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Research/Poetry: Exploring Poet's Conceptualizations of Craft, Practice, and Good and Effective Poetry

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"bus-stop-test" – ©Valerie Triggs

Listen. I'm trying to tell you
how easily the poem you thought
was a beautiful woman becomes
cronelike by a kind of witchery.
(Addonizio, 2000)

Kim Addonizio's (2000) poem, *The Revered Poet Instructs Her Students on the Importance of Revision*, accentuates how my personal interest in the idea of "good poetry" has become more of a professional pursuit (see Faulkner 2006, 2007). Whatever we call the poetic work (e.g., autoethnography, research poetry, investigative poetry, narrative poetry)

written by those, like myself, who define themselves as primarily social researchers or even those who choose the label researcher/poet, an important concern is what constitutes good and effective poetry. This interest was born out of frustration with some poetry published as academic research that seemed sloppy, ill conceived, and unconsidered. Just because this poetry is published in academic journals, read at academic conferences or labeled academic, does this mean there should not be a concomitant interest in poetic craft? Especially when poets spend considerable time studying craft issues in an effort to further their aesthetics? When we consider the time that researchers invest learning their own methods, it seems that researcher poets should study poetic craft with a similar intensity and not claim “poetic license” as a reason for unconsidered craft (cf. Cahnmann, 2003; Percer, 2002). Or to state this other ways, one poet I talked with about craft told me that “whatever you crap out is not a poem,” and another reiterated that “poetry isn’t poetry until there’s revision.” Of course, there are numerous researcher poets who are intensely interested in the epistemic-aesthetic dialectic in this kind of work (e.g., Prendergast, 2006; Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005). Cahnmann (2003), for instance, claimed, “If poetry is to have a greater impact on research, those engaged in poetic practices need to share our processes and products with the entire research community, and the terms of its use must be clearly defined” (p. 30).

This investment for me has meant studying poetry seriously and learning to articulate what works effectively and even on occasion, sublimely, in a poem. For instance, what I like about Addonizio’s revision poem is, first, her attention to craft through writing about craft. She utilizes a formal form, the pantoum, yet employs an informal voice to express frustration with bad early drafts of poems. This informal voice passes what poet Phil Memmer calls the “bus-stop-test”—If you recite your poem to people at a bus stop, and they don’t ask “what?” then you can use the language when writing in form. You have demonstrated the language is not outdated or old-fashioned (Advanced Poetry Workshop, 2007). I appreciate the subject matter given my present obsession with poetic craft, which relies, in part, on the idea of revision. I also relish Addonizio’s use of the pantoum, a Malaysian form with patterned quatrains that is one of the slowest of verse forms, because of the argument in the poem that revision is a constant, repetitive, and painful process (Strand & Boland, 2000). As such, Addonizio alters the form through a turn of phrase or use of key words but still stays true to the idea of a pantoum even if it is not immediately recognizable. For example, the second line in stanza one, “how easily the poem you thought,” becomes “How easy, you thought, to write a poem:” in the second stanza.

The success of Addonizio’s use of form here rests on the seeming ease of it; it doesn’t feel forced like early drafts can be. Her use of the second person pronoun *you* along with the first person *I* makes the poem feel like a sincere personal address to the audience. We get the sense of being in the classroom with the narrator as a co-participant in the experience with her own and her student’s green drafts. Finally, the analogy of revision as aging creates depth in the poem; we see causality at work. Revision is always painful like growing older when we can’t rely on the beauty of youth or the sense of time as boundless. Understanding the importance of revision in poetry and in self-image may bring feelings of wanting to return to a previous ignorant state.

Addonizio’s appreciation for revision demonstrates the quagmire of examining this idea of good and effective poetry. Poetic traditions and influences, aesthetic concerns, and definitions of what constitutes poetry differ and often wildly so. Tony Hoagland (2006) argued, “despite the usefulness of categories, in the blurry hybridities of aesthetic practice, many contemporary poems fall outside any designated bin” (p. 158). Then what is “good” poetry used as social research and what should it accomplish? What can a study of poetic

craft tell us about the aesthetic/epistemic dialectic in poetry as social research? What do poets and social researchers consider important to their craft? The poet Katherine Soniat (1997) wrote about her desire to translate and reinvent archival texts she was using as inspiration for her poetry “without using the source verbatim” (p. 259). “I was becoming aware that if I read too closely, if I took notes as conclusive blocks of information, this poetic endeavor was doomed to the coldly encyclopedic and nothing more” (p. 259). Based on my readings, I suggest that many social researchers use poetic representation as a means to evoke emotional responses in readers and listeners in an effort to produce some shared experience between researcher, audience, and participant. Table 1 shows the implicit and explicit goals of some researchers concerned with poetic transcription and research poetry as stated in their writing about method/craft.

Table 1. Goals of Poetic Representation

The similarities in the goals are worth nothing: evocation, political action, understanding, connection, and emotionality. All of these authors and researchers wish to evoke the emotional through poetic means, goals that are similar to many poets. A studious concern with craft may further the poetic goals of writing research poetry and facilitate the connection between science and art. With this aim, the specific question that I addressed through interviews with working poets was: How do poets perceive, describe, experience and write good and effective poetry?

The Interviews

I used phenomenological interviews aimed at exploring the meaning and experience of "good poetry" (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose was to seek comprehensive descriptions or depictions of poet's experiences with reading, listening to, and writing good and effective poetry. I sought vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like including thoughts, feelings, behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with poetic experiences. For example, I began interviews by asking poets to think of a poem they considered to be good and what made it work. I audio-taped the interviews with permission; they ranged in length between 1.5 to 3 hours. The poets received transcriptions of the interviews for further comment and clarification.

I interviewed 6 women and 5 men ranging in age from 27-68 ($M=39$). All interview participants were published and working poets meaning they actively wrote poetry, taught poetry, and sought publication for their poems as well as participated in poetry readings in various venues as poets and audience members. Their occupations included visual artist, former hospice nurse, director of arts programming at a community center (including writing), instructor of poetry and composition, free-lance writer, university vice president for marketing, former and current poetry editor of literary journals, and assistant director of an MFA program. Ten of the poets had an MFA (eight with an emphasis in poetry, one in fiction writing, and one in painting).

I read and reread each transcript making notes about good and effective poetry and the poet's process of creating good poetry. First, I marked every relevant passage and grouped the passages according to the experience, process, and descriptions of good and effective poetry. Next, I read through the passages asking whether the moment was necessary to the experience and if there was a label that could be abstracted from it. I then clustered passages that were core themes of the experience. These core themes are represented in Table 2. For each participant, I wrote a textual-structural description of good and effective poetry (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 2. Core Themes of "Good" Poetry

Finally, I wrote a composite description of the essence and meaning of good and effective poetry that incorporated each poet's individual textual-structural descriptions.

Good and Effective Poetry

Deep Suspicion

The more I know about poetry, the more gun-shy I am to come up with statements regarding it. If you had interviewed me when I first started writing, seriously, I would have all these absolutes. Good poetry does this and good poetry does that. And the weirdest thing is now that I'm, I don't even want to say more established, but now that I'm more into it and I take it even more seriously and I've been doing it longer, I'm way more reticent to be like, good poetry does this or good poetry does that. (Matt, 651-657)

Gabe reflected on one difference he saw between social scientists and poets: "In one way there are the researchers for whom the art is a secondary matter to the representation versus those people for whom the art is the primary and representation is secondary." For Gabe, the poetry writing process means first, to consider the art and enter the artistic dialogue, only later does he consider the subtext or epistemic concerns and audit for authenticity or genuineness. His poems about Pennsylvania are indicative of this process.

It was sort of, "I know what's out there. I'm going to grab it even though I haven't yet experienced it" which may be something that flies in the face of some social science commitments, right? It's not representative if you haven't yourself experienced it or your subject hasn't spoken about it. Again, in my case, because the art was first and foremost, and I wanted to enter into that dialogue, I took that image.

One should also be deeply suspicious of their work, especially if you have the feeling you are on to something. "Step back because that's often when you're failing. It's when you're most conflicted and you're outside your comfort zone that maybe you're actually saying something that's worth saying." The process entails knowing you have something worth saying, seeing whether a poem is revisable. Beware if you have spent too much time with a poem or are afraid of going back to it.

On the other hand, an editor or a peer's estimation may increase one's confidence in a good poem. A good poem speaks to tradition; others recognize experiences and "common appreciations" in the poem, such as a description of Pennsylvania: the state where to talk of soup is to talk/of God and Sunday bundling and bazaars. Gabe cited this as good because the poem had been anthologized; he was the first to talk about Pennsylvania this way, and he tapped into a common understanding. "It responds to the poetic tradition while trying to expand it, and it has an unexpected twist in it.... It's not just experimentation for experimentation's sake."

Poetry as Narrative Connectedness

"So, that's how I know a poem is authentic, when I feel like I'm a member of this community, this reaching out" (Marian, 15-16).

Marian considers a good poem to be one that is authentic, courageous and accessible, it shouldn't solely entertain her but rather highlight her discomfort with her own insecurities "because I'm invited in a community where I'm not alone. Where the poet is, obviously, searching for something. And I'm not looking for an answer, but I'm looking for somebody to travel with." As an example, she suggested *Healing the Mare* by Linda McCarriston (1991) as representative of a good poem because of the process of sense making that occurs. The narrator in the poem describes her care for an injured mare as a way to understand her own abuse as a child: "As I soothe you I surprise wounds/of my own this long time unmothered." The description of making sense of the past was vital to Marian's contemplation of authenticity. McCarriston's narrator shows us how she has transformed the past into her present state. The reader witnesses the transition through a show of vulnerability that Marian defined as "a self-imposed sensitivity and the ability to fear, anguish, angst, pain." This vulnerability honors a moment more than "to be brave and fearless" and represents "a tool that you can use to connect those dots from the past to the present to the future." The experience may not mirror every reader's experience, but it works because "It helps you to look back and see your own helplessness and you find yourself in that journey."

Authenticity is someone else's voice reaching you and mirroring your own experiences, even if the experiences aren't identical. At some point others may remember a poem and connect the experience to something in their own life, and this is especially important for creating a sense of connection. As Marian stated, McCarriston was white, Irish, born in Boston, and she was Black. But both of them were struggling with getting respect and acceptance for who they were from others without becoming victims. The connection that good poetry can make is to that of fear, the basic emotion—fear of being the other not fearing others—according to Marian. Poets that can address this fear in their work accomplish authenticity by writing "from the place that doesn't want to be written," going to "where it hurts. Even if you have to go back to the time when you were personally humiliated." Marian considered this connection to fear as not giving in to victimhood, rather it is altering an experience by witnessing it in the present: "You can go back, revisit that, as a witness and stand beside that little girl. And that is really being authentic, that little girl reaches her hand to you and you reach back. And that's how I have found my authentic voice." A good poem uses authenticity to reach out to the reader and nourish her. It provides courage to keep walking, to take another step toward fear, to keep going.

Showing vulnerability as an honest human experience is important in this wrestling with fear as it lets us know that we're strong and have the power to be strong even in our weak moments.

And even on the days I don't want to be forgiving, I can even harness the anger, even the rage, that then propels me forward into action to help my granddaughter to be a young...kid of color who has pride and self-esteem. So, these are the things that really help me, everyday. And I couldn't do it without this good poetry.

And the good poem keeps us coming back again and again. In the process, the poet does not sink to the ugliness, even if she describes the ugly in her work. This writing from pain and hurt allows a poet to use the experience as a mirror to help other people who otherwise may ignore an incident a poet writes about and to be less fearful.

Marian doesn't pay attention to work that she doesn't think is good, and for her,

good and effective are synonymous: "A poem that's authentic and that other people want to read." The process of creating this poem is one of using imagery to invite the reader in, rather than just putting words down on a page and using images that may even surprise or "trick" someone into staying with the poem through the difficult material to learn and be connected. Marian provided an example from a poem she wrote about children playing behind a Catholic church in a city ignorant of racism where she used the image of bats. "I had the bats diving down into the cone of light chasing after the children." Using images that may delight is an attempt to accomplish this universality and narrative connection.

I want something in my work to make them want to be curious about me and acknowledge that I'm here and that we are here as equals. And so it goes back to that interdependence. I need that person, as much as I may hate to admit it, as much as they would hate to admit that they need me too. And I think that we reach out for each other on the page.

Psychological and Emotional Effect

"What I'm looking for in a poem that I seldom find are big ideas and something that strikes an emotional chord that kind of resonates. And that poem has very simple words and the ideas are even simple, but surprising" (Karen, 21-23).

The grunt, gasp, exclamation "oh" or "hum" that follow a performance of a poem are typical reactions to a poem, especially because we can't produce a set of prose sentences that can exactly expose the meaning. Describing a poem may be like trying to describe music; the sonorous qualities are almost ineffable though the words may sound verisimilar to their meaning. There exists a tension between the explication and the disposition. This may just be the strength of poetry according to Farah; the tension between explaining emotions that arise from a poem, what it generates and the feeling present in someone. Farah provided the example of *In the Garden* by Louis MacNeice where he used shorter lines and rhyme at the end of one line and the beginning of the next to create an effect like dancing. This is appropriate because the poem concerns a dancer leaving her husband. "And it's just amazing to me that sound can sort of mimic an action. Or that sound can mimic something more vague or hard to pin down, which is like an emotion or psychological state."

Poetic tensions played out in Farah's conceptualization of the writing process as writing vs. analysis, and ideal vs. real. She talked of a cycle of despair at not having enough time to write, being afraid to write, not writing daily, and fighting against classic ideas of what it means to be a poet. A poet sits down and writes everyday, reads deeply and carefully, and imitates good writers.

That's partly what makes me feel like a beginning writer. I'm still finding that part out about where it fits in, how it fits in, and how I make it a priority, even among these other competing priorities. And I feel like I have a lot to learn about. I mean, I can talk about a good poem when you set a poem in front of me. I can say a little bit about why I think it's more or less effective than this other poem that you sat in front of me, but when you try to do it, it's kind of a different story (480-486).

The difficulty for Farah was not having consistent feedback from a group of people focused on her writing and the expectation of writing regularly as in her MFA program. She

described a difference between brainstorming and “being a poet” and how when she is being a poet she thinks in iambic rhythm. This marks a difference in writing and critique/analysis of poems. The necessary revision process, which is often not part of the conceptualization of what doing poetry means, requires balancing daily activities like cleaning the house with revising poems, selecting poems for a book, and sending them out for publication. When it doesn't happen, she doesn't feel like a poet.

A good and effective poet may be different than a good and effective poem. She provided Pablo Neruda as an example of a good and effective poet because of his varied body of work from odes to love poems to political poems. An effective poet's reach is broad; you can access them from an “academic and human direction.” The poet can contend with free verse as well as form, but most importantly the good poet “makes the poem seem like it's a monument, in the context where a monument is required.” To discuss a good and effective poem, Farah suggested looking at what the poem is trying to do within a particular tradition. However, there is a problem with a label (e.g., confessional) if one only privileges the content and doesn't see the larger poem what it is and trying to be.

Good poems have structure and are memorable, mediocre poems sound similar because of worn out language that stands in for emotion. Farah contended that many students aren't “really aware of the degree to which there are expressions out in everyday use that we think sometimes are new (but) aren't.” Every word in a good poem is necessary whereas in a mediocre poem you can rearrange words and achieve the same effect. With a memorable poem “you walk away and you can still, you still have a distinct sort of sense of that poem as an individual poem whereas mediocre poems tend to sound the same after awhile.”

A good poem is one that is memorable, maybe even years later. Gabe cited Galway Kinnell's poem about oatmeal as one that is memorable because of the specifics, as well as the delivery of the poem. Memorable refers to the construction, images, resonate comparisons (the relation to a personal experience), the hinge (where a poem takes off in a surprising direction). An effective poetry refers to “poetry 101” or common ground among poet's conceptualizations of good poetry. This is also a feeling of not having wasted your time, especially when you have been to too many readings. Gabe described the experience as recognizing things you haven't been doing in your own work.

The other thing that I feel in addition to relief is satisfaction. It's hard to say what one feels because often you'll feel sad or happy depending on what the poem wants you to feel. I think in the aggregate after those feelings, I just feel satisfied. I often feel, inspired is not the right word, stirred, I guess. I'll leave a poetry reading feeling really good and I'll feel like so many things are justified now. It's a very affirming quality to a reading that goes well, or to a book that goes well.

Gabe acknowledged a difference between reading and hearing a poem and reading one on the page. Some poems may not be meant to be read; there may be a character who is not a voice but the subconscious. Therefore, a conscious performance of it can be strange. His preference is for voice. One test of whether a poet is good is whether he buys the book; this is a call to action he enjoys. “I feel like a call to action and that call to action may not always be to sit down and write. It may not always be to go and proclaim to the world. Sometimes it may just be, I want to go for a walk now.”

The language in a good poem can be fun, as in experimental poetry, but there must

be a strong emotional or psychological thread through “how the poem sets me up for its ending or how the poem sets me up for understanding the moment that that poem is trying to convey. And it tends to work for me in imagery and sound, sometimes through repetition.” A good poem begins in an experience, but it pushes beyond to be “some kind of emblem.” One way to do this is to write a series of poems using different perspectives. The goal is to get beyond one particular experience, “poor me,” and to examine parts of the experience that matter to be successful at confessing in poetry. This involves a tension between the specific and the universal. The dialectics of the poem are represented in the particular, not the commentary, and make a reader surprised “at a part of human experience that you didn’t think of in that way before.” But “you recognize it... it’s revealing something about what I didn’t realize.” Hoagland echoed this sentiment: “I love poems that locate, coordinate, and subordinate, that build up a compound picture of the world. These poetic properties—of attention, proportion, and relationality—I have come to think of as Thingitude and Causality” (p. 164). Skating just short of sentimentality is another way to conceive of making this connection. Former poet laureate, Ted Kooser (2006), cited a letter he wrote to the late Richard Hugo expressing admiration of his poems that skirted on the edge of sentimentality without falling over the edge. Farah likes poems that offer some kind of dialectic between happiness and darkness. An example of this would be her series of poems about marriage where she had incorporated some philosophical writings against the existence of God, and used that to juxtapose the exciting and decidedly boring everyday details of being married. The poems are intended to get beyond “a really bad day my husband and I had” to examine the larger role of marriage.

Pushing the Boundaries

“American poetry still largely believes, as romantics have for a few hundred years, that a poem is a straightforward autobiographical testimony to, among other things, the decency of the speaker.... Welcome to Poetry City: hurt someone’s feelings—go to jail” (Hoagland, 2006, 197).

The frustration with too much niceness in poetry can be seen when Phil described good poetry as challenging to others, as that which can hurt feelings because “the stakes are high.”

Can you write the poem that’s going to make your mother weep?... And not because you hate your mother, not your mom who you can’t stand who would never let you do anything you want to do and you don’t want to be around and haven’t spoken to in ten years... But your mom who does everything for you who you love talking to and adore, and you know these poems will upset her. Can you push hard enough on your work to do that because it’s something you believe in and something you want to write, a story you think has to be told? And push hard enough to accomplish what you hope to accomplish with it, not let yourself off.

A good poem addresses large issues—death, silence, absence, and loss—though Phil quoted a former teacher who felt that of the four subjects in poetry, it was all about death once you examined it regardless of what subject matter a poet claimed. Phil felt frustrated with some contemporary poetry where groups of poets are “writing about absolutely nothing” and just “fucking around with words.” Or another way to state this: A poem about your cat better be more than a poem about a cat. This is why Phil cited Bridget Kelly as a great poet: “Her poems are never just about the fact that her kid happened to have a funny little story they told him. They’re about that and the end of the world.”

Phil differentiated between an effective poem, a good poem, and a great poem: “A good poem has to be effective, but an effective poem doesn’t have to be good.” *Effective* was a pejorative label according to Phil, a way to show faint praise; the effective poem works by getting across its meaning through the use of poetic sound, music, and metaphor. “It’s not archaic. It has some modernity about it. It’s a decent piece of work.”

Contrast this with the notion of a good poem as one that gives you “goose bumps,” makes you smile and you can’t stop smiling at the mastery as you read it, and at least in some small way changes your thoughts about the poem’s subject matter so that you can’t look at it in “the same way again.” “I know a poem is really good when...the feeling I have in my stomach is the way I felt the night I was lying awake in my bed when I first seriously thought to myself, there’s probably not really a God, is there?” A good poem is one that you come back to again for many years as opposed to an effective poem where you may read it once and forget about it.

In a “really good poem by a really good poet,” we will go along with whatever the poet does in the poem, such as squirrels falling from the sky, quipped Phil. This typically occurs near the end when “the poet’s done their work and the rhythm is that compelling and the music of the words is compelling and whatever the poem has done thematically or metaphorically is that compelling that anything will work.” In his own work, he has started to look for the point where he can “take the turn” to stop talking about the incident or content of the poem and begin to talk about the “big issue.” The question for Phil is “how do you keep that going at the same sort of linguistic pace as the rest of the poem? Because that’s the hard thing to do.” A poem shouldn’t sound didactic or too overtly philosophical with “tiresome explanations.” Phil asserted that a poem must move us on several different levels, like Bridget Kelly’s work, with “surprising twists you’d never expect, things early on in the poem that seem just like wonderful details (that) turn out to be very important metaphors by the time you get to the end, but they creep up on you in marvelous ways.” The goal is to have a fun and interesting poem so that you can tell the audience the philosophy “and hope the rhythm will support it at that point.” You get the audience to connect through the specific details of the poem and the universality to allow a few lines of telling.

The process of writing a good poem requires much work and knowledge, some luck, trusting artistic instincts, and the ability to self-edit. Phil claimed that anybody could get their poems published with persistence given the number of literary journals, but a good poet has to be willing to be good. “You have to say, I’m going to write a really good poem about this, and then sit down and do it—and do the work and think, and then somehow get that onto the page.” Poets need to learn what they think is good, find their own way of writing and be able to “just know” when they’ve written a good poem. “That’s the secret in a way. You learn what not to throw out...the other way you write good poems is you hate your work to some extent. You keep working on it until you can’t hate it anymore.” A poet constantly questions the self and finds the balance between pushing hard and trusting the poetic process. Hoagland (2006) argued that we need to hone the icy eye of a prosecutor in order to stop “the decay of fierce analytical thinking in our poetry” (197).

This honing of an ability to trust one’s poetic instincts occurs by reading (and reading and reading), and then studying a few poets who are great, understanding what they do specifically in their work. For Phil, Bridget Kelly, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, and Charles Wright are the poets he can’t live without and to whom he compares his own work. “I really think of myself as writing for all the great, dead masters that came before me that I

admire tremendously and would want to have respect my company.” Another way to learn to trust poetic instinct is to not fight against daily demands by panicking if you haven’t written in 3 months. “I can have anything else going on in the world and if it’s time for a poem to come out, I’ll figure out a way to get it done.” Phil fits writing in when it can happen; he often props a poem on the dashboard when driving to and from work. The trust in poetic instincts helps his writing.

What ends up happening a lot is that because I take so many breaks in the process of writing a poem, it helps those twists and turns happen. One thing I try to do is never stop at the end of a complete sentence...if I’m going to stop writing for the day, I stop in the middle of a sentence. At the end of a line, but maybe with a stanza break coming up next or something. So, not only do I not know what’s going to happen next, but anything could happen next.

Fragmentation/Flux/The Ineffable

“Each of us who writes must find a balance between restraint and expressions of feeling” (Kooser, 2006, 57).

Sheila likened good poetry to a punch in the stomach or something that blows the top of your head off (after Emily Dickinson) and stays with you through life. She articulated this conceptualization of good poetry during her MFA program and cited Robert Hayden’s *Those Winter Sundays* as one of the first poems she encountered that engendered this reaction for all for all of the reasons—rich imagery, musicality, and conciseness—she learned poetry should be good.

A good poem is a poem that stays with you, or at least a part of it, an image from it stays with you through your life. In that poem it’s the image of the father’s hands, these large worker’s hands, callused, cracked from manual labor, juxtaposed with this family life and doing these kind things for sleeping children, and a sleeping wife, perhaps. This tenderness that is, it’s not sentimentalized, it’s not obvious, it’s just understated and there. Restraint is important to me.

She considered restraint to be saying “something without over explaining it, without descending into pathos” and the expected anticipated ending. Robert Hayden, Richard Hugo, Philip Levine, and James Wright accomplished this restraint in their work through a sense of authenticity, describing a working class life. The draw for Sheila was the connection she felt to poetry her father would have liked even though the working class background didn’t represent her experience. Authenticity, which she considered to be a horrible term, is about detail and observation and painting a place and the people inside a place; it begins with small details that start a moment.

Farah cited the ineffable quality of her own work, not often understanding why something gets chosen for publication and the difficulty of judging effectiveness, as the mark of a beginning poet. But she considered a poem to be good if she could solve some technical problem or had a feeling of having accomplished something in the poem. “I was writing sonnets for awhile, so if I could write a sonnet that would fit the form, had a turn where it was supposed to have a turn, kind of had rhymes, then I was like, ‘oh, that seems good.’” Some of the difficulty in judging effectiveness stemmed from a shift in her criteria, maybe even a radical shift, after being in an MFA program and her formal study of poetry.

I think it's more because I've read a little bit more or thought a little bit more about other aspects of poetry. Then when I look back on that other thing, where I was maybe trying to accomplish something in terms of form, and then I'm looking at it in terms of word choice. Then suddenly, that part doesn't feel like it's working.

Hoagland (2006) calls this self-consciousness “the necessary border crossing of craft, skill, and even of poetic ambition” (62).

Sheila described her aesthetic of good poetry as in flux and bifurcated since motherhood and increasing daily responsibilities.

My brain is broken in a profound way since having a child... I'm literally fragmented in my days because I'm trying to do a hundred things at once... I feel in chaos all the time, pretty much all the time, every day... I tend to write, now, poems that are really fragmented. If there's a narrative, it's a broken narrative. It's a submerged narrative. It's not a narrative that's overt. It's certainly not a narrative that is identifiable as from my life. I've written a lot of collage poems since becoming a mother that are really just—I hate that word just—they are, among other things, exercises in language.

You know good poetry when you see it after years of training, having seen and read and practiced. This is the way to earn the right to bifurcation or the use of whatever works. “We should be allowed to take from whatever, whatever school, whatever method, whatever, whatever, whatever works... I don't get why you have to align yourself one way or the other.”

In this spirit, Sheila hasn't put aside those who were “blow the top of my head off poet(s)” for her previously, but she doesn't return to them or confessional/narrative poetry as often. Good poetry shows a truth that the audience immediately knows and recognizes as if they had written the lines, but concomitantly it demonstrates that you “write what you're willing to discover” like the poet Yusef Komunyakaa urges. She tells her students to go beyond the “old creative writing maxim: Write what you know.” This is emphasized by teaching her students the importance of language and its impact and using the advice of a former teacher who “gave her poetry in a real way” by saying he wanted poems or lines from poems you could take and put on a t-shirt.

Even though Sheila described a change in her conception of good poetry, she argued that narrative was still vital because poetry has to connect to humans in some way, be connected to the body, or it's worthless. For her, this meant changing the way she approached language and narrative in poetry. Whatever a poet does that is different for her can be labeled experimental, regardless of the form.

So I've returned in some ways to language as a primary engine for my poetry, as opposed to a secondary engine. It was always that narrative was first, narrative was the driving force and language was important. I wanted to make sure the language was complimenting the narrative, but now I'm sort of doing it in an opposite way.

Hoagland (2006) considers the use of collage and juxtaposition as a way to create more participation in the audience. They may have to work more to discern meaning. Sheila

considered her interest in collage poetry now as one of discovery and surprise and invocation of the ineffable without using clever tricks such as the poet turns out to be a barking dog at the end of a poem.

I don't like to be told anymore...I don't prefer directness in a certain way now in poetry.... It's because my life isn't direct anymore. I don't have ready answers for anything anymore. It used to be my project, truly, in poetry to try to make sense of my life and of the world because my growing up years were chaotic... but now making beautiful things is not as important to me as making interesting things.

The audience should sense layered meanings and want to return to the poem; there is something more than entertainment. Sheila asked, "Why would you want your audience to read your poem and say, wow, good poem and put it down and never return to it?" Don't show the audience something they already know like a Kincaid painting of cozy cottages. "The minute the poet makes her or his project to capture something in that way, I think you've failed as a poet."

Flexing the Poetry Muscle to Get a Good Physique

A good poem provides aesthetic pleasure according to Dan. He quoted Robert Pinsky who considered the human body to be the medium and instrument of poetry. As such, the experience of a good poem is an adrenaline rush, perhaps like sleep deprivation or over sleeping, over or under eating. The aesthetic pleasure manifests in the feelings reading a poem provide- the way your foot moves, your tongue, and the breaths you take, the sounds.

For me it's sort of a breathlessness, a wordlessness, a silence, pleasant contemplation. Almost a feeling of not wanting anything but those words, not wanting to explain them... Even if you don't understand them completely, (not) going to the dictionary to look them up is simply sort of abiding with the words. Enjoying the silence around them. A good line of poetry...I don't need anything but that line.

Kim exhorts the poem that is "physically fit;" it doesn't outwardly say anything but shows what it needs to say by using a turn or moment of emotional change and understanding. For a reader, the poem begins with a visceral reaction in the stomach like "a little butterfly when someone surprises you when you're reading" and then moves to an intellectual understanding of how the poem works. Kim, like Sheila, cited *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden as an illustrative poem to show beginning poetry students. "It is absolutely a tight working body. It is, as I like to say, a physically fit poem. Seriously, there's no flab on that poem anywhere." She uses this poem to appeal to students' hearts first through a relatable clear moment, and then they feel it using their heads to explore the formal background and how "it speaks to its predecessors...(and) also makes way for the future in a very specific way with the realism." A good poem is like the development of love: "It starts in your gut when you see them walk across the room. I think when you see the poem walk across the room, and you fall in love with it, then you start to care how it's made." The poem's words have multiple meanings, specifically the description of the blueblack cold which emphasizes bruises in an angry household, bitter weather, and hard sounds like chronic anger. Importantly, the poem takes a turn, like all good poems in the English language, changing from what it was originally to something else.

It's an imaginative leap...it's the moment where you leave behind the intellectual and make the bridge to the next thing that happens, and that is often why poems are so hard to paraphrase. Because the turn is inexplicable, it defies logic often, it moves to something else, something that's emotional or visceral but not intellectual. Sometimes it can be intellectual, but it has to be emotional on some level or it doesn't matter.

The academic or intellectual part of poetry is not as interesting to Kim because of her approach to poetry. "For me in poetry, it's as daily as laundry. You read some poems, you do some laundry, you clean your dishes, and it makes sense then that you do everything sort of the same way." She talked about flexing the poetry muscle as a daily occurrence, and she tells her students to always be thinking or percolating ideas for writing poems and understanding poems previously read. She tells them to think of this as making a toolbox of what works in good poems, so that they can use them in their daily lives (e.g., wedding toasts). "It's only when you think it's good that you respond to it and go back and think about how to keep it for yourself." Kim doesn't write every day, but she believed that the planning or idea generation for a poem occurs days before the writing process. And poems have a way of coming out, even if it is through "weird dreams. This approach may be because she considered most poets to be beginning ones until they die since in writing and teaching one is never good enough. Therefore, all poets need to train themselves. "If you don't push the metaphor, if you don't try to tighten the story then you're never going to get good at it."

An important part of the intellectual work of poetry is to find the form that works for the poet's project as Kim stated, "the poem is always personified. Like if the poem wants that form, you give it to it." For instance, if you want to talk about loss a pantoum may work "because for every step forward there are two steps back." In her own work, Kim described a recent series of prose poems that use the form to accentuate the scene, characterization, and story, and not necessarily technique. She considered the prose form a way to help keep a reader focused on the scene.

It's a nugget. It's like a big wad of words on the page and you pick it up and you read it. And I didn't want people pausing, necessarily. I didn't want the breaks of the lines, I wanted the continuity of the prose poem because that way you stay in the story and wouldn't get bounced out.

Another important consideration with using the right form is finding a good reader with an eye for your work, someone who asks questions that further it. They understand your aesthetic as a poet, even if they dislike it.

People who hate your aesthetic are good readers because they can weed out the bullshit faster. Because they don't agree with you, they're like this is wasted, this is wasted, this is wasted, this is trite, this is your poem... I think having a good eye is multiple things, but it really is understanding your project and your intent, and also understanding your ticks, your compulsions, your easy outs.

Like others, Kim's aesthetic of a good poem in her own work and to some extent others changed after her MFA program. This can be seen in her decision about point of view. She asserted that first person poems don't interest her anymore; she preferred third or second person poems that ask different questions than beginning poets may ask.

I think that might be my objection to a lot of family poems and first person poems...It's so easy to get at it—why are you writing this? And certainly, we all have to have our own moments of understanding...but there's a certain point, once you're past twenty-five you kind of know and should maybe ask some other questions.

Or alternatively, the poet should ask these questions in another way as Sharon Olds does in her earlier work because “the point of view, the way she enters the poem, she never comes in the front door. She bombs the wall out...and I like that. She surprises me constantly.” Kim enjoyed poems in the second or third person because they offer a new perspective, their different, unexpected, startling and “because they're less ‘you know and that's one to grow on about my childhood poem.’ I feel mean saying these things, but I'm not interested in that poem.” The poems that hold her attention concern people, a journey or some kind of turn, have their own internal logic with set up rules that are followed, and have something at stake. A good poem has “details that you don't forget. Unforgettable images. Images that surprise you, startle you, shock you, even. Images that are visceral. You've got all your poetry senses working; you can be a part of that scene.” For example, Kim described *The Pope's Penis* by Sharon Olds with an image of the penis like a clapper and a bell amidst silver seaweed. The poems that she comes back to are ones that “bloom” at the end. “I don't like full stops on poems.” You want to start thinking once you finish reading, after the gut reaction, and go back to contemplate meaning again and again. She said “what always amazes me about poetry, it's so small on the page and so huge in your head.”

A good poem has “big new ideas stated simply.” It says exactly what it means, but there is also an exciting “jumping off point.” Karen considered simply describing or telling what happened in a poem, like a still life, and expecting the reader to bring the big idea to the table as not indicative of good poetry. “I like a big, philosophical one-two punch, I guess. I want there to be something to mull over.” Yet, a good poem contains simple language and is not high-blown, the ideas may be difficult but a poet needs to use accessible language. Karen discussed *The Rain* by Robert Creeley as an example of a good poem because of the way his language surprises her and makes her think of the rain in new ways.

I guess I haven't thought about it in quite that way before. And I don't even know if I think about the rain that way. The fact that he does, I kind of link up to different things that make me feel decent and innocent and happy. So, I guess I could see rain doing that, but I can think of a lot of other things that make me feel like *I'm wet with a decent happiness*.

A good poem then resonates with someone's experience, even if not directly. The idea is that a poet should make something new, “as Ezra Pound suggested...saying something we haven't heard before.”

Karen mused that a good poem may be something separate from a poem that a person likes complicating our discussion of what constitutes good poetry.

It's sort of a trap to think you recognize a good poem. Like there's something that exists in the world that is a good poem that is different than a poem that you like. Because I know I've liked a lot of poems that others would probably consider bad poems. Consider Billy Collins, who, a lot of people think he's just a big hat, but I think he's wonderful.

She continued by stating that Collins does build poetry that can stand up to critique and that reveals something meaningful. Kim had similarly suggested that most poets' wouldn't acknowledge they have a narrow version of what constitutes good poetry, ruling out entire schools. She and Karen both labeled themselves as "conservative" in their views of poetry because they considered their ideas of good poetry to be narrowly defined. Karen worried about getting stuck in an aesthetic because of possessing ideas that were maybe "too definitive about poems" and thus, being unable to grow

Karen described how she could determine visually through an examination of form what poetry would be successful through her work as poetry editor for a literary journal. "Without reading a word, I can look at the shape of it and tell by crazy-long lines that sort of don't mix in with the rest of the poem, crazy-short lines. No shape... it just doesn't have a physique." She considered form to be something unique to poetry. "It's one of the main ways it delivers its message.... But, a poem that kind of looks sloppy on the page is probably not done. It's probably not been refined to death. It needs to be spruced-up." A poem that appears to be "out of shape" is almost always bad according to Karen; a good poem has a good physique, and "it's not just a messy pile of words." She asserted that "a good poem has a plan behind it, and the form follows the plan. You couldn't have a ridiculous long dog leg in a poem, because the poem's demanding a different shape, has its own sort of knees." For example, free verse doesn't mean that a poet can write anything however they want, but "it means that you're free to choose your own form." In addition to form, the language in a poem should be carefully considered, tight. Every letter, every syllable, every word has an exact purpose and almost no other would do."

An effective poem was something lower than a good poem as it encompassed all of the things Karen considered to be important in poetry with the exception that it didn't "stir" her. "I couldn't look at some poem that everyone else acknowledges as a great poem and say, yeah that is a good poem. I could really only go as far as effective unless I had a visceral reaction to it." In her own writing, she considered good to be that which moved beyond what appeared to be only about personal experiences. "I think that's how you write a good poem. You move past what seems mundane and what seems too self-centered, not in the selfish way, but too centered on what your kitchen looks like." The self becomes a "jumping off point for every bigger thought." This means throwing away false starts and things that are not central and part of the poem.

Imagined Reality

"I think that's what poems are...imagined reality" (Dan).

Matt enters poetry through the visual. A good poem is one that can describe things that can't exist, such as an imaginary knife in someone's hand. "I like images that are complicated in that regard that you really have to pick (them) a part, they aren't necessarily based on something real." A good poem is like modern art, you are blown away by it or not; it relies on someone's reaction to it and the use of images. Thus, good poems make you want to enter them and feel them in some way. They contain images that one can enter; there are no missing walls or holes. Parini (2008) argued "poetic language matters because it is precise and concrete, and draws up closer to the material world" (14).

What a good poem will do is it will create a world. And you can kind of go into it and you have to test: can this happen? No. Can this happen? Yes. Those rules, any relation they have to the real world that is irrelevant. I really want to get in there and probe and see, is it this or is it this?

Matt's thinking about good poems as narrative, literal, and ending with a moral (e.g., Charles Bukowski) changed to this idea of a good poem as a fully rendered imaginary space. "I don't want a photograph or a newspaper article. I want a poem." Matt also expanded the previous statement that a good poem has no holes to sometimes a good poem has holes that keep someone coming back to it. "I really like that too, sometimes, when it doesn't have everything because it keeps you coming back. Because you want to know what the poet's not saying."

In his own work, Matt often begins with a phrase and thinks of images that get at an idea. For instance, he described a series of poems taken from a Salvation Army Christmas slogan, *Hunger Has No Season*, where he used that phrase and imagined different seasons of hunger. It is more difficult to begin with an idea because it is abstract and one has to find the images; he doesn't want to write poems that are abstract with a bunch of ideas.

I'm more interested in deciphering a difficult image than being given an obtuse line in the text. It's very thick and can be read multiple ways, but I'm more interested in a thick image or a complicated image more so than the writing.

The label poet is even problematic; one can self-publish a book, teach poetry, and that still doesn't make one a poet. This aligns with Matt's idea that good poetry is not confessional or just an outlet for feelings. He doesn't tell people he is a poet often because of a resistance to notions of poetry as self-healing and writing as a release.

It's me out there, but I'm picking and choosing how I'm represented and that relationship, to me, versus a videotape of me. So, I like poetry that's a little bit removed; I'm not interested in a straight, boom. It's withholding a little bit, it's crafting a little bit.

A good poet can use whatever subject matter, even confessional, as long as a poem is crafted and different from a journal entry. A poet can't get away with only having a good story. "You can be a lot truer if you're not bound by the truth." You want a poem that screams. A well-crafted poem is sharp and has things cut out. A good poet learns what to cut, for instance, choosing the images that are most representative of a feeling, just the details that further the poem, and leaving out the guy you passed in the street when you broke up with your girlfriend.

A good image can describe something, but it must not do so with "a really sharp line that accurately describes something." Matt cited Charles Simic, and his collection, *Dismantling the Silence*, as good due to the fact the Soviet occupation and his past in Belgrade were dealt with indirectly. There are layers of visuals—the sheer visual imagery, that is beautiful, and the layers underneath that can be picked apart. All of this accrues into something amazing, a mystery: "There are a lot of good ways you can read it and it never, you're never going to be done with a book like that." The too-defined line that describes something may mean a poem is over after one read. He said, "I don't like poems that tell me too much. I like poems that lie to me and are subversive and are hiding things." There must be some mystery in the work, the poem "isn't coming clean with something" or defining the narrator. A good poem lies. "And I think that's what a good book of poems is like...you can guess and you can get close and you can know what it's not, but you'll never know...in a good book." He cited Richard Hugo's book on writing poetry, *The Triggering Town*, and the idea that the truth often holds a good poem back. Hugo's chapter on

assumptions and writing contains contradictory facts about the description of a town that demonstrate this.

Another element of a good poem is surety of voice according to Dan. This voice constitutes the craft of poetry: "There should be a tension between the syntax of the sentence and the way it flows across the line so the lines are broken and the rhythm of each line. There should be some sort of tension there, something to keep the reader from mistaking the poem for just ordinary, everyday language." The voice should be one with urgency and uniqueness, one the audience believes, but one that is also "genuine to itself." To portray this urgency of voice, a poem must have what is essential and necessary, and this doesn't necessarily mean the shortest. It may take a few pages to get across what is needed.

An effective poem is "how close the poet can get to the imaginary reality of their subject." Dan argued that a poem is not a traffic report or a grocery list; rather an effective poem is one that is clearly different from everyday language, even if a poet borrows an interesting passage from a book. The poet adds to it through enjambment, for instance. In his own work, Dan had been writing poems from the perspective of different birds and fish, thinking about "being true to the experience of that voice." He told me that most of his poems arrive from imagined versus physical experience, and he is interested in the intermingling of those experiences because of his belief that the inner world is just as real as any physical world. Dan emphasized his process of *looking* instead of *trying* to find things to say.

I may have an idea, title, first line or something, but when I sit down I try not to have an ending in mind, try not to have a line that I'm working towards. Like, oh yeah, that's going to be an awesome last line. Now let's write five pages to get to that last line.

The best poems are good and effective. "A good poem can give you pleasure and can maybe give you some sense of mystery that fends off your own confusion or your own blindness. It should also touch that inner world, that inner weather as Frost calls it."

He knows one of his poems is good if he experiences surprise and discovery at what he has written when going back to it after a few weeks. Though, he labeled himself a "tinkerer" and often revises and rewrites poems, even after they are published, going for the right lines and words to capture the urgency of voice he deemed important. "Knowing when I've written well has a lot to do with how much work I've put into the poem, how many drafts I've gone through...I'm suspicious of poems that come off after one or two drafts." He composes poems by hand in notebooks as a way to slow down because he expressed that a bad poem was the poet's fault and not the poem's fault. "I compose long hand, because I really believe in the poem as a handmade object. A person with a pen and some paper made the poem, and that's hand-crafted." Everything in the poem should belong, should form a web, "It should all hang together without any loose ends or anything that isn't going to contribute to the whole."

Keeping the Mystery

Christof relayed the difficulty of describing good poetry, the "inherent mystery" in good poetry that should leave one inarticulate. This approach, like Kim and Farah, focuses on the feeling in poetry rather than the intellect. "I can be critical but I'm happy not to be, and that's not my basic approach to it." Poetry can be ruined if it is used only as a vehicle

for ideas. Farah claimed that explanations of poetry often fall a little flat. In fact, Christof stated that teachers often destroy poetry with the pressure of interpretation. "It's like being outside of yourself. It's the experience of reading the poem, but at the same time you're aware of interpreting and aware of yourself as a reader interpreting the poem, and I hate that split focus." He cited total involvement and absorption in the poem as the key experience. A poet must bring everything he/she is to the experience. He said, "I don't have a special place for poetry that exists outside of my life." Christof's argument, echoed by Kim and Karen, that poetry and daily experience are fused is similar to Rose's (1990) statements about living the ethnographic life as a way to radically democratize knowledge, becoming a poet and ethnographer are not separate spheres of being.

A good poem is one where the poet is authentic. The speaker is "telling me something, and I'm supposed to believe....I buy the speaker, period." He articulates even further by comparing an inauthentic poem to a bad movie: "You watch a movie and just so painfully you can't suspend disbelief at all because the characters are made out of cardboard." An inauthentic poem brings out the reader's critic, whereas an authentic experience is "either invading your world or you've been invited to invade that world. It doesn't make any difference. In any case, the wall has been torn down. You are no longer looking through a glass or a window at something." Christof cited Frost's poem, *Directive*, as authentic because of the experience of reading it, being excited about the language use. "You're actually physically and metaphorically walking back into this town now that is abandoned. And he takes you to this, through that place. You see the little, discarded doll." The authentic poem is a complete experience; it doesn't just start and end powerfully, but it "creates a space that is the most exciting space for me to live in." When a reader finds a poem interesting that constitutes an authentic experience.

For Dan, "a good poem should combat ignorance with mystery." This means readers should be taken out of their knowledge base, what they know, and what they are happy knowing. The poem, "should present you with a new set of questions that you're satisfied with not answering almost. That would be the mystery part." Dan continued by asserting that these may be spiritual questions as many poems contend with these kinds of questions inherently. A good poem does both of these things or its "not necessarily going to be a poem I'm going to write down long hand in my notebook to get the inner workings of and understand more." A poet should bracket what they know by beginning with the knowledge, but then "plunge off into the wilderness and explore." This process echoes that of bracketing in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Dan adopted William Stafford's metaphor of a thread.

You're looking for the end of the thread or where the thread connects to something else that's going to be the end of poem. You don't start looking for the thread; you start with the thread and sort of follow it. You're walking with the thread, but the thread also has its direction that it's going that you're kind of following.

Following the thread through the poem is based on intuition or "memory of the future" (a line taken from Robert Graves). The process is one of letting the poem instruct a poet while writing, being careful not to let pre-conceived notions of what a poem should do get in the way of writing it. A poet should have some "kind of absurd idea before you start a poem to make it interesting, something that's off the wall. A talking chair." A poet should be willing to try any weird idea to see if there is a thread to follow.

Christof claimed that writing poetry means that a poet necessarily wears a mask;

he/she is adopting a self-conscious pose. "It's not the unselfconscious way you have a conversation." At the same time, the poet should be concerned with mystery. It is important to get away from ego to a child-like place where you can take a crayon and draw something weird and let others interpret it. Christof wants to get wrapped up and transported back to that world. "That's basically is kind of an immaturity in dedicating yourself and your life to making art...to me it's a really exciting, playful, childish activity that has all kinds of adult concerns attached to it, especially after the fact." Mystery is having no idea what you are going to write, not writing toward something, loving language, and not considering a set of rules for effective poetry. Even a consideration of a set of rules makes no sense because learning poetry is like learning a different language. An effective poem implies an objective valid set of criteria, which is antithetical to poetic language, the enjoyment of poetry. "There's something weird about it (poetic language), whether it's the language itself or the way things are, the metaphorical level, or, the deep structure of a thing." Different interpretations of one's work demonstrate the arbitrary nature of language, the mystery of it, and the importance of letting go of one's work. Not worrying about a correct reading or interpretation allows people to use their own interpretation. "I like the good poem question better than I like the effective poem because it means it is supposed to have an effect. And you're asking me to tell you what that effect should be and how it arrives at that effect."

He doesn't know if his own poetry is good until years later because he believes poets have useless perspectives on their own work immediately afterwards. It takes time to let go of some of the ego. At first, if he feels a poem is a "wholesale failure" he will throw it out, though maybe begin with the same idea and title. The revision works best when he is "still in the zone." When he is not, he would rather just write a new poem. His favorite audience is one willing to provide feedback, often the audience not trained in poetry or amenable to poetry readings. This observation is borne out of the sameness of poetry workshops and writing programs whose mission is to produce publishable poets.

Conclusion

Good poetry is hard work. It takes training, much reading, and concentrated study to "know it when you see it." Beginning poets should start with an examination of "bad" poetry so they can begin the process of understanding how poetic devices, like form, work to make a poem matter. This is part of honing poetic instincts; learning how to use language to describe the ineffable, say the unsayable, know how to craft a poem with a good physique at the same time that a poet retains the mystery. This means that "every word counts," that form follows content. A good poem is one that an audience remembers and comes back to again and again.

A poem must connect to something larger than the poet and the particular moment. It should make a reader want to return to the poem again, to see things in new ways, be surprised and to consider what a poem has to offer over time. These characteristics of a good poem seem congruent with goals of social research. Furman et al. (2007), for instance, write about research poetry as tapping into universality:

...the goal of the poet is to transform his/her personal experience into that which is universal, or in the vernacular of social research, generalizable. In this sense, the goal of the poet is to present his/her experiences, both internal and external, in such a way that the reader may enter the work as if it were their own (303).

They argue the goal of generalizable findings can be met with poetic renderings. This belief in the ability of poetry to speak to something universal, or at least clarify some part of the human condition is why some poets write. Frost (1995) writes in *The Figure a Poem Makes* that a poem

assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs its course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not with necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion (777).

The stay against confusion also has to do with the subject matter, the fact that poetic devices such as imagery and rhyme are not enough to make a poem matter, show the audience there is something important at stake. Hoagland (2006) wrote about the importance of the material in poetry as allowing him to have a personal stake in a poem's function. This echoed Marian's ultimate consideration of good poetry as that which "can take and find universality," and others' concerns for poetry that has high stakes, is emblematic, full of big ideas, and has emotional connectivity.

As a writer, you place your work in the context of those before you to demonstrate the connection. Mark Jarman (1995) considers poetry as a way to bring the past into the present; it is another way to view what poetry can uniquely accomplish in addition to brevity, compression, and tact. When discussing writing a poem entitled, *What Only Poetry Can Do*, about a visit to Macduff Castle with his father at 9 years old and again with his family at 37, Jarman asserted, "Poetry crossed boundaries of time and space that I could not cross any other way. It did what only poetry can do" (p. 73). He was able to use poetry to do what he could not do physically, return to being 9 years old, and to revisit a physical place that was inaccessible because of change. Robin Becker (1995) echoed this when she described how poets "re-invent" experience, the poet can "combine the real and ideal, the concrete and abstract" as a way to depict simultaneity, being "old and young at once" and "inside and outside personal experience". For researchers, this may be a process of bracketing as conceived of in phenomenological methods (Moustakas, 1994) where you place theory and knowledge of a topic away until the analysis phase of a project.

What researcher poets should do with the poet's exaltations and vexations of good poetry may best be summarized by Kim who articulated her belief that social researchers interested in poetry should remember that a researcher/poet represents at least half of the content of a poem and must "aspire at the level of language. It can't just be mimicry of the voice, of the participants. It can't just be." If researchers use poetry as a means of analysis in addition to representation in a project, they need to remember to be reflexive and understand that the "turn" in a poem comes from inside a poet and not from external things (e.g., Furman et al., 2007). This entails wearing "both hats," that of a poet and that of a researcher, and demonstrating some effort to understand poetry, even if one is not a great poet. Or to conclude with an analogy about good and bad poetry Kim offered:

I'm going to make a cooking analogy. If you do it poorly, it's going to look like a veggie tray. You will have cut all the veggies and put them on the tray and they will be exactly as they were, only cut up. But baking is alchemy. You put all the shit together and somehow it makes a cake.

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