

Allie Novakovic-Emberson

Feedback Letter for “Radiating Heat and Love”

Dear [Author]

It was a pleasure to read through this draft of your lyric essay. You do a beautiful job of combining non-fiction and poetry to bring a lot of personal and creative memories to light in ways that are palpable to readers. The essay uses different sections that share the title’s theme and show all sides of what it means to experience love. Whether the focus of a section be the loving warmth of a pet, the loss of love and how to rebuild, or the physical burning sensation of needles permanently inking your skin just to show a loved one you are thinking of them, this collection of memories evokes so much inner warmth, strength, and fire that radiates through the paragraphs. The piece carries an overall darker tone as well, and I think this highlights the realities of our own misconceptions about what love *should* be, by giving an honest and realistic approach to how the speaker is affected in each scenario.

Creatively, this piece is a breath of fresh air and I’m so intrigued by the direction you’ve decided to take each different paragraph. There’s a distinct physicality to your words and this gives readers the ability to feel these scenarios deeply. As I read, it was almost like I could feel the acid churning in my stomach and then moments later closed my eyes to imagine the warmth of my pet curled closely beside me in bed. These moments are navigated honestly and simply, so that it feels possible to picture yourself there, surrounded by the elements of that time and feeling what the narrator feels inside and out. I was especially moved by the evocative imagery in “Candle Burning” and how effectively this paragraph about the proper way to burn a candle reflects the struggles that many people go through inside. The lines “...otherwise you’ll end up

with a sad flame hidden within the walls of a hollow cylinder of wax. You need to be careful how you put out the flame, too. If you want to be able to enjoy a pleasant burn ever again, avoid blowing it out. This will just disperse char and ash over your candle, leaving imperfections and burns that tunnel deep into the candle” (pg. 5) are so thought-evoking and emotional, making us reflect on our own inner flame and how important it is not to allow your spark to go out. I feel like this section can be taken a few different ways, and it may push the reader to look inward toward their own flame or realize that dealing with another’s charred candle can sometimes keep you from tending to your own needs. However it’s deciphered, I feel like this imagery is brilliantly poetic and highlights big life choices within the simplistic and intentional scene.

Additionally, I appreciate the structure of this essay and how each section feels just as meaningful as the last. “History of Tattoos” stood out to me because it’s not only relatable, but also still as emotional and impactful as the previous section that discusses the synced breaths of a newborn on their mother’s chest. These ideas are such a contrast from each other, but they both bring that same feeling of warmth, admiration, and love. The final line that reads, “in thirty years, I’ll be able to look at the bow and arrow sitting on my left bicep and remember one of the most important people in my nineteen-year-old life, even past the haze of ADHD-induced fog and memory loss” (pg. 4) really resonated with me, bringing back feelings of nostalgia, love, and funny memories just like the speaker’s unimpressed mom eventually coming to understand her desire to have tattooed marks of admiration on her skin, stamping that moment in time forever. Though each paragraph is distinct from the last, they all pull on your heart strings in different ways, showing readers how many emotions can be wrapped up in the idea of love.

As I read, I also gathered some suggestions that can hopefully be helpful as you move on to the next half of your piece. What first stuck out to me as a positive in “Lovesick” was how

much it lives in the feeling of that memorable time, rather than explicitly explaining the situation at hand. Each question makes the reader feel the weight of what it means to have a bleeding heart and constricting breaths, and it isn't until the final line, "Do you ever wonder if Belle's prince was still a beast, even after he returned to his human form?" (pg. 1) where we realize what the situation is tackling, and how love can hide parts of a person's true intent. I think it's brilliant that each line uses such purposeful and poetic prose that leaves a lot to the imagination, and I think you can carry even more of this poeticism in some of the other paragraphs. For example, in "Physical Touch" it seems like the first paragraph about the newborn is written factually, to give readers this knowledge and insight before getting into the emotional anecdote about crawling into bed with your parent/pets, but I feel like there is more emotion that can be given to the first paragraph itself. Even just adding a line or two that brings awareness to the baby's senses in that moment would be intimate and share this information in a more poetic way that flows with the rest of the paragraphs and keeps us in that moment. Some of the essay reads as memoir, so going through and adding some extra alliteration or metaphor might just tie in the poetry altogether.

Other than this, a lot of my focus was on "Eden" and wanting to know more about how *he* is vital to these feelings the speaker is experiencing, and how he'd feel about her finding out about the ivy. There's a lot of telling information within the setting – the wilting sunflowers and rotting dirt covered with just a wobbling cobblestone path – and this imagery is very evocative, giving the piece its unsteady tone. It's clear how the world around the narrator reflects their shifting feeling about the situation they're in, so I'd love to know just a bit more about the secondary character and how he feels about it all (if that's something within your knowledge). Also, is the speaker only referring to one specific person/relationship in this way? Adding even a bit more characterization might help make this clearer.

Overall, I love the direction you're headed with this essay, and I can't wait to see where you take it from here!

All the best,

Allie