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Poetry Writing: A Process of Finding One's Own Voice

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Abstract

This article presents, in the form of a free-verse poem, the trajectory by which the author discovered how to unleash his voice as an academic writer. The poem describes how the author became completely disillusioned with the processes and products of mainstream academic journals in accounting and business, and how the discovery, by serendipity, of a chapter presenting writing as a method of inquiry, by Richardson and St. Pierre, invigorated his academic career. Then, inspired by a series of letters written by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, the author presents a writing process that may be useful for other authors seeking to get rid of the standard academic "non-style" of writing and find their own voices.

Keywords

Writing as a Method of Inquiry, Academic Writing, Poetry Writing, Voice

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Poetry Writing: A Process of Finding One's Own Voice

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This article presents, in the form of a free-verse poem, the trajectory by which the author discovered how to unleash his voice as an academic writer. The poem describes how the author became completely disillusioned with the processes and products of mainstream academic journals in accounting and business, and how the discovery, by serendipity, of a chapter presenting writing as a method of inquiry, by Richardson and St. Pierre, invigorated his academic career. Then, inspired by a series of letters written by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, the author presents a writing process that may be useful for other authors seeking to get rid of the standard academic “non-style” of writing and find their own voices. Keywords: Writing as a Method of Inquiry, Academic Writing, Poetry Writing, Voice

Prologue

When words start to fill the blank page,
I notice the signs emerging without my full control,
And hear a voice that comes from an unknown place.

Lengthy was the time I took to devise,
Where and how to speak with my voice,
So close the answer laid,
In the only place where I was truly myself, in all those years:
The pages of my journal,
Since in the texts I published so far,
I am barely there.

I

An artisan and his doppelgänger cohabit my body and mind,
I feel the artisan when I am teaching,
I hear his voice,
Literally and figuratively,
Using words as raw materials,
He sculpted events for reflection and learning,

Word by word, line by line, traveling on ideas,
Students tour the paths he carved,
The double, however, brings a non-style of writing¹,
He published some authorless texts,
Dry and dull, devoid of any beauty,
But rejected manuscripts piled up,
Infected with misplaced authorial passages,
Noises of the artisan, maculated anonymity.

Sometimes we cannot tell dreams from life,
Art from miscellanea,
I dreamed that I could choose every word accordingly,
Clarity without editing.

As I metamorphosed from a naïve young researcher,
Complacent with the privilege,
Of being paid to learn and write,
To a disillusioned mature academic,
Aware of the forces that maintain mainstream academia,
I felt my passion ebbing away.

Relevance lost and never found,
Who reads accounting journals?
Where are the practitioners in this conference?
Research and practice, worlds apart²,
Statistical significance, practical irrelevance³.

Publishing in journal A, B or C,
Because other people value the cover and the label,
Unknowingly, I refrained from defining success on my own terms,
I tried to mirror what I saw outside,

¹ Badley (2015, p. 713)

² Baldvinsdottir, Mitchell, and Nørreklit (2010, p. 80)

³ Basu (2012, p. 858)

Conquered empty and fleeting rewards.

II

Why do I write academic papers?
 They are virtually unread, let alone cited⁴,
 It is just a game, a pointless writing game,
 There is too much energy and anxiety involved,
 Writing about subjects I do not value,
 Producing texts that are not read⁵,
 I am giving my best in exchange for mere crumbs.

This distasteful recurrent feeling,
 That I learnt something I should already know,
 Unseasoned and slow,
 I advance, and I am still lagging,
 What prevented me from seeing what I can now see?

I am tired of pursuing what I do not need,
 Of reading and rereading,
 And not seeing what is there,
 Like how easy it is to neglect,
 Clashes between classes⁶,
 Or how the status quo is fed by the search for invariant scientific laws⁷,
 Then a slap in my face,
You must act as conscience, critic and counselor of society⁸,
You shall ask,
Where are we going?
Is this desirable?
What should be done?
 The disquieting awareness that I have never applied,

⁴ Marinetto (2018)

⁵ Leavy (2019)

⁶ Chua (1986, p. 619)

⁷ Chua (2019, p.3)

⁸ Dillard and Vinnari (2017, p. 88)

In my research,
Such simple, much needed, value-rational questions⁹,
Have I ever performed research that matters?

I turn to look in the mirror,
There is a ventriloquist's dummy!
Fooling itself that it knows something,
There is a marionette and a pretender!
Happily accepting a pittance,
Do I have something to say by myself?

I want to open my eyes,
And stop being a somnambulant,
I want to reach a different way of seeing,
What matters is in our minds,
Open systems,
Conscious and unconscious.

I enlist to battle the reigning discourse of the contemporary university¹⁰,
A teacher-researcher-soldier,
In a battlefield of meaning,
An academic researcher in managerial times¹¹.

A sense of purpose awakens,
An impulse to give something back,
In return for my blessings,
I must think and question,
And now I ask,
What is the value of our actions?
I embrace the mission to make students aware,
To prod them towards such questioning,

⁹ Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 60)

¹⁰ Kelly (2015, p. 1154)

¹¹ Elizabeth and Grant (2013, p. 124)

At least for a moment.

III

Hesitantly, I engaged in my first conscious critical research endeavor,
Then came a major international conference,
Message delivered; feedback received,
What is my target journal?
I was caught in the trap again,
From the AcademicConferenceMachine¹² straight to the academicwritingmachine¹³.

Rewriting, once more,
I need to keep remembering that grit entails,
perseverance and passion for long-term goals¹⁴,
Two years writing the same text,
The same story,
I am tired.

The story,
The part with which I struggled the most,
I devoted to the story,
I thought that interpretive and critical studies were mostly about the narrative,
But the tale I told went unnoticed,
Was it uninteresting?
Why did people focus so much on technique?^a
I kept writing, following instructions,
I could see the manuscript morphing into the standard scientific shape.

Nothingness again,
Lack of enthusiasm,
I dreamed about the critical rupture,
I aspired to a renewed appreciation for research,

¹² Benozzo et al. (2019)

¹³ Henderson, Honan, and Loch (2016)

¹⁴ Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007, p. 1086)

Now I am helpless,
I fooled myself into thinking I enjoyed doing research,
Maybe the truth is,
I do not.

Nowhere to go,
Interpretivism, critical studies, positivism,
When it comes to the writing, they are too similar,
Worship for research standards,
Discovery relegated,
Machinic writing¹⁵,
Alternative streams that mimic the mainstream,
Same practices, same routines,
Disillusion,
The standard scientific article is the paradigm of paradigms,
And an inescapable conclusion,
Writing science is boring.

This nuisance, this frequent feeling of discouragement, with a touch of bitterness,
Such a regular visitor,
This social representation demands too much,
An urge to disappear, to completely change my context,
as if I was going to live in another country^b,
The driving force evanesced,
Writing as the finest part of researching was just me,
Believing in a make-believe,
That being an academic was all about writing,
Now, I am lost.

¹⁵ Henderson, Honan, and Loch (2016)

IV

I have not given up,
Writing is what makes me feel myself,
Unanticipatedly, I think about poetry,
Its density, the sturdy level of precision that it demands,
The ability to compress meaning and feelings,
I took a book from the shelf,
It has been there for more than 20 years,
I have not read it,
Two books in one, from Rainer Maria Rilke,
“Sonnets to Orpheus” and “Duino Elegies”,
I start with the sonnets,
I scrambled,
Then I started to listen to the music,
It is beautiful.

I dived into Rilke,
“Letters to a young poet”,
A felicitous discovery,
It is about life, more than poetry^c,
Letters that sound as melodic as poems,
*“Write about what your everyday life offers you,
Describe your sorrows and desires,
the thoughts that pass through your mind,
and your belief in some kind of beauty...”*
Something resonated, deep inside,
I finally understood,
I must only write,
It is the only thing that matters.

I anticipate the joy of just writing,
It will balance the tedious task of writing scholarly papers,
Maybe I can even discover answers by myself^{ed},

V

Fortune sent me another book,
 And a chapter with a spellbinding title,
*Writing as method of inquiry*¹⁶,
 How could it be?
 I sense the connectedness, when I realize,
 that other people also get bored reading qualitative texts!¹⁷
 Also, emancipation,
 Freedom from the fakery of getting it right¹⁸,
 No longer obliged to maintain that façade¹⁹,
 that I built to prevent others from seeing what I really am,
 that I know how to play the academic game²⁰,
 that I know something definitive;
 It is an entryway to new academic journals, texts, and authors,
 Their existence I would not dare to dream of,
 Inventive titles that made me anticipate the pleasure of reading,
*Getting personal: writing-stories*²¹,
*Exploring a timeless academic life*²²,
*Learning to write through an awareness of breath*²³,
*Creative writing and academic timelessness*²⁴,
*Post-academic writing: Human writing for human readers*²⁵,
 Now I have my own list of “A” journals,
The Qualitative Report,
Qualitative Inquiry,
New Writing,
Higher Education Research & Development,

¹⁶ Richardson and St. Pierre (2017)

¹⁷ Richardson and St. Pierre (2017, p. 1411)

¹⁸ Richardson and St. Pierre (2017, p. 1415)

¹⁹ Gale and Wyatt (2006, p. 1123)

²⁰ Gale and Wyatt (2006, p. 1123)

²¹ Richardson (2001)

²² Yoo (2017)

²³ Yoo (2019c)

²⁴ Yoo (2019a)

²⁵ Badley (2019)

Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies.

I savor their words and sentences,
I highlight and write in the margins,
It is the first time, in years,
that I have enjoyed reading academic works,
Texts that seem to be written to be read,
Evocative texts, written by humans for humans,
I can hear the authors' voices.

I wanted to go out, screaming to everybody,
Eureka, I have just found gold!
I learn that writing is a way of undermining,
the separation of time and space,
and of experiencing connectedness to others²⁶,
I am delirious,
Academic journals do not exhibit such lyricism,
Am I living in a dream, or waking from a nightmare?
Writing as a method of discovery,
Academic journals that publish articles that are enjoyable,
I realize I was long searching for something,
That I did not even know it existed.

I will never see my research endeavors with the same eyes,
A new world has been unveiled,
A miracle that just occurred to me,
I tried to share with others,
The excitement that research can be so heretical,
Freethinking,
Then I looked in the eyes of my colleagues and wondered,
If I said some secret password,
That, in a split-second, turned off their attention,

²⁶ Richardson (2001, p. 36)

Questioning the status quo seems unbearable,
For the ones who believe they are benefiting from it.

Now I face the challenge,
of writing texts that are “good reads”²⁷,
I just have to figure out,
How to be my greatest asset²⁸.

VI

So many attempts ending in versions of the same text,
In each new one I start differently,
Always aiming at being myself,
And they just keep being boring.

I hear this omniscient voice of scholarship,
cloaked as my own²⁹,
I need to replace it with mine,
I hoped that writing my own story would help³⁰,
But my voice has too long been silenced³¹,
It may take a while³²,
I wonder if it is just a matter of keep trying.

What is impeding me?
I feel this pressure inside, this torrent of feelings and thoughts,
As if I had something worth saying,
But what is coming out is not what is inside,
There is a filter, a censor in action³³.

From the dozen versions of the same text,

²⁷ Richardson and St. Pierre (2017, p. 1417)

²⁸ Murakami (2009, p. 18)

²⁹ Richardson (2001, p. 34)

³⁰ Badley (2019, p. 5)

³¹ Yoo (2017, p. 446)

³² Gale and Wyatt (2006, p. 1120); Badley (2019, p. 5)

³³ Badley (2019, p. 3)

I found some passages amusing,
Some have style,
Some seem unique,
I hear of a tone color,
Something is emerging.

Dismay and excitement take turns, in this quest to find my voice,
Being released from the standard scientific format is not a magical spell,
It is unquestionably liberating,
but it is just the beginning,
Inevitably, I question my ability to write something worth reading.

I seek inspiration in Rilke's letters,
The beauty of his prose marvels me,
It is delicate and gentle,
Heartfelt,
A master poet who could write prose that sounds like poetry^e,
I wish I could use Rilke's advice in my academic writings.

Dispirited, I put my text aside,
And started to write in my journal,
In the not-so-good old days, I used to write free verse poems,
Maybe it helps me unwind my thoughts and feelings,
A sort of uncompromised writing,
If there is such a thing.

A flash of a glimpse, by chance, I spot,
In the opening lines, my poems have a distinctive voice,
What this voice produces surprises me:
Passages that are rather unintended,
While I recognize myself, I am also presented to a new myself,
Maybe I am seeing glimpses of an irrational union of opposites,

The unconscious is producing content which is amplified by the conscious mind³⁴,
At some point, however, my poems lose their particular scent,
They start to sound like bad prose.

I contemplate my writing process,
And perceive that I start writing slowly,
I look for the right words,
Even my handwriting is neat,
Then, in the middle, my writing hastens,
Led by the flow of thinking,
I like what I hear from my verses, in the beginning of each poem.

I try this new approach, aiming at writing poetically,
I start writing slowly,
And try to keep the pace,
Without noticing, my writing speeds up,
My fingers seem to move faster than I want.

I resort to longhand writing,
Trying to write my prose in verses,
Now I can see my style,
and hear my voice, again,
I realize I can hear my voice by listening to what I write³⁵,
It speaks when I write slowly and in verses,
It seems about pace.

Writing with the computer triggers the academic non-style,
I go back to pen and paper, to slow down the rhythm,
Then move on to the computer, until I feel my voice vanishing,
It is time to slow down again.

³⁴ Jung (1958/2014, p. 468)

³⁵ Zinsser (2001, p. 37)

I have found a way to unleash my voice,
 To reconnect with myself
 Pen and paper,
 Find the rhythm and start listening to the words,
 Move to digital,
 Feel the “academic voice” taking over,
 Stop,
 Go back to pen and paper,
 Start listening to it again,
 Can I convert my poems to prose and keep writing with my style?
 Do I need to?...

Epilogue

By writing in verses I envisioned that what Rilke illuminated is conceivable in academic writing,
 To dwell in the common place, to see things anew³⁶,
 Then we might just keep carving the text,
 Be the artisan of readable texts³⁷,
 Be the shaper of poetical monographs³⁸,
 Those are challenging aims,
 To achieve intellectual depth,
 Emotional connection,
 And embodied writing,
 To reverberate in our hearts and minds³⁹

If expectations about form shapes the content of our writing⁴⁰,
 It may be that form and style also mold our voice(lessness),
 This is what I discovered through writing,
 Writing as inquiry is discomfoting,

³⁶ Yoo (2019c, p. 4)

³⁷ Badley (2019, p. 7)

³⁸ Yoo (2019a, p. 153)

³⁹ Elizabeth and Grant (2013, p. 124)

⁴⁰ Richardson (2002, p. 414)

A process of extracting meaning out of pain,
 It is inescapable,
 It is me becoming⁴¹.

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⁴¹ Gale and Wyatt (2006, p. 119)

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Endnotes

^a Some of the comments I received include:

It would be helpful if a data structure was included to understand how the findings emerged from the coding.

The introduction does not motivate the paper well. Try to focus on a standard four paragraph, two page introduction. In the first paragraph, please describe what we already know. In the second paragraph, please outline the gap in the literature. In the third paragraph describe how

you will close the gap and add to the current knowledge. Lastly, conclude with your contributions.

^b “After almost two decades in noncontinuing positions, I have finally acquired tenure. This means that I should be bursting with joy, full of vivacity, and new energy, but instead I feel myself winding down like someone who has been at the helm for a long time. *Why do I feel this way?*” (Yoo, 2019b, p. 1)

^c “...write about what your everyday life offers you; describe your sorrows and desires, the thoughts that pass through your mind and your belief in some kind of beauty—describe all these with heartfelt, silent, humble sincerity and, when you express yourself, use the things around you, the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember” (Rilke, 1934, p. 11).

^d “... and finally I want to add just one more bit of advice: to keep growing, silently and earnestly, through your whole development; you couldn’t disturb it any more violently than by looking outside and waiting for outside answers to questions that only your innermost feeling, in your quietest hour, can perhaps answer” (Rilke, 1934, p. 13).

^e “You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer” (Rilke, 1934, p. 35).