

## Love – a Valentine’s Writing Workshop \*

Sometime in February, I might offer this workshop. It could be for an ongoing writing group, or a one-off workshop. To prime the group in advance, I recommend sending the participants a couple of sample love poems about plants with the suggestion to find a plant to fall in love with, be with, adore, smell, touch, maybe taste. . . . then write a love poem or a Valentine to/for the plant and bring your poem to the workshop.

Here are the poems I suggested: [Bernard & Cerinthe by Linda France](#), and my own poem:

Rosaceae and Lionel

Rosa o Rosa dainty and sweet and early to bloom  
budding forth in cluster balls of green on bare branches,  
delicate but strong survivor of frost and wind – Lionel  
longs to lie along her canopy gazing up at the afternoon  
half-moon in the grey blue sky rocked by a gentle breeze.

He sucks her scent of crimson and gold oblivious to passers-by,  
as she roots deep – he’s half-asleep not caring who comes  
who goes. She knows – she knows how to grow strong and free  
spreading her colours like wings to attract a solo bee: Lionel.

Lionel longs to float beyond time suspended by white petals.

At the workshop just after Valentines day, we began with the writing prompt “The first time I fell in love . . . ” which is based on a more general prompt The First Time I often use with new groups:

### THE FIRST TIME

THE FIRST TIME is memorable. When experiencing the new, our senses and emotions flood. We are shocked. We get a rush, sometimes delightful and other times traumatic.

During firsts we exist completely in the moment, without past or future flavouring our experience. We are open. We are new.

Our writing is fresh when we approach it from the position of firstness. This requires an act of imagination. It takes preparation. You may close your eyes and then open them on a familiar scene. You may pretend to be someone else meeting your brother for the first time. You might want to walk out of the room. close the door behind you and then re-enter. Experiment with several ways to prepare yourself to write from this place of firstness.

**Today** write as if you are experiencing your subject for the first time – whatever it is. like it is your first encounter. Or, describe a character, a creature experiencing something for the first time. Or, simply start with the phrase “the first time,” and write without stopping until you fill the page or two pages.

It is the first shower that wets.  
ITALIAN PROVERB

After a round of sharing our free-writing about our first love and our plant-love. I asked the question: *What breaks your heart?* And with sugar paper, scissors, Sellotape, coloured felt tip pen, and oil pastels – I encouraged everyone to make a heart and then write or draw notes or images of *what breaks your heart*. I usually allow 20 minutes for this activity.

The next step is for people “show and tell” – encouraging the listeners to have pens poised ready to note more things that break your heart. Once everyone has spoken, I invite a short period of silence with everyone exhibiting their heart between index fingers and thumbs – then I ask us all to tear our hearts into four pieces. This is high drama – often with shocked faces!

Next, with Sellotape, we put our hearts back together again and write and/or make images or symbols on the back of our hearts answering the question: “What mends my heart?”

Like in a Quaker meeting, we then share our words and experiences of what mends our hearts – with pauses for silent reflection. I make this into a ritual punctuated by a meditation bell. After each person shares what mends their heart I read one the following verses from the Interbeing Community founded by *Thich Nhat Hanh*:

1	Aware of my <b>body</b> , I breathe in Smiling to my body, I breathe out	aware of body Smiling
2	In touch with the element <b>earth</b> in me, I breathe in Recognising the element earth everywhere, I breathe out	element earth in me, everywhere
3	In touch with the element <b>water</b> in me, I breathe in Recognising the element water everywhere, I breathe out	element water in me, everywhere
4	In touch with the element <b>fire</b> in me, I breathe in Recognising the element fire everywhere, I breathe out	element fire in me, everywhere
5	In touch with the element <b>air</b> in me, I breathe in Recognising the element air everywhere, I breathe out	element air in me, everywhere
6	In touch with the element <b>space</b> in me, I breathe in Recognising the element space everywhere, I breathe out	element space in me, everywhere
7	Aware of this year’s <b>seeds</b> under the earth, I breathe in Watering seeds of deep <b>peace</b> in myself, I breathe out	seeds under earth deep peace

I usually end a workshop ends with some discussion and evaluation. If returning for another session, I would offer prompt related to the last verse in the meditation – What seeds are you sowing to promote deep peace?

\*I first did this workshop with [Ted Bowman](#) facilitating the process. Valerie Gillies and I were participating. This was part of a facilitator training residential in Wiston Lodge in 2003.