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Ode 214

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Lauren Malanka

Ode 214*--to Creative Writing class*

Following the prescribed regimen of textbooks, protractors, projectors, thesis statements statements
of research, musty gym clothes, symmetrically-aligned school lunches,
tables and chairs,
you need that wash of endorphins
flooding like oxygen
within our misshapen bubble.

Open to a clean slice
of paper,
the antennae of your pens poised.

Later,
something will catalyze a volley of laughter
and
when a teacher joins in, she does something right.

Glue me together. Glue
the sixth-grader writing about her tabby cat her sister found under a napkin in the backyard, to
the young woman who enrolled in "Narrative Writing" and assembled a mosaic of her childhood.

You glue me together, so
I take you with me.

You join me in the library during free periods.
Other faculty may glance at the English teacher reading, smiling,
ensconced in a fortress of student papers,
and maybe they envy her momentarily (or think her mad).

Your papers are always with me, on late Sunday mornings at the dining room table,
on the 190 bus to New York.
You're with me on a deserted beach, in a coffee shop in Chelsea.
You've accompanied me to stale family gatherings in hermetically sealed banquets halls.
To my parent's house, fragrant and full of cooking, the sound of the dog's nails clicking on cool tile
floors.

My rooms are painted with your idylls and your nightmares.

And on paper our fingerprints mingle, forming florid patterns
amidst the letters and inkblots.
With you
I unfold and turn inside out—and if a something like a soul does exist,
some energy that binds my physical coil like DNA—whatever it is—it sings
the song of songs, Solomon.
the origin of all poems, Walt Whitman.

It's the song of

Van Gogh's roiling skies
Vermeer's opulent teardrop in a girl's earlobe
Joyce's smoking incense of synesthesia
The baroque crushed velvet of a freshly cut rose
plopping to the earth.
The beach, when the sun liquefies
turning the same color as the sea and sand
Russian dressing slathered on a perfectly stacked sandwich
Grandmother's crisp white curtains blowing over an open window
The dulcimer playing while a child swooshes down a playground slide,
While dust motes dancing in a light shaft streaming through a filthy classroom window.
The Zen-like hush of a snow day, tongues wet with cocoa, when we light candles and their
incandescence turns the color of flesh
The vibration of OM in an amphitheatre
The prayer of a Private never told.
It's remembering the dream that reveals
something to be understood
later on in life.

It's the song heard when we've uttered that which actually breaks us open,
Our ghost stories,
Our confessions.

--Lauren Malanka

Note: the penultimate stanza is a catalogue of metaphors and imagery I read throughout a year of teaching Creative Writing.

Lauren Malanka is a teacher of English at Tenafly High School.

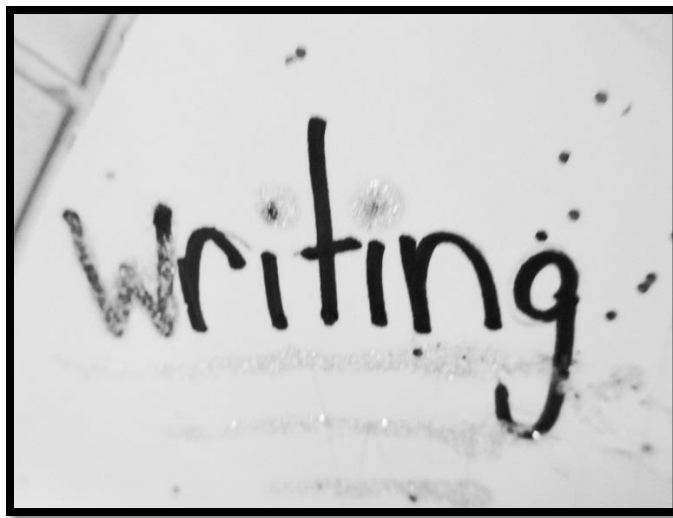


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