quiet places, or getting out to a library,

Starbucks, or Barnes and Noble. I had to read and concentrate with no sound, but I would occasionally be able to play some of those YouTube videos you can find with calming audio waves if you type in something like “music for concentration”. When I moved on to the creation of my website, I was able to listen to almost anything that I wanted except for when I was editing videos and audio. I would often choose upbeat music and gospel to keep myself up, alert, and motivated.

More often than not, though, I found it hard to go from not really thinking about the subconscious things done on a daily basis to having to pay attention to it all of the time. If I didn't write an idea, comment, or thought down I would forget it almost instantaneously. There were so many great ideas that were just lost because I didn't catch it before it flew out of the window of my brain.

Research and Tools

When it comes down to the research of my thesis, I would say that I simply stuck to resources like Kean's library databases, books that I could find, articles (online and journal articles), mentor texts (poetry collections), conversations with faculty and staff of the university, as well as my professor, Alan Levine, who was so supportive and instrumental throughout my entire thesis journey.

Kean's databases were a little limited in terms of what I could find on my topic, which is why I made the comment earlier about not necessarily being able to find other authors of creative work or scholars who may have published academic work in close relation to what I am tackling. For my books, I either ordered offline, went to a book store to look for them, or raided my town's public library looking for potential in everything that I came across. I have to say that the

articles were the toughest to tackle because I dislike reading heavy academic jargon, and while there is some informality, I still find myself disengaged and/or struggling just to get through the article without my mind wandering.

I find that I naturally work better when I've had a conversation about what I am doing with some else. I feel that it helps me to organize my thoughts a little better, and to also work out how I would like to say things. Regarding the mentor texts, which were all poetry collections, I feel like they have helped me tremendously, and provided me with countless inspiration for all of the times that I may have been stuck and didn't know exactly what to do. Sometimes the way that something is structure or said will prompt me to begin to write new work or critique old work. Further, my professor has always been going about coming across certain resources and tools that can possibly be of use for the thesis.

Speaking of tools, I would like to point out that I made use of things such as Zotero, which is actually a program that my professor introduced me to. Zotero is sort of an online software/program that allows people to organize all of their resources. The resource provides a convenient way of getting more done across fewer digital spaces and mediums; it will even export your source information for you if you'd like to it to all be compiled into one document, which is great. Moving along, I also blogged. My blog name was Unicorn Essence simply because I wanted to be different, and no one had already taken that name. I didn't always blog as much as I would've liked, but what did do was definitely a start, and who knows... maybe the blog won't die down after I graduate.

Along with the blogs came sharing out my work on social media within a hash tagged network of writers and educators. I took to pen and paper whenever I had the chance, but would go for the computer whenever I was crunched for time, or if I really just wasn't feeling it that

day. Last but not least, I made use of googling whenever I felt the need to. Google is definitely a great go-to resource for me; I google everything. It has been most useful to me whenever I needed to do some very quick research and have the answer to my concern or question in the palm of my hand.

Poetry

I decided that I would share a short methods blurb for each poem that I have included in this thesis to showcase how it came to be what it is now. This was probably one of my favorite parts of my methods section because I got to tell stories, and appreciate where my poems have come from. I realized how useful a short blurb would be for each of the poems seeing as how I was chronicling my process. Some of the poems have more of a backstory than others, but it was useful to be able to slow things down a bit and have that conversation with myself and others.

“hom(e)age”

“hom(e)age” was the first poem that I went back to when I started my reflections. There wasn't any significant reason; it was the first poem sitting on top of my pile. I started by looking at the notes and comments that I had written on a printed copy. I worked on this particular poem during an independent study one semester, and most of my IS advisor's comments were given to me verbally. I either wrote out her suggestions on my copy or made a mental note. After looking suggestions over, I immediately went into my iTunes and pulled up the song that I was listening to when I wrote this poem in my living room (“Joko Ya Hao”- artist unknown; this is a South African worship song).

I remember having one candle lit in front of me, and the lights dimmed. Coming back to this poem was frustrating because I remember my IS advisor telling me that I could potentially have three poems in one. I didn't want to tack on too many more tasks that began with "write poem about...", so I had decided I'd find ways to cut and chop, but if there was something that I wanted to keep, then I would have to figure out a way to make it work better with what my intentions were for the poem, which could potentially lead to re-phrasing or moving things around. I looked at the line that began with "I am a story..."; I had originally written next to that line that it could potentially be a new poem, but I didn't want to take it out just yet, so I decided to move it to the top where it seemed to fit better.

There were some obvious phrasings that struck me that I did not want to change at all like "black fisted/seated in war"... this is one of my favorite lines, but I was missing description in other areas. In the second verse, where I mention hymns, I could've definitely used the title of one in place of the word "hymns", or list some of the brand names of the products that I actually use in my hair to ground what I am talking about, so those changes were made too. When I got around to the end of the poem, I kept feeling like I needed something more. Sometimes, I don't know when enough is enough or when to stop. I kept typing trying to fill a void that I thought existed, which is how I came up with the lovely phrasing of "I am a poem/on fire/a 3-wick jasmine scented storm".

This phrasing came to me as I piggy backed off of the object I had in front of me (a candle) and the words of my mother and biological father who describe me as a "quiet **storm**". Despite this verse that I ended up loving, there was nothing to close it out. I wondered if there even needed to be anything to close it out. Why can't I leave it like that? The thing is, I *can* leave it like that, but every time I read the poem (in silence and out loud) I would utter the word

“storm” and I felt like it flew off the edge of a cliff because there was no barricade to prevent such a tragic event.

Eventually, and after staring at the poem on the page for a very long time, I ended up flipping the page over and re-crafting the entire poem. I had took to the internet for more research and inspiration, and ended up adding parts to the poem that weren't originally there. Overall, I feel satisfied with the work that I got done on the poem, but I have a feeling “hom(e)age” will live many more lives.

“rosa”

Rosa is a poem that I didn't feel like I was capable of creating. I had written another poem titled “Sarah Baartman”, and my independent study advisor told me to play around with that concept again because it could be a powerful gesture to write about many of the women whose lives and stories have inspired me. For “Sarah Baartman”, I literally retold the account of her life (summed up) and all the things that she was made to endure. The poem “rosa” is more of a thank you than anything else. I wanted to capture the essence of the importance that was the refusal of her seat on a bus. I had taken a very long break from writing during my Fall 2017 semester at Kean, and I had intended to get back to the grind over the Winter break.

Unfortunately, I had gotten really sick and wasn't able to get back to work until early January, which would be the start of my final semester for my master's program. It wasn't long before I fell sick again, and wasn't well until sometime in February. I still say “geez” every time I write that out. Despite all of this, and sometime in early January when I was feeling better from my first sickapade, I sat down in my local Starbucks and apart from one other poem, “rosa”

ended up being born on that night. I started by simply googling her name so that I could do a general and massive sweep over any and all information that I could get on her.

My goal was to find out as much as possible about the day that she got arrested, the boycott, and the characteristics of that time that I could. Of course, not everything could make it into the poem, but even just reading about the setting of the bus and when it happened helped tremendously in the short image that I decided to open the poem with. For me, it wasn't about fitting every ounce of the information into the poem, but rather narrowing it to what I could genuinely focus on for just a moment, and from that I ended up writing about the significance of her being and of her actions.

“maxiumus”

There isn't much to recount with the creation of this poem and how it came to be. “maxiumus” was so easy to write that the content just flowed from my hand as if I had been waiting to tell this story without even knowing it. Maxiumus is a guy, and I met him the same night that I wrote “rosa”. I was sitting in my local Starbucks doing my research for the Rosa Parks poem. He approached me when I was finishing up my work. I remember walking away from that night not really being able to form what I was feeling into concrete thoughts or words.

An entire day passed by and I tried to get more poetry done in that time, but my day wasn't productive. Once I got home, though, I realized that my encounter with Maxiumus could be a poem. I cringed horribly at the fact that I hadn't thought of this before. The night that I met him I was so eager to get away and get home, but I was also fascinated by his ego and the way that he pushed his way into my life for a couple of hours and was so persistent. It wasn't really

hard to pull the images that I did for the poem or some of the small details that I was able to incorporate. I sat up in my bed at the end of that next day, and pulled out my notebook. The rest is history.

“little”

When I was workshopping my poetry with my independent study advisor, she instructed me to look at the ways that I use the word little. In conversation, she noticed how much I used that particular word to describe things in my life, and sometimes to even state how I felt about certain things, so she asked me to write about that. I made a note in my mini pink-paged legal pad under “poem ideas”. I found this poem particularly difficult to write; I was very aggravated every time I thought about *having* to write it, but I understood its importance and the need to reflect on my usage of the word.

Even though I used the word so much (similar to the way individuals use “like”), I couldn’t bring myself to write about it in the way that I could write about music, trees, or any other thing for that matter. Why couldn’t I write this? My first draft of the poem was topped up with clichés, bits and pieces that couldn’t go together and probably wouldn’t under any other circumstance. According to my advisor, I was being abstract with phrases like: “mouth on fire” and “purging sanity”. I accused myself of being lazy when including lines that read: sinks to the pit/of my stomach”. *What in the world were you thinking?* is what I would ask myself.

“little” was written in November of 2017 and probably reworked two months later. I remember the only comment she wrote at one point was “dialogue” because she asked me to add in more of the conversations that I would have with people where I used the word. Somewhere in

between questioning my memory skills and realizing that I use the word “little” overbearingly in difficult times, I found a way to voice a very genuine account of what it is like to downplay everything I say by letting the word “little” sit nonchalantly next to it. I started paying attention more to my conversations. I would work out stanza ideas at the bottom of my printed out drafts of the poem. It was important for me to write this poem not because I was asked to, but because I needed to own up to it for myself. What created the habit, and why I can’t seem to break it.

“escaping titles”

“escaping titles” is a poem that I have been reluctant to touch since I wrote it in 2013 when I was at the University of New Haven. I showed up to my creative writing class one night in the university’s gallery because my professor had a “special” assignment for the class to complete. A painter by the name of Margaret Bowland had come to the school to talk about her exhibit that graced the gallery walls. Unfortunately, I had missed the Q+A the night that she came in person, but my professor took the entire class to the exhibit and told us to single out a painting that stuck out to us. He then instructed each of us to write for about 10 minutes in front of that one painting. We did this twice.

I don’t remember it taking it much time at all to get down on paper what was swirling in my head the minute my eyes were locked with the young girl painted in front of me. I saw a purity and an innocence that didn’t feel right to capture in any other way in the moment than professing reminders not only to my audience (young black girls), but also to myself. I had never made any changes until this Spring 2018 semester. I remember my independent study advisor telling me that the entire poem was really all in the first stanza, and it was about hair. However, I

felt that I could construct another poem about hair at a later time if I wanted to, but I needed to write this poem that way that I had written it at the time.

After hearing that the poem was sort of lost after the first stanza, I second guessed myself and the goal of this poem, which was to get young girls to listen... to feel, but whenever I read it aloud, I immediately remember why I had started writing it in the first place. It was shocking to see the young girl's face painted white, but I immediately began to think of the standards that black people have to uphold to succeed. I started scratching down my thoughts viciously during the class exercise... anything that made sense. Anything that captured some of the challenges that my people are faced with when it comes to belonging. I feel that many (not necessarily all) black women/girls can testify to having to come to terms with her own unique version of beautiful, for this country has never made that a welcoming idea for her.

In the online article “Margaret Bowland Finds the Meaning of Power in New Portraits”, Caro (a writer for *highfructose.com*) made it clear that Bowland's art “explore[s] and discover[s] the meaning and implications of ‘masking’ oneself throughout history...the white represents a sort of conformity, as centuries of women have subjected themselves to society's ideals of beauty” (par. 1). To read this and to know this was important and it compelled me to keep the poem the way that it was. I have gone back, though, and at least looked at the structure of my poem and its aesthetic on the page. I found myself trying to be more aware and careful of my line endings and how I broke the words up. Suddenly lines like “ready to slip into this world unchained/in vain...” became “slipping into this world/unchained, in vain/ your heart is screaming...” A lot of what I went over was getting rid of some wordiness in places, and allowing myself to be a little more choppy in how I presented my idea.

“post-barrel cop out”

“post-barrel cop out” was especially hard to write. The inspiration for the poem came from another poem that I wrote titled “bound”. “bound” did not make it into the collection of works for this thesis, but within the poem, there was a small stanza where I listed a few names of some of the fallen individuals killed by police officers. My independent study advisor pointed that part out specifically and suggested that I think about just the names of all of the individuals. Thus, I ended up with a poem that was essentially just a list of names.

Doing the research for this poem was so hard, but I started with the names that I knew already and then consulted google from there. I found it very difficult to figure out what to type in to get the results that I needed, but in the end I feel like I collected enough information. From there, I just started listing with no particular structure or organization technique. After going through the names and dates, I realized that I would like to order it in some way, but instead of going by the obvious (dates in chronological order), I listed the names of the deceased by age.

While this list should be much longer than it is, it was especially heartbreaking to go through some of the younger deaths, so I decided to go from the oldest person to the youngest in an attempt to emphasize how they somehow just keep getting younger... the stories more ridiculous... and the consequences less vigorous and sometimes nonexistent. The names in and of itself was powerful enough to me, but because I wanted to pursue some sort of digital component to accompany my thesis, I thought that there would be so much that I could do with the digital version of this poem. It wasn't hard to figure out that I would have gunshot sound effects in the works, but I couldn't quite settle on how the names would show up on the screen.

Instead of a gunshot during each name's appearance (because every person didn't get shot on this list), and while I did research on each and every single individual, I finally came around to adding in audio from bystander videos or dash cam footage for a few of the names. I decided to only do some because others have way too much talking, or no audio at all and because I felt it would be more powerful for the reader/navigator to not necessarily know when they'd hear something. It definitely took a lot out of me to write this and create the digital side for it, but it is absolutely worth it. Their names deserve to be spoken, written, and read. I want people to know. Almost anyone has a vast platform at their fingertips on a daily basis, and this is one very small way that I know that I can make a difference and pay homage to the fallen and their lives.

“semi sweet”

Writing “semi sweet” was one of the hardest poems that I wrote in 2017. The idea came to me from one of my coworkers/classmates. She knew that I was writing my manuscript for my Advanced Writing Poetry course and pursuing very complex topics like sex trafficking and child slavery. She told me about the child slavery that was going on in West Africa (especially in the Ivory Coast) on cocoa farms. I had no idea about it, and after I did some research I blamed myself for not being more aware. *How could I have not known about this for so long?*, I asked myself. When writing this poem, I thought of the events that were taking place and wondered how I could tell this story.

I didn't know how to approach the poem, and I was afraid of messing it up. How could I mess up something that wasn't written yet, right? Well, I knew the topic was important and I

wanted to make what I wrote down about it count. I honed in the word “story” for a little while until one day it came to me. I had decided that I would write this poem from the viewpoint of a child slave. Some intense googling taught me that children were kidnapped from their homes and sometimes promised a job to be able to make a living for their family. Once they were at the farms, though, they found that they were made to wake up very early in the morning and work. If they did not do something correctly, like carrying a sack of cocoa beans too slowly, they would be beaten or whipped. Some of these individuals never made it out and never saw their families again.

I was disgusted, and wanted to capture what could be the voice of one of the individuals made to grow up on one of these farms being overworked and tortured. I am grateful for the privileges this life has dealt me—the fact that I cannot/do not have to speak from experience or witness on this topic—however, I knew that writing this poem would be tricky with my lack of knowledge. Most of my stanzas were produced after having read more of an article; I would read a little and then write a little and that seemed to help. I viewed as many images as I could and watched as many videos as I could find. It took me about a good hour or two to come up with all of the ideas that would make up each stanza, and to figure out how much would be too much in terms of content. And so, I ended up with the poem that sits before you. According to classmates, colleagues, and professors, this poem has been one of the strongest I have ever written. I am glad that I am more aware of what has been going on in the Ivory Coast and I hope that I can continue a journey of helping others to be aware as well.

“murderer”

“murderer” is not the first poem I’ve written about my grandfather, and it certainly won’t be the last. I actually don’t remember what I was thinking before I wrote this poem, or if I was lead to this idea by a prompt or an image that struck me and clung to my mind, unwilling to leave until I had written something down. I might have been thinking about death in general, and was lead back to my grandfather. Whichever version is true isn’t as important to me as the existence of the poem itself.

What I do remember, though, is actually sitting down and writing the poem; I stared at pictures of cigarettes and ash trays for quite a while until I figured out the language I would use to describe them. I didn’t want to come right out and say what it was because at that moment, I felt it would’ve been boring. So, I took a memory tour of my grandparents’ house in North Carolina, and I went to the space where my grandfather smoked the most, which was his room. From there, I was able to let the poem write itself because it didn’t take much at all to write down how I remembered the room; that is a memory that I’ll always have.

My poetry professor always noted how much easier one’s own creative visions manifest through images and playful language. To inscribe memory in that manner didn’t feel like I was completing a poem for my manuscript that semester, but rather telling a story even if I was the only person in the audience. The editing of this particular poem didn’t extend beyond fixing stanzas and lines structurally and visually on the page. Certain things can be an eyesore even if it just because one line sticks out way too far. I didn’t have to think long and hard about the title... it came to me as soon as I jotted down the period after the last word because, to me, that is what a cigarette is.

mini marathon poems

These poems were written in my Advanced Writing Poetry course. The assignment was to write one mini poem a day. The poems had to be at least three lines. I would be lying if I said I didn't have a hard time with the assignment. Though the poems are short, I would find myself either forgetting, and then remembering before the day was up, or I would either sit with my notebook, phone, or laptop and beg for something to pop up in my head. Around the time that the assignment came along, I was knee deep in other assignments for classes, and didn't find it easy to access my creative juices. I didn't think that I always had to be "inspired", but I just found it quite hard to keep up and switch between the creative and the academic.

Now, there is a way for these two things to meld together and coexist, but for me, it was always separate. Throughout my education (elementary to higher ed.) I was able to find ways to bring my creative side into my academic side, but my brain would still come to hard stops. I would be so mentally exhausted from all of the more traditional work that it was hard for me to get myself to a place mentally to write creatively. I got it done though, and these three are my favorite out of the set, which is why they are the only ones featured in this thesis and digital project.

The set of 10 mini poems were heavily inspired by Nayyirah Waheed, a contemporary poet who I had the pleasure of being introduced to from Tumblr in my early undergrad years. I came across a collection that she had self-published titled *salt*. and I fell in love. The day that I wrote two of the mini poems in this project, I had Waheed in my hand all day. I'd read her and then put her back down, stare at the trees and the squirrels outside, and then pick her back up. Her writing was authentic for me. It was true and it allowed me to feel my bones. I have to thank

her for allowing me to be free enough to be able to write through those ten days that I thought were going to be dreadful because I had been in such a lull.

“u of new haven jamaican”

“u of new haven Jamaican” is about an ex-boyfriend. I just heard all of my ladies reading this go *mmmmm* in my head. Maybe they didn’t say it out loud either! Moving along, yes, it is about a past relationship and it was very easy to write this one. The concept of the poem is not a bright one seeing as how I am talking about not communicating with someone anymore and ultimately (by the end) being looked over. Despite the really somber idea behind the poem, I got the chance to look back on some memories that weren’t so somber and write most of the poem before I got to the end. I will say that drudging all of that up again didn’t really feel so good in the process of writing the poem, but a kid’s gotta suffer for the sake of the art sometimes.

I think I found this poem a little easier to write because of the images, and because I didn’t have to imagine anything, but instead I spoke from my own experiences from my early years of undergrad. I could literally step into my mind and re live the moments that I mentioned right down to the salted caramel macarons. I received feedback for this poem during a workshop in my poetry course. At that time, the top of the page said “Untitled” and I didn’t have any dialogue. Even though my classmates liked the idea of poem not being title, I definitely didn’t. It needed to have a name, and it ended up coming together perfectly because I was able to get the name of the school where I attended and met my ex in there, and also include part of his identity.

My professor was the one who suggested that I add an example of what was said in one of the voicemails even if I couldn’t remember it exactly. It is now one of my favorite parts in the

poem, but I must say that I cringe every time I recite the poem because I don't have the accent down pat. This poem was one of the stronger poems in my manuscript last year, and I've come to love it more and more every time I read it.

“when the sun goes down”

One of the most prominent aspects of slavery is the fact that slaves were made to work the field, and were tortured without any sort of pay for the work that they did, and with a very unfortunate and deprived way of living. When making my hypertext poetry piece, *Breaking the Manacles*, during my first semester as a grad student, I wanted to try and capture the voice of a slave. The voice that I am imagining is fictitious as there is absolutely no way that I would be able to accurately account for something like this. I am aware of how sensitive the topic is, but I when I completed that hypertext piece back in 2016, I was moved to write about the kinds of things that are hard to talk about and say out loud.

I started the poem very simply with the “shackled, chained” phrase, and worked through some lines from that along, occasionally pulling from memories and moments from elsewhere. The bits that I included where I preface with the words “I sing” actually come from one of my favorite movies, *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*, which is a Tyler Perry film. The main character in the movie, played by Taraji P. Henson, was moved in spirit to sing this part of the song the church choir could be heard singing in the background. The idea of the sun going down and setting actually comes from a song that I came across in my research literally titled “I Be Glad When the Sun Goes Down”. I was able to incorporate that phrase towards the end.

“advice”

“advice” started out as a very convoluted draft. I was sitting in my room on my bed; I proceeded to procrastinate and not write the poem I had started, and while doing this I came across a video of Zac Efron talking about an experience that he had with Michael Jackson. I went down a rabbit hole of thoughts, lingering on how Zac was talking about his dreams, and so naturally I started to think of my dreams and how some people didn’t really believe I would be cut out for the arts and what I wanted to pursue.

Forgetting what he said now, at some point I paused the video and wrote the first line “accept the fullness of loving yourself”. In that moment, that was my way of saying that *all that you are and everything that makes you you is special. Believe in yourself and accept all the parts of you are*. I got up from my bed to do another task unrelated to the poem I was supposed to be writing (I think) and I went over and sat on the floor in front of my bookcase. I ended up putting some books back in the bookcase where they belonged, but while doing that, I picked up Toni Morrison’s book *Home*.

I had remembered that *Beloved* was the very first book that I read of hers and how that shaped me into being the writer that I am today; Toni Morrison herself has just been an influence and a source of enlightenment and motivation for me, so I went back to my journal and wrote “spine carved out of Toni Morrison’s *Home*” (again, this was a part of what made me me). The “Broadway tunes” phrase was a no brainer once I started to reminisce on my days in theatre. With the way that I originally had the page, the poem was longer. I wrote this poem in January of this year, but on May 1st I ended up looking at the poem on the page again not liking what I saw. I grabbed a pencil and rewrote the poem on the side of the page. I didn’t necessarily change too

much of the wording, but I eliminating some things and played around with the lines and stanzas. I like this version much more.

“that sweatshirt”

So, this is that rant poem. That poem that would make you feel better right when you are getting out of a relationship where you haven't been appreciated. Funny thing this, I wrote this poem way after the fact. I didn't write it because I was just starting to feel that way, I wrote it because I hadn't written one yet. I think I told myself that writing about the typical stuff wasn't really doing it for me anymore. Yeah sure I could write plainly about how I had been hurt, or I can do something about a broken heart, but instead I spent some time just sitting and staring into space thinking about the relationship.

What did he and I have? What did we not have? What was good and what was bad? Is there anything that stands out? Well, somehow I came to thinking about items that I had of his because that was a thing. I took his hoodies. I had about five or six of them that I had to mail back. I remembered that I folded the white one last and put it on top because out of all of them, that was my favorite one to wear, and I believe it was the one that I had for most of the three years of the relationship. So, I decided to make it the star of the poem and I sort of centered the relationship around that white sweatshirt.

I couldn't get the right kind of hoodie for the picture that I used on the [website](#), but that didn't matter as much to me because the real picture comes from the description in the poem. I'm realizing that a lot went into the editing process of this poem as I had nine stanzas originally and way more lines than the finished product. I took out a lot and reworded some things. My original

second stanza didn't make it to the end, and lines like "I never really knew you" made me cringe because they were so cliché. I also had to move some stanzas around as six became three and three became two and so on. Despite the ugly history of the poem, it was a fun poem to write; yes, the last line felt really good to write.

"august 10, 2014"

I remember sitting in the writing center when I wrote this poem, but I don't recall how the idea came to me. I think I was just looking out of the window staring at the grass, flowers and trees. I must've been somewhere between nostalgic and inquisitive that day as I wrote about a really happy memory with a heartbreaking ending. This was the same semester that I wrote "that sweatshirt", and if I had been thinking about the story of that poem, then I was fixed on figuring out when things started to take a turn for the worst in my last relationship.

The trip was to North Carolina. We road down with my mother and my sister I believe. Naturally, a lot of our time was spent with my family at my grandmother's house, which is where I was able to pull the exact images of that day with the clothes line outside and the water tank. My grandmother's trees were in bloom that month and the grass needed to be cut, so it was a little high. I had worn a pretty dress that day, and he had his camera, so pictures happened.

I knew what the title of the poem was going to be before I wrote the poem. I remembered the picture he took, and after I searched for it in my files and found it, I proceeded to look at it on and off for a very long while. Once I felt like I had a few lines/phrases that could be put together, I started writing. I believe it took me an hour or two to come up with the first draft, but I don't remembering the poem changing too much between its creation and getting it to the final

manuscript. The one phrase where I say: “finessed steps backwards” seemed to give some of my classmates trouble. They didn’t understand the line, but it wasn’t abstract to me.

What the phrase meant was that he was walking backwards. He walked backwards without missing beat or worrying about obstructions in the yard. This is where I felt like the word finessed fit in perfectly. I felt that the rest was self-explanatory, but I guess not. I strongly considered my classmates’ commentary because I definitely didn’t want to come off confusing, but I didn’t end up changing anything for that line. When I wrote that line, I meant it and I still smile every time I read it.

“no, i’m not sorry for loving you”

This poem was so easy to write. I understand that everyone is not religious, but I am. I was born and raised up as a Christian, residing in a Baptist church for most of my life thus far. “no I’m not sorry for loving you” is just about me being unapologetic about loving my God. I remember I had been watching a touching video about a hard time that someone was having. I had started quietly praying for that person in my mind. Soon after I found myself in tears, feeling good all over because I believe that my God is a way maker and that the situation that this person was dealing with was already covered by His grace and mercy.

Later that same day, I was listening to a gospel song titled “Indescribable”; in that moment, the song was describing exactly what I had been feeling. I told myself that I couldn’t miss this opportunity so I began to write. Although the poem is a short one, I felt like I said what I needed to say. I didn’t want to overthink this one. I then proceeded to probably sing every song that I remember from my time in a private Catholic school. One of the songs that I remember

said: “sing Hosanna to the Lord”, which is where the first line of “Hosanna in the highest” comes from.

While I wanted the pouring of my heart to come through with this poem, I also wanted it to be simple and to the point. I could probably go on forever, but that wasn't my intention. This poem was one of the most current written this year, but it has easily become one of my favorite just that fast.

“black tongue”

This poem is a gem to me. It has to be one of my absolute favorites out of the entire collection. I really felt like I was in my element when I wrote this poem. “black tongue” was originally supposed to be the title of one of my poetry manuscripts in 2017, but I decided that something else would take that spot so that I could have a chance to write this poem.

I was really determined to try and connect to multiple senses in the poem so that I could create more of an experience than anything else for my readers, which is why in the first stanza I had my readers in the body with “coughing up rose petals” and entangled in description when I began to describe the appearance of me and my people and all that we embody.

I was happy when I finally finished this one because it took me days to begin to figure out what I could say, and hours to organize that information into words and phrases that were actually okay to use. It's funny because I wrote the actual poem in about 10 minutes. It encapsulates our oppression and our misfortune, but also our fight and our strength. This poem is power to me and I cannot wait for the world to read it.

“sarah baartman”

“sarah baartman” is a poem that I cannot help but be full when hearing the title. In 2015, this poem was the start of something new for me. In my opinion, it was one of the best poems I had ever written in my life and I started writing when I was about ten years old (maybe sooner). It only took my 15 minutes to write, and my professor said it was ready to be published after only a few grammatical/mechanical changes.

I had come across a hateful video that I talk more about in the reflection for this poem on my website. The video was hard to watch to say the least. There was no fight, no strength left in me to say anything after it was finished so I opened my journal and started writing. I jotted ideas down and continued doing research simultaneously until I felt like I had enough to string together.

I came across another video, but this time it was a documentary of her life. I remember the way the tears ran off of my face and onto my journal paper. Her entire life was taken away from her, and once I had come around to the part of her time at Piccadilly Circus made to perform for others, and the part where French educators and scientists passed her body parts around a classroom I lost it.

No matter how much I knew about the wrongdoing to my ancestors, every story, artifact, or song felt like I was hearing about it for the first time. It still does at times. I set my pen to the paper and didn't really come back up for air until I was finished... until I was for sure that I didn't need to go back and change anything else. I applaud Sarah Baartman for her resilience for all of those years and am happy that her remains are in their rightful resting place.

Website Creation

This part will be simple I promise. I do not want to be long winded and bore any of my readers with all of the tedious activities that went into the creation of my website, but I do want to highlight the most prominent things. So, as I have stated previously, it was my intention to have a digital component along with the written portion of my thesis. Having this digital side was important to me because ever since I had taken Introduction to Electronic Literature in my first semester of grad school, I realized how powerful it can be to let a poem breathe and live so boldly in another medium. It isn't always easy trying to transfer the poem itself, an supporting factors, and intent all wrapped into one to a different medium than the poem was created in, but it sure is fun to try.

I wanted to use the technology that I have to breathe new life into my work and re imagine it in a different way. The site is intended for everyone to be able to have their own way of looking at the work, and find their own interpretation through that, but I definitely couldn't leave it out. I created my website with Wix and it was a lot of hard work. Trust me. I ended up having late night adventures editing video and audio to include into the piece and even using PowerPoint's remove background feature to cut out images that I wanted to stand alone without anything else surrounding it. I definitely did run into ruts when those cut out items wouldn't stay where I placed them... they would sometimes try to jump around the page, but hopefully this doesn't happen when I launch the site.

It took me several hours just to create one page because with each poem, I wanted to make sure I was capturing it right. Every element had a purpose whether it was the color of the text, the images/background on the page, if the page had sound or not, and where the poem would be and why. How does it look on the page? Is this image too washed out. The color

scheme is off. How do I get this feature to work, and could I potentially do something better? What is the purpose of this item. This is not fading in correctly. If I was just adding a shape to the page to be able to click on... the color mattered and I spent several minutes messing with the color changer.

I made specific use of lightboxes to have things appear or fade onto the screen more seamlessly. I think that one of the biggest decisions that I was unsure about was whether or not I would want a menu on every single page. Personally, I felt that it didn't serve the pages that I had the poems on, so I decided to leave it out and have individuals just press the back button to get back to the gallery of poems that I had. With my first hypertext poetry piece, I had it set up so that there was a hyperlinked word in every single poem that connected to the next. The reader/navigator didn't have to go back to the gallery to be able to get to the next poem, but this time was different. I didn't want anything to mess up the flow of the pages and how I created them.

I was very careful in how I approached this digital piece, and even though it was stressful, it was my favorite part of this entire thesis journey. I like when I can get my hands dirty with creativity and allow others to see how I would envision something. There is so much more that I wanted to do for the website, but I am satisfied with how it is now. I do not intend to let my work die after it is submitted, so hopefully I will be able to continue to work on it and get it to be exactly what I hoped that it would be... not just for myself, but for those who read/navigate it as well.

Poems & Reflections

“hom(e)age”

I am a story, birthed
from the wounds of slaves.
The heartbeat
of my ancestry sunken
on the Georgia Coast.
I've lived in a world
black fisted,
seated in war.
Martin Luther King Jr's
"I have a dream" &
Malcolm X's 1964
"by any means necessary"
brought up warrior children,
whose children get gunned down
in our 2018 streets.
A world sung in pass me notes

&

amazing graces. Twisted up
in my dark brown coily hair
with Tropic Isle butters and oils.
I am a poem, on fire.
A 3-wick jasmine scented storm,
whose mother's hands kneaded
fight into my frail form, brother's
healing arms carried me from
my father's sins, & sister's words
that could unwrap the pieces
of my heart from bondage.
I am history
walking upright.
I am greatness.
I am.

“hom(e)age” Reflection

The title of this poem came to me after taking to Aja Monet’s collection of poetry titled *My Mother Was a Freedom Fighter*. The very first section in this collection is titled: inner (city) chants. From seeing the section title written this way, and from this instance alone, I was inspired to add the parentheses around the letter “e” to create the word “home” within “homage”. While my goal was to pay homage by referring to parts of my history throughout the poem, I also wanted the word “home” to come through because that is the word that kept coming through to me while I was writing. I suppose it helps that I was actually in my own home when writing it.

The poem simply speaks to where I am from, and the things that make up who I am. I start off by describing the world that I’ve been a part of. I describe my existence as a story, but that story might not have had the chance to be written if it wasn’t for what my ancestors endured. The term “black fisted” pays tribute to the historic raised black fist. It’s Black power. It’s unity. When I say “seated in war”, I am referencing the long and unfinished fight that Black people have had to endure in this country; I come to think of the Civil Rights Movement and other triumphant occurrences that have shaped my people’s history. The world that I grew up in, and the spaces that I occupy also consist of more lighthearted things as well from the songs that I grew up singing right down to the products that I put in my hair.

I begin to close this poem by bringing my family into the mix. There isn’t one part of me that anyone in this world could be introduced to that hasn’t been molded by those closest to my heart. This poem means so much to me because it is partly a way for me to acknowledge all that has brought me up in this world, influenced me, taught me, and grounded me.

“rosa”

Alabama, 1955
sweet modiste seated
on a Montgomery bus
windows exaggerating
white light

Your Winter arrest
bore burdens,
justice rocked by the
Mother of Civil Rights

Thank you,
for spurning ghost laws
that shook the voices
of my brothers & sisters
still...

As if to say

this is for the blacks
with no top jobs...
the street corner
shoe shiners & chauffeurs

As if to say

this is for the starlight progeny
the warm water drinkers,
victims of a vapid education

Rosa,
you are splendor
in a vile history

you are peace.

“rosa” Reflection

Rosa. Rosa. Rosa.

It’s easy to forget all that has come before you when you are a part of something so big... so vast. Life, to be able to live, is this sweet thing that often times gets taken for granted. We don’t thank those that need to be thanked. We overlook those that need the attention and care the most. It can become easy to settle into a routine and forget the reasons, people, and events that have gotten you to where you are.

Rosa Parks, though she wasn’t the first to give up her seat on that particular bus in 1955, she rose as a symbol for the boycott that followed... for the many black individuals who has been harassed, taken and/or shoved off of a public bus, and fined for their daily day-to-day transportation. Even more than that, the boycott was a product of the overall injustice that Black people and people of color faced and still *do* face on a daily basis.

I cannot even fathom all of the names of women who deserve to be at the top of a poem, sitting a few font sizes bigger than the rest of the text... standing out. “rosa” sits proudly amongst the other poems as a reminder to never settle for less than you deserve, and to understand that this world extends far beyond just one individual, so when you fight for something understand the *who* that you are fighting for.

“maxiumus”

& it's like what Demi said
"You're only brave in the moonlight."

Where I entertained
your Jamaican beard
& Indian hair, over
a Starbucks chai tea latte
already gone—drippings
falling into the cup's
bottom creases.

I noticed,
your cologne was woody,
but still sweet
while you flashed
your smile aged
by air kept
from journeys & many lives
in DR, India, Miami Beach

Maybe it was your
"sensual and sexual" wiles
hissed at me, as you caressed
my lips with your eyes,
or how you twisted
my intelligence in that brain
sloshing under your
black beanie hat...

that had me sitting—
legs crossed,
one finger daggering
my temple—thinking...

I'd rather be watching Gilmore Girls

“maxiumus” Reflection

So, this is an interesting one. Maximus is a guy that I met one night when I went to Starbucks to do some work and change up my pace and routine a bit. I walked into the establishment, coffee machines and blenders screaming, and chatter from customers filling the entire room. I solidified a table for myself, and then stood in line to grab something small so that I wasn't using a public space for hours without buying anything. I got settled into my chair in a comfortable and satisfying way before I took to the internet to start some research on Rosa Parks because I was attempting to write a poem about her.

I am not sure how long I had been sitting quietly and working my way through several tabs on Safari and Chat Baker lullabying in my ear before a faint woody (but yet still somehow sweet) scent hugged my nostrils. I figured that someone must have walked by me or sat somewhere near where I was wearing such an intriguing cologne, but I didn't stare stop my work to loop up because I was focused. Also, I don't think I cared to match a face to the scent.

Towards the end of my night there, I held a five minute conversation with myself in my head regarding stopping my work then and going home to get some rest to pick back up where I left off the next day. I had been out all day and thought that I had a productive outing, so I took my rose gold wireless Beats Solo headphones and I started to organize my things on the table to pack up. Right then, is when I heard a voice talking to me. Now, I can't remember exactly what that first sentence was out of the person's mouth, but I turned around and there he was...

He immediately began talking to me about the poetry books I was carrying and if I was a writer. He then went on to tell me his job as a freelance writer and his life. He asked me questions and I barely answered. He tried to tell me about myself multiple times from vague answers that I gave him, but yet still found time to look me over and flirt in between his sprinkling of wisdom. He was an interesting person indeed. I sat focusing viciously on the way that his mouth moved and what came out of it. I watched the way he twirled and moved his head around and what he looked at. I noticed the way that he sat and where he placed his hands at certain times.

While it is true (like the poem says) that I was thinking about Gilmore Girls, I also thought to myself that it would be so sad if I didn't take some of this in even if it was to suffice only for my own personal knowledge of the kinds of people that choke my energy. Starbucks was beginning to close and the conversation came to end. I let him put his number in my phone (I think this was because I was so out of it by that time) and he walked me to my car. I thanked him for a good talk and I drove away. His number is still sitting in my phone from that night.

“little”

My mother asks, "Are you afraid?"

"A little," I say.

My brother asks, "Is it hard for you?"

I tell him, "A little."

My sister asks, "Does it hurt?"

I say, "A little."

My friend asks, "You tired?"

"Just a little," I say.

"Little" is fear's slinking
shadowed body
towering over me

"Little" is my confidence
lurking behind every
weighted wooden door
I open to step through

"Little" is my worth crawling
out of my mouth, begging
like a child for its mother

"Little" is the way I lie.

“little” Reflection

“little” was not a poem that I looked forward to writing or reading back to myself. My independent study advisor noticed my heavy use of the word and asked me to write about it... so I did. The task was not something that I looked forward to doing at all, but I realized how significant it would be for me to be able to voice my experience with the word and tell my truth regarding the ways that I found myself using the word “little”. It was an arduous feat, but I think I am better for having done it, so that’s all that matters, right?

When coming into my realizations about my use of the word, I took note of the fact that both my sister and my mother over use the word. My sister’s fiancé actually pointed this out to all of us one day. I was aware of it before because I could hear myself speak and acknowledge that that was one of the words that I had used in the sentence, but I have never singled out a word like that before in such an intimate way to figure out why I use it.

I have questioned my word usage in my poetry and writing before, and I have taken note of my language and the choices that I have made in my writing before. However, *before* it didn’t seem like I was analyzing those choices in relation to my life, my existence and why I am that way that I am/do the things that I do. Before it was just for the sake of being aware, but I was afraid of writing this poem because this time it felt different... it felt like there was more at stake.

While writing the poem and reflecting I noticed that I used the word very generously for a lot of different things and in situations that aren’t so taxing. On the other hand, though, I noticed that I tend to use the word, too, in times where I could stand to be a little more honest with myself.

See, there it is. Little. No, I should have said: in times where I could stand to be more honest with myself. Yeah... because I deserve that from me.

“escaping titles”

Brown eyed girl, arched back,
searching for a home.
Everyone here swears they know her
Hair everywhere, feeling out the air

Young and easy,
slipping into this world
unchained, in vain
Your heart is screaming
louder than your mind
Step slowly, queen

The world is waiting to break you
It's learning to make you hate you
But stride slow, it has to earn you

Goals set to achieve
This is what we do
Putting on our dresses
Stretching the truth
Attempting to prove our worth
Like an unarranged marriage
As a people we commit to destruction

Isn't it lovely?
Cultural breakdowns
that make standing up
for anything not worth it

Isn't it grand?
Feeling like a number,
laced whenever, wherever,
however...

Isn't it romantic?
To want to love,
to give all that you have
& tumble down in defeat
of someone that does what they do
for a chance to laugh at you?
Isn't it just romantic?

Our love,
often distorted.
But seek its truth.
Love you.

Become the eye in which we stare
Give those trailing behind
something to believe in
Embrace the patterns in your hair
Teach the others to scrub
worry off of their skin

Everyone here swears they know you
Step slowly queen
The world is waiting to break you
Hate you
Unwilling to earn you

But seek the truth,
love you.

That is lovely.
That is grand.
That is romantic.

“escaping titles” Reflection

This poem is my truth. It is truth for a lot of black women regarding what we face on a daily basis as we try to find a place in a world that depicted black people as villains. I wrote this piece in a gallery at my previous school (University of New Haven); the assignment was given to the entire class after Margaret Bowland came to speak about her exhibit. I couldn't understand fully, then, what message I was sending to the young black girls that I was addressing in the poem. However, I let my pen scribble for 10 minutes on my college-rule lined paper and I didn't stop writing until the 10 minutes were up. Margaret Bowland's work is bold and beautiful, and it struck me within seconds of entering the gallery room. I didn't know that it was going to tell me about myself. I didn't know what it would mean for me and the person that I am today. I remember after writing this poem, and another titled “White Fives” (from the same 10 minute assignment given to my entire creative writing class), Professor Randall Horton responded to my work the next week in front of my peers. He told me that when he read my work, especially “White Fives”, it reminded him of Ntozake Shange, the author of *For Colored Girls*, which ended up being a Tyler Perry film later on. I was honored to have been compared to her because she is phenomenal to me, but I didn't fully recognize the height of that compliment at that time. I didn't understand the power that it held. My creative writing class was a game changer for me in the sense that my professor opened up a door for me to be able to step into my skin. He unknowingly tapped into a facet of myself that I hadn't even been introduced to yet. He changed my life. In my research of Bowland and her artwork during my time at UNH, I found out that the young girl was Janasia Smith—she was 12 at the time. “escaping titles” is the poem that I needed to either hear and/or read when I was that age, but I didn't have anyone to show that to me. I hope that this piece can be peace or those young girls who need to hear this the most.

“post-barrel cop out”

Kathryn Johnston | 21 November, 2006 | 96

Walter Scott | 4 April, 2015 | 50

Keith Scott | 20 September 2016 | 43

Eric Garner | 17 July, 2014 | 43

Terrence Crutcher | 16 September, 2016 | 40

Tanisha Anderson | 13 November, 2014 | 37

Alton Sterling | 5 July, 2016 | 37

Philando Castile | 6 July, 2016 | 32

Akai Gurley | 20 November, 2014 | 28

Sandra Bland | 13 July, 2015 | 28 **#sayhername**

Tarika Wilson | 4 January, 2008 | 26

Freddie Gray | 12 April, 2015 | 25

Amadou Diallo | 4 February, 1999 | 23

Sean Bell | 25 November, 2006 | 23

Rekia Boyd | 21 March, 2012 | 22

John Crawford III | 5 August, 2014 | 22

Michael Brown, Jr. | 9 August, 2014 | 18 **#handsupdontshoot**

Trayvon Martin | 26 February, 2012 | 17

Laquan McDonald | 20 October, 2014 | 17

Tamir Rice | 22 November, 2014 | 12

Aiyana Jones | 16 May, 2010 | 7

“post-barrel cop out” Reflection

Oh man. This is a hard one. “post-barrel cop out” is not a piece that I thought that I’d be writing in a million years. This is not just because I never even thought I would have to (as in... I can’t believe these events have taken place causing me to write this), but also because five years ago, I probably would’ve thought that this was just a list of the individuals whose lives were lost because of police instead of it being a poem. I chose to follow through and write this because I feel like the fallen deserve it. When the idea came about I didn’t feel right just letting it fade into the back of mind even if I didn’t necessarily get to use it for this thesis. Their names need to be spoken and remembered. They deserve respect and just as if I was taking a moment of silence, I carefully and slowly typed each name and date on a blank Microsoft Word page.

Today, I can sit here and type this: this is a poem and so much more. It is life’s heartbeat paused in a single moment. It is memories and stories and images. It is a part of my history engraved on a page, and I can barely look at it sometimes. This list should be longer...it *is* longer. There was a point when I didn’t know if I should create the digital version of this poem and then have “to be continued” fade in right at the bottom of the screen; I was anticipating a potentially controversial move, but am I wrong in my sentiment to somehow know that this is not over? Whether it is bullets to the chest or hands around the neck, am I wrong to assume that this will happen again? The real question is: when will it stop?

I remember the first overwhelming thought that came to my head when my independent study advisor introduced the idea of this poem to me was (inspired by a different poem of mine, “Bound”), *oh wow that’s a lot*. I immediately grew anxious about the new task that I had

acquired. Similarly, I grew even more anxious when I finally sat down to do the research for this poem, which included finding out facts about the person's life and watching bystander and/or dash cam footage of their death, arrest, or altercation with the police. It is one of those moments where I was very well aware of the severity of the topic and what was going on in these videos, but when I saw it again—when it was right there in my face again, disbelief paralyzed my body. It was late at night, and as I was stretched out on my living room couch, all that I could do was close my laptop, bow my head, and pray for their souls and their families. I prayed for my entire family, myself, niece, and nephew. I prayed until I had nothing left in me to say. I prayed until I broke down in tears.

“semi sweet”

I've never given much thought
to how similar the color
of a cocoa bean is to my skin.

6am, first pod down.
Then the machetes.
I whack the pod in my left hand,
a few beats, & then it repeats.
I have the scars to prove it.

Sometimes I count the beans
as I go, make a family.
Instead, I traded my mother
for a weak wage.

I'm beginning to give thought
to how similar the color
of a cocoa bean is to my skin.

See, the bean is mutilated,
crushed, but then transformed
and somehow I missed
the latter process.

So, with every bite you take
of a damned Nestle crunch,
or the God-given Hershey bar
with almonds... know that you
beat me. You consume a pound
of my flesh.

Your glowing eyes, fraternizing
with the crisp folds of the wrapper—every
corner you lift,
a whip greets my back,
the crease in my leg.

Each square of chocolate
you place on your lips
is another limb lost
 soul scorched
 mind murdered

I want you to taste my tears
in your chocolate milk...
feel my heartbeat in your stomach
as you swallow me whole
with a smile.

I am wasted in you
all because I accepted a job.

“semi sweet” Reflection

I came across multiple articles chronicling events that would take place and quests that journalists took to try and find answers... there has been accounts of child slavery going on in West Africa (the Ivory Coast) on cocoa farms. “semi sweet” is my account of that from the perspective of a child slave.

I came across this one article from the Food Empowerment Project titled [“Child Labor and Slavery in the Chocolate Industry”](#). Within this article, the writer interviewed a freed slave about their time spent on the chocolate farm. The journalist asked the individual to express what they would like other people to know about all that was going on and what they had been through. The freed slave, Drissa, stated “When people eat chocolate, they are eating my flesh” (“Child Labor and Slavery”). I don’t think I could even finish the article after reading that line.

From the day that I had found out about this horrible issue, I made it my mission to stop eating chocolate from major chocolate companies like Mars, Hershey’s, Cadbury, Nestle’, Godiva etc.... basically any company that has been known to source their chocolate from these kinds of cocoa farms, or companies that haven’t been transparent about where they source their chocolate in general. This meant no more kit kats. This meant no more Hershey’s almond kisses that my mom buys every year around Christmas. I was never a big chocolate eater, but a girl can have her cravings.

Despite how hard it was to give up my main sources of chocolate, I know that it is worth it to put up a front and a fight for the stories and issues that aren’t spoken about as much on a daily basis.

I cannot possibly begin to imagine the day to day life of these tortured children, but this poem was written as a way to not only acknowledge what is happening to them, but to also say that I'm sorry for what they have to endure.

“murderer”

The way it lies flat, placed gently
in between the nubs of your
brown glass receptacle.

That square of a room brimful
with white haze became its space
to gather densely with those alike.

Its thin cylinder figure is neat
and uniform, until it meets its demise—
fire to ash—as it disintegrates earth
bound just as you did.

Stained with its kiss,
your blue button up
collared shirt still hangs
from the nail in the
yellowing wall panel.

The smell of a cigarette—
poignant, deadening, full of you.

“murderer” Reflection

George E. Thorne Sr. is my grandfather. Born on November 18th and carried up to the heavens on October 12th, 2008. I knew my grandfather to be a gentle man with a heart of gold and hands of steel. It was our pickup truck drives to the dumpster, and our trips to the store to get his cigarettes and my root beer barrel candies that stain my memory.

This poem is one that stemmed mainly from how I remembered his and my grandmother’s room to be. Now that my grandmother occupies the room by herself, it is much different than when my grandfather was alive, but still full of him. It was a tiny room, and I spent many a night sleeping in their bed when I was younger. I would watch judge shows with my grandfather, or sit on the bed watching other shows while he listened to his church songs or studied his bible. Many times, he left a small radio on that delivered what sounded like the back and forth from the police radios.

Many things hung on the walls... if it wasn’t plaques or pictures, it was hats or clothes. Perhaps the most dreadful thing in the room was my grandfather’s ashtray. I remember me and my sister hiding his cigarettes from him as if that would stop him from smoking all together. I don’t think anyone could’ve actually gotten him to stop. For my grandfather, it was a bad habit formed long before I was even born. Cancer might have taken his life, and memories are now put into poems so I won’t forget, but his spirit is within me... that’s the greatest gift he left me.

mini marathon poems

Half flesh, half rock.

Let your scars open to moonlight.

Be QUEEN: midnight skin laced in gold.

-don't apologize

34

brown girls

eaten by the world.

-lost

When I'm told I'm not black,

I open my mouth wide

the motherland engraved on my tongue,

and spit Africa at the ignorant.

-identity

mini marathon poems Reflection

I actually wrote ten mini marathon poems. Each mini poem was harder to write than the last one. What made the task harder was the fact that I had to write one each day for ten days, which in theory sounds completely fine, but is a different story completely when it's an assignment for a class and lives among many other assignments prodding your brain politely to make room for them during a very stressful semester.

I was down to the last two days of the ten-day marathon, and then I came across a picture on Instagram about young girls that had gone missing. The day after that I was sitting at my job in Kean's writing center reading Nayyirah Waheed's *salt*. Waheed's work was a tremendous help to me last year; whether it was reading her for pleasure just to get through the day, or if it was for inspiration before I wrote. Her work and her style are raw and unique.

To represent her, and leave somewhat of a mark on the page, I decided to follow her way of putting the title of the poem at the end of all of my mini marathon poems. This structure of hers was absolutely genius to me, and it is something that, at the time, I wouldn't have thought to do. I feel that because each poem was written on a different day influenced by different experiences, they all had the chance to be wildly unique and random. There is no specific theme that I was going for... I just wrote.

Maybe I will take to doing a marathon again, but for a longer period of time. Stranger things have happened.

“u of new haven jamaican”

You used to be the one I called
when my hair was still unruly,
the squawk of your deep voice crammed
my voicemail spitting patois as audio waves.

Something like:
“Bumbaclot! Why yuh no answer yuh phone”
I can’t recall

Cold nights outside of Bethel Hall
watching the RA’s through double glass doors
conversing while eating popcorn

Whispered chuckles fill the shadows
as student’s voices carry out
around the bricked building
on the smoke and twang of weed.

You used to be the one I called
lying across my tan and cream comforter
with SpongeBob gliding in and out of my
peripheral on the television.

Now, I am that third late night
salted caramel macaron you desire,
but put back in the box, proceeding
to grab something else.

My hair is now straight,
And my voicemail inbox empty.

“u of new haven jamaican” Reflection

I stated in my methods section that “u of new haven jamaican” was written about an ex-boyfriend. Yes, that’s true, and it didn’t necessary end on the best of terms; however, I was able to reach for some pretty pleasant memories even though the relationship didn’t last and the concept of the poem is not a happy-go-lucky one. There is always a calm after the storm, and not only do I live by that saying, but I really do think that it can apply here. This poem flourished out of pure and genuine growth and a calmed heart after a really rough time in my life, and I am proud of its existence... of its life on the page.

I think that this poem came at a time where it would be really hard for some others to write given the situation that provides the context of this piece, but I think it is actually better to write through the hard times, instead of after. You can always write after, but sometimes the writing about it is actually what helps you to heal from open wounds. Being on the other side of that pain helps me to look at this poems and others like it with a new perspective.

I am grateful for all of my experiences, no matter how hard they were to go through. This particular poem wouldn’t have been created if I tried to write it sooner than I did. I am not sure why I picked it as one of my poem ideas, but last year was a year of healing for me in so many ways, so I might have just been moved in a moment to get that out of me. A part of that struggle is released every time I read the poem aloud, so here’s to reciting it over and over... time and time again.

“when the sun goes down”

Shackled, chained
mighty and trained
down to the field I go,
but time ain't on my side

I sing: Lord, I want you to help me

See, these here hands
be wriggling in that there dirt
conversing in worms tongue
smooth and steady

I sing: Lord, I *need* you to help me

Where, oh where, might he be?
Bessie say down by the schoolyard

I gots to find life out there
'cause these folk jus want dirty money, and when wading
in the water didn't work,
I grew me a ole choke cherry tree.
Strapped on my back.

But Lord, I be so glad
when that sun go down.
Ain't no use in sleeping',
I be scared

Jus let that sun set on me.
Keep plucking' till the sun
go down... till it go from me

“when the sun goes down” Reflection

I was always so worried about how people would respond to this particular poem. “when the sun goes down” was written in 2016 for a hypertext poetry piece that I curated for my electronic literature course. To my knowledge, this is the very first poem that I incorporated very slight workings of Black English Vernacular (BEV) into my work. Honestly, it is not a dialect that I would speak in, although I am familiar with what it is and how it is used.

When I write about topics and experiences that I might not have gone through myself, but could either be affected by or have a connection to in some way or another, I am usually very careful about how I go about it and how in depth I go into the poem. I will sometimes limit myself when writing about more complex topics because I have a fear of not doing something right, or simply offending someone... anyone. Many would tell me that in a way, this is part of my experience as a black woman. However, I feel it is more so a part of history than a part of my experience. My life and my experiences are affected by slavery, yes, but I need to be accurate in how I present these things as topics such as this one is highly controversial.

I am an artist, and am within my own right to my work and how I present it, but I am responsible for my thoughts and my actions, so I took this into heavy consideration when deciding to incorporate the poem into my work that would be seen by so many other people. I actually remember my professor being moved to tears when I recited my poetry from my project. The response so far has been encouraging, and for that I am grateful.

“advice”

Accept the fullness of loving yourself

spine carved out of Toni Morrison's Home

full lips of Broadway tunes,

with hips that memorize the way roses bloom.

big.bold.beautiful

stars fell outta the sky to meet you

& enemies find your tongue

fits into your mouth funny

'cause grace couldn't sit in theirs.

Accept the fullness of loving yourself,

honey,

God makes no mistakes.

“advice” Reflection

This poem is about me loving myself. This poem is a birthmark of my life. This poem is advice that I need every single day, and that other young girls may possibly need to hear every now and then. In “advice”, I was able to capture some of the things that remain the most important to me, and that make up who I am as a person. From my interests in theatre and wanting to pursue an acting career at one point to the books that I read, this poem is definitely a way for me to be grounded in who I am and what gets me through each day.

With “advice” I feel like I am constantly reminded that it is never too late to chase my dreams or reflect on and appreciate the ones that I had that may not have come true for me... yet. It is important, and for each day that I get to live I want to do so with purpose no matter what I am doing. Through all of that, the main message is to just love yourself. Through everything... love yourself. Be your best friend.

For the strong women who stand up for themselves when no one else will. For the loner kid who struggles to make friends. For the girl in the corner that can't seem to navigate the world she's been thrown into. For the sassy and the confident and the bold and the bright. This poem is for you. I hope that this can bring light to whoever reads it, and that it can provide strength, healing, and happiness for them.

“that sweatshirt”

White,
except for the hood strings;
they were dingy,
folding into themselves
from wear.

I can still feel the iciness
of its silver zipper touching
my chest. It crept down
past my belly button.
AERO stretching across my breasts.

I draped the cape-like hoodie over my
body when you weren't there—
remembering the time we lay cramped
in my awful college twin-sized bed.

We found ways to suffocate
our laughs and kisses
so my roommate could dream.
But... the pockets.

The pockets had space for all of our secrets,
just the left side, though. We only ever used one.
That other pocket was yours;
you had a lot to hold.

Today, I wish I had that sweatshirt;
it reminds me of your infidelity,
your lies.

Today I wish I had that sweatshirt...
So I could burn it.

“that sweatshirt” Reflection

Ahhh the sweatshirt, oh the memories. There was a time where the sweatshirt and I stayed up for a final together... it might've been Shakespeare, but I can't recall now. The sweatshirt's first road trip was to North Carolina, but it was hotter than expected during the car ride. The sweatshirt and I lived a very adventurous life during our time together, but all good things must come to an end, right? Sometimes I guess. There was a lot of poking and prodding that took place to locate the idea for this poem—my brain just wouldn't give in, but once I had my ideas in order, my pen moved smoothly across the paper.

Sending all of the sweatshirts back that I had accumulated throughout the three year relationship was definitely an experience. I didn't really think anything of it until they were actually gone because I had to open my drawer to that empty space until finally something else took its place. Like I had stated in my methods section, I was in my Advanced Writing Poetry course, and I wanted to go about the next poem that I would write in a different way. So, instead of writing a very cliché poem about love or loss, I decided to focus in on one object and write about that. It seemed to work.

Giving the sweatshirt back meant everything really was over, and that was okay for me. None of what happened towards the last days of the relationship were easy to go through, but it was the items like the sweatshirt that made hard times a little better because of the memories that they held. Giving back the sweatshirt was me allowing myself to step into growth. Giving back the sweatshirt was me allowing myself to forget some small details. Giving back the sweatshirt was me saying: love yourself first. And so I did.

“august 10, 2014”

Amongst the old clothes pin line & the water tank
on the side of her crimson and white ranch home—
the beauty of you was left in Whitakers, NC,
in my grandma’s backyard.

We glided under a radiant sun and bending trees,
creating a tunnel of blush pink and white flowers.
I paid no mind to the webs connecting tree branches
or the tall dandelions brushing against my shin.

I watched as you finessed steps backwards
in the yard as I crept toward you, searching
for your eyes behind your Canon—
you capturing stills of me at all angles

Unknowingly, that was our last trip,
and the last time I remember you loving me.

“august 10, 2014” Reflection

I wrote “august 10, 2014” out of the need to remember that day. This is the clearest memory I have, but I started to really go back through the timeline in my head, and that is when I realized that trip was the last time I remember genuinely feeling happy where I was while in my last relationship. All of the other days leading up to the relationship ending I just felt... numb. That trip was the last time I saw him look at me like he did the first time we met. There needed to be a poem for that. For so long, I tried not writing about that relationship at all; I wanted to forget that it even happened, but it happened for a reason. So, here we are.

It seems a little funny to me now because I never liked taking pictures, but I would let him take pictures of me more than *I* took pictures of me. I can't remember too much else from that day except for this moment in the yard. I have carried the memory with me for quite some time, but I thought it was time to release the memory somewhere else and let it be.

I am glad that I got the chance to write this poem because being reminded of spectacular moments in life help me to feel even more appreciative of those good times because it could have been worse. In no way do I ever brush over all of the ugly parts as if they don't matter, but at some point, those ugly moments cannot and should not hold reign over you anymore. Even the tougher times in life that we want to forget got us to where we are. I am grateful for all of my experiences.

“no, i’m not sorry for loving you”

Hosana in the highest! Praise is rooted
at the bottom of my feet for you, O Lord.
My existence, above yours– your first
choice– & no, I am not sorry for loving you.
You are my strength because I’ve never
had enough of it to hold with both hands.
Worship holds my heart hostage, in awe of
a God that loves in spite of an imperfect
flesh. Glowing eyes, stars falling out of my
mouth... you are almighty... all powerful
& no, I am not sorry for loving you.

“no, i’m not sorry for loving you” Reflection

I found it very hard to continue to go to church once my grandfather passed away, and especially once my pastor passed away. The atmosphere was never the same when I would walk in. I ended up solidifying a new church home in Connecticut when I lived there for school and after I moved back to New Jersey due to the fact that my partner in my last relationship lived in Connecticut.

Now that I am out of that relationship, I am still having a hard time touching down on another church home. However, I have still been growing spiritually and have been pouring myself into the ministry that I perform with my choir at Kean. Even though I haven’t touched down in one church just yet, I have found that I have been able to grow even closer to God. It was up to me to keep that fire lit and to keep giving God all of me even if I didn’t find a church home that fit best yet.

There aren’t enough words in the English language to express how full my heart is just because I am able to know Him for myself and trust in Him with every fiber of my being. Although this may not be everyone’s truth, it is mine, and I am blessed to be able to have that because I do not know where I would be without my faith in Him. This poem is just a thank you. It is my whole heart lifted up to Him.

I felt the need to go on forever when writing this one, but in the end I didn’t feel like I needed to ramble on. I just wanted to unapologetically express my love, uncaring of what anyone would think or say. I did not touch or change a single thing about this poem. It’s perfect just the way that it is.

“black tongue”

We speak with battle scars—
love with sugar and honey,
coughing up rose petals
at the feet of white carcasses,
& hiding under moonlight.

Our breath perfumed
by the salt of the North Atlantic—
waters that birthed my ancestors
into the U-S-of-A.

Jagged teeth
snatching flesh,
laying bare
the nations in us
Iroquoian vocab—
wrapped in Kente cloth,
sprouting American flags.

Yes, untamed locs
like my Cherokee cousin,
European spoon-shaped eyes,
Capetown resting
at the tip of my tongue.
Our brains cast in porcelain,
but we put our hearts
in our mouths

‘cause revolution is
black tongue.
black tongue.
black tongue.

“black tongue” Reflection

I almost feel as though I have said all that I have to say about this poem in my methods section. I don't know if I could've said it better than that. “black tongue” means a lot to me because after writing this poem, it was the first time in a very long time where I felt like “I had it”. I don't necessarily know what “it” was, but it was a good feeling and I never wanted to let go. I had been in such a rut with my writing and I didn't really have any fresh or new ideas.

I feel as though this poem touches on a lot of different aspects of who I am and where I come from. I talk about my people's oppression, our tactics in trying to survive in this world, what we embody and more. There is no space for filler information with poetry, so I had to get to my point and get to it quickly.

This poem is one of my absolute favorites to recite verbally as it has a certain flow to it when I speak that captures a sense of strength for me. I *feel* strong when I recite the poem, and I hope that I am able to bring that through even in just its written form.

“sarah baartman”

Plaster cast of your body
upright in Musée del’Homme,
standing caricature like
The French parading your plump body

A puppet of sorts—
lifeless, as your bones glisten
beside you, brains pickled in a jar nearby

1810, the tempestuous Atlantic
ripped you away from the Gamtoos
resting in the mouth of the Indian Ocean
like the Dutch, heaving my ancestors
on the White Lion, “Man of Warship”

Cape Town to London
Witnessing the black, yellow, green
of South Africa’s flag ripple
a distant goodbye
resembling diverged paths between
the motherland of trees and wildlife
and Piccadilly’s circus—a caged nightmare—

Your rough hair—like mine—
skin, a burnt umber
Hips as wide as the Gariiep Dam
You, what I shouldn’t be,
“Supposedly”

The arch in your back,
a doorway wrapped in false truths
5 years gyrating for the public’s eye,
shaking whatever hung loose
For each chocolate-rich roll
of your thigh, I stand up

Unfathomably put on display,
where crazed eyes and curious minds,
attempted to bridge a gap between animal and human
Blades of hatred
that lacerated your flesh,
so people could get a glimpse
Of Hottentot Venus’ vagina

“sarah baartman” Reflection

Somehow I have to find a way to talk about this poem, and it just so happens to be the poem that I hold closest to my heart. “sarah baartman” started it all for me. I wrote this poem in November of 2015. I was in a poetry course at Kean, and my professor told the class to write a witness poem. I cannot recall now if the witness poem was specifically supposed to be something that we had not experienced ourselves, but I have a feeling that this was in the case.

The professor asked us to pick an occurrence or an event that had stuck out to us. At first, I had no idea what I would write about, but when I finally settled on slavery, I had to take to doing research to narrow down a specific event that had happened. I don’t know how in the world I came across Sarah Baartman, but I did. I had found a video that seemed to be a business function of some sort. It actually looked like a work party, but despite what the event actually was, there was a cake. You’re probably thinking positive and delicious thoughts about cake, but I promise you that won’t last.

The cake was in the shape of a woman’s body. It was a larger body, and I could tell it as a woman because of the chest area. What I did not anticipate on witnessing was a cardboard cutout just wide enough for someone’s face to stick through. The cutout sat right above the cake so that anyone could stick their head through and be the head to this cake body. A white man in blackface poked his head through and fake screamed every time someone cut into the cake.

I scoured viciously for the comments and read several that spoke of a woman named Sarah Baartman. I immediately researched her name. I had the strangest feeling that I had come across

her name before, but I wasn't for sure. From there, I couldn't rest until I was able to do something or get some of the anger that I was feeling out. This poem didn't come out as angry as I first was, but instead I think it took a sorrowful stance, which is appropriate to me. I was in disbelief of what I had saw. I was mad at those people in the video. Their laughs haunted my memory for months after. I thought... this is we are to them... a joke.

Discussion

Let's chat. My autoethnography was a highly personalized account of who I am as a writer, and my creative process with my own poetry. I want to take the time to go through some of the main categories, similar to my rationale section, where I can dig a little deeper into things for everyone reading this. As stated in my rationale, and according to Sarah Wall, an autoethnography "offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding" (39). As much as my thesis was a personal choice made to help me understand myself and the way that I work better, it was also a strategic choice that I made for whoever happens to read this, for educators, and for other scholars.

My intentions and goals with this thesis was to be able to contribute to both the educational and creative communities so that other writers like me can have some sort of reference for breaking through boundedness and various ruts in their writing lives. When I came into my Master's program, I had every intention of finding my creative edge again because I thought that it had faded. I didn't know where I was headed, and I felt as though I couldn't even gather enough information about myself to say where I had been. It was important for me to try and find my voice again as I felt as though it was lost, muted, and muddled under all of the academic jargon and traditional structure. Don't get me wrong, I acknowledge and am grateful for being well versed in both communities (creative and academic), but there was a time where I didn't necessarily know if I belonged in either one of them.

It took me a while to find the academic feet I'd use to stand on in higher education, and I had also been forced to stay away from the creative for so long that I didn't feel like I knew how to stand on my own in that either. I felt restricted, bound up, and torn at how to begin to maneuver through all that I was experiencing and that is when I was introduced to electronic

literature. I had no idea what it was, and am still learning every single day about it. I didn't understand the term digital humanities, and I definitely wasn't adept to said "new media tools" until I had someone explain what these things were to me. Do you know how you may have some information, but because you build your own language around it and your own way of identifying it, it seems unrecognizable by any other name? That was my exact dilemma. I ended up knowing more about these topics than I let myself believe. This was a huge relief just because I wasn't completely out of the loop anymore, but it was a great advantage in that I didn't feel like I was starting from scratch.

When I created my hypertext digital poetry project, *Breaking the Manacles*, the first time around I had a different focus. I wanted to instill empowerment through pain as I worked to paint a picture of the intracultural riff between African people and African Americans. Some individuals don't acknowledge that there is a riff, and for some it is the first thing they bring up in conversation about race and these two groups of people. In my personal opinion, I do see cultural boundaries and differences that have risen over the years, but I still feel as though we are one flesh.

The main aspect of African American lineage is the fact that we have African heritage, so whenever I hear someone trying to tell me about myself I immediately want to retaliate with *well if my black isn't from Africa then I have been lied to my entire life about where my ancestors come from*. I am aware of the Native American ancestry that I have, as well as the European, but I am not going to pretend that the African is nonexistent. Whether your experience was slavery or colonization, we are much more similar than some let on. I am proud of all that I am made up of, and I will not let my voice fade when I say I am proud to be a black woman.

Getting back to my hypertext project, I wanted to express this in my poetry and attempt to bridge the gap that was sitting in between African Americans and African people. We are stronger together.. we all are no matter what race or ethnicity we are. Now, as I began to transition into the second year of my graduate career, I wanted to expand on the work that I had already done. In what ways would I be able to tie the creative work that I was doing into my Master's thesis? Well, I had noticed that my poetry overwhelmingly shifted from complex issues like sex trafficking and slavery to myself, my experiences, and the things that make up who I am. After all of the frustrating years of having someone either telling me that I can't include myself in my work, or to try and write about myself (the task being very daunting and complicated) here I was... writing about me.

I found this transition to be one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had. I think I have learned more about myself in these two years than I could have ever imagined. So let's get into some of the insights into my current work in relation to the topics I brought up in my rationale. To begin, I think it is absolutely impossible to not have a section on digital media or media tools (in other words... technology). I have found that technology has been a huge part of why my thesis even exists and that it impacts my work greatly. From using Kean's online databases and finding resources on the web, to socially networking and creating my webpage... There is so much life that has derived from me being able to make use of online software. Programs like Zotero, or even the program Slack that let the Kean graduate students collaborate and work with the Norwegian graduate students that my program director had been advising was very useful to my thesis journey.

If it wasn't for new media tools, *Breaking the Manacles* (the first version) wouldn't exist and neither would this revamped and expanded version. I am grateful for all that it has afforded

me. I do want to acknowledge the concept of limited access for some, but keeping that in mind, I decided not to go with a thesis solely online so that at least those who do not have access to the web can have all of the parts of the thesis (even the poetry). Speaking of the poetry, the digital space that the poems will reside in create new life for them; they are all able to shine in a way that differs than black text on a white page. While the traditional print version has its affordances and advantages, there is something to be said about work and art that can maneuver through and live successfully and effectively in different spaces.

Moving along, I'd like to expand on my sentiments regarding voice. I noted previously that I came into my master's program trying to find and claim my voice, and to be able to establish it among the many other scholars and educators of my field. I have found that throughout this thesis journey, I have become more aware of myself. My voice has been constructed from and influenced by the countless writers, scholars, and poets that come before me. From Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni, and August Wilson to Nayyirah Waheed, Aja Monet, and Yrsa Daley-Ward. Legendary and historical to contemporary and revolutionizing, they have all had a hand in shaping me into the person that I am today with a mind of my own and strength like no other. Their work and contributions, for me, was similar to having permission to be myself. With that confidence, I was able to write with more authority and allow myself to not question my own intelligence.

My voice has been my driving force throughout my work, and I wanted to challenge myself with this thesis to do one of the most daunting things I have experienced in education, which is sharing my ideas... standing up and allowing my thoughts to sit next to those who teach me. Allowing my voice to mingle with the voices that came before me, are existing currently with me, and those that will come after. It is like putting yourself on the line... taking a step with

your eyes closed and praying that the ground is there to meet the sole of your foot, but what I wanted to show other students and scholars with my work is the truth that their voice matters. It matters. It is important, so don't be shy to use it. I have been taking the back seat and never really speaking up for the better half of my life thus far. I didn't find it comforting to be at the top of anything or in front of anyone. I didn't believe in myself the way that I believe in myself today. While I came into my program lost, confused, and unsure of what I wanted to do, I persevered through all of that and was able to develop and strengthen a voice inside of me that I didn't know existed.

As I have mentioned previously, my heritage/lineage and the history of my people make up who I am, and tells something about my identity as a human being. I am a black woman. A poet. A scholar. A writer. A singer. An athlete. An aunt, sister, cousin, and daughter.... all of my experiences and life choices are a part of my identity. Writing for me starts with the self, so identity and race have been instrumental to my process and how I work. The way that I think, the way that my mind works, how I process information and in turn deliver/produce information all happen in ways that are unique to who I am. This thesis would have been completely different if I wasn't... well... me.

With intentions and goals to be able to give back to other students, I want to say: find what grounds you. Accept flaws and shortcomings, but push your strengths and turn them into opportunities. Have conversations with yourself through your ruts, and always remember why you started. Creative writing is a passion of mine, so it often doesn't feel like work when I am able to be in my element and having fun making, but for those that find themselves in somewhat of a lull like I did, the best advice that I can give you is to love yourself. Loving yourself doesn't just refer to looking into the mirror and loving what you see. Loving yourself is taking *care* of

yourself. It is knowing your own limits, and allowing yourself to have that second slice of cake. It is doing the things that make you happy.

When you love yourself, opportunities and life's events start to fall into place naturally. You will find yourself better equipped to handle the obstacles that life sets in your way. It took me developing that solid relationship with myself and God to find my way back to my writing. I was able to produce some of the best work I have ever created, and it all started with me being honest with myself, as well as me being determined to finish what I had started and come out better on the other side. I stated in my introduction that I wanted to come back to myself reborn and that is exactly what I have done.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to point out that this thesis has not been an easy thing to produce and write. I was faced with countless obstacles in my last semester of grad school, but I am proud to now be standing on the other side of that. I definitely don't think that this will be the end for my thesis work. I am proud of what I was able to accomplish despite all of the obstacles that were set up for me to fail. I may not have done as much as I wanted to, and everything may not be presented in the original way that I intended, but I am okay with that. Everything happens for a reason, and I am stronger having gone through my many hardships.

This thesis means so much to me, but even though I am my thesis subject, I am not worried about me... I am hoping that the work that I have done here is able to reach out to and touch someone else. I hope that my words and my experiences are able to get through to someone who needs it. My work could be the start of an entirely new generation of writers opening up about their process and how they work. When we share more we are able to do more and learn more.

If my work is able to just help only one other person then what I have done is worth it. I know that for me, this work has allowed me to get to know myself a little better, and it has served as a sort of grounding to stay true to myself, my style, my writing, and my beliefs. This completed thesis means that I am capable of more than I thought that I was. I am growing every single day, changing and evolving into a better writer. I want to see that same growth and change for other writers who may have begun their journey struggling, but is determined to come out on the other side alive, well, and thriving.

Annotated Bibliography

Mentor Texts

Leon, Kendall and Stacey Pigg. "Graduate Students Professionalizing in Digital Time/Space: A View from "Down Below"." *Computers & Composition*, vol. 28, no. 1, Mar. 2011, pp. 3-13. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1016/j.compcom.2010.12.002.

This article by Kendall Leon and Stacey Pigg seems to be a very similar account of my personal process as a graduate student partaking in the act of using modernized techniques and digital spaces to enhance writing in a professional and creative manner. This text will be helpful in my research particularly to get a more direct and in-depth perspective of the very kind of work that I am doing currently.

Lorde, Audre. *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2017.

This collection of poetry by Audre Lorde can be seen as a work comprised of the many identities she claims, and may offer insight in the way of identity with poetry by a black woman for black women. This work can be essential to my research as a mentor text.

Monet, Aja. *My Mother Was a Freedom Fighter*. Haymarket Books, 2017.

Aja Monet's collection is gentle but bold. She lays out her truth about love and spirituality. I oftentimes found myself turning the pages of this collection viciously while working on the creative end of my thesis with my own poetry. This collection is mentor text for me.

Waheed, Nayyirah. *Salt*. San Bernardino, CA, CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013.

Salt by Nayyirah Waheed focuses on a myriad of topics such as the self, love, language and closely on the diaspora of African American and African people. This work has been a guiding light for my own creative work and endeavors, and can serve as a mentor text in the furthering of my research. Poetry inspired by Waheed has been compiled into a manuscript (2017) titled "marble." and can be of use in my poetic digital compilation to compliment my thesis work.

Daley-Ward, Yrsa. *Bone*. Penguin Books, 2017.

This collection of poetry by Yrsa Daley-Ward has been somewhat of a guiding light for my poetry for this current 2018 year; it has been able to inspire some of the work that I curated this year. Her style is direct to say the least. She is clear, raw and truthful, and open to sharing the deepest sides of who she is. This text is definitely a mentor text for me.

Ethnography and Reflection

Ellis, Carolyn; Adams, Tony E. & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

In this article, Ellis et al. begin by defining autoethnography and noting that it essentially fits the bill as process, but also as product. The research is broken down into important information relaying detailed information about the process of doing an autoethnography, as well the product that results from it, and some of the issues and criticisms that can follow autoethnographic work. This resource would be great for my thesis because it

essentially gives me, as the title states, a complete overview of the work that I am in the midst of pursuing. Not only can this article help me to understand the scope of the project that I am taking on, but it can also add some much needed depth and perspective.

Sparkes, Andrew C. “Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 17, 2000, pp. 21–43., journals.humankinetics.com/doi/10.1123/ssj.17.1.21.

Andrew Sparkes’ article was able to open my eyes to a lot. He touched on concerns of narcissism and even the idea that stories cannot be enough, and there has to be valid and legitimate evidence behind stories to push work forward. He makes a lot of great points that I feel I may be able to incorporate into my work, but most of all he states at the end that “if autoethnography and narratives of self do nothing else but stimulate us to think... then they will have made a significant contribution to the field” (38).

Wall, Sarah (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2), Article 9. Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_2/pdf/wall.pdf

In this article, Sarah Wall tackles the pressing issues against autoethnography and speaks in defense of it even though some feel that personal experience is not real data. In a raw and truthful tone, she acknowledges how difficult doing an autoethnography is. Further she goes on to speak on reflective practices, voice, and autoethnography’s validity. I feel that this text was able to provide context for me. Even if I do not end up quoting specific material out of this article, I feel that Wall was among some of the first to begin to advocate for more writing that touched on personal experiences.

Wall, Sarah (2008). Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7(1), pp.38-53.

In this article, Sarah Wall brings to the forefront some of the complications that can be run into when it comes to autoethnography. There are a number of concerns that still exist with this method of doing research as if narrative and storytelling are not valid forms.

This article can prove to be beneficial to me because at the same time that I am receiving valuable information surrounding autoethnography, there are counter arguments and claims that need to be addressed with this method. I would hope to prove that the kind of information gained from this sort of work is absolutely valid and essential to the field as it stands.

New Media/Internet

Koehler, Adam. "Digitizing Craft: Creative Writing Studies and New Media: A Proposal." *College English*, vol. 75, no. 4, Mar. 2013, pp. 379-397. EBSCOhost, library.kean.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,url,cpid&custid=keaninf&db=trh&AN=86131502&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

In "Digitizing Craft: Creative Writing Studies and New Media: A Proposal", Adam Koehler touches on the issues and concerns regarding the life of creative writing in digital spaces, and how it can essentially grow and develop in those spaces. This text will be beneficial in my research as I feel my thesis can act as a response or an example of one of the unique ways in which creative writing lives on as the world continues to make strides

in technology advancement every day.

Birkerts, Sven. *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. Fawcett Columbine, 1994.

In *The Gutenberg Elegies*, Birkerts jumps back to the very familiar conversation about whether or not books are dead. The elegies focus on the fate that these very digital times leave for reading, and to him, it is not good. I feel that this resource can be beneficial to me because although my thesis is not centered around books, I am pursuing a hybrid thesis where parts will live online. Navigators of my online site will essentially be "reading online". Birkert's book can act as a counterargument for my work. With my thesis being hybrid (living online and on paper), feel I am showing that reading online or even just having/publishing work online may not be so bad, and can bring about some amazing affordances that I would not have otherwise.

Lanham, Richard A. *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998.

In this book, Lanham advocates for the use of electronic text and gives a clear opinion of how he feels it has benefited the arts and creativity. He argues the fact that technology has not necessarily forced a "cultural reevaluation" in any way, but instead advocates for the way technology can "express so eloquently an omnipresent reevaluation already in being" (p. 84). I would like to use Lanham's work as one that can support my thesis as it will be an endeavor that is highly involved with technology/digital spaces and tools. I feel that his argument may be a bold stance in favor of the claim that I will be making with

my thesis in that this electronic age that we are in has afforded so many different resources and ways of creating, making, and publishing that can work together with the traditional modes that still hold the weight that they deserve.

Voice

Bryant, Lizbeth A. *Voice As Process*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 2005.

In this book, Bryant talks about voice as a process of construction and explores the different kinds of voices that she sees in her classroom; she explores the ways in which students can still be successful with the many voices that they own and how those voices can accommodate the specific writing task that they may be tackling at the time. I feel that this source may be useful to me with my idea of constructing voice. I can relate to some of the stories that she provided from her ethnographic research about her students when it comes to voice in academia. This text may help all that I am pursuing as I hope to challenge the traditional ways of thinking about writing and the process of it.

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1996, pp. 29–40. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/358272.

In this article, Jacqueline Royster centers her argument around subject positioning, and notes that it is crucial when it comes to voice. There is a power and an authority that having voice contains, and in her personal experience, she notes that “when the subject matter is me, and the voice is not mine, my sense of order and rightness is disrupted” (Royster 31). This text may prove very beneficial to my work because of the direct

correlation and ties that Royster make to the African American community and how they are shaped by voice. Our stories have been told by others far longer than they should have been; I can relate to her urge to want to claim voice because I am trying to claim mine.

Race & Identity

Nasir, Na'ilah Suad. *Racialized Identities: Race and Achievement Among African American Youth*. Stanford University Press, 2012.

While Nasir doesn't focus on higher education in this book, and while she puts an emphasis on African American youth, she does do a good job of going into how identity is constructed for the individuals that she is studying. She makes a point that their identities are made racial, and that those identities are heavily influenced by their environments (what and who they are around). I was able to pull a lot from Nasir in terms of the construction of one's own identity, what makes that up, and how they might be able to go about working with their identities instead of against them.

Miscellaneous

Lieber, Dave. "The power of storytelling to change the world: Dave Lieber at TEDxSMU 2013." *Youtube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 26 November 2013, <https://youtu.be/6Bo3dpVb5jw>.

I came across Dave Lieber when researching material for theories or ideas in support of what I was doing (storytelling and self-narrative along with my poetry). I really enjoyed this TEDTalk and thought that some of the information in this video would be able to help support my thesis and its overall concept of using personal experiences and

storytelling as data.