Land, Emotion and Poetic Provocation: A Paper and Poems

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This paper is an inquiry into the creative process, specifically, my own process of creating poetry of connection with land within the umbrella of poetic inquiry. Poetic inquiry is research within social sciences that employs poetry as means of research or for reporting of research (Faulkner, 2009; Prendergast, 2009). Situated within the growing field of arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012), poetic inquiry is a meeting space of traditions of social science research and of literature (Prendergast, 2009). It draws on writing to bring to research more aesthetic ways of knowing (Galvin & Todres, 2012; Leavy, 2009) and to open possibilities of and through language (Leggo, 2008).

For this inquiry project, I have read work from a selection of poets (Dalton, 1993; Dawe & Squires; 2009; Lane, 2010; Mac Lochlainn, 2002; McGrath, 1992; Norman & Leggo, 2016; Oliver, 2004; Sinclair, 2008; Steffler, 1985 & 1998; Whyte, 2007/2014; and allowed writing of my own poetry to be provoked as response. The poems, from both lesser and more well-known poets in the Western tradition, centre on relationship with land. I also worked with poetry from two Indigenous poets (Deerchild, 2015; Maracle, 2015) who speak to experiences within their lives and within colonialism, which is systematically about land-control (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Coulthard, 2014). This loose selection is intended to be provoking, rather than comprehensive or systematic, and is largely work to which I had some existing
relationship. Indeed, the same can be said of this paper, which may be invoking and provoking for those who connect to the topics it covers.

As Barone and Eisner (2012) describe, undertaking “arts based research implies a fundamental shift away from the conventional assumption that all research is meant to bring us closer to a final understanding of various dimensions of the social world” (p. 14). For this paper I take up this approach, also echoed by hermeneutics (Smith, 1991), of dwelling in rather than resolving complexity, of provoking of questions rather than curating definitive truth. Seeking emergent learning, I have asked: What can I learn about my creative process (reading, writing and editing poetry) within a context of arts-based research and poetic inquiry in particular? How might I clarify and expand my understanding of craft by engaging creatively with the poetry of others? These are contained within a broader ongoing question: How might I prepare myself and my creative process to receive teachings from land or the sentience of the more-than-human? Emergent from this question is consideration of how emotionality might be acceptable or unacceptable in poetic inquiry and how we might permit ourselves to be in our work as we are rather than how we would like or are supposed to be.

The poems contained in this paper may or may not connect directly to the works I had read. My poetry was written during a certain period of journeying in my life and within particular human and more-than-human communities that themselves participate in a broader place and time. I understand my poetic process for this project as situated within a tensioned triad of provoking texts, of myself as instrument of creation and of my communities of embeddedness. Each poem
included in the accompanying collection situates uniquely along these tensions and with greater or lesser allegiance to any given leg of the triad.

Accompanying the poems, I engage with three topics of theoretical consideration. First, I situate this project within a broader inquiry of deepening my relationship with land. Second, I hermeneutically examine the statement “poetry is not therapy” as pivot for exploring overlapping complexities of affect and poetic inquiry. Finally, I explore learnings gained about creative process within some examination of the poetry I created and its relationships to the provoking texts and to place.

**Positioning Myself**

I write from the Vancouver campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC) on the unceded traditional and ancestral territory of the Musqueam, a Coast Salish hə́n̓q̓̑əmin̓ə̑l̓-speaking people. As I write, morning is just brightening the Salish Sea and the clouds hang low over Vancouver Island, showing fresh snow on the peaks. Birds are easing into their day-time activity as are the UBC maintenance vehicles.

A person of Irish and German settler ancestry living and working in a colonized land, I endeavour, through my being, teaching, research and writing, to attend to relationships contained in place. In this, I seek to take up Sami scholar, Rauna Kuokkanen (2010) call for responsibility of academics to acknowledge “the concrete, physical locations of our enunciation” (p. 63), and do “homework” pertaining Indigenous epistemes or life philosophies in support of “endeavours aimed at decolonizing and transforming the hegemonic academy characterized by sanctioned epistemic ignorance” (p. 63). Shawn Wilson (2008), a Cree scholar, puts
forward that research from an Indigenous epistemic centre centres relationship and relational accountability, as all knowledges come from relationships and “with all revelation comes responsibility” (p. 95). Research, in this view comes from relationships with ideas, people and places, and should strengthen and affirm these relationships. I try here to attend to my relationships with the ideas, people and places of this work.

**Land-Listening as a Broader Inquiry**

This particular poetic project situates within a broader ongoing inquiry. Emphasizing both process and product, I trouble what it means to open myself to a listening or dialogic relationship with land and what might be created from within such a relationship. I find within epistemologically diverse traditions, clear articulations of the plausibility and deep importance of nurturing dialogic relationships with land.

In the Western philosophical tradition, David Abram (1996) takes up the work particularly of Merleau-Ponty (1968) to build a phenomenological articulation of the senses which describes a reciprocity within sensation. Human perception, as engaged through our senses, is attuned to receiving the voices present within an announcing landscape. This reciprocal understanding of perception is based on an “ongoing interchange between my body and the entities that surround it... a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness—and often, even independent of my verbal awareness” (Abrams, 1996, p. 52). Accessing this awareness requires a quieting of the inner chatter of thoughts, but also a particular way of understanding language. He explains,
We conceptually immobilize or objectify the phenomenon only by mentally absenting ourselves from this relation, by forgetting or repressing our sensuous involvement.... If, on the other hand, we wish to describe a particular phenomenon without repressing our direct experience, then we cannot avoid speaking of the phenomena as an active, animate entity with which we find ourselves engaged...To the sensing body, no thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. *Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.* (Abram, 1996, p. 56)

Fisher (2013) uses the lens of ecopsychology to show how allowing for the emergence of reciprocal understanding calls for the opening and emotional healing of our relationships with our bodies as instruments of this perception of an announcing more-than-human world.

In seeking teachings on dialogic relationship with land I might also look to my own Irish ancestry and the wisdom traditions of the Celtic cultures of Ireland and the British Isles. Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donohue (2004) speaks to a continuity of being:

*The earth is our origin and our destination. The ancient rhythms of the earth have insinuated themselves into the rhythms of the human heart. The earth is not outside us; it is within: the clay from where the tree of the body grows.*

(p. 36)

Delores Whelan (2010) in her work with the Celtic calendar teaches of the rhythms of seasons serving as guidance for allowing space in the busy doing-ness of our lives
to attune to winter stillness outside and within us. Frank MacEowen (2002) describes tradition that understands imagination as a way of engaging the threshold between the physical and non-physical and embraces vision-seeking practices. Within the attuning and opening of the senses is

a practical path that enriches us by instilling into our daily flow of awareness a sense that we dwell within a place and that we have also been placed in a spiritscape in which many other beings dwell...a path of reclaiming a relationship and dialogue with an earth that is aware of us. (p. 113-114)

While key aspects are also shared in common, the North American Indigenous traditions and their scholarly articulations are very diverse (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 1994; Fixico, 2013; Hogan, 2007; Kovach, 2009; Simpson, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Blackfoot Leroy Little Bear (2000) explains that Earth is Mother and that philosophy, values and customs stem from and are accountable to this relationship. Language is emergent from sacred relationship with territory, contains the true names of the things themselves (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006), and affirms the animacy of the rocks, trees, rivers and animals (Little Bear, 2000; Sable & Francis, 2012). Law is shared and agreed upon through a web of internalized teaching stories that are laid out on the landscape (Basso, 1996; Borrows, 2016) and comes from interactions the land. Dan Sheridan and Joe Longboat (2006) describe the Haudenosaunee imagination:

The ecology of traditional Haudenosaunee territory possesses sentience that is manifest in the consciousness of that territory, and that same consciousness is formalized in and as Haudenosaunee consciousness....
Haudenosaunee minds are composed not just of visible ecological domains but also by the numinous qualities of those domains that, allowed to mature, express the fullness of traditional territory. Old-growth minds and cultures mature, emerge, and encompass the old growth of their traditional territory. Haudenosaunee minds are congruent with their traditional territories but more important, Haudenosaunee minds are required to accomplish that symmetry in accomplishing their authenticity. (p. 366)

Pertinent to my own study as someone of the settler generations, Sheridan and Longboat (2006) continue:

Exactly how many generations settlers take to naturalize their cultural identity to Turtle Island is beyond us, but when the transformative powers of the land speak, we recommend opening the heart and mind to the timeless, living ontology that lives on the very land that crafts Indigenous mind and Haudenosaunee imagination alike. (p. 367)

In choosing these perspectives to bring forward, I am acknowledging the importance of drawing on ideas to which I am connected in some meaningful manner. In this way my research serves to strengthen rather than weaken my relational connectedness (Wilson, 2008) or embeddedness in the world. Heeding Wilson’s call for research that is bound by a relational ethicality, I choose to draw on the Western tradition which is my institutional and cultural immersion and from which my work emerges, traditions held in the memories of my ancestors, and the traditions of the Turtle Island lands on which I live and work.
North American Indigenous traditions, particularly those contained in lands of my day-to-day physical participation, must be a key encompassing frame. My experiences with the birds and trees and salmon in the spaces I inhabit bear the gifts of the “old growth” names and stories of these traditions.

A Question of Affect

It is a natural tendency, very marked in the modern Western world, to ignore suffering. [To see suffering] ...as something that is a mistake or an accident or a crime. Something to be fixed. Something to be refused. Something that makes one feel powerless. (Sontang as cited in van der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela, 2007, p. 19)

In Corner Brook, Newfoundland, after more than a decade of writing poetry and keeping it to myself, I shared some writing with a poet-friend who soon after put me on stage for my first public reading—an evening in tribute to the poet, John Steffler. It was a full room and quite the coming out for me. As I applied myself to learning more of poetic craft, I benefited from a community of emerging writers who had studied creative writing at the university there. A well-circulated phrase was, “poetry should not be therapy.” As I endeavour to do with all teachings, I continue to hold this statement lightly, to put it away or take it out again, to rotate it and examine it from new angles. Depending on how I hold this notion, it points to other questions, particularly as I am interested in considering not just poetry, but poetic inquiry as a research methodology that has feet in both literature and social science (Faulkner, 2009; Prendergast, 2009). David Smith (1991) describes this process of
interpretation by drawing on living experience to reach between part and whole as hermeneutic inquiry.

This question of how the affect lives within and may be welcomed in poetic inquiry is emergent from my project of reading and writing. With the exception of Cree author, Rosanna Deerchild’s (2015) book of poetry about residential school experience, I largely did not read poetry directly about trauma or healing. Rather, this project overlapped with a time in my life of raw journeying through healing of my own childhood trauma. Already intentionally engaged creatively for this project, a great deal of poetry emerged from this intensive space. How do these raw and emotional pieces fit as poetic inquiry research and as part of this research project in particular? Is this writing “just therapy” and not poetic inquiry at all?

This journey through emotion is not divergent from a broader quest to open myself to be able to listen to and perceive wisdom from an animate landscape. As Fisher (2013) describes within ecopsychology (and which I through experience would corroborate) becoming an instrument of listening to both human and more-than-human others is at core a journey of healing, of learning to surrender. Similarly for me, finding voice to speak about these experiences is about facing old and new fears and gathering strength: it is a profound risk taking in spaces that may be inhospitable.

A friend recently told me of his doctoral committee suggesting that his emotional resonance as a refugee with the refugee stories of his research participants was a liability that he would have to contain and manage. In
counterpoint, Smith (1991), in a hermeneutic frame, describes cultivating a vulnerable research stance as key to the deep engagement of experience:

How I will be transformed depends on my orientation and attitude toward what comes to meet me as new; whether I simply try to subsume or repress it within prevailing dispensations (a possible prelude to war or hostilities) or whether I engage it creatively in an effort to create a new common, shared reality." (p. 193)

Through literary métissage Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers & Carl Leggo (2009) put forward autobiographical life writing as vital, both as research praxis and curriculum. They assert that this method of generating interpretation through weaving crafted personal texts serves as

a counternarrative to the grand narratives of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy and pedagogical praxis. (p. 9)

Other research approaches such as autoethnography (Chan, 2008/2016; Ellis, 2004) and a/r/tography (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004; Sinner et al, 2006), and, more tangentially, a general focus on self-reflexivity in research (Creswell, 2013; Pillow, 2003), affirm a public stage space for personal journey stories. In Indigenous methodologies (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012; Wilson, 2008), being explicit in situating who is the self behind the researcher’s pen and how he/she is related to the research is core to establishing trust. Bringing personal
stories and details into research does not mean, however, that this writing is “therapy,” nor does it necessarily clarify how researcher emotionality is permitted.

Diverse modalities of art-making are well recognized as conduits for healing in therapeutic contexts (McNiff, 1998). So too with writing. In my own healing journey, I have often been encouraged to write and benefited from many different kinds of writing. Much of this writing is personal journaling and some is poetry. There is certain power to the “making” inherent in arts modalities, both in mirroring back and aiding interpretation of present circumstances, and for pointing the way toward change. Creating something in the world that is of me and from me is an opportunity to remake who I am. In a very fundamental way, to remake myself I need to remake my relationship to the world around me. Art-making can help to make concrete the old as part of imagining the new. Both personally and communally, art-making can also birth the new.

Poetic inquiry is both product and process (Faulkner, 2009; Prendergast, 2009): a way of showing and representing knowledge gained and the inquiry itself. As product it is a written poetic representation in the world of something that was done or learned. As process, writing poetry takes its authors on a learning journey. The act of writing as creation here also is the re-creation of the learning self of the writer(s). Carl Leggo (2008) writes of living poetically or living creatively with attention as a vital way of being in the world, and that poetry “involves seeking ways to attach ourselves to strong emotion” (p. 7).

Drawing on etymology (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.), the word therapy comes from Greek *therapeia*, which means the curing or healing of the sick, rooting a
current understanding that the therapeutic healing process is about eliminating (emotional) pathology as it presents in an individual. It is curative treatment for individuals who deviate from a healthy or ‘normal’ ideal. Drawing on Indigenous teachings brings a much different perspective. Wellness within Indigenous traditions is about balance of the four aspects of self, these being the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual (Armstrong, 2000). Lucy Sauvé (2008) writes similarly from a non-Indigenous environmental education perspective. Instead of pathologizing deviance, wellness is about returning to, or living in balance. In Indigenous traditions, this is a life-long pursuit of self-transformation and learning toward wisdom, which is highly regarded in Elders who provide community guidance (Archibald, 2008). Balance is also sought within relations of self, human and land communities. *Elder in the Making* (Hsiung, 2015), a film that explores reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the diverse newcomers, calls for us all to become “Elders in the making,” to take up a journey of wisdom-seeking and responsibility in our relationships with land and each other.

The recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian residential schools in Canada (TRC, 2015) speaks strongly to the communal importance of sharing personal trauma stories. For many of those who contributed statements it was the first time they may have spoken about devastating experiences within the schools. It was an opportunity for the young to hear the stories that underlie deep struggles in their families and communities. Within the broader community of the Canadian public, the stories told collectively through the TRC have the power to re-write narratives about Indigenous and newcomer/colonial history in Canada.
Individual lives and traumas make up the relational webs that flow through our communities and histories. Patterns of underlying truths are uncovered only through collectively taking up the storytelling of trauma and healing.

I might even go so far as to say that researcher healing, understood this way, serves the “knowledge creation” mandate of research. That is, if knowledge is understood as encompassing all aspects of our being and therefore values mental, physical, emotional and spiritual truths. Focusing, in our case here, on emotion and emotional truth, I would propose that because research does not value emotional intelligence, pervasively emotional truth is inappropriately rationalized and insisted on as being solely mental truth. The underlying pain, fear, anger and shame of personal and communal experience, while deeply influential and powerful in discourse, remain unnamed. It is through my own healing, through exploring my emotional reactions, that I approach interpretation of the currents of un-named emotion within rational discourse.

Emotional intelligence is required to name and decipher emotional truth. Healing of the self is required for emotional intelligence: just as our relationship with our nose is our instrument of intelligence around smell, a cultivated relationship with our own emotions is our instrument of emotional intelligence. Just as those who are unable to smell would have a very different belief in a world of smells, so too with our beliefs in the value of emotional intelligence. Just as recognizing a sour smell is different from knowing it indicates a gas leak, experiencing emotions is very different from being able to learn the stories they carry.
Anthropology as a discipline is in transformation in response to critiques (such as Lassiter, 2000) of its researchers claiming expertise on the cultures of others without recognition of or intelligence about their own cultural lens. I wonder if some may write and speak about emotions and emotionality in ways accepted by Western research without necessarily showing themselves as emotionally intelligent. How might research change if we were required to document how we hone in ourselves the instruments of theories rather than simply the mental capacity to think about them? I put forward that journeying through our own emotions (our sense organ of emotionality) as a way of becoming emotionally intelligent is a vitally important and hardly acknowledged aspect of knowledge creation in research.

This journey itself is not creation, however—such a journey becomes creation when something, such as writing, is made and shared. Poetic inquiry and arts-based research are put forward (James, in press; Leggo, 2008; Prendergast, 2009) as a way for emotionality to be included within the dialogic of creating, offering and receiving research, a way that knowledge is felt rather than just thought of. A common question in art-based research and to which poetic inquiry is no stranger, is one of evaluation. When is emotive writing poetic inquiry?

Louise Rosenblatt (1978), in her transactional theory of literature, puts forward that a text is poetry when a reader has an aesthetic response, that is, is transported from reading (or listening) to that of transformation, of being drawn forward into the work and changed by it. The aesthetic, which is necessary for a poetic work, is contained in the experience of the embracing reader rather than as a
definitive feature text. Poetic inquiry contains both aesthetics and points to further meaning: the words that make up poetic inquiry, Kedrick James suggests (in press) “are not singularly solipsistic and emotive, but serve as a vehicle for understanding about people and playing a more-than-aesthetic role for writer and reader” (p. 3).

Sandra Faulkner (2009/2016) puts forward that poet-researchers should develop a personal statement on the art of their work (an *ars poetica*) as a way of refining (and for assessment of) poetic craft. With the statement “poetry should not be therapy” both considered with complexity and not definitely resolved, I turn now to reflection of poetic craft as explored through this inquiry project.

**On Poetic Process**

Where prose often seems transparent and is taken for granted, poetry invites the writer and the reader to pay attention to the semiotics of figurative language, sound effects, texture, voice, rhythm, shape on the page, line breaks, and stanzaic structure. In a poem, everything signifies. (Leggo, 2008, p. 10)

We live between the act of awakening and the act of surrender. Each morning we awaken to the light and the invitation to a new day in the world of time; each night we surrender to the dark to be taken in the world of dreams where time is no more. At birth we were awakened and emerged to become visible in the world. At death we will surrender again to the dark to become invisible. Awakening and surrender: they frame each day and each life; between them the journey where anything can happen, the beauty and the frailty. (O'Donohue, 2004, p. 1-2)
Cultivating a creative process that is permeable to the voices of the more-than-human others requires both awakening and surrender. It is both cultivating elements of craft and letting go, surrendering to the work itself. It is cultivating trust and follow through within a self receptivity, particularly for when tasks feel scary or uncomfortable.

I find inspiriting Métis Lewis Cardinal and Okanagan Jeannette Armstrong’s (1991) description of the Native creative process. Cardinal speaks of creativity as a human responsibility or purpose of bringing forward the new:

To move from the known, you must know that the moment you make a decision in that direction…. It is at that moment that you jump out there in a creative sense. To do otherwise is not new. It is not creative, but simply a shifting of pieces. (p. 69)

The nurturing of the creative self is engagement with the emotional, with fostering care as a source of power. He continues:

…Academic training is fine, but if you lack a centre as an artist then creativity is not possible. I have learned from Native people that the most powerful force is soft power, caring and commitment, together. You need to that centre to make a contribution creatively. You need to realize its power to make it realize your vision. You can have visions and dreaming but how you realize them depends on caring and commitment. Soft power is more powerful than adversarial or hard power because it is resilient. By nature, soft power is giving and flexible but strong. It is woman power, female power. (p. 96)
In this project of reading for provocation and writing new poems, I have had opportunity to observe and consider my creative process through a diversity of articulations. The poems that follow could be divided as those which emerged spontaneously without my looking for them and those which I sought to create as response to some provocation from the readings. Some poems were provoked thematically, for example “A Love Poem” (Sue Sinclair, 2008) and “For Daughters and Nuns in the Residential Schools” and “Empathy is a Room” (both Rosanna Deerchild, 2015). Others came from emotional provocation, for example “Surprising Something Somewhere” (Sue Sinclair, 2008) and “The Breathing” (John Steffler, 1985).

Some provocations were based on my appropriating textural features such as the use of third person (Patrick Lane) in “woman wakes coughing” and “shoes”, which I found allowed me to reach outside of the particulars of my own story in new ways. After reading work by Lee Maracle (2015) and Mary Dalton (1998), I decided to write a poem that was contained within an extended metaphor (Spring). Following after Patrick Lane’s poem “There is a time” (p. 34-5), I wrote “Grey Morning Roofers” using a strong sense of repetition. Lee Maracle (2015) draws on the physicality of layout as does my “NO ONE WENT CRAZY.” As response to Mary Oliver (2004) and David Whyte (2007/2012), I wanted to write with a clearer sense of evocative and detailed description of a natural space with an emergent message. I went for a walk in each case, in search of the poems “Neither Foreign nor Familiar” and “High Tide.”
Largely my process was not so concrete. For each author I read all of or a considerable portion of a book of poems and then tried to carry forward a felt sense from this immersion in crafting a response. For example, I wrote “When I Lived Uphill of Mary Dalton” after spending time with the poetry of Mary Dalton (1998) and of Carl Leggo (Norman & Leggo, 2016), both Newfoundland poets who are strong storytellers of that place and traditions. While I make connections to particular prompts, my poems were also wily and resisted control and intention. A number of poems were provoked by and support the project rather than having clear attachment to a particular text.

I found that long after I had moved on to other authors, the voice that Rosanna Deerchild’s (2015) work had brought forth in me continued to pour out in new poetry. This collection from Deerchild recounts her mother’s residential school experience in a visceral, raw and powerful voice. The writing is stark, with short lines, and resonates to me as profoundly oral. It was a container through which some of my deepest parts found voice and insistence to be put into writing.

It was only once this stream of poems “dried up” that I felt I could consider them as having come from but distinct from me. In these poems is a child voice that wants everyone to know about her silent struggle; she brings her unmet need to be acknowledged to these poems. She is also not clear that she is not her trauma but only a bearer of it. During the full intensity of healing, she and I are also indistinguishable: her pain is my pain, her child needs are my adult needs. It was only as I journey through this part of my healing and came back to the grace and perspective of adulthood—to feel in touch again with my centre of power, intuition
and grounded connection—that I am able to consider these poems more from an aesthetic stance (which I understand requires taking on, at least in part, the perspective of a reader). Because my healing progresses rather than being repressed or stuck—that is I undergo transformation—as a reader some weeks later I am no longer the voice that narrated the poems. While still more closely intertwined with these poems than with others, I am able to benefit from some triangulation through a transformational passage of time.

A key aspect of my consideration of these poems is also a pervasive tension in poetry inquiry more broadly (Faulkner, 2009/2016) between the dual aims of communicating content and of creating aesthetic experience. Sometimes knowledge content and aesthetics are mutually enhancing, and in other cases one aspect may be biased at the expense of the other. I found, while it contains key content, I had difficulty assessing the aesthetic of the poem “The Staff on Which my Music is Written”. This is possibly also because it carries a different voice than I am accustomed to in my work.

I took a very deliberate approach to editing and curating the collection of poems and indeed also to the writing of this more traditionally scholarly text. Always, I set about to be prayerful. To set my intention early in the day and sometimes again for gratitude and receptivity, to meditate and tend to my energetic spaces. I attend to my living connections both inside and outside of buildings—the company of houseplants and of robins who just the other day began again their spring song disturbances of morning, of the ancient wisdoms of water that flows through and around our bodies.
In editing my poems I endeavored to draw on intuitive sense—sometimes I might search for a variant word in a thesaurus, but also often I might find clarity in a time of still quiet. Engaging with intuition requires clearing our lenses, but also trusting and surrendering cognitive control. Even as the poems deal with varied and sometimes very raw and difficult topics, it is important to me and I am learning to take care that they are held in some way within a sacred container. I recognize that in all making, including making with words and writing, we participate in the emerging creation of the world. As affirmed by hermeneutics (Smith, 1991), I seek to engage questions of my time with wholeness and balance.

There is power in every individual because there is power in the word. Humans are very powerful in this way. To turn the realm of thought which is abstract potential, into a thing in the physical world, through word, is powerful creativity as a natural act. The essence of creativity in all things is what makes the universe shift. It is the cause something to become from nothing. The word in that way is powerful. When we speak a word we declare something. We create it and then it can be. It can become action. So it is a sacred act. We as humans are extremely powerful in this way. (Cardinal in Cardinal & Armstrong, 1991, p. 89)

**Looking Forward**

This project is, of course, unfinished. Many great and provocative texts on this subject were not included (You missed Seamus Heaney? Where are the other Indigenous poets?). There are many half-completed poems such as one following after Tom Dawe (Dawe & Squires, 2009) on the hospitality of my mother’s bountiful
vegetable garden that has refused assembly. Future inquiry would do well to consider more directly rhythm or meter as one of many other key aspects of poetry. The teachings contained in the texts I worked with will continue to reverberate and can be returned to over the years to come. Indeed, much poetry remains to be written to really consider the questions around connection to land.

It is important to consider, in closing, the relationship between this collection of poems and a sentient landscape. Even if not sought or acknowledged, I understand that the voices within the places we inhabit and from which we write participate in and speak through our words, writing and activity—that human being-ness is not a closed system. Certainly, I felt presence with me in many ways throughout this writing.

This writing of poems and academic text took place during Vancouver’s cool, wet and sometimes snowy winter when the demands of my time leaned toward largely indoor activity. My writing space faces a view of the Pacific Ocean and my days are marked by wind, weather and the varying activities of the eagles, crows and other birds that share this space. This was a period of time for me characterized more by upheaval and grappling with neediness more than by stillness.

Writing about nature is interrelated but distinct from writing dialogically with nature. Reflecting, I believe writing through textual provocation to have been a competing “conversation partner” and in many ways might be a barrier more than support for land-mediate creation. The presence of land in each collection becomes very important then as well. Some, such as Tom Dawe’s (Dawe & Squires, 2009) “I know I’ll not look back/from this stillness/listening in the first frost/in the hushed
scriptorium/of emptiness” (p. 72) offered me deeply felt experience of land—like he and therefore I could be listening to that otherness. In Suzanne Thomas’ (2004) sensualized academic work, I sometimes wished for more leaf mold, for her theorizing about the embodiment of land to be surrendered: that it might get out of its own way and be allowed to breathe on its own along with the voices it hopes to bring forward.

My poems here do not represent creativity from a meditative or mind-quiet space of listening (also described by Abram, 1996) that often characterizes for me “listening to the land.” I am interested in further considering how seeking to write very descriptive poetry while immersed in natural experience feeds an inner narrating voice, rather than open attentive listening—how poetry more than other arts asks practitioners to simultaneously hold and work with language while letting go of thought.

What these poems do strongly represent is a journey of emotional opening, transformation and learning. I understand this clearing and clarifying of our relational lenses as an important part of being able to trust intuition and the teachings of the more-than-human. It is journeying through to being able to embody profound creativity that is uninhibited by fear, shame, guilt and anger. Creativity that is both awakening and surrender (O'Donohue, 2004). Creativity that is moving “from one point to another, aware and totally alive, comfortable to be out there past the edge of the known realm, into what is only possible” (Cardinal & Armstrong, 1991, p. 85).
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