

What Do You Mean By Love?
Colleen Doucette, Class of 2024

This project was a deep dive into lyrical love poetry, starting with Sappho and continuing into my poetry. Initially, I sought to understand the love in my life, different cultures, and our society and figure out how to best represent this love through my poetry. By starting with a long reading list, combining poetry, novels, academic writing, and criticism, I gained a broader understanding of the current and past academic and non-academic frameworks around love. I understood love as contingent upon history and random chance, a word whose meaning appears in entirely different contexts between cultures. This allowed me to find my voice in the conversation on love, respecting the authors and thinkers who have come before me while transforming conventions, like the triangulated figure, into new forms in my poetry. These conventions of lyrical love poetry (including, but not limited to, the “I/You” use of pronouns, the muse, the presence of the lover, and the paradox of love) allowed me to step into the role of reviser and editor with a better understanding of the tools I have in my pocket to elicit emotion within the reader. Running in the background of this project was a workshop, where I researched and took notes from Professor Rahimtoola on the use of blank space, pronouns, imagery, metaphor, and rhyme in my poetry and analyzed it in the poetry of others, like Adrienne Rich and Carol Anne Duffy. The project culminated in a collection of eight lyrical love poems.



Faculty Mentor: Samia Rahimtoola

Funded by the Surdna Foundation Undergraduate Research Fellowship