

Good afternoon. My name is Tori Woods, and I am a senior Communication major with a Writing specialization. I entered Loyola College four years ago as a girl with an undisciplined passion for writing; I will graduate as a woman whose passion, undiminished, has been cultured and refined.

I have always written poetry, but prior to entering Loyola College, it was a private, journalistic, unharnessed method of cathartic expression. I have taken three poetry courses at Loyola: Empirical Rhetoric- Fiction and Poetry with Ms. Jane Satterfield, Writing Poetry with Mr. Ned Balbo, and Advanced Poetry with Ms. Lia Purpura. Throughout these courses, each taught by established, published poets, I have learned techniques of revision, linguistic decisions, and conventions of form and style. These have liberated and transformed my thoughts into viable poetry. I have studied, both academically and on my own, modern and classic poets such as T.S. Elliot, Billy Collins, Andrew Hudgins, and Madeline DeFrees. Through the Modern Masters Reading Series, I have been privileged to hear some of these, and other, established poets read their work.

Through attending these readings I have learned that poetry is an oral art as well as a written craft. To hear a poet read his or her work is to understand the work; subtleties of pacing, emphasis, and even the writer's literal voice become an integral part of the poem. A poetry reading is the apogee of copious writing, revising, work-shopping, and personal reflection. These readings have instilled in me the desire to present my work in this format today.

Poetry has been an oral tradition since the advent of recorded human history. To create and publicly present one's poetry is to add one's voice to the voices of those who came before us. It is a uniquely articulated contribution to the ongoing evolution of the human experience.

The poetry that you will hear today is the culmination of my four years of study in poetry and represents the transition of my poetry from a private experience to a public exposition of communication. Through poetry, I hope to interact with people I may never meet; through my poetry, I am putting something that I have created into the world. Rather than solely studying and critiquing others' expression, I am adding my own voice to the dialogue.

The work you will hear truly represents collaboration with my professors and my fellow students. Through the nurturing workshop experiences, which provide supportive, critical and instructional analysis, I have grown as a writer and a person. They have helped to foster a confidence in my abilities and my talent, and instilled in me a great desire to pursue a career in writing.

I hope that the selected poems will display a pattern of growth; as much as I have changed these four years, so has my poetry grown, evolved, and changed. This reading is a portrait of a growing writer's journey of discovery and expression.

I will now read a selection of 6 poems created throughout my 4 years at Loyola. Each will be prefaced by a brief contextual introduction. The theme of my reading today is "Evolving Loss".

My first poem, titled "Flower Today", was written during my freshman year and published in The Ohio Poetry Association's journal. While waiting for the shuttle with a friend outside of Boulder near the end of winter, I found a small flower and took it home. I still have the dried flower, to this day.

Flower Today

**I gave myself a flower today,
I think I was right.**

**The veins stretched indigo through an off-purple petal,
Tinges of citron kissed green the tips.
Underside crinkled like used to be foreskin,
Marvelous androgyny of petal and stem, together,
Unity, life.**

**I found the flower I gave myself nestling in a
Browned patch of death, once weeds and flowers
Beaten at last.
And I thought of contradictions,
Life sitting in a pile of death, immune beauty lying in a pile of faded.**

**Then I looked closer at the celery sunshine center
And noted three brown protrusions, alive and well,
But terribly, incongruously brown,
Matching the decay in which my flower sat.**

And I thought

How foolish.

There's death within us all.

An earlier version of the next poem was published in Loyola's "Garland" magazine. Part of writing poetry is constantly revising, reviewing, and allowing one's work to grow. I believe that a poem is never truly finished. This poem is called "The Museum". Written for a poetry class my Sophomore year, it recalls the experience of visiting The Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C, and the emotions that accompanied that visit.

The Museum

**The museum was created
to confront the enormity of The Conclusion.**

6 million people dead.

**What should I do but wonder,
or cry, or scream in disbelief?**

**6 million people.
Individuals, with stories and lives made less
important by sheer magnitude,
their common fate absorbed into
Catastrophe.**

**What did I do?
Shut down, unable to comprehend**

**the innate, grotesquely pertinent point
of The Burning—
from 6 million people dead,
only ash.**

The Museum sought

**to recapture humanity lost
by displaying recovered artifacts.**

**The most personal of items,
confiscated luggage, in piles, personal effects
spilling out of a re-created train.**

**And shoes, a small mountain of leather
remains, surrendered by their owners.**

**And hair. A plasticine case, lining the wall,
filled to brimming with hair, every color. Pounds
And pounds of the hair of the shorn.**

Still here, I find

**simply
too
much**

**To understand,
To believe.**

My Junior year, I took an Advanced Poetry class, and was at my most creatively productive. The next two poems are from that year. This next poem, "After Words" describes my reaction to hearing of the death of a friend from high school.

After Words

**I see his lips still moving,
but my selective hearing kicks in
after, "Yeah, Mike Miller",
is spoken.**

**I'm sure he is telling me details
about the car crash that killed our friend
who was 20 years old,**

**whose name was Mike,
who had memorably empyrean eyes.**

**I walk down the stairs calmly,
wrapped in silence,
not even hearing my feet.**

**I step outside,
light up a cigarette.
I'm surprised to see
there's still a sun in the sky.**

My home is in Bay Village, Ohio: a small town just outside Cleveland. Cleveland winters don't have much to recommend them unless you care for snow, and lots of it. When two friends accompanied me home for Spring Break last year, I naturally took them through to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame to prove to them that Cleveland isn't all bad. I wrote the following poem from a discussion we had after our visit.

Walking Through The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

We were in the hall of human experience.

**We were surrounded, pounded with images and sounds
of the greatest rock musicians in history.
So many of them are dead.**

**We marveled, felt humbled
in the house that rock built,
and the house that rock burned down.**

**We tried to tally the uncountable measures
of what drugs gave humanity,
and what they took away.**

**We tried to understand
the double edged needle,
the swallowing flames
as we looked at shards of a smashed up guitar
reassembled in a pristine case.**

We couldn't avoid the questions:

**Could Hendrix have rocked the anthem
without acid?**

**Could Kurt have tapped into our angst
without smack?**

**Would Lennon have dared to imagine Lucy
on his own?**

The next poem I will read today was written recently, in February of this year.

My grandmother passed away after years of being in a nursing home, and I wrote this poem after her passing.

Nordstrom's

**My mother's mother died,
while my mother and I were in Nordstrom's**

**tying on suits-she could
never have afforded--
for her funeral,
which we knew
to be imminent.**

**The call came at the cashier,
we figured we might as well
continue-- dabbed our eyes,
went to ladies shoes,
bought my first 'Republican' pumps.**

**We wound up in Cosmetics-
my mother's eyeliner was so old it crumbled,
and she needed make-up
for the funeral.**

**The Asian salesclerk, accented--
from Korea? Vietnam?--
smeared my mother in powder,
covered her tired eyes,**

**smoothed the bags--
it had been
a long month of waiting
for my mother's mother to die--**

**It was time for lipstick.
"Smile!" she brightly commanded, "Smile"
to properly apply the lipstick,
"Smile!" and my mother
dutifully grimaced,
"Smile".
Someday, my mother would die too.
This, I saw, was the saddest I would be.**

Today's final poem was written over Thanksgiving Break of last year, when I had the wonderful opportunity to visit a friend who was studying in Galway, Ireland. The locals of Galway refer to the rolling hills surrounding their city as The Burren, and the hills are as soaked in history as they are beautiful. I wrote this poem on the plane ride back to Baltimore.

The Burren

**The famine walls slash through Eire,
raised scars on the land
that refused to grow.
Rolling miles of green
which used to feed millions,
then suddenly, one season,
stopped.**

**In church, I sat behind a woman
with a portable oxygen tank
machine breathing for her in rhythmic clicks,
pumps like an even paced steam engine.
She was too weak to take a breath.**

**How must it feel to know
that you're dying?**

**--an x-ray, tiny cancer eating your lung--
--surveying stagnant soil, potatoes rotting in the turf--**

**Incongruous knowledge,
such an odd sensation.**

**--Like watching the moon rise over Galway Bay
While the sun is still in the sky--**

Seeing something you're not supposed to see.

Knowing something you're not supposed to know.

Next year, I will be attending graduate school to earn a Masters in Journalism. I will also write poetry. My mission and challenge in life will be to continue writing beyond the safe nest of Loyola, beyond the walls of a class room, and out in a world that increasingly wants to compartmentalize all our lives. Part of me wants to be a professional, successful woman of the world, and the other part of me wants to be a poet, a Bohemian on Walden Pond. But through my time at Loyola, I have come to learn that I don't have to work to 'find' a way to make these two halves of me co-exist. The two halves of me already do exist simply because that is who I am. I must always continue fine tuning the balance, a challenge that the best of a liberal arts education sets before us.

Thank you.