Found Poetry as Literature Review

Research Poems on Audience and Performance

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Creating found poetry from theoretical literature offers an arts-based approach to literature review in inquiry. Found poetry has a long history of practice in poetry as the imaginative appropriation and reconstruction of already-existing texts. This article presents literature-voiced research found poems that express distillations and crystallizations of a wide range of writing in contemporary continental philosophy and performance theory. The suite of poems forms part of a current dissertation inquiry in the form of a curriculum theory of audience in performance and education.

Keywords: *found poetry; literature review; audience; performance; research*

The found poems on audience and performance presented here have been created as part of the literature review component of my current doctoral dissertation project in interdisciplinary studies (theater and curriculum) at the University of Victoria, British Columbia (see also Prendergast, 2001, 2004b, 2004d, 2004f). The poems represent emerging understandings of *audience in performance* coming from readings in contemporary continental aesthetic philosophy and theater/performance theory. The suite serves to reflect on, play against, and perform with the central topic of this inquiry, that of developing a curriculum theory for audience education in the performing arts. My intention is to place these poems, and others, as chapters and as interludes within and between chapters throughout my dissertation (see also Prendergast, 2004c, 2004e). Research poetry used in this context offers an alternative method for understanding and representing key theories and texts in inquiry. This aesthetic and intellectual choice is drawn from my belief that the transitory, ephemeral, and affective nature of performance requires a similar form of writing. This kind of language is clearly to be found in poetry, with its unique ability to capture and present aspects of the past (in memory),

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present (in experience), and future (in hope/fear). This approach also pro-
vides a welcome and effective concord of arts-based topic and method that
has proved ideal for a literature review project interested in surveying impor-
tant ideas about live audiences, specifically theater audiences, from
contemporary aesthetic philosophers, theater artists, and performance
theorists.

Ekphrastic Inquiry

The practice of writing descriptively, most often poetically, about works
of art is called *ekphrasis*. The original definitions of the word from the Greek
are "speaking out" or "telling in full" (Heffernan, 1993, p. 6) and "to show
very clearly, to make completely clear" as "a descriptive text which places
the matter communicated clearly and distinctly before our eyes" (Bruhn,
2000, p. xviii). The practice of writing ekphrases began in the rhetorical
schools of ancient Greece, with the paradigmatic exemplar being the exten-
sive description of Achilles's shield in Homer's *Iliad*. Ekphrastic writing has
continued with time through examples found in the work of poets such as
Ovid, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, Yeats, Shelley,
Byron, Browning, Auden, Larkin, Williams, and Ashbery. All these poets
have written in response to either real (*actual ekphrasis*) or fictional
(*notional ekphrasis*) visual works of art (Heffernan, 1993, pp. 7, 146). I am
naming my practice of writing poetry in response to audience and perfor-
mance a methodological form called *ekphrastic inquiry* (see also
Prendergast, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a).

Writing Research Poetry: A Guide

Sifting through data, whether researcher data from field texts of various
kinds or participant data, is the process of intuitively sorting out words,
phrases, sentences, and passages that synthesize meaning from the prose in
the light of a particular research question (Gee, 1985; Tedlock, 1983). These
siftings will be generally metaphorical, narrative, and affective in nature. The
process is reflexive in that the researcher is interconnected with the
researched, that the researcher's own affective response to the process
informs it. As Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) stated, "Creating
poems . . . has been an extremely successful activity for many qualitative
researchers" (p. 136). Ely et al. also noted "one joyful thing about writing
poetry is that, given the same data, different people create differing versions"
(p. 136). It is performative in nature in that poetry is originally an oral art

form that is deeply rooted in the sense of voice. Creating research poetry is a performative act, revealing both researcher and participant(s) as masked and unmasked, costumed and bared, liars and truth tellers, actors and audience, offstage and onstage in the process of research (see also Cannon Poindexter, 2002; McCrary Sullivan, 2000).

Melisa Cahnmann (2003) considered the use of poetry in educational research practice and shared her own ethnographic research poems. Cahnmann wrote in her abstract that

> developing a poetic voice prepares scholars to discover and communicate findings in multidimensional, penetrating, and more accessible ways. The . . . craft, practice, and possibility for a poetic approach to inquiry among teaching and learning communities . . . encourages all researchers, especially those using qualitative methodologies, to consider what poets do and learn how to incorporate rhythm, form, metaphor, and other poetic techniques to enhance their work. . . . The use of poetry [is] a means for educational scholarship to impact the arts, influence wider audiences, and improve teacher and graduate student education. (p. 29)

The works of Laurel Richardson (1994, 1997) and Corinne Glesne (1997) are most commonly cited in studies employing poetry.[1] Although sociologist Richardson did not focus on the how-to aspects of her lyrical ethnographic research poems, Glesne (p. 206) did break down for the reader how she went through a sifting process to create two versions of poetic narratives from participant interview transcripts. According to Glesne, the first version is "chronologically and linguistically faithful to the transcript" (p. 207), whereas the second "draws from other sections of the interviews, takes more license with words" (p. 207). Glesne described how she worked from a more typical qualitative data analysis involving coding and sorting data by themes and then moved into the poetic transcription process:

> I found myself, through poetic transcription, searching for the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then drawing from all portions of the interviews to juxtapose details into a somewhat abstract representation. Somewhat like a photographer, who lets us know a person in a different way, I wanted the reader to come to know Dona Juana [the participant] through very few words. (p. 206)

Speaking autobiographically, I can locate my interest in research poetry coming out of my drama/theater background. I experience the voices I read and translate into research poems as heard, as spoken, as expressed, as soliloquies/monologues/dialogues, as character driven. I am always interested

in the clearest possible voice being heard, whether it is the researcher's, the participant's(s'), or the literature's voice(s). This connection between research poetry and drama seems important in articulating this method, along with the recognition that poetry and drama come from the same roots in Western history (out of ancient Greece), from song and ritual, and share an inherently oral nature.

Forging strong links to poetic practice in literature is one way to validate research poetry in research that is underexamined. Found poetry has an established history and practice in literature, including works by prominent poets such as Maya Angelou (1991), Annie Dillard (1995), Rick Moody (2001), and John Robert Colombo (1966). Ezra Pound (1948) included elements of found poetry in his famous work *Cantos*, as did T. S. Eliot in some of his works. Like these found poets (except in a research as well as an aesthetic framework), I am interested in expressing my own view of the thoughts and words of others through the re-creation of their texts. As Butler-Kisber (2002) wrote about her own use of found poetry in research,

> Whether found poetry is used as a public form of representation or as an analytic tool within the inquiry process, it will bring the researcher closer to the data in different and sometimes unusual ways that can yield new and important insights. (p. 235)

All the words in these poems are to be found where cited in the original source texts. I have played with line breaks, patterns on the page, parentheses, and the occasional use of repetition for emphases. This present work is an attempt to capture a number of different, and valuable, voices and theoretical perspectives through the crystallizing and creative process of found poetry. My hope is that some or all of these poems, written specifically as part of an inquiry literature review, may also have future pedagogical value in becoming part of the curriculum I envision for audience in performance studies in education.

PROLOGUE

poetry and theatre[2]

poetry
      like revolution
is anarchic
   imaginative
   compassionate

in opposition
            to social order

theatre
shapes itself
for its own purpose
(like revolution)
            its anarchic purpose

to re-
    form
        (through play)
                to re-
                    create

defining the problem[3]

    i. we have never
       as a society
       acted so much
       or
       watched so many

       watching
       (of course)
       carries its own problems

       watching
          itself
             is problematic

    ii. drama is built
       into the rhythms
       of everyday life

       a habitual experience

       more in a week
       than most previous
       lifetimes

at once
        a dramatic
        and a social
    fact

prelude to performance[4]

theatre
(in perpetual crisis
    but
indestructible)
        is materialist

no thought
    without
    the body

a strange mirror
that
brings things
close up
        exaggerates
                syncopates

(the impossible
reigns)

theatre
is an acrobat
    an oxymoron

a hero (who)
wipes down
his glorious nudity
with a rag

a princess (who)
is a goosegirl
her donkey-
skin dress
the colour

of the moon

a locus
for disorder
    insoluble contradictions

theatre
proclaims
the unacceptable
the monstrous

it is a hole
the spectators
must plug
(as best they can)

otherwise
their little craft
will leak

ACT I—CONTEMPORARY AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHERS

Foucault haiku[5]

in this place/in that
the fluttering attention
of the spectator

in a ceaseless exchange
the observer and the observed
take part/take part/take

drama[6]

- the art form from earliest days
  - lays the highest claims to spirituality
    - (representation of ideas/
    - innermost suppositions)
  - depends equally
- on an audience

art[7]

art is magic
delivered from the lie
of being truth

poetics[8]

the sphere
of infinite vibrations
of meaning

grain[9]

grain is the body
the voice the hand the limb as
it performs, performs

the spectator[10]

i.   may look
      but
      may never
      be looked at

      (a magical ceremony
      of annihilation)

ii.   should
      simply be
      a pair of eyes

      (fully aware
      that he is helpless)

iii. a projection
      of impotence

      (if I shout
      I would be stopping
      the actor

but
not Hamlet)

iv.   someone
who is dreaming
and knows

(there is nothing
he can do)

in the theater[11]

all that is there:

man's desire
to be outside himself

the better
to see himself

(not as others see him
but
as he is)

what comes out[12]

the audience
writes the play
                quite as much
                as the author does

the abyss[13]

separates the players
                from the audience

(as it does the dead
                from the living)

        silence

heightens the sublimity
         the intoxication

(indelible traces . . .
             of ritual origin)

theatre and religion[14]

in each case
the same story:

the ideal community;

the act that separates
(error or sin);

the ultimate restoration
(the living, the dead, the unborn);

the tragic hero (who)
         passes over . . .

the audience dances[15]

the audience dances
(by proxy) through the chorus
of the play, the play.

ACT II—THEATRE ARTISTS AND PERFORMANCE THEORISTS

curriculum actions[16]

   to break down
   the distance between
   actor & audience

   to give the spectator
   something more
   than passive

i/you[17]

 the stage uses
    "you"
 in its relation
 to the audience

 (spoken to)

 in the act
 of speech

the actor's act[18]

 discarding half measures

 revealing, opening, emerging

 (an invitation
    to
 the spectator)

 an act
 of deeply rooted
 genuine love

 paradoxical and borderline

 the actor's
 deepest calling

**THE CONDITION OF DEATH . . .
FOR THE CONDITION OF THE ARTIST AND ART**[19]

 . . . this specific relationship
 terrifying
 but at the same time
 compelling

 unremarkable

on the other side
        opposite

they astound us
as though we
were seeing them
for the first time

set on display
in an ambiguous ceremony:

                irrevocably different
                and infinitely foreign

their individuality
        distinction

their CHARACTER

glaring
                almost circus-like

this theatre is[20]

- resistant to official views
- peopled by resistance
- at the frontiers of everyday life
- the urban experience
- the televisual, filmic
- the fine art cabaret
- the street, the factory, the school, the prison, the farm
- the most solid of buildings

the line[21]

the line
between art and life
should be kept as fluid

(perhaps indistinct)

as possible

do you think about the audience?[22]

the audience
is *there*

(the air you breathe)

the other part
of the exploration

no theatre
          without
audience

no life
          without
breath

a pain in your chest
(aware/unaware)
like my breathing

the flow
the flow
the flow
          (the whole)

i believe[23]

i believe
in the intelligence
of the audience

that the audience
wants to create

give the audience food

(not already masticated
            organized
            painted)

the opportunity
to invent

(like a word)

to discover
the actor
is on the wing

definition[24]

four great spheres
of performance:

entertainment
            healing
                education
                    ritual

in play
with each other

(a very serious matter)

the subtext[25]

a web
woven from
"magic ifs"

threads
in
a cable

- given circumstances
- figments of imagination
- inner movements

- objects of attention
- smaller and greater truths

(a belief)

it is subtext
that makes us say
the words we do

why are we concerned with art?[26]

to cross our frontiers
   exceed our limitations
   fill our emptiness
   fulfill ourselves

not a condition
          (a process)

what is dark
slowly becomes
transparent
         (the theatre)

to peel off
the life mask
        (in us)

full-fleshed perceptivity

place of provocation

imaged in breath
       (body)
inner impulses

defiance of taboo
       (transgression)

provides the shock
to give ourselves
                    (nakedly)

to something
impossible
to define

mandate[27]

the acceptance
of poverty
in theatre

stripped of
not essentials

reveals
the backbone
of the medium

but
    also
        the deep riches
        in the very nature
        of the form

audience actions[28]

to enter into
dialogical relations
to accept
parameters
to act
in unison
to become

the audience[29]

is always
the other person

throbbing with excitement
        or menacing
        or grave
        immobile
        attentive

the constant lesson
taught and retaught

(respect and learning)

as vital
as speech
      or love

EPILOGUE

above all[30]

drama
is the art
of the actor

good theatre[31]

    stands
  face to face
with its audience

Notes

1. I have been gathering a bibliography of research poetry that now numbers more than 100 citations, most published in the past 5 years. An article featuring some excerpts from this bibliography may be found at Prendergast (2003a).

2. Gordon McDougall, in Goodman and deGay (2000, p. 128).

3. Raymond Williams, in Goodman and deGay (2000, pp. 55-59).

4. Anne Ubersfeld (1999, pp. 189-191).

5. Michel Foucault, *Las Meninas*, in Cazeaux (2000, pp. 402, 409, repetition added).

6. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, in Cazeaux (2000, p. 250).

7. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, in Cazeaux (2000, p. 250).

8. Roland Barthes, *The Plates of the Encyclopedia*, in Cazeaux (2000, p. 398).

9. Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 54, repetition added).

10. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, in Contat and Rybalka (1976, pp. 9-10).

11. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, in Contat and Rybalka (1976, p. 12).

12. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Theater*, in Contat and Rybalka (1976, p. 68).

13. Walter Benjamin, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 78).

14. Roger Scruton (2004, p. 454, repetition added).

15. Roger Scruton (2004, p. 454, repetition added).

16. Bert O. States (1985, p. 170).

17. Bert O. States (1985, p. 170).

18. Jerzy Grotowski, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 218).

19. Tadeusz Kantor, in Huxley and Witts (2002, pp. 256-257).

20. Alan Read, in Goodman and deGay (2000, pp. 191-192).

21. Allan Kaprow, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 260).

22. Elizabeth LeCompte, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 275, repetition added).

23. Robert Lepage, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 283).

24. Richard Schechner, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 355).

25. Konstantin Stanislavski, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 389).

26. Jerzy Grotowski, in Goodman and deGay (2000, p. 25).

27. Jerzy Grotowski, in Goodman and deGay (2000, p. 25).

28. Colin Counsell, in Goodman and deGay (2000, p. 207).

29. Peter Brook, in Goodman and deGay (2000, p. 92).

30. Vsevolod Meyerhold, in Huxley and Witts (2002, p. 306).

31. Alan Read, in Goodman and deGay (2000, p. 191).

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