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ish: How to Write Poemish (Research) Poetry

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Abstract

Discussion has occurred around what constitutes quality research poetry, with some direction on how a researcher, who is a novice poet, might go about writing *good enough* research poetry. In an effort to increase the existing conversation, the authors review research poetry literature and ideas from art poets on how to read, write, and revise poetry. The authors interrupt the prose text throughout with poetic interludes and quotes from poets. The conversation is framed by the conception of *ish* and *poemish* which is drawn directly from Reynolds's powerful book *ish*. Poemish representations may be said to be research representations characterized by features of poetry and an effort to blend the aesthetics of poetry and science of research into something which may be said to be poem-like, ish, or *poemish*.

Keywords

good enough research poetry, poemish, poetry, qualitative research representations, research poetry, writing

"Poetry is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry expresses the universal, and history only the particular."

~ Aristotle ~

Introduction to Poetry (an excerpt)

"I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide
or press an ear against its hive.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it."
—Billy Collins (1988)

Discussion has occurred around what constitutes quality research poetry (e.g., Piirto, 2002) with some direction on how a researcher, who is a novice poet, might go about writing *good enough* research poetry (Lahman & Richard, 2014). In an effort to increase the existing conversation, we review research poetry literature and ideas from art poets on how to read, write, and revise poetry. Throughout, we interrupt the prose text with poetic interludes (Lahman et al., 2010) and quotes from poets. The conversation is framed by the idea of *poemish*, a safe space for creation, which is borrowed liberally from Reynolds's powerful book *ish*. Poemish representations may be said to be research representations characterized by features of poetry and an effort to blend the aesthetics of poetry and science of research into something which may be said to be poem-like, a resemblance of a poem, ish, or poemish.

Research Poetry 101

I want to help them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide
or press an ear against its hive,
but I am unsure I know how.

I'd say drop a mouse into a poem
but I'm uncertain if I can show it how to
probe her way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
but what if we fumble for the light switch?

I want them to ski the Colorado Rockies
across the surface of data poems
waving at the research participants on the lift
without crashing.

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I think maybe
then their
poems will
refract,
reflect,

hum,
buzz,
prod,
explore,

illuminate,
burn,

slalom,
shhhs.

But all we do
is tie the research poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.
"I am not poetry"!

We begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.
"I am research poetry"?
—Maria Lahman

"Writing a poem is discovering."

~ Robert Frost ~

Research poetry can be used as an entry point into expressing the inexpressible (Teman & Lahman, 2012). Doing so requires the researcher-as-poet to be "dramatic versus didactic, using [everyday] human language as opposed to scholarly language" (Faulkner, 2018, p. 226). Poetry "makes the invisible world visible" (Parini, 2008, p. 181). Poetry has the unique ability to "clarify and magnify our human existence" (Faulkner, 2016, p. 16). A distinguishing characteristic of research poetry (e.g., poetic transcription, poetic inquiry) in comparison with poetry qua poetry is that research poetry is a facet of qualitative research—it is "both a method and product of research activity" (Faulkner, 2016, p. 20). Research poets have some sort of goal in mind when they set out to express research findings in poetic form—these goals range from eliciting emotional responses from the reader (e.g., Carr, 2003) to capturing nuances of phenomena while maintaining ethical anonymity (González, 2002) to furthering social justice via postmodernist (e.g., Hartnett, 2003) and critical representations . . . to honoring and preserving participants words, voices, and perspectives (Nichols, Biederman, & Gringle, 2015).

In support of these goals, we frame this article with Reynolds's (2004) idea of *ish* or a safe space in art for growth and good enough creations. Ish reminds the audience of the form the artist is working in but in some new way. In the children's book *ish* (Reynolds, 2004), the protagonist is a young boy, Ramon, who becomes frustrated by his ability to recreate a realistic vase of flowers through art. Each time Ramon tries to draw an image, he crumples up his attempt. Ramon's older brother causes these feelings by mocking his artistic ability, eventually causing Ramon to stop drawing. All the while, the boy's younger sister has collected each crumpled artistic attempt, smoothed it out, and displayed it on her wall. Ramon's discovery of the dramatic display of his multiple attempts to capture a vase of flowers through art culminates in Ramon moving into feeling free, renewed, and creating with a sensibility of ish. He even creates poemish poetry.

His ish art inspired ish writing.
He wasn't sure if he was writing poems,
but he knew they were poem-ish. (Reynolds, 2004)

Elsewhere, Maria and Veronica (Lahman & Richard, 2014) have written in a similar vein, calling for the possibility that research poets be allowed a space to create *good enough* research poetry within.

Poetasters and Research

"Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history."

~ Plato ~

The field of research poetry by now has a well-developed body of work including textbooks (Faulkner, 2016; Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009), conference presentations, methodological development (e.g., Faulkner, 2016; Furman, 2006; Glesne, 1997; Lahman et al., 2011; Prendergast, 2006; Richardson, 1993), and supportive journals of which *Qualitative Inquiry* continues to be a leading force. Also growing in support of poetic methods and representation are field-specific journals. For examples, see the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (e.g., Finley, 2003), *International Quarterly of Community Health Education* (e.g., Nichols et al., 2015), *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* (e.g., Taylor, 2014), *Journal of Consumer Research* (e.g., Sherry & Schouten, 2002), *Family Systems & Health* (e.g., Shapiro, 2004), and *Management Decision* (e.g., Darmer, 2006).

The main forms of poetry qualitative researchers create continue to be data poems or transcription poems (e.g., Glesne, 1997), which are poems researchers create with data from a study such as interview transcripts; research poems, which the researcher creates about the research experience; and auto-ethnographic poetry. Found poetry (Prendergast, 2006) and formed poetry (Furman, 2006) are

more recent additions, which have burgeoning areas of literature and creativity surrounding them. Exciting new research poetry ideas are emerging in many areas. Some examples follow: counter poetry (Lail & Lahman, 2017), tandem found poetry (Burdick, 2011), collective poetry (e.g., Teman, 2010), collage poetry (e.g., Lahman in Lahman, Teman, & Richard, 2017), and visual poetry (e.g., Lahman, Teman, & Richard, 2017). Burdick (2011) working on Prendergast's development of found poetry has created the idea of tandem found poetry where the researcher and the participant separately yet simultaneously create data poems and then meet to discuss their creations. Lail and Lahman (2017), drawing on counter stories, discuss the idea that research poets attempting to show alternative views to dominate stories may be thought of as counter poets. Eric (Teman, 2010) has created collective poetry by combining transcripts both to illustrate a mingled cry of pain and sorrow and to shroud the identities of participants. Maria (Lahman, Teman, & Richard, 2017) created a collage poem with images of her daughter, language from institutional review board (IRB) about children in research, and indelible black marker. Veronica (Richard, 2011), starting with her dissertation, has been mixing professional photos with both participants' words and her own words of reflection to create visual or graphic poems, highlighting participants' voices, the metaphorical processes of photo elicitation, and reflexivity (Richard & Lahman, 2015).

As Miller, Donoghue, and Holland-Batt (2015) contend, choosing to represent data in a poetic modality provides an avenue for both the researcher and reader to appreciate and experience the participants' understandings. In this vein, research poets give some advice on how to go about writing poetry with most of it being centered on the creation of poems (see Glesne, 1997, for an early outline of this process and Butler-Kisber, 2010, for a later outline).

Areas of Tension

"Poetry lies its way to the truth."

~ John Ciardi ~

Areas of tension in regard to research poetry continue to exist among research poets and qualitative researchers in general. We use the word *tension* as a metaphor of a rope pulled taut. When a thought is pulled taut, we are engaged with it and actively considering it unlike when a rope or thought is slack. Areas of scholarly tension are rich with potentiality and ripe for poetic contributions. Some of these areas are articulated as qualifications to write research poetry and illustrate the differences between the poet and the research poet. On one end of the rope are the literary poets who generally have training in their craft and who usually do not provide an explanation or interpretation with their poetry. On the other end of the rope are the research poets who may not have training in writing poetry but who do have training in qualitative analysis. Research poets may want to explain or be required to explain their poetic processes and intended meaning. In the following section, we discuss qualifications for novice research poets.

What about qualifications to write poetry? In our experience, novice research poets may be asked about their use of poetry in what might be termed high stakes research such as a thesis or dissertation. See Johns (2014) for an example of addressing this issue with a diplomatic and thorough introduction of research poetry as a component of a dissertation.

An argument could be made that historically poets may have had little to no training while contemporary poets may have extensive training, practice, oral readings, and publications of poetry considered to be "good." Because of the expertise and implied status that comes with a literary education, there may be tension between the expert literary poets and research poets. This tension leads to the discussion of what "good" research poetry should encompass. According to the research poet Faulkner (2016), there are general core themes of what constitutes "good" poetry. Although Faulkner's list is fairly extensive, it includes such ideas as authenticity, courage, emblematic, ineffability, visceral, and engagement of the human condition (Faulkner, 2016). Perhaps the most powerful way to portray whether a research poem is art (or, at least, art-ish) is to work on honing one's artfulness. For example, Piirto (2002) suggests researchers be aware of traditions and techniques within the poetic world.

The expressive value of poetry in research is powerfully conveyed by Furman, Lietz, and Langer (2006), where they discuss poetry's "metaphoric generalizability" to "penetrate the essence of human experience" (p. 2). This may occur through applying creative arts to one's study, which facilitates the researcher's ability to express the "richness and fullness of the phenomenon being explored" (Furman et al., 2006, p. 3). Qualitative researchers use poetry to express meaning in powerful and profound ways, not necessarily for literary value; instead, researchers use research poems for "generating or presenting data" (Furman et al., 2006, p. 3). We researchers wish to remain true to the participants and the stories they share. In this way, we sometimes borrow methods from literary poets to "remain faithful to the essence of the text, experience, or phenomena being represented," resulting in research poetry (Furman et al., 2006, p. 3).

With the tension among scholars, some stand out as elitist when it comes to representing research in arts-based ways. For example, Greene believes only "geniuses can be artists" (Piirto, 2002, p. 433). This illustrates the criticisms of attempts at postmodern representations of qualitative research. Somewhere in Greene's statement, we might derive a bit of wisdom—if we were forced to find it, it

might go something like, "Be sure you know something about poetry before attempting to write poetry."

Using Greene's logic, arts-based research quality will be decided once the researcher is dead (Piirto, 2002). Her words act to subjugate the artistic abilities of postmodern researchers—skilled or amateur, no matter—who desire to further the accessibility and power of academic research via the arts. This is most ironic. In the end, we can live with Greene classifying research as "art-like" versus art qua art; since, researchers should possess the right to create poetry as humans who experience the world in different ways and take pleasure in representing this. After all, doesn't it take someone going out on a limb writing something new to contribute to our great body of literature? We academics do not write with the intent of having our method of writing criticized, as artists are criticized in the art world. We do not live fully in the art world; we do not want to live fully in the art world, but we want to be able to use art-like creations to represent our participants' voices and our methodological discoveries to put into question the very nature of what it means to do academic research and representation. Why should the art qua art requirement be based on the four tenets of old, White, male, and dead? We tug on the rope in part to defend different ways of knowing and representing and in part to defend the accessibility of academic research to nonacademics.

Authors as Research Poets

"Poetry is thoughts that breathe, and words that burn."

~ Thomas Gray ~

One thing we three have in common and assume we share with all poets, researchers, or otherwise is a love of words—the sound of words, syllables, rhythm, rhyme, meanings, double meanings, alliteration, interpretations, playing with words, the visual look of words, and so on.

Maria

I have been poking around in research poetry for over a decade. I had a minor in English in college and the opportunity to be taught a course by a poet in residence, Jean Janzen, a premier Mennonite poet (see Janzen, 1995, 2008, for examples of her poetry). When a decade later I became immersed in qualitative methods, I thought back to these poetic experiences making connections to the world of social science research and the burgeoning literature on how to draw on literary aesthetics and be a researcher at the same time (e.g., Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). I noted that while I had many examples of research poetry and scholars pointing out poor research poetry to share with my students, I had few examples of how to teach them to write quality research poetry.

Eric

I was first inspired to write research poetry in a qualitative writing class in my doc program. I recall tremendous trepidation at the thought of having to represent our findings in various ways, including something written in postmodern style. I agonized over the data I had amassed on a university campus gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) center. During the course of the research study, one of the participants committed suicide. Devastated, scared, and shocked, I did not know how to write up these "results." That is when I discovered the power of research poetry—it afforded me the means of representing something truly inexpressible (Teman, 2010). I have since become an avid research poet.

Veronica

I have been writing and teaching poetry for 16 years—the early years as an English major and high school English teacher and the latter years as a research poet, methodologist, and dissertation advisor. In my formal training, I read, reread, and dissected the words of the literary poets deemed worthy of attention. Then, I was asked to go from the consumer of poetry to the producer of poetry. In some of these experiences, I mimicked the structure and purpose of the masters. At other times, I explored the power of poetry to help me make sense of life events. During my doctoral work, poetry came forward through the participants' words. As I transcribed, read, and reread their words, various poetic and descriptive narrative structures surfaced as the modes of representation. These modes surfaced partly because of the arts-based data collection methods I used. Since these experiences, different circumstances (in and out of the research realm) have sparked my poetic teaching, thinking, seeing, and hearing.

A Poemish Perspective

"Wanted: a needle swift enough to sew this poem into a blanket."

~ Charles Simic ~

Write a poem down as it comes to you, ideally without stopping or being interrupted. In Maria's family, several of the members have an overpowering need to write in this way so when the ideas come, others dash around supportively looking for writing tools and then no one interrupts. Maria has felt powerful urges to write highly specific words in awkward places such as in the shower, when nursing her child, or teaching a class. While these episodes make for humorous

enactments later of would-be authors writing on napkins, scraps of paper, and in smartphone memo applications, the search to find a way to capture ideas is in earnest.

Moments in life or research prompt poetic thinking. For Veronica, different events and ideas are thought out poetically. It could be a life-altering experience and the weight of the resulting pain or joy; it could be the routine nature of riding a bike and paying attention to the city or country smells and sounds; it could be reading a participants' words and seeing the poetic possibilities almost jumping off the page. Veronica also writes on scraps of paper, computer sticky notes, transcripts, and journal pages until she is ready to put the words and forms together. Sometimes, she goes through a period of thought work, letting the ideas ruminate, mentally repeating them over and over until ready for the permanence of paper or computer screen.

Eric said of this initial writing urges,

> I try to sleep . . . oh, God, do I try. But those characters . . . they come to life in my mind. They won't leave me alone. I squeeze my eyes tighter, but bolt upright I sit. The characters won't shut up. I find my interview participants' stories continuing in my mind. Will I remember this tomorrow? I better get up and write it down now, right? What if I forget? They speak in poetry . . . in verse. I must capture these actions . . . these emotions. Poetry allows me to do this.

Ideas on how to develop a poem are important to consider after you get the main idea of the poem written. Poetry may come to poets in a seemingly out of the blue fashion. However, the work of the poet comes in the revisions. All of the discussion presented next would occur after the initial outpouring. In the following sections, we explore reading poetry, writing poetry, and revising poetry.

Read, Read, Read

"Poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking."

~ John Wain ~

To write poemish research poetry, one must first read poetry extensively and regularly (Lahman et al., 2010). Unfortunately, for some researchers we have worked with, the idea of reading poetry brings up a past full of negative experiences. These experiences include, among others, a sense of intimidation, the unknown or indecipherable, or a sense of alienation or off-putting. So how to start? A blogger from a seemingly defunct blog, "readingwhilefemale," had some practical tips we appreciated on reading poetry, "Just enjoy it. Paraphrase the poem into simple explanations that will create a 'road map of the poem' of where it begins, travels, and ends."

Certainly, research poets should read research poetry, but more importantly, they should read literary poetry. One enriching strategy we have found to help overcome a reluctance to engage with poetry is to join a poem of the day virtual lists (e.g., https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem-day; http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/) or read a poem of the day book (Academy of American Poets, 2015; McCosker & Albery, 1998). These practices are rich yet a reasonable time commitment for people with lives already overly busy.

When one of the poems you read inspires you, do some work around it. Who is the author? What era and contexts were they writing out of? What other poetry have they written that you may wish to read? What about the poem appeals to you? Was the poem formed? If so, how? What poetic devices did the poet employ? How might your poetry be affected by this poem?

This reading of poetry sparks the writing of poetry. For example, in thinking about how and why she writes research poetry, Veronica remembered Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)" (Academy of American Poets, n.d.). After reading the poem several times, she thought of using Browning's poem as a model. In this process, Veronica reviewed the structure, style, and aims. In this analysis, Browning's model helped Veronica realize the progression of her ideas through the Italian sonnet—to count or describe ways of writing poetry and to end with a message. In Veronica's case, the message is of writing poetry to give voice, to discover, and to challenge the status quo.

Maria has a deep desire to represent the painful and unexpected death of her mother and was floundering in too much emotion to write when she first read *End of April* by Phillis Levin, a poem which expresses the inexpressible. Levin's poem was a reminder of how powerfully nature conveys human experience, so Maria went back into her own garden poetically, where she can never spend enough time, to consider death.

End of April (an excerpt)

"Under a cherry tree
I found a robin's egg,
broken, but not shattered.

I had been thinking of you,

when I saw it: a blue scrap,
a delicate toy, as light
as confetti

I looked inside:
it was glistening, hollow,
a perfect shell
except for the missing crown, . . .

What had been there
is gone now
and lives in my heart

where, periodically,
it opens up its wings,
tearing me apart."
—Phillis Levin

Eric finds inspiration for his poetry in novels. By reading Maya Angelou, for example, he cannot help but become inspired. As he reads her beautiful and powerful words, he visualizes the stories he wants to tell through poetry. Sometimes this happens while reading, other times this inspiration occurs late at night while trying to sleep, where he finds himself, instead, thinking about the poetic representations of his own research.

Write, Write, Write

> *"Poetry surrounds us everywhere, but putting it on paper is, alas, not so easy as looking at it."*
>
> ~ Vincent van Gogh ~

Lousy Verse

Lousy verse masquerades poetical.
Poetaster's doggerel is comical.
The good poems I have read
don't come from my head.
Research poems may be quite abominable.
—Maria Lahman

Poetry with impact. Along with reading poetry, research poets also, of course, need to write poetry and create room in their lives for experiencing and playing with words in different ways. These writings extend what one is reading and allow research poems to move from the abominable to an impactful form so that others may experience the world in new and meaningful ways. While considering what to emphasize from the vast array of options in the area of how to write poetry, we reviewed textbooks and websites on writing poetry. As the area of how to write poetry is so vast, we will only address what seem to be primary areas: choosing important impactful topics, imagery, clichés, triteness, and sentimentality, rhythm and rhyme, sound devices, allusions, and repitition.

> *"Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words."*
>
> ~ Robert Frost ~

impacting, impression, poignant, stunning,
effective, moving, rousing, sympathetic, affecting, cogent,
dynamic, effectual, emotional, forceful, gripping,
inspirational motivating, potent, provoking,
staggering, stirring, touching

The creation of poetry with impact is a foundational area for would-be research poets to consider. One aspect of transitioning to an impactful poet includes considering what the goal of poetry is. Poetry is not only writing about our own experiences but also trying to write primarily for the reader, so the reader can experience new feelings and understandings or re-experience them in a novel way. Here, we would like to point out research poets have an advantage because the science part of our goals are always about others even when we are motivated by deeply personal experiences. Qualitative researchers and research poets alike are trying to understand and represent the world for the reader. This has been called a move

> *away from* writing poetry to celebrate, commemorate, or capture your own feelings (in which case you, the poet, are the center of the poem's universe) *towards* writing poetry in order to generate feelings in your reader (in which case the poem exists entirely to serve the reader. (Ziehl & Jerz, 2013)

Imagery

> *"Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen."*
>
> ~ Leonardo da Vinci ~

Poets attempt to create images in the readers' minds that will evoke emotion. How to create effective imagery is therefore one of the most important areas to consider in poetic representations. To do this, poets pull on all the resources they have such as attending closely to visual details in their life, vocabulary, metaphors, and similes to attempt to make the images new and perhaps unexpected (Ziehl & Jerz, 2013).

Research poets will wish to consider concrete words carefully as they evoke images. An understanding of concrete versus abstract images is important here. Concrete words allow readers to directly connect with experience through their senses, whereas abstract words are intangible and perhaps even ephemeral. A literary reflexive activity follows to help with understanding the role of concrete words in poetry.

Challenge: Chose an abstract idea such as happiness, joy, hope, sorrow.
Concrete Words: Brainstorm a list of all the concrete words you can think of that illustrate the abstraction you have chosen.
Senses: Reread your list of concrete words. Are all the sense represented? Add more words as needed.
Poemish: Form the beginnings of a poem from this list.

To illustrate, we use a poem written by Maria's 8-year-old daughter, Kate. Kate's school assignment was to take an abstract feeling using the human senses to

make the emotion apparent to the reader through concrete imagery.

Hope

Hope is orange like a sunset.
Hope tastes like minty candy.
It is smoke from the first fireplace lit this year.
Laughter that is jolly is hope.
Hope is soft as a baby chick.
—Kate Lahman

Kate's poem evokes Emily Dickinson's famous poem of the same emotion. An excerpt follows.

""Hope" is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—

And never stops—at all—
And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard—"
—(Dickinson, 1861 in Johnson, 1961)

Here Dickinson employees the image of perhaps a soft bird perched and singing to evoke hope.

By asking Kate and her classmates to create imagery with the senses, it is clear Kate's teacher knows her stuff. Imagery should pull on the five senses with the number six sense kinesthetic (movement) also being employed (Ziehl & Jerz, 2013). Kate says if asked about movement she would have added, Hope is a gentle breeze blowing. Note her natural use of alliteration.

The use of similes and metaphors are natural ways people attempt to describe abstract events to others. Poets can deliberately use these devices to help convey meaning. A simile use the words like or as to compare two things whereas a metaphor states the two dissimilar things are as if the same. For example, Kate employed a simile when she wrote hope is *like* a sunrise and a metaphor when she said hope *is* smoke.

Another take on this challenge is to use an arts-based perspective and choose an image or artifact in response to a prompt. In this way, the research poet moves from image to poem. One can practice describing a phenomenon or listening for participants' concrete and metaphorical description based on an image or artifact (i.e., photo elicitation or artifact elicitation). Veronica has noticed how participants automatically identify the concrete and use metaphorical language in describing abstract phenomena. Once the concrete ideas are captured, the act of eliminating the nonessential words (as in transcript data) and focusing on the structural aspects of words and phrases brings the poet researcher closer to representing in poetic ways.

Challenge: Choose a photograph (or artifact) that represents your definition of _____ (phenomenon of interest); choose a photograph (or artifact) that represents your experiences with _____ (phenomenon of interest).
Concrete Words: Using the photograph (or artifact) describe your definition using the picture or artifact to spark prose or brainstorm list of concrete words and metaphorical comparisons related to the phenomenon.
Eliminating Nonessential Words: Read through the concrete words and metaphorical description and begin to eliminate nonessential words.
Poemish: Form the beginnings of a poem from this writing.

Below are the beginnings of this process, where one of Veronica's teacher participants has chosen a photo to define writing and has written the accompanying text:

Picture taken by Chris Kirby

Writing is taking your thoughts and imagination and setting them free like holding a balloon and letting it go. You put your thoughts out there and know that you can't get them back in your brain. Once the balloon is let go, you can't pull it back.

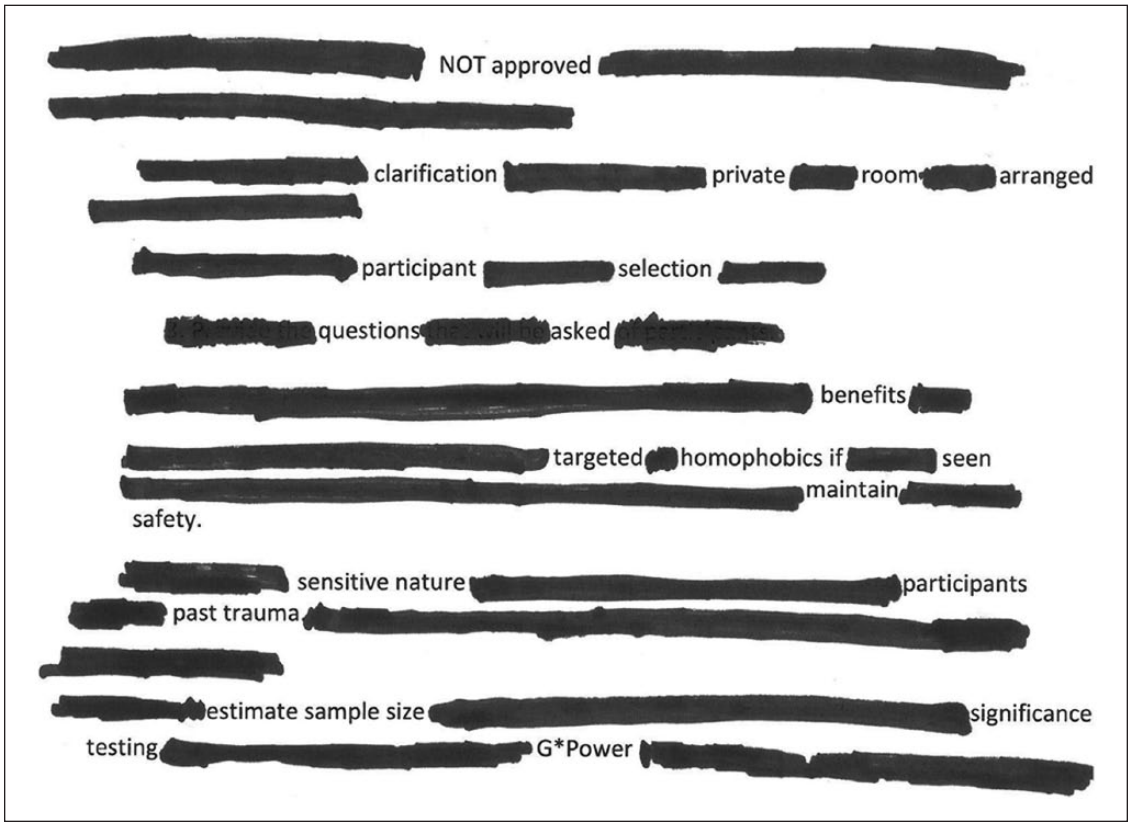
In this example, we see the participant using the image to help her capture the risk aspect of writing. The participant, much like Maria's daughter, used a simile in a very natural way, taking what can be considered an abstract process and comparing it with something concrete. The following is Veronica's construction as the research poet.

Writing is . . .
Thoughts and imagination
And setting them free
Like holding a balloon
And letting it go.

You put your thoughts
Out there
And know: you can't get them back.
—Veronica Richard

Research poets and critical research poets will wish to employee imagery but may invert or subvert the images to

make critical points (Ziehl & Jerz, 2013). The following poem is an example of a critical poem or counter poetry (Lail & Lahman, 2017; Majmudar, 2017) in which Eric subverted a memo from IRB denying his request to research lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adult students, who were public with their identity. Literary poems of this nature seem to be termed resistance poems (e.g., Lahman et al., in press).



Avoid Clichés, Triteness, and Sentimentality

air your dirty laundry, babe in the woods, calm before the storm, divide and conquer, eagle eye, fan the flames, go with the flow, hold your head up high, in a nutshell, ivory tower, justice is blind, kiss of death, lap of luxury, moment of truth, no stone unturned, out on a limb, playing with fire, quick as lightning, running in circles, sweating bullets, two peas in a pod, ugly as sin, upper crust, vanquish the enemy, weather the storm, worst nightmare, young and foolish (Luke, 2017).

A *cliché* is defined as "a trite, stereotyped expression; a sentence or phrase, usually expressing a popular or common thought or idea that has lost originality, ingenuity, and impact by long overuse" (dictionary.com). Ziehl and Jerz (2013), considering concrete images in terms of cliché, write, "A work full of clichés is like a plate of old food: unappetizing" (p. 9). Research poets will want to avoid clichés unless they are composing data poems and the participant has used a cliché to convey meaning. Clichés in this sense bring easy understanding of experiences to readers. A research poet may also wish to play with clichés to make a point.

Ivory Tower: A Clutch of Clichés

Do we meet in an ivory tower,
with an exclusive club,
a coded knock on the
ivy covered door allowing entrée,
confirmed with a secret handshake?
No research poets allowed,
only poets.
—Maria Lahman

Sentimentality involves an obvious attempt to evoke emotion that may seem almost vulgar or crass in the effort made. Overused examples could include baby animals such as a kitten, rainbows, and roses with raindrops on them. This type of writing is not without appeal to many and may be seen or heard in cards, advertisements, and

some music lyrics. We caution that research poets should represent data as sentimental if that is how the participants spoke but in their own poetry will wish to continue to challenge themselves to find new ways to portray sentiment. A literary reflexive activity follows to help sharpen imagery.

> **Challenge:** Choose a sentimental image, such as a puppy wondering in the rain, that conveys a sense of loss.
> **Brainstorm:** Write down all of the images you can that convey a similar sentiment to the one you have chosen. Here are a few: a stub of a candle, sock with a hole, one mitten, unfinished knitting, mom's items that need to be organized after her death, a puzzle missing a piece, dead flowers in a vase, an empty place at the dinner table.
> **Free write one image in prose:** Miriam is teaching Maria's young daughter, Kate, to knit. At age 82, Miriam shared a knitting project laid aside over 10 years ago as no matching yarn could be found. Maria is surprised when Miriam comments she plans to finish it someday. Wondering about this, an image of Kate at some future estate sale buying Ms. Miriam's unfinished knitting and yarn pushed its way into Maria's head.
> **Poemish:** Rewrite the image as a poem or part of a poem.
>
> **Hold Death at Bay**
>
> She seems to hold death away
> with her gnarled hands
> by ever working:
> canning, collecting,
> sorting through a life,
> off handedly showing
> a decade old knitting project
> stored away half finished.
> How can death come
> when the knitting remains undone?
> Knitting needles hold death at bay.
> —Maria Lahman

Rhyme and Rhythm

> "*Poetry is the music of the soul, and, above all, of great and feeling souls.*"
>
> ~ Voltaire ~

Humans naturally take pleasure in rhythm and rhyme (Naylor & Wood, 2012). Poetry is extension of this pleasure as poetry is for the ear as Ziehl and Jerz (2013) remind us, saying,

> Whatever poetry you write or read, learn to listen with the ears of your audience. Poetry is meant for the ear; pay attention to the sounds the words make. Writing in "free verse" does not excuse the poet's obligation to please the ear.

The advice on rhyme from professional poets seems to be to use rhyme with caution and/or sparingly. However, poet novices seem drawn to rhyme. Elsewhere, we discussed that the power of the poem's topic can cause poor rhyme, overused, or ill-used rhyme to be palatable (see a discussion of September 11 and rhyme in Lahman & Richard, 2014). It is possible novice poets are drawn to rhyme as many of the classics they are taught in school are rhyming poems created by some of the most notable poets in history; consider here Frost's "Stopping by a Woods on a Snowy Evening," Whitman's "Oh, Captain! My, Captain," Dunbar's, "Sympathy."

Children's Poet Laureate Kenn Nesbitt (2014) has a helpful blog entry where he examines what it means when a rhyme is considered poor or forced. Nesbitt reviews major types of forced rhyme. If a line of poetry is rearranged in an unnatural way to put the rhyme at the end, it is considered forced. Nesbitt uses the following example:

> "Whenever we go out and walk,
> with you I like to talk."

At times novice poets also add words that are not related to the topic of the poem to force the rhyme. A silly example of this would be,

> I'm in a writing slump.
> My heart needs to jump
> and go bump, bump.

A poet might also extend a line of verse in an ungainly manner so a rhyme may be added at the end. Readers may have heard of the term *wrenched rhyme* as it has a cacophonic sound that stays in the memory. "A 'wrenched rhyme' is where the end sounds of the words are the same, but the accents are not on the same syllables. For example,

> "I like to dance. I like to sing.
> I like smiling and laughing" (Nesbitt, 2014)."

Near rhymes are words that almost rhyme and should be avoided if possible. Nesbitt suggests one way to avoid some of these rhyming problems is to choose words that have many options for rhyming. Rhyme Zone (https://www.rhymezone.com/) is an Internet site where you can type in a word and read through rhymes. Instructional entries such as the one we reviewed here on forced rhyme are also available.

Sound Devices

"The essentials of poetry are rhythm, dance, and the human voice."

~ Earle Birney ~

Rhyme, rhythm, and meter are of course major sound devices.

> Sound devices are resources used by poets to convey and reinforce the meaning or experience of poetry through the skillful use of sound. After all, poets are trying to use a concentrated blend of sound and imagery to create an emotional response. The words and their order should evoke images, and the words themselves have sounds, which can reinforce or otherwise clarify those images. All in all, the poet is trying to get you, the reader, to sense a particular thing, and the use of sound devices are some of the poet's tools. (Meeks, 2017; http://www.chrismeeks.com/blog/poetic-sense-sound-and-imagery)

The following are just a few more sound devices that poets may employee to increase the effect of their work (Meeks, 2017).

When employing *alliteration*, the poet deliberately places words close to each other that have the same initial sound. The sound is generally from consonants. Unless the poet is being humorous or making a critiquing point about poetry, alliteration should not be overused. As the poet edits, they will wish to listen for a use of alliteration that is pleasing and points to key words but is not over done. In the following excerpt from a poem by Maria, we underlined initial consonants to denote where alliteration was employed.

Covering (an excerpt)

"I wanted to wear it
Gauzy white net,
fine lace trim,
the only
dainty,
delicate,
wholly
feminine article
on my
plain,
prim,
pristine,
mother."
—Lahman (2015, p. 407)

Cacophony, in opposition to alliteration, is formed to displease the ear. Here poets seek a jarring effect that offends the ear and highlights poetic contexts that may be ugly, need a light shown on them as in critical poetry, or are naturally busy and discordant such as an orchestra tuning up or a busy city street. Meeks (2017) points out that in English, the sounds /*b/, /k/, /c/*, and /*p/* are harsher than the pleasing sounds of /*f/* and /*v/* or the lulling /*l/, /m/* and /*n/*. The following verse Maria has been composing while reflecting on the potentially devastating nature of the tenure process is an example of cacophony employed to highlight conflict.

College careers careen,
collapse, crumple
in a cacophony, as
colleagues collide,
and career
in crescendo.

A word that is an *onomatopoeia* in the most conservative sense is an imitation of a sound such as buzz or chug. Using poetic license, poets have pushed this sound device to include words that suggest sounds such as sled or fiddle. Gwendolyn Brooks's (1956) poem "Cynthia in the Snow" uses onomatopoeia and other sound devices to convey image.

"It SHUSHES.
It hushes
The loudness in the road.
It flitter-twitters,
And laughs away from me.
It laughs a lovely whiteness,
And whitely whirs away,
To be,
Some otherwhere,
Still white as milk or shirts.
So beautiful it hurts."

Allusions

An *allusion* is a subtle reference to some other historical or contemporary literary piece, happening, person, or place of a significant enough nature that a reader could be presumed to have shared. The reference is not direct as in when a writer cites or references an event. Instead, the allusion indirectly sets the tone of the imagery the poet is creating by bringing the sense of what the larger audience is assumed to feel about the event to bear on the feelings the poet is working to evoke.

In the poem that follows, titled *Mother Hood*, Maria used the word owl as a description. Many readers will recognize the idea that owls are wise but then Maria invokes Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, as a historical allusion who some readers will recall was represented as carrying a little owl, which is one of the reasons owls are symbolic of wisdom today. It is possible more readers would have recognized Minerva's Greek counterpart Athena, but the choice of Minerva provides an alliteration opportunity as in, Minerva mysteries.

Mother Hood (an excerpt)

""I want one," he says,
a determined
owl glint in his eye.
"Then you can work
to get one," I reply
sweeping out of the room
to Minerva mysteries
of hooding
my chair,
her chair,
her chair's chair,
sweep behind me,
a wake of history,
tradition,
knowledge,
regalia,
motherhood."
—Lahman (2017)

Repetition

Using *repetition* enables the research poet to provide an explicit focus on an idea, feeling, or phrase. This focus mimics that of a refrain, something that the reader comes to anticipate. Repetition can also be the repetition of structure—structure of words or syntax such as parallel structure. Veronica provides an example of repetition in an excerpt from her artifact poetry on the gang violence in Chicago.

Are We Paying Attention? (an excerpt)

"A gang slur shouted.
Open fire.
A 15-year old boy shot.
Pronounced dead.
Victor Vega
No suspects are in custody . . .

Talking on a cellphone
In the front of his home,
A 14-year old boy shot several times,
Left to die.
Rey Dorantes
No suspects are in custody . . .

Talking with friends
On the South Side of the city
20 rounds shot into her group,
One bullet hit her back.
Porshe Foster

No arrest has been made . . ."
—Veronica Richard

In the next section, we explore poetic revision and tips on effective ways to do so.

Revise, Revise, Revise

> *"Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary."*
>
> ~ Kahlil Gibran ~

One way to tell a poet might be by their overriding need to continually revise a poem. In our experience, it is common at poetry readings for poets to stop and edit their poem aloud mid reading. Poetry is such a compressed form compared with most literary forms that every word, punctuation, and space matters. That being said, some poets such as Billy Collins do little revision. However, as research poets, we are often in the position of learning an art so we say revise, revise, revise.

After getting the initial outpouring of poetry down in a form where it can be saved, backed up, and edited, put the poem away for a while. Maria shares that due both to the demands at work and a need to be prepared mentally to work with highly sensitive topics such as death or loss, she may come back to the same poem or series of poems time after time over the course of several years.

As you revise, save former drafts and put them side by side so that aspects of poetry such as the shape of the words, white space on the page, the sound, and look of word choice may be deeply considered. Put the poem in single space so you can consider how it may look when published. In actual experience, research poets do not have control over whether a poem is in a two-columned or single-column journal and other similar issues, but journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry* make a great effort to allow authors to ask for alternative layout and attend to requests to the extent possible.

Part of revision includes reading the poem out loud both to yourself and when you are ready, to others. Some have described poetry as an oral form that must be read aloud and while we agree for the most part, we would remind readers of concrete forms of poetry (Lahman et al., in press) that are meant to be viewed and may make little sense if only read to someone. Even, poetry that is primarily for reading aloud relies heavily on visual aspects such as white space, line breaks, and punctuation choices which all influence the interpretations of the poetry.

Creating a research poetry writing group is also valuable. The group would primarily read and review each other's poetry but could also read poetry collections and pieces on how to write poetry and then meet to discuss these. Maria's articles on research poetry and several of her poems emerged from a research poetry group collaboration.

Clearly, there are many aspects of creating a poemish space only some of which we were able to consider here. We end with a sonnet created around the issue of how to write research poetry.

How Do I Write Thee?

How do I write thee? Let me count the ways.
I write thee to the weight, load and degree
My ears have heard, what my eyes can see
From others, a message I desire to raise.
I write thee to point out meanings that lay
Sometimes mute and often said quietly.
I write thee freely, as words allow me.
I write thee purely, as pushing to the frays.
I write thee with experience and time
In my old ways, with my past forms and guides.
I write thee with a purpose beyond rhyme
With their words. I write thee with pride,
Duty, scripts of time spent. Hence, it's no crime
To write thee not within the lines but out side.
—Veronica Richard

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