



“IT’S A TRASH”: POETIC RESPONSES TO THE EXPERIENCES OF A MEXICAN EGG DONOR

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the use of found poetry as interpretive and aesthetic inquiry into the meaning and experience of reproductive tourism. The context is an ethnographic study of transnational egg donation, focusing upon the fertility services industry in Cancun, Mexico. Our source is an audio-recorded interview conducted with Maria, a young Mexican woman who struggles to maintain her integrity as a single mother donating eggs to a fertility clinic. Drawing upon Maria's story, we experiment with three forms of found poetry as a method for listening deeply to her voice. In this paper, we share our research process, poems, and reflections.

KEYWORDS: poetic inquiry; reproductive tourism; qualitative research; found poetry; egg donation; infertility

What can poetry contribute to the understanding and evocation of the ethics of a burgeoning multi-billion dollar international reproductive tourism industry? This question inspires this collaboration in poetic inquiry. We write as three poet-researchers – Heather Walmsley, Susan Cox, and Carl Leggo. Our methodology braids together contrasting personal and scholarly backgrounds with the thread of a common conviction: that poetry is a way of “opening knowing,” a “fierce kind of inquiry” (Stewart, 2012, pp. 116-117).

Reproductive tourism refers to the movement of patients between nations in search of eggs and sperm, fertility services, and surrogate bodies. Often, such patients travel to take advantage of legislative, cultural, ethical, and cost of living and/or price disparities between jurisdictions. Critics have framed this phenomenon dramatically – as a “reproductive brothel” (Cherry, 2014) or “moral pluralism in motion” (Pennings, 2002). In Canada the Assisted Human Reproduction Act (AHRA) has prohibited the purchase of eggs and surrogacy services since 2004, on ethical grounds (Downie & Baylis, 2013). The resulting scarcity of eggs and surrogates, and the cost of treatments, has driven many Canadians to fertility clinics in Cancun, Mexico (Schurr & Walmsley, 2014).

In January 2014, Heather travelled to Cancun and conducted in-depth interviews with clinicians, medical tourism agents, reproductive travellers, and egg donors. One driving question was whether Canadian law effectively exports the commodification of children, exploitation of women, and associated assaults on human dignity to the poor and vulnerable overseas. Within a void of empirical evidence, she sought the “actual stories, desires, and migratory pathways” (Inhorn, 2011, p. 88) of egg donors and recipients. This research obtained ethics approval from the Behavioral Research Ethics Board, University of British Columbia.¹ Participant consent forms explained that analysis would involve creating poetry from interview transcripts, as part of an arts-based research methodology.²

This paper centers upon one of these interviews conducted with a young Mexican egg donor one evening after work in a park in Cancun. Although this interview has been transcribed, we chose to work only with the audio recording of the interview and not the written text. Each of us listened carefully to the audio recording

“What can poetry contribute to the understanding and evocation of the ethics of a burgeoning multi-billion dollar international reproductive tourism industry?”

and wrote three found poems, according to the distinct formal requirements below, and in the order presented below. We also composed commentaries – reflecting on our poetic intentions, form, and process, and circulated responses to each other’s work. We originally developed this collaborative writing process using “data” from an online infertility discussion forum (Walmsley, Cox, & Leggo, 2015).

Poetic forms

The three forms of found poetry we used are described below:

1. Found poetry – Erasure poetry. Take one text and black out words and/or letters, creating a poem from the remaining words and phrases (which must remain in order). It is possible to create new words by fusing two words after erasing letters, but letters must remain in the order they appeared. The researcher-poet has freedom regarding punctuation and layout. Given our use of audio rather than written texts, this process became a process of selecting and recording phrases that resonated (the words remaining in their original order), and effectively “erasing” what did not.

2. Found poetry – Free-form excerpting and remixing. Excerpt words and phrases from source text(s) and rearrange them in any manner you choose to form a poem. Again the researcher-poet has freedom regarding punctuation and layout.

3. Found poetry? Or not? Total poetic freedom. Write a poem about anything inspired by the data and stimulus, the research process, or the writing process.

Strands of Inquiry

Heather. “Poetry is a break for freedom,” writes poet and philosopher David Whyte (2017), “The discipline of poetry is in overhearing yourself say difficult truths from which it is impossible to retreat.” My intention in this work of collaborative poetic inquiry is threefold. I wish to use poetry to listen to the difficult truths of the reproductive tourism industry from the perspectives of differentially located participants. These truths unsettle debates raging within bioethics and policy on the commodification of the body and compensation for donor gametes; they unsettle understandings of reproductive tourism and female agency; they disrupt my own understandings of motherhood.

I also wish to use poetry as a way of hearing differently – of hearing subtler shades of experience than those emerging from thematic or narrative interview

analysis. This hearing involves careful attention to my own cognitive and affective responses. It is enriched through careful attention to the responses of Susan and Carl, to similarities and differences, and how I relate to them.

Finally, I hope to use poetry to write “difficult truths,” with greater clarity and impact. A lover of literature, working in sociology, I am driven to craft a “poetic social science” that moves both heart and head (Bochner, 2000). I am inspired that neuroscience now acknowledges poetry as an integrator of linear left-brain activity with somatic, visual, emotional right-brain activity. “The imagery and sensations of poetry,” writes Siegel (2007), psychiatrist and pioneer of interpersonal neurobiology, burst “our cognitive conceptions at their roots ... give birth to a new way of *knowing*” (p. 162).

Susan. The practice of poetic inquiry offers a gorgeous opening to anyone who longs to explore creative approaches to meaning-making in qualitative research. As a sociologist, ethicist, and health researcher who early on made what she thought was a pragmatic choice to study biology rather than creative writing, I have in some ways come full circle through the life sciences, social sciences, and humanities. This is no claim to mastery of any sort but rather a shorthand way of saying that I mostly live in the interstices, never quite comfortable within any one culture of knowing.

As a qualitative researcher constantly in search of more authentic, aesthetically satisfying and deeply ethical approaches to understanding experiences of health, illness and the body, I find in poetic inquiry the opportunity to listen differently, to become more acutely aware of how I listen and of how I represent what

“Poetic inquiry is to me like a crackling fire that invites you to rub your hands together and then spread them wide, turning your palms toward the flames so you might not just become warm again...”

I hear. Following Glesne’s (1997) reflections on poetic transcription, I seek some middle ground between “the ‘small t’ truth of description” that is the representation of an interviewee’s experience as filtered by the researcher, and “the large ‘T’ truth of seeing,” as Paz (1995) writes, “with the eyes of the spirit” (p. 213).

Poetic inquiry is to me like a crackling fire that invites you to rub your hands together and then spread them wide, turning your palms toward the flames so you might not just become warm again, but your blood might fill with a kind of elemental energy that flows from hands to heart and then to head. This flow of energy counters dualistic ways of thinking about the body and

mind, reaffirming that insight and understanding arise as much from sensory experience, emotion, intuition, and imagination as they do from logic or cognition.

Carl. All my emotions and experiences, all my hopes and desires, are steeped in poetry. I live in poetry, and poetry lives in me. I recognize with Adrienne Rich (1993) that “a poem can’t free us from the struggle for existence, but it can uncover desires and appetites buried under the accumulating emergencies of our lives” (pp. 12-13). Like Rich, I know that a poem is “not a philosophical or psychological blueprint; it’s an instrument for embodied experience” (p. 13). A poem is a way of living with an imaginative and expansive devotion to one’s own experiences as well as the experiences of others. In writing poetry, poets learn about themselves in relation to others. The pronouns *I* and *you* connect in the richness of communication and communion.

I engage in poetic inquiry because I am committed to infusing social sciences and health sciences research with the disciplinary goals of the humanities, especially literature and creative writing. I applaud Jean-Luc Nancy’s (2006) understanding that “poetry is at ease with the difficult, the absolutely difficult” (p. 4). I embrace difficulty, especially the tangled and complex questions of how we live in a cosmopolitan world full of injustice and crisis and fear. I support Nancy’s claim that “poetry must be taken into account in everything we do and everything we think we must do, in our arguments, our thinking, our prose, and our ‘art’ in general” (p. 15). Nancy promotes “a polyphony at the heart of every voice” (p. 43). I seek to hear the polyphony in every voice.

Erasure Poems

Money

Carl

I need money
I did it because of the money
I really need the money

if you get less eggs they pay
less money the only word
I can say about the money

it's trash I need the money
I didn't want to because it's so
bad money I want more money

I spent the money the next day
all the money was for them
everything was for the school

I never do something for me
I want to have more boobs
the money, everything is for

the school single mom
you think about what you do
with your body I don't want to

it's not good money
it's like an experiment
it's just money

you don't have an idea how
much money they get with
my eggs a lot of money, a lot

I want a good life
two years maximum
I think I'm just going to do it

like everything
it's money money
money money

Nothing
Heather

Another clinic, they
pay ten thousand pesos but
if you have less than

ten eggs
they pay one thousand less
for each egg

it's not legal it's not legal it's not legal
they do that
and they are woman.

Different fathers
don't give a shit
don't give money

nothing
nothing
nothing

zero
totally zero
totally zero.

The father of her, he disappeared
now he wants to see her
doesn't want to give money

"low season,
low season,
low season"

so bullshit, fucking
hippy, never wants
to give money.

They call me again,
they want me to do it
now

si, si, si,
they want me to do it
now

I need the money
I didn't want to
it's so bad money.

I say the truth -
I don't want to get
menstruation

she said, "but Maria you
have to
we made the plan"

I don't want to
I don't want to
I don't want to.

I'm not rewinding
I'm not retracting
I'm not irresponsible

I'm going to do it
I want to hold on
just a few, just

three or four days
I'm not a bad person
but they pay SO BAD.

My Things

Susan

I was living here
 right here in the corner
 I was living with my ex boyfriend
 and she was my neighbour
 I had really a problem
 before kind of what I am going to tell you
 on December 21st she called me
Maria Maria please
I am going to Mexico City
give me a jacket
please please please
give me your jeans
please please please
 I only have just one jeans of that colour
 it is for my work
Please please don't be like that
I am going to give it back
 that was on December 1st
 yesterday was January 27th
 and she didn't call
 we crossed I think
 I was out with my boyfriend
 she'd go out and say *well hi*
 she'd say *you were out*
 I'd say please call
 I don't have my things!
 one month ago and she is not giving my things
 so I am like don't talk to me
 I have some things of her
 so you know
 I have the things
 I washed them
 I had the things prepared
 my boyfriend said *why don't you*
why you don't go and ask for your things?
 I said no I don't have to go with her and ask for my things
 she has education
 she has to go

she asked me to give her some things
 so now I am like I keep my things
 there is no more worry
 God bless you
 So let's start....
 Si si
 it's strange
 she knows she has my things
 she loves my things!
 so it is, you keep your things
 okay, si.

Carl's commentary. In her poem “Nothing” Heather recreates the aural dynamic of Maria’s speech. By focusing on Maria’s typical way of speaking where she repeats many words and phrases three times, Heather not only evokes the story-telling dynamic of Maria’s speech, but she also evokes the character of the story-teller. Maria is vitally and vibrantly present in her speech. In many ways, Maria’s story is a hard story to attend to – there is so much injustice, unfairness, and sadness in the story. Heather’s poem represents the challenges of Maria’s life. On the other hand, the whole interview also presents Maria as humorous and hopeful. There is always more to the story than any single poem can hold or evoke.

In a similar way, Susan conjures the character of Maria as complex, even paradoxically tension-filled in her poem “My Things.” Maria is poor and generous; she is hopeful and hopeless; she is gregarious and protective. The poem is aptly titled – Maria’s life is governed by the economic system of capitalism with its commitment to reciprocity, exchange, remuneration, and mutual agreement. What Maria has learned is that this arrangement often doesn’t work very well. Susan’s poem evokes this tension by focusing on the momentousness of Maria’s emotional responses to a friend’s borrowing and not returning her clothes. A poem works primarily with babble and doodle – aural signifiers and visual signifiers. In “My Things” Susan evokes the rhythms of Maria’s speech and story-telling by focusing on the graphic layout of the poem on the page.

“A poem works primarily with babble and doodle – aural signifiers and visual signifiers.”

In my poem “Money,” I collected the references to money that are sprinkled throughout the interview, and I shaped them on the page in order to evoke a keen sense of emotional turmoil. I am impressed by Maria’s honesty, humour, and

humanity. While Maria's stories are definitively hers, I also heard many resonances with the stories of family and neighbours I grew up with in Newfoundland. In significant ways, these are the stories of the economically underprivileged, the working poor.

Susan's commentary. Carl's poem "Money" moves along with a strong rhythm, contrasting Maria's need for money to cover her children's schooling with her desire to have a good life. She says "I never do something for me" and has disdain for how she must earn money to provide for her children. As a result, the money is trash. Thus Maria forces us to think about the value of money in the context of how it is earned as opposed to how it is spent.

In Heather's poem "Nothing," I hear Maria speaking very directly. I am grateful that we were able to work from the audio-recording as I would never have grasped as much from a written transcript. Like Heather, I am coming to appreciate how important it is to hear the actual voices of those we are speaking through as we create this kind of poetry. Staying close to their words is only part of the picture!

In creating "My Things," I found the act of transcribing Maria's interview very intense. Such a breathless rush of words and so many forms of non-verbal but audible communication. Two languages, and at least four voices; the sounds of a park, children, wind, recording equipment, laughter, women talking, a child interrupting. I felt as if I was almost there! As I started getting the words down, the way they came out, the lovely accent so impossible to capture, I realized that Maria's story of lending a friend some nice clothes to go to the big city contains the essence of a much deeper ethics that is fundamental to relationships between women and what it might mean to be an egg donor. This is no mere story of a missing pair of jeans, it concerns the responsibilities women have to one another and the importance of mutual respect.

Heather's commentary. Working from the audio changes everything. It focuses and complicates issues of voice and authorship. I am struck by the focus of established "found poetry" rules (which assume a written text) upon word order, layout, and punctuation. Audio pulls my attention instead to speech patterns, intonation, emphasis; it offers a strong sense of individual voice. Listening, I hear Maria's love of repetition, the way she repeats when she is animated: Si, si, si. Please, please, please. Low season, low season, low season. In "Nothing," I use this speech pattern as a way into the analysis, as a way of hearing what is truly important to Maria, and as the central organizing principle of the poem.

I love Susan's focus in "My Things." I too was hit by the symbolic power of this side-story about clothing that preoccupied Maria early in our interview. The poem makes a powerful statement of outrage and injustice, of the respect that should be accorded to things given – be they a pair of jeans or donor eggs. The lack of punctuation and stanza breaks disorient at first, but they channel an authentic voice, and the repetition eventually provides a rhythmic internal structure I did not anticipate visually. The use of italics for speech gives a clear sense of the different voices, appropriated by the narrator.

Carl's play with spacing of words in "Money" intrigues me. The irregularity of the pauses, the changing rhythm, the lack of stability until "money" repeats at the end; they suggest Maria's surging speech, her simultaneous bravado and fear, her emotional turmoil. I enjoy the simple clear focus of this poem: how important money is for a young single mother working hard whilst the bills never cease. It is an important poem – for Maria, and for egg donors everywhere.

Free-form Excerpting and Remixing

My Eggs

Susan

I was living here
 right here in the corner
 I was living with my ex boyfriend
 and she was not from my country
 I had really a problem
 with what I am going to tell you
 on December 21st they called me
Maria Maria please
we have this woman here at the clinic from Atlantic City
give us an egg
please
give us two eggs
please please
give us all your eggs
please please please
 I only have one, just one egg this month
 it is for starting my family
Please please don't be like that
you can have lots more

you are like a rabbit
you can make lots more
 that was on December 1st
 yesterday was January 27th
 they kept calling
 wanting more
 I was out with my boyfriend
 the girl at the clinic
 she'd say *you were out*
 I'd say please don't keep calling
 I have given you my eggs
 one month ago and you are not giving me enough money
 so I am like don't talk to me
 I have some money from them
 so you know
 I have the money
 not very much
 my boyfriend said *why don't you*
why you don't go and ask for more for your eggs?
 I said no I don't have to go to them and ask for more
 those women have education
 they have money to travel
 they have everything
 and they ask me to give them my eggs
 so now I am like I keep my eggs
 there is no more worry
 God bless you
 I wonder if she knows she has my eggs
 they love my eggs
 so it is, I keep my eggs.
 Si, no mas.

Teeter Totter

Carl

it's so bad
 in Mexico
 it's so sad

it's not legal
it's not legal
it's not legal

always always
it's destruction
destruction

always the same
after the extraction
you feel like a balloon

you can't
make pee
you can't poo

nothing nothing
it's nothing
zero totally zero

god bless you
but
bye bye

I have to be rude
if I'm not rude
I don't like to be rude

the kids get you
crazy doesn't matter
if you plan them or not

I'm very cool
I'm a cool mom
but they don't know

I start feeling bad
about my body
to do that to my body

the hormones I feel more like
how do you say
horny

my body I love
the way I am now
I really love it

I don't want
I don't want
I don't want

they don't want to pay me more
they don't want to
they don't want to pay more

no no no not a problem you don't
have options no nothing
they just make the extraction

I just had four good ones
they were going to pay me 4000
four fucking thousand pesos

I go out of the hospital
I puked
I felt so bad

I was white white white
I felt so bad
they paid bad

they treat you
like an animal
disgusting it is nothing

a new clinic that pays more
it's on Facebook
going to get so many women

It's a Trash

Heather

I need the money

I pay

everything
school
rent
food
light
toys
everything

every each

problem
my problem
Christmas
birthdays
everything
spend spend spend

my eggs are

they call me a lot

I already made it like

they tell me

very fertile

five times

my eggs are very fertile

but they pay

so bad

it's a trash

it's the only word

8,000 pesos

it's a trash

like

an animal

one time one egg

swallow all the medicine

they don't pay

disgusting

like the animal

so

uncomfortable

every day inject yourself

two injections

maybe three

injections
anesthesia
surgery

last time I did it
these girls they told me
hey Maria we have

just four good eggs
four good ones

four fucking thousand pesos!

they don't do it well

a headache
bleugh I puke
white white white.
I felt so bad

I was mad

I spent the money next day
all the money
for school of them
the fucking school

twenty thousand pesos
school
rent

I want
I never do it
everything

to have more boobs
for vacation
something for me
for school
school school school
was eating me

it's so
pffff
the owners don't care
don't want to pay

bad paid in Mexico!
it's a trash

it's so sad
it's a trash

Susan's commentary. In "It's a Trash," Heather respectfully examines Maria's ethos around egg donation. Maria wants it to be clear that she is not doing this for herself. She donates eggs to pay school, rent, food, light, toys. She is a single mother and as soon as the money is made, it is spent. She is on a treadmill and cannot get off. The gravity of her situation and the impossibility of improving her life through egg donation is thus at the heart of her assertion that the money is trash.

Carl's poem "Teeter Totter" is playful in showing visually how Maria will adopt one position and then its opposite. She literally teeter totters back and forth as we see her thinking, her decision-making, her living come to life in this crazy attempt to find some balance. The ultimate insight comes toward the last third of the poem when we see that despite a miserable experience with egg donation, Maria is already holding out hope for the next clinic being different, more humane, and perhaps more willing to pay her enough to suffer through this again. This is very sad and yet also such a tribute to resilience and the ways that people who have little choice continue to make their difficult lives into something livable. Might it be that through listening deeply to Maria's story, the researcher somehow contributes to the possibility of making things ever so slightly better?

In creating "My Eggs," I wondered if my previous erasure poem ("My Things") could literally be turned into a poem in which, as I imagined, the clothes were a metaphor for Maria's eggs. My challenge was to see how few words and phrases could be changed so that this new poem still made sense. Would the same flow and style and emphasis still work? Would the same sense of underlying indignation at the lack of respect for her acts of generosity prevail?

"Might it be that through listening deeply to Maria's story, the researcher somehow contributes to the possibility of making things ever so slightly better?"

Heather's commentary. Reading "Teeter Totter," I envy the freedom of the experienced poet, who can dance the tightrope between structure and its dissolution without tottering one bit. I love the rich presentation of Maria here, a complexity that Carl's play with the dynamic of "disorder" in poetry allows. The structure and imagery of the teeter totter is marvelous and the poem neither simplifies nor contains the individual. We see the contradictions: anger, self-pity, self-love, fury, pain, disgust, humiliation, outrage, determination, strength, vulnerability, naiveté, and hope.

My second poem “It’s a Trash” has an analytical starting point. Conducting interviews in Mexico, I was struck by the deeply contested understandings of “ethical” compensation for donor eggs and surrogacy services. Clinicians assured me that they did not pay their donors *too much*, certainly not enough to live on. Conveniently, if they paid more, this would entail the “sale of eggs,” the inducement to “donate,” the commodification of the body. It would violate bioethical principles upheld by countries like Canada and create a market in human eggs.

“I try here to honour her voice, her heart, her sense of justice and ethics. I spread my poem on the page like a balance sheet detailing income and expenditure, to visualize her verbal accounting of injustice and lack of reciprocity.”

Maria, on the other hand, feels cheated and exploited by the *smallness* of her financial compensation. Egg donation is risky, painful, inconvenient. If it is work, she wants a fair wage. If it is a gift, she requires respect, care, money, and relationship. I try here to honour her voice, her heart, her sense of justice and ethics. I spread my poem on the page like a balance sheet detailing income and expenditure, to visualize her verbal accounting of injustice and lack of reciprocity.

Susan also writes deeply into this issue in “My Eggs.” “You are like a rabbit”: the line is funny, and horrific, in its proximity to the truth. Read alongside “My Things,” this poem reveals Maria as trapped by her own cultural norms of gift and reciprocity (which dictate that she should not have to ask for her clothes back or demand more money) into a frame of exploitation that is legitimized by globalized bioethics and medicine. A Mexican donor, wedged between the perils of inappropriate behavior and exploitation, is vulnerable. “My Eggs” expresses that vulnerability, with a gentle disturbing humor.

Carl’s commentary. In “My Eggs,” Susan presents a creative response to the issues that arise in “My Things.” By rewriting the first poem with a different focus, the whole business of reproductive economics and ethics is held up to a harsh light. With a hint of satire, “My Eggs” takes the seemingly insignificant issue of borrowed clothes to a place of heightened consciousness about the convoluted and contested

experience of extracting eggs for a price in a free enterprise system that is characterized by a lot more enterprise than freedom. “My Things” and “My Eggs” are a powerful poetic combination!

In her poem, “It’s a Trash,” Heather uses Maria’s words to evoke the character, voice, and heart of Maria in ways that honour Maria’s challenging stories. This poem insists on acknowledging the complexity of the ethics, politics, and economics of medically assisted reproduction. This is a very sad poem, and the poem needs to be sad. Maria’s voice is both poetic and prophetic.

Similarly, in “Teeter Totter” I have used mostly Maria’s words, but I have worked with the words like an alchemist who is seeking to translate or transform language into heightened hermeneutic possibilities. Orr (2002) reminds us that, “a poem isn’t meant to simplistically turn disorder into order or chaos into cosmos” (p. 23). Instead, in poetry “disorder is *dynamic*” (p. 23). In “Teeter Totter” I am seeking to honour the dynamic disorder of living and experience by composing an iteration of order with poetic rhythms.

Free Poetry

Acido Desoxirribonucleico (ADN)

Heather

My eggs, they are fertile
maybe I have five kids
different women

maybe, yes I’m curious
maybe see a picture
of the baby

of course, it’s my ADN
maybe yes, I’m curious
it’s my family

maybe, to see a picture
my family is Italian
they have blue eyes

my kids, they don't have blue eyes
maybe, to see
of course why not

**Hearing with the Heart
(for Maria)**

Carl

you live faraway
in a world I know
only as a tourist

still your stories
ring the stories
of neighbours

I knew growing up
in places and times
with bedraggled hope

like a dirigible rises
in the air defying
gravity with gravitas

your voice sings
unguarded pure lyrical
amidst the cacophony of

airplanes barking children
dialogue exasperation fun
gumption holiness interruptions
joy kin laughter murmuring
notes openness play questions
resilience Spanish traffic
ululation voices wind
xylophones yammer zest

like the Caribbean Sea
I hear in your stories
the heart's rhythms

bumbling
 crumbling
fumbling
 grumbling
jumbling
 mumbling
numbing
 plumbing
rumbling
 stumbling
tumbling

like the Caribbean Sea
I hear in your stories
the heart's rhythms

 hope
 generosity
 joy
 imagination
 spirit
 laughter
 courage
 persistence
 love
 sympathy
 wisdom

I lean into listening
I learn how to hear
I begin to live

the language of unsaid
the silent yearning
we do (not) know

I fall in love glad
you call out with heart
teaching me how to hear

A World Away

Susan

becuz I heard in your voice
 a song
 woven between the dog barking
 the dust settling
 and the cars honking
 imagined you barely sitting
 child on your knee
 restless and sweaty
 on a park bench telling
 us in your best English
 that in your corner of the world
 your beautiful body is an egg factory
 you were suddenly no longer
 a world away

Heather's commentary. There is a myth, perpetrated by the reproductive tourism industry, peddled to donors and intended parents alike, that identity is nurture alone. Rather than acknowledging the biological, cultural, societal, and legal complexities of identity, parenthood, and relationships ... recruiters tell donors their eggs are mere bundles of cells, that they are absolutely not their own potential future children. This is why I wrote "Acido Desoxirribonucleico." When gently pressed on the issue, Maria revealed to me that she was in fact curious about the genetic sons and daughters she may have. She was highly aware that others' children created from her gametes might look more like her than her own children do. Acknowledging this curiosity, in a context of such denial, struck me as brave, honest, and important for others to hear.

Carl's poem, "Hearing with the Heart," is notable in its honesty too; it sings out, so genuine, strong and true. This poem has a lovely light playful quality. I enjoy the one-word-per-line stanzas ("bumbling ... crumbling and hope ... generosity") for the pace and the sounds, and then for the magnificence of humanity conveyed. Hearing with the heart is so important, and yet often so challenging within academia. In the field, talking

***"Hearing with the heart
 is so important, and yet
 often so challenging
 within academia."***

face-to-face, one has little choice but to engage the heart. Back in the office, reading transcripts, recreating poetry from another's story ... left-brain activity takes over.

Working from audio helps. The rhythm and sounds of voice conjure life, body, and soul; they remind us of the interpersonal relational context of the work. Susan's poem, "A World Away," speaks to this, with immense power and startling simplicity. The beauty of this poem lies in its essence as a dialogue, as Susan generously shares her process of listening, of attuning to the sounds of Maria's environment ("dog barking ... dust settling ... car honking") of imagining Maria's body ruefully perceived as an egg factory. I experience this profoundly, as a listening into compassion, into empathy, into a sense of shared humanity and joint responsibility, until all egg donors globally are "suddenly no longer a world away."

Carl's commentary. In "A World Away," Susan evokes the presence of Maria with heartfelt poignancy. In carefully chosen language that calls forth vivid images and cacophonous sounds, Maria's story is presented with complexity and tenderness. Susan has crafted her words in precise ways that offer a heightened understanding of the events of Maria's life. Maria tells her story with an unrelenting truth, and Susan's observation that "your beautiful body is an egg factory" is a brutally sad testimony to the challenges that Maria lives every day. The alliteration in the final stanza sings in a prophetic voice.

The title of Heather's poem "Acido Desoxirribonucleico (ADN)" calls the reader to focus on the medical culture that objectively, scientifically, logically, procedurally oversees the physical processes of reproduction, but the poem concisely and precisely opens up the heart's expansive longing for connection, even love. This poem accomplishes what poetry, at its best, seeks to reveal – the ambiguity and mystery and wonder that is the heart of human experience.

"Hearing with the Heart" represents a testimony to the poignancy of Maria's story for evoking human connections. As I listened to the audio recording of the interview with Maria, I was enchanted and entranced with the music of her voice and the cacophony of sounds that interrupted and punctuated and accompanied the conversation. As I listened to the interview, I was impressed with the vitality, complexity, and humanity that inspires and enthuses the conversation. In "Hearing with the Heart" I express my gratitude to Maria for teaching me how to listen, attend, and hear with heart and love.

Susan's commentary. Heather's meditative poem "Acido Desoxirribonucleico (ADN)" tackles a neglected question: How does the egg donor feel about the unknown babies she has played such an important role in creating? How many are

there? What colour are their eyes? This kind of curiosity is dangerous; it could get in the way of egg donation; it could mess up successful arrangements. It is not a piece of the story that most clinics want to identify, much less talk about. Heather has written this poem with a very gentle hand.

Carl's "Hearing with the Heart" pays homage to those who are so generous with their lives, so willing to open bravely to unknown others. It reminds us there is little else that could be more precious or more important in how we go about the work we do. I especially loved the alphabetical stanza with the list of things and sounds and feelings, ricocheting us from exasperation to holiness and making me quickly go and look up a new word "ululation," only to find that it is a long howl, and then see that it is nestled next to voices and wind, exactly where a howl should be if it is to be picked up and heard.

In "A World Away," I write into and out of the feelings that Maria has stirred in me. I explore the impact of her words and her story and wonder at the power of her lone voice in reaching me at a deep level. I almost feel as if I have been sitting next to her. There is something ephemeral in coming to know someone like this, something that is as penetrating and yet indescribable as the long howl to which Carl refers.

Discussion

Heather. Maria's interview bursts with vulnerability, courage, and rage. The audio draws my attention to her rhythms and intonation. Maria's repetitions signal intense emotion; they become an organizing principle in my poetic inquiring, striving towards difficult truths. I hear the vulnerability – reinforced by a Western bioethical pressure towards altruism, of being a cheap clinical resource. I hear outrage at the lack of reciprocity – in cash, respect, or kindness, for eggs. I hear curiosity – denied by an industry claiming eggs as mere "bundles of cells," about a donor's possible genetic children.

Reading Susan and Carl's poems, I am delighted by their play: the tightrope dance in "Teeter Totter" between structure and dissolution, the tragic humor of "My Eggs." In their final poems Susan and Carl share their own beginnings, imaginings, and feelings. Experiencing this profoundly, listening into compassion, I am called to greater vulnerability and reciprocity in my research. I seek to find a way to reciprocate, to honour the generosity of Maria, who spoke to international researchers one night candidly in a park in Cancun, in hope perhaps, that they could change something. This work, I understand, has just begun.

Carl. As a poet, I am always a student. Poetry is full of mystery, and long ago I relinquished any hope for mastery by immersing myself in the inexhaustible wonder of poetry. In my journey with Susan and Heather, I have been exploring the possibilities of poetry for collaboratively and creatively researching the experiences of others by attending to our own particular positions as interconnected in/to the whole world. As I listened to Maria's stories, I was blessed by her conscientious commitment to sharing her stories so others might learn. The goal of my poetry is to honour Maria by recognizing her humour, humanity, and hope, but also, my goal is to acknowledge how Maria is, like a poem, full of mystery and wonder.

The Mexican poet and diplomat Octavio Paz (1999) notes that, "soon after being born we feel we are a fragment detached from something more vast and intimate" (p. 95). He understands how we "desire to return to that totality from which we were ripped" (p. 95). Paz knows that poets research this experience of the fragment that seeks the whole. In listening carefully to Maria's words, stories, voice, I know I can be readily dismissed for appropriating her experiences, refracting them through the lenses of my many privileged Canadian positions, and misrepresenting Maria in countless ways that will only serve to perpetuate her Otherness as marginalized. Nevertheless, I am willing to take the risk of being offensive in order to claim for poetry a place where Maria's voice can be invited and even amplified. Like Hirshfield (1997), I know that "truth and beauty live most happily amid complexity and paradox" (p. 102). That is the heart of poetry.

Susan. Like many qualitative researchers, I have long relied upon the analysis of transcripts arising from in-depth interviews as the bread and butter of my methodology. No matter how skilled the transcriptionist, however, the attempt to capture word for word what is said must inevitably be reconciled with a kind of failure that has only recently become fully apparent to me. Even with a good transcript in hand, I often return to the original audio files to listen for tone, inflection and all the nuances of voice and breath that allow us to interpret someone's words in situ. In this work with Heather and Carl, I have come to appreciate how this kind of deep listening must be at the heart of scholarly work that purports to "understand" another's experience. In shifting our attention from looking at words on the page to listening closely to the music of the human voice we may, if we are lucky, find an invitation to come to know someone. This is a humbling experience and one that constantly reminds me of the extraordinary generosity of research participants. Heather recognizes in this, a call to sustained engagement in the research while Carl realizes that in order to reciprocate we must take the risk of opening ourselves to the possibility of not getting it exactly right all of the time. To do so is, nonetheless, to trust that the piece we each bring to the whole has value in and of itself.

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NOTES

¹ UBC BREB No H13-02561.

² It should be noted that this process is a deep inquiry into researcher process, a reflexive evaluation of the impact of poetry on our own processes of listening. According to this design we do not receive input from the interviewee as to how well heard she feels in the resulting paper. We feel this absence. We would love, in a future project, to re-design our fieldwork and process to include the aesthetic, evaluative, and reflective participation of research interviewees.