

Mustafa Brown

Professor Baba Badji

Creative Writing Poetry

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# **The Guilty Conscious**

**By Mustafa Brown**

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## **Introduction**

It was during the first grade that my parents and teachers started to take note of my natural talent for writing. I didn't think much of it at first; I simply saw it as an enjoyable past-time alongside drawing. When I was eight, I started to journal away at the various experiences in my life, feelings I wanted to get off my chest, and thoughts that I assumed nobody else would understand. What hooked me was the ability to rhyme words, the freedom to express my thoughts. I tried my hand at it and thought it was fun, and would occasionally write a few pieces every now and then. Soon, I discovered that my writing ability was very thought-provoking and catered towards sending a clear message, as I went from writing letters to my grandparents to full-fledged essays that can go into depth about whatever topic I desired. As you will see in my work, I incorporate a few "letters" to some of my loved ones; a way of expressing heartfelt feelings that I wouldn't otherwise know how to convey. My awareness of language use and attention to detail only increased my passion to write, because at this point in my life I was going through a lot of mental turmoil - as is the case with any young adolescent growing up.

If my love for poetry wasn't as pronounced when I first discovered it as a child, it was beaming now. With a few years of poetry writing under my belt, there were more things for me to appreciate than just rhyming words, such as form, voice, tone, literary devices, and theme. The multitude of elements allowed me to experiment and use the words that I would write to discover more about myself and other people. I even gathered some of my closest friends to each write our own piece of poetry every week

and give it to each other to read. The purpose was to review each other's unique use of language and examine the form of poetry that is most prevalent in our individual works. I found it truly enlightening, because I could feel certain emotions, envision certain environments, and hear certain thoughts. Lest my own poems weren't insightful enough, I decided to take it a step further, and have been exploring different poets' works and striving to improve my own craft since then.

### **Poetic Potentiality: Form, Language, and Emotion**

The process I take in writing my poems is straightforward. A lot of the pieces that I write are from the heart. So, I may write them once, and very rarely will I go back to edit or change any of the words that I put on the paper. Well, you may ask, doesn't that take away from the raw potential of the poem? It may be true for certain poems or poets, but I don't think that is the case for my writing. Firstly, let us go back to the basics of poetry. It comes in all different shapes and sizes, forms if you will. Each one has a different cadence, and a different sound to it. For these works, I want to reference Robert Frost and his article 'The Figure A Poem Makes', where we learn about the distinct nature and form of poetry, tailored to the poet themselves. In this article, Robert Frost makes the claim that a poem can take on any form, and it is not bound by the constraints of a predisposition on how a poem should be structured, but rather crafted by how the words themselves take on a certain shape, and emit a certain tone. "Granted no one but a humanist much cares how sound a poem is if it is only a sound" (1939). Who exactly are the humanists in this regard? It's us! We are sociable and caring creatures. Frost here is saying that a poem can take on any kind of rhythm,

the point is that there IS a rhythm to it. This is an important concept because people who are not familiar with poetry may think it is only of one kind; a planned structure that has set lines and stanzas, maybe they rhyme or not, but everything has to be in order. That is just not the case. What makes poetry beautiful is the uniqueness in which it is written. Some poems are a little bit messy. Others are a little bit formal. Some use a lot of metaphors, while others are heavy in rhyme schemes. I instinctively write with rhythm - no pun intended - since a lot of my poems include a lot of rhyme in them. Take the poem “draining” for example. Just about every line is made to rhyme, and it is done so without forcing the rhyme out of the next word or line. This is what I mean by straightforward, in that I will usually take the first idea that comes to mind and put it onto paper. I’m confident in doing so because I trust my instinct. I trust my intuition and gut feelings. It may not make sense on its own, but once the entire piece comes together all the lines are made to fit and be connected one after the other. “It should be of the pleasure of a poem itself to tell how it can. The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom” (Frost, 1939). Frost here is saying that poem itself will bore the form and the figure. The magic is in the words themselves as they flow line by line. I try to stay true to that concept by truly feeling and putting my trust in the words that come to my conscious, putting them on the paper, and letting the figure of the poem manifest itself. By the end, I’m able to learn something about the poem or about myself that I wouldn’t have realized otherwise, should I have tried to follow a certain script or style.

### **Technique and Devices**

Speaking of style, let's transition from "what" a poem looks like to "how" it was written. While the form of a poem may be the first impression, what really captures the reader is the content. What language is used? Are there any rhymes? Metaphors? These are the elements within a poem that really get you to think and appreciate the poet's work. For starters, let's look at language. The language that a poet uses in their work has a profound impact on how the poem is received. For example, let's consider some of the pieces in this portfolio. "draining" and "odd one out" are two poems that really stand out when it comes to incorporating everyday slang. Now, it should be made clear that one should not use certain phrases or just casual expressions in their poetry without a clear purpose in mind. Everyday language is no exception, but in some cases - such as here - it is warranted. To exemplify this point, let's look at George Stein's "Knowing and Poetry". Stein uses this article to paint a very distinct boundary between the language of poetry and what we may call "natural" language. The difference between the two is that the language of poetry deviates along its path and carves itself into something new, but it makes use of "natural" language in order to sustain itself and make sense. This is important because just as poetry isn't limited by form or structure, it isn't limited by language and use of certain words or phrases, either. "The language of everyday practical communication is usually transparent. It calls attention not to itself, but to whatever it refers to or is intended to effect" (Stein, 1979). In other words, you may come across slang as you do with some of the pieces in this portfolio. At first it may jump out to you, which is a reasonable reaction because you probably don't know the poet and/or aren't familiar with their work. But

the words and phrases aren't there to simply make you blink twice. They are there to add on to a certain emotion or idea. They are there to "express" the vibe that the poem is giving. Of course, I deliberately did so to encapsulate certain feelings that each poem entails.

Yet another element that we must discuss here is the emotions that are in a poem. You cannot express yourself without some type of emotion being behind it. Those emotions may make you feel elated, hopeful, melancholic, even confused! Poems can have multiple purposes, from sending a message, or telling a story. But I think the majority of people can agree that something important is lost if you do not "feel" something from a poem. The beauty of poetry is that it can completely transform simple emotions such as "sad" and "happy" into something more colorful and descriptive, something the reader can really sink their teeth into and pinpoint the emotion in or around their body. An excerpt in T.S. Elliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent", aims to explain the clear purpose of emotions in the creation of poetry. This is because we cannot use them sparingly or without an objective, similar to language. "The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all" (Elliot, 1919). Indeed, it would be difficult to find new emotions when you have not even put your pen to the paper yet! Elliot in this passage is explaining that poetry actually allows us to be a lot clearer and descriptive about our emotions, and in doing so find out feelings that would not otherwise fit the basic category of "emotions". Take a look at "Me, myself, and I" once more, as I consider it

quite a strong poem in this regard. Upon reading this poem the first time, you may get a sense of depression and lingering hope. But then read it again, a few more times. Pay attention to the imagery. Listen to the repeated words. Now you're getting more that "hopeful" feeling is more accentuated. Somewhere in the poem you get a tinge of excitement and gratitude. It seems like a bunch of mixed feelings all rolled into one. So who's to say that mixed feeling are only one emotion? Clearly they're not. Rain can be depressing or comforting. The wind can be frightening or exciting. It all depends upon the reader's choice of interpretation. The feelings you get from the poem are not bound to one concrete emotion, but more abstract sensations that can only be explored through the rich seasoning of language and expressions.

### **Final Word**

Overall, I very much enjoyed compiling this collection. It allowed me to sink into my deep conscious and contemplate my deepest, darkest thoughts. One thing I do well in my poems is the use of repetition, as I am very adamant on sending a clear message, and sometimes the best way of doing so is to repeat yourself. Using a more nonchalant tone that can be used to flex and enrich any set of words it takes on is a default character of mine, so I find it relatively easy to describe certain feelings or portray vivid thoughts. However sometimes these may come at the expense of only a couple lines, with the reader left to figure out the rest. In some pieces, it's best if it stays that way, in others you would very much rather a more descriptive passage. I would also like to experiment with other forms of poetry in the future, possibly prose, or maybe a more organized poem with set stanzas, a quartet or sestet, for example.

My work is very simple for the most part, with lower-case being a staple, use of slang language, and natural rhyme of certain words. I believe it's indicative of my carefree nature on the outside. But on the inside, I have a very keen eye for details, and every word I put to the page is not without a clear intention. Perhaps more formal pieces could be in the works.

As I continue my journey through the dunes of poetry, I want to uncover even hidden emotions. I want to see what feelings can be expressed through the words I put to paper. I want to see what ideas can come to fruition through articulate imagery. Most of all, I want to learn more about myself and where I'm headed. Only time will tell.



## **word is bond**

word is bond

bond is a word.

you can twist and shape it however you like

can the same be said about

Love?

Trust?

interpret it how you must.

bond is a word,

and word is bond.

## **draining**

draining...  
no, i'm training.  
It's shining...  
no, it's raining  
fading...  
no, i'm waking.  
grateful?  
nah, still complaining.

why?

it's so frustrating.

i don't even know who i'm blaming.  
i don't even know what i'm craving  
i don't even know why i'm paining.

i tell myself, keep going, keep dreaming  
keep motivating, keep believing,  
keep creating, keep achieving

fear not when the road starts waning  
it's my own guts that i will keep hating  
and those dreams that i will keep chasing  
and those storms that i will keep braving

but wait.

do you feel that?

...it's like im fading.

sunshine?  
no, it's still raining.  
grateful?  
nah, still complaining

because it's all  
just  
so  
draining.

### **odd one out**

i was never first,  
always last.  
i was the tortoise that was slow and steady  
while all the hares zoomed past  
difference is, they needed no break  
but i was gassed.

odd one out.

i was the one picked on first  
like the ugly duckling in the herd  
ridiculed for my short stature  
and small utterance of every word  
and even after i proved my talents bigger and better  
it was never truly the recognition i deserved

odd one out.

“you’re crazy”  
“you dont know what it’s like”  
what do you think i’ve been doing all this time?  
you’re only insane ‘till you make it  
then everyone wants to be your friend  
if you weren’t with me before i make it to the top,  
don’t talk to me again.

odd one out.

## **he said he would**

he said he would, he said he could  
he said he should.

she said she would, she said she could  
she said she should.

I said I would, I said I could  
I said I should.

the chains of Promise are broken  
the market of Deception looks for buyers  
if you and I refuse to invest  
then truth be told, we're all liars.

## **feelings**

pen to paper  
ideas to mind  
take a peek into the soul  
see what's deep inside.

sit with those Feelings  
let the war rage in your heart  
after the battle  
there's a healing in which you'll take part

ask who, what, where, when.  
why, how, and worry not about back then  
worry not about the future, embrace the present  
it's a gift you must cherish,  
for those who get the message.

you only get one chance  
you're not here to stay  
so why are you afraid?  
fly, and take your breath away  
turn your dreams to reality  
label your doubts a fallacy  
embrace pain and failure  
on the road to what you're bound to be

love, live and learn  
respect, give and earn  
stand tall, stand firm  
you never know when it will be your turn.

## **count your blessings**

Wake up  
in a cozy little house  
complain about walking out early in the cold  
it takes up such a little part of your day  
yet there's such a beautiful character it will mold

count your blessings.

a 40-minute drive to a prestigious school  
to learn and explore things that you had no clue  
by the way, there's good lunch spots  
classmates and friends to talk to  
how could you complain?  
do you have nothing to do?

count your blessings.

a passion so bright  
you pursue it day by day  
it fuels the dreams within  
and lights the pathway  
a month without it  
and you don't know what to say  
how about being grateful  
for the Game you love to play?

count your blessings.

life couldn't be more comfy  
no job, no car, but still have money  
great parents to provide  
trustworthy neighbors to hang with  
there's people who would go through hell  
just to taste it.  
so when you lay on that bed at night  
put all your worries to rest  
be grateful a hundred times over  
this is the circumstance in which you exist.

count your Blessings.

## **Faith**

when the sky is falling  
and the bridges are collapsing  
when Law and Order is abandoned  
and chaos is ensuing

have faith.

it's a blur, to say the least  
an invisible void over my head  
try as I might  
as I lay alone in my bed at night  
my hopes and dreams fill me with dread

have faith.

do this, do that  
right or wrong, no one truly knows  
it's the step forward that counts  
for it is in the unknown you will find growth

have faith.

don't wait.  
don't hesitate.  
don't procrastinate,  
initiate.  
the cursed blessing of time waits for no man  
but you're the ghost of your soul  
the master of your fate.

have Faith.

## **Tough Love**

*To my little rascal of a brother.*

Player 1 and Player 2  
One is Red, One is Blue  
Born to compete against each other  
Why, I have no clue

The countless arguing, bickering, and gloating  
Trying to shatter the other's pride  
Or simply boasting

False claims are made  
Feelings are always hurt  
It's never over until one rises  
And the other eats dirt

Always beating around the bush  
Never honest, always dubious  
Constantly looking for cracks and faults  
Always questioning, but not curious

Why?  
Because it's fine.  
It's the animosity in which I revel  
I couldn't imagine you even reaching my level

But it's okay.  
We can still fight  
And argue  
And play.  
There's no reason for us to change our way

Like Cain and Abel  
Or Vergil and Dante  
Forever united by blood  
But forever our path to stray

So fear not, no hard feelings  
We're still Player 1 and Player 2  
But make no mistake,  
I'm still better than you.



## **Dream**

*To my mother.*

It starts with a vision;  
A clear ambition  
To go on a mission  
And execute with precision.

I was too young to know what it meant  
But I tried anyway, because I was hellbent  
On seeing the success, for that is time well spent  
I wish not to look back on it and be filled with resent.

But am I truly content? It's hard to say  
When it does not seem like anything is going your way  
It seems that true patience is the price to pay  
Didn't work? Oh well, let's try for another day.

They say it's discipline you need, not motivation  
They say it's consistent action you need, not stagnation,  
They use pretty phrases like "embrace the fear" or "hold on to your faith"  
"Be the captain of your soul" and "the master of your fate".

That all sounds good and well, but honestly, I'm tired.  
Years on end I've done what's required  
But these dreams continue to slip away, almost like they've retired  
And I'm lost, forgetting what exactly it is I desired.

What is it? I've been trying to search all this time  
Scanning every opportunity, trying to take what's mine  
Searching for an obstacle to scale, or a mountain to climb  
Constantly looking for "work", falling victim to the grind

I'm just waiting for a sign.  
A straight shot instead of a squiggly line  
I don't wanna be the old guy who was only valued back in his prime  
This is a ramble of frustration, I promise I don't even need to rhyme  
They're just unfiltered thoughts put in order by design.

So maybe, now it's simply time to confess  
And make proper sense of this lyrical mess  
And try to uncover the source of my stress

Instead of leaving everyone in the dark, simply trying to guess

It was all about success.

Yes, I wanted to be the best.

Excellence was the only option, never anything less

Driven by a fear of failure and a hunger to win

I can proudly say this is a trait of which I have been blessed.

I want to be a professional athlete, where the competition is high

An entrepreneur who works for himself, doing my own thing while sipping chai

I don't want to learn how to float, I want to learn how to fly

I wanted to be the man, I wanted to be that guy

Because that is my pride. It's been my only guide

If I fell victim to the average lifestyle, I wouldn't know if I tried

I'm neither confined by regular schooling or the boring old nine-to-five

There are far more important things to me for which I'd love to strive

So let me get by.

Again, I won't know 'till I try.

I'll learn how to fight, make money, and get a car to drive

It is a selfish pursuit, in search of the prize

But rest assured everyone is getting a piece of the pie.

I must, for after countless moments to reflect

I know this is something I no longer want to regret

I no longer want to look at the child within me and fret,

As I tremble and tell him I didn't even try my best

For that is the theme

Of this uncharted stream

Of words that aim to depict

What it means to dream.

It starts with a vision;

A clear ambition

To go on a mission

And execute with precision.

## **Me, Myself and I**

dark, cold, silence.  
calm rain, brisk wind, cool atmosphere.  
Just me, myself, and i.

why?  
why am i here?  
what am i supposed to do?  
i thought i had an idea but  
now i have no clue.

step forward -  
no, that's a puddle  
you got your feet wet.  
step backward -  
no, you slipped on the pavement  
you tripped and fell over.

i don't even feel like getting up  
i look to the sky  
i see the stars and the moon  
sparkling, beautiful designs  
on a blanket for earth's slumber

is it worth it? i wonder.  
the same story keeps repeating itself  
i've been here before.

but this weather?  
this rain?  
this wind?  
the night?  
i love it.

i don't wanna be anywhere else.  
it's my home.  
where my wildest dreams come to fruition  
i could touch them as if they exist.

so let's try this again.  
get up  
dust off  
step forward -

feet got wet - that's okay  
another step  
and another  
and another.  
in the dark, cold, silence  
in the calm rain  
brisk wind  
cool atmosphere

just Me,

Myself,

and I.

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