

Introduction. Poetic Inquiry and Writing Studies Research

Writing, Like a Road Trip

Writing's like a road trip,

This factory process of keeping things moving ...

trying to get to the next stop.

He said up the body count,

It's more assembly line thinking,

so I'm upping the body count.

trying to get to the next stop.

Now I want to sit a while before going to the next place.

Those months that I didn't do much.

Hurry, think of a project!

Where I was just sad.

I don't see the end of it.

Good ideas don't come out of busy days.

“Writing, Like a Road Trip” is a poem I crafted using phrases mined from interviews I conducted with faculty writers in which we talked about what it's like to write for high stakes scholarly publication, what it's like to build and sustain an academic writing life. I am struck by how the poem captures the resilience of these writers, their persistence, their willingness to do what must be done to get to the next stop, even when there is no end in sight. The poem surfaces embodied, emotional dimensions of writers' lived experience and highlights the complex relationship between unique and shared experiences among faculty. It offers an artful way of considering how academic institutions, systems, structures, values, and expectations impact the lives of real people and the implications of those impacts for access, equity, and epistemic justice in higher education. This book is about how and why I came to write poems like these and the potential value of the methodology I employed, poetic inquiry, for writing studies researchers.

For nearly a decade, I conducted interviews with faculty writers from several universities, across institutional positions and various disciplinary fields about writing for publication, pursuing tenure and promotion, negotiating personal and professional relationships, establishing writing practices and identities, navigating institutional systems and structures, and related topics. Over the years, I published several articles based on these interviews, including collaborations with fellow researchers about the emotional landscapes and transformative

experiences of advanced academic writers. I have been profoundly moved, surprised, delighted, devastated, infuriated, and inspired by what I heard, especially as I groped my own way forward transitioning into life after tenure, searching for purpose in my academic career and passion in my writing life. At some point, though, I realized I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that I wasn't moving with integrity: the ways I was holding, analyzing, and circulating writers' stories (and, I am coming to see, my own story as well) were not aligned with my values, with what writers were telling me needed to change about academic institutions, discourse and culture, with my commitments as a writing researcher to honoring the full complexity of writing, writers, and writing lives. I realized I was moved, touched, and transformed in ways I wasn't capturing in my published work.

Driven by this feeling, I searched and searched for a qualitative research framework that would allow me to capture the complexity of what I was discovering through my research with faculty writers; eventually, I discovered poetic inquiry, an arts-based research method that involves crafting poetry from qualitative research endeavors to analyze data and/or represent findings. I was immediately captivated by reading research poetry. As I read, I felt powerful embodied and emotional connections that reminded me of interacting with writers in my own research. I began to experiment with writing found poems crafted with lines from transcripts of interviews with my study participants. I might have stopped there, content to revel in this experience of composing poems from my data as a way of connecting with fellow writers, sitting with their words, internalizing their meaning in the context of my own life. I did not consider myself a poet or even an artistic person and assumed I was unqualified to officially apply poetic inquiry as a research methodology. Two simultaneous experiences changed my thinking, transformed my relationship to writing and research, and led to the book you are reading now.

First, as part of my recovery from the tenure track and transition to life after tenure, I participated in a two-year collaborative life coaching experiment initiated by a coach a friend of mind had been working with. I joined my friend, a faculty member secretly working on a novel, and two other successful women embarking on transitions toward new projects and stages of life. We met with a life coach three times a month, twice as a group and once in individual sessions. One component of our work together became redefining our relationships with creativity. I composed the following poem during a collaborative coaching retreat in fall 2021.

Swing
suspended, supported
floating, flying, lingering, listening
wonderous, weightless
Imagine

The process of (re)discovering creativity manifested differently for each of us—my friend leaned into her novel, another woman, a creative writing teacher at an arts academy boldly developed inquiry-centered curriculum, and the third member, recently retired, imagined ways to cultivate a sustainable community in rural Arkansas. Growing my practice of poetic inquiry as the heart of my post-tenure book project became the vehicle for my journey with creativity. The support of the coach and that collective empowered me to revisit initial skepticism about poetic inquiry—Could I be a poet? Was I a poet already? What could blending writing, research, and poetry unlock in/for me? The following found poem, which I composed from a zine created by a member of our coaching group, captures the uncertainty, focus, and anticipation I felt at the time.

Everyday Writer

Turn the page.

Put care, attention.

Simple, right?

A popcorn kernel,

words of remembrance.

A hum.

The second experience that transformed my relationship to writing and research was reading Jessica Restaino's (2019) book *Surrender: Feminist Rhetoric and Ethics in Love and Illness*, an ethnographic study tracing the final years in the life of her research collaborator and friend, Susan Lundy Maute, as she lived and died with breast cancer. In a moving narrative that weaves reflection, qualitative data, and scholarly citation, Restaino (2019) explores her "unraveling as a researcher and writer, [her] loss of a more formalized research methodology, [her] increasing inability to separate the personal from the professional, the emotional from the intellectual and—ultimately—the profound, real loss of [her] collaborator" and friend (p. 54). In cases like these when we are faced with research that "undoes us" (p. 74), Restaino (2019) observes, traditional methods and frameworks fail us. In response, Restaino's book is a proposal, at times a plea, "for broken methods and contradiction, for creativity and too much feeling, for blurred genres and for doing the work that scares us" (pp. 12-13).

Ultimately, Restaino (2019) calls for methodological surrender, "a kind of letting go, a release, not only of what we already know how to do (practice) and what we think we know (epistemology) but also of our subjectivit(ies) as writers and researchers" (p. 13). Rather than provide a singular method for doing this work, she models for rhetoric and composition scholars committed to feminist research and writing the "practice of becoming ourselves through our work, that is, allowing the process of doing the work—however that must happen—to teach us to become new writers, researchers, friends" (p. 13). Reading Restaino,

I was hooked, compelled, smitten. It was the first time in a long while that I can recall reading an academic book cover to cover. I was enthralled by the writing, the message, the way vulnerability was modeled and invited, the call “for work that makes us human, over and over again” (p. 13). The following found poem is inspired from notes scrawled in my creased copy of Restaino’s book.

Marginal Notes

On well-worn, dog-eared pages exuberant, hungry, searching—
Wow! Yes! I crave. Me? Lose myself?

Scary.

This is what I need [triple underlined]. How can I . . .
eventually, bright orange ink:

POETRY.

Slowly, I realized poetic inquiry—despite, or rather because of the vulnerability and fear it sparked in me—could be my methodological surrender, a way to stand with integrity in my writing and research, my personal and professional life, by listening, writing, knowing, being, and doing differently. These two experiences—the collaborative coaching endeavor and falling into Restaino’s (2019) book—propelled me forward on a journey to explore how poetic inquiry might speak back to that nagging voice of frustration and misalignment, what it could mean for my life and my work.

As I read through interview transcripts from faculty writers in my study, often in preparation for our annual interviews, I began to notice passages that enticed me to create poems from their words as a way of engaging their experiences. I don’t remember the first poem I crafted from transcripts, but I share the poem below, “Don’t Make Me Tell You,” composed from a transcript of one of my interviews with Jeanette,¹ to illustrate my growing excitement as I discovered the connection, insight and magic a poetic inquiry approach made possible.

In spring 2021, during our third of six annual interviews, Jeanette told me she was invited by an upper administrator to join a women’s focus group created to help university leadership address the needs of vulnerable faculty during the pandemic. She told me “it was the most superficial, not-listening-to-you experience” she’d ever had. As a researcher, human, mother and woman-identifying faculty writer myself, I felt compelled to listen deeply and differently to her experience, and to go about my research and writing in ways that invited others to listen differently as well. Poetic inquiry provided a method and methodology for doing just that. As I applied arts-based literary techniques to my analysis of Jeanette’s

1. I use pseudonyms to refer to study participants unless they opted not be assigned a pseudonym.

transcripts, arranging her words on the page with attention to line breaks, rhythm, breath, a more “*holistic, integrated perspective*” emerged (Leavy, 2020, p. 3) both in terms of my relational understanding of this writer’s experience and my relationship to my work.

Don’t Make Me Tell You

Don’t make me tell you
that my child’s mental health was in peril
all year, and I had to...

Don’t make me tell you
that I have a family member in my home with dementia
who escalated when the attack on the White House happened
started wanting to buy guns.

Don’t make me tell you that.

But understand it could have been that bad. Not just:
Oh gosh, we’re all stuck at home watching Netflix,
and it’s hard to get motivated,
and our kids are here.

It wasn’t that.

It’s: My daughter who was perfectly healthy before COVID
[has] a major depressive disorder
and I’m not sure she’s okay.

Or: My family member’s become paranoid
and delusional because he’s watching TV all day
and the world is swirling,
and it feels really unsafe
as his dementia escalates.

*If I would just
get up in the morning,
carve out an hour
it would be okay....Right?*

Composing the poem from Jeanette’s interview transcript was a way for me to practice what Krista Ratcliffe (2005) calls “rhetorical listening,” in the sense that it compelled me to “stand under” the discourses and material realities shaping

Jeanette's lived experience of forced quarantine during the pandemic. Listening to her story of "not being listened to" made visible dimensions of Jeanette's life that impacted her writing but were dismissed, ignored or forced to stay hidden by the institution from which she sought support. Writing the poem drove home the ways my experience of the pandemic was both similar to and different from Jeanette's and the reality that faculty so rarely acknowledge or anticipate the complexity of one another's lives. It crystallized how popular advice for improving scholarly productivity falls agonizingly short when it fails to account for writers' material realities and how miserably institutions fail to fully support faculty when they are unable to really listen.

Stimulating active participation and engagement, the poetic inquiry process resonates with "community listening," which Rachel C. Jackson theorizes as a form of meaning making rooted in Indigenous spaces that involves "collaboration between the teller and the listener" (Jackson & DeLaune, 2018, p. 44). This stands in stark contrast to Western research traditions intent on objectivity and extraction, which have caused profound damage to Indigenous and other communities (Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Different from rhetorical listening in important ways, the notion of community listening emerges from Jackson's experience co-teaching a Kiowa cultural literacy class and her efforts to understand how Kiowa storytelling works. "Kiowa storytellers do not ask us to analyze their stories or take them apart," Jackson explains. "They ask us instead to put them together by bringing what we know—not as scholars but as humans—into storied space in order to engage and participate in the story, to share in making the narrative rather than taking control of it" (Jackson & DeLaune, 2018, p. 41). Indeed, writing "Don't Make Me Tell You," called me to be present in my research and writing in a way I never had before; rather than spit out findings assembled through an approved system of objective analysis, I found myself "[co-]creating knowledge based on resonance and understanding" (Leavy, 2020, p. 3) as poetic inquiry invited me to embrace a listening practice that felt aligned with Indigenous values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Wilson, 2008).

Listening collaboratively to make (rather than extract) meaning requires "an openness to listening, to hearing, to knowing in different ways, to hearing silenced or marginalized voices, especially if one comes from a dominant culture or voice" (Hough, Slied, & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 79). As Hough, Slied, and van Rooyen emphasize in their contribution to *Poetic Inquiry as Research: A Decolonial Guide*, poetic inquiry throws into relief the reality that "all knowledge is inherently *positional* and *dependent* on the observer's biases and perspective" (p. 80). Writing poems that listen compels me to consistently consider how my biases and perspectives always inform how I relate to participants, interpret our interview transcripts, and arrange their words to make new (collaborative) meaning. It also lays bare what I do not know, keeps me open to different ways of knowing, and makes me determined to "keep listening and learning" (Hough, Slied, & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 79).

As I explore in the chapters that follow, poetic inquiry calls me (again and again) into this way of listening, guides me to attend to how my unique positionality and lived experience inform my work for better and for worse, ever shaping what and how I know, what I deliberately or unknowingly ignore, how others relate to me, how they see and know themselves in my presence. Reckoning with how my intersectional identities position me within complex matrices of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 2015) is a dynamic, iterative, ongoing process that I return to in various contexts and for different purposes throughout this book. Here, I offer an initial articulation of a few main elements of my positionality and link them to questions I hold close as I relate and listen to, hold space for, and collaborate with participants in my research study.

- I am a white, cisgender, middle-aged woman whose mind and body are usually enabled as I move through the world. *How do I understand, or acknowledge that I may never fully understand, the lived experiences of faculty in my study who grapple with extreme mental health concerns, undergo cancer treatment, live in pregnant bodies, live in man-identified bodies differently privileged by patriarchal society, suffer daily the micro- and macro-aggressions of anti-Black racism?*
- I am the mother of a teenaged son and happily married to a white man who fully supports my life as a teacher, researcher, and writer. *What will I notice and miss in the lives of fellow motherscholars in my study with family dynamics similar to and different from my own? Women escaping abusive marriages? Single people, non-parents, those whose writing lives are impacted by the desire and struggle to pursue same sex relationships in a small college town? What will shared aspects of our experiences reveal and obscure?*
- I am an associate professor with tenure at the University of Oklahoma, a citizen settler on land that was home to native communities including the “Hasinai” Caddo Nation and “Kirikir?i:s”² Wichita & Affiliated Tribes and on which 39 tribal nations currently dwell as a result of settler and colonial policies designed to assimilate Native people (“Land Acknowledgment Statement,” 2020). *How does my professional location affect the stance I bring to research with faculty writers across ranks? What will it mean to recognize, honor and engage Indigenous worldviews and methodologies as a white settler scholar? How will I continue to learn about and support Indigenous people, culture, and history connected to the land on which I live and work?*
- I have living, college educated parents, who raised me in white middle class neighborhoods, helped me thrive in school and smoothed my access to resources including post-secondary and graduate education. *How will I maintain an openness to different ways of knowing and learning, to*

2. <http://www.wichitatribe.com/media/18910/wichita.mp3>

experiences of faculty writers who have been and continue to be marginalized, gaslighted, deemed outsiders and/or “presumed incompetent” by an academy never designed for them (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Niemann, Gutiérrez y Muhs, & González, 2020)?

I recognize that these intersecting identity dimensions (among others) inform my experiences of privilege and oppression as a scholar and human, shape what I see and hear (and don't) as a researcher, and influence how I make sense of what I find. I acknowledge, too, that merely taking stock of how my identity descriptors and social locations distance me from participants in my study can lead to “othering”—negatively inflecting characteristics that set participants apart as representing that which is different from me (Hough, Sliep, & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 80). Poetic inquiry, though, sponsors a different kind of listening that goes beyond taking stock to taking care. Using the words of participants to compose research poems that avoid othering demands self-awareness and accountability, honest and continuous reckoning with positionality, and sustained reflection “on difficulties and parts of relating that may get lost in translation” (p. 79). An alternative to extracting information, or even facilitating a one-to-one, participant-to-researcher exchange, poetic inquiry offers an immersive process of meaning making that encourages me to ask what is missing, what is different, and what seems the same, and then to linger in those spaces, actively seeking out alternative perspectives and new knowledge and (re)committing to listening and learning.

For me, writing research poems feels like a “methodological call[!],” a chance to “mark a different space” in my writing and research (Pelias, 2004, p. 11). The poems “collect in [my] body: an ache, a fist, a soup” (p. 11). This book is a result of splashing around, swimming, reveling in the soup; it is one of the first in writing studies to model and promote poetic inquiry as a form of methodological surrender that can “bring resonant frames of understanding” to research around writers and writing lives of all kinds (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 69). My journey as a researcher working with poetic inquiry is ongoing, but what I've experienced so far has convinced me of the potential value of a poetic approach to researching writing, writers, and writing lives. By sharing my journey I hope to reveal pathways for other researchers who may never have considered poetic inquiry in the context of writing research or their own research/writing practice. As I continue to feel my way forward, this book is my effort to document and share what I've tried and what I've discovered as well as to entice fellow writing studies researchers to think along with me about what poetic inquiry might bring to our collaborative endeavor.

What is Poetic Inquiry?

“Poetic inquiry’ is the use of poetry crafted from research endeavors, either before a project analysis, as a project analysis, and/or poetry that is part of or that constitutes an entire research project” (Faulkner, 2025, p. 195). “Merg[ing]

the tenets of qualitative research with the craft and rules of traditional poetry” (Leavy, 2020, p. 85), poetic inquiry researchers might write poetry as a form of fieldnotes or memoing or as a way to analyze data, represent findings, or as a vehicle for reflecting on our own embodied experiences as researchers and writers. In a poetic inquiry-based study “poetry *is* research” (Leavy, 2020 p. 85); poems become data, enact analysis, and invite complex interpretation.

Poetic inquiry has roots in women of color’s “theory in the flesh,” which Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) explain is a way of theorizing from lived experience, “the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings” (p. 19). Theories in the flesh inhabit an epistemological stance (Calafell, 2010; Collins, 1989; Dillard, 2000; Hurtado, 2003; Madison, 1993; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981/2015; Pitts et al., 2019) that recognizes how the circumstances of minoritized lives generate experiences different from those in dominant groups and “deserve other forms of excavation and representation” (Beltrán, 2019, p. 146). Indigenous arts-based methodologist Romana Beltrán (2019) observes that because poetry can “facilitate access to our embodied knowledge” and resist “dominant processes of meaning-making into which we have been socialized” (p. 146), it is a promising medium for excavating and representing theories in the flesh. Anzaldúa famously uses poetry, along with textual fragments and other genres including prose, myth, song, dialogue, and so on, to theorize her lived experience as a “border woman” (Anzaldúa, 2021, p. 49) straddling a range of physical, psychological, cultural, linguistic, sexual and spiritual borders. Such creative acts, Anzaldúa (2015) explains, generate *conocimiento*, a form of spiritual inquiry and subversive knowledge, that “attempt[s] to bridge the contradictions in our experience” fusing personal realities “to create a politic born out of necessity” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). Toward that end, many women-of-color scholars use poetic forms and methods to privilege personal experience, embrace embodied epistemologies, and center theories in the flesh (Calafell, 2007; Dillard, 2006; Madison, 1993, 1994; Moraga, 2011).

In this spirit, qualitative researchers have turned to poetry to honor and represent embodied ways of knowing, being, and doing. Some use words from research interviews to create poetic transcriptions (Glense, 1997; Richardson, 1992), poetic representations (Richardson, 2001), or found poems (Butler-Kisber, 2012) that capture the essence of participants’ experience, language, and/or cadence. Others write poems not based on participants’ words but from scratch, using poetic devices to interpret data in ways that “allo[w] for the subjective responses of the researchers,” an element not always valued in traditional qualitative research (Langer & Furman, 2004). Sometimes, when “data and interpretation merge into a single act, a single form,” qualitative inquirers embrace poetry *as* research (Sullivan, 2004, p. 34). Although a plethora of terms and approaches have been used in countless adaptations of poetic inquiry (Leavy, 2020; Prendergast, 2009), the intention to use poetry to “synthesize experience in a direct and affective way” (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii), to “present human phenomena in a manner that

preserves its *livedness*” (Furman et al., 2007, p. 302) remains constant. Monica Prendergast (2009) identifies three categories of research-driven poetry, all of which I model in this book: participant-voiced poetry, crafted from transcripts of interviews with one or more study participants, written entirely by a participant, or collaboratively written by participant and researcher; researcher-voiced poetry, crafted from research texts produced by the researcher, such as autoethnographic observations, reflective memos or field notes or generated from scratch by the researcher; and literature-voiced poetry, crafted using words from published scholarship (see also Leavy, 2020). Although the boundaries among categories can be porous and I’ve crafted poems—from reviewer comments, for example—that don’t fit neatly in any category at all, the categories are useful for getting a sense of what poetic inquiry entails.

Participant-Voiced Poetry

Participant-voiced poetry, sometimes called found poetry, involves extracting words and phrases from research texts (such as qualitative interview transcripts) and arranging the words in poetic form. Also called poetic transcription, this method of using poetry to represent and analyze research resonates with feminists and women of color who theorize from “physical realities” and “flesh and blood experiences” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19) in ways that bridge seeming contradictions in experience and meaningfully complicate conditions of living (Faulkner 2020). D. Soyini Madison (1993, 1994), for example, uses poetic transcription to honor, analyze, and represent storytelling performances emerging from/within Black oral traditions because, she says, in poetic form words are less “isolate[ed] from the movement, sound, and sensory body that give them substance” (1994, p. 46). In this spirit, Esther O. Ohito and Tiffany N. Nyachae (2019) use Black feminist poetry as a form of feminist critical discourse analysis to surface new insights about “the complex lives, lived experiences, and knowledges of Black girls and women” (p. 839). Noting the importance of the theoretical and epistemological constructs in which poetry is created, they generate “list poems” from research artifacts in the stylistic lineage of Black feminist poets (p. 843).

The poems “Writing, Like a Roadtrip” and “Don’t Make Me Tell You,” which I included previously in this introduction, are participant-voiced poems composed from interview transcripts gathered for my study of faculty writers. In the first, I arrange words from multiple participants to juxtapose the experience of the one and the many. In the second, which is composed of words from a single transcript from one participant, my aim was to capture one aspect of the experience of a woman-identified faculty member being a writer, mother, spouse, and caregiver, during the pandemic. Following is another participant-voiced poem with phrases gathered from multiple interviews with two different participants. Words on the left are from Kyle, a tenure track writer in health sciences, and the words on the right in italics are from Mark, a writer who left academia instead of going up for tenure despite

having a solid dossier. In the poem, I juxtapose their responses over the years to my question: How would you describe yourself as a writer in this moment?

I am a writer ...

Who understands. Perfect
writer? Futile task.

Who is clear, compelling.

Who suffers. Not coming
easily, not feeling fluid.

*Who doesn't want to need
writing to feel purpose, survive.*

Who struggles. Always
a struggle.

*Who wants to be a writer, produce
content, add to life, create.*

Who needs to write more
time to be dedicated to craft.

*Who is drawn to write but
every day not big brand.*

Who needs to find time to write
about what I want to write.

*Who wants to write to
connect, share, remember.*

In these foregoing participant-voiced poems I employ the affordances of poetic style—imagery, line breaks, stanza arrangement, etc.—to artistically represent less visible dimensions of writers' lived experience. In doing so, the poems pull back the curtain to reveal aspects of faculty writing lives that cannot be addressed with traditional advice such as “carve out an hour for writing each morning” in the service of institutionally defined productivity-focused objectives.

Researcher-Voiced Poetry

Researcher-voiced poetry, poems crafted by or from texts produced by the researcher, become a different type of data as they explore how the researcher's

relationship with participants, research phenomena, and research study itself impact meaning making. Researcher-voiced poetry can take the shape of found poems crafted from fieldnotes, memos, or drafts of manuscripts aimed at publication. They can also be self-generated poems the researcher creates from scratch. The diamante poem “Swing” and “Marginal Notes” from the opening section of this chapter are examples of researcher-voiced poetry, poems written in my words capturing some aspect of my lived experience as a researcher in this context. Following is another self-generated poem, a haiku I penned on a chilly Monday morning after Halloween in 2021 as I struggled to make the most of the time I’d allotted to my writing and research that day. The poem offers a snapshot of what it felt like for me to be a faculty writer, writing about faculty writers in that moment.

Heavy, hooded blur
 fat coffee-drenched tongue, sluggish
 sloshy swallow: hope

Consider my poem next to the following excerpt from a participant-voiced poem, originally published in my article on resilience in faculty writing lives (Tarabochia, 2021, stanza 24), inspired by the many stories I’d collected about the crushing physical manifestations of the pressure and anxiety of high stakes writing for publication, writing on the tenure track:

Wake up hot, sweaty.
 Awful, like being smashed down,
 but with no way out.

Poetic inquiry as a methodology offers a mechanism for treating both types of poems as part of the research study. Taken together, they contribute to a textured, multifaceted view of the lived experience of faculty writers and the process of probing and representing writers’ lives.

Researcher-voiced poems can also be used to grapple with research ethics, researcher subjectivity, and positionality, inherently gnarly issues that are central to qualitative human-subjects research. In “I (We) Refuse to Be Silenced,” Beltrán (2019) models the value of poetry for engaging in self-reflexivity, the practice of systematically considering power dynamics, hidden assumptions, and positional identities in relation to research processes and knowledge production. She describes beginning a session on self-reflexivity at the annual Society for Social Work and Research Convention by inviting participants to create “I am from” poems. Now a poetry exercise used across a range of contexts, the “I am from” poem emerged in 1993 when Kentucky poet Georgia Ellen Lyon compiled a series of lists about her life into a poem with lines that began “I am from . . .” and ended with “sights, sounds, places and people” (Beltrán, 2019, p. 146; Lyon, n.d.). “Paired with the frame of critical feminist scholarship as resistance,” Beltrán explains, the poetic structure of the “I am from poem” becomes a prompt for reflexive praxis, for reflecting on

lived experience, representing the “situated self,” and embracing “a type of vulnerability that [is] nonnormative” in academic spaces (p. 146). In a similar vein, methodologist Valerie J. Janesick (2016) offers a template for creating “I poetry,” or identity poetry, that researchers can use to reflect on their role in a research project. Inspired by the promise of this approach to researcher-voiced poetry, I wrote the following poem to explore my orientation toward and articulate my investment in using poetic inquiry in my study of faculty writers (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix A).

I am from straight, cisgender, slim, able-bodied, whiteness,
 from educated, English speaking, property owning, middle class citizenship
 from married mother, neurotypical, (mostly) mentally stable womanhood.
 I am from “follow the rules,” “confess your sins,”
 and “hard work pays off.”
 Good girl, good student, good choices.
 I am from check the details, put in the time,
 butt in seat, and “do you get up?”
 I am from crying
 at my desk, late, bone deep frustration
 on the stairs, baby asleep, what if I can’t finish
 in the kitchen, across the island, no more to give.
 Awake, drenched, heaving, pounding
 heart burning.

The following haiku series on method is another example of researcher-voiced poetry inspired by Janesick (2016). Originally an element in a Japanese party game, the haiku form typically consists of three lines with five, seven, and five syllables respectively. Often part of longer five-line tanka poems written spontaneously and collaboratively chain-style, the formulaic parameters of the haiku invited “intellectual challenge” and “a bonding opportunity” for rowdy party-goers (Runyan, 2021, p. 146). The haiku evolved to be a more serious form designed to capture the essence of a moment. I wrote my haiku poems (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix D) in response to the welcome urging from a *Peitho* reviewer to be clearer in my article manuscript about my method of composing research poems; the form helped me capture the essence of my composing experience and reflect on my stake in my poetic inquiry project.

Read their words, struggle.
 Visceral connection
 seeing myself there.
 To find the story
 each word amplifies the next

reverberating.
 Heart pounds. Stomach drops.
 cut pieces strike a ~~chord~~ nerve.
 There we are, exposed.
 Objective research,
 evidence: “the data shows.”
 But the poet? Naked.
 Is it them or me?
 We (e)merge to discover
 A shared thread—the light.

Composing these poems was a way for me to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainty of qualitative research, to avoid shying away from my responsibilities as a researcher even as I faced head on the challenges of enacting and explaining/justifying an unfamiliar methodology that felt difficult, and also aching right, even as it raised important questions at the heart of human subjects research and academic writing.

Literature-Voiced Poetry

In a similar vein, literature-voiced poetry provides an artistic mechanism for engaging with published scholarship and theory, which becomes the source text for found poems “supported and contextualized with researcher statements” (Leavy, 2020, p. 90). The goal of this category of poetic inquiry is to “synthesize, process, and make meanings” of existing concepts and theories in ways that make visible the messiness of these processes and deliberately grapple with implications for the current inquiry (Prendergast, 2009, as cited in Leavy, 2020, p. 90). Page 55 from Jessica Restaino’s (2019) book *Surrender: Feminist Rhetoric and Ethics in Love an Illness* became for me a source text with which to grapple with poetic inquiry as a form of methodological surrender in my research with faculty writers (Figure 1.1). The resulting poem and visual art have served as a touchstone for me as I follow where this project leads.

This particular type of literature-voiced poem is an erasure poem, also called critical or counter poem (Lahman, Richard, & Teman, 2019). In the spirit of what McGann and Samuels (2006) call “deformance,” erasure poems radically interpret the source text by deforming it, manipulating it, even destroying it, to make it strange and open to novel readings. More specifically, erasure poetry embraces “the imaginative power of redaction” (Runyan, 2021, p. 134; see, e.g., Kleon, 2010) to discover complex meanings and to resist dominant structures and discourses that often enforce more utilitarian engagement with published literature (Faulkner 2020; Lahman, Teman, & Richard, 2019).



Figure 1.1. Example of erasure poem. Photograph by the author.

Rooting Surrender

Contradictions held
 root-linking, music-bent
 reinscribed unity, imagine
 undoing, “unbecoming” rhythmic
 mysteries unknown loss
 grounded embrace: surrendering
 forced to unlearn
 to grieve

Multi-Voiced Poetry

Working across categories of poetic inquiry generates even more opportunities to put ideas-in-process in conversation in potentially rich, transformative ways. I wrote a series of poems, including found poems using Susan Walsh’s (2006) article on resymbolization in arts-informed research and journal reviewer reports as source texts, as well as self-generated poems, as a way to grapple with issues of difference, subjectivity, methodology and representation (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix C).

How—at a time of such racial pain—
 does one hold deep connection and
 respect for difference?

Where do you orient, author/researcher?

How do you engage and yet
 keep your distance?³

“Poetry situates me ...
 through its very form.”

“I too am the poem.”

“I resymbolize what occurred ...
 according to my own life and
 experiences.”

“I cannot do otherwise.”⁴

Respect difference
 make myself vulnerable
*listen, describe, feel.*⁵

3. Found poem using as a source text the reviewer report I received in response to a manuscript I submitted to *Peitho*.

4. Found poem using published scholarship as a source text (Walsh, 2006, p. 990).

5. Author generated poem.

A final example includes two found poems—one from a journal reviewer report and one from personal correspondence with a colleague and fellow poetic inquirer Adam Rosenblatt—and a poem I generated reflexively articulating the process of composing data poems (Tarabochia, 2021, Appendix F):

Poems feel disconnected from process that generated them.	Skeptical of long-winded passages about my subjectivity,
Engage the poems.	earnest and transparent they may be.
Self-reflexive examination of assembly process	They also re-center me me me.
what/how/why? ⁶	Always power: feminist ethic of care, making space for their words. ⁷

*Replace the poems
with “me, me, me”? I resist.
They “luxuriate.”⁸*

The Difference is Poetry

As is evident from the examples above, within each category of poetic inquiry, different genres or types of poems can be used according to the researcher’s goals and curiosities. Some poetic forms and approaches that will be modeled throughout this book include:

- concrete poetry “presented in a physical shape that reinforces the poetic content” (Leavy, 2020, p. 95);
- composite poems crafted from the words of multiple participants to surface similarities and difference among individuals and groups (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000; Teman, 2010);
- profile poems crafted from the words of a single participant;
- poetry clusters, series of poems crafted around a particular theme as “a powerful way of expressing a range of subtle nuances about a topic while simultaneously producing a general overview” (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4); and
- tandem found poetry, wherein “two found poems are created separately but at roughly the same time, from the same text, by the interviewer and the participant,” often from an interview transcript (Burdick, 2011).

6. Found poem using as a source text the reviewer report I received in response to a manuscript I submitted to *Peitho*.

7. Found poem using as a source text personal communication from Adam Rosenblatt, October 25, 2020.

8. Author generated poem.

Across the many categories and forms, poetic inquiry researchers turn qualitative research material into poems to make “the world visible in new and different ways, in ways ordinary social science writing does not allow” (Denzin, 2014, p. 86). Readers and writers of typical qualitative research studies are accustomed to representation—of data, of participants, of experiences, of lives. But poetry is not representation; poetry is embodied presentation—“poetry is about showing, not telling, our (in)humanity and all of its mysteries” (Faulkner, 2020, p. 11). Whereas scientific representation strives to provide clear, objective, justifiable evidence for proposed meaning, poetic presentation is unabashedly ambiguous, emotional, a passionate invitation to consider, reflect, feel. In the words of poet-educator-scholar Carl Leggo (2008):

Poetry does not invite readers to consume the text as if it were a husk that contains a pithy truth. Poetry is not a window on the world. Poetry invites us to listen. Poetry is a site for dwelling, for holding up, for stopping. . . . Poetry creates textual spaces that invite and create ways of knowing and becoming in the world. Poetry invites interactive responses—intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic responses. Poetry invites a way of uniting the heart, mind, imagination, body, and spirit. (pp. 166-167)

While both poets and qualitative social science researchers seek to “evok[e] a snippet of human experience” (Leavy, 2020 p. 85), their orientation to those snippets, their goals in evoking them, and their hopes for how our readers encounter them diverge. The difference is poetry.

Communications researcher Sandra Faulkner (2020) thinks of poetry as “a distinct form of writing defined by alliteration, form, image, language use, line, metaphor, meter, rhythm, simile, structure, and syntax” (p. 11). Drawing on poet B.H. Fairchild’s definition, she describes poetic practice as the use of “an array of rhetorical and prosodic devices of embodiment to achieve an ontological state, a mode of being, radically different from that of other forms of discourse” (as cited in Faulkner, 2020, p. 11). Poetic inquirers use poems to deepen understanding, express lived experience, honor relationality, promote reflexivity, and advocate for change in mind, emotion, individual behavior, and/or collective action. We are after different ways of knowing and being.

Why Poetic Inquiry?

Poetic inquiry is a “flourishing offshoot” of the more established branch of arts-based research that emerged in response to the “representational crisis of qualitative research”—the concern that participants’ and researchers’ voices could be “appropriated, over-shadowed or even silenced” in an effort to adhere to scientific rigor (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xi). According to Patricia Leavy (2020), critical schools of thought that “challenge traditional ways of knowing,”

including postmodern theory, postcolonial theory, feminist postmodernism, and feminist poststructuralist, provided rich context for the emergence of poetic expression in research as a methodological innovation also “concerned with producing situated and partial knowledge, accessing and magnifying subjugated voices, decentering authority, and paying attention to the discursive practices that shape experience and our articulation of human experience” (Leavy, 2020, p. 86). Embracing research as a “human endeavor” that seeks to “reflect the thickness of living,” poetic inquiry offers holistic ways of being, understanding, relating, and representing (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xi).

As Kathleen T. Galvin and Monica Prendergast (2016) point out, the turn toward artistic means to meet “the demands inherent in the study of human worlds and human fragility” is not new (p. xi). In fact, they explain, poetic inquiry is rooted in a “longstanding philosophical heritage ... concerned with human existence” (p. xii) that includes theorists such as Wilhelm Dilthey and William James writing about aesthetics, sensation, emotion, and perception as well 20th century phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer (among others) interested in concrete lived experience. The long roots of poetic inquiry extend, as well, into the historic and proliferating relationship between creative work and research in the higher education environment (Smith & Dean, 2009). Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (2009) recount enduring arguments for the value of practice-led research, wherein creative work constitutes a form of research with identifiable outputs, and wherein documenting and reflecting on creative practice can lead to insights that may be communicated as research. Practice-focused types of research are significant for signaling, valuing, and generating a type of knowledge that is “unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional” (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 3), often richly imprecise, “emotionally or affectively charged” (p. 3), and just as vital as knowledge generated through “more theoretically, critically or empirically based research methods” (p. 2). In this tradition, poetic inquiry leverages a long-held awareness of what Patricia Sullivan (2012) calls “the liberating and critical power of art” (p. 2) to cultivate alternative ways of knowing and doing.

Part of a “growing ‘aesthetic move’ in the human and social sciences” (Galvin and Prendergast, 2016, p. xi), poetic inquiry offers researchers “a way of dwelling in nuance and intricacy” (Tse, 2014, p. 177). It captures “the thickness of living” without appropriating or silencing participants or losing the reflective power of researchers explicitly grappling with the “emotional labour that come[s] with the demands inherent in the study of human worlds and frailty” (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xi). Poetic inquiry leverages the affordances of creative processes and outputs to position qualitative researchers and participants “in fluid, dynamic, and relational terms” (Tse, 2014, p. 181) so that we might challenge and transform traditional forms of knowledge production and understand more deeply and complexly aspects of the human condition.

Poetic inquiry allows researchers to resist abstracting experiences into replicable behaviors and to situate them instead in the material bodies and contexts

and relationships that shape and are shaped by them. “In poetic form, words are not in isolation from the movement, sound, and sensory body that give them substance” (Madison, 1994, p. 46). Embodied experiences expressed through poetic inquiry are situated as well as accessible and relatable. Poetry captures *and* invites embodied experience, drawing attention to our shared humanity: we all have bodies. Forging connection through difference, poetic inquiry offers a new approach to learning about and from human subjects, a way of “materializing the material” (Schell, 2012, p. 137). It becomes a way of theorizing through lived experience: “Instead of coming in through the head with the intellectual concept, you come in through the backdoor with the feeling, the emotion, the experience” (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 263).

To illustrate, below is a found research poem from my first interview with Sadie, a Black woman scholar who was pre-tenure at the time of our conversation in 2016. The poem demonstrates how poetic inquiry *feels* fundamentally different, for researcher-poets and for readers, from engaging with/in more traditional forms of qualitative research. Poetry makes writers and readers viscerally aware of our minds, bodies, spirits and emotions. As Laurel Richardson (2001) points out, the “body responds to poetry. It is *felt*” (p. 879).

Everyday Brilliance

When I became a faculty member, I experienced the real academy
 Oh! You think I am an idiot, all of you people--rest of the world
 thinks I am a stupid idiot. Oh! Constant onslaughts undermining who
 I am anxious about my writing fearful about whether I will make tenure
 elusive, traumatizing, so much at stake—Fight! Gear up! Exhausting.

Grew up poor, working class, rural south Louisiana.
 Black women told me I was a smart little Black girl.
 When the schools weren't serving me, I had Black women
 in my life, everyday brilliance celebrated.

Born in [a Midwest metro], single mother worked all the time,
 overcrowded schools; I just wasn't learning.

Second grade, white⁹ teacher: I can't teach her, she can't read.

Aunt: It's your damn job to teach her to read.

Young new Black women's classroom: within weeks I was reading.

9. Following Sadie's preference, rooted in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) practice, I do not capitalize “white” because it does not refer to a specific cultural group. I intentionally do not capitalize “white” throughout the book for the same reason.

The day my aunt realized, I sat in her chair, started reading.
She heard me, poked her head out the bathroom—
butt naked just remember—walked out—stark naked—
whole family there, danced around the house “Hallelujah!
Thank you Jesus!” She did all this. Crazy! Wonderful.
Second grade, seven years old, my aunt danced
Stark naked for *me* because ... I’m about to cry ...
I was reading.

Celebrations of everyday brilliance
left an indelible mark, affirmed
I was a smart little Black girl.

Community of Black women supported my type of intelligence,
recognize[d] the capacity to think well through everyday life.
[When] I internalize not-good-enoughness, this loud voice in my head:
*white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal institutions have been
trying to kill you. Examples across your life, historical pattern.*
And that voice becomes louder, in my head.

The women in my past have given that voice
a megaphone.

[Pause.] Swallow. *Breathe*. Even now as I type and re-read this poem, I experience it viscerally. It evokes a bodily response. This poem drives home (to my head, heart, chest, and gut) how, why and to what effect so many writers from minoritized groups experience the tenure process as “elusive, traumatizing.” Poetic inquiry is a relational methodology. Whether or not researchers have had an experience described by a participant, the embodied experience of a poem, crafted from participants words, connects. Researchers use poetic inquiry to forge connection through difference. By “jar[ring] people into seeing and/or thinking differently” (Leavy, 2020 p. 22), poetic inquiry can support social justice commitments, stimulating empathy, compassion, and awareness and moving readers toward transformation of thought, perspective, behavior and action.

Just as poetic inquiry is valuable as a research methodology that challenges existing norms and ways of knowing, it is also a subversive writing methodology for researchers driven to critically question how they have been taught to “compose, report, organize, position and narrate scholarship and research” (Waite, 2019, p. 42). Poetic inquiry creates opportunities to “write in queer(er) ways,” (Waite, 2019, p. 42) by experimenting with forms and practices that challenge common standards and expectations for academic writing. According to Stacey

Waite (2019), queer poet and scholar of composition and pedagogy, the effort to queer academic writing practices is as futile as it is necessary “because writing itself is institutional—our language and its regulations always already constituted by dominant narratives and disciplinary conventions” (p. 43). However, says Waite, the impossibility shouldn’t keep us from writing queer(er) and “relish[ing] the failure of doing so” (p. 43). Poetic inquiry invites composing practices that embrace the “queer art of failure” (Halberstam, 2011) not to avoid rigor and responsibility but to uphold relational accountability. For scholars determined to actively “grapple with the undeniable impossibility of writing, the undeniable impossibility of linear forms, singular voices, conclusions, dependable narratives, and discernable data” (Waite, 2019, p. 43) poetic inquiry is an ideal instrument, a perfect subversive writing methodology for those who are certain only that “knowledge is partial, failed and fragmented” and that we must continue to research and write anyway (Waite, 2019, p. 43).

Feedback from a well-meaning and enthusiastic reviewer on one of the first article manuscripts featuring poetic inquiry I submitted for publication illuminates how the composing practices at the heart of poetic inquiry engage tensions between the urgency and impossibility. “Situating this piece as part of a discourse on ‘failure,’” my reviewer noted, “by pointing out that all research is subjective and incomplete, and by asking readers to listen to silences and what isn’t on the page, the author gives themselves an escape hatch for having to create an essay that closes its own loopholes, yet doing so would strengthen the piece.” In valuing coherence, cohesion, closed “loopholes” and “strong” scholarship, the reviewer communicated reluctance to fully embrace poetic inquiry as a queer(er) writing practice. However, the same reviewer commented: “I feel a tension in this document between the experimental poetic methods the author is trying to advance and the traditional modes of writing and citation used...I wondered whether this piece could be accompanied by some untraditional texts or just more attention paid to cutting away some of the more traditional aspects to make the style cohere throughout.” My reviewer simultaneously craved a manuscript that more radically resisted traditional academic genre norms *and* achieved stylistic coherence, a normative expectation that queer writing often resists. My reviewer identified the paradoxical challenge and affordance of poetic inquiry, the opportunity to move doggedly if incrementally toward an ever-receding horizon of change.

Because fields and disciplines are constructed through adherence to normative assumptions about research and writing, to get somewhere other than where we’ve always been, we must “purposefully engage in acts of disruption and subversion” (Waite, 2019, p. 49). In that spirit, poetic inquiry works as what queer rhetor Hilary Glasby (2019) would call a queer writing studies methodology, one that “take[s] us closer to those dark, stagnant places we tend to avoid or understand as nonproductive” (p. 28). Those places, says Glasby (2019) “can offer insight and meaning through mess and dis-ease” if researchers have the tools to engage them (p. 28). Just such a tool, poetic inquiry “call[s] to the surface the

attitudes and assumptions we bring” not only to research but to academic writing as well, and invites us to notice and examine the origins and effects of our “dominant inheritances” (Waite, 2019, p. 50). It is a writing methodology for those of us compelled to ask hard questions about why we are here, researching and writing about these things in this way and ponder how we might be and do differently.

Ethical Considerations

The many affordances of poetic inquiry make it a promising choice for critical researchers in a range of contexts, with various subjects and purposes. Samantha Cooms and Vicki Saunders (2024), two First Nation’s women, use autoethnographic perspectives to explore the role of poetic inquiry in decolonizing research. “The nonlinear way in which data are represented in poetry,” they attest, “means that it can attend to the intersectional experience of oppression due to race, gender, religion, class, or disability” (p. 5). Moreover, poetic inquiry can foster community identity for groups oppressed by dominant structures and frameworks, make visible experiences of harm, discrimination, resilience and resistance on individual and systemic levels, and improve empathy and understanding by stimulating emotion and imagination in audience members (Cooms & Saunders, 2024). As more and more social science researchers across fields and disciplines recognize such benefits and embrace poetic inquiry for these purposes, ethical considerations are essential.

Lori A. Chambers (2023), a Canadian researcher of African descent, reiterates the long history of poetry as a “knowing practice” and part of a “culture of resistance” for people minoritized, marginalized and/or persecuted through systemic oppression (p. 1134). Based on her efforts to “interpret, represent, and re-tell” (p. 1133) experiences of African immigrant women living with HIV in ways that are “grounded in participants’ home knowing” (p. 1133), Chambers (2023) argues that poetic inquiry can be a culturally responsive methodology “when conducted with, for and by, people with an experiential understanding of its decolonizing potential and cultural reverence” (p. 1149). Likewise, in her study of minoritized youth activism, African American poet-researcher Camea Davis (2021), found that poetic inquiry offers “new entry into qualitative research for researchers and participants that do not neatly fit into ... identities sanctioned as ‘normative’ in academia” (Davis, 2021, p. 114)—white, male-identifying, hetero, Eurowestern, enabled, etc.

Poetic inquiry also has affordances for those, like me, who share many “sanctioned” identities. As Davis (2021) explains, because “poet-researcher[s] [are] constantly tasked with answering who am I, who are we, and what might be/what possibilities exist” (p. 116), the process of poetic inquiry can be a vehicle for writing through our biases and assumptions and crafting reflexively informed, explicitly collaborative, re-presentations of data and vital, if mutable, insights and findings. In their introduction to *Language, Land and Belonging: Poetic Inquiries*, Margaret McKeon and Natalie Honein (2023) explain that—because poetic inquiry invites

“a continual process of questioning, of welcoming, of awareness”—it can be “an act of defiance, a way to learn to unlearn” (p. 4). Indeed, many researchers use it “as a reflexive practice to improve ethical research practice, particularly when uncovering insights into power imbalances, bias and expectations which aligns well with decolonisation principles” (Cooms & Saunders, 2024, p. 12). Nevertheless, warns Cree scholar Cash Ahenakew (2016), poetic researchers must take care not to instrumentalize non-dominant ways of knowing and being and attend carefully to “the paradoxes and limitations of translating” between spaces (p. 337).

It is important to acknowledge that the very aspects of poetic inquiry that speak to its decolonizing potential “—positionality, voice, and representation—present challenges” and important ethical considerations for poetic inquirers (Chambers, 2023, p. 1149). For example, my own poetic inquiry into the lives of faculty writers, which I draw on in this book, is not decolonial in the sense that while it offers insights that resist Western, Eurocentric methods and logics, it does not directly benefit Indigenous people and communities; it doesn’t improve conditions or keep people from dying (Smith, 2021). Although I hope to suggest and inspire the potential for poetic inquiry to embrace relational responsibility and materially impact human rights and social justice efforts, my current project doesn’t move beyond decolonization on a discursive or metaphorical level (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Following the lead of Ehren Hulmut Pflugfelder and Shannon Kelly (2022), when I consider my own subjectivities, relations, responsibilities and complicity in the context of my current poetic inquiry, I concede it might be more apt to call it “anti-colonial” (p. 69)—part of a larger effort to disrupt colonial influences on qualitative methodology and ways of listening in qualitative research.

Another ethical consideration for poetic inquirers involves confronting the reality of utilizing anti-colonial, decolonial and other critical methodologies in the context of the neoliberal academy. Ahenakew (2016) laments the trouble with grafting, or “transplanting ways of knowing and being from a context where they emerge naturally to a context where they are artificially implanted” (p. 323). Likewise, Chambers (2023) asks if poetic methods can really constitute a decolonizing praxis in the context of the “current Eurowestern centrism of academic scholarship” given that “academic knowledge production” including dissemination requirements “is not currently structured for diverse knowing practices” (p. 1150)? Are “poetic retellings” destined to remain “ornamental to rather than representative of scholarly thought” (Chambers, 2023, p. 1150)? Can poetic inquiry avoid “reducing the world to what can be captured by thought” and imagine ways to “research ‘otherwise’”(Ahenakew, 2016, p. 324)?

I believe poetic inquiry has the potential to forge ways of being and researching otherwise. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that while poetic inquiry can certainly be a tool for enacting epistemologies rooted in relationships including “interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas” (Wilson, 2008, p. 74; see for example McKeon, 2019), it is not inherently so. Poet Sheila Stewart (2019) explains “Poetry can both

aspire to contribute to a more equitable society and reinforce the status quo, in some cases directly contributing to the project of colonization” (p. 67). Poetic inquiry researchers must be diligent about considering and addressing how the very cracks and gaps that invite new relations, perceptions, ways of feeling and (not) knowing can reinforce oppressive systems, structures, stories, and dynamics.

Because research poems are open to interpretation, for example, those who write them must question how they might resonate or not with readers unfamiliar with content, context, perceptions and experiences represented. “What resonates with people with insider perspectives,” Chambers (2023) explains, “might not induce the same feeling or meaning among audience members from different social locations” (p. 1150). How might assumptions, stereotypes, and biases shape interpretations in harmful, even oppressive ways? What happens, for example, when language diversity is a consideration and interpretations must work across languages and translations (Chambers, 2023)? What can poetic inquirers hope to do in the face of such challenges?

These questions and considerations are vital and should remain ever-present in the minds of researchers and readers compelled by the radical potential of poetic inquiry. At the same time, the only way to make space for this kind of work is to forge the space ourselves by doing the work in all its partiality, inadequacy, uncertainty, and risk. Poetic inquiry provides a vehicle and scaffold for doing just that.

Who Practices Poetic Inquiry?: Alignments and Possibilities

Social science researchers from across disciplines—including anthropology, education, English, nursing, social work, women’s studies, psychology, sociology, and counseling—and from around the world employ poetic inquiry to artistically engage with and represent qualitative data in ways that conjure new ways to understand human experience (Prendergast, 2009). Since its inception in 2007, the International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry (ISI) has convened every two years, cultivating community among those who use poetry as, in, and for research. The symposium has generated a diverse collection of edited books,¹⁰ including two foundational collections, *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (Prendergast et al., 2009) and *Poetic Inquiry II: Seeing, Caring, Understanding* (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016), which offer international compendia of works from scholars in the US, UK, Canada and Australia. As Vanessa Tse (2014) notes in her review of the first volume, contributors to these collections demonstrate the capacity of poetic inquiry to avoid “exclusively privilege[ing] cerebral understanding” so as to honor “the visceral stirrings that comprise human phenomena” (p. 177). The groundbreaking collection, *Poetic Inquiry for the Human and Social Sciences: Voices from the South and North* (van Rooyen & Pithouse-Morgan,

10. A list of books written by ISI conference delegates is available at <http://www.poeticinquiry.ca/books-and-collections>.

2024b), was inspired by the ISPI 2022, characterized for the first time by a presence from the Global South. The goal of the symposium and the collection was to offer “new ways to think about intersectionality by using poetry’s ability to connect, evoke, and voice that which has been silenced” (Pithouse-Morgan & van Rooyen, 2024, p. 2) and to think more expansively about poetic inquiry research by “recognizing the contributions of different poetic traditions, cultural heritages, and ways of knowing” (p. 2). Contributors include poets, practitioners and scholars from Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands among other places.

Many researchers from a wide range of disciplinary and geographical contexts embrace poetic inquiry to facilitate their commitments to transformative work. Indeed, Heidi van Rooyen and Raphael d’Abdon (2020) describe it as “a practical and powerful means for reconstitution of worlds.” Because poetic inquiry “recognize[s], acknowledge[s], and appreciate[s] diverse ways of knowing, being and doing” (Cooms & Saunders, 2024, p. 3), it aligns well with radical research traditions including decolonizing methodologies, Indigenous methodologies, feminist and queer methodologies and methodologies rooted in disability studies. In what follows, I briefly outline some ways researchers working in these methodological traditions use poetic inquiry to challenge “Western epistemic traditions that favor objectivity, divisions between mind and world and research methods that support these ways of knowing” (van Rooyen & d’Abdon, 2020).

Decolonizing Methodologies

By decentering the academic voice and resisting hegemonic notions about academic authority, poetic inquiry “suggests a way to decolonize knowledge production” (van Rooyen & d’Abdon, 2020). As van Rooyen and d’Abdon explain, poetic inquiry

is a decolonizing strategy in that it encourages greater collaboration and coexistence between researchers and research subjects, in which the former have an opportunity to escape the prison of academic jargon, and the latter are allowed to speak for themselves in new, empowering ways.

Indeed, researchers with decolonizing commitments gravitate to poetic inquiry because it pursues “epistemic diversity by foregrounding practices and interpretive frames that are still permeated by coloniality” (van Rooyen & d’Abdon, 2020). “The poignancy, musicality, rhythm, mystery and ambiguity of poetry are well suited for oral traditions,” for example, and “invite users to engage creatively with language and experience” (Cooms & Saunders, 2024, p. 10).

Drawing on work by Botswanan scholar Bagele Chilisa (2020), Chambers (2023) describes poetic inquiry as a “culturally responsive” arts-based method that

“respond[s] to the social, political and historical contexts of knowledge generation for people from colonized cultures” (p. 1134). Chambers uses poetic inquiry to “re-fin[d] [her] ways of knowing as a person of African descent brought up in a Caribbean oral storytelling culture” (p. 1148). In a similar vein, Britton Williams (2023) and Camea Davis (2021) root poetry and poetic ways of knowing in call and response as an interactional form they experienced as ceremony, method, epistemology, and invitation to become.

Poetic inquiry enables researchers to engage means of expression and ways of knowing, being, and becoming often excluded by “assumptions and expectations attached to Eurocentric academic writing” and research (Williams, 2023, p. 61). In this way, it has been a valuable tool for researchers dedicated to forwarding “a global push to decolonize and recognize multiple kinds of knowledge” (van Rooyan & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024a, p. 259) by challenging “hegemonic epistemic assumptions that separate the mind, heart, and body, venerate objectivity and replication, and restrict research procedures to those that firmly establish these ways of knowing” (van Rooyan & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024a, p. 258). Importantly, as Tuck and Yang (2012) have argued, decolonization is not synonymous with critical, anti-racist, social justice frameworks. When used as a metaphor for any liberatory effort, decolonization becomes “an empty signifier” (p. 7) that ultimately “recenters whiteness and resettles theory” (p. 3). According to Tuck and Yang (2012):

decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land, and not just symbolically. (p. 7)

Thus poetic inquiry, even when it is culturally responsive and actively pursues epistemic diversity and justice, may not always constitute decolonial work.

While poetic inquiry is not a straightforward, uncontentious means of pursuing decolonial research, for qualitative researchers like Urmitapa Dutta (2021) research poetry has “created and served as cracks through colonial, imperialist, neoliberal, and patriarchal ways of being” (p. 599). In her research in solidarity with Miya communities in Northeast India, Dutta gravitated toward what she calls “insurgent poetry,” a form of “undisciplining” (p. 602) that “allows for political intimacies, for intertwined histories, for affective connectedness, and for solidarity—an onto-epistemological reorientation” (p. 603). Her move to research poetry, Dutta (2021) notes, was not incidental, as resistance poetry has long been central to Miya communities as well as essential for the decolonial, Indigenous, Third World, and Adivasi feminists informing her work. In other words, poetry “represented critical sites for decolonial resistance that not only disrupt the colonial, imperialist, patriarchal, heteronormative gaze but as importantly commit to lived struggles anchored in mutuality, solidarity, reciprocity and justice” (p. 600).

Dutta (2021) found “the modality of insurgent poetics” to be a vital medium for articulating “alternative horizons, experiences, and ways of knowing in ways that defy and transgress colonial rationalities and hierarches” (p. 604). In that spirit, van Rooyen and d’Abdon’s 2025 collection offers examples, explanations, questions and heuristics for approaching poetic inquiry as a decolonizing research method. In sum, poetic inquiry has proven to be one promising if imperfect tool for contributing to the decolonial project.

Indigenous Methodologies

According to van Rooyen and d’Abdon (2025), a key principle for decolonial research is acknowledging and respecting Indigenous worldviews. Tending to ways of “knowing beyond the rational to include body, soul, and spirit to make sense of the world” (van Rooyan & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024a, p. 258), poetic inquiry is “well-suited to epistemic standpoints grounded in [I]ndigenous knowing practices and participatory frameworks” (Chambers, 2023, p. 1149). Research is ceremony within an Indigenous paradigm, explains Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008); the purpose “is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves,” to maintain “relational accountability” (p. 11). As a “relational research practice concerned with the self and self-in-relation” (McKeon & Honein, 2023, p. 1), with “particularity, complexity, and transformations,” (p. 4) poetic inquiry offers a mechanism for engaging Indigenous methodologies.

In his study of tutors in an alternative learning organization in Auckland City, New Zealand, Adrian Schoone (2020) uses poetic inquiry to make sense of research fragments in “an artistic and phenomenological way” (p. 39). He creates poetic constellations to “represent the essences of tutors’ lived experiences” (p. 41). Constellating is unlike triangulation, a common strategy of using multiple forms of data collection to enhance validity in qualitative research, in that it is not about proving the soundness of a particular interpretation. Constellating is also unlike crystallization, a practice Laurel Richardson describes as “combin[ing] symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach” in order to provide “a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding” of a topic (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). Poetic constellations do not seek to “pull together” (Schoone, 2020, p. 40) meaning at all, but to honor the gaps, the beautiful “dark spaces” (p. 40) between fragments of found poetry, each becoming “a universe unto itself” (p. 40).

Schoone demonstrates constellating as a relational practice. Aware of his positionality as a pākehā (Māori name for a New Zealander of European descent) working with a high proportion of Pasifika students in Aotearoa (New Zealand), a place largely inhabited by Māori people, Schoone (2020) creates constellations to honor resonance with the *mauri* (the Māori life source). Research poems are re/formed and re/imagined from reader to reader and moment to moment,

“yielding alternative essences and understandings,” keeping the “the research breathing and therefore ‘alive’” (Schoone, 2020, p. 40).

In recognition of the deep resonance of poetic inquiry with Indigenous ways of knowing, the Seventh International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia (also known as Mi’kma’ki, the traditional territory of the Mi’kmaq) in Canada and invited participants to “inquir[e] into their relationships to ancestral languages and lands, with Indigenous participants speaking of the reparative importance of their languages and cultures in the face of ongoing colonial violence” (McKeon & Honein, 2023, p. 1). The book *Language, Land and Belonging: Poetic Inquiries* (Honein & McKeon, 2023) emerged from the symposium and includes contributions from academics, performers, activists, and artists from a range of global contexts each “reflect[ing] on many aspects of relational, ancestral, and community repair through poetic inquiry” (p. 1). The contributors and others invested in Indigenous epistemologies, including those authoring chapters in section two of Faulkner and Cloud’s (2019) *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, use the “reflective practice of poetry writing as a way to honor [I]ndigenous people and their land” (p. 45) and explore connections between identity, settler colonialism, belonging and place. “Through poetry, as artful inquiry,” poet Margaret McKeon (2019), a self-identified colonizer raised in a Western worldview, models how poet-researchers and researcher-poets alike can lean into Indigenous ways of knowing, come to “dwell in complexity rather than easy conclusions” (p. 57), and “learn how to walk with worldviews differently” (p. 59). The symposium and edited collections demonstrate how poetic inquiry facilitates Indigenous methodologies, honors “bodily, emotional, and intuitive-spiritual knowing” (McKeon, 2019, p. 59), and values forms of meaning making rooted in relationality.

Feminist and Queer Methodologies

Poetic inquiry compliments feminist and queer rhetorics and methodologies as well in part because it is embodied inquiry—one that attends to sights, smells, sounds, tastes, textures and bodily movement, and extends beyond the discursive to the material (Faulkner, 2018a). In her ethnography *Real Women Run* (2018c), Faulkner demonstrates poetic inquiry as a form of feminist embodied analysis to query and queer “embodied experiences in everyday relational life, of which running and the interplay between physicality, emotional life, and intellectual life is a part for women who run” (Faulkner, 2018a). She poetically analyzes 41 interviews with women-identified runners, crafts an autoethnography of her participation as a runner in the 2014 Gay Games, and includes critical content analysis of websites and blogs targeted toward women who run. Through narrative poetry, haiku, found poetry and poetic transcription, Faulkner (2018c) demonstrates how research poetry “can not only show embodiment, it can be an embodied experience” (Faulkner, 2018a) for researchers and readers alike. When it comes to

research, Faulkner (2025) expounds, “poetry promises to return researchers back to the body to demonstrate how our theories arise out of embodied experience” (p. 199). “A poem becomes *embodied experience*” for readers, Faulkner (2025) continues, “when audiences feel *with*, rather than *about* a poem; they experience emotions and feelings *in situ*” (p. 214).

Embodied experiences and emotions conjured through poetic inquiry cultivate empathy and human connection in ways that honor the historical “use of art, performance and narrative ... in many queer and feminist political rights movements” (Denton & Cain, 2023, p. 139) and support the “antinormative principles” of queer theory and praxis (Denton & Cain, 2023, p. 144). Queer researchers Michael Denton and Leia K. Cain (2023) find narrative and arts-based research methods to be particularly powerful for constructing knowledge with queer participants and creating situated queer epistemologies. They describe various ways they each have used the blended methodology in their research. Denton, for example, has used narrative and ABR to “highlight the neglected experiences of gay men living with HIV (GMLH) in higher education” (Denton & Cain, 2023, p. 143), and Cain has used them to “explore how collegians describe the complicated intersection of being queer and southern within the U.S. Bible Belt” (p. 143). Denton and Cain (2023) appreciate the “historical association of art and narrative with queer resistance and worldmaking” (p. 139) and the ways arts-forward methods, “speak to ... values of mutuality, reciprocity, and presenting complex, sensitive, and holistic portrayals of participants while still allowing for examination of oppressive dynamics (e.g. cissexism, genderism, heterosexism, trans oppression)” (p. 139), qualities that align with goals and commitments at the heart of queer methodologies.

Poetic inquiry also aligns with queer praxis in that it “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (Halberstam, 1998, as cited in Faulkner, 2018a). Drawing on Jack Halberstam’s definition of queer methodology, Faulkner (2018a) articulates “a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior.” In her chapter on queering sexuality education in family and school, Faulkner (2018b) models poetic collage as a queer scavenger methodology, juxtaposing current event headlines about reproductive justice, sex-ed curriculum, and conversations with her daughter about sex and sexuality to invite “broader understandings about communication and sexuality education than a reliance on one tradition” (p. 26) or source would allow. In true queer form, Faulkner’s collage reiterates the multiplicity and instability of language, truth, and reality.

Because poetic inquiry directly engages the complex relationship between language and reality, it aligns with the spirit of queer rhetorics, which William P. Banks, Matthew B. Cox, and Caroline Dadas (2019) define as “queer theory in action” (p. 10). In particular, poetic inquiry resonates with three queer rhetorics—rhetorics of

intentionality, failure, and forgetting—in ways that illustrate its potential for queer research and praxis (Banks et al., 2019; Banks & West-Puckett, 2015). Rhetorics of intentionality challenge “heteronormative rhetoric that values outcomes, that privileges the finished product over ongoing processes and practices” (Banks et al., 2019, p. 12), and that judges outcomes and products against normative criteria. Rather than pursue an objective outcome, poetic inquirers enact and support tentative, collaborative, recursive ways of knowing that continually fluctuate and shift over time.

Focusing on intention over outcome means questioning the neoliberal obsession with success. Indeed, poetic inquiry resonates with rhetorics of failure as a “promiscuous metho[d]” (Banks et al., 2019, p. 14) favoring arts-forward approaches that might seem “frivolous” and “irrelevant” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 6) in the face of serious research and scholarship. Research poems, in their paradoxical concrete abstraction, destabilize objective meaning by inviting multiple interpretations in any given moment across cognitive, material, emotional, and spiritual dimensions; they beg the question “why *this* meaning at *this* time and under *these* circumstances” (Banks et al., 2019, p. 11). The ambiguity of poetic meaning resists the notion that we can ever really know—ourselves, others, anything—embracing instead what Patti Lather (2007), citing anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran, calls “knowing through not knowing” (Visweswaran, 1994, as cited in Lather, 2007, p. 17). Poetic inquirers do not define success as knowing once and for all and failure becomes a valuable frame for rethinking “what we are (really) searching for—and what we think we’ve found” (Banks et al., 2019, p. 14).

Poetic inquiry also gives researchers embracing queer rhetorics and methods a way to explore what has *not* been found, to consider what has been “(strategically) forgotten” (Banks, et al., 2019, p. 15). Many poetic inquiry projects feature lost or forgotten people, stories, experiences, not to “rescue” (Banks et al., 2019, p. 16) them but to self-reflexively consider what must be forgotten to keep certain subjects in focus. Poetic inquirers continuously ask what they might need to forget to discover something new and how they might hold space for such tensions in their work. “These particular queer rhetorics—of intentionality, failure and forgetting,” argue Banks et al. (2019) offer a launching pad for considering how “we might engage queer rhetorics at the level of methodology” (p. 16). Poetic inquiry provides researchers with one promising, underexplored way of methodologically engaging those rhetorics and grappling with emergent possibilities.

Disability Studies and Crip Methodologies

Many features that align poetic inquiry with queer rhetorics and methodologies make it a promising tool for researchers in disability studies (DS) committed to “cripping” traditional research practices. “From the beginning,” Margaret Price and Stephanie Kerschbaum (2016) point out, “DS scholar have understood that methodology is a key mechanism of disabled peoples’ oppression,” traditionally conducted by nondisabled researchers with a focus on scrutinizing bodily and

mental impairments (p. 23). In contrast, critical disability studies (CDS), “*itself a methodology*” (Price & Kerschbaum, 2016, p. 23), cripps traditional research practices by exposing normative structures along with the power dynamics that uphold them and by working to reconsider and restructure oppressive frameworks (Minich, 2016). Crip methodology, then is “not about studying the supposedly broken bodyminds of the abject. Rather, it is about studying broken systems, broken attitudes, broken gazes” (Price & Kerschbaum, 2016, p. 23).

In this spirit, the rise of disability or crip poetics among disabled writers and researchers has specifically sought “to resis[t] an ableist tradition of bodily representation in favor of rewriting cultural narratives by turning explicitly to lived disabled experience” (Lau, 2020). Travis Chi Wing Lau (2020), for example, describes the “cripistemological process of learning to live with my pain” as “the work of poetry.” He discovered in disability poetry, a way of “attending to pain’s languages and forms, its poetics” and experimenting with new ways of “conceptualizing embodiment in and through language” (Lau, 2020). Likewise, in her lyric autoethnography, Shelby Swafford (2023) takes on cultural assumptions about the unknowability of pain (Scarry, 1985). She “blend[s] poetics and personal narrative” and “textually constructs crip time” to explore her experience living with chronic pain and illness (p. 130). “Using the numerical rating pain scale as a heuristic,” Swafford (2023) “tell[s] a story of [her] body that resists compulsory nostalgia”—the notion that a disabled body longs for a self before disability—as well as “curative frameworks, and ableist temporalities” (p. 130). Embracing crip time is a way of “bending the clock,” enacting a “temporal reorientation away from normative/ableist/straight time and toward disabled subjectivities” (Swafford, 2023, p. 131). Poetic inquiry is well suited for representing crip time because, like disabled minds and bodies themselves, both are messy, surprising, striking and spectacular. Indeed, many disabilities studies scholars (Esposito, 2014; Ferris, 2004, 2008; Koppers, 2007) “have recognized the possibilities of poetic inquiry for writing their bodies in crip language, for capturing the particularities of living in a disabled body through poetics” (Swafford, 2023, p. 134).

A self-identified Middle Eastern disabled scholar Shadhd Alshammari (2022) speaks to the value of poetic inquiry as a form of embodied activism that “allows [her] disabled body to move on paper, effortlessly, without obstacles” (p. 364). Her autoethnographic poetic inquiry considers the impact of the Gulf War on Palestinian families and examines concepts of disability, resilience, and historical trauma. She starts with memories and conversations with her Palestinian grandmother and mother, which she “morph[s] into poetic fragments” (Alshammari, 2022, p. 364) to critically and creatively represent her experience living with multiple sclerosis and interrogate complex attitudes about disability rooted in Palestinian culture and personal discourse. Poetic inquiry enables Alshammari (2022) to interrupt Western understandings of disability and ableism by probing how “a culturally specific discourse considers disability and war terminology, not as simple metaphors, but as real and lived experiences of historical trauma” (p. 371).

Just as Alshammari (2022) and Swafford (2023) challenge the notion that experiences of bodily disability are inexpressible through language, disability scholars and researchers use poetic inquiry to resist the troubling belief that cognitively disabled people are arhetorical, “incapable or outside of language” (Lau, 2020), a normative assumption that “underpins the dehumanization of neurodivergent people” (Lau, 2020; See also Yergeau, 2017). For example, embracing poetry as embodied, multisensory exploration, doctoral student Kate Roberts Bucca (2023) offers a “schizo-poetic and visual inquiry informed by disability poetry and schizo-poetics” (p. 100) to consider the experiences of graduate students with mental illness in relation to those of their neurotypical peers and contribute to conversations around disability in academia. Schizo-poetry utilizes features of poetic inquiry to disrupt notions of coherence as it strives to represent “seemingly incoherent experience” and create “a feeling of *rightness* ... even if conveying nontypical or nonsensical convergences of ideas and words” (Bucca, 2023, p. 104). For Bucca (2023), blending poetic and visual inquiry is an ideal way to capture “that tension between unity and difference” (p. 104). Poetry, she says, “invites interpretation, multiple meanings, and the chance for readers to locate themselves within a piece, even if they have not shared the experience under examination” (Bucca, 2023, p. 105). In this way, poetic inquiry offers a means of communicating across difference.

While the examples so far have featured researchers leveraging the autoethnographic affordances of poetic inquiry to challenge assumptions about non-normative minds and bodies, qualitative researchers also find that poetic inquiry aligns with principles of critical disability studies. For example, Caroline E. M. Hodges, Lee-Ann Fenge, and Wendy Cutts (2014) used poetic inquiry as part of a participatory arts-based research framework for “researching and communicating young people’s everyday experiences of disability” (p. 1090). Poetry workshops offered disabled youth a way to tell their stories and interrogate dominant perceptions of disability. Through performance poetry, they engaged public audiences intellectually and emotionally, prompting them to rethink dangerous stereotypes of disability. Based on feedback from disabled people who wrote and performed poetry and from audience members, the research team discovered that poetry “can provide a powerful therapeutic and creative outlet to communicate lived experience of disability” (Hodges et al., 2014, p. 1099), as well as “engage the public on an emotional level, fostering human connection between the poet/performer and the audience, encouraging them to critically reflect on their own attitudes and transgressing stereotypical ways of thinking about disability” (p. 1100).

In a similar vein, researchers involved in the “DiStory: Disability Then and Now” project in Toronto, Canada embraced poetic inquiry as a method of representation and analysis to make visible thoughts and experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Kuri et al., 2022). When COVID lockdown interfered with a face-to-face collaboration among researchers and community

members with intellectual disabilities, Erin Kuri connected with members over the phone in recorded conversations about their “pandemic experiences, thoughts, worries, fears, and hopes” (Kuri et al. 2022). Through a rigorous, collaborative, reflective process, Kuri and her team wrote and revised found poems from phone transcripts, inviting frequent feedback from call participants. Their goal was to “holistically represen[t]” lived experience, “preserve and evoke affect,” inspire empathy, and spark meaningful change. Kuri et al. (2022) offer a series of poems as an embodied documentation of how people with intellectual disabilities live and continue becoming as they “resist social abandonment [and] navigate necropolitical ableism” in the context of a global pandemic.

As these examples illustrate, researchers in disability studies committed to critiquing traditional methodologies find poetic inquiry a valuable tool in the effort

to make the world in which we live roomier, not only more transparent and known, but to make space in the imagination, and so in the culture, for the wide and startling variety of rich and fulfilling ways that real people live and love, work and play in this world. (Ferris, as cited in Lau, 2020)

The power of poetry to represent a range of lived experience and imagine alternative futures makes poetic inquiry an enticing option for researchers across a range of fields and orientations committed to cultural critique and social change.

Deep Listening Through Methodological Surrender

Poetic inquiry beckons researchers compelled by the promise of reflexively researching and writing otherwise because it is a vehicle for methodological surrender and deep listening. As I’ve explained, I was first drawn to poetic inquiry as a practice of methodological surrender at a time when the standards and parameters of more traditional methods didn’t feel right for the research I was immersed in, for how I wanted to be and feel as a researcher and writer finding my forward in the midst of a major professional transition. I was entranced by Restaino’s (2019) call, captured in the following found poem I crafted from part of the introduction to *Surrender* (pp. 12-13), to lean into feelings and behaviors researchers are often taught to avoid.

For broken methods
and contradiction
For creativity
and too much feeling
For blurred genres
and for doing the work
that scares us.

I understood methodological surrender as a way to practice becoming myself through my work, to allow the process of doing the work to teach me to become a new writer, researcher, human, to pursue work that would “mak[e] me human, over and over again” (Restaino, 2019, p. 13). Poetic inquiry was my means of surrender.

As Restaino (2019) conceptualizes it, surrender is in part a letting go—of control, of certainty, of what we think we know about ourselves, our practices, each other the world. It means leaning into to queer epistemologies that embrace “the unknowable” (Rhodes, 2015) and accepting the vulnerability that comes with “getting lost” (Lather, 2007) in pursuit of ethical approaches to research and writing that overwhelms and “undoes us” (Restaino, 2019, p. 74). I felt drawn to exploring these ways of being with and in my research and found myself searching for ways to engage.

John Keats’ theory of negative capability links poetry to the act of surrender. In letters to relatives contemplating craft, Keats marveled at the capacity of great thinkers and poets to sit with “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts” without desperately “reaching after fact & reason” (Keats as cited in Poetry Foundation, n.d., *Selections*). The theory suggests that poets have a unique power to surrender, “to bury self-consciousness, dwell in a state of openness to all experience, and identify with the object contemplated” (Poetry Foundation, n.d., *Negative Capability*). That capacity, poet Mary Oliver (1994) explains, is vital for “transfer[ing] from the page to the reader an absolutely essential quality of real feeling” (p. 84). “Only by remaining . . . negative, or in some way empty,” Oliver elaborates, “is the poet able to fill himself [sic] with an understanding of, or sympathy for, or empathy with, the subject of his [sic] poem” (pp. 80-83). Sheila Black, poet and co-editor of the anthology *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* emphasizes the value and risk in dwelling in such a state of emptiness when she identifies disability poetics as a poetics of negative capability—“an upheaval, a defamiliarization, an ability to remain open . . . a poetry of vulnerability” (Wagner, 2019). These poets attest to the value of holding negative or empty space for the unknown and unknowable; poetry welcomes a vulnerable willingness to be filled with something new.

Poetic inquiry, then, is a promising method of surrender because poetry is never about knowing once and for all, but giving in to winding recursive contemplation, intuitively feeling along, opening oneself to the essentiality of feeling. Poetic inquiry offers me a way to inhabit the paradoxical knot of promise, possibility, uncertainty and doubt at the heart of methodological surrender in a way that attunes me to my decisions and responsibilities as I grope my way forward. It feels risky because I am not a poet and in fact tend to struggle to acknowledge or claim my creative potential. It feels like giving over, laying bare; it feels like surrender.

Importantly, the surrender poetic inquiry makes possible is not a state of submission rooted in detachment or relinquishing of responsibility but one of hyper-awareness rooted in relationality and accountability. Drawing on psychoanalytic feminist theorist Jessica Benjamin, Restaino (2019) describes surrender in terms of intersubjectivity, the “tension between interacting individuals” (as cited

on p. 45) that resists “push-me-pull-you, doer-done to dynamics” and “either/or’ reductive binar[ies]” (as cited on p. 46) in favor of following “emerging if unfamiliar rhythm[s]” (p. 46). What happens, Restaino asks, when researchers surrender into a process, allowing this kind of intersubjective endeavor to unfold? How does surrender affect who we can become in our work and what effect might our new becomings have on what we can do and know?

Surrender, in this spirit, operates with “rhythmicity” (Restaino, 2019, p. 49); far from giving up or standing still, it involves continuous movement, “relational exchange, shared motion, a phenomenon of contact and mutual impact after which we are changed in some way” (Restaino, 2019, p. 47). If surrender is a dance, for me, poetic inquiry is the music, the soaring, shifting score that simultaneously invites attunement and lostness, responsiveness to others—researcher participants, readers, human bodies, and bodies of text on the page—and sharpened awareness of my own body and mind. Surrender, like poetry, is “rhythmic, vulnerable, unpredictable, and collaborative” (Restaino, 2019, p. 49). Both involve risk and faith in discoveries to come from following the song where it leads.

As I show below, poetic inquiry entails and inspires this kind of methodological surrender in large part because it facilitates deep listening, at its core a relational, intersubjective practice. In rhetoric and writing studies, the concept of listening is often associated with Krista Ratcliffe’s (2005) theory of rhetorical listening, which involves “standing under” the discourses we encounter and letting them “wash over, through, and around us” (p. 28), listening with intent to not only understand others and the cultural contexts they inhabit but to honor the “rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well” (p. 28) and to consider the implications for ourselves and others. As Ratcliffe (2005) explains, rhetorical listening from an “accountability logic” (p. 31) means recognizing the stake we have in one another’s lives and well-being; it means reckoning with interlocking forces of privilege and oppression, acknowledging how we are culturally implicated in past events, and behaving in ways that account for the ongoing effects of complicated power dynamics.

Methodological surrender and deep listening as a research practice are mutually sustaining. Both are intentional, ongoing, and active. They are about leaning into relationship and connection. They are about relinquishing control and certainty, letting go of traditional measures of success and how things have always been done in order to awaken new senses, new questions and curiosities, new ways of seeing and moving in relation toward mutual accountability. Both practices humbly engage difference by honoring reflexive intuition, vulnerable responsiveness, and attunement to self and other. Poetic inquiry can facilitate surrender and the deep listening praxis so many researchers value and crave, yet it remains an underexplored research tool toward this end, especially in writing studies.

From graduate students learning methodological traditions and experimenting with approaches to dissertation research to midcareer faculty like myself longing to ignite new passions and forge new relationships with research and

writing, researchers willing to surrender to process and commit to “be transforming” (Oleksiak, 2020b) through deep listening, will find promise in poetic inquiry. In the following section, I emphasize the promise of poetic inquiry for engaging unique challenges and opportunities at the heart of writing research.

Poetic Inquiry and Writing Research

Poetic inquiry offers wholistic, humanistic ways of understanding writers and writing development (our own and others’), dimensions that are not always surfaced through quantitative or even traditional qualitative approaches. Because writing is such a complex, multidimensional activity (Bazerman, 2018; Bazerman et al. 2017) “caught up in all facets of our lives” (Dippre & Phillips, 2020, p. 4), tracing and representing the “rambling pathways” of writer development (Dippre, 2019, as cited in Dippre & Phillips, 2020, p. 3) can be a complicated, daunting endeavor. Providing a unique “porthole to ... experience” (Leavy, 2020, p. 98), poetic inquiry offers an artistic, embodied, relational way “to attend to all this complexity” (Dippre & Phillips, 2020, p. 4) and (re)center human elements in the study of writers and writer development. Poems have the potential to capture the rich nuances of writing lives, to reveal what researchers might never access otherwise. In the words of Laurel Richardson, foremother of poetic inquiry in sociology: “a part of humanity that may elude the social scientist reveals itself in poetry” (Richardson, 1997, as cited in Leavy, 2020, p. 98).

Attending to the complexity of voice and research relationships, poetic inquiry is ideal for writing researchers committed to amplifying subjugated voices with critical awareness (Hatton, 1998; Leavy, 2020; Norum, 2000; Poindexter, 2002; Smith, 1999). Poetry has the power to make visible lived experiences that might otherwise be hidden or dismissed, to reveal damaging effects of dominant systems and structures on the material realities of writers, and to support calls to action by contributing to “a developing body of evidence” that is not objective and distanced but intimate and compelling (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xv). Writing researchers might use poetic inquiry to pursue transformation in policies and procedures that serve some writers more than others. For example, research poems showing how university responses to the COVID pandemic impacted the (writing) lives of women, caregivers, and BIPOC scholars could be used to persuasively “critique power structures, offer alternative views, and advocate for social justice” (Faulker, 2019, p. xii). Moreover, as writers ourselves, writing researchers might use poetic inquiry to attend to our embodied presence in our research, how we develop as writers and humans in response to dynamic forces, including our research with and for writers. Writing researchers grappling with the following questions might find poetic inquiry to be a promising approach:

- How do I make visible the “human” in human subjects research?
- How can I more fully honor the nuance of participants’ lived experience?

- How do I stay accountable to those experiences traditional research tools are most likely to miss or flatten?
- How might I orient to my work not as an objective analyst, but as a “vulnerable observer” immersed in the process (Behar, 1996)?
- How do I acknowledge my entanglement with dominant ideologies and (re)orient to my work in the spirit of knowing, being, and doing differently?
- How can my research directly challenge and begin to transform structures and systems that privilege certain bodyminds (Price, 2015) over others?
- How can I honor and draw forth my work from the rich historical roots of theories of the flesh, forged by women of color to theorize from physical realities and embodied experience?
- How can I center relationships (with scholars/scholarship, research participants, self and readers) as both the foundation and goal for my research and writing?

Despite the promise of poetic inquiry, few writing studies scholars publicly claim it as part of their research methodology. A noteworthy exception, writing researcher Collie Fulford (2025) composes poetry as a practice of close listening, a way to enact reciprocity, and an analytical process-product. She uses poetic inquiry as one approach among others for analyzing qualitative data from her study of the writing lives of adult students at an Historically Black University. Creating found poems from interview transcripts, she says, “allows a level of intimacy with another person’s way of expressing ideas,” attending to “meaning, rhythm and syntax” in an attempt “to distill what is already there” (C. Fulford, personal communication, Nov. 17, 2021). More than member checking, sharing poems with participants, their words echoed back in an aesthetically creative form, becomes an act of reciprocity and mutual vulnerability. “It’s evidence I was listening,” Fulford explains, “and I found their words both meaningful and *beautiful*. We don’t talk about aesthetics or pleasure much in composition research,” she continues, “yet there they are” (C. Fulford, personal communication, Nov. 17, 2021).

Participants react with surprise and pleasure when they read their words in Fulford’s poems, which is how Fulford often feels when finding/making them. Fulford decided not to include research poems in her book (2025) but poetry writing was still a crucial part of her process. As Faulkner (2020) notes, not all research poetry needs to be featured in analysis or even published. “Harnessing the power of poetry” behind the scenes, so to speak, can be a valuable way “to center creativity in the research process” (p. 155), and a good place to start for writing researchers looking to integrate poetic inquiry into their research and writing.

Researching Faculty Writers

When I began my study of faculty writers in spring 2016, I didn’t have poetic inquiry in mind. I was finishing up the book required for tenure at my institution

and beginning to wonder what was next. For that book (Tarabochia, 2017), I interviewed and recorded meetings between writing specialists and faculty in other disciplines working together to develop disciplinary writing pedagogy and curriculum in order to understand how they negotiated expertise and worked across difference to accomplish their goals. When I interviewed faculty about teaching writing, they almost always wanted to talk about their own joyful, traumatic, fulfilling, fraught experiences as writers. I wanted to know more about their lived experience as writers and hoped any insights I discovered could inform growing efforts to better support and retain faculty writers. I recruited my first set of participants from a faculty writing group facilitated by the Writing Center Director and Vice Provost for Faculty at my institution. Participants agreed to annual interviews for up to six years during which we'd talk about their writing lives.

Over the next several years, I recruited additional participants at my institution and two other universities. Faculty joined and left the study over time. Some changed universities, others left academia. In all, I talked to 31 faculty writers at least once, and I talked to 20 of those writers between five and nine times. Twenty-five writers identified as female, and six identified as male. Writers identified as white/ Caucasian (22), Black (2), mixed race/Hispanic (1), Latina/Puerto Rican (1), Iranian (1), Asian (1). Three people chose not to identify race/ethnicity. Faculty came from various institutional positions, though most were tenure track with scholarly publication demands. They worked in many disciplines including education, modern language and linguistics, geography and sustainability, social work, history, writing studies, literature, anthropology, visual arts, health and exercise science, library science, and sociology, among others. Although the research poems throughout the book don't necessarily include words from every participant, my relationship and conversations with each person informed my poetic sensemaking and inquiry process.

My approach to our annual interviews was broadly rooted in Robert Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental theory of self-evolution, which seeks to shed light on how humans make sense of their experiences and their lives. Loosely following the design protocol described by Lisa Lahey and her colleagues (2011), our interviews began with a self-inventory in which participants jotted down memories or experiences from their writing lives related to 10 words—angry, anxious/nervous, success, strong stand/conviction, sad, torn, moved/touched, lost something, change, important—and used their notes to guide the interview. According to Lahey et al. (2011), these words are meant direct interviews to “ripe areas” and interviewees to establish “ongoing awareness of themselves” (p. 202).

The protocol engenders data ripe for poetic inquiry. Promoting feminist values of relationality and deep listening, it empowers participants to generate a rich “pool of experiences to select from in the interview” and choose where to focus our attention (Lahey et al. 2011, p. 203). Many faculty writers told me they found the inventory and interview process meaningful for their personal thinking, reflection, and growth. So rarely are they invited to reflect on their writing

lives and revisit experiences about which they carry strong, sometimes unprocessed emotion. My choice to focus on emotion was intentional, particularly in academic contexts that privilege the life of the mind, and aligns with poetic inquiry as an embodied methodology that honors emotional landscapes, bodies and bodily knowledge.

Despite the clear resonance between my approach to interviewing faculty writers and poetic inquiry methodology, I spent years exploring ways to make sense of the data I was gathering before leaning into my poetic practice. I've experimented with ways to analyze interview data and examined various aspects of writer development, including: the relationship between graduate student and faculty writer development (Tarabochia & Madden, 2018), the role of emotional labor in advanced writers' developmental trajectories (Madden & Tarabochia, 2020), how transformative experiences inform learning transfer for faculty (Tarabochia & Heddy, 2019), how self-authorship works as a lens for understanding and supporting faculty writer development (Tarabochia, 2020), and the use of secondary qualitative data analysis for researching writing development (Madden & Tarabochia, 2021). My consistent engagement with the data, my extended relationship with participants, and my deep reflection on my own experiences as a faculty writer throughout the evolution of the project prepared me to embrace (and share) the poetic inquiry process illustrated in this book.

Writing Good (Enough) Poetry: Evaluating Research Poems and Researcher-Poets

Concerns about how poetic inquiry should be employed and evaluated and by whom are frequently voiced by critics, researchers, and poets. Poetic inquiry has been “the subject of premature dismissal by some and intense scrutiny by others, perhaps in part due to misconceptions that it’s easy or lacks rigor” (Leavy, 2020, p. 102). My experience corroborates Leavy’s (2020) contention that “use of poetry in research increases rigor in the interpretation and writing process; it does not diminish it” (p. 103). As Anne Sullivan (2004) explains “engagement with craft slows us down, brings us into a new kind of attention to the data before us” (p. 35). Deciding how to enact poetic techniques requires researchers to attend to “subtle relations among elements” discovering nuances “not initially perceived, precisely because they are subtle, elusive, encoded” (p. 35). Our colleagues in creative writing can attest to the rigor of craft. Although writing studies and creative writing are often treated as distinct areas in English departments, we of course have much in common. Patricia Sullivan (2012) notes vigorous calls particularly in the 1990s from scholars such as Wendy Bishop, Katherine Haake, and Lynn Bloom to think more intentionally about the relationship between creative writing and composition, and a Creative Writing SIG continues to be active at CCCC. Not surprisingly, creative writers and researchers have long been doing poetic

inquiry, conducting investigations and explorations *through* creative and critical practice (Creative Writing Studies Organization, 2019), with intention and rigor. Writing studies researchers, particularly those of us who come to poetic inquiry without explicit training in creative writing, have much to learn from our colleagues who have built careers in writing, publishing, and teaching poetry. At the same time, questions arise about the standards to which poetry should be held when written in the process of poetic inquiry as an arts-based, qualitative-research methodology. Is there value in imperfect poetic practice?

Energetic debates over rigor and standards fuel the reluctance of many would-be researcher-poets, exacerbating feelings of doubt like the ones expressed in my poem below, written one fall evening after ruminating about my worthiness as a poetic inquirer while snuggling my son to sleep.

Bedtime Ruminations

And if I'm not
a poet . . .
And if I fail . . .
to materialize, concretize,
crystalize, constellate?
What then?
Will it have been worth it?

Questions like these are vital: What counts as a successful poem in the context of poetic inquiry? What credentials, experiences and expertise are required to write “good” research poems? Some arts-based researchers (Piiro, 2009; Prendergast, 2009), advocate for clear standards for arts-based research, including research poems, out of “respect for the domain” and “in defense of quality and qualifications of the artists and their arts” (Piiro, 2009, p. 97). Duduzile S. Ndllovu and Heidi van Rooyen (2025) emphasize “the need for rigorous and aesthetic evaluations that meet both scientific and artistic standards” (p. 156). Others, (Bochner, 2000; Clough, 2000) worry that obsession with criteria, ultimately rooted in human values, choices, and often irreconcilable differences, can have a normalizing effect and derail researchers working with “alternative” (Bocher, 2000, p. 267) methods from realizing the full potential of their approaches. Criteria can become a means of “contain[ing] our desire for freedom and experience, a way of limiting our own possibilities and stifling our creative energy” (Bochner, 2000, p. 267). Given that experimental forms are often linked to resistant politics and social and cultural criticism, the conventionalizing effect of criteria can easily “serve a conservative and destructive function” (Bochner, 2000, p. 269; see also Clough, 2000; Sullivan, 2012).

Nevertheless, careful, ongoing consideration of criteria has the potential to sharpen practice, enhance craft, and strengthen the power of a poetic approach.

Addressing the challenge of assessment in composition courses that assign unconventional forms of writing, Patricia Sullivan (2012) suggests flexible ways of discerning value “in the absence of previously established criteria” (p. 15). The “process of revision and invention of new criteria,” says Sullivan, means attending to “particularity” as well as reimagining the work of writing and what counts as good (p. 99). In a similar vein, I am compelled by efforts to discern the quality of poetic inquiry and worthiness of poetic inquirers based on the *goals* for incorporating arts-based approaches into qualitative research, goals rooted at least in part in a feminist research agenda committed to “ethical and deep relationships between researchers and participants . . . engender[ing] change and mak[ing] participant lives better, and . . . social justice and equity for all” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 97). Toward similar ends, Ndlovu and van Rooyen (2025) argue that a decolonial approach to poetic inquiry should “include marginalized voices and ensure that research outputs are accessible and meaningful across diverse communities” (p. 156). Arthur Bochner (2000), Kimberly Dark (2009) and Leavy (2020) also focus on audience response as an important measure: Does the research poem offer a moving story felt in the body not just in the head, invite connection, “*fee[l]* truthful (Leavy, 2020, p. 103), enact ethical self-consciousness that “provides a space for the listener’s becoming,” and inspire action (Bochner, 2000, p. 271)? Goal-related criteria make it possible to both rigorously and flexibly evaluate poetic inquiry.

I am persuaded by arguments for “good enough” poetry as/in qualitative research (Lahman, Richard & Teman, 2019; see also Faulkner, 2025). With Andrew Sparkes (2020), I see a role for non-poets, or researcher-poets, who might produce “not-quite poetry,” and “still accomplish their representational task” (p. 44). I believe that “poemish representations” can meaningfully forge a “safe space for creation” (Lahman, Richard & Teman, 2019, p. 215) provided that researchers who don’t identify as poets hone our capacity to recognize “occasions” for research poetry (Sullivan, 2009), commit to intentional revision decisions, and do our best to attend to poetic craft (Faulkner, 2020).

In my own exploration of poetic inquiry, I developed various strategies for recognizing occasions for research poetry, as the following chapters will make clear. I believe in the power of revision and sometimes revised research poems after receiving feedback from participants or with aesthetics in mind. However, some poems have been revised very little in part because I find them interesting as relics of a moment of poetic interpretation. This respect for unrevised poems is likely rooted in my time facilitating restorative poetry workshops with incarcerated women as a volunteer for the nonprofit Poetic Justice.¹¹ Writers in our workshops always had a choice whether to share their poems, to request silent or subtle recognition from fellow workshop members, to invite rigorous response and feedback, and whether to revise their work or not before submitting for

11. See <https://www.poeticjustice.org/>

publication. I empowered myself to make that decision with research poems in this book as well.

Despite skepticism about whether researcher-poets can be reliable critics of their own work, I agree with Faulkner (2020) that in specifying the goals of a particular work, a researcher can constitute valuable criteria for judging the extent to which the project has achieved those objectives. As with any research methodology, poetic inquiry is a rigorous process that calls for study, practice, peer assessment and ongoing, recursive development. Ndlovu and van Rooyen (2025) offer valuable questions and exercises researchers can use to assess the craft and reach of their poetic inquiry practices and products. Poet-researchers have a responsibility to use these tools and others to hold ourselves accountable to both “the craft of poetry” and “the ethics of research” so as to “enhance the legitimacy and impact of poetic inquiry” (Ndlovu & van Rooyen, 2025, p. 179). I find the process of critical reflection on rigor and critical consideration of a range of possible criteria valuable and motivating as I find my way as a researcher-poet.

Chapter Breakdown

In what follows, I share my journey with poetic inquiry, drawing on qualitative interview data from my study to demonstrate, theorize, and reflect on particular poetic methods of inquiry and to speculate about how they might meet various needs of writing researchers. Each chapter features a set of poetic practices and techniques using my research with faculty writers to illustrate the affordances and challenges. Examples include: *composite poems* (poems created with words of multiple participants from across interviews); *cluster poems* (series of short poems each crafted with words from one individual gathered into a cluster to shed light on an issue or topic—mothering in academia, shame, mental health); *profile poems or I-poems* (extended poems crafted with words from one participant from multiple interviews collected overtime); and *collaborative poetry* (poems crafted from transcripts from one participant written collaboratively with the participant). Each chapter includes a breakdown of the process of creating each type of research poem from qualitative interview data and an analysis of the affordances of the technique along with ideas about when and how other researchers might experiment with the approach.

The first chapter focuses on composite poetry, an approach that combines lines, words or phrases from multiple research participants into one found data poem, highlighting its promise for honoring the complicated relationship between the one and the many—between a unique research participant and the larger group(s) of which they are a part, between individual and collective, personal and shared experiences of a phenomenon under study. Drawing on my research with faculty writers, I show how composite poetry can hold researchers accountable to “multiple and complicated truths” (Faulkner, 2020, p. 7)—in my case, truths about how faculty writers conceptualize, experience and resist the notion of resilience

in their academic writing lives. In doing so, I suggest, composite poetry empowers researchers to disentangle seemingly universal constructs, such as resilience, that drive dominant discourse and assumptions about writing and significantly impact writers' lives. Using resilience as an example, this chapter demonstrates how composite research poetry could be used to mine various phenomena for the purpose of deconstructing stock stories about writers and writer development. The chapter concludes by explaining how composite poetry responds to "occasions" (Sullivan, 2009) in qualitative research that call for poetic rendering and how writing researchers can build the capacity to notice these opportunities.

The second chapter considers the value of poetry clusters—series of poems created from various source texts including interview transcripts, literature and, researcher notes/reflections that engage a particular theme—for mining aspects of writers' lived experience. Centering a poetry cluster called "Write Like a Mother," I model how this approach to poetic inquiry provides writing researchers "a powerful way of expressing a range of subtle nuances about a topic while simultaneously producing a more general overview," a way of conjuring "a richer and deeper [multivocal] understanding of a phenomenon" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4). I model the value of clustering for evoking the "radical specificity" (Sotirin, 2010)—the ungeneralizable intimacy and intensity of sensations, events, emotions and relations—around a shared condition, in my case motherscholar-ing (Howard et al., 2023). I theorize cluster poems as a practice of constellation (Hidalgo et al., 2021; Schoone, 2020; Wieser-Weryackwe et al., 2023), an alternative to the traditional ways of validating findings in qualitative research through triangulation or crystallization (Richardson, 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Constellating meaning through poetry is a practice of relationality and accountability, worldviews and ways of being central to cultural rhetorics and Indigenous research and writing paradigms (Kovach, 2009; Riley-Mukavetz, 2020; Wilson, 2008). The goal is not to substantiate objective analysis, but to honor "the multiplicities of orientations" possible, "visibilize a web of relations" (Powell et al., 2014) and robustly represent the messy complexity of writing lives.

The third chapter offers three approaches to poetic inquiry that enact a praxis of deep listening in qualitative research—profile poems, reverse interview poems, and I-poems. Deep listening is a rigorous, recursive, reflexive effort to understand with "greater precision and compassion" the positions, perspectives, stories and experiences of research participants (Rosenberg & Howe, 2018, p. 76; see also Boehr, 2021). Inspired by rounds of listening featured in Carol Gilligan's *Listening Guide* for qualitative research (as cited in Gilligan et al., 2006), the first two types of poetic inquiry featured in this chapter establish the landscape of a participant's experience (profile poems) and interrogate how the researcher's social locations and reactions shape understandings of participants and their stories (reverse interview poems). The final type of poetry highlighted in this chapter, I-poems, can be used to create space between the participant's and the analyst's perceptions, a pause for listening before interpretation (Edwards & Weller, 2012).

The juxtaposition of my poetic approaches to engaging in deep listening with data from the same research participant highlights how each approach enacts a different type of listening and provides a different “angle of understanding” (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p. 216). It underscores for qualitative researchers the value in using these forms of poetic inquiry to deliberately shift modes of analytic ontology, to move between looking at and standing alongside participants in order to listen more deeply.

The fourth chapter explores a collaborative form of poetic inquiry featuring my work with Julie, a faculty writer who has participated in my study since 2016. Together, we engaged in a process Melanie Burdick (2011) calls “tandem found poetry” (TFP) by which “found poems are created separately but at roughly the same time, from the same text, by the interviewer and the participant” (p. 5). Over the course of a year, Julie and I independently created poems from each of her seven interview transcripts and met regularly to share our creations and reflect on the experience. I documented our recursive process and in this chapter analyze the self-generated data to understand what made the experience so provocative and powerful for us. In doing so, I show how TFP intentionally rejects positivist assumptions and traditional power dynamics of researcher/researched, embracing friendship as method (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) and inviting study participants to collaborate in the determination of what needs saying and how it might best be said (Burdick, 2011). I highlight several gifts TFP offered me and Julie, including healing through multiple truths, (re)tracing hope and joy, honoring versions of lived experience, emphasizing that the nature of new knowledge and understanding will necessarily shift with each iteration. I suggest that TFP, as part of a feminist research praxis, offers writing researchers a means for creatively and collaboratively grappling with questions about perception, truth, and meaning by profoundly and playfully shifting traditional research relationships and outcomes. Finally, I identify essential components of TFP as an inherently responsive, adaptable process.

In the conclusion, I highlight four interlocking dimensions of methodological surrender with/through poetic inquiry: rhetorical, pedagogical, ethical, material. I explain how these dimensions manifested in my own poetic inquiry project, scaffolding new ways of listening and changing the trajectory of my writing, research, and sense of self as a researcher, writer, and human. By highlighting the transformative, subversive potential of poetic inquiry, I hope to ignite the imagination of writing researchers considering experimenting with poetic inquiry.

As the chapters will undoubtedly show, I discovered the promise of poetic inquiry slowly through fits and starts in surprising moments of immersion and delight, and I continue to grope my way forward with and through this method. Based on my experience, I urge writing researchers intrigued by the possibilities of poetic inquiry to take a playful approach; read widely—poetry as well as poetic inquiry scholarship—follow your intuition, and try out the techniques and approaches that beckon you. I hope this book supports and inspires you on your journey.