

In the fall of 1995, while on sabbatical from SFSU, Myung taught Creative Writing at Oberlin College. We did an “advanced writing project” together; below is my (minimally edited) final report for the chair of the department.

CRWR 390: Advanced Writing Project
Oberlin College
Fall 1995

Professor: Myung Mi Kim
Student: Erin Wilson

Final Report

1. *Are you satisfied with the work you did this semester?*

Yes, I’m pleased. I wish that I had been able to write more, but that would have been impossible—most of the semester was really about my development—I mean, my writing changed a lot, so although I only finished maybe 12 pieces, or something like that, there is an incredible range in them—a lot of change.

2. *What did you learn in this class?*

This class was important for me—the open structure

allowed me to really follow my interests. At the beginning of the semester Myung recommended a ton of books and authors that seemed to be dealing with the same issues as I was, and I felt completely confident to go and read them, and think about them, and then work as was necessary for me. Because Myung was taking my work so seriously, and at the same time obviously enjoying it and responding to it—it lent me confidence in some way.

3. *Was your professor helpful?*

I've never felt so challenged and supported in my life as a writer—I trust Myung as a reader in a way that I don't trust anyone else. She—I don't know how to say this—but she trusts my texts to be present and demanding and interesting. She enters the reading process not thinking “what is this lacking” but “where does this take me.” I feel like if I have a question—for example, earlier in the semester one of my housemates was going on and on about “prostitution of experience” and I talked vaguely about it in one of my meetings with Myung. She let me finish my vague talking, then said a few things of her own, straight to the point: Is that what's important? What kind of limits am I putting on myself if I say that I can't write about my real life experiences? What kind of silencing is happening then? When does writing become confession? Is that something that I need to worry about?—and then Myung let me do some talking too, reminding me that there wasn't some universal take on prostitution of experience, that it was something that I was going to have to decide for myself.

I've found Myung's editing to be incredible—she's pointed out things that I wouldn't have thought of—for example in a prose-ish piece, the fact that three lines end with prepositions. Even though the lines weren't obviously lined, I still needed to think about what it meant to end with a preposition—the weakness of the finish vs the way it leads into the next line, what did I want the word to do—

I've also found Myung to be an incredible guide/mentor—I'll be off in the library, off at my computer, thinking and thinking, and when I resurface to talk with Myung she's always right exactly there. She always suggests books I might find instructive—she recommends women authors without me needing to ask!! without it being an afterthought, with the idea that it might actually be extra-special useful for me to read how other women have struggled with these same issues—

As I said before, Myung is someone I trust a lot—as a reader and as someone who is willing to engage my text, my mind, my subject. I'm going to miss working with her.

That first semester Myung gave me many gifts. She tuned my ear and language. She discussed ideas and took me seriously (where did the phrase 'prostitution of experience' come from? I am glad college was a long time ago). I was wary and felt vulnerable as a young female

poet and she helped me trust. She taught me to read. And working with her brought me joy.

In writing this I've struggled most with the phrase, "Myung *let* me do some talking too." At first I edited it out and had a bland phrase like "we talked some more." But I couldn't do it. I had to wrestle my way through the original phrase because it was difficult and I'm sure that's how it felt: I had proposed something, the professor had spoken and my voice was only allowed back in when invited.

I know now that Myung is the last person who would want me to feel like I needed her permission to speak, or that anyone needed to be given permission to speak. Nonetheless, that dynamic was clearly operating in our relationship and I've come to think that the concept of permission was the heart of that semester. At 20 I distinctly felt like she was giving me permission to be myself, with my interests, with my own language—not to rest there but to start there and live from there. As problematic as the idea is to me now, I experienced her "permission" as an amazing feeling of acceptance and challenge. The report above is a living document of my struggle to embrace her permission, to try and accept that I didn't need it, to be freed from it, to reveal my dependence on it, to say how much I wanted it.

I say at the end of the report, "I'm going to miss working with her." In fact, after graduating from Oberlin I spent a disastrous year in Chicago and then followed Myung to San Francisco State to get my MFA. Permission has not been an issue in a long time, or finding women

poets to read, or thinking that 12 pieces in three months is too little. I am glad to have that first semester's report because it is a moment of such openness and clarity.

Now I cannot talk about Myung as my professor in the way I did then, and what I've learned from her has poetics mixed into life in a way I don't want to try to publicly untangle. This is what I can say now: I still believe in that first report. And my relationship with Myung has continued to be a vital source of acceptance, challenge and joy.