Dear Rae,

So far this quarter, I’ve found myself grappling head-on with my perfectionism. I think of writing as what I’m good at; having chosen it as my major, it’s where I’ve hinged my hopes for my future. It’s something I adore, but equally, it exposes my vulnerability like nothing else. I turned in my first Critical Reflection thinking that these assignments would be nothing more than an exercise, a method of prompting our creative thinking. When my CR1 was returned and I realized they were scored, I hit a bit of a spiral, admonishing myself for not pouring more work in to meet some self-imposed standard of greatness. I have to remember that drafting is a process and perfection isn’t an instantaneous norm. I am working to develop the thick skin that I know is needed to continue as a writer, to accept criticism with grace and know that often critique will only make my work stronger in time.

I began work on my chapbook draft with more clarity and confidence than with my CRs. In fall quarter, I took David Shields’ 284 class on brevity and flash fiction, and for several months my brain has been programmed towards short-short prose. My chosen chapbook for review, *An Elegy for Mathematics*, only bolstered this mode of thinking. I loved how Anne Valente managed a collection of stories which appeared unrelated yet still fit together, which saw unity stylistically while they differed in topic. I set out to write my chapbook with the same goal in mind: a collection of semi-related shorts, each with their own conflict and arc, but with crossover in tone and theme.

I saw a few challenges in this stage of drafting. First, as always in writing, I found myself walking the line of how much information to reveal. I want my readers to understand enough about the story that they don’t feel lost, but also don’t feel like they’re being beaten over the head with a stick. It’s always hard to tell from the authorial perspective whether this balance is working, so that’s definitely something I’ll be working towards during workshop. I also want to be sure that the stories work not just individually but as a coherent collection, despite not being directly related. This leads into my third focus, which was word count. Despite setting myself the challenge of brevity and short-shorts, I found that several of my stories turned out longer than I had intended. Because of this, I was only able to include three works in this first draft, even though my original vision had the chapbook comprised of at least five. I’ll have to decide moving forwards towards the final whether to prioritize expanding the individual pieces I’ve already included or incorporating more shorter works for the sake of the chapbook’s overall arc. Regardless, I’ll certainly have to continue to choose my words carefully and ensure I remain within the assignment limits. Brevity practice at its finest.

Sincerely,

Zoë