

Introduction

Inquiry Triptych is a suite of research poems — clinical, doctoral, and postdoctoral — within and beyond the academy. A triptych is a three-leaved tablet that was written on with a stylus in ancient times. *Inquiry Triptych* theorizes interpretive social science research in poetic form; inquiry is the hinge that binds together its three tablets. Engaging here in these poetic inquiry pages I compress and crystallize large concepts, observations, and reflections in as few, precise words as possible.

Poetry and music are branches growing from a common trunk (Bringhurst, 2006). Musicality “is poetry’s bottom line” (Raffel in Wolff, 2010, p. 108). Poetry, the most musical of literary forms, pays close attention to arrangements of sound at the most basic level of syllables, phonemes, and letters. Steven Heighton defines a poet as a writer who leads with the ear, “guided not only by meanings of words but by their music” (Heighton in Sarah, 2007, p. 194). While we “do want poetry to make sense,” poetry “wants to be heard and felt more than it wants to be understood” (Sarah, 2007, p. 200).

Music and poetry have common historical roots, shared attributes, and similar constructs (Dabney, 1927; Ferguson, Salter, & Stallworthy, 2005; Grout & Palisca, 1988; Reck, 1977). Most salient for me is that both music and poetry are ways of thinking and knowing; both are contextualized by silence; and both can express ineffable, nonverbal embodied experience. Similarly, neither music nor poetry can be used to “advance an argument or impose a solution as prose can” (Geddes, 2006, p. xxi).

It is not surprising that the process of creating an arts-informed thesis led me, a music therapist-researcher rooted in interpretive inquiry, to and through poetry as I searched for the means

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to represent my findings about the nonverbal essence of music therapy experience (Rykov, 2006). I needed a representation that honoured the creativity and risk-taking of my research participants, adult cancer patients in a music therapy support group. The discursive prose of traditional research was insufficient for this purpose (Rykov, 2011).

The first poem in the triptych, “questions before and after understanding,” addresses my researcher role in the cyclical nature of inquiry. The second poem in the triptych, “n=24,” is a lyric contemplation of the dichotomy — real and imagined — between accuracy and truth; I suggest that truth welcomes accuracy *and* can exist without it. The last poem in the triptych, “postphilosophy rant,” affirms my interpretive inquiry standpoint — ethically, aesthetically, and epistemologically — as a viable thread among many in the messy, chaotic fabric of embodied being.

It is prudent to assess those circumstances where it is believed that poetry and explanation cannot co-exist equally, and where living poetically is considered to be a diminished stance — critical, political, and potentially dangerous. Ever since Plato excluded poets from his ideal society, poetry (compared to discursive prose) is thought to be “deceptive or frivolous rhetoric that misleads citizens and calls up extravagant desires” (Culler, 1997, pp. 70-71). Rather, poetry and prose are equal and feasible endeavours for their respective purposes.

Inquiry Triptych follows now in a musical form, that is, uninterrupted by further discussion. Music, after all, is a continuous experiential flow that does not stop to explain itself or announce transitions. I urge you to focus on these poems that are “wiser and more honest” than the poet (Geddes, 1986). I invite you to listen for the hinges between the poem tablets as you engage with them.

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questions before and after understanding

what remains of unfinished
dreams from which I wake is

space between absence and presence
at the crossroads of here and there

truths I show and truths I hide
memories I recall and those I forget

moments between then and now illumine
the polarities I choose
[to balance between]

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n=24

or maybe 23 or 25 or 26
difference between accuracy and
truth incites complexity

magic spells
or maybe counts
the same way we do

like the speeding cyclist
who stops traffic to kiss
the startled pedestrian

we create islands to ride
while the ride is good until
harsh words sever meat from bone

we function in
historical moments
hysterical mindsets

without humour
we die
of despair

without despair
we die
in peace

without music
we die
of meaninglessness

without art to tell us how
meaningless we can become
we lose all reason

reality through tailspin
lens of pure song and metaphor
mirrors objects closer than they appear

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the journey longing
for unattainable fulfillment
never knows its route or destination

we forget how disruptive memory is
how easier to imagine
than to remember

we stand as
the judge enters
the courtroom

we clap as the
maestro ascends
the podium

we gasp as the baby falls
from his mother's arms
to death

nothing more can be said
yet everything is expressible
all is translatable in silence

our duty to tell tales is complicit
with witness and remembrance
of experience beyond words

good and bad endings
include the back story
underbelly of the whale

grief that aches in poignant want
spends generous gratitude for
all that crosses its path

truth sprouts like
small crevice wildflowers
after a rain in

24 perfect petals
or maybe 23
or 25 or 26

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postphilosophy rant

blame it on capricious gods
Greeks and Sumerians fabricate
to explain the wiles of humankind
and impose order on
the common chaos of being

with vestiges today in
objective acceptance
the consequence of breaching
enlightened evidence is ostracism

now as then
myths obscure
the embodied paradox
TRUTH = truths

no crying foul, no charges
of sophistry, relativism, rhetoric
can obscure this monism forever

let's get on with it
return the pantheons to
their rightful frolic

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Mary H. Rykov is a League of Canadian Poets associate. She completed a PhD at OISE/UT and a Postdoctoral Fellowship at McGill University (Medicine) and the University of Saskatchewan (Epidemiology & Community Health) through the Canadian Cancer Society. She currently teaches and writes curricula for Centennial College. (www.musictherapyservices.ca)