

quiet my mind and simply exist in the present. This wasn't and still isn't easy; as I've stated, I rarely experience peace due to OCD. However, just trying—and occasionally *succeeding*—is progress! Additionally, the practice encourages me to work through perfectionism by completing the haiku within a time-frame of 15–30 minutes. Now, I've a permanent space in my journal for haiku, as I've continued to write them.

In the following piece, "9 Muses," I wove several haiku together into a multipart poem. Inspired by my love of Greek mythology, "9 Muses" utilizes the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne to share my overarching OCD narrative:

## 9 Muses

OCD whispers / lies, savage lies—smothering / my beloved Muses.

### i. Calliope

Rewrite and rephrase / and redo. You'll get it right / someday.  
Well—maybe?  
Had I the Tablet / of Calliope, would I / recover my voice?  
Dear Prose, dear Verses, / dear Rhymes, please return to me;  
/ I fear my Silence.

### ii. Clio

Lost—I've lost myself, / entombed myself while chasing / the impossible.

### iii. Euterpe

The Silence still reigns. / With clenched fists, I fracture it, / set free crescendos.

### iv. Erato

I'm learning to love. / "I'm worthy of gentleness," / I repeat each day.  
Soon, I'll believe it / whilst I navigate the thorns / of Erato's Rose.

### v. Melpomene

Upheavals shifting / spark within me infernos / ever-smoldering.

### vi. Polyhymnia

Shrouded eyes, hushed lips. / Trembling hands lift the Veil— / now vulnerable.

### vii. Terpsichore

Clumsy feet stumble, / dancing baby steps, blooming / into pirouettes.

### viii. Thalia

A quirk of the lips. / Then dulcet chimes—laughter! Mirth's / flickering tempo.

### ix. Urania

Urania's stars / glimmer in chaos. Draw air, / hitches in my throat.  
Would her stars thief breath / if they aligned perfectly— / like marching soldiers?

In the following two pieces, I broke from the traditional haiku. For me, accomplishing two poems with no formal structure also equates to hard-won progress. Little by little, I think I'm reclaiming my voice, which I explore in "Vox." Before that, however, I wrote "Echo and Narcissa," a twist on the Echo and Narcissus myth. (Truthfully, I'm unsure why I instinctively turned to Greek mythology, but I'm relearning how to listen to and trust myself.) In "Echo and Narcissa," a narrative poem, I cast myself as three characters—Echo, Narcissus reimagined as Narcissa, and Narcissa's reflection—who are all representative of various facets of my OCD.

## Echo and Narcissa

We know the tragedy of Echo and Narcissus—but what of Echo and Narcissa?

Let's say, one fateful day when sunbeams ignited the heavens, Echo was bewitched by a dancing maiden with kindness in her brown eyes and a flawless grace in her step. Wherever the dancing maiden went, Echo longingly trailed close behind.

Echo imitates her. When Narcissa speaks, she speaks tunefully in ballads and bells; but when Echo mimics, she rasps sour melodies. Seasons change; love darkens to bitterness, swathes Echo's blackening heart with poison ivy-green envy. Still, Echo follows.

Chasing, ever-chasing Narcissa.

And Narcissa dances on, sings on. Oblivious, content. Until one day, in morning's softly gilded light, she pirouettes by a pond, glimpses her reflection painted in its water.

Like Narcissus, she collapses.

Unlike Narcissus, Narcissa falls not in love.

Echo looks upon Narcissa and sees a blossoming flower; Narcissa looks upon her likeness and sees a graying, withered bloom.

And now, the twist: Echo and Narcissa are one and the same.

## Vox

My voice simmers like gently bubbling water on the stovetop, tempered by force-fed lessons—

"Be a *lady*." "Be *polite*."

"Softly now; a lady never *raises* her voice." "Learn to *smile* and *nod*."

"Hold your controversies!"

So I make myself smaller, keep my voice safe and simmering like I've been taught. But when I write, the dial turns; the gentle bubbles reach a rolling boil, and I cast aside indoctrination. Aloud, I simmer still, but I've not cooled, and every day that passes, I turn the dial—just a little bit more.

## Forward and Backward: A Word On Healing

In "The Crocodile in the Bedroom," a fable about a crocodile who adored the tidy flowers illustrated on the wallpaper and hated his wife's not-so-tidy garden, author Arnold Lobel asserts, "Without a doubt, there is such a thing as too much order" (Lobel 2). I've kept that quote at the forefront of my mind while writing for this class. While not a perfect solution, remembering that narratives—and by extension, my writing—aren't supposed to fit in neat boxes has helped me win more battles against my OCD.

Working through my OCD is an ongoing process with steps forward and backward. As I've stated, the symptoms wax and wane. Some days, I may be experiencing harm OCD- and/or pure O-related ruminations; other days, I may be obsessed with perfectionism and symmetry while I clean and organize. While familiar now, my OCD's manifestations are still unpredictable. After my fleeting peace in the morning vanishes, I can actually feel, as I've described to my psychiatrist and therapist, my brain searching for/deciding what to focus on. I honestly haven't the words to describe it precisely. In that moment, I'm both an outsider and insider to my own brain, and I know the illogic and ridiculousness of whatever my OCD chooses; unfortunately, this doesn't ease the resulting obsessions and compulsions. If anything, it causes more distress because I perform my behaviors while recognizing