Intensive Study in Critical Analysis and Development of Short Fiction

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This project grew from the maxim that writers are made from good readers. It combined close, critical reading of Alice Munro’s short stories with the drafting process of my own, original short fiction. Doing so allowed me to apply observation of a successful author’s technique directly to my creative writing process. I analyzed and wrote critical essays on Munro’s collections while simultaneously developing three of my own short fiction stories. These two tasks were performed in a circular, reciprocal process; critical essays were written during my own drafting process so that my observations of Munro’s methods could immediately inform my stories’ development.

Over the course of the summer I read seven of Alice Munro’s short story collections in order of publication. Please see the attached bibliography for a more detailed list. For each collection I wrote two critical essays. The first addressed the entire collection as a whole, and then discussed the majority of stories’ structure through six categories: plot, drama, symbol, time, title, and end. For the second essay I selected three notable stories from each collection to discuss in greater depth and analyzed them using more, precise, technical categories. As a result, I have compiled around forty pages of organized notes on each of the seven collections. These notes document my expanding (and continuing) understanding of Munro’s structural method in building fiction. The repetitive act of dissecting each collection this way helped me to cement my understanding of the stories I read, much as a musician must practice scales again and again in order to access the landscape of possibility available within them. Craft books by James Wood and L. Rust Hills informed this analysis.

I also produced and revised drafts of four of my own short stories during this eight-week study. Compiled they represent approximately ninety pages of original material, much of which I will continue to revise during the school year as part of an Advanced Independent Study/Honors Project with Professor Walton. During the summer I met with Professor Walton every one or two weeks to discuss my reading and the development of these stories, and to hand in drafts and critical reading papers. Additional conversation addressing amplifications, questions, or concerns took place over regular email correspondence.

This project functioned will have linked my previous work in creative fiction writing with Professor’s Walton, Paterniti, and Clarke, with an English Department Honors Project in the short story this coming year. The Surdna Fellowship provided me crucial time to hone my reading ability, while developing stories with a thoroughness, depth and intention I had not accessed previously. Three of the four stories developed during this study will be revised for inclusion in my Honors Project.

Faculty Mentor: Professor Anthony Walton

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