

BODY WORD SOUND: THE HEALING POWER & POTENTIAL OF POETRY

First **and foremost a verbal art, poetry** might very well be the basis of all language, and is closely related to musical traditions, with its origins in hymns and chants, which historians and anthropologists tell us were used to pass along essential information before we had written language. The Sumerian collection of poetry, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* often is cited as one of the earliest works of poetry, dating back to the 18th century B.C.; other examples of early poems might include the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. These expressions later evolved into “lyrics” - a word which comes from the Greek *lyra* or lyre, the instrument that was used to accompany the speaking of poetry from about the seventh century BC onward.

So, with that established, let me acknowledge that I consider myself a poet. I have published books, appeared in anthologies and magazines, I run a poetry series, teach poetry to youth in K-12 schools around the Bay Area, and was recently appointed Poet Laureate of my small town --- blah blah blah, but really, all of that is my way of legitimizing what I really am: a body word sound shaman. I know that this might sound whoowoo and perhaps arrogant, but please understand that I have come to this awareness over time and not in the least bit exuberantly.

I am a love detector
I tell the truth
unabashedly
generally with good intention
I cannot help it
this is a talent
this is a curse
people say I am stadium lighting
a crystal megaphone
translucent waves of thought
flowing like water
into the depths of your ears
witnessing with 10 thousand watts of wonder
smiling into the open eyes
of anyone brave enough
to dare expose themselves
to the x-ray dream
of purposeful vision
it isn't easy being me

people run
they hide
they throw stone eyes
and backhanded curses
but I don't stop
I fly with hummingbirds
dive into the night
pop through the sun
wake up with a handful of stars
in my hair
I understand
why I am scary
it is hard to be seen
without disguises
I am not
for the faint of heart
I am for the willing

I began writing as a way to save myself. I needed a place to put my darkness, draw it up from within and look at it, name the monsters, judgments, shoulds and shouldn'ts, give them a place to live outside my body, so they could no longer control my mind. This became a practice, a raja gnana, an inner movement to compliment my other yogas.

I am self taught, an “outsider” artist, with a BA in economics—Phi Beta Kappa no less—who suddenly stepped away from the “dream” job, expected life and declared myself a poet. My ex-fiance, friends, family, co-workers truly believed I had a mental breakdown. Maybe I did, but fate brought me to the doorstep of the 13th Century Persian Sufi Mystic poet Rumi – and I knew I was not alone.

I too was a poet dancing, dervishing, laughing and crying words out to the wind and whomever was listening, and our similarities empowered me to keep going. Just like the first poem of Rumi's I memorized:

I burn away;
laugh;
my ashes are alive
I die a thousand times
my ashes dance back
a thousand new faces

I started by writing and speaking poems for the trees, plants, flowers and creatures who inhabit nature, the elementals, four-leggeds and faeries. Not about them, but for them, as they were a forgiving audience, which is what I needed; I came from a very critical environment, with perfection paramount in my upbringing.

Poems became my imperfections, and nature did not care. One day, I was hiking alone on a remote trail on Mt Tamalpais in Marin, and the words: “Love yourself, touch the blades of grass, let your soul sing loud at last” landed in my mind, and without pause I starting belting the words like I was singing in the shower, as a mantra of sorts, alternating between the actual words, and what people now call light language -- walking, singing and babbling as I climbed to a pinnacle overlooking the Muir Woods canyon. As I got to the overlook, I paused to take in the beauty and suddenly, the forest erupted in applause, literally, the trees sounded like 20 thousand people cheering at the Shoreline Amphitheater. I knew it was for the courage I allowed. I had always been afraid to sing – as I am one of the far too many in this culture who was told to “shhhhuush” and just mouth the words during choir practice.

This experience helped me realize that I am not a “writer” but instead, I am a vocal “scribe”. I have made it my life’s practice to hollow out and let my creative funnel open, and hold tight as the words pour though me like a hawk flying onto the page and out my mouth. Poetry is soul reflection. A Theta state I visit regularly, and it casts a tapestry of sound that allows deeply buried emotions to rise up and web into lettered filaments. It is a light at the edge of the abyss and a way for us to translate the ineffable in a way that lets us “clap with one hand.”

Over time, I have honed my ability to focus my funnel and offer it as a tool to help others find their inner voices and lost selves. It has been thirty plus years since I first walked away from the life I was “supposed to live”, and now those same people who ridiculed me are showing up at my threshold, asking for guidance, support and wisdom, and I am honored.

Poetry is life power, and it rejuvenates the inner dimensions, stilling our need to define “god”, and instead offering seekers the language to see ourselves reflected in our own eyes. And in this way, I help others string pearls of feelings together, into poems, that offer a gateway into the intimate stories and emotional connections that are vital to personal healing.

In the words of transformative poet Kim Rosen, “the Medicine of Sound Poetry is a prescription for our times. At this pivotal moment in history, there is a paradoxical urgency to slowing down, focusing on what matters most, looking into each other’s eyes, and speaking the truth. Poetry is the language of the innermost self, where the grit of our humanness meets the grace of our vastness.

Hearing and speaking it aloud can literally change brain chemistry and thus dissolve painful patterns of thought, feeling, and physiology, aligning us with what is innocent, intimate, and holy within. This invariably ripples out to touch and transform the world around us.”

Or to quote Amos Wilder:

her voice

was a mountain sound

captivating the

creatures of the

wild wood

she was one with

the forest – rooted

in her lungs

rings and veins

combined.

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