Lack of Focus: A Journal on My Practice of Pursuing Publication

I would like to finish something. While I feel that I have had a lot of experience in my undergrad and graduate coursework on invention and revision in the writing process, I do not feel I have enough experience with finishing a piece, creative or scholarly, for the purposes of publication. For my portfolio project, I would like to look to practice final revision and polishing of a collection of new and previous work, scholarly and creative, to better understand how to bring a piece to a publishable level of quality. While I understand this does not guarantee publication, I do feel that this project will help me prepare for the process of completing a work.

I essentially have two reasons for this. One reason is that since I plan to take a couple years to teach before I consider pursuing a doctorate, I would like to have practice in writing with the intent to publish, rather than the just focusing on the piece as an assignment for a class. While I do wish to continue working on papers that I write for a class, I rarely come back to them and want to have some practice and guidance with currently publishing authors in the department to approach how to finish a project. The second reason, the more selfish one, is that I have thought about what I want from my graduate college experience and I feel like I want to take advantage of the resources in our department to help me satisfy a lifelong dream of being published. I know that I necessarily will not be published, but I do think it would be beneficial to me to understand how to finish a project. By the end of the project, my hope then is to have between three and six pieces which are publishable in quality.

My project will be broken down into three sections, each of which will focus on a genre of interest to me and will align to the specifications set forth in the portfolio requirements by the English department. The three sections which follow my interests will include revising a paper from a previous class into a scholarly journal article, at least one creative nonfiction personal essay or memoir, and at least one piece of fiction, a short story. I feel that choosing these three sections work to focus what I have studied with my writing as both a professional writer and as a possible academic.

For the scholarly section, I wish to expand a conference paper, itself a project that came out of my undergraduate capstone, for publication as a possible journal article or book chapter. The current idea for the project revolves around using narrative theory and agency in videogames by expanding and extending my ideas on the role of the player within the narrative of the videogame. Since my current conference paper was composed for and presented at the recent Midwest Conference on Literature, Language, and Media at Northern Illinois University, it is narrow in scope and is only ten pages in length. While originally written as a portion of my senior undergraduate capstone course, this paper was completely rewritten for the purposes of a conference presentation. Therefore, extending the project to the breadth and depth required for a peer-reviewed academic journal will involve significant research in the fields of Narrative Theory and Game Studies. Specifically, I wish to do more research involving Marie-Laure Ryan's *Possible World Theory* about how we infer the world of a text through that text’s features. I also plan to research player agency in gaming by reading up on the work of Jesper Juul. The debate between narrative and game mechanics is a burgeoning one and I wish to draw my research from both fields to further my argument in this paper significantly. Part of this will also entail a deeper reading of game studies scholar Ian Bogost and his publications, *Unit Operations* as well as selected essays arguing against narrative in videogames. Due to the amount of research involved to ground my article in sound evidence and extending my argument to a length of 20-25 pages, this project will meet the requirements of having a significant amount of new scholarly work.

The fiction section is to be comprised of around twenty pages that are made up of either one or multiple short stories. As of the time of this writing, I wish to revise a piece of realistic fiction that I wrote as an undergrad and a science/speculative fiction (SF) genre short story that I plan to write over the summer. The piece from my undergrad workshops will be either a ten page short story I wrote on alienation and apathy among a circle of teenage friends currently titled, "Miscreants" or another piece of the same length titled, "Skating on Black Ice" which concerns a car tuner, his car-totaling accident, and the idea of new relationships. Another piece from my advanced workshop, "Dog Days of August," I may also consider due to its use of place and the home in a story about an old man and his confrontation with a land developer. The new piece, a currently untitled SF genre short story I plan to write over the summer, concerns a possible evolution of body modification and I want to include it due to how it will be informed by my study of Posthuman theory in the English 661 course I took this past spring with Dr. Lillvis. An area of my interest within fiction is the ability to create complex and detailed worlds within a short work, such as I have read in nongenre works by Alice Munro and Wendell Berry. I have also seen this in the SF short story cycle, *Futureland*, by Walter Mosley and the crime drama short story, "Cartagena" by Nam Le. I would like to research more fiction by these authors to develop my own abilities at world-building in fiction.

I see similar requirements of the fiction section applying to the creative nonfiction section, however, it would be comprised of either a single essay or memoir of around twenty pages or multiple shorter essays. Although I am planning to begin a new essay over the summer, I also wish to continue working on a piece about my father I started writing in ENG 593 last semester. This personal essay, currently titled "Soft Serve," concerns the relationship of my father and I juxtaposed alongside my relationship with my daughter. Due to the inherently emotional subject matter, this piece has been difficult to shape into a unified piece and my hope is that I can revise and polish it to form for publication. For this particular essay, "Soft Serve" I would like to attempt to possibly incorporate more of the lyric or segmented/fragmented essay writing of Eula Biss in *No Man's Land* and Nick Flynn in *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*. These pieces will form my portfolio and, in effect, mimic the journal form with its separate scholarly, fiction and creative nonfiction suites.

I will again emphasize that I am aware how difficult and competitive the publishing process is and understand that this project will in no way guarantee that the work of the portfolio will eventually reach publication. To me, that's not the point. I wish to understand the full writing process as a writer from beginning to end with the help and guidance of the resources our faculty can provide. To do this, I feel that my portfolio project should focus on producing professional quality work of a publishable level and my hope is that I can produce this level of work for my project.

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(subject to change with committee suggestions)

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