

Creative Writing Project

Sam Huffer

8 April 2019

Instructions

1 Creative Piece + commentary (1500 words)

Creative piece (1000 words): This piece will be the completed work of the draft developed during the writing workshops that are part of the lectures. The piece must develop out of a particular creative exercise or experimental writing technique, either one that follows or is adapted from approaches discussed in class, or one that the student has developed themselves.

Commentary (500 words): the creative piece will be accompanied by a commentary that reflects critically on the writing process. It is expected that you will describe the exercise or experimental writing technique used to prompt the creative piece, and discuss how it shaped the direction of the piece in terms of style, subject matter and theme.

Creative Piece: “Raindrops”

She always has a problem with me cutting my hair short – why?! Mum knows I have to force the bathwater to stay, that washing long hair infuriates me. And she always shouts whenever one of us kids doesn’t do what she asks. What happened to talking levelly?

What’s that pitter-patter? Oh, it’s raining again. And it’s not hitting me, of course. I’m always miserable in time for rain, it seems. The rain’s pitter-patter and the river’s murmurs harmonise pleasantly as I walk, the river’s churning erasing the rain’s ripples instantly. My boots squelch aggressively in the mud as I walk, leaving a trail of tiny puddles. Walking under a tree, I look up and watch a droplet tremble over my head, swelling with water before leaping free. It never hits me, curving away to be absorbed by a large puddle. All the raindrops do, my magic frustrating their advances. I look down at my reflection in the puddle – brown hair, round face, sad, dejected eyes. Not my natural green, but the deep, ugly blue of my uncontrollable hydromancy. The blue that betrays my misery. Why can’t they happily flash yellow for once in my fucking life? Or angry, flaming red! I’m angry right now, aren’t I? Not enough, apparently. Probably too upset like always. I hate it. Stomping the puddle angrily, I continue walking.

That’s a funny noise. . . like laughter . . . boys talking boisterously. I try to ignore it, focusing on the sounds of water around me, but the laughter slowly drowns them out. Oh fuck, it’s those three asshole noble kids from the academy. Probably wanting to flaunt their fancy, windy magic. They think they’re so great, bullying people with happy magic. Shitty little punks.

Forst – their tall, thin, silver-haired leader – approaches me first. “Hey Riven! Moping about by the river again, are you?” he sneers with a punch-able, arrogant smirk. I’ve never had the courage to punch him, though. He and his two cronies have bullied me relentlessly, pushing my buttons, stabbing at my insecurities, torturing me emotionally while the adults ignore it. I wasn’t happy before I met them, but those vicious jerks have deepened this well of pain. Why can’t they leave me alone?

I turn, looking him in his cold, ice-blue eyes. Might as well get this over with. “What do you want, Forst?”

“Don’t be rude,” says Teh, the burliest of the three, an ugly grin on his face, his black eyes twinkling maliciously. “We just want to talk.” Bullshit you do, you witless goon.

“Right, just like in class yesterday? Need to pick on my hair some more?”

“Not that we need to; it speaks for itself,” retorts Balange, pushing his glasses back up his nose to his cold, grey eyes like a peacock. He’s far smaller than Teh, and (easily) proportionately cleverer.

“So short, undignified, unladylike. Ugly. I was just asking Forst if some boy had stolen your moping grounds.”

“Not that we’d care,” Forst continues. “We’d shove him in the river and keep looking for you.”

I clench my hands into fists – probably uselessly – and spit, “Why don’t you jump in the river instead and see how you bastards like it?”

Forst chuckles – uh oh, that’s never a good sign. “In mid-winter? Gods, no, we’d catch a cold.” He steps uncomfortably close to me, nose to my forehead, and when I don’t back away – why should I? – he punches me in the stomach. Fuck that hurts. Thankfully the rain’s soothing . . . oh crap. “I think we’ll make you instead. It’s not like you can fight back right now, right?” Shit “I see your fury.” Stop winding me up. “The angrier you get, the faster your sadness evaporates” – Stop – “robbing you of the one thing you can actually do” – Don’t you . . . – “splash us with puddles.” Fucker!

I glare up at his now red and light-green eyes as his fist connects with my cheek. I thud on the ground, cheek stinging, staring up at the clouds. Great, now my cloak is filthy. Mum’ll be pissed. And I can feel the crap running down my face too . . . but I’m facing up?

“Like my new magic?” he crows. “I think ash” – A secondary element? That explains the eyes, at least – “is rather fitting for a superior magician who actually deserves their powers, unlike you.” Like hell you deserve any power. He kneels besides me and punches my face, one side squelching into the mud. Fuck, ouch! “You? You’re useless” – Punch – “unloved” – Punch – “unwanted” – Punch – “unnecessary.”

At least I’m not a cruel brat who’s undeserving of happiness, *unworthy* of power! Everything gets handed to you! It’s not fair. “IT’S NOT FAIR!”

I lash out blindly as he punches me again. I miss and roll on one side. Looking around, I see Forst on the ground . . . clutching a bright red burn on his face? What? My hand feels hot . . . fire! Was that fire?! “Ouch!” I exclaim, shaking my hand. What was that shock? Not lightning . . . I look down at a puddle forming between us and see my eyes glowing electromantic cyan. Fire . . . and lightning? I can use magic besides water? FUCK YEAH, BITCH!

It feels like water is running down my face. Tears . . . of happiness? Impossible, I’m never happy, certainly not this happy . . . not just tears, it’s like the wind’s pelting me with rain. I look back down, seeing my eyes glowing yellow in the puddle. Air magic too? Could today get any better?

“Three elements in a row?” exclaims Balange. “Impossible!”

I blink, refraining from wiping my tears away – I want to feel the physical proof that I’m actually happy enough to unlock aeromancy. I stand and see that Balange and Teh have retreated a few steps and that Forst is gaping stupidly in the mud.

“Feels pretty possible to me,” I smile, and walk away.

Commentary

Story

The story I wrote for this assignment revolves around a magic system inspired by a comment in *Sanderson’s Second Law* (2012) about a character who can only fly when she is happy. I adapted that idea into a magic system where one can manipulate elements, but only when feeling emotions corresponding to that element. Building on that, the story features a girl, Riven, who has been limited to sadness-based hydromancy, but when provoked by her long-term bullies, lashes out and uses other magics, startling and humbling said bullies.

During planning, the magic system (as currently described) didn’t seem to have enough in-built dramatic tension for the story I wanted to tell or to avoid feeling like “a wizard did it”, so I added a constraint where one can only manipulate elements after feeling the corresponding emotion intensely enough to unlock that magic, a constraint reminiscent of the sharingan’s prerequisites in the *Naruto* franchise. This helped the story make more sense and made the confrontational scene more impactful.

Experimental Basis

To write this story, I used several exercises and styles covered in the lectures and tutorials.

Firstly, the stream of consciousness writing exercise in an early tutorial where I produced an internal-monologue stream of consciousness speed draft. I felt this technique would be good for getting inside Riven's mind; the writing style and tone it engendered helped me explore her thoughts and emotions and relay them to the reader.

Secondly, a realist style of description as discussed in lectures and tutorials. This style was better suited for describing the setting and details about the characters and their actions, and in a couple of spots helped me demonstrate Riven's emotional state through water, particularly rain.

Lastly, an adaptation of the mash-up exercise detailed in the lecture slides, where one writes two pieces and combines them in some manner. I figured it would be a good idea to write a stream of consciousness and realist draft, and then compare and combine the two, taking the passages that worked the best or combined cleanly and interestingly.

Process

I began by noting down a very rough plan of the story's events, and then turning that into both the stream of consciousness draft focusing on Riven's thoughts and emotions and the realist draft focusing on description of setting, characters and action. (Both featured the same dialogue.) I then compared and merged them, copying, pasting, and colour coding sections into a new 1600-word document (yellow: stream of consciousness; cyan: realism; green: dialogue).

Next, I printed this mash-up draft with extra spacing between lines so that I could write notes in the margins about what to cut, combine, condense, or change. Here I tried to blend the realist description and Riven's thoughts so that there'd be fewer large blocks of either. After these edits, I re-typed the draft and re-printed it for further editing to meet the word limit, and re-typed the final draft.

Bibliography

Brandon Sanderson, 2012, *Sanderson's Second Law*. Available at <https://brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-second-law/>.

Fandom.com, *Sharingan*. Available at <https://naruto.fandom.com/wiki/Sharingan>. Last updated 2 April 2019.