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A Poetic Ethnodrama: Discussing the Impact of the Pressure to Publish on Creative Writers' Production

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A Poetic Ethnodrama:

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by

Abby N. Lewis

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the presence of the pressure to publish while in college as an undergraduate or graduate student, and the impact that pressure has on students' ability to produce creative work. After interviewing participants, the researcher created an ethnodrama to best represent participants' emotions and unique experiences with publishing while in school. An examination of the literature reveals that master's-level students are often overlooked in scholarly research on the subject of publishing. This study uses a qualitative research method to identify key emotional experiences from students at the master's and undergraduate level in the hopes of providing a platform for these marginalized voices.

DEDICATION

To everyone who helped make this a success, be it through offering insightful revisions, listening to my constant "shop talk," pointing out leads to explore, or simply encouraging me to keep going. It has meant more to me than you know.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a graduate student who has had the good fortune to publish one full-length poetry collection and one chapbook, I found myself wondering how pressured my creative writing peers felt to publish and build their curriculum vitaes (CV). Does publication intimidate them? Do they feel they *must* publish in order to be considered a "legitimate" writer, whatever that may mean? And, most intriguing to me, how do their thoughts on publishing impact their ability to write, to continue producing new and innovative creative work? Does it inhibit them, does it serve as motivation or creative fuel?

I also found myself wondering how closely discussion of creative writing[1] publishing in academia, or the lack of discussion, shapes writers' concepts of the process of publishing, as well as their ability to (un)successfully navigate through the publication process in the field of creative writing. I not only seek an answer to these questions but hold an innate desire to share what I find with as many people as possible. As a poet, poetry seemed like the default medium to share the results of this project but did not seem to fit as the best medium by which to express said results. The ultimate decision to write a poetic ethnodrama from the interview transcripts, however, not only maintains the unique voices of participants, it allows me to expose larger groups of people to my findings. It also places viewers all together and allows them time to discuss what they have just witnessed after the production ends. Additionally, the ethnodrama acts as more than a play; it is a projection of reality and a voice for participants.[2]

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[1] Hereafter written as CW.

[2] I was inspired to write an ethnodrama due to the work of many wonderful playwrights, such as Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, the entire works on ethnodrama—scholarly and creative—from Johnny Saldaña, Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*, and many, many more.

Literature Review

Academic publishing, depending on one's field, carries with it an air of mystery for those contemplating entering higher education, whether as a graduate or doctoral student or as a faculty member. In recent years, however, studies have been conducted (Dooley & Sweeny, 2017; Mendoza, 2007; Tran, 2009) and articles published (Polsky, 2007; Stoilescu & McDougall, 2010) in an attempt to explain the process of scholarly publication. Academic capitalism plays a prominent role in the output of scholarly work, as well as which universities the majority of the output of scholarly work is coming from (Tran, 2009). Sometimes there is a prominent academic hegemony in play that results in students (more often than not, minority students) feeling isolated in their own programs (Kearns, 2009; Sethi, 2002). Some college faculty members attempt to demystify academic publishing by incorporating mentored publishing into their graduate program (Tran, 2009, p. 404), while other faculty members work in collaboration with their own peers to meet the—spoken or unspoken—publication quota (Narin et al., 2015). However, there are both advantages and disadvantages to collaborative publishing, which will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

This study first provides a general overview of academic publishing across many fields in order to provide the standard norm for publishing; however, the study is primarily focused on the publishing, or lack thereof, of undergraduate and graduate students who identify as creative writers. Specifically, are CW students conditioned and initiated into publishing in the same way as scholarly- and research-oriented students? What kind of a disadvantage, if any, are CW graduate students placed in who choose to enroll in an MA program before or instead of an MFA program? The answer seems obvious: MFA programs are dedicated to the cultivation of CW skills; however, is the lack of emphasis (and thus pressure) on the clockwork production of

creative work in an MA program a hidden advantage? Or is that advantage in the master's degree simply overrun and replaced by the emphasis on academic publishing? In order to work toward an answer, this study provides a discussion on academic capitalism in the university, a brief overview of relevant trends and concerns in the field of CW over the years, and a look at current and past CW pedagogy. Finally, the study focuses on CW students' individual experiences, as one goal of this study is to give voice to marginalized groups.

Academic Capitalism

Academic capitalism comes in many forms and carries with it many potential hazards and repercussions. Academic capitalism consists of intentional for-profit activity on the part of faculty members, universities, or academic institutions. Buzzwords around academic capitalism include but are not limited to economization, commercialization, capitalization, commodification, financialization, and production. Jessop (2018) attributes the rise of academic capitalism to three big factors: (1) ''knowledge-based economy,''' (2) financialization and "the rise of finance-dominated economic regimes," and (3) "fisco-financial crises" (p. 104). Academic capitalism, however, was not always so prevalent in universities. The end of the Second World War, Sputnik, and the flood of baby boomers into American school systems launched a major expansion in universities. This expansion also coincided with the growth of creative writing programs in universities (Galef, 2008; Myers, 1996). In the original CW programs, "*teaching* was the goal, not production and expansion" (Myers, 1996, p. 6, italics added), but over the years, academic capitalism has altered the focus of universities in the US to teaching students to cultivate publications and build their CVs rather than teaching them how to teach CW. Recently, however, there has been a movement to return to the inclusion of CW pedagogy classes in MFA programs (Bizarro, 2004; Ritter, 2007).

The mindset that a long publication list is the most important qualification in academia is quite insidious, however, and not easy to reprogram in faculty. Long, Boggess, and Jennings (2011) highlight the impact publishing has on the hierarchy of faculty members within the university. They found that "many universities place a great deal of weight on the *quantity* of publications produced" by faculty candidates when hiring rather than considering other equally important factors such as the *quality* of the research (p. 102, italics added). Vance (2010) notes how essential publishing is to keeping faculty members energized and excited about their work and their field of study, which in turn works to energize their students. If faculty members only teach and never pursue their own research, they risk burning out on teaching, thus transferring that exhaustion to their students. It seems part of the conundrum of publishing in academia is the struggle to find a middle ground in which publishing is present but not the determining factor for faculty members during the hiring process or when under review for possible tenure.[3]

Tran's (2009) study on the publishing output of mass communication graduate students from 1999 to 2008 reveals the potential of a strong hegemonic dynamic in high ranking colleges that not only emphasize publishing in their graduate programs, but sometimes even require it. According to Tran (2009), "U.S. mass communication programs have long been encouraging students to go beyond course papers and develop a publication record prior to receiving their graduate degrees" (p. 395), and if that was not enough pressure, the results of the study indicate

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[3] Fitzpatrick (2008) brings up the concept of "knowledge mobilization," which is prevalent in Canadian universities and appears in Scotland and Newfoundland universities as well. Knowledge mobilization is all about networking in the sense of community involvement between universities and their local communities. It encourages collaboration for the sake of knowledge sharing and capitalizing on helpful production rather than on networking for the sake of building one's CV or credibility as an instructor or researcher. It is important to note than in Scotland, tenure is not a concept that exists. Fitzpatrick, however, draws attention to the fact that traditional scholarly publication (e.g., the appearance of one's name in a peer-reviewed journal) is still valued over knowledge mobilization experience as a more credible line on a CV, and as long as this trend continues, knowledge mobilization will likely remain an underdeveloped field in the US, much to the disappointment of many local communities.

that the "top 10 institutions were responsible for a half of student research output" (p. 400). This means that of the already low publication rate for graduate students (one dual-authored article for the majority of students and two sole-authored articles for the most prolific graduate students during their graduate career) (p. 403), half came from prestigious institutions that could afford to emphasize collaboration and had faculty who were present and available to mentor and train students in the process of scholarly publication. Tran's study shows, at the very least, that the chances of students getting a scholarly article published while in graduate school—especially if the students are nontraditional, working their way through college, or attend a far less prestigious institution—are in fact very low. What's more, the chances of being published as a faculty member, and the minimal effect a few publications has on the ability to nab a tenure-track position, are also rather disheartening (see Herrmann, 2012). The issue has been historically difficult for CW students as well. Even though MFA programs emphasize publications, "Estimates peg the professional success rate for graduates in creative writing at about one percent (as compared with 90 percent for graduates of medical school)" (Myers, 1996, p. 2).

To further exacerbate the issue, there is a general air of mystery surrounding the concept of publishing in academia.[4] The mystery of publishing is further convoluted when one is not yet faculty; that is, when one is still in school as a doctoral candidate, a graduate student, or even an undergraduate student. Stoilescu and McDougall (2010) provide a comprehensive guide on how to enter into academic publishing as a graduate or doctoral student, yet they state that graduate students should pursue publishing to see "if they enjoy publishing and if academia is a suitable lifestyle for them. Maybe, doctoral students should write just because of who they are and not because of external, social, or professional pressures" (p. 79), but this seems like a romantic ideal

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[4] Polsky (2007) does a superb job of dispelling the mystery, yet his article focuses on publishing specifically in the field of political science.

when one considers the pressures of academic capitalism on one's ability to get a job in academia.[5]

Hoffman (2012) points out that the term academic capitalism is oxymoronic, that it violates "the common conception that academics should be motivated by the pursuit of new knowledge and the elevation of learning over profit" (p. 12). Learning for the sake of learning is difficult to do when one considers the decrease in hiring tenure-track faculty and the increased use of (often underpaid) adjuncts or graduate students to teach classes (Hoffman, 2012). Dooley and Sweeny's (2017) study on the stress of academic publishing is notable, as it highlights how graduate students suffer the most from stress and anxiety while waiting for a decision on possible academic publication (more so than postdocs and tenure-track faculty). Dooley and Sweeny (2017) found that "graduate students reported suffering more intrusive thoughts as they waited," and they also "spent more energy bracing for the worst and reported the poorest coping skills of any group" (p. 12). Dooley and Sweeny also found that the more publications one has under one's belt, the lower the individual's stress and anxiety levels, as the more wisdom one gains on publishing, the lower the level of distress.[6]

Mendoza (2007), on the other hand, focuses specifically on the impact of academic capitalism on doctoral students. Mendoza points out that only a scarce two empirical studies have been conducted on the impact of academic publishing on graduate students specifically (p. 72). Particularly in the STEM fields, graduate students may be prevented from publishing their research due to patents, and as Mendoza (2007) notes, for a graduate student "who aspires to an academic career, however, publication delays represent a serious obstacle and a betrayal" (p. 72).

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[5] For a recent example of the ongoing debate on whether graduate students should publish, see Flaherty (2017).

[6] Perhaps important to note is that Dooley was currently a graduate student at the time of the article's publication.

Patents, though, are not an issue for CW graduate students; they face a different sort of obstacle. Their work is not directly tied to the work of their mentors/professors in the sense that they are not actively joining a research team that was operating before they arrived and that will most likely continue to operate after they leave; however, graduate students who are creative writers currently pursuing an MA rather than an MFA are forced to conduct much of their writing on their own—often limited—time (i.e., when they are not acting as research assistants, teaching classes, studying for comprehensive exams, writing a thesis, or doing general homework for the classes in which they are currently enrolled).

According to Cassuto (1998), "Much more attention is now given in graduate school to teaching students how to write for publication, a skill that an older generation was expected to develop only after getting jobs" (p. B4). In fact, "we are increasingly entering a brave new world in which one's graduate school determines one's future prospects as never before" (p. B5), which is why it is sometimes imperative to make connections with faculty members/mentors in order to increase one's chances of being given opportunities that will build one's resume and advance one's career. Yet those faculty members, who sometimes serve as gatekeepers, have the power to do more harm than good (Rubinstein, 2019).

Collaborative Writing and Community

The field of CW within academia is rapidly becoming a competitive one in which even creative publications (novels, full-length poetry collections, a long curriculum vitae of magazine and journal publications) do not guarantee a job in academia as a CW instructor. Olthouse (2013), in her study of MFA writers and their relationship with writing, points out, "To be an MFA writer was to be overloaded with teaching and grading responsibilities, to be rejected 90% of the time in publications that do not even pay for accepted pieces, and to fit writing into a daily

schedule despite the fact that, it seemed, at times, no one cared" (p. 270). And these are writers in an MFA program, a program which is designed to *inspire* writing and the sharing of one's work. Many CW instructors often do not share their work with their students. Myers (1996) points out that "the real work of most English professors is the writing not of literary texts but of scholarly books and articles. What's more, these books and articles are almost never assigned for class, students are not expected to know them, and few scholars are even inclined to read them" (p. 11). Most students know that faculty members publish, but few feel compelled to find and read their instructor's publications. Is the same tendency true for students of CW instructors, and if so, are CW instructors missing potentially valuable teaching opportunities by declining to share their own creative publications with their students? Perhaps not, according to Peckham (2011):

> When a handful of students recently pressured me to share some of my own work—adding they would find it, anyway, online—I reluctantly agreed to photocopy some of my more recent prose poems for them. Not long after, I collected these same students' final portfolios and found that many of them took a stab at writing their own prose poems. I felt both proud and perturbed, for many of their poems resembled mine in shape and tone just a little too closely for comfort. Yet, I have to admit, their patterning flattered me. (p. 96)

Peckham admits the power dynamic at play in sharing one's work with students "is charged," and it makes her uncomfortable. Maybe sharing one's work with current students is not the best avenue, but does that mean that instructors must also take steps to ensure students do not have ready access to their work, as Peckham's students seem to?

Olthouse (2013) found that writers approach writing in a social way, with openness, and writing is indeed a social activity (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, p. 17); yet, collaborative writing can be problematic. Narin et al. (2015) found that power differences among academic writers can negatively impact collaborative writing groups. A specific power difference that arose in Narin et al.'s study was the "hierarchical relationships" between the published and the unpublished writers in the group. It was stated that collaborative writing must remain productive and pleasurable to continue effectively, but also important to note is that "current managerialist regimes create pressures that can cause writers to feel paralysed at the thought they may not gain employment or will be made redundant if they fail to publish" in academia (Narin et al., 2015, p. 598-599). The same mindset may very well be present in scholars and faculty of CW. Comparatively, Ugrin, Odom, and Pearson (2008) found that positive relationships between mentors and mentees (especially ones in which the two share commonalities and the mentee feels less stress) increased mentee productivity and the chance for future career success, so the comfortability of students in academia is highly important.[7]

The issue of power and authority figures is problematic in other countries as well (Nguyen, 2017). For example, CW students in China "do not easily engage in peer critique or debate with the authority figure" (Whitehead, 2016, p. 376), which makes the traditional Western workshop model rather problematic—to say the least—in a classroom in China. These problems exist within MFA programs, of course, but there is little literature on the collaborative writing groups of MA students or college undergraduates. How does the power dynamic work when all participants in the collaborative group exist on the same plane, when none of the students have

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[7] It would behoove universities to take this into consideration, as student production has an impact on university status, success, and funding.

yet to be officially published, when they are all roughly at the same stage of the writing /

publication process?

Power Dynamics, Hegemony, and Transferable Skills

But power dynamics do not just have to do with one's publication record. Sethi (2002), in

writing about her experiences as a woman of color in graduate school, notes her marginalization

as the "token" student whose interests were to be ignored because she was the one student

concerned with issues of race, class, and gender. Her graduate experience is discouragingly

normal for minority and marginalized groups, and so is worth quoting at some length. [8]

> I have been wondering if being a "graduate student" is really more about being a
>
> professional academic than being a student. One of my disillusions about graduate school
>
> is the intense emphasis placed on presenting, publishing, and building a curriculum vitae.
>
> Judging by the vast number of graduate student conferences, the corresponding graduate
>
> culture to participate in these conferences, and the constant rumors of the need to
>
> "publish or perish," I am curious as to exactly which academics can devote their time to
>
> such endeavours. Looking critically at such a graduate culture, I am led to believe that
>
> "professionalization" is really a code word used to maintain a particular hegemony of
>
> white male, middle-class scholarship. (Sethi, 2002, p. 136)

Sethi's experience highlights a number of issues within academia. The lack of interest Sethi

received from both her peers and her instructor led to such frustration on her part that she wound

up dropping the class. [9] The experience also led her to describe her time at graduate school as

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[8] For an engaging and comprehensive discussion on the ethnocentric roots of the traditional CW model, see Whitehead (2016). For more insight into the extreme whiteness of many MFA programs, see Díaz (2014).

[9] See also Means, Beatty, Blockett, Bumbry, Canida II, & Cawthon (2017) for a discussion on the impact of microaggressions (among other exercises of White privilege) on minority doctoral students in higher education. Importantly, Means et al. point out, "Research on graduate students of Color preparing for faculty and higher education administrative roles is sparse and varies greatly" (p. 111), which highlights the need to give voice to marginalized students at the graduate level and above.

"alienating" (Sethi, 2002). Sethi points out a common hegemonic imbalance in which the system of getting ahead is one that is designed for traditional students who have both the time and the funds to travel to conferences to present papers or to conduct research independently of class time and graduate research assistant obligations.

Perhaps Sethi's (2002) feelings of isolation do not seem consequential enough to warrant further inquiry, but compositionists and transfer researchers Driscoll and Wells (2012) have shown that students' dispositions such as motivation, value, and self-efficacy impact their ability to not only retain knowledge, but whether they notice the knowledge can be transferred to other classes or whether they even see the knowledge as being noteworthy of transfer to another course or context in their academic career. If students are not motivated to learn or even care, they are more likely to forget concepts they have just learned, and if students do not see course topics as in line with their values, they are also more likely to discard the concepts. As Driscoll and Wells (2012) note, "over the past twenty years, composition researchers have shifted from understanding literacy development as something that takes place primarily within the educational context of the classroom, to something impacted by the individual's experiences outside the classroom" (p. 2).

Roozen (2008) conducted a case study of an undergraduate student in which he argues that students' outside-the-classroom explorations of multimodal outlets and genres other than academic publishing lead to the cultivation of transferable skills which students can then add to their toolbox to be used in the college classroom. Charles, the undergraduate subject of Roozen's case study, used the recreational outlets of stand-up comedy and open mic night poetry readings to improve his public speaking skills, which he deployed in Speech Communication 101, a course in which he had been struggling, to get a better grade. As Roozen (2008) points out, "the

researcher who examines non-school and school writing as separate, autonomous activities cannot see and account for how they mutually interact and inform one another" (p. 29). Similarly, students who are taught to view the skills and knowledge they attain in the classroom as purely "academic knowledge" will be less likely to see how they can transfer that knowledge to their extracurricular, professional, and even personal lives. In traditional English MA programs, the lack of emphasis on CW may seem to have no bearing on students' prior abilities as a creative writer, but students who are able to not only recognize but transfer their CW talents to their academic writing (and vice versa) are far more equipped to continue working toward honing their CW skills while enrolled in a master's program. In this context, then, the argument could be made that MA programs (using Roozen's (2008) concept of valuing and recognizing students' out-of-classroom work and explorations in addition to their in-classroom work) do in fact train creative writers. The process, however, requires active recognition, collaboration, and transference of skills from the students, in that they must recognize the instances in which they can use their CW skills in an academic situation, and when they can transfer the skills cultivated during their research-focused master's education to their CW.

The Creative Writing Workshop as a Site of Collaboration

It's common practice during CW workshop classes that the author of the piece which is being discussed must remain silent during the discussion (Nguyen, 2019). The author is allowed to ask clarifying questions but is not permitted to challenge comments made by peers or jump in to defend his or her authorial choices in the piece. Sometimes, the author is allowed to make a general blanket comment after peers have workshopped the piece. During this blanket comment, the author may choose to clarify any points of confusion brought up, verbally defend some of her authorial choices, simply thank her peers for the feedback, or choose to remain silent and offer

no commentary; however, authors rarely choose to do anything other than say thanks, as offering commentary would portray the author as defensive (Nguyen, 2019). Kearns (2009) refers to this method as the "normative workshop," and points out how this method negates the author's expertise on her own story (p. 793). She also highlights how it silences authors, and for writers who exist in minority groups, such as Kearns (and also Nguyen, 2019), it further silences those who already feel silenced by the larger Eurocentric hegemony of most CW workshop formats, "thus furthering their feelings of alienation and disempowerment" (Kearns, 2009, p. 794).

Kearns (2009) terms this strong-armed aspect of the normative workshop as the "gag rule" (p. 793). Participants sometimes assume the author is ignorant, that if she turns in a historical short story, she did not properly (if at all) research the time period the story is set in; that if she writes about a culture different than her own, she is wrongfully appropriating the culture; that if she chooses to write an autobiographical piece of nonfiction, she is self-absorbed and unwilling to branch out. The gag rule also places the author at the mercy of this feedback in that the author is unable to defend her creative choices, discuss the literature she pulled from to write the piece, or even state what she was *trying* to achieve in the writing. Workshops are designed to help authors improve their writing, but the "fault-finding mode" (Kearns, 2009, p. 795) in which participants only offer negative feedback does nothing of the sort. In fact, it has quite the opposite effect. Numerous articles cite how emotionally scarred authors can be after immersion in the normative workshop (Kearns, 2009; Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2019; Olthouse, 2013; Peckham, 2011; Stukenberg, 2017; Waggoner, 2001).[10]

Ironically, the "hierarchical interaction" Kearns (2009, p. 793) writes of is reflected in a response to her article in the next issue of *College Composition & Communication* (*CCC*). In the

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[10] For an example of a more open type of workshop, see Lerman & Borstel's (2003) book on the Critical Response Process.

response, Vanderslice (2010) gives a normative workshop response in that she primarily

critiques the flaws in Kearns's (2009) article, asserting that Kearns did not adequately cover or

even acknowledge all of the literature on CW published in the last fifteen years (p. 760), yet in

Kearns's response to Vanderslice (which would not be permitted in the normative workshop

setting but is in the "Interchanges" section of *CCC*'s academic journal), most of the articles

included in Vanderslice's works cited as literature overlooked by Kearns are articles published,

as Kearns points out, "in the last five years, not fifteen" (p. 761). If Kearns had not been

permitted a response to Vanderslice's criticism, readers would be more likely to side with

Vanderslice and perhaps even discredit Kearns's (2009) article in their minds when, in actuality,

Kearns provides a calm, concise, and logical response to Vanderslice's strong-arm criticism.

Perhaps also of note is that more than half of the articles cited in Vanderslice's criticism as

overlooked by Kearns are articles Vanderslice has published with Ritter in the past five years (p.

760). Although Kearns's article was published in the 2009 issue of *CCC*, it was initially accepted

in 2005, which is when the first of Vanderslice's coauthored articles was published.

The inclusion of this public dialogue is not meant to shame any particular author; rather, I

cite it here as an example of how pervasive and even insidious the normative workshop can be

on the psyche of authors. It trains authors (even authors of scholarly articles), as Kearns (2009)

states, to find fault in writers' work first and foremost, which is rather unproductive (p. 793).

Additionally, it does not utilize the collaborative opportunity writers are placed in when they

take a CW workshop class. According to Myers (1996) in his oft-cited book on the history of

creative writing, *The Elephants Teach*, the traditional workshop method grew out of a

progressive idea about teaching called the "communal making of poetry" (p. 116-117), founded

on the idea that the purpose of class and instruction was to focus on the students' writing and on

teaching students how to objectively criticize their own work. That is, it was meant to be a collaborative, communal, and encouraging environment based on learning a skill (how to objectively critique one's own work) rather than on systematically breaking down the author's self-esteem and descending like piranhas on any inherent weakness in the author's writing style (when in fact the perceived "weakness" of style may be the expression of a different cultural perspective, which traditional White students in the class mistakenly label as wrong, incorrect, or "bad" writing simply because the style does not resemble that of the canonized literature of which English students are familiar) (see Lim, 2010). One of the reasons given for why the gag rule is used is because "normally an author's readers don't have the author there to explain things, so it's useful and interesting to the author to see the reactions of a group of readers to the text as it exists by itself" (Kearns, 2009, p. 794), which becomes highly problematic when the readers in the workshop are vastly different from the author's targeted demographic.

While the argument in favor of the gag rule is true to a certain extent, it does not explain why the entire workshop has to be dedicated to this normative method. If each workshop opened with the gag rule and then shifted into a more productive method, such as what I like to refer to as the roundtable method proposed by Kearns (2009, p. 801), perhaps workshops would be more productive. While most CW instructors will tell students that the gag rule reflects the submission experience, this is not necessarily true. When academic scholars submit an article to an academic journal, the journal can accept the article with the condition that the author make revisions to the article. The submission process then becomes an active dialogue and collaboration between the author and the staff of the magazine. Journals of creative writing are far more unlikely to offer feedback or accept a creative work with the condition that substantial revisions must first be made; however, working with a literary agent and querying publishers with a novel (or,

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particularly, an idea for a nonfiction book) leads to a revision and collaboration process not too dissimilar from academic publishing. The prevalence of the gag rule, thus, begins to lose its authority.

Granted, the work is read and commented on by the writer's peers and instructor, and usually by the end of the term the writer submits a revised version of each workshopped manuscript, but this is only a once-over; it is not a collaborative, metaphorical tennis match of back and forth between the author and the reader of the text. The common argument is that readers of a novel will not be able to quiz the author about what a particular line or passage in the text means (Stukenberg, 2017, p. 282), but what is forgotten is that before the book reaches the market reader, it is vetted by numerous editors, copy editors, proofreaders, and production staff members who will be asking questions similar to ones asked (albeit facetiously, no doubt) in workshop, so why not hash out the issue in workshop by allowing the author to ask questions back and explain her intentions *before* sending it to a publishing house for consideration?

This argument, however, is based on the assumption that the normative practice is effective the majority of the time. The normative, or traditional, workshop is said to have originated in the 1930s and 1940s at the University of Iowa (Myers, 1996; Stukenberg, 2017; Whitehead, 2016). The traditional model, then, is a decade shy of being a century old. Perhaps it is time to reassess the model. This is not to say the traditional workshop method should be entirely scrapped but to argue that it should likely be truncated to make room for the introduction of new, experimental pedagogical methods during the second half of the classroom session. After all, "workshop alone does not teach everything," and the "workshop is not always a safe pedagogy" (Stukenberg, 2017, p. 278), as has been noted (see the arguments of Kearns, 2009, and Sethi, 2002, for salient examples). The danger of the workshop becomes even more dire the

higher an author climbs in academe. Much published CW pedagogy, for example, is written in relation to MFA students who plan to teach CW classes of their own after graduation (see, for example, Ritter, 2007). After all, according to Myers (1996), "Creative writing began with the hiring of writers to teach writing" (p. 7). Few studies focus on master's students who plan to pursue a career in CW; in fact, few studies focus on master's degree students in general (Vandenberg & Clary-Lemon, 2010). The focus on undergraduate students is larger (Kearns, 2009; Stukenberg, 2017). There are, however, a select few that focus on CW at the community college level (Waggoner, 2001), yet the traditional model is used (in variations, but still used) all the way down into high school pedagogy.[11]

The Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) website has stated that the traditional workshop format is "inappropriate" for undergraduate CW classes (n.d.). According to Stukenberg (2017), the traditional CW workshop "can overly emphasize [the] end-product, when what students need is more help in understanding how writers work through a process and how to get started (invention)" (p. 286). James McGowan, in an interview for Waggoner (2001), points out that two-year college CW classes are much more laid back in that most students take the course as an elective, so the stakes are rather lax, whereas four-year colleges include juniors and seniors who perceive CW classes as training courses for a chosen career path (p. 59). Other community college instructors interviewed by Waggoner (2001) agreed that there was less focus on publishing at the two-year college level, which created opportunities to focus more on the craft and invention aspect of writing. Instructor Ed Davis even went so far as to comment,

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[11] For works on high school students (and largely spoken word poetry), see Desai, 2016; Desai & Marsh, 2005; Dooley, 2014; Ellis, Gere, & Lamberton, 2003; Fisher, 2005a, 2005b; Jocson, 2005, 2006, 2011; Kinloch, 2005; Low, 2011; Weinstein & West, 2012; and Williams, 2015.

"You're likely to get a kinder, gentler reaction to your work, I think, at a two-year school as opposed to a four-year school" (Waggoner, 2001, p. 63).

Davis also made the key observation that almost none of his "students *wanted* to workshop in the traditional style. . . . What they seem to want is to be listened to, responded to, and encouraged, honestly and convincingly" (Waggoner, 2001, p. 64, italics in original). During the emergence of the normative (traditional) workshop, famous writers taught at universities because "the idea was not that the university could produce writers, but that writers could learn from one another, and from the practice of writing, under guidance of a practicing master teacher" (Stukenberg, 2017, p. 280). Thus, the "workshop makes community its site for learning" (Stukenberg, 2017, p. 280). The tradition of bringing in a famous writer, however, has turned insidious over the years, as Ritter (2007) points out. As Nguyen (2019) asserts, perhaps we need to "rethink how we workshop." Perhaps we need to return to the beginning days of the traditional model, when the university was merely the gathering place for current writers rather than the furnace in which new writers are forged. What, then, does a CW community look like in the twenty-first century?[12]

The problem of grading in creative writing. Inevitably, since the kind of writing that takes place in CW programs is part of a course for college credit, a grade must be assigned to each student by the end of the semester. And as Peckham (2011) notes, grading in graduate CW classes is problematic. Ultimately, grading "is not about the work, after all. It's about the *reading* of the work" (Peckham, 2011, p. 95, italics in original). What Peckham notes is that, as the authority figure on assigning a grade to each work, she felt hyper conscious of the role of

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[12] Note that there are more ways of collaborating than the normative workshop. The emergence and prevalence of the digital age brought with it many studies regarding the impact of technology on CW pedagogy and on collaboration avenues during the process of writing (for examples, see Clark, Hergenrader, & Rein, 2015; Goldsmith, 2011; Harper, 2014; Hayles, 2002; Vanderslice, 2016).

subjective interpretation in her reaction to the student work she reads. Was she assigning a high grade to a piece of writing primarily because she found it interesting and because its content aligned with her personal interests as a writer? Or was she assigning grades solely based on the strength of the writing? Or, perhaps, it was a mixture of both, but how is Peckham to tell when deciding on a grade which side of the scale she is leaning toward? And is it fair to assign a high grade because the story entertained and interested her, when she knows it may not have the same effect on the next reader? In other words, grading is subjective, as is feedback received from peers; it changes with each reader. It is important to note as well that the problem of grading does not exist solely in CW classes, but in university structures as a whole; Astin (2017) notes that many colleges are obsessed with "smartness" in students, and that traditional grading methods "tell us virtually nothing about student learning," suggesting instead that instructors adopt "narrative evaluations" (p.26). Rejection letters received from publishers on one's work, however, are also subjective. Perhaps one of the most beneficial realizations for writers is that one does not need to (and should not) incorporate all of the feedback received on a piece of work, just as one should not follow every suggestion made by publishers. Writers must learn how to listen to feedback with humility and patience, and then, while taking that feedback into consideration, continue to do whatever the writer feels is best for the creative piece. However, Peckham is a CW instructor, and her work focuses on the grades of CW classes rather than her students' relationship with publishing.

Other literature focuses on the emergence of CW as a discipline and a legitimate field in academia (Bizarro, 2004) and the thoughts of CW instructors (who are also writers) on two-year college CW programs (Waggoner, 2001). Bizarro (2004) states, "Many writers view creative writing as something that has stumbled, by chance alone, into academe" (p. 295). This

viewpoint, still held by many, breeds insecurities in both student writers and CW instructors, in which all writers of the "creative" sort feel as if they exist both within, and separate from, academe. This is one of the reasons why strong and effective collaborative writing groups are so imperative to the success of writers, especially since all writing is also social writing; that is, it is not a static, solitary endeavor (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015). As one instructor interviewed by Waggoner (2001) points out, "Because of the 'community' as middle name for many two-year colleges, these institutions should be active within their communities for bringing together writers and students" (p. 68). Additionally, as Vandenberg and Clary-Lemon (2010) note, many MA programs emerge in universities in response to the local conditions and economic demands of the community. MA programs are also suited to an openness toward intra- and interdisciplinary flexibility, and they attract more culturally diverse and minority students than PhD programs overall. Thus, hearing from oft-overlooked MA students will aid in publicizing the value of paying more attention to MA degrees and students.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was chosen as the methodological framework for this study because it provides the opportunity for the micro-level details needed for the study. Publishing is a nuanced field, and the culture of higher education is very succinct in its campus-specific eccentricities. Finding a method that allowed an entryway into discussing both the concept of publishing CW while in undergraduate or graduate school and the college publishing culture as a whole was rather difficult. While conducting interviews, I was careful to recognize and utilize any opportunity to ask probing questions (Manning & Kunkel, 2014) that would encourage the interviewee to further elaborate. The loudest research question clamoring for the spotlight in this study became: do undergraduate or graduate students who identify as creative writers experience pressure to publish their creative work while in school?

I relied heavily on the expertise of Saldaña (2005, 2011) while I contemplated how to transform the research I had gathered into an ethnodrama. Saldaña's (2005) anthology of ethnodramatic works, along with Cannon's (2012) article, became the basis for how I approached the frightening process of (re)shaping and bringing together participants' emotions and feelings to represent a single narrative that accurately portrayed each of their shared experiences with publishing. With Saldaña's (2005) concept that an ethnodrama should be both entertaining and informative in mind, I strove to compose a creative piece which executed my goals as a researcher while also providing entertainment for readers and audience members who knew little to nothing about my research.

Recruitment and Participants

Study participants were primarily obtained through snowball and convenience sampling. Advertising for the study was done in phases. Phase one involved emailing faculty members such as the CW instructors on campus and the faculty coordinators for undergraduate English honors students and English master's students (Appendix A). This phase also included sending emails to campus student organizations such as creative writing societies, the distribution of flyers (Appendix B) in the English building on campus and posting the flyer on Facebook, and utilizing the power of word of mouth. After a month elapsed, phase two began, during which time flyers were distributed more widely in other buildings on campus and in the local community (such as in bars and coffee shops). The two-phase plan was designed to stagger exposure to potential participants so that the study would be continuously perceived as new. People are likely to ignore flyers that have been hanging in the same spot for months. The widening of the exposure was also designed to ensure that individuals who best fit the criteria of the study would encounter the flyers first, while the phase two distribution was meant to target those who may be a less perfect demographical fit for the study.

Seven individual participants responded to the recruitment strategies. This study also uses, with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the interview transcripts from four previous participants in a prior study, totaling in eleven participants. The four previous participants were notified about the change in an email which asked for permission to use their interview transcript in the new study, as well as the possibility of their words appearing in the ethnodrama (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to reply to the email to give consent; however, the email also noted that a lack of written response from the participant would be interpreted as consent. Three of the four participants responded and gave affirmative consent.

One participant did not respond; the lack of response was interpreted as consent to use the transcript in the new study. The data from the first study, which focused on talking to spoken word artists, poets, and writers in the community, is relevant to this study because it provides insight into the mind of artists who do not necessarily identify as being English majors, or even part of an academic community. Comparing and contrasting the four writers who primarily perform outside of the classroom with the seven writers who discussed their CW in relation to the classroom works to provide a nice dichotomy of talent that is being honed inside and outside of the university.

Of the eleven total participants, eight self-identified as female and three self-identified as male with participant ages ranging from 25 to 67. Sexual orientation of participants, while sometimes discussed during the interviews, was not explicitly requested for the study; therefore, that information will not be disclosed. All participants currently lived in the state during the time of the interview, and ten of the eleven participants were currently enrolled in a university at the time of the interview. Part of the criteria for the new study required that students be currently enrolled in a university during the time of the interview. The one participant who was not enrolled in a university during the time of the interview was a participant from the previous study in which that restriction was not present.

Data Collection

Every interview was conducted in person and audio recorded with the participant's permission. Each interview was a one-on-one interview between the researcher and the interviewee. The interviewee was asked to determine the location of the interview with the only restriction being that the interviewee felt comfortable in the chosen location. Five of the interviews took place on campus, three were conducted in nearby coffee shops, and three

occurred at the interviewee's own residence. Each participant was provided with a consent form before the interview was conducted; the form described how the interviewee's participation was purely voluntary, and that the participant would not receive any kind of compensation for participating (monetary or otherwise). The form also included that quotes (verbatim or paraphrased) from the interviewee may be used in the ethnodrama, and that the ethnodrama might be performed on campus or in other venues at an indeterminate future date. The form also stated that all necessary measures will be taken to ensure no identifying information appears in the published thesis or in the ethnodrama: participants are assigned aliases and location names are changed.

Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 1 hour in length. A semi-structured interview schedule was used (Appendix D) because it allowed the researcher the opportunity to ask probing questions that could lead to stories. As part of the goal of the interviews was to use the transcripts to create an ethnodrama, I was looking for stories to use in the ethnodrama that would serve to highlight the interviewee's experiences with publishing while attending college. The four interviews from the previous study also used a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix E). A semi-structured interview was also used because most creative writers are inherently storytellers—most people are storytellers at heart, really; creative writers are just more attuned to recognizing stories when they appear. The researcher's ability to ask unscripted probing questions drew out the natural stories hiding behind interviewee's statements.

Data Analysis and Preliminary Findings

All interview audio recordings were put through an auto-transcription program, then each auto-generated transcript was downloaded and edited by me. I listened to the original audio while looking at the auto-generated transcript, adding in coded tags for speakers, locations, and

people mentioned in the interview while also correcting any grammatical errors or incorrect transcriptions done by the auto-transcription program. Some initial coding (Charmaz, 2014) also took place during the transcription process. Transcribed interviews for the four initial participants from the study were between 20-30 pages long, with one being only 13 pages long. The transcripts for the batch of seven participants ranged from 10 and 20 pages in length. Together, the transcripts totaled at 185 single-spaced pages in Times New Roman 12-point font. After the preliminary initial coding (Charmaz, 2014), several rounds of emotion coding (Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Saldaña, 2013) were done. Saldaña (2013) defines emotion coding as a type of coding that "labels the feelings that participants may have experienced" (p.105). A list of frequently recurring emotions was then compiled for each interview. These lists were used as reference materials to maintain and faithfully portray the personality of each interviewee in the ethnodrama. During coding, five themes emerged.

Writing is a Social Activity

As supported by the literature (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015), writing is a social activity. Many of the participants expressed as much during the interviews. Most notably, Johnathan (all names are pseudonyms) stated on writing in Scene 1 of the ethnodrama, "I feel that as an artists who wants to share the experience or that moment of the world, someone has to be there to view and interpret and share in that experience," highlighting that writing is a communal act that requires at least two people, the writer and the reader. Joanna also mentions in Scene 5 that she always wanted to be a writer, yet she never felt as if she could accomplish it until she met her now close friend who writes YA literature, which implies that active writing is inspired by involvement in a community of writers. December, in Scene 4, even states, "it feels like a disconnect to me to share your work with a small group and not want to share it with a

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larger group." December says earlier in the scene, "I don't want those stories or ideas to just sit there; I want other people to read it, and I want it to affect them," implying that written work loses value if there is not a large audience to consume it. In Scene 5, Sydney expresses that she does not feel like "a real writer" if she does not get published, implying that writers can only exist if their work is seen and consumed by others. Adam states in Scene 3, "Normally, you write a play and workshop it," implying that collaboration and feedback are necessary to the successful process of writing a play.

Publishing is a Personal Choice

A second prominent theme, in seeming contradiction to the previous theme, is that the decision to publish is often a personal one. In Scene 3, Jamie says, "I think publishing should also be a personal choice," while also stating, "But, for me, I definitely feel like being published is something that I *have* to do. I think it's 'cause I want it as one of my professions." The choice to publish is personal for Jamie because it relates to her career aspirations. Hannah, similarly, in Scene 2, states, "I don't write for just fun as much anymore. I think, 'What can I do with this later?'" Hannah, then, often writes with the thought of publication in mind; in fact, it plays a part in her motivation to write or not. Johnathan, in Scene 1, admits that he often writes with the goal to artistically surpass the quality of his previous publications, saying, "it makes me think of an interview with Elizabeth Gilbert, who said that her ultimate pressure came from the concern of would she ever publish anything beyond the one piece that she's recognized for? And I really relate with that." Whereas December, in Scene 4, states, "Part of the reason I write is just for me, because I have stories or ideas that I have to get out." Publishing, then, becomes a way to build a career, a desire to constantly improve your own skills, and something that you are inherently compelled to produce as an artist.

Desire to Demystify the Publishing Process

Although many of the participants expressed that they learned a lot in their college CW classes, most stated they wish they had learned more, particularly about the publication process following the acceptance of creative work. Jamie says in Scene 3, "I feel like it would help if the instructor would have told us about her experience publishing, because especially since I'm someone who wants to know more about the young adult publishing world, I could find out more about what it's like to publish an actual—like, a whole book." And Hannah, in Scene 2, states that no one talks about what happens after acceptance: "And then once you're accepted, like, nobody talks about that as much . . . and so I guess that sets you up to think, 'Oh, I'm gonna fail,' because you don't even know what the process is after that." In Scene 4, December reflects that CW instructors have "given advice" about publishing, "but they've not really *taught* how to navigate publishing at all. I wish that they would." The majority of participants expressed their desire to know more about the publication process, particularly the process of how to get larger works such as novels published and what to do after a work is accepted for publication.

Reluctance to Identify as a Writer

Several participants expressed a reluctance to identify as a writer. Joanna, in Scene 5, states that she would "pretend like I didn't do it" if she got something published: "I think I'd keep it really hush-hush and hope no one noticed." December, in Scene 4, says quite frankly, "I stopped telling people I'm a writer now. It's easier to just say, 'Yeah, I'm a teacher,' or, 'Yeah, I'm a student.'" Interestingly, December's reluctance to identify as a writer stems from her dislike of the skeptical reaction she often received from identifying as a writer. Joanna, on the other hand, seems to want to reject affiliation with publication for fear that those close to her will see themselves in her work and dislike how they were portrayed. As Joanna says, "even the

monologue I'm writing, it's all middle-aged women, right? Because that's what I know," implying that her writing is based off of her reality and the people in it. Jamie, comparatively, describes her uncertainty in claiming ownership of her work: "it's like I want people to read it, but I don't know if I feel like I'm up to par. So, sometimes I don't . . . mention that I have things published." Jamie's reluctance to identify as a writer seems to stem from a lack of confidence in her own creative work.

Stress

Nearly all of the participants conveyed or described levels of stress; however, the source of the stress varied from the stress of living up to peers, the stress of representing the group and the university, the stress of getting a job as a writer, and the stress of getting a job in general as someone with a college English degree. Hannah, in Scene 2, expressed the strongest amount of job-related stress: "When you get out, it's gonna be like a bloodbath just to try to get that *one* tenure-track position or that *one* instructor position, and even sometimes, like, adjunct positions, are competitive." Johnathan, December, and Hannah all admitted that funding was a critical part of their decision to attend graduate school. Johnathan, specifically, stated, "The funding was the make-or-break. If I didn't get it, I was not going to attend." In Scene 1, Johnathan also expressed that he did not feel pressured or stressed about publishing until "I got to college and started thinking about pursuing a career after my associate's degree" and realized that academia prioritized publications when hiring. Sydney, in Scene 5, states, "Even writing the cover letter" for CW submissions "is daunting, because that's really you selling yourself, and I feel that at this stage I don't have a whole lot to sell myself with. Like, I am a newbie." Sydney's stress stems largely from entering the CW game late in her academic career, and thus feeling wildly underprepared and underqualified for the position. Sydney even confesses, "I'm a first-

generation college student, and I think that it comes from home initially, that you have to pursue very practical things, that creative writing is something that happens for other people; it doesn't happen, you know, for me." Stress, then, can even stem from a conflict of interest with family members. And many of the participants had to manage multiple categories of stress during their time as a student.

Construction of the Ethnodrama

The process used to construct and organize the ethnodrama was modeled after Saldaña's (1998) first attempt at an ethnodrama. I also used other examples (Ares, 2016; Cannon, 2012; Saldaña, 2005, 2011; Sallis, 2011) as references while writing. I knew I needed to present the ethnodrama as a series of episodes, each featuring a different cast and setting, in order to represent the unique individuality of key participants. All character names are pseudonyms. The dialogue from all of the characters is composed of *in vivo* quotes (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013), with the exception of the omission of placeholders (e.g., "um," "like," "I feel"), false starts (e.g., "theater—studying theater"), repetitive content, and some extended pauses. The only additions to dialogue were made in the interest of maintaining the flow of the play. For example, a character may repeat a question asked of them by the interviewer before launching into their verbatim quote (this technique was used most prominently for Johnathan's scene). There were only two exceptions to this method of composition. Scene 3 with Jamie and Adam and Scene 5 with Joanna and Sydney are unique in that each scene combines two interviews into one conversation. Each character's dialogue is still largely composed of verbatim quotes, with the inclusion of some transition words (e.g. "sure," "okay," "that makes sense"), and some transition questions in the case of Sydney's dialogue (e.g. "Would you ever take a creative writing class now?"). I decided to pair Joanna and Sydney together in Scene 5 since they shared similar

experiences and a natural dialogue existed between the two; however, Sydney's character sometimes had to function as the interviewer. In contrast, Jamie and Adam in Scene 3 largely talk to themselves, although they occasionally touch on the same subjects. Their scene is disjointed overall and meant to function as a foil to Scene 5.

The most challenging part of writing an ethnodrama was knowing what to cut from the dialogue and what to include. Many of the participants expressed the same concerns, just in vastly different ways, and so it became a matter of deciding who *said it best,* so to speak. And, due to the desire to avoid creating an ethnodrama that would run for an hour-and-a-half, I was only able to use the interview transcripts from seven participants out of the eleven. In spite of this, however, I made the decision *not* to include composite characters. Even though "[c]omposite characters work in a long, personal text where you want to compress time and don't want to introduce all the participants," they ultimately work against the artistic piece, generating "few if any individuals, except for undeveloped, undercontextualized characters" (Ellis, 2004). As a primary goal of this ethnodrama is to represent each character's unique individuality, composite characters would have compromised the individuality of participants. I was also troubled by the usual concern of finding a balance between informing and entertaining the audience with the script (Saldaña, 1998, 2005, 2011; Sallis, 2011).

I chose the ethnodrama to represent the findings for this study because the CW community at the university I studied is very tightly-knit. Most of the participants I spoke to knew each other in some capacity, be it through a shared CW class they had enrolled in, or from seeing each other at any of the various venues in the community where people are invited to share their creative work. The most prominent theme that emerged from this study, *Writing is a Social Activity*, further solidified my hypothesis that writing is a community-building activity in

many ways, and I wanted to represent that by constructing an ethnodrama that can be shared with

the community in order to inspire further dialogue and community building (Lea, Belliveau,

Wager, & Beck, 2011). As Denzin (1996) says, "This is a socially constructed world" (p. 93).

CHAPTER 3

ETHNODRAMA: AND NOW IT'S LATER

SCENE 1

Setting. *To the front right of the stage sits a wooden desk. A large pile of papers is stacked on one side of the desk, mirrored by an equally large stack of old, unidentifiable books on the other side. A packed lunch has just been set out in the center of the desk.*

Characters. *JOHNATHAN, a nontraditional student of around thirty who is about to graduate with a master's of English and make the transition to adjunct faculty member.*

[*JOHNATHAN is seated behind the desk. He remains seated for the entirety of the scene, and he is eating periodically throughout. He is responding to unheard questions from an invisible interviewer.*]

JOHNATHAN: [*leaning forward on his elbows in order to hear a question.*] What made me decide to attend graduate school? [*pause.*] I was tired of my job, and I wanted to work in an artistic field, as opposed to strictly labor. I enrolled here because I wanted to work with a specific professor who inspired me to write poetry. [*pause, listening again.*] The funding was the make-or-break. [*pause.*] If I didn't get it, I wasn't going to attend. And I probably would not have waited and applied again the next year; I would have taken a director position at work, because $50,000. [*laugh, pause, leaning back in the chair.*] I identify as a poet, but I write fiction and nonfiction. And I would like to start exploring playwriting. I think a lot of my interest in poetry comes from the imagist and the

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Japanese short form styles of poetry, and that poetry is incorporating music and representing an image as an extension of the subjective internalization of the moment or the experience. [*listening, then he runs his hand through his hair.*] Publishing is probably more so my goal than to just be writing. Certain artists can just write freely for themselves. But I feel that as an artist who wants to share the experience or that moment of the world, someone has to be there to view and interpret and share in that experience. [*pause.*] The people around me influence my thoughts and feelings on publishing to a certain extent. . . . People who encouraged me to publish definitely influenced my thoughts and feelings, but I think I've reached that point where any kind of discouragement does not affect me so much now, but it did before. When I first started writing in high school, I had no pressure to publish, but it was just something that I wanted to do; [*said slowly and deliberately*] when I got to college and started thinking about pursuing a career after my associate's degree, publication became a much more [*carefully*] pressurized concept, because with academia being so based on business, publications are required to stand out from the other applicants.

[*JOHNATHAN takes a bite of his food and chews; he starts nodding his head to something the invisible interviewer says, and there is an extended pause before he begins again.*]

JOHNATHAN: I think the pressure doesn't affect me so much when I am involved in the process, but once I have . . . hit a milestone in a creative or academic process, then it hits very heavily because it's the revision time and those revisions are based on what's going to be out in the world. I think that's really when that impacts me. Some days I feel that it's

very impactful on my ability to write. Um . . . not always in the creative aspect either, but within the academic aspect you start questioning, "Am I doing this correct? Will it be received?" And it makes me think of an interview with Elizabeth Gilbert, who said that her ultimate pressure came from the concern of would she ever publish anything beyond the one piece that she's recognized for? And I really relate with that in terms of my writing. The more I write, the more that pressure builds, because I see all the errors that I'm not supposed to be doing, and what's not going to appeal to an audience. [*pause; looking down at his food.*] I think there's a milestone when you start recognizing your own improvement, and then you look back at what you have and it's terrible. [*laughs.*] And so you just try to keep building, and as you look back it's always going to be worse. [*pause, in a lighter tone.*] My first submission was on a whim. And so, I had no pressure at that point in high school. But when I saw that it got published, it was very disorienting. Not necessarily exciting, but it was like, is that really a thing? [*laughs.*] So, my first couple of publications didn't really impact me much. I didn't intend on publishing at that point, and so I was very disinterested in the process or reaction to the work. [*listens, resumes eating.*] I really enjoy the concept of publishing, because I feel that it's just another form for artists to express themselves and to share their experiences with people they may not know or may not get to come in contact with otherwise. [*pause.*] I do think it's not without its pitfalls because that pressure can be destabilizing and can be very detrimental to a writer or any kind of artist. I support the concept of publication, but I definitely feel there's more work to be done in moving towards an inclusiveness that I feel we don't get yet from many of the larger publishing houses or companies. [*JOHNATHAN has finished eating and begins to gather the empty containers.*] The more

that I write, and the more that I see the way people regard my publications as opposed to artists who are published, I think it definitely has that . . . growing sense in my mind, and so it has become very commercialized in my thoughts and in my own work. There's definitely that pressure to continue to push for publications as opposed to artists who don't do that or can't achieve that goal, and it creates a disadvantage, I feel, with certain aspects of minority writers and artists. [*lunch all packed, JOHNATHAN leans his elbows on the table again, engaged.*] Initially, when I'm talking to a fellow writer and I find out they don't have any publications, I do have that—that judgmental reaction, and I try to catch myself in that judgmental state, but for me, I tend to judge more harshly for those who don't push for publication but expect to be published without having to work for it. [*pause.*] With a lot of the workshops that have predominantly poets, most of them aren't getting publications because the information provided is very limited in that sense: being able to find journals, learning to navigate through the different contexts of what journals are looking for. But if it was a larger school with more resources, that would be more readily available. One professor did focus several lectures on publication, and I felt those have been very beneficial. Before those lectures the idea of publication was just this abstract concept, and I didn't think of it from a business perspective. I think having those types of lectures is very encouraging to students and helpful in the sense that they understand rejection or acceptance to particular publications could be based on errors on their part, not just someone not liking their art. Again, it's very stressful, because not only are you accounting for your errors, but you have to know the demographic the journal's targeting, and what their editors are looking for. . . . [*pause, Johnathan leans back in the*

chair.] I don't feel that I've learned enough about . . . the process behind publishing in school. So, sometimes that's very discouraging to not just me but other artists as well.

[*JOHNATHAN makes a steeple with his hands and gazes up at the ceiling. The lights fade.*]

SCENE 2

Setting. *The scene opens inside a museum. Artwork hangs in a perfect row along three corners of the alabaster walls with small lights vaguely illuminating each piece. A table is set up in the middle of the room, stacked with copies of a literary magazine.*

Characters. *HANNAH, a woman in her late twenties who is just finishing up her final semester of graduate school and has begun the process of job hunting.*

[*HANNAH walks to the front left of the stage to stand before a microphone under a spotlight.*]

HANNAH: [*taking a deep, shaky breath.*] Grad school kind of changes you. I decided to go because of my passion for writing and literature [*pause*] and wanting to pursue a career in that and see what that was like. Attending this university was . . . comfortable. I knew a lot of people going into the program, so I knew I would have people to socialize with. [*pause. HANNAH is visibly nervous.*] I used to identify as a fiction writer, but I write more poetry, so I guess I have to identify as a poet. Poetry is something that works better

for short, performance-based stuff. Fiction is more of a loner-type thing, but poetry could

be a social action. [*pause, uncertainly.*] I don't know, you don't see fiction read out loud

as much. And that's probably what drew me more to poetry than fiction, the social

aspects, because I feel like it's more sociable to be a poet than a fiction writer, which is

kind of weird. [*pause.*] I feel like you can't really workshop the type of fiction that I'd

want to do, so you can't [*frustrated*]—like, workshopping a novel in an academic setting

is harder even though the novel's what's popular, but you can have publishable poems

and there's not, like, another step you *have* to take to workshop that. [*pause. HANNAH*

swivels her body to face the audience on her left. She is talking quickly now.] The way

we're taught to navigate the publishing world is helpful, but it's also, like, stressful,

because you've got all these different places to publish and they don't really teach you

that. The popular publishing, it's more academic publishing, and it's stressful trying to

keep up with everything, 'cause I know the ins and outs of, like, what you should look for

and make sure that you fit with certain literary magazines, but I don't feel like my fiction

would *fit* with literary magazines because I'm more novel-based with that, so. . . . I feel

like poetry is more competitive than fiction. Which, I mean, fiction's competitive too, it's

not like it's *lesser*, but with short stories, people . . . [*softly*] read more novels than they do

short stories. [*HANNAH turns to face the audience on her right, as if she's pleading her*

case before a jury.] Poetry's competitive, and it gives you a leg up if you've got

something published and you're in a creative writing community. Once you've been

published, people are like, "Oh, they've been published." So, the outside community

looks in and they see, okay, this person has [*pause.*] three poems published, but this

person hasn't had anything published, so they don't know what they're talking about as far

as, like, feedback and stuff like that. [*slightly calmer.*] The field of English is so competitive, and if you want to make it in an academic life, then you've got to get these publications out there. You've got to have this long list of publications 'cause you see the CVs and stuff from your professors and you're like, "Oh, they have 20 things published," and [*shakily*] you wanna find something that gives you a leg up because . . . you're so confident . . . that you're not going to find a job. [*HANNAH momentarily turns her back to the audience, then faces the middle rows. Her voice is thick with emotion.*] When you get out, it's gonna be like a bloodbath just to try to get that *one* tenure-track position or that *one* instructor position, and even sometimes, like, adjunct positions are competitive. I wanted to get a PhD, but it's not looking so plausible right now, just because I don't want to put all that time and effort into it for making about the same amount of money that I could just teaching at the college level with a master's. The jobs that I'm seeing are really similar in pay; it's not worth . . . all the extra effort. [*pause. HANNAH looks down and twists her hands in front of her.*] I have felt like people who think I haven't been published see me as a less legitimate writer, especially people that are outside of creative writing, like the people that are more academic and do more of the scholarly stuff and aren't creative. They see it as kind of lesser than academic work, and so then when you don't have a long stack of publications to back you up that you're a creative writer, they don't give you any credibility [*softly*] with that. [*HANNAH looks up and stares into the distance.*] I don't write for just fun as much anymore. I think, "What can I do with this later? Is this actually gonna be something that I can send off?" I found I still feel that pressure even when I'm writing for fun outside of class. I think it's kind of hard to break into figuring out how the publishing world works, and it should be a little more

transparent, because publishers miss out on so many authors that possibly have the potential to have good work, but they're not following the structures that, say, someone who has a creative writing degree learned. Like the formatting stuff that publishers look for. I think that's kind of classist in a way, because the publishing that I've worked in, basically, if you don't have the structure they want, then they're not going to fool with it because you can't follow instructions, but I think with something creative like that, [*confused*] you want creative work, but you don't want creative formats? In school, everyone talked about, like, how do you get published? How do you get out of the slush pile? And then once you're accepted, like, nobody talks about that as much . . . and so I guess that sets you up to think, "Oh, I'm gonna fail," because you don't even know what the process is after that, 'cause obviously there's stuff you have to do, stuff you have to sign on whatever part of it. . . .

[The spotlight clicks off, plunging the stage into half-darkness with only the small lights on the paintings remaining aglow. HANNAH disappears; her prerecorded voice is heard during the remainder of the scene, even after the actress reemerges onstage.]

HANNAH: The first time I got something published I was excited but also a little, like, taken aback by it, because I didn't expect—I didn't feel like that was the best poem out of the five that I submitted. So, I was kind of surprised that that was the one [*confused*] that got published? [*pause. A spotlight illuminates the table in the middle of the stage stacked with copies of the literary journal.*] The poem was published in the university's literary journal, and my experience with that—like, they didn't even tell us that we got in or we

didn't; [*wounded*] we had to go pick up the copy and look through it and actually find out if our name was in there or not. [*HANNAH appears onstage and drifts toward the table.*] So, it was very, very stressful, because, like, I'm going to pick this up; how many copies do I pick up? Because I don't know if my name's in there or not. [*HANNAH reaches the edge of the table and hovers uncertainty.*] And so, I didn't want to look through it . . . there . . .

[*Several people emerge from behind dark curtains at the back of the stage and bustle about, chatting silently, as HANNAH's prerecorded voice continues. Director's note: Extras who appear in the background in this scene, and the ones who appear at other tables in the coffee shop in Scene 3, should be played by the main cast. This is meant to portray the characters as part of a community rather than isolated individuals.*]

HANNAH: [*looking around nervously.*] *In public.* And then pick up one copy versus however many copies I want if I'm in it. [*exasperated.*] So it's really, really stressful. I was really irritated that they didn't send out emails confirming that we were in the journal. They could have handled that a little bit better, they could have sent out the email while it was at the printer, [*frustrated*] because they *know* what's getting printed at that point. So, I think that was kind of a little sloppy on their part to not . . . especially since it was a student journal, because this is usually one of the first places students are submitting, and so if they don't know the ins and outs of publishing, I think that would have been a really stressful and very disappointing experience for the people that didn't get in, because you have to actually physically look at the book and see that your name's not in it.

[*As HANNAH's prerecorded voice speaks the last few lines, the HANNAH onstage glances quickly around once more, then snatches a single copy of the journal before fast-walking offstage, her head ducked down. The people milling about freeze and the lights slowly dim, the last light lingering on a copy of the journal resting in a stand on the table before flickering out.*]

SCENE 3

Setting. *The scene takes place in a bustling coffee shop. Sounds of coffee being brewed, steamed, and names being yelled to pick up an order play at certain points throughout the scene. There are several tables and bar stools, half of which are occupied by customers on some sort of electronic device.*

Characters. *JAMIE, a senior college student and aspiring novelist; ADAM, JAMIE's fellow undergrad and theater friend who sees himself as a playwright.*

[*JAMIE and ADAM are seated facing each other at a table, laptops in front of them. JAMIE is hard at work, typing away, while ADAM broods in front of his laptop. After a few moments, JAMIE stops typing, sighs, and stretches. ADAM does not notice. He is lost in his own world.*]

JAMIE: [*contemplative pause as she stares off at nothing.*] Did you know that I was ten years
old when I first started writing? It was for a short story competition, and, I remember that
I wrote a short story about a mermaid and a dolphin who are best friends. [*she laughs.
Pause, serious now.*] It wasn't until I was a junior in high school that I decided I wanted

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to go further with my education. And it was just something that I knew I wanted to do. No one else in my family went to college. I definitely wanted to have more opportunities and a better job, than— [*cuts herself off abruptly.*]

ADAM: [*talking to himself.*] I didn't know what to do with my life after the military. So I said, "Let's go to a university setting." [*pause.*] Did not know that I would actually click well with it. [*small laugh.*]

[*A name is yelled for a pick-up. The pair sit in silence for a few moments.*]

JAMIE: [*suddenly.*] I prefer writing novels because I like bigger things. And I've tried publishing novels. Some. Whenever I was in high school, I wrote the first two novels of a series. Well, originally it was one novel, and I didn't know how things worked. So, it was . . . 800 pages. It was way too big. So, I, like, did work, cut it in half. And it was, um—it was not accepted. [*pause.*] As I got older, I became a little more nervous about publishing. . . . I think eventually it's definitely something that I want to do, but publication is always there in the back of my mind. I'm always thinking about it as I'm writing.

ADAM: [*fully lost in his own world, he does not acknowledge JAMIE.*] For playwrights, they don't—well, their plays do get published, but it's more after several reading sessions and maybe the play may start being put on. [*pause.*] But I'm okay with it. You can self-publish a play, but it—what's the point? I feel like that's . . . cheating sometimes. [*pause, then, adamantly.*] Normally, you write a play and you workshop it. And the stage reading will happen, and if it does really well, then you might be able to find a theater to put it on,

and if it's *really* good, [*excitedly*] it gets to go to Broadway! But, essentially, you need to *wear the life* out of the play before it gets published.

JAMIE: [*still staring off into the distance, eyes glazed over.*] It's just, being in school so long and now I'm like, [*with conviction*] "Yeah, I want to get out here, and I want to do this!" But I feel like being in school kind of hindered me a little bit because I don't have as much time to actually work on something like a novel, especially with keeping grades up and jobs and theater. . . . I do feel more confident about publishing after taking the creative writing classes here, and after having all the feedback. And I do think this environment is motivational because you have a chance to try different things and then also learn from the classrooms and stuff.

ADAM: [*in his own world, to himself.*] There's a lot of shit places to publish . . . [*he lapses into an inarticulate mumbled complaint.*]

JAMIE: [*aware that ADAM is not listening, but continuing regardless.*] One of the things that I worked on abroad came out, and that was the first time I'd ever published a short story, and. . . . I felt I was more accomplished because every time I publish something it just gets bigger. So I'm like, maybe next there's a book. [*she gives a nervous laugh, as if what she has said is impossible, but she has a mischievous confidence about her as well.*]

ADAM: [*not even looking at JAMIE, completely absorbed in his thoughts.*] Self-publishing—it's not cheating, but it's . . . not helping you at all, because I could just write a play tomorrow and send it to self-publishing places. Put it on my shelf. You're not getting out there. You're not workshopping. You're not learning . . . what could be fixed. [*laughs, pause.*] 'Cause the hardest part about writing plays is not . . . telling a story, it's the

dialogue. 'Cause you have to have as *natural* a dialogue between two human beings as you can.

[*A loud whirring starts up behind them at the coffee station. The commotion ceases and a name is called.*]

JAMIE: I've always read novels, particularly young adult fiction. And it's still something that I enjoy even as an adult. I've always been a huge reader and I wanted my work to be out there. [*pause.*] But I think publishing should also be a personal choice. Because a lot of people might consider their stuff too private. I feel like in some ways it would be good for people to publish so you can get it out there so you're not as—especially if it's like a *fear* thing. But if it's something they're really *uncomfortable* publishing, then definitely not. Some people I know write just to write, and they don't want to be published. So. [*pause.*] But, for me, I definitely feel like being published is something that I *have* to do. I think it's 'cause I want it as one of my professions. So, I feel like if I'm gonna actually make it with doing that—and I want people to read it 'cause I feel like I have good, interesting stories to tell. And I kind of just want to get them out there and feel accomplished. I've always been an overachiever. So, I want . . . like everything I do, I want it to be big as I can make it.

ADAM: [*to himself.*] I don't even know anybody who self-publishes plays.

JAMIE: When it comes to theater, the first thing I think about is my CV because that's what they always push in school. But when it comes to literature and writing, they don't push it as much so I don't think about it as much and it tends to be more of a personal thing. When

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it comes to writing, actually, the last thing I think about is my CV. [*momentary silence.*]

Near the end of my semester abroad I found out one of the teachers had a few young

adult books published, and I was like, she could have *totally* talked to us about that. I

don't know, I feel like it would help if the instructor would have told us about her

experience publishing, especially since I'm someone who wants to know more about the

young adult publishing world, I could find out more about what it's like to publish an

actual—like, a whole book.

ADAM: [*under his breath, but subconsciously picking up on what JAMIE is saying.*] I have six

different resumes. I'm really weird. I'm primarily an actor. [*short pause, with emotion.*]

But I love writing plays. [*quickly.*] And I have two CVs. Not one, two. I have your

standard resume; I have an acting resume, a directing resume, a theatrical writing resume.

So that one's, like, just plays. And then I have one for screenwriting. . . .

JAMIE: [*continues to herself.*] It's just—even with the stuff that I have published, I am

definitely . . . it's like I want people to read it, but I don't know if I feel like I'm up to

[*pause*] par. So, sometimes I don't . . . mention that I have things published. I've

wondered if instructors feel the same about their work and that's why they don't talk

about it more. [*pause, softly.*] At the age I'm at now, if I hadn't been published, I feel like

I would feel even more pressure to publish, and I don't know if that's a good thing or a

bad thing. Because I could be more *determined* to do it. But I feel like there's only so

much pressure you can take before you just kind of become stagnant. I definitely feel like

I can take more creative risks now that I've been published. Between being published and

taking a bunch of classes and getting feedback and then seeing other people's work as

well, you kind of learn what risks you can and can't take.

ADAM: [*beginning to turn his attention back to his laptop.*] I think the current process of

publishing hurts beginning writers. If you're a motivated person, stubborn . . . you're

gonna get published eventually. [*with a scoff.*] But I don't feel like I have to be published

in order to feel like a legitimate playwright. [*he starts typing on his computer. JAMIE*

stares blankly for a moment before returning to her screen as well.]

[*The loud whirring starts up again. Movement onstage freezes and the lights dim.*]

SCENE 4

Setting. *For the opening sequence, the stage is solely occupied by a standing microphone*

in the center.

Characters. *DECEMBER, a second-semester graduate student who has already been*

through one graduate-level program and decided to return to school after working as a teacher

for several years.

[*DECEMBER walks onstage and stands at the microphone. She shakes out her hands and*

beams at the audience; she radiates positive energy.]

DECEMBER: [*with passion.*] I love learning. [*giggles.*] It sounds cheesy, but that's why I'm here.

I chose this university for two reasons: they accepted me and they offered me the GA

position where I wouldn't have to pay for it, because if I would have had to pay for it, I

wouldn't be here. [*breathy laugh.*] I do identify primarily as a fiction writer, but I've

probably written as many short stories as I have novels. [*pause.*] I have felt pressure to pick a genre and stick with it, and that angers me. I feel like poetry and fiction feed off of one another, and so my fiction is stronger because I study poetry, and studying fiction helps poetry writers because it helps them see more of the whole picture. Poets can spend four hours looking for, like, one specific word, when the entire concept of their poem needs some work instead. And so, the different genres [*emphatically*] *talk* to each other and influence each other, and to ignore that or say that that can't happen is detrimental to everyone involved. [*with passion.*] I *love* publishing my work. Part of the reason that I write is just for me, because I have stories or ideas that I have to get out. But the other part of it is that I don't want those stories or ideas to just sit there; I want other people to read it, and I want it to affect them and—like, I've got stories that I've read that I'll remember forever and I would just like *someone* to feel that way about something that I've written. [*brightening.*] The first time I got published it was wonderful. [*laughs.*] Like, best. Day. Ever. I was really excited. Surprised! [*emphatically.*] Because I didn't know. It was a whole thing, 'cause it was when I was in high school, and I had entered a contest and, like, on my birthday . . . [*laughs. DECEMBER flings out her arms to illustrate as she's speaking.*] Like, my teacher took me, and only me, on a field trip to the college where they published the journal that my story was in. And I didn't know that we were going to do this. Like, I thought we were just going to a workshop that I had been specifically selected for. But then we get there, and, like, it's announced that I'm the winner, [*mimes "oh" face of surprise and places her hands on her cheeks*] and that it's getting published!

[*DECEMBER removes the microphone from the stand and begins to pace from one side of the stage to the other, periodically leaning in toward the audience whenever she emphasizes a word.*]

DECEMBER: And so, it was like a whole *surprise* first of all, and it was a whole *event*. And it was magical and wonderful. One of my top five favorite memories. [*laughs, pause.*] But the excitement never dulls either. It's like, *every* time. And I'm surprised *every* single time. Every time. I'm like, [*with baffled excitement*] "Oh, *really*, you want that? Good." [*laughs heartily. Pause, soberly. She is back in the middle of the stage.*] People absolutely assume writers have to be published to be legit. I stopped telling people I'm a writer now. It's easier just to say, "Yeah, I'm a teacher," or, "Yeah, I'm a student." Because if you say . . . like, "Hey, what do you do?" And you're like, "I'm a writer," then they're instantly skeptical. [*judgmentally.*] "Oh, you're unemployed. And you have no direction with your life." Like, no, that's not the case. [*pause, scornfully.*] I was absolutely not taught how to navigate the submission process in school. That is a *self-taught* skill. Like, they've given advice, but they've not really *taught* how to navigate publishing at all. [*pause, reflectively.*] I wish that they would.

[*The lights dim on DECEMBER, and she vanishes. The lights then go up elsewhere onstage to show a woman in front of a whiteboard on wheels; several feet to the woman's left is a second woman sitting at a small desk with a computer. The nameplate on the desk reads "counselor."*]

DECEMBER: *I* found it very difficult to learn the submission process outside of the classroom.

But I was in high school when I was learning it. I've always been writing, and it's always

been the goal. [*DECEMBER reemerges and begins to act out a conversation with the*

teacher in front of the whiteboard, a massive three-ring binder in her hands.] So, I was in

high school, and I was asking questions to high school teachers who had never been

published in all their life, and I'm like, [*with emphasis and a bit of humor*] "Hey, how do

I do this?" Like, this is what I want to do forever. [*suppressing a laugh.*] *Help* me. And

none of my high school teachers could really help me. [*the teacher quickly shakes her*

head, and DECEMBER walks on.] I walked into the guidance counselor's office having

printed out my 350-page novel that I wrote over the weekend in my hands. And I'm like,

"Help me get this published. What do I do?" [*the counselor at the small table is confused*

and scared. She scoots her chair back, away from DECEMBER.] And she just stops and

stares at me, and at this, like, massive stack of papers in a three-ring binder. [*in a stage*

whisper.] And they're like, "Oh, well, we don't know anything about this. You're on your

own." [*normal voice. The counselor stands and leaves, while DECEMBER sits down at*

the desk and begins typing at the computer.] And so then it was me on the internet at like

16, Googling, "how do I get published?" Things like that. It was a struggle. At first. For

sure. [*chuckles, pause.*] I figured it out. But it took way longer than I feel like it should

have. [*pause.*]

[*The prerecorded voice ends. DECEMBER looks up from the computer, stands, and*

walks back to the microphone at the front of the stage.]

DECEMBER: I do judge other writers. Hard sometimes. If you're actively . . . *participating* in a writing community, like, that exists at a university, then, at some level, like, what are you doing if you're not . . . publishing? So, yeah, I judge those people. [*pause*.] It . . . it feels like a disconnect to me to share your work with a small group and not want to share it with a larger group. That whole idea of "publish when you're ready," if you are waiting until, like—[*making several exasperated noises*.] That's the same kind of philosophy that comes from, [*mockingly*.] "Oh, my muse isn't here. I must wait until I'm inspired to write." [*angrily*.] Like, no. If you keep waiting, it's never gonna happen. [*with passion*.] You've got to go out and make things happen.

[*DECEMBER stares down the audience as the lights click off*.]

SCENE 5

Setting. *The scene takes place in JOANNA's home. There are two chairs in the background, unoccupied, and a coffee table strewn with papers.*

Characters. *JOANNA, a woman in her fifties who has decided to return to school after working as a nurse for years; SYDNEY, a classmate from JOANNA's playwriting class.*

[*JOANNA stands over SYDNEY's shoulder as she squats in front of the coffee table, rearranging some of the papers into a specific order. JOANNA holds a cup of coffee, and SYDNEY's cup rests to her left, on the edge of the table. The pair mimes a conversation while the lights go up, both gesturing, then we jump into their conversation.*]

JOANNA: [*contemplatively*.] I would love to publish my creative work. That's like the big

fantasy. I have always felt like I had, like, a book or ten in my head and that I just needed

the discipline to get it on paper.

SYDNEY: Really? I never knew that about you. I thought this playwriting class was your first

time writing. What got you interested in it?

JOANNA: I actually have—my neighbor and one of my close friends writes YA literature.

[*energetically*.] I mean, I knew I wanted to publish something right before I met her, but

once I met her . . . I felt that it was doable, you know? Small-town writer, it can still be

done.

SYDNEY: [*nodding*.] Yeah, I'm new to the game. I haven't published anything, *but* I am

looking. Everything seems very daunting.

JOANNA: Yes. [*contemplatively*.] I don't think I've ever been published. I mean, I won a poetry

contest when I was in grade school, and I think that ended up on something disposable.

You know, that went home.

SYDNEY: [*smiling*.] What do you think it would be like when you get something published?

JOANNA: Um, I guess fear and super-pride. [*quickly*.] But I wouldn't tell people. I think I would

pretend like I didn't do it. [*SYDNEY laughs*.] I'd keep it really hush-hush and hope no one

noticed. [*pause, humorously*.] Until I was on Good Morning America and then they'd be

forced to see it.

SYDNEY: [*laughing while shuffling the papers into a stack and standing up*.] Yeah, I wanted to

do creative writing for a really long time, but I was afraid that it wasn't the most practical

thing to pursue. I think that's why I tried to do journalism first, because that was writing,

which I wanted to do, but not the *way* I wanted it. [*pause, hesitantly.*] Do you think publishing is something unattainable?

JOANNA: I do. I'm terrified. Like, I have . . . no knowledge about how you get published, how you get an agent, how you get an editor. Like, it's all just this *huge* mass of mystery to me. I find it terrifying and unattainable. [*pause.*] I have never taken a creative writing class. I should. Like, even in my undergrad I didn't . . . I wanted all that information and thought that I'd figure out the rest of it on my own, later, whatever. And now it's later.

SYDNEY: [*echoing in wonder.*] And now it's later. [*laughter from both, pause.*] Even writing the cover letter is daunting, because that's really you selling yourself, and I feel that at this stage I don't have a whole lot to sell myself with. Like, I am a newbie. [*pause, a little desperately.*] Please publish me. But at the same time, I think the amount of pressure on people to get things published is not necessarily conducive to creating the best material, because it kind of puts a lot of pressure on an artistic outlet to manufacture, to produce. [*pause, a bit sadly.*] I have mixed feelings about it. [*brightly.*] Would you ever take a creative writing class now?

JOANNA: I think I'd be mortified.

SYDNEY: Mortified?

JOANNA: I'd be really embarrassed. 'Cause even this drama writing class, I feel like y'all are so much better at this than I am. [*turning to find one of the chairs, and sitting on the edge of it as she speaks.*] So, for me, being so much older than everybody else, and, like, coming in at it from a totally different career and life experiences. I—you know, even the monologue I'm writing, it's all middle-aged women, right? Because that's what I know, whereas you all are young people writing about young people, and so, yeah, I have every

expectation of being mortified and sitting at my desk reading my work, like, sweating and being very self-conscious. [*SYDNEY makes a sound of sympathy*.] So, yeah, that's why I don't take creative writing. In this class, since I know you and some others, it is much less mortifying, but it is *definitely*, like, outside my comfort zone, and I'm happy I've done it, because I feel like it has, like, been a super-stretch activity for me. But yeah, it is very stressful, even turning it in to the professor, wondering, like, oh my God, what must she think of . . . what I'm writing?

SYDNEY: [*quietly*.] I took my first creative writing class, actually, at the graduate level. I'm a first-generation college student, and I think that it comes from home initially, that you have to pursue very practical things, that creative writing is something that happens for other people; it doesn't happen, you know, for me. My family . . . we're all very practical, blue-collar people. So, I feel that if I don't get anything published [*sadly*] . . . that I'm not . . . a real writer, that it really is a hobby if you don't get anything published. It's not. . . . [*frustrated sigh, long pause as she grips the papers in her hand to the point of crumpling the edges*.] The sense of realness shouldn't come from who else reads it, [*emphatically*] but to *me*, it feels like it does. That if I don't get things published, there's no measure of legitimacy to what I'm doing.

JOANNA: [*contemplatively*.] That's really interesting. I do think that a lot of people write. And does that make us writers? I don't know. It's along the lines of . . . like, I jog. And I said something. "Well, I'm not a runner 'cause I just jog." And someone said, "Well, you know, if you run, you're a runner," so I wonder if that's the same thing. If you write, that means you're a writer. [*pause*.] But in my mind writer equals published. I think it's really *hard* to get things published. And so, if someone is *published*, they really jump through

an awful lot of hoops to make that successfully happen. Some external something has

passed approval on the writing if it's published. It's been found to be marketable or . . .

you know, readable, whatever.

SYDNEY: [*thinking*.] Yeah, I can see that. That makes a lot of sense. [*she relaxes her grip on

the papers*.] I think publishing is a positive thing if it gets you exposure for your writing.

JOANNA: [*adamantly*.] I just want to commit. I have this daily goal tracker I keep on my

refrigerator. And one of the goals says, "Write every day." [*with conviction*.] And I think

that if I would, then I could write a book, as compared to saying, [*quickly*] "I really want

to write a book. I've got this great idea. I really want to write a book." I never liked sitting

down and committing it to paper. [*pause*.] It's hard to get something published that isn't

written.

[*SYDNEY nods in agreement. Both women stare down at the papers strewn across the

table, their collective project for their drama class*.]

BLACKOUT

CHAPTER 4

CODA

Reader's Performance

The ethnodrama underwent many extensive revisions after its initial birth. The infant version was shared with a few select peers. After receiving feedback from them, I condensed what was a thirty-page manuscript into roughly twenty-two pages. From there, I shared it with a few more close peers, this time focusing the feedback less on length and eliminating unnecessary dialogue and more on the performance aspect. What kind of emotional ark did readers undergo? Once I had talked to several people, I reordered the scenes and rewrote what finally became the third scene. Jamie's character was initially paired with a pseudo character named Kathryne who served as a replacement for the interviewer, but she stood out as an obvious prompter for Jamie's dialogue, especially since Kathryne was the only character in the ethnodrama whose voice was not that of a real person. This led to the removal of Kathryne and the decision not to include any composite characters in the ethnodrama, and she was replaced with the far more organic character of Adam, one of the interviewees who had not yet been included.

After about three or four rounds of this kind of peer workshopping and rewriting, I gathered a group of five together to perform a table reading of the ethnodrama. During the table-read, I was able to notice points in which the readers stumbled over dialogue, indicating that I needed to reword or simplify those sections. Additionally, I kept track of how long the reading took to get a sense of the run-time should the ethnodrama be performed professionally. We also did a Q&A session directly following the table reading. The participants agreed that while the play was rather morbid overall, it succeeded in accurately portraying the emotional experience of publishing as a college student. The participants even had strong feelings about some of the

characters. For example, several found Adam's character to be a nice comic relief, and some of the older readers described Joanna as relatable, insights which I may not have fully realized on my own.

Limitations

This study quickly became a patchwork project of sorts, as the thesis was initially intended to be an exploration of the experience of spoken word artists in the academic community and the struggles for legitimacy they face (what with the absence of physical publications in their field). However, I quickly realized there was not a large enough population of self-identified spoken word artists in the community to successfully sample and use for qualitative purposes. After the first four initial interviews, I revisited the thesis and reshaped it to fit the broader theme of anxieties surrounding publication while attending university. Had there been more spoken word artists in the area, this thesis would have focused on oral publication as a spoken word artist and the refusal to recognize performance as a legitimate form of publication in academia (or, at least, in the field of literature and language).

Another obvious limitation is the fact the sample size is largely pulled from one university and, for the most part, one cohort. The experiences of the cohort interviewed will not be the same as the experiences of the next cohort at their university or at another university. This is a limitation, yet it also serves as a unique benefit of the study, since the thesis documents a social experience which can never be perfectly replicated; however, this does lead to another limitation. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the interviewing process was the semi-questionable self-reporting of the participants. Many of the interviewees would confidently state their stance on an issue, only to revise and even contradict themselves when asked a follow-up probing question which recontextualized the generalized question to reflect a specific scenario.

For example, I would ask, "Do you judge individuals who identify as creative writers but do not have anything published?" Most participants claimed they did not judge those individuals, but I then asked the probing question, "In workshop, when you know someone in class has been published, do you pay more attention to that individual's feedback on your work than you do feedback from others in the class who have not yet been published?" Most participants replied yes, they pay more attention to (and thus place more value on) feedback from published peers than unpublished peers; this indicates that there is a layer of judgement present when it comes to the publications of peers. The judgement is simply far more insidious than participants realized. If I had obtained a larger sample size, this particular oxymoron would have been investigated further.

Perhaps also of note is the gender disparity of participants. Of the twelve total participants interviewed, only three were men. I made a point to include two of the three men in the ethnodrama to add some gender diversity; however, the participant pool overwhelmingly consisted of women. Additionally, I did not have the opportunity to interview any people of color (POC). I would have liked a more diverse representation, but no POC volunteered for the study. As noted previously, sexual orientation was not a prominent factor in this study, since sexual orientation tends to be a personal matter, and I did not wish to disclose that personal information in the study or in the ethnodrama.

Discussion

Because the sample size was small, the population to pull from was limited to one university, and the range of ethnically diverse voices was sorely lacking, further research which replicates this realm of inquiry would be monumentally beneficial in the field, particularly if the studies focus on the experiences of graduate students. Some of the last few questions I asked

participants were left over from the previous thesis of this study (i.e., oral publishing for spoken word artists), so a reiteration of the study which offers more concise and centralized questions would be beneficial; a change in approach to an unstructured interview style would also likely produce interesting results. There were times when I found myself begrudging the semi-structured interview questions, as each interviewee's personal journey into becoming a writer was so unique that I found myself wishing I could abandon the semi-structured interview style and conduct a fully-fledged case study on each participant. On that note, I was also disheartened by the lack of frequent communication between myself and the participants as I wrote the thesis. If I had the chance to do the study over again, I would have attempted to include the participants in the making or staging of the ethnodrama; however, over the course of the study, many participants graduated, moved, began a new job, or entered a new career path, thus becoming largely unavailable.

An individual's experience with creative writing is so intimate and unique, and the relationship between writer and publishers is so nuanced, that this study ultimately revealed more questions than answers. What percentage of English MA graduate students are published before entering graduate school? What percentage received their very first publication while in graduate school? And if students are first published as a graduate student, is it due to a personal motivation to publish, encouragement or assistance from a faculty member, the recent acquisition of skills and knowledge on the publication process obtained from university classes, the desire to keep up with their peers, the hope of landing a job after graduation, an inherent need for outside validation? Perhaps it is a combination of all six, if not more, possibilities. The particular relationship between stress and publishing as a graduate student is a finding rich with potential

for further exploration, as the levels of stress for each individual graduate student consisted of many factors which wove together to generate unique, acute experiences.

Additionally, most interviewees agreed that universities should teach them what to do after a piece of CW is accepted for publication, but what would that look like? Each publishing house, magazine, or journal has its own post-acceptance process, so how do CW instructors prepare students to navigate such a complicated and constantly shifting terrain? And is it even realistic to expect CW instructors to be the ultimate authority not only in writing creatively, but in the publication process, the inner workings of publishing houses and journals, in obtaining an agent, managing (or creating) a social media presence as an author (an aspect which this study unfortunately did not explore), *and* expect the instructor to operate as a traditional teacher who must assign objective grades to largely-impossible-to-grade-objectively material? These are the questions recurring which sing out desperately for answers.

Conclusion

I can only hope that I have manage to accurately portray (and convey) the emotional experiences of the participants in this study through my analysis and the ethnodrama. It was a pleasure and a delight to be able to talk with so many diversely creative individuals. I readily admit that part of the motivation for exploring this project was the personal desire to seek out other writers and quiz them about their experiences with juggling school and publishing. However, the study quickly grew into something much more complex. There is a wealth of knowledge to be gleaned from graduate and undergraduate students' experiences with publishing. I aim to continue exploring this area of inquiry, and, hopefully, this study will encourage others to explore the same or similarly worthy topics.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Promotion Email to Faculty and Organizations

Dear [name of individual],

I am writing to inform you of a study I am conducting for my master's thesis. The goal of the study is to explore the influence of publishing on the mental and emotional psyche of graduate and undergraduate students currently enrolled in a university. Preferably, I would like to interview student poets, but I am more than happy to speak to any students who are creative writers or who write academically. If there is anyone you know who would be interested in volunteering for this study, please share this email or the attached flyer with the individual(s) in question. Be aware that the study is completely voluntary and the participant will receive no monetary compensation for choosing to participate. The interested individual(s) may participate in a one-on-one interview with me that will last for at least half an hour and up to two hours in length. Please let me know if you have any questions. Interested participants must contact me at lewisan1@etsu.edu. Thank you so much for your time!

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

All best,

Abby N. Lewis
Master's Candidate in English Literature
and Communication and Storytelling Studies
Department of Literature & Language
Department of Communication & Performance
East Tennessee State University

Appendix B

Flyer

ARE YOU A WRITER? DO YOU HAVE THOUGHTS ABOUT PUBLISHING?

Participants needed for graduate thesis research study

If you are 18 or older and currently enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student in a university, you can contribute to a study about the impact of publishing on students' psyche.

If you have any questions or would like more information about the study, please contact Abby N. Lewis, graduate student in the department of communication & performance and the department of literature & language at East Tennessee State University, at lewisan1@etsu.edu

Approved by ETSU Campus IRB / Approval Date: March 11, 2019

Appendix C

Past Participants Consent Email

Dear [name of participant],

Hello again. I am writing to inform you of a change to the study you participated in, "The 'Poet's Voice' in Spoken Word Poetry Vs. Academic Poetry." I am now conducting a master's thesis in a new, related study. This new thesis involves the use of an ethnodrama that will be written based on interview transcripts. An ethnodrama is a play that is written based, whether loosely or verbatim, on interviews with participants. I am writing to ask for your permission to possibly included parts of your interview transcript in the final graduate thesis and in the ethnodrama. The ethnodrama will be published as part of the finished thesis and will appear on East Tennessee State University's academic e-thesis database. It is also possible that the ethnodrama may be performed on campus at ETSU (or possibly in other locations). If you are in any way uncomfortable with the inclusion of your interview transcript in this project, please let me know by replying to this email, and I will not include any data from your interview transcript in the ethnodrama or the final thesis. A lack of response to this email will be interpreted as consent.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

All best,

Abby N. Lewis
Master's Candidate in English Literature
and Communication and Storytelling Studies
Department of Literature & Language
Department of Communication & Performance
East Tennessee State University

Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Poetic Ethnodrama

Interview Moderator Guide

Aims or Goals:

1. The goal of this research study is to explore the influence of publishing (academic capitalism) on the mental and emotional psyche of graduate and undergraduate students currently enrolled in a university, preferably student poets, but also including any student writers.

Guidelines:

1. **X focus.** We are focusing today primarily on academic publishing and on your specific thoughts on or experiences with publishing while enrolled in a university as a graduate or undergraduate student.

2. **Note about evaluation.** This study is mean to expand our knowledge about the impact of academic publishing on the psyche of students. The moderator is not after a solitary answer; therefore, nothing you say will be considered a "wrong" answer.

3. **Time.** This interview will last between half an hour and two hours in duration.

4. **Bathroom/Food.** We can take a break during the session at any time if you feel it is necessary. You are also welcome to request that we stop the interview at any point.

5. **Cell phones.** Cell phone use is discouraged during the session; however, you may place your phone on vibrate. Please try to refrain from looking at or using your phone during the session.

6. **Follow-up interviews.** It is possible that I will explore this subject further in the future. If you would like me to contact you regarding your possible participation in any future questions, please write your name on a list to possibly be contacted later for a potential follow-up interview.

When We Write about Your Experiences:

1. This session will be audio recorded with a hand-held audio recorder and with my cell phone.

2. My ETSU faculty advisor, the Communication & Performance department chair, and I will be the only ones who have access to the audio files. However, you may ask for a copy of the transcribed interview that you participated in for your records.

3. The recordings will be transferred to and stored on my password-protected laptop. The audio files will be transcribed verbatim in order for me to be able to thoroughly study your answers.

4. The information gathered in this session may be used in the final thesis I write, which will be published and possibly presented at a conference at some point in the future. An ethnodrama will be crafted based on interview transcripts; yours may be one of them.

Interview Discussion Questions

1. **I was thinking you could start by introducing yourself. Can you provide your name, age, if you're currently a graduate or an undergraduate student, and which university you are enrolled in?**

   <u>Possible probes</u>:
   a. What made you decide to attend college/graduate school?
   b. Why did you enroll in the university you did?

2. **Do you have any plans to teach at the college level and/or do you intend to pursue a PhD?**

3. **What kind of writer do you primarily identify as: academic writer, poet, fiction writer, short story writer, creative nonfiction writer, something else?**
   <u>Possible probes</u>:
   a. Do you write in more than one of these categories?
      i. If so, have you ever felt pressured by others to "pick one" and stick with it rather than pursuing multiple genres?
      ii. Do you engage in any hybrid writing?
   b. What does the label you chose mean to you?

4. **How do you feel about publishing your work?**
   <u>Possible probes</u>:
   a. Why do you feel the way you do?
      i. Would you say those around you influence your thoughts and feelings on the matter?
   b. Do you think you are pressured to publish in any way while in school? If so
      i. where do you think this pressure comes from?
      ii. are you often aware of this pressure?
      iii. how would you describe its effect(s) on your ability (or inability) to write?
   c. If you don't feel any pressure, could you describe why or how you feel that way?

5. **Has your work ever been published?**
   <u>Possible probes</u>:
   a. If so, what was that experience like for you?
      i. Can you describe it?
      ii. How did you feel before, during, and after the publication process?
   b. If you haven't been published, what are your thoughts about publishing?
      i. Do you think it's a good thing? A bad thing?
      ii. Do you feel as if your writing has to be published in order to be considered legitimate?

6. **Have you enrolled in a creative writing class in college (or as a graduate student)?**

Possible probes:
a. If so, did the instructor discuss publishing? What was that experience like for you?
    i. Did the instructor plan a whole lecture on publishing?
    ii. Did the instructor share his or her personal thoughts on publishing one's own work?
        1. If so, how do you think that shaped your perceptions of publishing?
            a. If it didn't influence your perceptions, why do you think that is?
        2. If not, do you wish the instructor had shared his or her personal thoughts on publishing?

7. **Do you feel as if you have learned enough about publishing to successfully go through the submission process?**
a. If so, did you learn this information while in a college classroom or outside of the classroom?
    i. If you learned it outside of a classroom, do you feel as if this information should be taught to students in creative writing classes, or even as if there should be a class dedicated to publishing?

8. **How do you feel about writers or your peers who have never published but continue to write?**
a. Do you think highly of them and/or their writing?
    i. If so, why?
    ii. If not, why?
        1. Do you think you would feel differently if their work were published?

9. **If you are a poet, do you ever perform your poetry / attend open mics / read your work in public?**
a. Do you see it as being different from publishing?
    i. If so, why?
    ii. If not, why? Please explain.
b. Do you think people view performative poets differently than written or published poets? Please elaborate.

10. **Any other thoughts about publishing as a college student that you want to share? Something we've talked about or something we haven't that you want to bring up?**

Semi-structured Interview Schedule from Previous Study

The "Poet's Voice" in Slam Poetry Vs. Academic Poetry

Interview Moderator Guide for Academic Poets

Aims or Goals:

1. The goal of this research study is to explore the creative processes of spoken word artists and the opinion of academic poets on the craft of spoken word artistry.

Guidelines:

1. **X focus.** We are focusing today primarily on the spoken word community and on your specific thoughts on or experiences with spoken word artistry. I'll be asking you to share information about how you became aware of spoken word artistry and your general perceptions about the art form.

2. **Note about evaluation.** This study is mean to expand our knowledge about spoken word poetry. The moderator is not after a solitary answer; therefore, nothing you say will be considered a "wrong" answer.

3. **Time.** This interview will last between half an hour and an hour in duration.

4. **Bathroom/Food.** We can take a break during the session at any time if you feel it is necessary. You are also welcome to request that we stop the interview at any point.

5. **Cell phones.** Cell phone use is discouraged during the session; however, you may place your phone on vibrate. Please try to refrain from looking at or using your phone during the session.

6. **Follow-up interviews.** It is possible that I will explore this subject further in the future. If you would like me to contact you regarding your possible participation in any future questions, please write your name on a list to possibly be contacted later for a potential follow-up interview.

When We Write about Your Experiences:

1. This session will be audio recorded with a hand-held audio recorder and with my cell phone.

2. My ETSU faculty advisor and I will be the only ones who have access to the audio files. However, you may ask for a copy of the transcribed interview or focus group that you participated in for your records.

3. The recordings will be transferred to and stored on my password protected laptop. The audio files will be transcribed verbatim in order for me to be able to thoroughly study your answers.

4. The information gathered in this session may be used in the final paper I write, which might be published or presented at a conference at some point in the future.

Interview Discussion Questions

1. **I was thinking you could start by introducing yourself. Can you provide your name, age, and the highest level of education you've attained?**

   Possible probes:
   c. What region do you self-identify with the most? For example, southern, Appalachian, midwestern, other?
   d. How long have you been aware of spoken word/slam poetry, if at all?

2. **Do you identify as a poet, an academic poet, a slam poet, a spoken word poet, a spoken word artist, or something else?**

   Possible probes:
   a. Can you tell me why you chose the label you did?
   c. What does the label mean to you?

3. **How do you feel about the level of awareness of spoken word/slam poetry?**
   Possible probes:
   a. Would you say it is a thriving community?
      i. Why or why not?
   b. How do you feel about the level of awareness of spoken word/slam poetry within academia?
      i. Why do you think the awareness (or lack of awareness) is at this level?
      ii. Do you like the current level of awareness?
      iii. Would you prefer that the level of awareness was different?

4. **Have you ever read your work aloud during an open mic, or just in front of an audience?**
   Possible probes:
   a. If so, what was that experience like for you?
      i. Can you describe it?
      ii. How did you feel before, during, and after the reading?
   b. Do you view this kind of performance as inherently different from spoken word performance?
      i. If so, can you explain why specifically?

5. **In academia especially, poets are often accused of reading their work in a dry, emotionless tone often referred to as the "poet's voice." Would you say you have attended a performance like this?**
   Possible probes:
   a. If so, what was that experience like for you?
      i. If not, do you think "poet's voice" is a legitimate phenomenon?
   b. How many times a year would you say you attend this kind of reading?
      i. And how many times a year do you attend spoken word nights?

6. **Any other thoughts about spoken word poetry or academia and the spoken word community that you want to say? Something we've talked about or something we haven't?**

ABBY N. LEWIS

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	A.A. English, Walters State Community College, Morristown, Tennessee, 2015
	B.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2017
	M.A. English and Communication & Storytelling Studies, East Tennessee State University, 2020
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	Writing Lab Tutor, Walters State Community College, 2014-2015
	Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, Department of Literature and Language, 2018-2020
Publications:	Lewis, Abby N. (2014). "My Time." *Gallery*. p. 19.
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	Lewis, Abby N. (2014). "Trusted You." *Gallery*. p. 11.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2015). "Swan's Lake." *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology*. pp. 41-42.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2015). "The Silent Ones." *Gallery*. p. 30.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2015). "What do you do for a living?" *Gallery*. p. 15.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2016). *Reticent*. Asheville: Grateful Steps Publishing.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2016). "The Creature in the Night." *Gallery*. p. 3.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2016). "You Said." *Gallery*. p. 5.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2016). "Standing on a Ledge." *Gallery*. p. 14.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2016). "Picturing God." *Gallery*. p. 20.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2016). "The Essence of Lounging." *Outrageous Fortune*.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2016). "The Inferno." *Dual Coast*. p. 28.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "Snakes and Stones." *Red Mud Review*. p. 16.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "Striving for Perfection." *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology*. pp. 79-81.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "Derailed." *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology*. pp. 59-61.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "The Story of Us." *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology*. pp. 51-53.
	Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "Smokey." *Tennessee Mosaic Regional*

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Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "Pinecone." *Cheat River Review*.

Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "Our Late Grandmother's House." *The Tennessee Magazine*.

Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "Snippets—I Can't." *Sanctuary*. p. 1.

Lewis, Abby N. (2017). "The Big Texan Steak Ranch." *Sanctuary*. p. 29.

Lewis, Abby N. (2018). *This Fluid Journey*. Georgetown: Finishing Line Press.

Lewis, Abby N. (2018). "Empty Vessels." *Sweet Tree Review*.

Lewis, Abby N. (2018). "The Bridge." *The Allegheny Review*. p. 49.

Lewis, Abby N. (2018). "Viola da Gamba." *The Allegheny Review*. p. 48.

Lewis, Abby N. (2018). "Smoke Break Outside Swann's Chapel Church." *Red Eft Review*.

Lewis, Abby N. (2019). "Over the Shoulder of the Moon." *The Mockingbird*. pp. 99-105.

Lewis, Abby N. (2019). "Palm Up, Fingers Curled." *The Crambo*. pp. 16-19.

Lewis, Abby N. (2019). "Prisoner." *The Crambo*. p. 20.

Lewis, Abby N. (2019). "Sentries of the Cemetery." *The Mockingbird*. pp. 60-61.

Lewis, Abby N. (2019). "0.6 inches." *The Mockingbird*. pp. 58-59.

Honors and Awards:

Walters State Community College Outstanding Student Award in Creative Writing 2015

3rd place, Poetry, "What do you do for a living?" *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology* 2015

2nd place, Fiction, "Swan's Lake." *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology* 2015

1st place, One-Act Play, "Derailed" *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology* 2017

3rd place, Poetry, "The Roller Coaster of Life." *Tennessee Mosaic Regional Literary Anthology* 2017

3rd place, Age 19-22 Poetry, "Our Late Grandmother's House." *The Tennessee Magazine* 2017

1st place, drama, "Someone's in the Attic," *The Mockingbird* 2020