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Writing Gets Personal: Listening at the Intersections of Creative Writing and Writing Tutoring

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WRITING GETS PERSONAL:
LISTENING AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF CREATIVE WRITING AND WRITING
TUTORING

A Thesis Presented

by

Zoe McDonald

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of

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I investigate the extent to which creative writing impacts the ways writing tutors work with student writers on their academic writing. In doing so, I interview five writing tutors with creative writing experiences for their personal definitions of creative writing, and the extent to which drawing on, or ignoring, creative writing impacts their writing tutoring.

Through combining the interviews with reflections into my writer identities, I find creative writing focuses on self-expression and narrative features which strengthen disciplinarily and conventions. Additionally, focusing on creative writing's influence in the writing center allows tutors to engage as fellow writers able to learn alongside the students they tutor.

Specifically, I notice writing tutors perceive a division between creative and academic writing. Crossing that perceived division requires a willingness to confront assumptions about academic and creative writing, but allows for the opportunity for tutors and the students they tutor to deepen their writing processes.

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Introduction

In June, my mom and I visited the Shelburne Museum. This was our second visit together, but this time we paid attention to the stories the exhibits told of Vermont's history, of how objects represented the lives of those in the past. As we walked through with the slow nods of recognition, we gathered the threads of personal and formal knowledge as we looked at pieces displayed on white walls. We adapted our assumptions about artists and their artwork as we read the placards that dropped hints about the context behind the displays.

My mom broke the typical museum gaze at the quilt exhibit. She drew on her experience as a quilter to look at stitch work, hand pieced patterns, and applique backing. For her, the quilts were not only works of art in a climate-controlled room, but handmade objects with a practical purpose. I saw the quilts as objects to be studied. My mom, on the other hand, could appreciate their process of creation, which required skill and time. She imagined the quilts transitioning from the quilter's table and to the back of a chair, a hope chest, or a bed before coming to the museum's walls. I could apply knowledge I'd read onto them but could not imagine the detail and time it took to make them.

Alice Walker uses quilts as a motif to represent the tension between impersonal objects to be looked at and as objects to be used. In her story "Everyday Use," the character Dee returns to visit her mom and sister. She arrives at the family's tin roof house with a radical boyfriend, new name, and wearing an orange dress as "the child who has 'made it'" (47). At the story's climax, she asks to take the family's quilts, those made

from her grandmother's dresses and promised to her sister Maggie. She justifies her desire for the quilts as "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts! [...] She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use." She continues, "[T]hey're *priceless!* [...] Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be rags" (1973, 57 emphasis in the original). Shortly after, her mother asks her what she would do with the quilts. Dee responds: "Hang them" (58). After reading this exchange, I wonder: Do we hang quilts on a wall or put them to everyday use and allow them to turn to rags? Why is there a perception that practicality, quilts with everyday use, and artistry, quilts on the wall, are a zero-sum game where one must win out over the other?

I open with this snapshot because I'm interested in how writers play with this tension between form and function, desires for self-expression within the realities of audience needs and expectations, and the notion Stacey Waite describes as "a sense that interpretation and writing are series of complicated political and multiple moves in a field of constraints" (2009, 64). The quilters of the pieces in the museum and the quilters in Walker's story created original patterns, and combined different techniques, while at the same time ensuring their patterns held together and could fulfill their everyday functions. Their quilts involved combining form and function to consider how to work within the limitations of audience expectations to create a form of self-expression, becoming quilts that were both recognizable and original. I'm interested in how writers navigate this uneasy negotiation between functionality, the material circumstances informing writing, and originality, or charting new terrain through written words. In this project I ask: How do writing tutors as creative writers negotiate form and function within academic writing?

How do they describe creative writing and how does it help them work with students on academic writing projects? For partial answers, I turn to the intersection of creative writing and writing tutoring.

Creative writing is a series of genres and writing with an emphasis on writing for artistic purposes. In *The College Handbook of Creative writing*, Robert DeMaria defines creative writing as “writing that involves the imagination and invention in form and content. It means *fiction, poetry, and drama*. [...] Its main function is not merely to convey facts or information. Its main function is to please the reader of audience aesthetically by playing with the imagination” (1998, 4 emphasis in the original). To expand on DeMaria’s definition, Margret Love-Denman and Rebecca Shoup in the fiction textbook *Story Matters* describe creative writing pedagogy as “listening to writers talk about the nuts and bolts of fiction writing and the joys, frustrations, and mysteries of the creative process” (2005, IX). To combine both, creative writing is writing in the literary genres, fiction, poetry, drama, and creative non-fiction, and is taught through a focus on the “aesthetic” and “nuts and bolts” qualities of writing. However, those textbook definitions fail to consider the ways writing, creative or otherwise, is socially informed.

Thankfully, foundational writing center scholarship focuses on the ways writing is socially informed as peers come together to discuss writing. In “Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind,” Kenneth Bruffee conceptualizes writing center sessions as a “conversational exchange” that also provide the “social context for conversation, a particular kind of community: that of status equals, or peers” (1995, 91–92). Writing

centers are a site for student writers to discuss writing outside of the classroom yet still under the umbrella of the academy. Yet even as Bruffee describes writing centers' merits as places apart from writing classrooms, he notes that within those writing center discussions there becomes "the potential to challenge the theory and practice of traditional classroom learning" (88). Writing centers focus on writing as socially informed but within those social interactions there becomes a radical possibility of changing "traditional" writing.

I am interested in the ways creative writing's focus on writing's aesthetic, emotional, and otherwise imaginative features influence socially informed writing center conversations. How can creative writing, a field considered closer to a studio art than an academic discipline, inform tutoring pedagogies, philosophies, and practices? Creative writing and writing centers allow for not only imaging writing as self-expression but also allow for applying artistic characteristics within academic writing. Throughout this project I ask: How does an identity as a creative writer influence writing tutoring?

Pushing the Boundaries of Academic and Creative Writing

Dominant creative writing pedagogy has assumed writing is talent based, or informed by qualities and characteristics that cannot be taught. Such an assumption trickles into the ways creative writing teachers view their students. Ted Lardner notes, "teachers of creative writing are more likely to posit inherent talent as the most important variable of writing students' success or failure"(1999, 74). However, composition assumes writing can be taught and is socially informed (see Bartholomae 1995; Adler-Kassner 2015). Mary Ann Cain explains, "composition has flourished under the

assumption that students are already writers, or have the capacity to learn—and that *everyone* should be writers” and composition questions “*how* writing can be taught and under what conditions” (1999, 91 emphasis in the original). Cain and a generation of writing researchers with experiences in composition and creative writing, including Wendy Bishop, Patrick Bizzaro, and David Starkey, depart from notions of creative writing as talent based to call for applying composition’s assumption that students are writers to focus on how to teach both academic and creative writing.

Over the last twenty-five years, compositionists have pushed back against assumptions which silo creative writing away from academic writing. In “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing,” Bishop tells the story of a student in a required first-year writing class who felt more successful revising an interview-based assignment once she was able to envision it “as a piece of imaginative writing” (1993a, 118). The student reimagined her relationship to her assignment to consider it as a fictional story, which in turn leads to a more successful assignment and the student becoming a confident writer. Bishop concludes “it was more productive to cross the line” between creative and academic writing, which allowed the student to find “that one genre is not more valuable than another for learning about writers and writing” (1993a, 119, 122). Kate Ronald too describes the benefits in mixing creative and academic writing by adopting creative writing’s workshop pedagogy in her required first-year writing classroom. She finds such a pedagogical shift allows her to engage with her students not only as a teacher, but as a fellow reader and writer (see Ronald 1998, 4–5,8). Likewise, other writing scholars focus on the specific ways consciously including

creative writing in writing classrooms positively impacts academic writing, including George Kalamaras proposing such a blurring can bring out a focus on “social responsibility” in responding to texts (1999, 80). In other words, writing scholars find creative writing—writing in literary genres, reimagining an academic assignment as a narrative, and adopting workshop pedagogy into academic writing classrooms—informs successful academic writing practices.

Outside of the writing classroom, others take up Bishop’s focus on tangling the boundaries between academic and creative writing. Bishop and Hans Ostrom’s *Colors of a Different Horse* (1994) and Starkey’s *Teaching Writing Creatively* (1998) look into the far-ranging applications of creative writing for those writing in popular and academic discourse communities. In *The Forgotten Tribe: Scientists as Writers*, Lisa Emerson finds scientific writers describe their academic writing in narrative, emotional, and aesthetic terms, or those characteristics that depart from traditional academic writing and cross into the territory of creative writing. She concludes:

For several participants in this study, the sheer open-endedness of creative writing at school was both puzzling and, in a way, frightening. Not until they were able to find something concrete on which to pin their imagination were they able to engage creatively. [...] Within this context, many scientists saw themselves as engaged in a creative endeavor, which involved creativity in writing.

(2017, 156–57)

Even those reluctant scientific writers who find creative writing on its own overwhelming, find ways to apply its influence to their academic writing. Emerson's study and others show academic writers describe their writing in creative, imaginative, and narrative terms. And yet little research investigates the ways tutors define or apply creative writing in the writing center.

From Silencing to Validating a Writer's Identities

Foundational peer tutoring theories frame writing centers as spaces apart from the power dynamics of writing classrooms; however, writing center scholars also are interested in the ways identities and experiences shape peer tutors' interactions with their tutees. In "Rearticulating the Work of the Writing Center," Nancy Grimm argues, "writing centers are triangulated into the relationship between teachers and students for the purpose of managing cultural anxiety about literacy" (1996, 527). She continues to critique the troubling trend of writing centers acting as spaces where writers "conform to institutional expectations and values" (1996, 530). Grimm and others note that as a result, the voices, experiences, and identities of writers that fall outside of the academic writing "expectations and values" are appropriated, standardized, or silenced. Harry Denny then builds off Grimm's work to investigate the ways writing centers replicate assumptions about academic writers, particularly through describing the risks both tutors and tutees face in naming their queerness both in their writing and in the writing center. Denny posts the reminder that even though writing centers are framed as safe spaces, they confront the "transitory area" where personal identities intersect with dominant expectations of academic writing (2005, 41).

As such, writing center scholars include recommendations for validating differences among writers. Grimm calls for naming assumptions about writers in the writing center. She calls for tutors to name the features and values of academic writing as well as naming the risks involved in failing to meet those expectations (see Grimm 1996, 545; 1998, 5–9; 2008, 5–7). Writing center textbooks too call for tutors to act as guides to help demystify writing conventions to help tutees negotiate their identities into their assignments (see Fitzgerald 2016, 133–41; Gillespie 2000). Yet Condon, et al. point out the reminder in *The Everyday Writing Center* that such work is not a onetime action but rather an on-going process of reflection into the ways personal identities and past writing experiences impact writer interactions in the writing center (2007, 44–47, 87–91).

One valuable place to start the work of validating differences among writers is to research the ways identities and experiences shape writing tutors. In *Noise from the Writing Center*, Beth Boquet observes: “Tutors [...] are as likely as any other student to procrastinate, to start and re-start a paper incessantly, particularly since tutors often feel a great deal of pressure, especially initially, to demonstrate their skill at writing” (2002, 112). Boquet’s observation serves as a reminder that both tutors and tutees have developing processes impacted by various pressures to “demonstrate” the writing abilities. Others find tutors benefit from the opportunity to share and discuss their writing. Meg Carroll notes tutors sharing writing center tutoring journals that often have little to do with particular sessions allow tutors to have an audience for their writing, respond to one another, and deepen their understanding of writing (2008, 56–57, 61).

Similarly, Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch find tutors draw on their past experiences to shape their tutoring theories. They conclude:

What did we learn about how students' interactions with theory shape their tutoring? We were struck by the reverse relationship: by the degree to which tutors' individual visions of the writing center shape their interactions with theory. Each tutor brought to the writing center a unique vision of tutoring, shaped by past experiences as a writer and with other writers, by career goals, personality, values, socio-economic status, politics. (2003, 73–74)

And yet while other studies suggest creative writing positively impacts tutors, the scholarly conversation to cross the divide between creative and academic writing has yet to be considered as one set of experiences that impact writing tutors (see Conner 1994; Bishop 1993b; Masiello 1994; Neff 1994). To expand on the suggestive work of those studies, this thesis examines the overlapping identities of writing tutor and creative writer through a mix of interviews, narrative analysis, and ethnography.

Turning to the Tutors

Over the spring 2017 semester, I interviewed five graduate writing tutors who self-identified as creative writers. All were current tutors at my university's graduate writing center, self-identified as creative writers, and volunteered their time for this project. I refer to them by modified code names of their choosing to protect their privacy and follow IRB protocol. I interviewed each individually and later all five collectively as part of a focus group. During the individual interviews, I asked about writing

experiences, writer identities, and the ways they noticed their creative writing backgrounds and experiences influencing their tutoring praxis and other forms of writing (see “tutor questions” in the appendix). In the focus group, I was primarily concerned with placing their writing stories in dialogue with each other. The conversation steered to connecting tutoring practices to individual written genres, such as the differences between poems or economics journal articles, and attempting to connect experiences with creative writing and writing centers to larger discussions of academic writing. After reviewing the interview notes and recordings, I have organized this project thematically to represent the subjects’ interviews as narratives, explore how they describe creative writing, and its influence on their tutoring.

Mary Ann Cain in *Revising Writer’s Talk* describes reflecting on the role of the writer and researcher focusing on small case studies rather than large sample sizes, as a move that allows for “interpretation rather than verification: ‘knowing better’ rather than ‘knowing more’” (1995, 11). In addition, I’ve found many social scientific studies focus on a small number of case studies as primary sources with the writer stating her intentions are not to draw all-encompassing conclusions about a larger population but apply a vertical approach that dives beneath easy conclusions. While this project cannot claim to speak for all writing tutors who have creative writing experiences, my five case study subjects allow for the potential of “knowing better” by going in depth into their stories, but also the opportunity to reflect on patterns of connection and disagreement.

My Subject Position

In their study of feminists' rhetoric since the 1970s, Elizabeth Tasker and Frances Holt-Underwood define a feminist research method as "one that explicitly identifies the researcher's emotional involvement with the subject; sees researchers as participants who are often not neutral" (2008, 55). Therefore, in following in the footsteps of feminist qualitative research methods it is my intention to name my "not neutral" subject position in order to point out the ways it influences my conclusions throughout this project. First, I am a member of my population. I became interested in the intersection of creative writing and writing tutoring through composition scholarship as one way to explore two aspects of my writing background. My interest in writing started through reading novels and writing poetry. Through college and graduate school, I published fiction and poetry in local zines and university anthologies, as well as gained experience editing, tutoring, and teaching first-year writing. And yet, I also have flunked writing assignments, unintentionally appropriated others' voices, and considered writing a form of competition.

Over the last two years, something shifted. Much like the student case studies in Lee Ann Carroll's *Rehearsing New Roles: How College Students Develop as Writers* (2002), I experienced a moment, specifically flunking a mid-term essay, where I realized the writing processes I had were unsustainable. Thankfully, I was able to turn to mentor professors and composition scholarship for examples of adapting writing processes to new contexts. After rolling my eyes, I asked questions. I made regular writing center appointments. I made outlines, free wrote, and read while writing in the margins. I want

to credit composition and my regular writing center appointments for my mindset change, but I cannot turn away from the influence of creative writing.

Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle define composition as “focusing on reflexive practice, which has been concerned primarily with how to help writers foster a more thorough understanding of their own processes” (2015, 3). I see this focus on individuals and their processes as opening the doors preventing those such as my sister, a woman of color without a high school diploma, from recognizing their voices in academic writing. I grow frustrated with the perception that creative writing relies on a top-down master and apprentice workshop pedagogy and appears to over represent the voices of white men writing for limited audiences. But something in me begrudgingly agrees with Robert DeMaria who writes: “I do not believe that genius and imagination can be taught, but I do believe that they can be supported by a study of the fundamentals of the writer’s craft”(1998, V). I feel a twinge of recognition when Anne Lamott describes writing because “really, secretly, when I’m not being smart-alecky, it’s because I want to and I’m good at it” (1994, XXVIII). Sitting silently as peers discuss a piece I wrote, or a professor telling me “you’ll need ten years before you’ll write anything good,” is as much a part of my writing development as talking about trusting the writing process, or telling my writing tutor I know how to write to an assignment but question my motivations for doing so. I follow the trajectory of a composition student writer case study of revising ineffective processes in favor of inserting my voice in given rhetorical situations but also that of a creative writer searching for the flow of words on the page.

As I take a moment to repeat well-worn post-modern terrain, I am interested in seeking ways to unite both parts of my writing background, the artful flamboyance with everyday use, or academic composition with popular creative writing. Throughout, I am continually reminded of Bishop's call to cross the lines between different types of writing and Waite's observation that although it is productive, it is also disturbing (see Bishop 1993, 117; Waite 2009, 59). I'm reminded of Slavoj Zizek's explorations of the Lacanian Real, the place beyond meaning. He writes, "The postmodern subject must learn the artifice of surviving the experience of a radial limit, of circulating around the lethal abyss without being swallowed up by it" (2008, 310). Thankfully "surviving" staring into that abyss allows for new ideas to take root. It is my hope to circle the abyss of possibility and practicality within this project as I explore ways writers blur the lines between their writing experiences and how those uneasy negotiations impact reflective writing tutoring.

Behind the Scenes of the Interviews

The subjects in this project are not random. I met Alisa, a soil science Ph.D. candidate, and Fox, a second-year English MA student, during a spring 2016 writing center practicum. Haun, a first-year English MA student, and I have taken classes in the English department together and were both working on papers for the same class at the time of the interviews. Bart, a first-year History MA student, and I met in a history seminar in the fall of 2016. Hunter was the only one I did not know prior to her interview. Additionally, I played a hand in influencing their responses during the interviews. I changed the order of my questions, asked additional unscripted questions, and included writing stories of my own as a way to shift the conversation. And yet, I believe my

subjects opened up in the ways they did *because* I am in a similar life and professional situation as them.

It is my hope to relay the experiences my subjects described based on their intersecting subject positions as creative writers and writing tutors, specifically the ways they extend the branches of scholarship that consider individual stories as valuable to writing scholarship, explore the boundaries of academic and creative writing, and reflect on privilege within the tutor and tutee relationship. Overall, I've found writing may be informed by conventions but it is not limited to them. Emotions, individuality, and narrative enrich conventions, logic, and the features of specific rhetorical situations, or as Mary Ann Cain writes: "We begin with re-visioning the writer as situated in particular social, material, and imagined spaces. We begin by claiming the margins of creative writing as spaces of resistance" (2009, 235). Writers are steeped in conditionalities, but through studying the margins of creative and academic writing we can bump up to their edges. Individuals with experiences along the edges of academic and creative writing frame writing as a negotiation between writing for the self and writing for others, describe academic writing as a narrative, and use those negotiations to participate as fellow writers alongside their tutees.

Chapter Overviews

The first chapter presents each writing tutor and creative writer subject's interview as a short narrative or vignette. Specifically, the vignettes combine the subjects' words with my interpretation to explore the ways their perceptions of writing have changed throughout their literacy histories. In this chapter, I reflect on my choice to

represent the interviews in a short narrative style through scholarship that considers narratives as evidence and the privilege inherent in representation. I find that such a process combines qualitative research methods with a flash fiction form allows me to forefront the ways the interviews are a process of negotiation between the subjects' words and the ways I informed their creation.

The second chapter expands on moments in the interviews, and alluded to in the vignettes, that illustrate the subjects' conceptions of creative writing. It considers the nuances behind claiming an identity as a creative writer as well as the identifying characteristics of the subjects' personal understandings of creative writing. Throughout, I draw on scholarship that considers creative writing's influence on other forms of writing and how a creative writer identity impacts other forms of writing. Overall, I find through departing from an academic definition of creative writing, my subjects describe shared creative writing features that can be applied to other writing contexts.

The third chapter expands on the moments the subjects describe drawing on creative writing in the writing center. Specifically, I find a lack of stories addressing tutoring sessions with tutees working on projects in a literary genre but rather find moments that apply creative writing's influence. In this chapter, I draw on peer tutoring touchstone theories as well as those that consider the ways the peer tutors replicate privileged writing practices. I find that those stories in which the subjects describe drawing on creative writing allow them to reflect on their position as fellow writers and gain a greater level of empathy with the tutee.

Finally, I close with a snapshot from the focus group interview exploring the ways my subjects describe using their personal definitions of creative writing within their academic writing processes.

CHAPTER 1: Writing I Care About: Interview Vignettes

In the introduction, I introduced the theme of practicality and possibility in writing. To explore the balance between the two, I turned to creative writing and writing center scholarship, and interviewed five writing tutors who self-identified as creative writers. Thus, in this section I explain my choice for presenting each interview as a short vignette and offer each a short analysis.

In early drafts, I played with mixing snapshots from the interviews into the analysis chapters. After showing those drafts to my mentor professor, I realized jumping into the analysis without introducing each subject planted trees outside the forest. Attempting to include representative moments from five subjects developed into alphabet soup with phrases and paragraphs of dialogue appearing removed from their original context. Such an approach also failed to capture an over-all arc of each interview, which was more thought-provoking than any analysis I could provide.

I later attempted to present the narratives as a direct address to the reader with the subjects' words as close to their original format as possible. I wanted to capture the feeling I had as the interviewer listening as the subjects spoke, repeated examples, or revised their ideas. Most of all, I wanted to capture those turns of phrases that made each subject's interview unique, such as when Fox called writing "a secular prayer" or when Bart described his favorite academic writing as "transporting a reader into the narrative." Such an approach is well used in longer studies. Emerson in particular uses it to great success through presenting her interviews as uninterrupted transcriptions that place the reader in the place of the interviewer listening from across the table. Such an approach

creates the feeling that each subject is talking without being slowed down by analysis or exposition.

However, such an approach took up a disproportionate amount of space and more importantly, I could not sidestep my lingering ethical concerns. I was part of the interviews as the interviewer and the other voice on the recordings. Each time I listened to them, I heard myself as I asked questions and shared stories of my own. As I transcribed the interviews, I found myself editing my own questions for clarity, taking out my false starts and extra “likes,” “ums,” and “you knows.” There are moments in the recordings when I cringe as I hear myself cut off a subject’s train of thought and others when I’m surprised at my ability to probe beneath the surface. Throughout the process of interviewing, transcribing, and coding, I am reminded how much the interviews are shared between my subjects and myself. However, I remained unsure how to write them.

In *Noise from the Writing Center*, Beth Boquet describes listening to a presentation at a writing center conference. The presenter illustrates the work in her writing center using graphs, tables of numbers, and generally following in the footsteps of quantitative research methods. Later Boquet notes the presenter “backed off any claims to statistical rigor by admitting that these numbers were collected fairly unscientifically, that she’s no statistician, that one of her assistants had in fact questioned their validity shortly before.” Boquet continues, “If we’re *just* ‘playing’ at academic seriousness, shouldn’t we admit it? Had she just done so? Why can’t we talk about *that* bold move?” (2000, 46 emphasis in the original). Boquet’s observation serves as another reminder to me not to place my interviews under the guise of scientific objectivity. I did

not intend or design this study to fit into the box of a scientific study and therefore that will not be the language I will use.

I needed new models, and other places to turn to represent each interview. Tim Mayers calls for writing inquiries that close the “conceptual separation between poetic theory and rhetoric, a separation which enables the notions that poets, as ‘special’ or ‘gifted’ individuals, can somehow stand apart from, or outside of, the social and ideological forces which entrap other people including other kinds of writers” (1999, 88). Replacing “poets” with creative writers, allows me to read Mayers’ call as a reminder to not present my interviews in a vacuum, as self-evident clinical reports, but rather within those “ideological forces,” those moments of hearing my voice in the recordings, those innumerable conditional factors that impacted their creation.

I have settled on representing the interviews as narratives. In broad strokes, such an approach is common in both creative writing and writing centers. Creative writing journals, including *On Writing*, often contain interviews and features that illustrate writing processes. Writing center publications, ranging from *The Dangling Modifier* to *The Writing Center Journal*, include behind the scenes narrative snapshots from directors and tutors that show writing centers’ inner workings. Such approaches blend together the subject’s words-- the tutee, the poet, the graduate student writing center director, etc.-- with those of the interviewer to become a reader-friendly collaborative narrative. They avoid the tendency to present a single uninterrupted voice, replicating romantic notions of writers, but rather forefront the ways the subject’s words are interpreted.

Mary Ann Cain defends such a hybrid narrative/scholarly approach writing: “The stories I wish to tell ask questions that scientific or empirical inquiries cannot, by themselves, answer—namely, questions about the nature of experience and subjectivity or identity” (1995, 10). In her study of the ways her gender impacts responses to her fiction, Cain chose to adapt her writing to match her method of inquiry, to ask probing questions about individuals and their interactions with larger systems. Cain recognizes such an approach depends on a degree of common assumptions, recognizable narrative trajectories, and cultural backgrounds. Stories become a research method by the ways they reflect assumptions and cultural norms embedded in the storyteller and the audience.

Furthermore, the post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak addresses questions of identity underlying narratives. Her influential “Can the Subaltern Speak” combines post-modern theory with stories she heard as a young woman in India to highlight the trend of those in privileged positions speaking on behalf of less privileged others due to their race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. As a result, the words of the less privileged are silenced, assumed, and combined into a universal narrative. Spivak writes narratives:

[M]ust note how the staging of the world in representation—its scene of writing, dissimulates the choice of and need for ‘heroes,’ paternal proxies, agents of power. My view is that radical practice should attend to this double session of representation rather than reintroduce the individual subject through totalizing concepts of power and desire. (1988, 74)

Therefore, I attempt to sidestep my anxieties about appropriating my subjects, and my desire to frame them or myself as “heroes,” to open the door to the “double session of

representation,” of illustrating the narrative layers, consciously representing that which is already a representation, of speaking for my subjects while they speak through me.

It is my intention to strike an uneasy balance between my subjects’ interviews in their own words and my representation of them through vignettes. Such an approach is far from ideal. It cannot replace the experience of listening to each take time out of his or her busy schedule in the middle of the semester to talk in the graduate writing center’s cubicle about the intersections of creative writing, writing tutoring, and other writing experiences. Each vignette is short, too short in my opinion, to capture the interview subjects’ range of thoughts. I lost their voices, speech patterns, and the countless details that provided me the seeds of thought that grew months after the recordings. Gone are the moments when I asked Fox about his experience working with an advisor who is also a published poet or Alisa’s details about her plans for her new novel. But I have gained a sense of greater honesty, or sense that the narratives strike a middle place between my interpretations and my interview subjects’ words. The narratives are easy to follow and provide me the space to analyze my subjects’ definitions of creative writing and how it influences their tutoring in the later chapters. Through writing each subject’s interview as a narrative, I peel back the curtain to reveal the hand I had in their construction.

In more practical terms, I recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and coded for key themes. From there, I considered each subject as a character in a short story. I centered on one-word themes for each, a recommendation I adopted from Hunter who uses the technique in her creative non-fiction and with tutees working on personal statements. I asked: What is the thickest thread that runs through their interviews? What

are they holding onto throughout their range of writing experiences? Thus, I considered each vignette not in terms of the person I interviewed, but in terms of a character undergoing a change centered around a one-word conflict. I slid into creative non-fiction through combining the interview techniques I learned in journalism and conceptualizing writing them as pieces of character-centered flash fiction. They are neither entirely true nor untrue, although to my knowledge they contain no intentional factual errors or deliberately misleading information, but occupying a third space as case study narrative non-fiction.

Now I offer my representation of my subjects' stories of themselves as creative writers and writing tutors.

The Vignettes

Alisa

Alisa, a Ph.D. candidate in soil science and fiction writer with a Ph.D. in chemistry, at the time of her interview was analyzing the data for her second dissertation and copyediting her first novel. When I followed up with her over the summer, she was drafting chapters of her dissertation and starting her second novel. What stands out from her interview are the ways she describes her scientific writing, fiction writing, and writing tutoring benefiting one another.

The Story of the Data

Alisa began writing because she was bored at school. "I was just bad at doodling," she said, "so I just put the pen on the page and the story

would just come out.” These early stories were only a few pages long and she could “fix a comma or a wrong verb but not change anything else.” In graduate school, she wrote a thirty-five thousand word thesis, which she described as a story. After writing her thesis/story she thought, “Well, if I can write thirty-five thousand words and my thesis has gone through revisions—where we should move this and put that there—I thought maybe I could do that for a novel.”

More recently, she combines elements from both her scientific and fiction writing as she works with tutees in the writing center. During one session, she showed a tutee TED Talks as an example of imagining an introduction as “a small short story.” She encourages tutees to use freewriting to “put words on the page” with lab reports. And yet, she names features that differentiate creative and scientific writing. When working with scientific projects, creative writing is “scratched out of the equation” that she “represses” to point out “those subjectives and biased comments,” or “adjectives and the first person” that are not accepted within the conventions of scientific writing. Yet she does consider scientists as storytellers. “They find the story of the data,” she said. “In scientific writing, it’s not in the paper itself but in the getting to the idea that there is more creativity. It doesn’t matter who did it. It matters what was done.” She added, “Creative writing can definitely be more scientific in so many ways. If you want to create certain emotions, you can draw

from scientific writing that is more dry or add passive voice to your story. If you manage to create emotion in the other person, I think you're being creative.”

I choose to center her vignette on the conflict of practicality. Creative writing allows her to evoke emotion in her readers and imagine questions her scientific research is unable to answer. Furthermore, she recognizes creative writing by the presence of adjectives and the active voice that she does not see in scientific writing. She uses creative writing to start her scientific writing but not to focus on specific content. During the focus group, she also told the story of a time peer reviewers told her to take out a pun in the title of one of her journal articles because it did not match the conventions of the field. Creative writing becomes something that can be used in an appropriate time and place, such as in providing an example of an engaging introduction for a tutee, but she often ignores her identity as a creative writer in favor of meeting the expectations of scientific writing.

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Bart

Bart, a history master's student and creative non-fiction writer of blog posts and short monologues, has worked at three different writing centers and taught composition at

American, Chinese, and German universities. Throughout the summer, he was developing a reading list for his thesis and considering different career paths. Even though I am familiar with his academic writing, his insights into writing surprised me, especially his coming of age narrative describing his early writing as “showboating” to his more recent efforts to be “more respectful of conventions.”

I Do Think of Argument as a Story

Bart initially resisted both collaborative writing center pedagogy and labeling himself a creative writer. In college, he considered himself a successful academic writer, one who “knew the rules to the extent that I could break them.” Before his first writing tutor training class, he “resisted” collaborative writing where he thought “all writing is good writing” and resisted specific writing center theorists saying, “I don’t like all this hippie stuff.” In terms of his creative writing, he saw himself failing to meet his goals. “I wouldn’t take a creative writing class if you paid me,” he said. “It feels like you’re playing with shadows.”

He underwent a gradual transformation through working with tutees and examining the connections between the different aspects of his literacy background. In one memorable writing center session, a tutee brought in critiques for a poetry workshop where she wanted to “actually help” the other students in her class, as opposed to focusing on meeting the goals of the assignment. Of this “beautiful” moment he said, “It really got me talking about the things in the writing center which I don’t often

talk about.” Through similar moments, he became “converted” to collaborative writing, “more respectful of conventions,” and soon considered writing tutoring as one of the most important parts of his identity. More recently, he further explored the connections between reading fiction, his role as a historian, and writing creative non-fiction. Often the dividing lines between those three experiences become blurred. “I don’t actually think my identity as a creative writer is all that much tied to the blog post thing,” he said. “I think the most creative thing is my identity as a historian. The more I think about it, the most creative thing I do is my academic writing.” He provided the example of a recent assignment that “wasn’t what the professor wanted” but rather “a chronology” that best fit his idea. Today, he “reluctantly” sees himself as a creative writer because “it happens frequently enough” but in his historical writing, he does “think of argument as a story.”

Bart’s vignette centers around the perception that creative writing is impractical, or “playing with shadows,” in tension with his experiences where it allows him to reflect on writing in new ways. In his interview I am struck by the conflict between the ways he described working with tutees on assignments, such as discussing how poetry could be more impactful with a tutee’s poetry critiques, yet his lingering desires to have his writing break from the evidence support model of academic writing. Even though he

hesitates to align himself with other creative writers, he does see how it does help him consider a writer's intentions and narrative arcs.

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Hunter

Hunter is an applied economics master's student and creative non-fiction writer. She has worked as a writing tutor since college, published both creative non-fiction and academic pieces, and now writes as part of the Writers of Instagram online community. She also describes herself as "jaded" and "cynical" about her academic writing, which she sees as following social scientific rather than narrative elements. Throughout her interview she describes searching for the emotions underlying writing.

I Remembered the Joy of Writing

Hunter knew she liked writing at an early age, but she said, "I never considered myself a valid writer. I remember thinking X and Y are writers, but not me." It wasn't until she took a creative non-fiction class in college that she told herself, "You can take a class in this. You're allowed."

As a result of her mindset change, she now searches for ways to rediscover the "joy in writing" in her academic work and to impart it to tutees in the writing center. She turns to writing short creative non-fiction pieces as "an emotional release." However, it is not always an emotionally

validating process. There was one piece that “was rough though because it was at a time in my life which followed the creative non-fiction saying: ‘you don’t want to let your story drag you around on the page.’” She also names practical considerations that limit her ability to write creative non-fiction including time, money, and energy. In the writing center, she searches out ways to improve her own writing to “give back to others.” With tutees working on personal statements, she brings in writing exercises she learned through writing creative non-fiction—including focusing on “voice and emotions.” However, she does not see herself applying her experiences writing creative non-fiction to her “short, pithy, and applied” academic writing. She compares her recent research on “methane bio digesters” to “writing as a formula” with a lot of “should not” conventions that “constrict” her ability to focus on emotional and narrative elements. Hunter continues to look for ways to apply her passion for writing to her academic writing.

Hunter enjoys some forms of writing more than others. She enjoys writing creative non-fiction and working with tutees on personal statements yet does not have the same level of excitement with her academic writing. At the same time, she names the forces that influence her decision to pause her creative non-fiction writing to focus on her academic writing. Throughout her interview, she tells me she can get to know tutees through their personal statements, which allows her to modify sessions for them.

However, she has a harder time recognizing narrative and emotional elements in her own academic writing. During the focus group she said a professor told her to use a specific phrase with her analysis and named other writing conventions in her field she considered at odds with her creative non-fiction writing. She continued to say that she felt her academic writing focused on presenting facts and evidence in dry language that felt methodical rather than emotional or personal.

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Haun

Haun is a poet and English master's student who previously tutored with the university's undergraduate writing center. However, he has an uneasy identification with other academic writers and poets noting, "I tend to lean toward being ironically anti-academic" and he no longer shares his poetry because, "It didn't feel like I had anything interesting to say." At the same time, he recognizes poetry and academic writing are large parts of how he developed as a writer. After graduation, he plans to return to farm apprenticeships and local activism.

You Write Best with Your Hands in the Dirt

Haun had early exposure to creative writing. He recited a poem he wrote on a children's TV show, practiced writing fiction and poetry, and ran poetry slams in college. He described his early writing history as, "writing has come pretty naturally to me in terms of traditional academic

success. I've always gotten A's on papers and all that jazz. Not to say I haven't developed as a writer, but it's always been in a context of success." However, he has since stopped performing poetry. "Then I just stopped digging it and I had less time anyway," he said. "It felt like poetry became this thing where if you're not providing stunning commentary on a social justice issue or representing a marginalized identity it's not worth it." In his mind, poetry and creative writing became writing removed from "real experiences."

He has since explored how assumptions shape perceptions about writers and writing centers. He uses his gender identity as a jumping off point for male-identified tutees to "see someone who they thought was on their team" point out "the limitations that go into the culture of masculinity." Within the writing center, he names two pivotal moments where tutees challenged his assumptions. In one, a tutee brought in poems for a poetry workshop. "He gave me these suggestions but no concrete task. Notably it was lacking that sense of frustration and desperation that lurks behind a lot of tutoring sessions," he said. In the other, he discovered a tutee "looked tired" in part because she was a single mother, which allowed him to reflect on "all the other ways people are getting on." He searches out writing experiences that combine elements of creative writing with tangible experiences. At one point, he names his role as a writer for the student newspaper as "a creative act in terms of what you choose to

put in the interview. I guess I wasn't making stuff up in that sense of creative. It was more emphasizing and maintaining the general truthiness if not the actual truth." He desires to return to farming to link his writing to tangible experiences. He shares a journal entry: "Reminder for future self: you write best with your hands in the dirt, sweating, working outside."

Haun focuses on questions of how personal identities shape writing. He sees himself as a poet yet is unsure how to navigate his identity with the perception that poets need to represent underrepresented identities or experiences to be practical. In the writing center, he consciously plays with ways he can focus on identities to challenge assumptions about writing. He saw that even though one tutee had a shared identity as a tired college student, she was impacted by a different set of experiences that impacted her academic writing. However, he views creative writing as something that was central to his writing development, but that needs to be attached to pragmatic experiences, such as framing or representing facts or identities.

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Fox

Fox is an English master's student and fiction writer. He came to graduate school after a ten-year hiatus from academia, during which time he published fiction and

poetry while working as a textbook copy writer. He won two writing awards from the English department and was unsure if he would apply to literary studies Ph.D. programs. Over the summer, he had plans to start drafting a novel.

That's Comforting

Fox started writing fiction in college. He taught himself to write through imitating other writers, yet each story was connected to his psychological state to “see if I was a failure.” Around the same time, he worked at a community college writing center that he compared to acting as an exam proctor or detention monitor. Even though he saw the occasional self-motivated tutee, he described his first tutoring experience as having a “power dynamic” and filled with “animosity.”

Throughout the years, he has learned to separate writing from other parts of his identity. “I wanted to use writing as an ejector seat for my life with the idea that if I’d get published it would somehow erase my past,” he said. “The different identity I’ve come to is that I can do lots of different things. I can be a good husband. I can be an academic if I choose. Your job is not who you are.” After a tutoring class, he encourages tutees not to feel too satisfied with their writing, such as focusing on “nuts and bolts” and “the logical order of things” with a tutee working on a social narrative. However, he also realizes writing has deadlines and “there always has to be a reason” to write. He compares writing and writing tutoring to other activities that require patience including driving,

investigating a crime scene, fishing, and yoga. He frames writing tutoring as writers helping one another. “The idea is that we talk to people and we can help them feel not that alone,” he said. “This is a road that you’re driving on but I’m here and I can see where you’re going. We have GPS. If you’re lost, we can bring you back around. That’s comforting. I like offering comfort to people. There’s a comfort I feel being there and offering something positive.”

Fox’s interview hinges on his ego and perception of himself as a writer. He shifted away from basing his identity on his writing abilities and into making room for multiple other identities, which put less pressure on him to use writing as the only measure of his self-worth. He has since envisioned writing as a process of creation that matters more than the final evaluated product and allows him to gain experiences to share with others. However, he does see creative writing focusing on individuals and emotions more so than facts, logic, and deadlines.

All five subjects describe using creative writing as an on-going process of negotiation. None of them, with the exception of Alisa who views creative writing as a tool she can choose to use in specific ways, feel satisfied with the ways creative writing impacts their academic writing and writing tutoring. Bart sees himself as a writer who follows conventions yet also seeks out thought-provoking narratives. Hunter describes herself as frustrated with her economics program and wonders if she will be able to see

narrative and emotional elements in quantitative and applied forms of writing. Haun sees his personal identities as incompatible with writing poetry. Fox does not have a firm definition of creative or academic writing but does see academic writing focusing more on writing craft and relaying facts. And yet, despite their range of experiences they are also able to describe creative writing in similar ways and to use those experiences on the margins of creative and academic writing in their own writing lives.

CHAPTER 2: Naming Creative Writing: Negotiating Expectations with Reality

“Oh I forgot to tell you. I also worked at *The Cynic*, the university’s student newspaper, in college. I don’t know why I didn’t think of that as creative writing because it totally was,” Haun added to his story of himself as a creative writer. A minute later he included a caveat. At the newspaper, he was concerned “with if not the absolute truth then the general truthiness” that made writing newspaper features less creative writing-like than poetry. It was this moment, and others like it, where my inner emerging expert who had a nice dividing line between creative and academic writing frowned. My first instinct was to eliminate those moments of disruption. I could focus creative writing exclusively on the literary genres and workshop pedagogy. I could ignore those more nuanced stories that required me to revisit theories of creativity in writing. But I remembered the words of my mentor professor, her work on “sideshadowing” (see Welch 1999, 120–22), and her reminder that I was speaking on behalf of my subjects. I would be untrue to them and my intentions for this project if I cut out the parts that required work, time in data bases, and messy conversations with my subjects, professors, and myself.

In the previous sections, I introduced the academic definition of creative writing formed around the assumption that only certain aspects of writing can be taught and therefore creative writing remains different from other forms of academic writing. From there, I represented my interviews with five writing tutors who self-identified as creative writers as vignettes. In this section, I return to scholarship that addresses the influence of an academic definition of creative writing, or writing in the literary genres and writing for

artistic purposes, and expand on those moments in my interviews I alluded to in the vignettes to explore stages of identification as a creative writer and creative writing-like features.

A generation of composition scholars grapple with how to place creative writing in relation to other forms of academic writing. On the one hand, the literary texts creative writing seeks to produce are revered in popular culture and studied in literary studies classrooms. Creative writing programs and classes are often popular and attract a range of students that may not otherwise take a composition, literary studies, or critical theory class. However, many inside those programs feel a tension between the ways they were taught to write through dialogues with professors and peers and the ways they later teach through a focus on writing's contextual processes.

Previous studies have approached the creative writing question from a number of personal and scholarly angles. Ron McFarland's "An Apologia of Creative Writing" in *College English* is often regarded as the first high-profile call from the past 25 years to reconsider the relationship between those who teach writing poetry to those who teach required first-year writing and other academic writing classes. McFarland writes: "Certain universals work with nearly all kinds of writing, from freshman composition to fashioning a villanelle. We regard writing as a process. [...] As with composition classes, I encourage students to move through drafts, to revise" (1993, 34). McFarland notes that even though he teaches poetry, his pedagogical practices are not distinguishable from those in composition. Creative writing has similarities to "nearly all kinds of writing" but is perceived as other.

After McFarland, others call to cross the lines. Composition scholars reference their creative writing experiences, cite other creative writers, or creative writing publications.¹ Some even include examples of their creative writing in their scholarship.² In one influential call, Bishop names the assumption about writing in a literary genre many students develop. Creative writing students “quickly learn that the most valuable texts are puzzles; they learn to solve puzzles in literature classes, and they come to creative writing hoping to learn puzzle construction, to escape to a garret and reappear hours later with a soon-to-be-acknowledged masterpiece” (1993a, 126). Thankfully, Bishop and others note that naming the daily conditions that inform writing, as well as modeling revision, help dissolve the popular myth of writing in a “garret” and into the realistic experience of writing as informed by multiple perspectives. Tim Mayers too counters this perception of writing as the result of an isolated genius, arguing those who teach writing “should try to help students discover that meanings can be made to fit words, not just the other way around” (1999, 87).

Although those calls to counter images of solitary genius writers appear to have peaked in the 1990s, there are recent examples of examining creative writing’s influence in different higher educational settings. Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice introduce the 2009 *College English* creative writing special calling for scholars to find ways to

¹ For touchstone works from this era of compositionists and creative writers see: Bishop *Released into Language* (1990); Bishop “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing” (1993); Bishop and Ostrom *Colors of a Different Horse* (1994); Bizzaro *Responding to Student Poems* (1993); Cain “Inquiring into the Nexus of Composition Studies and Creative Writing” (1999).

² For examples of compositionists including their fiction or poetry in their scholarship see Cain’s *Revisioning Writer’s Talk* which includes two short stories “Shelter” and “Bridge of Flowers, Bridge of Iron” (1995, 55–68, 72–83) and Bishop’s “Places to Stand” which includes the poem “Othering” (1999, 15–16) and “Against the Odds” which includes “My Convention Poem” (2001, 332–332). Note Bizzaro’s elegy for Bishop in the 2009 *College English* creative writing special issue includes her poem “Early Morning Muse” (2009, 268).

adapt teaching creative writing in the face of changing technologies (2009, 213–14). David Starkey introduces the 2014 *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* noting writer/teachers continue to question the applications of creative writing as two-year colleges focus on vocational skills (2014, 125). The current generation of composition scholars expands on the work of those in the ‘90s through naming examples of how to further cross the lines between creative writing and other forms of writing through reflecting on their experiences, drawing on critical theory, and naming classroom practices such as allowing students to pick which genres they learn to write, or creating a hybrid composition and creative writing classroom (see Sullivan 2015; Sumpter 2016).

Across the board, these scholars from the ‘90s through today call for blurring the boundaries between different branches of literacy practices. Doug Hesse, in response to calls put forth by compositionists in the ‘90s and as a response to the trend where creative writing attracts a growing number of students, suggests composition and creative writing “would do better by keeping more open borders, if not sharing a departmental house then at least being friendly neighbors with fenceless backyards” (2010, 43). Yet Hesse’s recommendation, and others like it, to include the occasional creative project in a composition class keeps the literary genres regulated to their own yard, with only the loose concept of creativity invited inside the composition house. In other words, those genres central to an academic definition of creative writing remain the domain of creative writing workshops and apart from other writing classrooms. Bishop writes “‘creative’ is already in the composition classroom,” (2003, 273) but those literary *genres* may not yet be but rather continue to straddle the lines between academia and popular culture.

To return to those uneasy negotiations, my subjects also reference creative writing's uneasy place as both inside and outside of academia. Some, including Haun, Hunter, and myself, took creative writing workshops in college. To speak of my own experience, taking fiction workshops allowed me to read contemporary writers and share my work. Thinking of writing a short story in terms of building tension through John Barth's "Incremental Perturbations" (1999) allowed me to transform ideas into recognizable narratives. Yet others did not come to creative writing through workshop classrooms. Fox learned how to write fiction and poetry through imitating other writers. In his case, creative writing was something he learned through doing, through teaching himself how to use mentor texts, rather than through a classroom and theory. These subjects, Fox, Bart, and Alisa, may not have learned creative writing in an academic setting and yet nonetheless creative writing continues to be intertwined with their academic writing lives.

This insider and outsider perception of creative writing, as influenced by academia but not limited to it, arose as one central theme during the focus group. The conversation covered creative writing as personal writing, struggles to keep writing in graduate school, and creative writing as an important part of the intellectual culture of the university. One turning point arose when I brought up being told by a creative writing professor to change my story's point of view. In response, I noticed the conversation shifted in a way that made creative writing sound more like composition. My subjects brought up audience and writing requirements. I heard terms such as "conventions," "revision," and "writing as a process." Yet later, when the conversation turned to the

subjects describing their recent creative writing, it sounded removed from academia with less composition-like considerations. Creative writing for a class was like composition, but outside of a classroom environment it was more open for debate. Audiences and rhetorical situations become less defined. This led me to believe creative writing workshop classrooms may be one site of creative writing but more are outside the academy's walls.

What Does It Mean to be a Creative Writer?

In "The MFA Graduate as Composition Instructor: A Self Analysis," David Starkey reflects on his position as a poet turned composition teacher. He describes his uneasy road from leaving a corporate job to a poetry MFA degree and eventually teaching composition. He reflects on the innocence lost upon realizing he was unsuccessful in teaching a required first-year writing course as a MFA style poetry workshop writing, "Quite simply, I was unprepared for the job I thought I'd been trained to do" (1994, 251). Kimberly Andrews writing in *College English* in 2009 sounds eerily reminiscent of Starkey as she describes a moment when she was told by an English department administrator she would not need to take a critical theory class as a creative writer. "I wondered what it was, exactly, to *be* a poet with a vested interest in an academic life." Andrews continues, "Cynically, I thought of university-affiliated [creative]writers as a hopelessly egocentric lot, unwilling to devote time to anything not in service to their free creativity" (2009, 245). Starkey and Andrews are in the company of countless others who experience creative writing in the academy as writing divorced from other practices, as "free creativity" rather than a tangible skill set. This perception of

the “hopelessly egocentric” continues to inform the cultural baggage attached to identifying as a creative writer within an academic setting.

I situate my five subjects, all of whom write literary genres and have varying degrees of identification to the creative writer label, within the messy cross roads of composition and creative writing. All confront the stigma of creative writing as an anti-academic art. What I see is that even though they share no uniform agreement on what creative writing is, or what such experiences and identities entail, there are some patterns that unite their stories. Creativity may mean anything goes but creative writing, and notions of writing creatively, are limited by writing realities including genre, disciplinary, and audience expectations.

There are key differences between images of creative writers and personal experiences. My five subjects identify as creative writers but have differing relationships to its connotations. In the ‘90s, Bishop and her generation of compositionists and creative writers focus on creative writing as an act. They are creative writers because they write fiction, poetry, etc. Likewise, my subjects all write literary genres, and yet an identification with creative writing’s associations are far from agreed upon. Bart and Haun describe their perceptions of creative writers in order to distance themselves from those negative notions of creative writing as impractical. In contrast, Fox merges his academic and creative writing identities together but describes a need to also remember his personal and professional identities. As a third form of identification, Hunter describes the moment she gave herself permission to call herself a writer and therefore take a creative non-fiction workshop.

“I gave myself permission. ‘You can call yourself a writer.’ Then I took the class,” Hunter said when describing her creative writing background. What sticks out is the middle sentence, the one where she refers to her internal monologue in giving herself permission to call herself a writer and then she was able to take a creative non-fiction workshop. One underlying assumption in her story is that creative writing is an identity that needs to be claimed and claimed with agency prior to the act of writing. The identity came first and then the writing. In Hunter’s story, creative writing is different from required writing classes. This one requires permission from the self. This one requires a new identity marker.

I’m reminded of Bishop writing in “Suddenly Sexy: Creative NonFiction Rear-ends Composition” of the debates in English departments over considering students as writers. Bishop takes a no excuses approach calling anyone who writes a writer and places the emphasis away from the identity and onto the writing process (2003, 262). I’m reminded of my own permission-granting mantra of the past year, “I give myself permission to be imperfect.” I no longer questioned if I was a good writer, or its implications, but considered myself a writing student as a way to question the writing process, apply for conferences, and pause my inner critic to put words on the page. My permission granting, like Hunter’s, allowed me to knock on doors, to give it a try, to laugh off moments that felt like failures, and stumble into enjoying the writing process. I noticed a shift away from focusing on external validation, such as grades or publication, and into telling one of my professors after turning in a paper, “I’m not sure how it turned out but I enjoyed working on it.”

Hunter and I are not alone in giving ourselves permission to consider ourselves writers before further developing our processes. Throughout her scholarship, Bishop shares her uneven road into academic writing, from flunking her dissertation exams, teaching at a community college, and publishing in no-name journals (see 1990a; 2001). Those frustrating moments became a part of her process that lead her to later write and edit groundbreaking academic work. Fiction writers have similar stories. In one interview, Dorothy Alison describes the ten-year process it took her to write her first novel after she considered herself a storyteller (Love-Denman 2005, 84). Jamaica Kincaid writes, “I just decided that I wanted to write. That I was a writer. [...] I seemed unable to do anything else. So I went to New York and said, ‘I’m a writer’” (Love-Denman 2005, 275). I’m not surprised that for some of us, especially as women or others with identities that differ from popular images of writers, the labeling and the conceptual shift away from the imagined ideal—the successful author, the genius student, the groundbreaking academic—and into a more tangible reality is what allows us to write.

What Are the Benefits of Creative Writing?

Recently, Eli Goldblatt attempted to reclaim composition’s history of expressivism and the work of Bishop, Cain, and other influential writer/teachers in the ‘90s who called for blurring the boundaries between creative writing and composition. Goldblatt acknowledges the reluctance to align theories of writing, or one’s self as a writer, to notions of writing as individual expression or more provocative yet, writing as therapy. Goldblatt argues this divisive reaction came to be in part because of the associations such notions have to creative writing which focus on “aesthetic achievement

rather than self-actualization” (2017, 447). Yet at the same time “when we focus so much on professional and theoretical understandings of writing instruction [...] we can forget the importance of two impulses that compel writers: the desire to speak out of your most intimate experiences and to connect with communities in need” (2017, 442). Goldblatt named two additional “impulses” for writing, creative, academic, or otherwise, which crept up again and again in my interviews.

There is a laundry list in scholarship naming what creative writing is not. Throughout composition scholarship creative writing is described as not academic, socially informed, or practical. Therefore, I depart from the tactic of naming creative writing in terms of a lack but return to those moments where my subjects name what creative writing is or can be, those moments in which creative writing isn’t an agreed upon point but rather a series of characteristics. In the following section, I depart from scholarly definitions to focus on key themes that emerged from my interview subjects’ definitions of creative writing. Even though I’ll continue to use the first person, the creative writing features are themes my interview subjects described in their interviews.

Creative writing, or the motivation to write in creative genres, is individual. To return to Goldblatt’s “impulses,” writers have reasons for putting words on the page beyond the external motivations of grades, access, or publication. It becomes the shift away from: Will this make the grade? And into: What do I want to say? Each of my subjects described wanting to share some aspect of themselves with an audience through their creative writing. Haun made writers sharing their identities central to his definition of creative writing. For him, creative writing is an opportunity to share marginalized

voices, to break stereotypes, and connect through experiences. Alisa's definition focused on the textual features that indicate the presence of a writer. Her definition contrasted creative writing with scientific writing. In her scientific writing, her advisors told her to "remove any evidence of a human being." But in creative writing she can include first person pronouns, adjectives, and the active voice. Creative writing allows her to put herself back into her writing on the textual level. Within this theme of creative writing as individual, I see connections to ethos and a writer's subjectivity. I see a focus on who is doing the writing and their experiences throughout composition's focus on writer identities and social justice. I hear a return to writing as a form of self-expression.

Creative writing is emotional. Hunter explained, "in creative fiction we talk a lot about being in a place where a story doesn't drag you around on the page." The story in this case isn't simply a process but an abuser causing its writer as victim harm. Her creative non-fiction anecdote is emotional where I cringe for writers who feel dragged around by their out of control stories. The writer's self-perception matters. Are they the victims of their stories or active agents able to work with them? Fox also highlighted the importance of mental states. He brought up moments in his own writing where he felt he wasn't emotionally ready to write a story or had to "work on himself as a person" before being able to write. I see his observation connecting creative writing to psychoanalytic theory, especially Freud and Jung's unconscious narratives, and the creative writing lore to write what scares you. I hear pathos, where my subjects' voice inflections changed when describing writing stories, where they said, "Oh I loved this," or "I found that frustrating," throughout their descriptions of creative writing.

Finally, creative writing is a narrative. Bart compared creative writing and academic writing to narratives and arguments. He explained a narrative as something which “transports” a reader into a new experience. Fox too described creative writing as a narrative. In his job as a textbook copywriter he translated facts into “a story that hopefully wouldn’t put readers to sleep.” Even in the context of what he considers a less creative writing-like rhetorical situation, there is a focus on narrative, on engaging an audience, rather than relaying facts. Narratives are entertaining. Narratives allow for an escape into different perspectives and situations.

Here I add in a third space to allow for those considerations which include both the features of the more and less creative writing-like forms of writing. There is not an even split between more creative and less creative writing-like characteristics. Many compositionists note that just because something is labeled creative writing, doesn’t mean it incorporates a theory of creativity, as seen in “the workshop effect” where literary writing turns predictable, dry, and formulaic.³ Considering the creative writing spectrum with a third space allows for the overlap and potential for creative and academic writing to contain both logical and emotional qualities, to be driven by individual and disciplinary expectations, and to follow a narrative but also include facts. In one example of this third space conception, Alisa described scientific writing in narrative terms

³ Patrick Bizzaro describes, “the workshop-writing phenomenon no doubt works vertically, where sameness is passed from teacher to student who, in turn, becomes a teacher who passes certain literary biases to yet another generation of students” (2004, 305). Judith Harris draws on poetry and psychoanalytic theories as a way to call for breaking the predictable nature of academic creative writing noting, “the teaching of both composition and creative writing would benefit from focusing less exclusively on the writing process and products and more on the writing subject” (2001, 201). For other examples of the ways other compositionists address “the workshop effect,” see Kelly Ritter’s “Professional Writers/Writing Professionals: Revamping Teacher Training in Creative Writing Ph.D. Programs” (2001) and Danielle Iamarino’s “Codifying the Creative Self: Conflicts of Theory and Content in Creative Writing” (2015).

referencing Jeffery McDonnell's article in *Science* (2017) comparing scientific writing to directing a movie. Bart noted his favorite academic writing is able to be factually correct, logically sound, and also contain an engaging story. From throughout my interviews with five tutors with creative writing experiences and identities, creative writing is both a writer making his or her internal desires work with external factors such as the practical realities of negotiating creating something new in an established format. Creative writing is not anything goes or reinventing the wheel. It is making the wheel roll to new places.

While I notice differing definitions of creative writing, I notice elements which resonate across individual interviews. Creative writing is an individual writer's voice, emotional expression, and a narrative. I also notice these three elements can be applied to all forms of writing, and not just the literary genres associated with an academic definition of creative writing, such as when Alisa described scientific writing as a narrative saying, "the data tells the story." I see a focus on emotions, or pathos, as one of the key features in classical rhetoric, the often unnamed motivating factor which helps writers move from limitless possibilities and into the limited available options. I see an individual's voice as ethos, or subjectivity, and another key component of classical rhetoric and contemporary social science. As Fox said, "The most interesting thing about the writing is the writer."

I see that far from the notion that creative writing means anything goes, or that creative writing is *only* fiction, poetry, drama, and creative non-fiction, creative writing and theories of creativity all reinforce the writing realities, including audience expectations, standards, and deadlines. Creative writing involves individuals negotiating

their writing projects, writing experiences, and personal goals. It is also recognized along a continuum of more and less creative writing-like features with an overlapping third space, blending narrative and logic, nuts and bolts with flow. With those seemingly paradoxical framings in mind, a scientific paper can be a who-done-it style mystery, a journalist can experiment with a creative interpretation of an interview, and I can include a denouement in a literary studies paper.

This fluid definition of creative writing also influences sessions in the writing center. In the next chapter I expand on the ways in which my five interview subjects repress their identities as creative writers in favor of focusing on logic and conventions but can also choose to draw on their creative writing experiences to work with a tutee's goals and reflect on writing's theoretical questions.

CHAPTER 3: Getting Creative in the Writing Center

Creative writing isn't in the writing center. That was my first reaction when I reviewed my interview recordings over the summer. During the focus group, Alisa and Haun said they never considered bringing their fiction to the writing center and felt it would be unethical to do so. Only Haun had an example of a tutee bringing in poetry to a writing center appointment. But at those moments when I asked each subject in his or her individual interview to describe a moment of drawing on creative writing in the writing center, all had stories to tell. They did not stick to the tidy academic definition of creative writing, but had descriptions of focusing on, drawing on, or reflection on creative writing's features with tutees. Creative writing may not be in the writing center, but its influence is.

In the previous chapter, I explored the ways my interview subjects, writing tutors who self-identify as creative writers, described their relationships to creative writing and their definitions of creative writing's features. From across their interviews, they described creative writing in ways that initially appear to run counter to academic writing. Creative writing requires permission and a label that is different from that of an academic writer. The subjects also characterized creative writing as individual, narrative, and emotional.

With that working definition of creative writing in mind, I now explore three instances of creative writing's application in the writing center. In this chapter, I question how a personal perception of creative writing as individual, narrative, and emotional impacts discussions with tutees about academic writing. I find creative writing can be

repressed in favor of focusing on logic, disciplinarily, or technical content, but more importantly, it can be drawn on as a way to negotiate tutor and tutee goals and for tutors to reflect on unfamiliar writing questions as they learn from their tutees.

In the peer tutoring model, student writers who visit the writing center, the tutees, discuss their writing with another student writer. Kenneth Bruffee in “Peer Tutoring and The Conversation of Mankind” (1995) writes students are intimidated by writing professionals but writing centers serve as a place apart from the baggage of grades and demonstrating competency. Tutees can share confusion, ideas, and processes to other students, their peer tutors. The peer tutoring model allows writing centers to function as spaces to encourage student writers and their needs as opposed to focusing on the requirements of the assignment, class, or professor. Another landmark essay from this era, Stephan North’s “The Idea of a Writing Center” (1984), likewise focuses on writing centers as spaces not concerned with particular writing features but rather North writes: “If writing centers are going to finally be accepted, surely they must be accepted on their own terms, as places whose primary responsibility, whose only reason for being, is to talk to writers” (1984, 446). These aims of a talk-based tutoring model as a place apart from classroom instruction continue to be the foundation peer tutoring writing centers are built upon.

The graduate writing center was in its second year of operation and without a permanent physical space at the time I conducted my interviews. It consisted of a cubicle in the library basement and a room in the basement of the administrative building. It employed approximately ten peer tutors, graduate students studying humanities, social

sciences, and STEM fields. The tutors were available by appointment and helped run workshops and retreats. All the tutors had taken classes and workshops with a focus on writing center theories. And yet just because my interview subjects worked in the same writing center and had the shared identity as a creative writer does not mean they combined of those experiences in the same ways.

It Was Already Creative

Fox reflected on a past experience working with a student in the undergraduate writing center on a social narrative assignment for the university's required first-year writing class. At this point in his interview, I noticed his definition of creative and academic writing blurred together to the point where I pushed him to differentiate them. When I asked him about a time when he decided *not* to draw on creative writing in the writing center, I predicted he would struggle to name an example. Instead, he told me:

So what I did was instead of emphasizing what a great creative writer he [the tutee] was I stayed away from that. We worked the nuts and bolts and asked more of him in that way. Yes, more of the craft side but more of, "Hey I don't understand what you're saying here." It sounds good, but what are you talking about? Emphasizing clarity. It's not just an abstract emotional feeling. It's being more hard on him. This happened, then this happened, but what happened here? It seems like you skipped something. and not emphasizing as much what a good job he did. I got the sense that this person was pretty satisfied with what he was doing. I didn't want to

feed into that, not that that's a bad thing, but I wanted to ask more of him-- maybe feel less satisfied. Maybe helping visualize "you could do this." Or when you give dialogue to someone you could do it like this. Ok let me see if I follow the logic in your sentences—what you're saying happened when you said it happened. What are you emphasizing? It was more nuts and bolts less about helping visualize something. He'd already done it, he'd already visualized that.

Fox considered "nuts and bolts," or logic and other elements of writing craft, apart from creative writing. Those "nuts and bolts" focused on possibilities in dialogue, changing the sequence of events within the narrative, and focusing on those elements where Fox could make the tutee "less satisfied" with his writing.

My first reaction is to identify with Fox, yet upon reflection there is something troubling beneath the surface. I recognize myself as a writing tutor where I also have shifted the focus of a session on to what I deemed important. Often it was out of frustration, where the tutee didn't share ideas of what he or she wanted to work on, so I named my recommendations. As a writing teacher, I'm glad someone took the time to help the tutee place his ideas within the expectations of the assignment. During the interview, I nodded in agreement with Fox's desire to help the tutee feel less satisfied with his writing. But after listening to the story, I return to a troubling feeling where the teacher part of me agrees with Fox's actions but the tutor in me resists. If I circle back to foundational writing center theories, writing centers don't replicate the function of writing classrooms and nor should they. Furthermore, Fox's story views creative writing

as a fixed concept where the tutee “had already done it” and it was up to Fox as the tutor to tell the tutee how to make his draft meet assumed academic expectations.

Fox’s story stems from his experiences as a writer but does not work with his tutee’s goals, or provide the scaffolding for his tutee to recognize patterns in his own writing. Fox has an impressive list of publications, awards, and writing experiences. However, I want to know more about his tutee as a writer. What were the ideas he wanted to share and had yet to make their way on to the page? What was he feeling insecure about moving into his next draft? What were some strategies that could help him feel more confident? How could Fox help the tutee feel more confident about his writing and start to lay the foundation for the tutee to focus on the logical “nuts and bolts” of his writing?

This moment, and others like it, disguise the tendency to appropriate and silence differences or non-normative features in writing. I assume the tutee’s draft was not recognizable as following the conventions of a social narrative. It had ideas, characters, and visual descriptions of a scene. However, it did not have a logical or recognizable plot structure. Fox recognized that the draft didn’t appear to connect ideas together, yet telling the tutee what to focus on did not provide him with the tools to recognize the need for a logical flow on his own. Gardner and Ramsey in “The Polyvalent Mission of Writing Centers”(2005), and writing center theorists who call for tutors to function more as teachers than peers would agree with Fox’s actions. Yet Bruffee, North, and a host of later theorists make it clear that although such justifications are tempting, a tutor’s goal is to provide the scaffolding for tutees to recognize their writing as opposed to being

dependent on others. Such a mode of tutoring slides into the myth of the writer, of Hemmingway in Paris or Virginia Woolf in her room of one's own, with the tutor fitting into the master/apprentice-do-this style of writing instruction that compositionists think creative writing replicates.

Mary Ann Cain writes that such a perception of creative writing creates an “elitist view,” which creates “a strict separation between being and doing, imagination and critical thinking” (2009, 230). Nancy Grimm too critiques the ways tutors replicate privileged views of academic writing that separate writing and literacy processes from one another. She writes, “without authentic listening, the very programs designed to address social inequality inadvertently reproduce it” (1998, 16). Through deciding what to focus on rather than listening to the tutee, and creating a further division between the tutee's feeling of satisfaction and action of bringing his draft to the writing center, Fox fell into the trap of ignoring the tutee in favor of writing instruction rather than writing collaboration.

I recognize Fox's story of a moment when he chose not to draw on creative writing as mirroring my own anxieties about my different roles as a writer, tutor, and writing teacher. I too have named my own goals for a tutee to cut down on time, ease anxiety, and push him or her into new intellectual territory. At the same time, I recognize that as a writer I resist prompts and one-way conversations. But despite those justifications both Fox and I have, writing center scholarship focused on the ways personal identities impact writing reminds us to work with those differences between the

tutor and tutee, the professor and student, and draft and imagined ideal, as opposed to through them.

Recent writing center scholarship continues in the groundwork laid by Bruffee, North, and Grimm to question how writing centers can be spaces to speak back to, and challenge, dominant writing practices. Sarah Blazer and Jackie Grutsch McKinney highlight the ways stories, images, and perceptions of writing centers as inclusive spaces mask the conflicts that come to adapting to, mixing, or subverting academic discourse. Both acknowledge the importance of framing writing centers as safe spaces for writers to talk to each other yet also call on tutors to receive direction and on-going support from directors and other academic writers to embrace the challenges of unequal access to academic literacy practices (see Blazer 2015, 24–25; Grusch McKinney 2013, 84–87). Stacey Waite also questions the future of academic writing, through drawing on Judith Halberstam and other queer theorists, with the call to “look at ourselves *and* outside ourselves at the same time” (2015, 52 emphasis in the original). Although Waite’s call may appear to be a contradiction in terms, it is a reminder to consider the ways individuals operate within the context of a larger system, to consider the ways past experiences impact tutor and tutee interactions. Within the work of recent writing center theorists, I hear the lingering call to continue to probe the surface of oft-repeated stories and to seek ways to navigate differences in perspective.

How Can You Hook the Reader?

I've found focusing on moments of drawing on creative writing allows the creative writers/tutors I interviewed to name stories that dive beneath the surface of assumed writing center actions and to negotiate their perspectives alongside their tutees. At the end of *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, Jackie Grutsch McKinney calls for a "new story" of the actions that take place in writing centers "over a new center" (2013, 91). While, few scholars call for new models for writing centers, there is a call for more description and reflection into the actions that occur within them. With that in mind, I turn now to Alisa's story of drawing on creative writing with a tutee who wanted to focus on her introduction. Alisa began:

I remember one time there was a student who was writing a speech. And I was like, "oh I learned this technique in creative writing where you revise the length of your sentences to grab the reader because it could get so monotonous." So I started talking to the student and was like "you know you can vary your sentences." Because I knew this was going to be a speech it was like these long, long sentences as written down were perfectly fine but if you had to speak those out loud then it would be like a monotonous speed. So, I was talking about this technique and I mentioned to her a writer that she could maybe read to see how they interested her, more like thriller, a work of fiction because those are the ones that create that tension. And also that was one of the best sessions that I had, when

thinking of creative writing it is also just the changing of sentences. But it is also, “How can you hook the reader?” I even pulled out some TED Talks for the student so she could see how they started with something personal or even a small short story of a couple sentences. How can this be more creative so people can be enthralled?

Alisa’s story is an example of navigating a tutor and tutee’s goals in a single session. The tutee wanted to focus on her introduction, on ways to “hook the reader,” and Alisa wanted to help her imagine sharing her written words as a speech. This moment of sharing session goals is far from even. I notice in her story Alisa focuses on her goals for the tutee to break up her long sentences more so than the tutee’s goal to focus on her introduction. Yet in contrast to Fox’s story where he decided not to focus on developing a tutee’s imagination, Alisa encouraged her tutee to explore how different mentor texts, including Ted Talks and a piece of fiction, could influence her writing. Alisa presented options but all within the bounds of what the tutee wanted to focus on.

In Alisa’s story, creative writing is a resource to draw on. On a theoretical level her focus on the tutee’s introduction and building tension to capture a reader’s interest resonates with her definition of creative writing as creating emotion in another person. As such, on a more applied level, she used a technique for revising sentences and she named mentor texts that allow her and her tutee to consider examples of engaging an audience. I connect her story back to Bishop’s “Writers, Tutors, and Talk,” which praises creative writing MFA students for being effective tutors because rather than understanding writing only on a theoretical level, they have first-hand writing experiences to draw on

(1993b, 31). Creative writing allows Alisa to consider the layers that impact writing and provides her with experiences and resources to draw upon as she works to further a tutee's goals as well as expand into considering complementary goals for their session. But in following the peer tutoring model there is another mode of negotiation that allows tutors to learn from their tutees.

Talking About Things I Don't Often Talk About

The co-writers of *The Everyday Writing Center* draw upon Native American folklore to call for tutors to cultivate a boundary crossing Trickster mentality. They explain how Trickster figures, such as Coyote, create possibility out of assumptions and silences noting, "When we are able to pursue the broken silence rather than turn away from it in fear or shame, then we may begin both to participate more fully in the (re)negotiation of meaning" (Geller, et al. 2007, 19). Later, the co-writers devote chapters to finding those Trickster moments for tutors to deviate from routines to reflect on writing alongside their tutees. I heard a Trickster moment in Bart's story of drawing on creative writing where a tutee helped him imagine her motivation for writing beyond earning a grade or fulfilling the assignment. Here is his story of drawing on creative writing in the writing center.

She [the tutee] was a middle-aged Somali woman who was getting a bachelor's degree. She was in a poetry class as a writing requirement. She had to write poems and her class had written poems. They had to do a peer review kind of thing. She never

came in with her poetry. These responses were very obviously a small part of her grade and a small assignment, but she was so dead-set on providing useful feedback. It wasn't about doing the assignment right. Her writing and her English were in good enough order that she didn't need to have help writing so much as she said, "I want to help these people. I want to give them something about their poetry that will actually help them." I thought it was beautiful that she cared so deeply. This middle-aged woman from Somalia wanted to improve the poetry of these 18-year-old kids. It really got me into the territory of talking about things I don't often talk about. It was-- How can poetry be more impactful?-- which is frankly not something I spend a lot of time thinking about. It was a really interesting exercise to try and think about how a piece of writing made me feel. How did this make me feel and how I manipulate feeling through language?⁴

⁴ The three tutoring stories have been edited for length and clarity. In Bart's story, the tutee's name has been removed to protect her privacy.

I see his story speaking back to assumptions about the roles of tutors and tutees. His story placed him, the tutor, in the learner position. I focus on his sentence, “It really got me into the territory of talking about things I don’t often talk about.” His tutee pushed his assumptions and comfort level into unfamiliar terrain. Questions about how to make poetry more impactful or how a middle-aged Somali woman could help young American college students revise their poetry confronted both practical and theoretical considerations, which confront a host of assumptions that underlay writing in academic contexts. And yet he did not shy away, or shift the conversation, but rather traveled into the unfamiliar territory with his tutee. It was not *just* him helping his tutee with her assignments, but through their conversation she was helping him see writing in a new way, to talk about new aspects of writing, and imagine new motivations.

In the process, he revised his assumptions about why tutees visit the writing center. He refutes two common reasons tutees visit the writing center. The assignment was low stakes and “a small part of her grade.” She also had the English skills to fulfill the needs of the assignment. Instead, the tutee came to the writing center to brainstorm ways she could use her assignment to impact and motivate her audience, connecting her assignment to the assumption that words lead to action (see Cain 1999, 92). Bart’s decision to listen to his tutee steered their session into learning alongside her, connect talking in the writing center to actions and theoretical discussions about poetry’s practicality.

Bart’s story involved a tutee writing in a poetry workshop, but it also focuses on the creative writing features Bart used to define creative writing. Throughout his

interview, Bart resists any form of writing for its own sake, or writing that does not appear to have a practical value. He told me more than once that he resists performing “literary analysis” or talking about writing on a theoretical level, such as about how specific words in a draft shift a sentence’s meaning. His definition of creative writing focuses on narrative arcs and places the desires of the writer before the requirements of the genres, assignment, or audience. He drew on his personal definition of creative writing to focus on the goals of his tutee, and the learning opportunities she wanted, and as a result he entered into the theoretical writing questions he liked to avoid.

Writing center scholars also have moments of learning from their tutees. Rebecca Jackson’s “Resisting Institutional Narratives” traces the ways she learned about academic writing from her tutee. The tutee had failed a required writing test “by a very small margin” and due to university requirements, had to meet with Jackson for regular writing center appointments (2008, 25). In the process, Jackson and her tutee formed a friendship and Jackson learned about the factors that impacted her tutee’s writing, including working to support her family, not having a personal computer, and being a Hispanic woman on a white-majority campus. At one crucial moment, the tutee shared a poem she wrote. At first Jackson resisted the unfamiliar territory but later reflected her tutee sharing her poetry “challenges official institutional narratives about acknowledging authority, staying on task, laying claim to a writer’s identity, and working within approved genres” (2008, 34).

In Bart and Jackson’s stories, creative writing in the form of focusing on a tutee’s personal motivations allowed them to adopt the boundary crossing Trickster mindset to

enter into unfamiliar intellectual territory and learn from their tutees. Within those moments, the tutors and tutees united to confront limiting notions about academic writing. In Bart's case, the tutee had something to teach him, he listened, and her words changed how he thought about writing. Through conversing with a tutee, listening to her goals for an assignment that went beyond the requirements for her class, Bart asked those questions so central of creative writers. The session may have been temporarily uncomfortable, but as he later said, "it was beautiful."

My interview subjects did not tell stories of tutees bringing in fiction, poetry, drama, or creative non-fiction into the writing center. They told stories of how specific interactions with tutees and their assignments connected to their writing experiences and their personal definitions of creative writing as individual, emotional, or a narrative. I used Fox's story of not drawing on creative writing because he wanted the tutee to focus on event sequencing in his draft as an example of a tutor dictating the focus of a session. From there, I unpacked the ways in which such a tutoring move does not empower tutees to claim agency over their texts but instead places the tutor in the role of a teacher. I then shared the story of Alisa drawing on creative writing with a tutee working on a speech. Alisa used her experiences as a creative writer to co-negotiate goals for the session as well as name a technique and mentor texts she developed from her experiences as a creative writer. Finally, I reflected on Bart's story of drawing creative writing with a tutee working on poetry critiques. He noticed his tutee wanted to discuss ways to make her critiques meaningful for her classmates and he focused on her goals to reflect on writing alongside her.

Stories of drawing on creative writing in the writing center were hard to find during the interviews. There remains a lurking assumption that academic writing is concerned with conventions, logic, and facts which leave little space for those rich considerations that lead my interview subjects to describe as the reasons they enjoy writing. Fox's story of ignoring his experiences and identity as a creative writer in favor of focusing the tutee on the aims of the assignment is common place with the other interview subjects describing similar moments. But in those moments where they bring in themselves as creative writers, my interview subjects describe creative writing as a set of experiences, writing tools, and mode of reflection that allows them to fulfill the aims of writing center sessions as spaces for collaboration, for naming assumptions, and for subverting the notion that creative and academic writing are distinct.

CHAPTER 4: What I Like About Writing

Throughout this project I have engaged with scholarship that calls for crossing the lines between creative and academic writing, and that which considers the roles of a writing center. I then interviewed five writing tutors who self-identified as creative writers individually and collectively. I presented their stories of themselves as writers and writing tutors as short narratives to highlight the ways I interpreted their interviews as well as the central conflicts that underpinned their interviews. From there, I focused on their definitions and descriptions of creative writing and found their perceptions of creative writing are both more expansive than textbook definitions of creative writing yet more grounded than an open-ended definition of creativity. Rather their understandings of creative writing are recognized by a focus on narrative, individuality, and emotional expression. Next, I focused on three stories in the writing center where my interview subjects described repressing or drawing on those creative writing features in writing center sessions. By drawing on creative writing, they broke from the tendency of tutors taking over tutee texts, to negotiate a tutee's goals with those of the tutor, and to reflect on writing alongside a tutee. In this final section, I conclude by naming those considerations of academic writing and creative writing that arose in the individual interviews and focus group, as well as in my first-year writing classroom.

I started this project interested in the conversation calling for crossing the divide between creative and academic writing. Textbook definitions of creative writing focus on the literary genres, writing workshops, and writing's imaginative qualities. A generation of compositionists including Bishop, Cain, and Starkey note combining creative writing

with academic writing allows for an additional vocabulary and set of experiences to draw upon that allow for writing teachers to engage with their students as fellow writers, for compositionists to include their fiction or poetry in their scholarship, and for students to develop writing practices that last beyond a semester-long required writing class.

I became interested in writing centers as spaces apart from the power dynamic in classrooms or office hours, but as a place for writers to form a community with each other. Throughout college and graduate school those conversations in writing centers, from bringing in the underdeveloped sections of this project, to asking questions about how to have a draft match a professor's assignment description, allowed me to break from writing as an evaluated product. Many of my favorite writers have experiences as writing tutors and talk about writing as a way to learn from their community or as Hunter said during her interview, "I thought it would be cool to be able to work with students and to hone my own writing craft: build that skill set while giving back to others."

As I researched writing center missions, I kept circling back to observations that peer tutoring breaks from notions of writing in isolation and into notions of writing as an engagement with others. To return to foundational writing center theorists, North and Bruffee both describe writing centers as spaces for writers to talk to each other about writing and that process. Collaboration challenges privileged notions of writing as talent based. More recently, others including Grimm, Denny, and Boquet call for focusing on writing centers as spaces for justice, where writers provide the tools to challenge those privileged notions of writing that silence and appropriate particular voices. Rebecca Jackson's "Resisting Institutional Narratives" calls for tutors to listen to those moments

that break from assumptions about access to writing and to use their position within the academy to advocate for inclusive practices. McKinney's *Peripheral Visions For Writing Centers* then expands Jackson's call to name those advocacy activities, such as classroom visits, leading workshops, and meeting with faculty, which tutors and writing center directors participate in to continue to make writing accessible.

Throughout, I have struggled to place the call to blur creative and academic writing within the context of writing centers. At times those conversations felt far apart, like I chose to interview writing tutors because I found them central to my development as a writer, or because they were close to my set of writing experiences. However, in returning to writing center scholarship, writing centers and creative writing fit together in thought provoking ways. Bishop reflects on the actions of tutors in the writing center and writing collaborative poetry to conclude, "I've come to see that writing is taught best and learned best when we highlight drafting but also include healthy wallops of talk. This is where the idea of a writing center overlaps with the idea of a writing classroom. [...]" Such work can only occur with the support and help of writing peers allowing us to value the story that is on the tip of every writer's tongue" (1993b, 40). Condon et al devote a chapter of *The Everyday Writing Center* to calling on tutors to maintain an adaptable, open minded, creative Trickster mindset. Creative writing is often critiqued for not being socially informed, for replicating ideas of writing as talent based, or as focused only on writing's craft-based considerations. However, writing centers are one site where writing is self-consciously socially informed and critiqued for not focusing on writing as a craft. And yet, writing center textbooks and the trade publications including *The Writing Lab*

Newsletter and *The Dangling Modifier* focus on writing as a craft. Creative writing textbooks and interviews with creative writers contain recommendations to share writing with a reader and the importance of reading diverse texts. Creative writing and writing centers are two sides of the same coin wherein probing the surface they come to resemble each other.

Doug Hesse describes creative writing and academic writing as neighbors separated by a fence. Hesse calls for tearing down the division, yet other more recent scholars continue to describe the factors which continue to hold the fence in place (2010, 43). I see writing tutors as creative writers, or creative writers as writing tutors, as those who walk through the gate and talk to those neighbors on either side. I see them leaving the gate open behind them and offering others the opportunity to travel between the creative writing and composition yards. Experiences as both creative writers and writing tutors allow for practice mixing writing strategies and a vocabulary for working with interdisciplinary writers throughout their writing processes.

I turn now to examples of my interview subjects, writing tutors as creative writers, applying creative writing experiences, strategies, and vocabularies to walking in their academic writing yards. During the focus group I opened by asking how each person defined creative writing. Here are Alisa and Bart's responses.

Alisa: We have the idea of the writer spewing these amazing words and not doing anything after. The other thing that I think about is how creative writing brings in audience. I just need to publish my data, but who is going to read it? Who are you trying to convince that your

conclusions are valid? As a creative writer, a lot of people write for themselves but you're also trying to entertain or use a metaphor and you're thinking about who is going to read it.

Bart: It's collapsing the notion that creative writing is for the self and say scientific writing is for other people. In both of those cases writing is self-expression but it's also for an audience. Every writing task is a mix of those two things. People depending on what they're working on tend to go more one direction than the other. Maybe it's a matter to get people to understand that tension.

During his interview, Bart expanded on examples where he saw "that tension" within his academic writing as he focuses on writing as a narrative for an audience.

I'm almost incapable of writing a paper that doesn't have a narrative arc. What is a person thinking or feeling about the writing on the first page versus the fifth page and the last page? To be real concrete, sometimes I'm like, "here's what I'm arguing," and then three quarters through the paper twist: there's a further level of what I'm arguing. I don't want to lay that all out in the beginning. I like to build tension. I've had, let's say, mixed responses. Usually I get sort of goaded for it and then they like it.

Alisa expanded on how she frames her academic scientific writing and creative writing as fulfilling different purposes but both focus on balancing a writer's ideas, or creativity, within the confines of a particular context. She said:

For many who are advanced in their scientific careers focus on how to make it more creative without getting to the point where people would not accept it. If I wanted to make a title of a paper more creative, it came time and no, no it's not serious enough. As you grow and know the rules then you can start to be more creative. There's always a limit of what other's will accept. But you can always be creative in a scientific paper, for example the "Teaspoon"⁵ paper is creative but in the writing sense they did not really leave the mold of what a scientific paper is. The idea behind it is what made it creative and humorous but the writing style behind it was a scientific paper. What's my issue with scientific writing is that it's dry. There's no need for that. But at the same time the more adjectives you add, the more biased your paper will be. Creative writing can definitely be more scientific in so many ways. If you want to create certain emotions you can draw from scientific writing that is more dry or passive voice for your story. It depends on the meaning you add, it can be a character or a robot that would be more dry. I think there are many ways to add one or the other. For me, know the rules so you can break the rules—especially in scientific writing.

I see those moments describing writing as a process of negotiation between what a writer wants to do within the confines of a particular context, such as Bart choosing to focus on "narrative arc" as a way to hold a reader's engagement or Alisa's scientific

⁵ This is a parody scientific journal article in which a team of scientists study the disappearance rate of spoons in their lab. See (Lim, Hellard, and Aitken 2005).

writers who make their writing “humorous.” Composition scholarship supports Alisa and Bart’s descriptions of writing as a mix of possibility and constraint. James Berlin and Christine Tardy write rhetoric and genres respectively provide the base line structures writers build upon and play with (see Berlin 1996, 1–3; Tardy 2016, 5–17). Wendy Bishop describes revision in a poetry workshop as: “The writer, as he writes, constantly makes choices, deciding when to use this word construction and when to avoid that topical direction” (1990b, 131). She continues to explore the tension between the writer’s identities and the writing before calling for a safe space to experiment (1990, 132).

Yet a division between creative and academic writing persists. In English departments, creative writers remain divided from specialists in composition, literary studies, and critical theory. Within composition, the conversation continues to critique creative writing’s workshop pedagogy or assume the literary genres are not a form of academic writing. Writing center scholars acknowledge the value of creativity and focusing on the writing processes of tutors. However, tutor training courses and writing center scholarship needs to strive to demystify the expectations, limitations, and possibilities in writing in the literary genres and in emotional, personal, and narrative forms of writing. Writing center directors also need to frame their centers as available for writers in creative writing workshops. The critical and creative, or academic and artistic, can and do work together. Yet in continuing to frame creative writing as apart from academic writing, they will remain apart in the minds of the upcoming generation of academic writers, teachers, and tutors. One obstacle will be for those in English departments and writing centers to communicate their values and pedagogies to each

other. From there, the next step will be to include creative writing in required first-year writing classes and tutor trainings to encourage interdisciplinary academic writers to draw on both forms of writing experiences.

Experiences with creative writing, and the opportunity to experiment with them in the writing center, provide the spark of writing playfulness that allow writers to explore unfamiliar practices, to dive deeper into understanding the confines and possibilities of their writing. Creative writing adds experience, vocabulary, and an identity that enrich academic writing. It is time to move away from naming what creative writing is not and further isolating it from academic writing, to instead focus on its positive impacts on academic writers. Creative writing allows for composition to reclaim its history of expressivism and to produce forms of writing that are engaging to read and able to communicate with wide audiences. Furthermore, writing center theory and tutor trainings that focus on tutors' experiences as creative writers could provide a way to break the tendency of tutors taking over tutee texts. Those with writing tutoring and creative writing identities and experiences abound in colleges and universities. It is time for those in composition, creative writing, and writing centers to use those boundary crossing experiences to make academic writing more accessible and even playful.

POSTSCRIPT

During the fall 2016 semester I had a sticky note on my computer that read, “opens up new possibilities.” It became a fill in the blank with whatever I was reading about at the time. Often it was “creative writing opens new possibilities,” “writing centers open up new possibilities,” or “shitty first drafts open up new possibilities.” I’d use the sticky note to think of those aspects of writing— tools for working with an assignment to arrive confidently at a desired outcome—that create those sparks of possibility. Academic writing did not have to be a series of “do nots” but could be a container to exploring thought provoking ideas.

In the required first-year writing classes I taught in the spring, I assigned Carmen Kynard’s “New Life in this Dormant Creature” (2002). Kynard quotes rap lyrics and one of her student’s poems while reflecting on her identity as an African American woman academic. She reminds readers: “Do not accept any notions that academic writing can’t be that. We got other models” (2002, 43). Through her writing, and others like it, I saw my students arrive at the partial conclusion that academic writing can have something to say and be interesting to read. At the same time, they wrote annotated bibliographies and literature reviews that had textual features I didn’t recognize as academic writing. Many were in the process of discovering academic writing conventions and created nuanced interpretations of the writing moves I recommended in their draft comments including “use academic sources” or “include a logical transition.”

I’d wonder during those mornings when my coffee had yet to kick in and this project existed mostly in my imagination if I were doing my students a disservice by

selecting class readings that pushed the boundaries of creative and academic writing. I attempted to provide context, name the risks involved in not following standard conventions, and the importance of knowing the audience. But was it enough? My voice of doubt crept at those moments when other English graduate students would tell me composition scholarship is not scholarly informed or is too touchy-feely to be taken seriously. I often responded by shifting away from “the way things are done” and into “things are often done this way but here’s an example of another way.”

My students wrote interesting literature reviews and annotated bibliographies in my class, but would they be able to adapt to writing biology lab reports, nursing clinical trials, and dissertations? I found my students wrote assignments that would leave me cracking up when I was grading. I’d nod along in agreement at their unusual conclusions and feel the need to limit myself on their draft comments. Through teaching alongside my journey into academic writing, I found that I too could start to read between the lines of an assignment description to insert my voice, to move away from putting off a writing assignment until close to the due date, and into a writing routine and an interest in how an audience responded to my ideas. Those uncomfortable questions about conventions, expectations, and possibilities lead into answers that provided the tools for eventually successful writing.

Did I include too much free floating anything goes touchy-feely creativity for my first-year writing students? They chose which genres to write for their final assignment, including poetry. My voice of doubt wants to make sure to name the risks involved and include a reminder that not anything goes. I found myself devoting class

time to considering how a poem is not an excuse for writing without considering audience, generic conventions, and reading mentor texts. At the same time, I devoted class time to how an annotated bibliography does not have to read as formulaic, depersonalized, and clunky.

I was surprised when students returned to class and told me how they applied elements from their assignments in my class to their other writing projects. One student told me she used free writing and wrote a shitty first draft to start a lab report that her instructor later complemented her on. Another told me she researched a company to better understand her audience before she wrote a résumé. Another told me he had written poetry for years but never had an audience until my class.

I also found myself returning to writing poetry and fiction. I recognized the set of questions I needed to ask about my intended audience, generic conventions, and revision processes. I now daydream about a composition Ph.D. program that would allow me to take a fiction workshop, or a creative writing pedagogy seminar, alongside creative writers and literary theorists to hear how their perspectives impact my writing processes. I imagine researching the history of teaching creative writing in academic contexts focusing on the shift around the turn of the twentieth century when the literary genres were no longer taught in required writing classes but became isolated in creative writing workshops.⁶

I have since entered a job where I write business letters, calls for volunteers, and report summaries for business, academic, and local audiences. However, those same

⁶ For more on the late 19th and early 20th century history of teaching creative writing in American colleges and universities see Mark McGurl's study of the Iowa Writer's Workshop in *The Program Era* (2009) and Tim Myers's study of the impact of Harvard's writing programs in *The Elephants Evaluate* (1996).

moments of frustration that in college lead me to take a piece of fiction to a writing center now allow me to write reports that circulated beyond my initial audience and opened the door to informed debates.

Considering the intersection of creative writing and writing centers as sites of writing theory and writing practice has opened doors in my life and of those I interviewed. The set of experiences, vocabulary, and creative writing's focus on individuals, narrative, and emotions within the confines of a rhetorical situation stitch literacy backgrounds together in innovative ways, or the notion Bishop describes as: "I can no more imagine being a writing teacher who does not write than I can being one who does not read" (1999, 14). Such reflection allows for moving away from overarching assumptions about writers and into personal engagement as readers, writers, tutors, and teachers.

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" ends in the final confrontation between Dee, the older sister who goes by "Wangero" who wants to hang the family quilts as works of art, and Maggie, the younger sister promised the quilts and who learned to quilt from her aunt and grandmother. The mother, the narrator, steps in. "I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap" (1973, 59). In Walker's story, the quilts remain with the sister who plans to put them to "everyday use." However, before she storms off, Dee/Wangero kisses Maggie. For the first time in the story, Maggie smiles. Often it appears that practicality and art are incompatible in

Walker's story or in academic writing, yet such an arbitrary division discounts the ways both considerations impact each other. Practicality can be kissed by art.

All writing may be creative and through considering its limitations, there are steps we can take to make those creative possibilities a reality.

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APPENDIX

Tutor Questions:

1. Tell me the story of yourself as a creative writer.
2. Tell me the story of yourself as a writing tutor.
3. Tell me about what you like about writing.
4. What do you think are stereotypes of writing tutors and creative writers? How do your experiences compare?
5. Complete the following sentences:
 - a. When I tutor I often/ sometimes/never draw on my creative writing background.
 - b. When I write in academic and professional genres I often/sometimes/ never draw on my creative writing background.
6. Tell me about a time during a tutoring session when you consciously decided to draw on your creative writing background and another where you decided not to.
7. Tell me a story about a time when your experiences as a creative writer helped or hindered you during a tutoring session. Tell me a story about a time when your experiences as a creative writer helped or hindered you in your own academic or professional writing.
8. What are some moments from your role as a writing tutor that have helped you see your own creative and academic writing differently?
9. To what extent did your training as a tutor include and speak to your identity and experiences as a creative writer?
10. What other parts of your identity inform you as a writer? Tell me story about a time you noticed that identity as a writing tutor.