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## Unifying Elements Of The Creative Artifact “Explaining My Depression to My Mother” By Sabrina Benaim

The focal point of this essay will be the creative artifact “Explaining my depression to my mother”, a slam poetry piece penned by Sabrina Benaim. Benaim first performed her poem to an audience in 2013, during the semifinals of the National Poetry Slam in Oakland, California. A year later, Button Poetry - an organization which “produces and distributes poetry media”– uploaded a video of Benaim’s 2013 performance to their YouTube page. This particular video now has over 7 million views and has managed to spread far and wide across various other social media and online video sharing platforms also.

Benaim’s creative work provides a window into her struggle with depression and expresses the despair she encounters when attempting to explain her emotions to her mother. It could also be considered that Benaim’s depiction of the mother in the poem, also functions as a representation of everyone around her, who cannot, or do not understand her emotional turmoil. This essay will aim to discuss why “Explaining my depression to my mother” can be considered to be a creative form of communication and how Benaim’s depression and despair are conveyed through her use of creativity. The concepts of virtuosity and unity and their presence within this slam poetry piece will be explored. As will the possible value this creative artifact may provide, and the influence it is capable of having upon the audience.

Communication is a rather broad term, but Fiske offers a basic, accurate definition, social interaction through messages. Benaim’s performance of her poem completely qualifies as an act of communication and as will be discussed further later in this text, there are a number of forms of communication that Benaim utilizes to convey her emotions during her performance. Creativity it is a much more elusive concept and there are varying degrees to which individuals may define or use the term ‘creativity’.

Farrow (2018) sees unity as one of the key components to defining a creative work, describing it as “when all elements in the artifact share the same internal logic”. Put simply, this can be understood as each element, or level of the creative work that makes it a whole, are all attempting to convey the same meaning or message. In Benaim’s performance of her poem, there are a number of elements that are intrinsic to her portrayal of her depression and the despair she feels. The cleverly written metaphors and the poetic, emotive language that Benaim uses in her writing, play a huge part in conveying her feelings to the audience. She also makes use of her frustration and anger and expresses these emotions in her voice. Benaim lets herself get so immersed in her words that as an audience member, you begin to feel as if you really are watching her vain and desperate attempt to compel her mother to understand.

Additionally, the raw emotion, frustration and nerves that are evident in Benaim’s body language provide the audience with a visual representation of her emotions and serve as another level of creative communication that unifies with the other elements. When Benaim is performing it seems almost as if her physical body cannot effectively contain and process all of the emotions she is trying to express. She is shaking, twitching, turning red in the face and overall appears to be extremely anxious and panicked. Although this display of emotion may not be considered a creative act at surface value by many people and does not seem to be an

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intentional; in order to be creative, one must be true to themselves and their emotions. As Farrow writes: “One of the most defining aspects of creative practice is its relationship with human emotions”. Benaim’s venerable and extremely impassioned approach to voicing her emotions is another unifying element of this artifact.

Another essential property of creative works is Virtuosity, which refers to the talent, skill and/or mastery that “distinguishes creative practitioners from other mortals”, whether this be a natural born ability, one developed by long term training, or a combination of both. There is no doubt that Benaim exhibits a great deal of skill and talent in her writing and performance of “Explaining my depression to my mother”. It is incredibly skillful and rather novel the way in which she is capable of writing about her feelings. A standout example of this effective personification is when Benaim declares “Anxiety is the cousin visiting from out of town that depression felt obligated to invite to the party”. By describing her depression through comparison to human characteristics and behaviors, Benaim reinforces the idea of the strength and power her depression hold over her. She then goes on to say “Mom, I am the party, only I’m a party I don’t want to be at”. This second phrase almost has the opposite effect of the first, but is still hugely successful in sending her intended message. Benaim is dehumanizing herself by referring to herself as a ‘party’ that depression attends, and has rudely invited anxiety along to.

Philip Alperson (2003) writes “Creativity in art seems to call for a special talent that distinguishes artists from the general run of human beings” and upon watching Benaim’s performance it seems straightforward that she would not just fall under, but leap into the category of ‘artist’.

The final component of creative communication that will be explored is the value this artifact provides to the audience and the wider world. Rollo May is quoted saying “Creativity ... brings to our awareness what was previously hidden and points to new life”. Benaim’s poem is likely to provide a means of understanding for those who do not suffer from depression regarding how hard the battle with depression really is, and how condescending and ignorant their comments may come across. Farrow argues that creative work is often “bigger than the sum of its parts because it helps us see a larger picture or a universal truth”. Due to the large number of views the video of Benaim’s performance has received, it is quite likely that there are many, many people out there that now have a better understanding of what people may be going through, and question themselves before making flippant, off the cuff comments to people dealing with depression.

Benaim’s depiction of her struggle with mental illness resonated with many people of all ages and from all walks of life who were going through or had been through, similar experiences. A statement found in the comments section of Button Poetry’s (2014) YouTube video reads: “She yelled the things that all of us are scared of even whispering”. This comment sums up how mental illness suffers many may feel about this artifact extremely well: Benaim’s poem depicts their internal struggle and their emotions in a way they are incapable of doing so. It also provides those with depression with a feeling that someone understands them and that they are not alone in their battle. Benaim was even contacted by many parents thanking her for her poems’ aiding in their understanding of their children’s depression. Boog (2017), states that following her performance in 2013, “Benaim stayed in contact with the thousands of people who discovered her through the video, including young people coping with depression and parents grateful for a glimpse into a child’s struggle with it”.

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In conclusion, the various unifying elements are utilized within the performance the considerable talent and skill portrayed by the author/performer and the overall impact and significance this creative artifact has had and will continue to have on audience members, leaves no doubt to the fact that Sabrina Benaim has creatively communicated her story and perspective and thus created an incredible piece of creative work.

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