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John Spaghotte

Peter C. Schuler

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John Spaghotte

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing:
Fiction

by
Peter Charles Schuler

June 2015

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ABSTRACT

Author Peter Schuler discusses his thoughts on how ideas of creativity, literature, and pedagogy helped to develop into his first novel, *John Spaghotte of Crumb*. Schuler is a native of the Coachella Valley in Southern California and writes from a middle-class appreciation of working and living in an area where everything is catered to the wealthy class. Through personal injury and his experience in undergraduate and graduate studies he fought to develop a healthy critical mind and a grasp as to the true nature of identity. As a result, his riveting debut novel about a young, nerdy California version of Don Quixote becomes a cautionary tale about the dangers of failing to recognize oneself among a world full of materialistic pleasures and grandiose, fictional heroes. In the formulation of his novel Schuler argues that artistic creation, appreciation, study, and the development of a critical scope to see the world with lead to a better understand his own identity while his protagonist suffers from the lack of such a development.

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To my family, my amazing professors, my best friends, and my wonderful endless ball of encouragement, Sarah Crouch.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

There is a darkness when we cannot understand ourselves, I think. The place inside that should be filled with self and identity. Just a void. I used to be a stranger to myself. I don't recommend it. I assumed that I already was the person I would become and therefore would unabatedly continue to be me. But that is wrong. Instead I have come to believe that I am a shifting, ever-ranging set of potentials. I used to have so much confusion and estrangement from my own identity and as a result my creative expression suffered. As I floundered about after high school I took my creativity for granted and allowed my critical mind to fade with the inebriation of drugs and alcohol. My true potential and identity suffered as I wasted my creative and critical yearnings in favor of the almighty party. It was not until many years after the near loss of my creative output that I would recognize how English studies invited multiple interpretative avenues into my life. In turn, those interpretive methods would help to define myself and establish my own successful creative and critically minded lifestyle.

Although not plain at first, my career in English studies has helped me to recognize my own possibilities in contributing to the world of the written word, pedagogy, and literature. The university has helped me in defining myself. Among them that choices and perspectives I form dictate how I value and comprehend myself, in retrospect. In fact, after high school my personality was a mess. So without understanding what I was doing, I gravitated towards English in community college for a simple reason: those classes were giving me new tools to look at the world.

During my bachelor's degree, courses gave me more methods. I learned how to look at the dimensions behind several disciplines of English. Writing craft, literature, and ultimately in graduate school critical pedagogy, opened up a whole new language of engagement, interpretation, and involvement to me. That language only expanded exponentially as I moved on for my M.F.A. candidacy. Learning this new language of interpretation remains a healthy and life-changing development of my critical mind.

Those critical tools have helped me to understand myself better, and by understanding myself better I gained a growing skill-set of how to write in a way that makes me proud of the creative work I am invested in. Also, I learned how to better interpret not only literature but the rest of life too. I admit I had a bit of a head start. Because of my experience as a musician, I had some practice in thinking as an artist and I could recognize the correlations between art and music fairly quickly. Like a chef that can taste both the birthday cake and the ingredients. I knew how to look at art in an attempt to decipher the individual parts from the whole product. Theories behind artistic creation, the practicing and discipline of craft, and developing a personal aesthetic concerning themes of organicism and unity to name some of the correlations.

So while my interpretative training didn't start at Cal State, it certainly thrived there and continued to teach me many things. I built a healthy practice critiquing the outside world. But education also helped me to learn to self-critique. And if identity, such as I argued earlier, is made up from the various choices and perspectives taken by an individual, then my career in writing and English has

been a blessing. The art of interpretation offers multiple avenues of understanding. We can only identify ourselves in the comparison of others. Therefore, the more voices and positions available to bounce an identity-formulation-comparison off of, the closer we can get to a development of a healthy critical mind. Through the study of various interpretive methods a solid sense of identity can be formed because by adopting the perspective of the other we have an opportunity to define ourselves through an outside perspective. This can help to limit confusion in self-identity recognition because though we can only define ourselves through comparison, illuminating aspects of identity can come unbiased through the viewpoint of others.

I never wrote a story until someone asked me to write one. In high school I had hand-written some terrible memoir-esque nonsense about beers and girls and parties. I am embarrassed to remember that old green notebook. It was later, well into my community college career, that I enrolled in a fiction course. Conceptualizing my first story and writing it took a long time. Partly because I didn't know how to write one. But also partly because I had an incapacitated left arm and hand. I was still living among the dusty dunes of the Southern California desert and I typed at an infant-slow pace. It was fall, 2008.

Two summers before, I had accidentally stabbed myself with a buck knife in the left forearm. And yes, it hurt. Arteries are not meant to be opened like birthday presents. There are over two-hundred muscles in a forearm and a four-inch blade went, not into, but through my arm. Disastrous for a guitar player. I had been playing Spanish Classical guitar for three years. Medically speaking, I

should not have survived. But as with most near-death experiences I had a new appreciation of and value for life. And two spring seasons later I enrolled in a fiction class. My first story, titled "Squinting Through the Maw," was about a dude who gets stabbed at a house-party and death follows him to the hospital. But after workshop and sitting with the story for some time, I thought it was okay. Acceptable for a first try. Even hopeful. I had a new feeling that I could learn my version of the discipline of writing. That I could hone writing as a new skill, just as I had with various musical instruments.

Although my study of music would highly inform my study of language, the stab wound to my arm almost wiped out the chance to do so. I had to go through painful and excruciating rehabilitation for my hand. Various doctors told me with an air of certainty that I would never play guitar or drums again. However I had a feeling that they were bending the truth in an effort to avoid a lawsuit. I didn't listen. What I did do was work every day to get my hand back.

Somewhere during that first year of recovery, I got some gumption. It came on very strong one night when I had hauled my acoustic guitar outside for kicks. I hadn't even touched it in months. I placed the few fingers of my left hand needed to make an open A-minor chord (a very simple chord as far as finger strength). The strings buzzed and muted when I strummed. It was not until then that I understood. My only method of creative release was frozen as a tortuous memory of the things that I used to do. I faced the real possibility of never playing again. I had played that simple chord tens of thousands of times. And there I was, facing the prospect of never hearing it ring from my own hands.

From that moment, I decided that I could interpret the doctor's diagnosis as nonsense. I started to do my physical rehab exercises daily. Five, ten, twenty times the amount and time that was required for occupational therapy. The unbelievable amount of pain was stifling.

When you cut the nerve itself and its been reattached, like mine, you quickly come to understand that the nervous-system is the literal source of pain in the body. So I would wail and huddle on my bed and try to do one more backwards wrist-flick before my whole arm curled up like a twizzler. I did that for a year straight. I learned a lot about physical pain from the experience but the point is that the loss of my artistic output made me reevaluate my own relationship with art. Losing the ability to play music left me yearning, sadly, for the ability to creatively express myself through my own lost art.

According to the doctors, I was making incredible progress. I remember one time in a rehabilitation room at the hospital, a little girl had broken her arm. My therapist brought me over to her and used me as an example. She wasn't making much progress in recovery and they showed her my scars, explained my injury, and relayed how someone in much worse shape was recovering faster.

A new personal aestheticism emerged from being stabbed, but it would be some time before I could articulate it. What I began to understand about myself was a strength and will that I hadn't known I had. I was told it would take ten years of recovery to write and do music or do anything that would require a decent amount of dexterity. But within a year in a half from the accident, I was

giving the figurative middle finger to fate and strumming that A-minor chord over and over and over. I felt like I had a second chance.

Before long I was back in community college at College of the Desert. Sometimes I would have to stay late. My writing hand was still extremely weak and long-hand was torturous. I'd ask the professors to leave all the notes up and I'd be scribbling trying to get the information down before the next class came in. But I managed.

In retrospect, the stabbing experience gave me a crash course in self recognition. The physical violence against myself (though accidental) was a metaphor, a way to read myself. If I continued to neglect my creative tendencies and output then the means to art as a creative expression might be lost forever. Not to say that disabled people can't be artists. But I hadn't really understood how important my chosen artistic endeavor was to my being. I realized that I was someone who had a mandatory amount of creative expression necessary to be whole. Without it, I felt alone and lost and stagnant. So with inclusion of formal education in my life, my means of creative expression expanded into the world of writing. And suddenly I found that in writing I had another universe of creation to explore. Thus my romance with words began.

Reading had always appealed to me. But I admit, around middle school, my passion for the activity slumped, ground down and almost stopped. Most of my reading came through school. I don't recommend that. Over time, my prose reading felt filtered. Restricted. The world of literature to me turned into a wasteland of prescribed tropes and antiquated language. But, not surprisingly for

a man who almost fatally stabbed himself, I was foolish enough to rush judgment. Soon I would stumble on a whole galaxy of wonderful literature.

My middle school reading list was horrible, so I entered high school with a bitter flavor about English and writing and literature as a whole. I had a difficult time understanding who I was. I hated school, but I liked the people. I fit in with my small group of intelligent but rebellious friends. But my identity was malleable, undefined enough that I became adept at fitting in with any crowd which seemed to further obscure the potential for solidifying my own identity. My critical mind began to fade with pot and beer and not reading anything ever. I did not know it, but my creative capabilities were dwindling. I was not trying to find myself, but one could argue that instead I was trying to lose myself in beers and bros and chasing ever-absent women.

One day a friend handed me a book. Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. And that was something. The voice, the character and absolute uniqueness just cannon-leaped off of the page. I remember thinking that his writing wasn't possible. The appeal was that such a tripped out, weird freak could be this booming voice of social criticism. Despite the pretense of constant inebriation in his narrative voice and protagonists, Thompson pulled off such a compelling evaluation of the world around him. After a lot of exposure I would come to see that his starkest examples were among his political writings, especially from the late sixties. But I was hooked. His yearning for a Gonzo-journalist style of justice was compelling and relatable. So I read more. Much

later, I realized the sort of voice-only qualities of Thompson as a writer but the reading hook was once again set deep.

With the help of Thompson, my reinvigorated passion for reading helped propel me through my associate's degree in English composition. I began to get a glimpse of the differing perspectives that literature could offer me. A new skill-set began to emerge, one of honing the act of interpretation across various mediums. Historically, biographically, philosophically, culturally, anthropologically, textually, linguistically, and artistically to name a few. My skills only increased as I moved into an undergraduate university setting. And once there, my palate for literature and the adoption of perspectives and possibilities extended indefinitely. The course content involving literature, ethics, cultural diversity, gender perspectives, and creative writing all helped to push me forward. Through both official curriculum and a community of readers that the scholastic setting offered, a number of amazing authors and inspirational works came into my vision. Vonnegut taught me how to be fun. Shakespeare taught me that people have always been wonderfully gross and weird. Poe taught me how to be inventive and original and justifiably creepy. Atkinson taught me how to re-imagine the world. Myers taught me how to think about teaching. Achebe taught me how to reevaluate. Critical theory helped me to define my own creative language. By that threat, Barthes reiterated a language of creativity that I had been practicing in music for years.

A few months into my MFA program, I moved into a cabin in the woods. My whole life, I had been living in the dry lovely deserts of the Coachella Valley

where purple mountains border a sandy horizon. But I had always loved forested regions. And once I realized how close the San Bernardino Mountains were to campus it was an obvious choice. The romantic notion of writing and living alone in the woods didn't hurt the idea either. So I found a spot in a little town called Crestline. There I was, alone, settled warmly in a little green single bedroom cabin. I loved every second of it. There were two streams running along the front and back. In the winter they filled up with rain and snow. And from anywhere in the cabin, I could hear the washing sounds of the waters going by.

Lake Gregory, though small, was just a block away. Sometimes I would sit at the bank of the lake and just watch the quiet rippled reflection of the sky and clouds. It didn't dawn on me for some time, but I was a kid from the desert who had moved to a place where I was surrounded by water.

Living alone was new. I had always lived with roommates. All of a sudden, my world was quiet and calm. I had all the time I could ever need to spend on creative output. Music and writing became daily activities. From experience, I understood that I couldn't strong-arm my characters into doing things that weren't natural. As with music, forcing elements and compositions together that didn't fit would make the whole creative product collapse in mediocrity. The plot would fall apart the second I tried to make things happen. Instead I just let those things happen apart from myself. I got closer to the plot by listening. It was a key trait that I had picked up from music production. Not just the simple idea of listening with your ears, but a way to make a creative product the best that it can be, by removing ownership from self-produced creative products like stories or songs.

In my green cabin, I not only kept writing but also started recording music in my living room. Just as I later came to find with writing, when I tried to force my hand and throw parts in that didn't fit, the product failed. This perception of art was an enormous shift in defining my own aesthetic and style. I began to look at my own work with the idea that I was seeking an inherent organicism and unity. And that pull towards art lead me to a discourse that would be instrumental in helping me understand my own experience with loosing, regaining, and eventually redefining my mode of creative output. It's called the Will to Death.

Defined by a guitarist named John Frusicante, the Will to Death was an artistic philosophical standpoint. But for me, it was an act of giving a name to what I had already been doing. Specifically that I had a self-destructive tendency towards art.

In this discourse, Frusicante claims that no artist is responsible for the creation of their art and that the act of crafting creative products is closer to a task of interpretation than of creation. Therefore, the artist should hone a sense of listening and searching rather than creating a practice of considering their art to be free from influence and origin. He would argue that the most effective way of producing and interacting with art is to consider its creation as already finished in some other ethereal plane. Fittingly, this idea would reiterate itself in my critical theory coursework and Barthes, among other thinkers, helped me to recognize those links between music, writing, and a critical stance towards literature and life.

The idea of death here is not one of physically dying. Rather, it's the idea of letting the ego, the conscious self, the entity of identity move out of the way of creative expression. It's the artistic practice of what I had been striving after. Namely that the best way I could express myself was by letting go, (or at least what I consciously understood as myself). This desire to 'die' in these terms was something that I had already been practicing without knowing. It was a way to interact with the creative realm without constraints.

The elements that I thought were most successful in story and music were unplanned and apparent. As a result my personal aesthetic continued to form. Organicism in the creative arts. There was a sense that these creative products existed in another language, another social form of communication. Realistically, there are some setbacks to this method and it's necessary to state that I use it in a dynamic way. For me, the Will to Death must be taken in moderation. I'm not claiming to be some art-monk who just meditates and lets stories and music pass through unabated. I don't think an artist can formulate a creative product without bringing something from their own perspective into it. We all have the opportunity to stamp our figurative face onto creative projects.

In the end, the artist, in the broadest sense, has the power to choose to share their work. They also have the power to not 'create' it by bringing it to the physical product. Hopefully, the products that an artist makes will be a reflection of their own aesthetics. In my opinion, with that acknowledgment comes the responsibility an artist has towards their product. I could never make something and share it if I felt it was artistically useless. By 'useless' I mean redundant,

stupid, immoral or offensive without proper justification. Of course it's all personal opinion in the end.

The ideas of creation and dynamic flexibility and ownership would translate directly to the development of my first novel. Having that critical eye towards my project helped my understanding that the Will to Death didn't mean an abandonment of my personal aesthetics of style, entertainment, and ethics. It meant that the weight of creating content was not on my shoulders. That I could shape the story and inform it, but I didn't have to memorize it or make it exist from nothing.

So, with this new information in tow I got down to creating rewarding fiction that appealed to my own emerging personal aesthetic. The new act of writing, arranging, and developing short stories began to fill up my free time. After the stabbing accident, I had been forced to move back to my mom's house as I could not work anywhere with one arm. So there I was, huddled in front of my keyboard, slowly typing away in the bluish light of the computer screen. My first stories were terrible. Not that the writing was that bad, but I began to read these short stories I had written and found myself bored with my own work. I don't suggest that. But I had hope in recognition. Writing fiction was not my first act of attempting to define my own aesthetic. As I stated earlier, I played classical guitar for many years before I stabbed myself. And what I learned about music in retrospect held true for writing fiction as well.

What began to happen to the critical viewpoint of my own creative work was that a new aspect of aestheticism and self-identity formulation took shape. I

had been self-recording music for several years after my hand had rehabilitated and healed, though not completely. Many of my first recordings turned out to be creative products that didn't please my own ears. Which was a dilemma. Why would I ever produce music that I wouldn't want to listen to myself? So I changed and adopted a minimum rule about being a creative person. Namely that whatever I take part in creating must be something that I find enjoyable to my own aesthetic principles. With this musical lesson in mind, I began to reread some of my earliest fiction works and came to a terrible and familiar realization: I didn't want to read the type of fiction I was writing. The characters, plot, narrative voice, and stylistic choices I was making weren't necessarily bad but they didn't turn into fiction that I wanted to read. Luckily, I had been down the same theoretical path with my music, so I could quickly understand and work to alleviate the problem.

Through this effort to be engaged and entertained with my own fiction writing that I met John Spaghotte. The first time I stumbled upon John, he was absolutely insane. I fell in love. Here was a story with intrigue, style, and that same ironic sense of criticism and judgment that I had admired in Hunter Thompson's work in high school. John was a wealthy Caucasian nerd. In scene, John was running from G-men and secret police while high on speed and carrying a katana sword.

At first, it was a short story. John Spaghotte, a 21st century Caucasian, nerdy version of Don Quixote, was paranoid and nuts, but likeable, and because I could identify with his sensibilities and world-view I rooted for him. He was

convinced that the government was testing a chemical weapon on the citizens of his hometown via the commercial factories that operated in the town of Crumb. Therefore, on a late night run home from stealing factory soup rations when John is faced with an alleyway full of demons and zombies and ghoulish people who block his path to freedom, he chose to scale this obstacle and fight to survive. It was the fight for a freedom to be paranoid and insane sure, but still. He ran through the crowd of government infected victims, only attacking one who barred his path. Of course, the scene was written in John's perception of the story. The outlying fact of the story was that it was Halloween. The people in the alleyway were costumed and drunk, not government victims of a mass conspiracy. Not even noticing John's ninja-black getup, the party-people were dolloped in fake-blood and slurring their speech. So in the warped reality of the story, John thinks he glides through and cleaves one of the government zombies.

However, what really happens is that he clumsily runs through the small crowd and nicks off a pinky of one of the shorter, zombified bar patrons. It takes a moment for the young costumed man to realize his pinky has been lopped off and even more time for the group to comprehend the real blood spouting from his finger among all the fake dismemberment and corn-syrup blood in the crowd. So that was the first iteration of John Spaghotte. As a writer, I was strongly attracted to the character and plot elements before me. And boredom was the last thing on my mind when reading that first draft of what would become the novel. However, it wouldn't be until I entered graduate school that I came back to John's story with full force.

It was also in my first year of the MFA that I started to consider pedagogical theory. It may seem eons away from the creative realm but just as comparative literature influenced my creative sense in undergraduate studies, I found that my thoughts on pedagogy fell along the same critical lines as my fiction and musical aestheticism development. In my first year I took a class on teaching creative writing workshops for adults. Most of the literature was concerned with pedagogical theory, however the class gave students an opportunity to teach a workshop in an effort to apply and develop a personal system of pedagogical theory and practice. Unsurprisingly, I found myself leaning toward a critical sense.

There were many different styles of pedagogical practice yet the one I found most attractive was a critical sense of existentialist and progressive styles of teaching. In terms of pedagogy, existentialist means that students, ideally, should have content that is catered to their preferred learning style. The progressive stance, similarly, is one where lessons and content are presented in a way that students can engage with course content within the scope of their own experiences. Both are student-centered approaches to teaching and both call for a personal stance in understanding how to learn and contextualize knowledge. It may seem redundant, by my own educational journey was rooted in traditionalism. The classroom was the realm of the teacher as the master authority and student's roles were to listen and memorize and learn only from that authority.

As a result, in my second year of the M.F.A. I participated in the S.C.I.P.P. program (Students and Coyotes: Instruction in Poetry and Prose) and was able to continue my pedagogical theory development. The program gave me a chance to put into practice my own pedagogical theory while teaching creative writing strategies to K-12th grade kids. What I found was that the school children had a similar relationship with education that I did. They found it distant, formal, and rigid. One interesting and recurring idea the kids kept bringing up was a curiosity about why the students were learning what they were learning. This idea of considering the 'why' gave me a final and encompassing element to add to my own creative aesthetic, expository writing, and pedagogy. The critical sense of questioning purposes behind educational theories and practice.

It may seem dissimilar but a critical sense of questioning the 'whys' behind content was the exact same motive in how my creative aesthetic had been developing. Part of the idea of unity and organicism in creative terms is that there should be a known purpose and arguable justification for any inclusive elements.

When teachers address the question of why the curriculum is what it is, the whole classroom experience changes. Students move away from memorizing content to reflecting on the aims of education, the power-structure of their society, and the larger ethical, political, and interpretive questions inscribed in social life. As with my own experience, many students without a critical means to question simply learn the curriculum without noticing the larger aims and structures that are introducing the content and discussion as a whole. Not that critical theory is the savior that hasn't ever been considered. In fact, one element

that bringing critical theory to the discussion does is force the participants to reflect upon the merit of using critical theory itself; what does that say about the system? As one can imagine, this may seem circular in the idea that everything introduced to the classroom needs to be examined for motive, history, and intent. But I would argue, that is simply the world we live in. If a universal sense of justice is the end game of what critical theory as a tool can do for education, then a good look at the idea of justice is in order.

In terms of educational pedagogy, this justice applies to the idea that every student should learn the same content in the same way. But in a critical sense, there is an inherent judgment made about what content is valuable and why it is chosen. The problem arising is that there is no single correct answer that seems available. Pedagogy at its core deals with people, and people are dynamic and unique.

Though seemingly impossible to get right for every student, in a modern system of social mandatory education there is always a choice made. A judgment of one (the teacher) making an assumption about the other (the student, specific or generalized) is inevitable in the teaching process. But in the reflection of education, the critical sense can give students the tools to look inside what they are learning. Through that ability students would be given the chance to see past the content and have the choice to subscribe to ideas, thoughts, and interpretations. Too often, the curriculum ignores building an atmosphere where students have a comfortable space to question the nature of it.

This philosophy to ask questions aligns perfectly with the tactics of existentialism and progressivism. The idea that students can choose their own methods of educational styles in the existential means combined with the progressive stance of using personal context and questioning with a “hands on” method is the overview of my personal pedagogical use. The aim is to be able to approach students from a standpoint of trying to help them to find their own unique scholastic strengths through all available and rational means. Though a “judgment” about what should be taught and why will always and ultimately be made, one way to address that is to be honest with students.

What I learned about this pedagogy then, was a critical theoretic approach is plausible and accessible. However, this particular pedagogy I have subscribed to isn't flawless. But it is meant to understand and at the very least, acknowledge the ways in which it is flawed. In that way, it is an attempt to provide a dynamic education to dynamic people – students at all levels, and this is on a personal note, might appreciate the effort to be given a way to find their own optimal educational methods.

In graduate school I also learned a great deal about the craft of writing fiction. I learned about how to inhabit characterization, tone, voice, plot, and tension to mention a few methods. I began to work on John Spaghotte's novel in greater depth and scope. I put rough drafts of the novel up for workshop and found out about when the character worked best, what plot-lines were the strongest, and how John's character and tale could form into the best version possible. I loved it. My amazing graduate cohorts gave me valuable feedback.

And soon the novel began to take definite shape. The scope and possibilities of the plot came into focus. Having such excellent feedback on an artistic work in progress was invaluable. With the formulation of the novel coming into being, I found that my whole experience of scholarly interpretational tactics was relevant. Only on reflection did I understand that, without specific knowledge, I had been putting all these new literary experiences into John Spaghotte's story. It was not a conscious decision. John Spaghotte's plot, characterization, setting, and theme amongst other inspirations were all directly due to my adoption of multiple potentials of interpretation.

Just as myself, John Spaghotte's understanding of himself is crucial to his involvement and interaction with the world. His characterization and much of the tension-lines run along that path as well. The novel in many ways can be read as a fable on the value of self-recognition. John suffers from a lack of such recognition. However, all of the elements of in the varied English disciplines study-course can be found in the novel. A direct example of the artistic journey I have taken in this four-year time span. My direct split from and conception of John Spaghotte lies in lessons found in this journey.

At Cal State, I had the opportunity to feed and nurture my own artistic sensibilities through all the different aspects of English studies. In craft, I learned how to interpret art based on ideas and discourse about the creative tendencies of writing. In composition, I learned how to guide thoughts in written form while gaining perspectives through literature analysis. In pedagogy, I learned how I can shape my own aesthetic and strengths into a successful curriculum. And by the

end of my M.F.A. program, I learned how they all relate and can influence and supplement each other. Inherent in each discipline is its own interpretational language and scope, yet in my case of fervently incorporating multiple interpretations, methods, and disciplines, all these elements complimented one another in my novel. John Spaghotte, with the inclusion of all these thoughts about interpretation and possibilities and identity, came to be through attempts to continue to recognize the self. It took a self-inflicted stab wound and a blend of insight and discovery of the artistic world of music and writing to find out just who I am and who I could be. Through the development of my own aesthetic that values organicism, a minimum loyalty of creative products that satisfy my own tastes, and a constant critical sense of questioning and considering purpose, I came to see my own identity as a range of possibilities. Knowing that meant that I could use such information to build a more reliable, sustained idea of who I was and what value I had. Art has really been a savior to me. I would be someone else completely had I not become a writer, because it is through the artistic creation, study, appreciation, and development of a critical mind that I came to understand my own place among the words, music, and people of this world. And I would not change a thing.