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TEACHING WRITING: FRAGMENTS OF A POET'S CREDO

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Carl Leggo was a poet and professor at the University of British Columbia. His books include: *Come-By-Chance*; *Lifewriting as Literary Métissage and an Ethos for Our Times* (co-authored with Erika Hasebe-Ludt and Cynthia Chambers); *Creative Expression, Creative Education* (co-edited with Robert Kelly); *Sailing in a Concrete Boat*; *Arresting Hope: Prisons That Heal* (co-edited with Ruth Martin, Mo Korchinski, and Lynn Fels); *Arts-based and Contemplative Practices in Research and Teaching: Honoring Presence* (co-edited with Susan Walsh and Barbara Bickel); *Hearing Echoes* (co-authored with Renee Norman); and *Poetic inquiry: Enchantment of Place* (co-edited with Pauline Sameshima, Alexandra Fidyk, and Kedrick James).

Author's abstract: I have been in school since I was four years old. Now, at the age of sixty-five, I look back on a long life spent in classrooms, as a learner and a school teacher and a professor of education, and I am filled with amazement that I have grown old! I was probably in my thirties before I began to understand how education always occurs in communities of teachers and learners who teach and learn from one another, who search and research together. As a beginning teacher, I wavered between feeling powerless and powerful. On the one hand, I assumed that I was in control in the classroom; I was the primary decision-maker. But, on the other hand, I typically expected educational experts to tell me what I should do. I depended on the stipulations of school administrators, the publications of professors, and the professional development workshops of school district consultants to guide, convince, and inspire me in my teaching. And, now that I've been a professor for a long time, I also know that professors don't really know very much. They might profess a lot, but they know the searching is always in process, returning to the beginning of the search again and again

in order to know the quests and the questions in lively other ways. As scholars, theorists, artists, and educators, we need to attend to language. We need to attend to etymology, diction, grammar, syntax, metaphors, and interpretation. All my life I have been enamoured with the necromancy of the alphabet, the magic of spelling, the alchemy of grammar, the mystery of books—the potent fecundity of language. I am always seeking connections to scholars who are committed to provoking scholarship with heartful and artful dedication.

Editor's Preface: With the permission of his family, we are honoured to publish posthumously "Teaching Writing: Fragments of a Poet's Credo" by Carl Leggo. Carl submitted this piece to *Art/Research International* on January 28, 2019, only five and a half weeks before he passed from his physical being and life on Earth. Even as he "dwell[ed] daily in the space between living and dying" with cancer, Carl graciously offered earnest reflections about writing, poetry, and living well in the world: "fragments and suggestions from [his] credo …what [he has] given [his] heart to." His wise words, always inspiring, are ever more precious now, a living reminder of the poet, teacher, and scholar he was and always will be to so many of his colleagues, friends, and students: thoughtful, erudite, generous, kind, courageous, vulnerable—and steadfastly hopeful. "Teaching Writing: Fragments of a Poet's Credo" is rich ground to return to again and again: a succinct articulation of Carl's ways of living poetically in the world, all threaded through with insights from some of his favourite authors. May "Teaching Writing" reverberate among Carl's many poems, articles, and books—and more widely, among the writings of those who share his he(art)ful path in the academy. May these ever widening and deepening reverberations bring healing and benefit to many.

- Susan Walsh, Ph.D.

Keywords: language; literature; writing; poetry; teaching writing; living poetically; wonder; imagination

Invocation

In *Why poetry* Matthew Zapruder (2017) writes about "the experience of getting close to the unsayable and feeling it" (p. xv). He thinks that "it may be that true poetry is the only way we can begin to see each other again" (p. 224). On January 17, 2019, my favourite poet, Mary Oliver, died. At the age of 83 years, she died with lymphoma. No poet has ever touched me more. She has both rattled and soothed my imagination and spirit. No other poet has ever spoken in the ways that she has spoken. I have been reading and citing Mary Oliver for many years. I, too, am living with lymphoma—not at all sure what the result will be, but definitely feeling like cancer is my daily health risk! I am glad that Mary Oliver lived till 83, and that she continued to write her wonderful poetry until the end. I am 65 years old, and so I feel most days like cancer is at least a little premature! Nevertheless, premature or not, cancer is what it is, and I am living with cancer even though a part of me wants to write that I am dying with cancer. Right now, I dwell daily in the space between living and dying. Matthew Zapruder (2017) claims that "maybe poems are not to be read for their great answers, but for their great, more often than not unanswerable, questions" (p. 107).

A while ago, I presented a workshop to some teachers about writing, especially poetry. As I spoke to the teachers, I realized that I have been sharing the same ideas, practices, and lessons for about forty years. Either I have something worth saying, or at least I am convinced that I have something worth saying! So, in this paper I am going to offer some fragments and suggestions from my credo (what I believe, what I have given my heart to). I heartily agree with Jean Baudrillard (1997) who once wrote that "doubtless the final state of thought is disorder, rambling, the fragment and extravagance" (p. 118). I am not offering these fragments as definitive guidelines for organizing a writing curriculum. I offer these fragments as the kind of wisdom I have gleaned from years of teaching and writing and living.

Michael Ondaatje (2002) once claimed that "practically everything I write is a surprise to me, so in that sense, it's inspiration. I don't sit down with an idea or a plan. I sit down to write and see what happens" (p. 36). I have always loved language, words, the alphabet, the dictionary, the possibilities of spells and spelling. I cannot remember a time that I was not passionately in love with language. I love the accidents of accents, the intentionality of intonation, the sinuous bending of syntax, the glamour of grammar. Poetry is my favourite genre because it is the most capacious genre. Poetry invites music, philosophy, story, imagery, romance, tragedy, fantasy, and comedy. Poetry is playful and purposeful. Poetry invents worlds and teaches us how to live in them. We have not even caught a glimpse of the limits of poetry. We do not even know if poetry

has limits. Like Matthew Zapruder (2017), “the energy of poetry comes primarily from the reanimation and reactivation of the language that we recognize and know” (p. 9).

As a graduate student in creative writing in the mid-1980s, I remember one significant incident. I was sitting at a table in the library at the University of New Brunswick, reading or writing or falling asleep, when a woman whispered, “Are you Carl Leggo, the poet?” I looked up with a startled face and said, “Yes.” I had been named, discovered like Lana Turner, and with the question and my response, I was creatively reborn—I was Carl Leggo, the poet. And I am, still. Like Hélène Cixous (1998) understands, “I wanted to remain faithful to chance, to mystery and above all to difficulty” (p. 159).

I stare at the blank page, and its whiteness blinds and intimidates and disorients like a snow blizzard that conceals all landmarks and reduces visibility to zero. I stare at the blank page, and I do not know where to turn, what to do. I am lost. Beginning. Scratching the first words in the whiteness, always intimidating. Where did I learn that I had nothing valuable to say? Even now I feel that way most of the time. Who wants to read my words? Why would anyone want to read my words?

The blank page is like a hospital bed sheet or a portal to the unknown or a salt desert or a prairie field filled with snow. The blank page is expansive. Even if I use large margins and double space, the typical blank page of eight and one-half inches by eleven and one-half inches can hold at least one thousand alphabetic squiggles. That is the problem. I must begin, and I must continue. Writing is plodding, one step after the other, one squiggle after the other, until the blank page is filled or I grow weary or I run out of squiggles. And that is the big problem: I never know where the squiggles come from, and I never know how many of them there are for me to use, and so I never know when they will end. I began in suspicion that I could never start, and I knew surprise that I had anything to write, and I continue in suspense about when the words will end.

Where did I learn the fear of the blank page? The page is not blank; the page is never blank. Instead it is scribbled over and over by all the writers who have gone before me, as it will continue to be scribbled by all the writers presently writing and all the writers who will write after me. My fear is not only that I have nothing to write; my fear is that I have nothing new to write. Others have said it all. Why say it again? In school I did not learn I had a word-making role in the world, or that the world ran only as long as I made my words. Instead of wavering with the anxiety of influence, instead of growing weary with the desire for something new, instead of propagating a myth that writing is individual and idiosyncratic and unique, I need to write an older myth that celebrates the communitarian dynamic of writing as corporate. Writing is a palimpsest. Writing is a wooden desktop that has been written over and over. Writing is layers of

acetate laid on top of one another, a thousand miles high. Writing is tangled and criss-crossing.

a

According to John Ashbery (2002), “there is more to our story, more to the telling of it” (p. 97). Writing creatively is primarily about learning to live creatively in the world. The only question that concerns me these days is: How can we live well in the world? Writing is about health and healing.

b

Margaret Atwood (2002) understands how “there’s one characteristic that sets writing apart from most of the other arts—its apparent democracy, by which I mean its availability to almost everyone as a medium of expression” (p. 25). I am glad when young people write, in any medium, in any language, including Facebook, slang, blogs, Twitter, and text-messaging. I trust that, if writers write, they will grow as writers. And young writers will attend to formal conventions when formal writing is expected and/or required. Students will want to learn all they can in order to make their writing as effective as it can be, and that includes paying attention to standard language use in those kinds of texts and situations when formal language use is expected and needed.

c

The most difficult part of assessing writing is using the standard approaches to assessment which are negatively oriented to finding what is wrong with the writing and how it does not fit standards. Creative writing should be evaluated creatively, by acknowledging the value of writing and the writer, by recognizing what works and suggesting possibilities for revision. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (2001) once wrote:

“The rule that makes
its subject weary
is a sentence
of hard labor” (p. 53).

We are obsessed with assessment! If a grade must be given, assign a letter like Q or Z. (These are interesting letters that are almost never used in assessing!) Above all, creative writing should be assessed by how much it moves us, brings us to laughter or tears.

d

Elizabeth Hay (2011) once observed that “it’s possible that a hidden symmetry is often at work as we stumble our way through life” (p. 292). As a writer I am a whirling dervish, a freestyle dancer, an interpretive dancer, a wounded dancer, a broken dancer. As a writer I want to be the adolescent dancer I once was, wild and free, listening to the music, interpreting in my own ways, oblivious to what was going on around me. I want to dance with wild abandon on the edges, without following somebody else’s dictates.

e

When we become “better writers,” do we become wiser? I sometimes complain that the biggest challenge of being a poet is that nobody reads poetry, but that is not true. Canada is full of poets. We are ubiquitous like Tim Horton’s. We just aren’t as popular. My biggest challenge as a poet is other poets who review poetry with a fundamentalist fervour for guarding their convictions about what poetry is, and can be, and ought to be. In my experience, most reviewers of poetry like what they like which is generally what they (and their friends) write. We need to be more generous in our responses to the poetry of others. Linda Hogan (1995) reflects on her process: “Walking, I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands” (p. 159).

f

Patrick Lane (2004) understands how he found his “place in the world with language” (p. 169). We need to care for the stories as we care for ourselves. We cannot exhaust the stories of childhood. How much can we know in stories? Stories shape experience. Experience is like the ocean. A story is a cup of the ocean. How do stories inhibit our growth as human beings? What are the stories we cannot tell? How can we learn to tell all our stories?

g

Octavio Paz (1999) thinks that “writing opened unexplored spaces for me. In brief texts in prose—poems or explosions?—I tried to grasp myself. I set sail in each word like in a nutshell” (p. 68). I am now living with cancer, and I do not know what the future holds. For a time, I did not write much, like I was scared of writing, frightened of remembering, eager to live in the present moment, perhaps unable to live well in forgiveness, accepting that the past is always present, always a part of my life, not only like a part that precedes, that holds “in the beginning,” that comprises the first sequence of chapters. Instead, the past is still present. It is still being lived, or it is still alive, or it is

still living. I want to say that the future does not count, has not yet been lived, and therefore does not enter into my storied universe. But I believe in the eschaton, the future, the hope—the future is then like the past, also present. Perhaps the future is the telling of the stories that are possible when we attend to the art and heart of story-telling. So, the future is the panoply of versions of stories that can be told to reveal the world. "Future" is a word. So, I am not talking about linear progress—I am talking about growth to freedom, growth in spirit, a keen sense of artful attending in the momentous moment.

h

To write well we must care about our writing. When we care about our writing, we write well. Like Thomas King (2003), "we trust easy oppositions. We are suspicious of complexities, distrustful of contradictions, fearful of enigmas" (p. 25). May we continue to shape our words and send them into the world! The act of writing is efficacious and necessary. May we read the words that we find along the way, and linger with them as we would linger with gifts that have been offered with hope. I am seeking cosmos in chaos, and finding that chaos is omnipresent and primordial and all-encompassing. Chaos is the ocean I swim in. Cosmos is the line I swim, lines in all directions, intersecting and parallel and skew. I lay down a line of words, and the words are ephemeral, aqueous, beginning in darkness, ending in darkness, always immersed in darkness.

i

There is no end to the information and knowledge I need to write my poems. For example, I need to know the names of plants, trees, flowers, birds, and clouds, but if I waited till I possessed the knowledge, I would never write a poem. So, I need to write about what I know and continue to learn more as I go. Nobody knows everything. Agnosticism is part of humility.

Mary Oliver (2010) once wrote:
"What can I say that I have not said before?
So I'll say it again" (p. 1).

j

Irving Singer (2009) thinks that "the humanities can benefit from science, but they suffer badly when reduced to its methodologies" (p. 118). When I start drawing shadows I realize that they are far more pervasive than I had earlier thought. The shadows are everywhere, creating a dark counterpoint to the light green grass. The grass is light. I

can actually see the blades as if they have been bathed in light. There is a silver colour to some of the grass, as if the light is shining directly on the grass. I now see the shadow everywhere. Perhaps the sun is moving. Perhaps I am moving. I want to know shadows, to know the ways I can linger in darkness and know, not the absence of light, but the spaces only light and earth can make, fecund places of imagination. There is always so much that I need to write and talk about and explore, always so little that I understand, but, of course, I probably can never understand many of the experiences in my life—I do not have the memory or the records or the insights needed to make sense of my life. So, I seek to make my life sensible, to understand as much of it as possible.

k

Wendell Berry (1990) is convinced that "a good poem reminds us of love because it cannot be written or read in distraction; it cannot be written or understood by anyone thinking of praise or publication or promotion" (p. 90). What would happen if I really turned my critical eye to everything I witness. I think it is easy to live critically, to make fun of everything, to cast a satirical light everywhere. I do not think it is at all difficult to critique, dissect, and deconstruct. Of course, everything can be criticized. What does the word "criticism" mean? How hard is it to be naïve, to hold hope, to re/present the world with an optimistic spirit? This is my goal. All fears and demons and potentially hard memories can be cleansed and transformed, rendered in optimistic ways. The world of words is a remarkably lovely location for locution. Enjoy!

l

Roland Barthes (1977) once claimed that "one writes with one's desire, and I am not through desiring" (p. 188). Like Barthes, I revel in the realization that rhetoric reveals our reality. I love to play with letters because in play I learn who I am, who you are. Unravelling = revealing = revelling. I am happy to doodle and write nonsense. I love to make up words. I love to play with rhyme. I love to compose long lists. I love to mine the past. I never feel like I have domesticated words. They are always wild and fierce and wonderful.

One of the most important ways is to emphasize playing with language—a lot of my work as a teacher educator is about encouraging teachers to be playful in their approaches to writing. Many teachers think they are preparing students to write the government-sponsored final exams at the end of high school, and those exams are not only important because they are government-sponsored, but because they also act as gatekeepers to university entrance. So, the goal for some teachers is in preparing their students to write these ultimate tests. We become readers and writers by engaging with the spells and mystery of language. I think we ought to emphasize the mystery rather

than the mastery of language. None of us ever masters language. We can never rest assured there is nothing more to learn. If we embrace the mystery, the playfulness of language, then we remain humble.

m

I am sitting in a retreat with faculty members, and my colleagues and I are talking words like chewing and swallowing myrrh from a fir tree. I am always very unhappy when words are made fat and sweaty like they have walked too quickly up the stairs and squeezed into your office. Language is not necessarily lovely and beautiful. With language, so much always remains unsaid. How is desire connected with the unsaid? What is an inability to hear? An inability to understand? A way/stance of being puzzled in the world? A sense of separation? A confirmation of aloneness? Steven Pinker (1999) accurately observes that "language comes so naturally to us that it is easy to forget what a strange and miraculous gift it is" (p. 1).

n

Stephen King (2000) wrote about the writing process that it is "a disjointed growth process in which ambition, desire, luck, and a little talent all played a part. Don't bother trying to read between the lines…. There are *no* lines—only snapshots, most out of focus" (p. 18). My advice to young writers is relatively simple:

- Believe in your writing and yourself as a writer.
- Commit yourself to writing every day.
- Cultivate a keen sense of your voice.
- Seek to know the world in writing.
- Always read lots of other writers.
- Share your writing with others.
- Learn to listen to your heart.

o

About her writing, Jeanette Winterson (2011) notes that "it is a true story but it is still a version" (p. 229). How can we learn if we do not sometimes (perhaps most times) invite failure or the possibility of failure? Perhaps we should give A's to people who try, and take risks, and experiment, and seek the unfamiliar, and fail, instead of those who play it safe all the time, and only, at best, recapitulate what has already been done. Parents and teachers need to let their children and students fail. Failure is a good thing. It opens the way for learning, forgiveness, grace, humility, openness, caring, compassion, and beginning again.

p

The word poetry comes from the Greek word *poiein*, to make—so as a poet, I am a maker—I could be making sense, or making stories, or making lines of connections with others. I am always engaging in something that feels like composing, constructing, and making. I always want to write poetry that is accessible to folk who do not ordinarily read poetry. Jay Parini (2008) understands that "the poet quickens our sense of language, and our sense of life as well" (p. 38).

q

I promote life writing as a way to investigate lived and living experiences. If I stand bare buff in public, I no longer need to hide, to linger in fear and silence, to live pretentiously under the guise of pretense. So, the main challenge of writing personally is that some people will scratch you off their Christmas card list or refuse to befriend you on Facebook. The blessing is that others will learn to regard you as trustworthy, as ethical, as human. Writing with love is simply necessary.

A phrase which I have been using for a long time is *living poetically*—about learning how to live well in the world. All of my poems are about daily living; they are autobiographical, about growing up in Newfoundland on the east coast of Canada. What I am really interested in is writing poems that others can read and enjoy. I write poetry for readers who will be reminded that the world, for all of the messiness, is still a beautiful place to be alive. So I write my poems to remind people to enjoy being alive, to savour the sensual experiences of lingering outdoors, of being with others, of relationships. And I write my poetry to deal with challenging issues. I've written some confessional poems that speak to life experiences. I write these poems autobiographically and personally because writing helps me to make sense of experiences and also helps me to connect with other people.

About her writing, Hélène Cixous (1998) notes: "I advance error by error, with erring steps, by the force of error. It's suffering, but it's joy" (p. 22). So, when I write about living poetically, I do not mean that everything is perfect. I am actually writing about living well in the messiness of the world we live in. What I am striving to understand is that poetry is not only this eloquent and lovely use of language that gives us sweet thoughts and entertains us and moves us. It is that, certainly, but it is a great deal more, and it can move us to action.

r

I agree with Stephanie Dowrick (1997) who thinks that "each choice we make replaces other choices" (p. 92). I am particularly concerned that much teaching about writing

perpetuates rules and approaches that sustain dominant discursive practices that actually impair, instead of support, the writing processes and practices of many students. I seek to interrogate seemingly natural ways of writing and teaching writing in order to promote other diverse approaches which invite writers to write in different voices and styles.

s

Lorri Neilsen Glenn (2011) claims that "poetry remains the erotic hearth we are drawn to, the deep river and nameless source" (p. 117) as well as "the grace we can find in the everyday" (p. 117). Language is game or play. To use language is to be caught up in discourse, in rhetoric, in the materiality of language, in a verbal performance, in a verbally wrought illusion or reality-effect, in producing and disclosing and constructing the world. I claim that the most effective way to use language with power, conviction, and confidence is to use language with play, pleasure, and delight in the potential of language for making together. The binary opposition between seriousness and play leads to misconceptions about writing which is, after all, indisputably, inarguably, and unquestionably most serious when it is playful.

t

All my teaching of writing, both in school and university classrooms, is informed and generated by my practices as a writer of poetry, fiction, and scholarly texts. Hence, the way I teach writing is connected to my own experiences as a writer. In turn, I encourage my students to pay attention to their writing processes in order to understand the complex ways that writing unfolds in individual practice. When I read many influential books about teaching writing, I find myself nonplussed by the advice that is provided because I just do not see my own processes and practices as a writer and teacher in the typical textbook advice. Take, for example, the important work of Donald C. Stewart (1986) who was an influential scholar of rhetoric and composition. I have paid close attention to his books, and I have always learned from him, but, nevertheless, I also have many questions about Stewart's views and advice. In *The Versatile Writer* he contends that "writers settle for nothing less than absolute honesty in their work. This requires a special kind of writing discipline because you have to learn to throw away whatever is false, no matter how much it pleases you" (p. 19).

u

The notion of convention has been constrained by defining the word as rules of standard usage. Convention does not mean custom. Instead of defining "convention" as a rule of conduct or constraint or control, thereby making convention a strategy of power, a more liberating notion of convention is the calling or inviting of a chorus or

assembly, a carnival of conversation. Hence, this essay contravenes common conventions of composition in order to court continuing conversation and collaboration in the creation of meaning. You are invited to interact with the text which is an open space where writers and readers come together. The text is open. The text eschews fixed meanings. The authors refuse the mantle of authority that authors are conventionally invested with in efforts to convene a less authoritarian spirit of openness where multiple meanings can be playfully and productively summoned. I admire Anthony Doerr's (2014) claim that "it's embarrassingly plain how inadequate language is" (p. 503).

v

V. S. Naipaul (2000) once wrote: "I wished to be a writer. But together with the wish there had come the knowledge that the literature that had given me the wish came from another world, far away from our own" (pp. 9-10). It does not matter how much I write or get published, I will never be satisfied—I always want more. I've been a writer (a poet even) since my later 20's, and I have evidence of writing poetry before that, too. I wrote several theses. Perhaps most of my writing has been writing for the wrong reasons. Perhaps I need to write for myself. To write what I want to write with little thought of the ways that the writing will be published and reviewed.

I am a writer because I have created myself, written myself as a writer, and in the creating and writing, I have come to know myself. I have called the shape out of the stone, or the stone has spoken and guided me to reveal the shape. The block of rock, the granite—the sculptor releases and relives the shape that is held in the stone. I do not think we could breathe, or function, or be together without writing. I call the shape forth and reveal the shape so that I can then be/come in the world full of grace, not granite. I will write, and my writing will find a fertile soil, not a fallow soil, in which to grow, and bear fruit.

w

According to David Lynch (2006), "ideas come along in the strangest way when you just pay attention" (p. 77). In ancient times a family servant called a pedagogue led the child (Gr. *paidagogos*: paidos=child+agein=to lead) to the teacher. The pedagogue was not the teacher; the pedagogue was the one who led the student to the teacher. The alphabet leads the student to the teacher, but we have pretended that the alphabet is the teacher when the alphabet is actually only the way. Pedagogy, and by extension life, since pedagogy and life are one, are always at the end of the alphabet. Of course, the end of the alphabet is really the beginning, a recursive movement of circularity leading to a grand (w)hole, dark and mysterious filled with stars (like Alpha), a (w)hole that is not

bound by fences. I want to interrogate the notion that ordered, logical, grammatical arguments fuelled by a classical rhetorical stance are the only way to know, to be, to be/come. I want to understand that the alphabet has constrained us to a linear way of thinking. We need a way to juggle many divergent paths of knowing—to walk down many paths at once, to dance with many partners.

x

Steven Galloway (2009) once wrote that "there is no way to tell which version of a lie is the truth" (p. 33). In school I learned to be a timid writer. I lacked the courage to write with boldness and innovation. In school I learned to be a half-hearted writer, afraid of the rules of correctness. Writing was a nerve-wracking effort to remember the many rules that constrained the writing, and the even more nerve-wracking effort to remember the exceptions to the rules, because writing apparently had a way of refusing to be boxed. Writing seemed organic, dynamic, alive, ever-changing, defiant of conventions, and radical. Writing was no hobbyhorse that rocked back and forth in endless and futile mimicry of going somewhere. Writing was a wild horse that charged and jumped and ran in exciting ways if only the writer shared the wildness. In school, of course, I rode the hobbyhorse, year after year. I went nowhere, but back and forth.

y

According to Méira Cook (2003), "the world is, was, and ever will be full of wonder" (p. 81). Perhaps most writers write in the gaps and cracks and spaces of living. I must write in the cracks and gaps (gasps) of a busy life. Why do I want to be correct and clear? I feel muddled and muddied most of the time. I feel like a fragment, a run-on sentence, a rambling sentence, an overlapping construction. I am incoherent, but still coherent in my incoherence, or only coherent in my incoherence. I do not want to write sentences that are clear. I want to write sentences that meander sensuously here and there, finding the way (or ways) as the lines of letters are impressed in space and time creating a universe of discourse which reveals what is otherwise unseen and unheard, a journey without beginning or destination, an explosion or strip-tease of revelation, in which the world is worded (the godly creative efficacy of words spoken and written), so you and I can know the world through the prism of language which disperses white light into countless shades of meaning, a dazzling and dizzying explosion of incoherence *in coherence*.

z

Luci Shaw (2003) understands that "no poem ends at the bottom of a page" (p. 72). In all my writing, I know I am not telling the whole story. I am writing a few fragments only, and the fragments are like bits of coloured glass that refract light in entrancing ways—

entrance (the verb); *entrance* (the noun). Writing is discovery. I love to be surprised in my writing. My calling as a poet is to write the poetry and to share it, and to send it out into the world. If it is not responded to, if it is rejected, if it is not liked, that is not my responsibility. My responsibility is to work with the words.

Convocation

Octavio Paz (1999) thinks that "perhaps true imagination, nothing to do with fantasy, consists in seeing everyday things with the eyes of our earliest days" (p. 103). I have lived sixty-five years, many of those years with my wife Lana. I will draw this essay to a close with a recent poem written for Lana's sixty-fifth birthday.

Love Is
(Lana, January 7, 2019)

Love is joking around,
even finding my way
in words when the words
are popping up like gophers

Love is walking a tightrope
of remembering and dreaming,
always tense with balance,
singing with rhythm

Love is the blank space
that just called out to me
to continue writing
whatever called out

Love is letting go with
a stream of green ink flowing
from my fountain pen like I can
row my boat to the earth's centre

Love is calling out, even quietly,
while I wait for an answer
that might never come, or
might come, full of surprises

Love is one more stanza, always,
a stanza like a dais, a platform
for shaping views so we can
see what needs to be seen

Love is knowing the mystery
at the heart of every tunnel,
with mazes here and there,
always hopeful for …

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