

## ABSTRACT FOR CREATIVE MANUSCRIPT

**How your writing has changed and grown during their time in the program, both stylistically and in terms of content; how a representative sample of their writing illustrates their best work thus far, and why this might be the case:**

The two poems that have been pulled into my thesis from before my entrance into the MFA program are “The Killing Cones” and “Basic Horsemanship”. These poems have been dramatically reworked; however, one can still see the old styles that I was accustomed to using. One of the first apparent changes in my work is the way that I treat a line of poetry. I used to “cut off” a line based on how it looked (spatially) on the page without regard to the word that I ended on. I did not see the line as a balancing act of suspense. I now try to treat each line like a seesaw of logic that tips the reader into the next line in new and surprising ways. Punctuation (or lack thereof) is also a very deliberate and careful construction in creating this perfect balance. I am able to think critically about the ways that punctuation interacts with the language around it. I like to use m-dashes in a non-traditional sense: not as a way of creating a lengthened pause, but almost like a rope that ties the logic of one line to the paratactic logic of the subsequent line. Often, I use this punctuation as a replacement for the semi-colon which I associate with prose writing.

I recently got a critique from someone that I shouldn’t use the ampersand in my poetry because it is distracting. The use of the ampersand is something I feel very strongly about and am willing to defend, as I started using it while in the MFA program. I like the ampersand for many reasons, not least of which is its history. I am fascinated by the fact that this symbol used to be a letter in the alphabet. Roman scribes wrote in cursive, so when they wrote the Latin word *et* which means “and” they linked the e and t. I like this fact because it points to English’s Latin underpinnings (I studied Latin for 7 years so this appeals to the scholar in me), and also because it highlights the fact that language and letters specifically are mutable. Because I touch upon personal narrative a lot in my poetry, I like the counterbalance of form and unusual punctuation to create a tension between content and style. Perhaps over an anxiety of being dubbed “too confessional”, I have chosen to highlight the materiality and falsehood of language in subtle ways so that the reader is consistently asked to reexamine the sincerity of what is being said. I like to think of my poems as plain-faced, and ampersands being the pockmarks in that face that adds shape and character in sometimes ugly—and yes even distracting ways. Since I have an affinity for Alice Notely and Bernadette Mayer, it seems only natural that I borrow their bold punctuation in the creation of my poems.

Obviously I am more interested in experimentation that I was before entering the MFA program. I came into the program with a semi-sound knowledge of contemporary poetry and a poor history of any type of history that preceded the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of The New York School. The education that I have received has dramatically shifted the ways that I interact with my poetry history. Although I was already attracted to Bianca Stone’s use of poetry comics, I did not understand the history on which this form has been shaped. I now realize that I am writing from a place that essentially ekphrasis in reverse. My undergrad

thesis had to do with ekphrasis, and I now see that I have internalized that research and taken it in a different direction. Poems that interact with images needn't be descriptive. In fact, they work best when there is subtext between the line of poetry and the image. Often times my process is that I write a skeleton of a poem, start creating images, and build lines while I am creating pictures. Like using the ampersand, which is popularized in branding (Johnson & Johnson, Barnes & Noble, etc.) businesses, I like the tension between poeticizing a form that is overlooked as "not artistic". Comics are a form that seems well suited for poetry because of the way contemporary poetry is consumed by a young readership. While I hope the poems can stand on their own, I think a large element of understanding and meaning-making would be lost without their companion images.

**The ways my work can still improve; what they plan to work on next--whether articulating the next steps for the thesis or plans for other projects; the relationship between their creative thesis and MFA essay.**

I am in the middle of writing a third comic for this book. I see them (like the ampersand) as pockmarks in an otherwise personal narrative about mental illness, substance abuse, and the dissolution of a marriage. What I want to work on is bringing in poems that speak to the fact that this personal narrative is not unlike the dissolution of an empire. How ambivalence or even apathy towards one's country is mirrored in the domestic setting. Poems like "Country of Misshapen Apples", "Forces Between Masses", and "The Kind of Times Are These" don't address this theme directly yet, but I hope that with time and editing, I can build upon this idea so that I have a manuscript that speaks to identity in all its configurations.