THE PRAIRIE CONNECT

SPRING 2016
Painting title: "Morris Wetlands."

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*Newsletter layout designed by Elizabeth Nault-Maurer*
The Publishing Process with Chrissy Kolaya

Given UMM's new Creative Writing minor and track, I asked my colleague Chrissy Kolaya to explain the process and challenges of getting one's work published. As you will see, Chrissy has some excellent suggestions and advice. I am very grateful to her, and I believe that many of you will feel the same. All Best, Michael Lackey

Publishing Individual Poems or Prose Pieces

For most writers, the publishing process begins by publishing individual pieces (single poems, creative nonfiction pieces, or short stories) in a literary journal. To do this, you’ll want to begin by first reading the journals you’re interested in submitting to and thinking critically about how your work may fit with the type of work they publish. If your work seems very different from the type of work you’re reading in the journal, that’s usually a good sign that you may want to look elsewhere. But don’t despair! There are thousands of journals out there, all devoted to different types of creative work. Two good places to look for journals that may be a good fit for your work are http://www.newpages.com/magazines/literary-magazines and http://www.pw.org/literary_magazines.

Know that to be successful at publishing your creative work, you’ll need a tough skin. My best-published short story “Swimming for Shore” landed a spot in Crazyhorse and went on to be anthologized, but before all that happy news, it was rejected by 15 different journals. Note that tenacity will become a recurring theme...

It’s important to know that there’s not much financial reward in publishing in literary journals. Every now and then you’ll strike it rich with a check for $20 or $30, but usually publication only nets you a publication credit on your CV and a few contributor’s copies.
Publishing Book-Length Projects

Once you’re ready to think about publishing a book-length project, things change a bit depending on whether you’re working in poetry or in prose.

Book-Length Prose Projects

For prose, writers generally begin by searching for a literary agent, whose job is sort of half-salesperson, half-lawyer. As you begin this process, I recommend reading up on this website: http://www.agentquery.com/writers.aspx

The salesperson part of the job means that the agent, if he/she signs you, works to find a publisher to buy your book: this may involve some schmoozing, some wining and dining, all the elements of good sales! But you won’t be involved in this at all—you’ll just be at home anxiously waiting for the phone to ring! At this point, your agent is doing all of this work for nothing—just on the hope that he/she’ll be able to sell your book for a decent price and will then get a cut of that (usually 15%).

When an agent does find a publisher who’s interested in your book, the agent puts on his/her lawyer hat and works to hammer out the details of your contract: things like what your advance will be, what rights the publisher will acquire, etc. Here let’s take a break for a quick vocabulary lesson: the advance is the money the publisher agrees to give you upfront to acquire the book. Royalties are the percentage of the book’s sales you will earn, but only after you earn back your advance.

So, there are two schools of thought about this: School One says that your agent should try to get you the biggest advance possible. Upside: Fists—full of cash money! Ah, but wait! There’s also a potential downside: if a publisher gives you one of those headline-making advances, they’ll also expect that your book will earn that much and more, which puts huge pressure on your book (and, by extension, on you) to sell, sell, sell. What this means is that, depending on just how headline-making that advance was, you could end up selling ten thousand copies of your book and having the publisher chalk that up as a failure. How’s that?
Because even though most people would be thrilled to know that ten thousand people bought and read their book, those ten thousand copies didn’t even come close to making a dent in that headline-making advance, making you look like a bad investment to future publishers. And those future publishers not only know this—your sales figures are available information for all future publishers thinking about publishing your second, third, or fourth book—but they care about this a lot—often, these sales figures are the very first and most important thing publishers look at when deciding whether to buy your next book or not.

School Two argues that a modest advance is best because it allows writers to easily earn back their advances, which makes them look like a profitable (albeit modest) investment for future publishers. So, your agent will have lots of advice on this, and if you’ve found your way to a trusted agent, you’d be smart to listen to what he/she has to say on this subject.

After months of work, my agent, Eleanor, who’s tenacious as all get out, finally found a good home for my novel, Charmed Particles, at Dzanc Books. I earned a very modest advance, which was easy enough to earn out, meaning that any sales beyond that were icing on the cake. This left me free to work on promotional activities for Charmed Particles and on writing my next novel rather than obsessing over my sales figures and worrying that they’d mean Eleanor wouldn’t be able to sell my next book. This path is less flashy and life transforming than some of those headline-grabbing advances we read about, but as a cautious person in general, it feels to me like a safer bet to build my sales figures slowly, the same way I build a book.

Book-Length Poetry Projects

If you’re looking to publish a book of poems, you’ll have to go it alone, without a literary agent. Because there’s very little money to be made in publishing books of poetry (sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but think about it—when was the last time you or someone you know bought a book of poems?) most agents are uninterested in representing poetry. So you’ll need to approach publishers on your own. There are two ways poets submit manuscripts to publishers of poetry:
1. Submit during the publisher’s Open Reading Period. Most poetry publishers offer a single period (usually a month) during which you may submit a book-length manuscript for consideration. Do yourself a favor and carefully read and meticulously follow any guidelines they provide on their website. Many of them receive so many submissions that they simply discard the ones that don’t follow the guidelines and are happy to have one less thing in their to-read pile.

2. You can also enter your manuscript in a contest run by a reputable publisher that offers book publication and a cash prize to the winner. These contests usually charge a reading fee of between $20–$35 and award a single offer of publication and cash prize (usually between $1,000–$2,500). If you’re at all uncertain about whether the publisher or the contest itself is reputable, please take a moment to talk with your friendly UMM Creative Writing Faculty. The creative writing world is a small one, and most of us have some familiarity with the contests that are on the up-and-up and those that aren’t.

So the question now is likely “How do writers find out about when these Open Reading Periods are or about these publication contests?” Here are a few good places to begin: For Open Reading Periods: http://www.pw.org/small_presses For contests: http://www.pw.org/grants

(You’ll notice I keep sending you to the Poets & Writers web site. One of the most useful and affordable educations you can give yourself about the field of creative writing is to read Poets & Writers cover to cover for a year—you’ll emerge with as firm a sense of how this weird little business operates as it’s possible to get. And luckily, UMM’s library subscribes to Poets & Writers, so you have access to this for free! Affordable indeed!)

In searching for a publisher for my first book of poems, I sent the manuscript to both Open Reading Periods and publication contests. Publishing a book of poetry is another lesson in tenacity—my first book of poems, Any Anxious Body—was rejected by 119 publishers before it finally found a very happy home with Broadstone Books, a publisher with an open reading period. Poetry publishers generally don’t offer advances, so there wasn’t much to the contract with the publisher beyond my royalty rate (which is fairly typically set at 10–15% depending on the number of copies sold) and the number of author copies of the book I’d receive.
And although one might assume that this whole publishing business gets easier as you go, that’s not necessarily the case. I’m currently shopping around a new book of poems called We Didn’t Come to Have a Good Time, We Came to See You, and while it’s been a finalist in a few publication contests, I’m still looking for a publisher for it. Here’s hoping it won’t take 119 submissions like the last one!

One of the things I often point out to students is that most of the writers I know who’ve been successful are both tenacious and open to critique of their work. It’s a delicate balance: believing in your work and also keeping an open mind about whether there are ways to make it even better. If you find yourself ready to begin thinking about this process, you may find the following useful: http://www.pw.org/content/publishing_book?cmnt_all=1 (Poets & Writers again!), but I also hope you’ll stop by or drop me a line—I love chatting about this, especially with students and alums! Write on, gang!
When, With Autumn Hands, We Dig
Joshua Johnson

the garden harvest disinterred,
the fruits and vegetables of our labor
laid out, arranged
rank and file:
arthritic lengths of dirt-shouldered
carrot,
squashed-nosed potatoes rolling amuck.

we play doctor, open them up,
all, all, an autopsy for the fall.
and inside?
spent shells, seas of gold,
ruinous and ruined,
a pocketful of pennies,
tinkling like a chandelier.

these, you say, letting the shells
fall, sluice through your fingers,
shall make a fine soup.
While attending UMM, Brittany Grady has been able to follow her passions as an English and German double major, a History minor, and a creative writer through her participation in various on and off-campus activities. She is the president of UMM’s chapter of Sigma Tau Delta and the submissions manager for *Floating World*’s creative writing club and literary journal. Brittany also serves as the English Student Representative, a position in which she coordinates communication with other on-campus majors and attends discipline meetings. This semester, Brittany has been awarded a UROP grant with Prof. Emily Bruce, and although her professor’s work leans more towards the historical aspect of literature, Brittany’s project will focus on what she calls her three favorite subjects: “the shifting relationships between fairy tales, modern fantasy, and morality.” UROP grants are a unique opportunity for UMM students: each semester the program chooses a select number of student applicants to “produce new knowledge and creative work” in a partnership with faculty members. A sought after honor for any student, Brittany’s UROP will provide her opportunities to submit her research for presentation at various conferences, including UMM’s own Undergraduate Research Symposium in the spring. While Brittany will not graduate until the spring of 2017, she’s already begun planning her life after UMM. She is keeping an open mind for her future career: she has dreamt of being a novelist since she was ten years old, but is also interested in working for an independent bookstore, as a publicist, a translator, or any job that she finds “sufficiently literary.” Brittany encourages those considering an English major to “be open-minded,” an attitude that has led her down many different and satisfying paths while at UMM.
Dan Nicla is spending his final semester at UMM reminiscing about his time playing tenor saxophone in Symphonic Winds, studying to complete his English major, and working both as the Hall Director for Independence Hall and as a Writing Center Consultant. Dan views his work in the Writing Center and his previous enrollment in Understanding Writing as “experimental research in tutoring and composition.” The tutoring aspect of his research came from his work helping students improve their writing, as this provided him with “immersive and real-world ‘research’ experience” connecting with individuals and honing his interpersonal skills. The composition aspect came from his work throughout his years of study at Morris and his senior thesis for Renaissance Romance Literature. Dan’s thesis discussed how Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Old Arcadia* rejected the humanist idea that reason could overcome emotion in humans because of their innate passionate natures. He felt that “Sidney presents so many passionate and emotional characters that it is hard to ignore the fact that he is commenting on humanism.”

Dan Nicla

Upon graduation in the spring, Dan will marry his fiancée Laura and hopes to find employment in residential life. He has thoroughly enjoyed working with students in the residence halls during his years at Morris and feels that his English education has only strengthened his skills in both his work on-campus and his future work in the field. He believes that “while English is about literature and writing on its surface, on a much deeper and more important level it is about communication, creating coherent thoughts and arguments, and learning how to understand others’ perspectives.” Dan’s studies in English and his experiences at Morris have prepared him for a successful career in residential life connecting with students and understanding their viewpoints, demonstrating the versatility of the degree and the students who study it.
When **Jessie Hennen** studied abroad in Munich during her junior year attending UMM, she fell in love with the city that promised her opportunities, personal growth, and the ability to “ride a bike on its cobblestoned streets.” Therefore when she graduated in December of 2010 with a B.A. in both English and German, she moved back to Munich to work as a nanny/English tutor for a local family. However, when their quite independent teenage children left Jessie some free time during her day, she began to work on a novel and some short stories. This, and a growing desire to move back to the U.S., prompted her to begin applying for graduate school. Jessie was accepted into the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and for the next two years kept busy working on her novel, honing her creative writing skills, and teaching undergraduates. During her third year, she accepted a fellowship inviting her to serve as a visiting lecturer for the International Institute of Modern Letters in Wellington, New Zealand.

She was funded by the university and taught graduate-level workshops in fiction writing during her two month stay. Jessie is still currently teaching as a substitute teacher for the St Paul school district and is still working on the novel she started in Munich. She has signed on with an agent and is refining her third draft of said novel, hoping to have a “workable, salable draft” by midsummer. After which, Jessie plans to begin applying for a Ph.D. program in order to fulfill her ultimate goal of teaching writing at an arts magnet school. The connections with her own teachers at Morris have inspired Jessie throughout her work, as the lectures she was taught stay prominent in her mind. That is why she encourages students to find a mentor at Morris, for the staff is “full of potential candidates.” Jessie has used her connections with the faculty at Morris and the skills they taught her to pursue her passion of writing and teaching across the world.
Don Lifto graduated from UMM in 1971 with a BA in Philosophy and a minor in English, entering a job market that was unfavorable for those with humanities degrees. From 1971 to 1978, Don completed his Master’s Degree in Elementary Education and an administrative licensure program at Winona State University while serving as a teacher for Winona Public Schools. Following five years in the classroom, he served as the elementary school principal in that same district before moving on to work as the superintendent of schools in Trimont, Mahtomedi, and Northeast Metro 916 in White Bear Lake. Don finished his Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Administration from the University of Minnesota in 2006 and is now working part-time as a consultant for Springsted Incorporated, “a St. Paul based, independent financial advisor and consulting company for school districts, cities, counties and non-profits.” He is an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development. Don has found that the communication, creative, and writing skills he learned from both his degrees provided him with a framework for success in graduate school and beyond. Don continues to work on creative pursuits in his free time, including a recent work combining the haiku and short essay entitled *An Alphabet of Haiku Musings: Reflections on Life, Death and Potpourri of Fascinations in Between.*

He hopes to devote more time to his writing in the future as the demands of his career lessen: “Poetry can serve as my outward manifestation of my thoughts and emotions... in the absence of that expressive creative channel, opportunities to share my life experience with others would be diminished,” he explained. In the rearview mirror, Don sees the relationships he developed with his future wife and his Phi Mu Delta fraternity brothers (see 1970 vintage picture in PMD shirt) as the highlight of his years at UMM. He also credits the hands-on faculty for his experience: after two academically difficult years a philosophy professor, Dr. Ted Uehling, took special interest in Don and mentored him throughout the rest of his college career. With Dr. Uehling’s help, Don found his passion in a Philosophy major and English minor and managed to graduate in four years. To those questioning their future as he once did, Don recommends the teachings of Parker Palmer, the founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal: “search for the intersection of personal passion and human need—at that intersection you will do your most important work and find happiness and satisfaction.”
One Degree, Five Paths to Success

This semester UMM students were treated to a special afternoon with a group of English alumni organized by Dr. Michael Lackey. The alumni hosted were Rachel Balzar, Sara Butterfass, Dominic Scheck, Kim Ukura, and Eric Wardell.

Held on April 1st, the event began with an hour-long Q&A with the five alumni. The focus of the conversation was the future of English students, namely the varying career paths with an English degree. All five alumni have pursued diverse career paths; some even being different careers than they had originally planned to pursue during their time at UMM. These students demonstrate the unconventionality of UMM students as well as the variety of careers available to them post-graduation.

Eric Wardell, now an English professor at Normandale Community College, originally came to UMM to pursue degrees in Law and Economics. But, upon taking Writing for the Liberal Arts, he fell in love with the complexity of stories that the English discipline could offer. It was in his English classes that he felt challenged to develop his own thoughts in a way he never had experienced previously. After his graduation from UMM he took a position as a writing center tutor at a community college and, unexpectedly, fell in love with teaching. He never imagined that he would end up as a teacher, but, in his words, “I’ve felt like so many of the best things in my life have just been stumbled upon.” After becoming involved with on-campus organizations and befriend other faculty members, he decided to pursue a Master’s degree at West Virginia University in order to teach college classes. Though he spent a few years after earning his Master’s degree freelance writing and editing, he found his way back to Normandale and is now teaching writing courses to college students.

Dr. Michael Lackey begins the Q&A.
To Morris natives, **Kim Ukura** is a familiar name. Now serving as an editor for the *Morris Sun Tribune* — as well as an award-winning book blogger in her free time — Kim found her way to a career in journalism through the tight-knit Morris community. During her time at UMM, she studied English with a concentration in Journalism and got involved in the campus newspaper, the *University Register* while also interning for the *Morris Sun Tribune*. After her graduation, she continued her education upon her acceptance to the University of Wisconsin, Madison’s graduate program in Journalism. Her first job after graduate school was as a trade writer writing product descriptions for widgets. After about a year, she discovered an opening at the *Morris Sun Tribune* for an Editor’s position. One phone interview later, she was offered the job and has been enjoying her work there ever since. Though she credits some of the position’s opening to luck, she reminded students that “the basis of being lucky is doing good work, and luck builds from that.”

In his college years, **Dominic Scheck** never knew how much importance science and economics would have in his life as he entered a career focused on writing. After graduation from UMM with a degree in English, Dominic took an internship at a research company that makes and sells start-up businesses. After months of hard work, he was approached by an economist curious about the effect of smoking on national healthcare. After careful research and putting the skills he learned at UMM to the test, he completed a massive paper of his findings. His bosses were impressed with his skills and he was hired as a full-time writer where he still works today. One thing that he loves about his current job is its versatility. Just a few of his duties include writing websites for experiments, gathering evidence, compiling research papers, and presenting his findings.

As he pointed out during the Q&A, “as an English major, you’re kind of like a utility knife.” Though he is enjoying the work at his current job, he is insistent that he — like all of us — is nowhere near his final destination yet.

Dominic Scheck talks with a student before the Q&A begins.
Like so many UMM students, Sara Butterfass has had a unique experience, both during and after her time at UMM. After her fourth year at UMM, Sara successfully applied for and received the prestigious Katherine E. Sullivan scholarship and spent a 5th year as a UMM student in Iceland doing research. After her graduation, Sara pursued a Master’s degree in Literary Studies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and is currently pursuing another Master’s in Library Science from St. Catherine’s University. In addition to studying, Sara works in the library as well as the on-campus Writing Center. “It’s a lot of communication in each job,” she said. She has found herself using skills she learned from classes at UMM, such as Understanding Writing and Editing & Proofreading, in both her current education and jobs. Though she admitted that immediately pursuing graduate schooling upon her undergraduate graduation can be exhausting at times, she has felt rewarded by the paths that she has taken so far and looks forward to where her future will take her.

Though Rachel Balzar had planned to attend graduate school directly after her graduation from UMM, her plans fell apart and she was left confused on what to do next. Her solution came in the form of the volunteer program Reading Corps. She has stayed in the Morris area working with literacy at a Pre-K level and has made incredible connections with her students. “It’s really cool watching these guys learn to ask questions about what they’re given,” she said of her students, “Plus, I think it’s amazing that I have 3-year-olds that know what alliteration means.” After spending a year applying to graduate schools, this time focusing heavily on personal touches to each application, Rachel received an early offer from Penn State with a package that pays entirely for her schooling and provides her with a modest salary for her work teaching college writing courses. She was initially surprised at the reaction she got from graduate schools about her gap year—they were looking for people just like her. For those applying to graduate programs, she highlighted that programs are looking for unique, diverse experiences to bring to the institutions, just like hers.

After the event, the alumni, UMM professors, and UMM students headed to the house of Dr. Michael Lackey and Dr. Julie Eckerle for a rewarding evening of laughing, eating, and book recommendations. The event as a whole left its attendees inspired with the possibilities that an English degree offers.
**STUDENT NEWS**

**Logan Bender** presented “The Epistemology of Writing, as Outlined by an English Major” at the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention in Minneapolis.

**Allison Bean** presented “Creative Nonfiction Work: Things I’ve Learned From School” at the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention in Minneapolis.

**Brittany Grady** presented an original fairy titled “The Singing Sword” at the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention in Minneapolis.

**Natalie Pope** presented “Female Idealism in Anna Karenina and War & Peace” at the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention in Minneapolis and at the 30th Annual National Conference on Undergraduate Research in Asheville, North Carolina. She also presented “Sexual Deviance and Ambiguous Gender in The Faerie Queene” at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research.

**Kelsey Jopp** presented “Positive Composition: Raising Happy Writers in High School” at the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention in Minneapolis and she presented “Defining Dimensions of Creativity through Revisions of Kate DiCamillo’s Because of Winn-Dixie and The Tale of Despereaux” at the 30th Annual National Conference on Undergraduate Research in Asheville, North Carolina.
After two years serving in the Minnesota Reading Corps, Rachel Balzar (Class of 2014) has accepted an offer of admission to Pennsylvania State University's Graduate School. Rachel will move to State College in August to pursue her M.A. in English.

Julie Eckerle presented “Early Modern Women’s Epistolary Communications across the Irish Sea” at the Renaissance Society of America conference in Boston.

Josh Johnson published “The Demon in the Page” in Metaphorosis Magazine, which is a story about language, translation, and the potential of human connection.

Michael Lackey guest-edited a special issue of the journal a/b: Auto/Biography Studies (January 2016) on the topic of biofiction, which includes his Introduction (“Locating and Defining the Bio in Biofiction”) and his essay “The Rise of the Biographical Novel and the Fall of the Historical Novel.”

The Twin Cities Book Launch of Athena Kildegaard’s new book of poetry, Ventriloquy was held on Friday, March 4 in St Paul. The celebration included settings of some poems composed by Mitch Grussing and sung by Anika Kildegaard, both UMM alumni. Luther College graduate Sam Milligan improvised with Athena on his string bass. The UMM celebration was held on Friday, March 25 in the recital hall and included Mitch and Anika.