

Poetic threshold moments: from fledgling to published author

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Proposals

Poetry is more a threshold than a path... . (Seamus Heaney)

The writing journey traversed by novice poets may ultimately involve a confident movement from private muses to printed author. This transition from writing poetry as a form of undisclosed work to a public mode of textual representation is often made difficult due to lack of formal mentoring opportunities and limited commercial publishing opportunities.

The act of placing poems—which are often informed by personal meanings and imbued with subjective significance—amongst the reading public for linguistic and aesthetic critique can be daunting for a writer who has not fully established their own confidence or had their craft affirmed professionally in some way. While poetry is often rendered as an ideal medium to capture and evoke human experience and feelings, some might view it as an elite and rarefied activity that excludes the potential for an ordinary person to technically master.

This paper presents perspectives from award-winning poets on an initiative where they were involved in publishing with undergraduate students who were completing a creative writing class at a tertiary education institution in NSW, Australia. This initiative provided students with the opportunity to be both taught by and publish with world-class poets. As a culmination of the semester's class the students also had an opportunity for selected work to be published alongside high profile writers in a collaborative anthology. The recent *Wording the World* (2010) and *Here Not There* (2012) poetry anthologies are printed artefacts of this process.

While reflecting on their experience of the initiative, the established writers provide interesting insights on the pedagogical value of such a program. It is also of interest to appreciate what motivates these poets to contribute their time and works to a project that assists student-writers to successfully cross a literary threshold. While reflecting on their journeys in achieving literary notoriety, the poets relate how they reached an understanding of threshold concepts associated with their identity as authors, their skills as writers, the way in which they influence other authors, and the way in which the writing community perceives them.

One of the key findings that emerges from the study of this initiative, where the experts so generously give of themselves, is that through their experiences of the potentially isolating act of writing poetry when they were younger, they are able to provide a sense of inclusivity and opportunity for newly emerging writers wishing to find a shape, voice and publication point for their creativity. Rather than seeing the process of poetry writing as a journey or a path, the data gathered from the established poets in this program indicates that there are a number of threshold points that poets experience as they move from being a fledgling to a published author.