

The Poet's Corpus in Love

Passionate Pedagogy

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*The acts of learning and teaching are acts of desire and passion.
Barreca & Morse, 1997, p. x*

Maybe we are searching for erotic ways of living, which express the joy, depth, richness, and responsibility of being human. The erotic is the source and sustenance of wisdom, but Western culture does not understand the erotic—that it can exist in spiritual and political activity and activism . . . that it is present in prosaic as well as ecstatic moments. . . .

*We need to speak about and with our bodies, to make art
and writing that kiss us, to know our own wiseblood.
Frueh, 1996, pp. 114–119*

Dear Carl,

It was so good to see you at the conference. Thank you for coming to Spokane! I had forgotten how much I missed you. Virtual communities cannot replace being in the same room together. One of my favorite memories was just sitting and listening to you and Erika present on life writing. I always get lost in her voice. I also loved hearing your poem on Mr. Burns. Thank you. I realized again that there's something very powerfully simple with allowing myself to sink into listening deeply. The sound of your voices made the space profoundly mindful and contemplative. I believe my familiar relationships with you and Erika more easily allowed that reflective space to emerge.

I'm wondering if you'd like to write a series of letters on love and learning. I know you agree that there can be no teaching, no learning, no pedagogical relationship without love. This asso-

ciation was particularly brought to light again for me while being with you and other friends at the conference.

With her characteristic insight, bell hooks (1994) reminds me that “as a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (p. 8) and “when eros is present in the classroom setting, then love is bound to flourish. [Yet] well-learned distinctions between public and private make us believe that love has no place in the classroom” (p. 198). Let’s write about another way.

I don’t believe that it’s just our grounding in the existential, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic theory of autobiographic inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Grumet, 1978; Miller 1979; Pinar, 1974, 1975) that gives us a particular view. I mean, if we simply think about teaching as art (Eisner, 1985; Rubin, 1985, 1991) and resist categorizing “pedagogical intelligence” into mechanical and routinized thinking and behaviour, can’t we encourage the unanticipated and the creative (Eisner, 1985)? I’d like to explore the significance of and relationship among eros, love, self, and other, in educational settings and learning relationships through a series of letters if that interests you.

Inspired by poet Rainer Maria Rilke and Virginia Woolf’s “Letters to a Young Poet” (guess who the young poet is?), I’m hoping you can enlighten. I’m suggesting that when the inloveness of educational eros is acknowledged in the dialogic space between teacher and learner, transformational knowing possibilities are greatly enhanced. So I’m thinking about learning as relatedness, learning as eros, and learning as love.

I even have an idea for the final title if we work through this: *The Poet’s Corpus in Love!* What do you think? This could be a playful pun that highlights the paradox of the word *corpus* which means both: “a body of writing or works” as well as “a corpse, a dead body.” How about we blend these two definitions together in recognizing the physical body as lifeless unless breathed through with love and vigorously animated with words? I remember seeing Sandra Weber’s (2005) presentation in Vancouver. She was explaining that education must be reconceptualized to acknowledge the body as mindful, and the mind as embodied. I’m also reminded of Joanna Frueh’s (1996) challenge of academics’ praise and value of rigorous arguments. Her perspective is that the word *rigor* in itself

indicates the inflexibility of a system that wants to promote itself. Rigor suggests unnecessary austerity, a lifelessness in which the thinker may be in good part dead to the world.

. . . Rigor reminds her not of discipline . . . but of rigor mortis. She [says she] does not want to be an intellectual corpse. (pp. 4–5)

What if we could write these letters alive in “the liquid world of words . . . streaming language, spinning tales, love stories that go by no single name” (p. 3)? Do you have time?

Pauline

*

Dear Pauline,

It was a delight to see you in Spokane. As always, I was very proud of you as the co-chair of the conference. You are a gracious and generous host. And, as always, it was lovely fun to collaborate with you in our presentation. I am glad to continue our collaboration into inquiring about love—definitely my favourite topic of research! In fact, in middle age I'm beginning to question whether there is any other topic worth discussing!

My poems, fiction, and essays are all efforts to articulate my experiences of love in all its multiplicity. Love opens up spaces for learning, not only in the classroom, but in every moment of being. In the academy, we impose limits and boundaries around most sensual explorations, most sensational engagements, most spiritual expectations, most serendipitous experiences. To sensuously seek the sensate world in the academic world is challenging. Our collaboration is the beginning of an erotics of research and teaching and living.

As a poet and educator, I am committed to learning how to live and love with wellness in the world. Motivated by Frederick Franck's (1993) commitment "to live in radical openness to pure experiencing in kitchen, bedroom, subway, newspaper, that is: to everyday life, inside as well as around oneself" (p. 10), I live, as our friend Celeste Snowber reminds us, in "the erotics of the everyday" (personal communication, October 4, 1996). I especially seek the "radical openness to pure experiencing."

Perhaps we write love and live the poems and stories of love that are available to us. I don't think we are ever whole in our experiences of inloveness. Some part of us is always desiring and seeking and longing for some other part that holds tantalizing hopes of filling the holes that perforate any seeming semblance of wholeness. The challenge in writing and living love stories is to acknowledge that some stories are lived on paper, some in imagination, some in dreams, some in the quintessential quotidian quotient of each day's daily extra-ordinariness.

I also think that as you and I continue to write about love in the classroom, we need to address the experience of the body more. I think I have been hiding from the body in recent years—breathing an airy word-play that is not sufficiently located in the body's insistent and frequently erratic (perhaps erroneous) desires.

We need to let our writing show us the way. We need to offer our words freely and optimistically. Some will receive them and some will not. We do not control the reception of our words. Our responsibility is to call the words together, to listen to them carefully, and to offer them to others.

With words,

Carl

P.S. Here is a poem, a gift, a breath. (I include it as a postscript, not because it is an afterthought, but so you will read it now as my last words till I send more words, in the fullness of resonant lines.)

OLD

that Christmas I grew old
illness chased

disease like a relay
race in my body

with one week
a blood-shot eye

another week
a shot knee

the next week
a flu that spilled
blue through me

till I could hardly
prop up the lie
that holed away
maggot-like
in my throat

a magnet for
more nonsense
about hope than
even the Pope

could spell
in a message
to the world

deaf to his words
even in a dozen
or more languages

till visiting Lou
(younger than me)
in palliative care in
Richmond General

sighing a prologue
to death's unwritten narrative

where empty carols
drummed the season's
frantic fiction
that we are all winners
when we shop at Winner's

I remembered how
since I was born
I've been growing old

so turning fifty-two
with a few more aches
now tunes only a sharp note
of gratitude I have
lived long full of longing

and when Pauline asks,
if you could have any
gift for your birthday,
what would you want

I reply, I want a poem
that seems perfect
when read for the first time

*

Dear Carl,

Thank you for sharing your beautiful poem. I feel immortalized in Leggo poetry! I distinctly remember hearing you read that poem at a conference years ago. We were in Ponderosa at University of British Columbia. You were standing close to the window and the light was shining over your shoulder onto your white shirt as you read my name in your poem. This may seem strange, but I even remember what I was wearing that day! I was in the red leather jacket that dear Dr. Daniel Barney made for me. Yes, few things compare to the beauty of wearing an original gift a friend has made or being in another's poem—it's special, a fullness, but more than that. I remember all these things because of love. Other conference presentations have faded into a rainbow blur. If we could attach all we learn to connections of love, I'm sure we would remember much more. I imagine different love connections like folders. Everything in the folder is related—love is really a schematic for memory. For example, we know that when trying to memorize something, a mnemonic or acronym helps remember inconsequential information. It is only through relationship that we can learn and remember because we are focussed on meaning.

Anne Michaels' poems are so rich. In one of them she writes, "Only the body pronounces perfectly / the name of the other" (1997, p. 46). I've often thought that I don't fit my name. I've never felt like a Pauline but it hasn't mattered. The label has not changed whether I have felt known or not. Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) suggests that the self can only acquire "being" under the Other's gaze. He says "the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, [sculpts] it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it" (p. 364). It is in the embodied experiences I share with you and others that I experience love. Only in another's action does my

understanding of being known, or as Michaels says, having my name pronounced perfectly, become real.

In thinking about learning as relatedness, how then, in the classroom, can we foster Peter McLaren's (1991) advice that "a politics of field relations must be grounded in eros, in passion, in commitment to transform through a radical connectedness to the self and the other" (p. 163)? Sure, we concur with the curriculum theorist, Joseph Schwab, who first introduced the power of the dialogic and dialectic in discussion methods in the 1930's; who supported the harnessing of *eros* to employ its energy for intellectual purposes; and who stressed the indeterminacy of the "known" (Westbury & Wilkof, 1978); but how do we deconstruct the public and private in the school setting so that these relationships can be built without suspicion? I was thinking of how we might more experience the body authentically in our learning? I wrote this for you a while back:

ONE DAY

one day when I am older and you have not aged a day
 look and smell the same and feel full as always
 constant and firm, words pressed in the fibers of your coat
 and tucked under your arms and caught in your hair
 I will lie with you on the beach or on the grass or even in a snow cave
 or anywhere that no one knows or wants to know what I want
 and no one cares about my longing
 just so I can peel the memories and the thoughts off your skin
 the frost still crisp and the designs sharply intact
 hold the fragile crystalline beauty in my hands
 feel them melt one by one, run down my arms
 soak into my pores just for one moment
 so I can know your mystery

Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) describes desire as "consciousness making itself body" (p. 389). Judith Butler (1987) describes German philosopher Georg Hegel's notion of desire as embodied identity. "For Hegel, labor is 'inhibited desire', and recognition becomes the more sophisticated form of reflection that promises to satisfy desire" (p. 43). Butler continues:

Desire requires as well the transformation of the particularity of the natural world (the lived body as well as natural objects) into reflections of human activity; desire must become expressed through labor, for desire must give shape or form to the natural world in order to find itself reflected there. Giving form is thus the external determination of desire; in order to find satisfaction, i.e., recognition for itself, desire must give way to creative works. (p. 57)

Creative works and writing poetry are renderings of research, reflections of desire.

MY RE/COLLECTION OF YOU

you always end off your letters in a different way

I've thought of your endings as goodbye gifts

in college, an old boyfriend use to write endings like
with a green love, with a hooting love, with a . . .
all kinds of love like different flavored candies
that melt in the mouth, colored the tongue for a day

but your gifts are mysteriously enduring
I have them stored on the shelf
all the different kinds, some translated, some still quizzical
May your day be filled with poetic sunlight means many things
I feel the warmth in words as I write them now
or maybe feel the joy in reading a poem later
I am grateful for you or *I am blessed by you* needs no translation
they sit quite still

then there's
in words, in the heart's imagination, in tenderness, in questions, heartfully,
swimming in words, journeying into the light, joyfully, with hope
if I substitute "sincerely" in place of these then I'm clear
your gift is simply a description of how you're feeling in that moment
not candy-coated, simply there, not for me, but offered
I hold your gifts, beautiful to look at, roll the textures in my hands
feel their weight and I set them down beside the others on the shelf
ornaments I keep that remind me of you
the way you love me
the way you love everyone
who knows how to collect ornaments

so I should mention
in our multitude of emails
you wrote *with love* only a few times
and I cherished the wrapping
the sweet smell when opened
but these cannot balance on the shelf
without being propped between the collection

Relating—making desire embodied, is an integral but wholesomely necessary part of learning in love. Learning in eros is erotic—it is a deep connection between learners which involves insertion, vulnerability, and a courageous commitment to entanglement.

Hoping you're having have blue skies too,

Pauline

*

Dear Pauline,

As always, you fascinate me, not only with what you remember, but especially with your ways of remembering. Your words are always challenging me. I live love with steadfast longing and commitment, but I have great difficulty speaking and writing the words. In twenty-five years, I only once told my maternal grandmother, "I love you, Nan." I had the words engraved on the back of a silver brooch. I never spoke the words to her even though I loved her dearly, the only grandparent I knew, even though she lived in the house where I grew up. For fifty-five years I never said the words, "I love you," to my father until he was near death with a brain tumor, and had no idea what I was saying, had no idea who I was even. I finally told my mother I love her, only recently, just before I left her alone in her house in Newfoundland, to fly back home across Canada to Vancouver. I am afraid of saying "I love you," and perhaps, for all my protestations about love, I am really afraid of loving.

As you know, I once fell in love with an amazing woman, and left my wife and family to be with her, and eventually left the amazing woman to return to my wife and family. I lived that story of love and love's loss and love's insufficiency a long time ago, but everything I know about love is caught up in the tangled brambles of a story that has no beginning or end, a kind of rambling tale that must be lived over and over with an agnostic's resolution that the truth will never be known. So, I send you a recent poem that speaks about love, long after love is lost, and only a trace remains, a memory like a spectral emptiness. I share this wry resolution with you because I know you can hold my words, perhaps better than I can right now, and I want to learn to say "I love you," so I do not feel either reticent or reluctant or regretful.

ADULTERY

I longed for a new beginning
like a seed holds memory

but what has passed
can't forget its long history.

we are all fast in the past
limping along, full of blame.

my eyes stare forward
but all I see is behind me.

Frank cites the Bible
like he reads it, or doesn't need to.

adultery makes a man unclean
there's not much left to say.

Joy recommends a film about

a man who takes a mistress.

*I recommend it, she says, because
it's good, not because you have.*

I miss my mistress: just another
asinine line with assonance,

nothing more. my mistress is lost
in the mist, in the midst

of regret and fear and silence,
absence held in the imagination.

missing, my heart's content,
an empty heart can't remember.

My ruminations on love are always scattered because I cannot hold the whole image of love in my miniscule imagination. Hélène Cixous (1993) recommends that “perhaps going in the direction of what we call truth is, at least, to ‘unlie,’ not to lie. Our lives are buildings made up of lies. We have to lie to live. But to write we must try to unlie” (p. 36). Perhaps that is what I long for, a life that lies less, a life that loves more. Perhaps most people want a story that is almost always illusionary, a story akin to a still, snapped photograph, a story that has been dreamed over and over in romantic tales of TV, movies, books, poetry, etc. In *The New Culture of Desire*, Melinda Davis (2002) notes that “most of us have no idea what we really want” (p. 1), especially because “our culture prompts us to consider our appetites every waking hour of the day: want this, want this, want *this*” (p. 1). Perhaps most people are afraid of stillness, silence, and solitude, and specifically sacred spaces of sane sameness. Perhaps most people want the glossy image without interpretation. Perhaps most people want what they can't have, and don't even really want, but don't know they don't really want it, or don't know they can't really have it. Perhaps most people don't even know what “it” is. Perhaps most of us want to see our picture on a WANTED poster. Perhaps we most(ly) want to be wanted! Perhaps our wanting is to be wanted. Perhaps my wanting is waning because I am growing content, intent, constant, intent in the instant. Perhaps that's true; perhaps that's not true.

My story with Caitlin still seems too complex to speak. I need to write more poems. I am not sure Caitlin fell in love with me before I did, but she was more courageous in naming the love. I have not been brave in love. I think Caitlin wanted me because she wanted my words, and I came with the words. I think I wanted Caitlin because I found words to offer her that I didn't even know I had, and in offering the words, I knew a desire that knew almost no bounds. But I learned I could not live by words alone. I learned how dangerous love can be. I learned why I often fail to speak words of love.

I have many other stories, of course. And I hope to share more of them with you. You are a dear friend, and I am daily grateful for your gifts.

In surprising love,

Carl

*

Dear Carl,

Thank you so much for writing. You raise so many issues about the human condition—the need for being wanted, a sense of belonging which is so critical in classrooms; the uncontrollable and unpredictably surprisingness, danger, and wildness of love; a wanting of a particular kind of love and happiness though we don't quite know what that is; and of course, the great fear of love. If “the complexity of teaching is due in part to the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the learner” (Kilbourn, 1998, p. xii), how then do we promote love in the classroom without understanding it ourselves?

I'm interested in what you named “love's insufficiency.” Is this the expectation of what we attach to the word love – the emptiness of the semantic word? Perhaps love really is Julia Kristeva's *prosody*. Prosody is the fissures and inbetween spaces in words. It holds the words together into meaning. It is not the content itself (see Sameshima, 2007; Kristeva, 1980, 1987). Your poem is full of heartbreak but I am glad you are looking to the past.

Your thoughts on Hélène Cixous come at a very serendipitous moment. I used to think if something was in front of us, we could both see it. I was again reminded this is not true from reflections my students wrote after taking a Public Art Tour at our university campus. So many of the students said they had walked daily past a piece of art and never noticed it. It was only after hearing the story of the piece, engaging with the meaning of the piece, and thus developing some care for it, that it became visible to them. So to really see our students, we need to care, take time to listen, and think about their stories. We also need to enable students to see each other. For example, in an elementary class, this could simply be choosing a student in a class meeting and collectively making a list of 10 compliments. I've found in my teaching experience that this is sometimes a difficult task for children to do, even when the person is a very well-liked individual.

Let's talk about eros. The word carries so many meanings. Remember, Eros was a Greek mythological character. He was the son of Aphrodite and excited erotic love in gods and mortals with his arrows and torches. Eros is the body's need to be alive, to feel deeply, to move passionately, and to create—in essence, to learn holistically. I suppose that a learning atmosphere of educational eros can be likened to a Heideggerian *pure* mood which is the place from which the world is unlocked (Bollnow, 1989c). In this place of heightened trust, wandering, and celebration, the learner is free to explore and learn in non-prescriptive ways.

I want to articulate the open dialogic space between teacher and student—that space where we are deeply discussing what is closest to us. Being in the space of eros between teacher and learner integrates Drew Leder's (1990) concept of the ecstatic body as

a field of immediately lived sensation . . . its presence fleshed out by a ceaseless stream of kinesthesias, cutaneous and visceral sensation, defining . . . [the] body's space and extension, and yielding information about position, balance, state of tension, desire, and mood. (p. 23)

The space of eros promotes openings, allows intent listening, urges watchfulness, and acknowledges appreciation. The space of eros is akin to Leder's (1990) notion of aesthetic absorption

which is based on phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968) "chiasm" which refers to experiencing the world as "flesh"—a meshing of subject and object, self and body, and body and world.

Your comment on being "intent in the instant" is well described by Mitchell Thomashow (1995). Much like the inloveness space of eros, being attuned to the everyday experience between teacher and learner, body and context, and inside and outside, enables the realization that "it is the process of thinking about the question that guides [the] experience" (p. 202). Thomashow goes on:

The purpose of my life is to be awake in this moment. This moment is temporary and infinite. I find the deepest significance in this utter ephemerality . . . sitting on a piece of land, feeling my body, using my senses, exploring the world, and delighting in its ineffability. In each case, I derive temporary meaning, but lasting wisdom. (p. 203)

I wonder, in our contemporary classrooms, how we can foster a sustainable stillness, a deep contemplation and a movement toward wisdom when our society is moving about so quickly with quick fixes and unconnected learning in disparate classes.

Learning in love is learning with passion. When the body is in a heightened state of reception, the act of learning is erotic—the body's primal state of yearning and desire—in open invitation for learning. We have been taught to believe that we must not love except in certain ways. We are encouraged to love a life-long partner, our children, and family members, but we become suspect when we love our friends, mentors, students, or those in our pasts whom we've had relationships with. Why are we expected to leave past relationships with anger and bitterness?

I like Otto Bollnow's (1989b) description of educational love, which embraces patience, hope, serenity, humour, and goodness. Bollnow (1989a) says that a pedagogic trust relationship creates a sense of "morningness" (p. 22). Morningness refers to newness or a sense of budding joy for learning.

One of the issues as you have raised is that love is used in so many diverse ways that we really do not know what it means. In *Love: An Unromantic Discussion*, Mary Evans (2003) notes that "love . . . has always been confused and confusing" (p. 27) and that "we have never been . . . entirely sure what we mean by love" (p. 26). Evans spells out three issues that need to be carefully considered in any discussion of love. She claims that we first need to question "the relationship between love and desire" (p. 23). Second, we need to consider "our moral confusion about" how we both love and desire (p. 23), about how "we should now organize personal relations" (p. 23). Third, we need to interrogate "the relations of women and men to love" (p. 24). In our ruminations here, we are seeking to explore experiences of love, to reveal that which is too often hidden and silenced, especially in educational contexts. I don't want to present a definitive explanation of love's possibilities in our daily lives. Instead, I simply open up possibilities for asking questions, for communicating, for unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions and conventions. Evans challenges "ideologies of romance" (2003, p. 54) and recommends that we abandon love in "its romanticized and commercialized form" (p. 143). I know you would agree that we don't need to abandon love in any of its forms but that love needs to be constantly narrated and questioned as part of our growing in humanness. How DO we organize our in-love relationships?

Pauline

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Dear Pauline,

I am always seeking the ways of inloveness that are steeped in a rebellion against the impossible, ways of living and loving that leave me both vulnerably exposed and emotionally alive as if the body's epidermis has been removed and everything is experienced with demanding and deafening poignancy, even urgency. I have lived in those ways of immediacy, vulnerability, and sensual attentiveness. I still seek to live in those ways but more and more with a generous splash of middle-aged surrender to stillness and fascination with the familiar. The heart sings many songs. I don't think we will ever answer our questions about love. Love will always remain an ineffable mystery, like physics or mathematics or God. What we can do is tell stories about love, and trust that those stories will animate our hopes and desires, our commitments and actions in creative ways.

In her poetry collection *Thirst*, Mary Oliver (2006) writes, "My work is loving the world" (p. 1). I think this is a testimony that all of us might call out with hope and enthusiasm. How do we as educators choose to love, choose to believe in love, choose to teach in love? How do we promote a vocation of teaching that enters into relationships of love seeking the value, the merit, the significance in students, filled with hope that they, too, will seek the value in themselves, and one another, and us. This is love—eros, agape, philia love. It is no wonder that educators fear love in the classroom, fear its energy for creating havoc, fear its unpredictability, as we fear the body, and the heart, and the spirit. How do we encourage educators to love the people they aspire to teach; to know their students; to enter imaginatively into the lived experiences of others; to listen to others; to learn from others in a system that is always seeking accountability and control?

In *All About Love: New Visions*, bell hooks (2000) acknowledges how difficult it is to talk about the heart: "Taught to believe that the mind, not the heart, is the seat of learning, many of us believe that to speak of love with any emotional intensity means we will be perceived as weak and irrational" (p. xxvii). Hooks understands that "to open our hearts more fully to love's power and grace we must dare to acknowledge how little we know of love in both theory and practice" (p. xxix). Even though we are constantly living by heart, learning by heart, attending to the heart, we still know little about love, little about the experience of the heart.

Of course, I am acutely conscious of the criticisms and concerns regarding self-disclosure in the classroom, but I am encouraged by Paula M. Salvio's timely and thoughtful book, *Anne Sexton: Teacher of Weird Abundance* (2007). Salvio asks:

What does it mean to bring into the classroom dimensions of our lives for which there is such little public acknowledgment? Why might this matter? How can we incorporate the personal into teaching without slipping into demand, confession, voyeurism, or unrefined reflection? How do we make our classrooms a space for the enunciation of something other than predictable retellings of socially inscribed stories of failure and success? (p. 4)

By exploring the pedagogical practices of the poet Anne Sexton, Salvio highlights how "the personal is already a plural condition" (p. 4), and she recommends that educators need

to compose spaces for learning and teaching that are unassimilable to the normal, controlled, anaesthetized spaces that create binary divisions—public and private, past and present, the psyche and the social—urging us to work toward developing an interstitial intimacy. (p. 50)

I think Salvio's notion of "an interstitial intimacy" opens up creative possibilities for telling our stories more, and for telling more stories, especially stories about love and loving.

As Ursula A. Kelly (1997) writes, "seizing the importance of re-presenting and re-writing our selves as we reconstruct our visions of world communities entails deconstructing the stories we tell (of) ourselves and the desires that inform them" (p. 49). I began dating my wife when we were both sixteen and just graduated from grade eleven. We married at twenty, and with her I have explored the experience of a long love. It is good to know long love, but long love must be written creatively, lovingly, with new beginnings rooted in the soil of old beginnings.

WRITTEN IN THE LIGHT HEART
(for Lana)

I have never known another so constant through seasons, even decades.
We met in G. A. Mercer Junior High where we both wore itchy wool blue blazers.
We were thirteen, joy-filled. You laughed always.

Marcus was reading the whole dictionary, had reached D and called you and all
your girlfriends daft distaff and I didn't know what he meant, knew only
I was in love with you, all of you, eager to please, though none of you saw me.

My whole world had been Lynch's Lane and boring facts in textbooks I had swallowed
for no better reason than the promise of a prize at the bottom like a sculpin might suck barnacles.

Years ago on Saturdays we strolled Water Street and Duckworth Street,
went to Woolworth's for strawberry shortcake and milk,
purchased at Afterwords for a dollar or two another armful of books
discarded from Gosling Library, waited for the bus outside Silver's and Sons,
dreaming of rings and weddings, and married, at twenty, ready for the world.

Except I wasn't as ready as you. I lived recklessly in the world, amidst
the wreckage of words, forgetting the tale of a tower's collapse around language,
puffed up with windy dreams.

I shattered faith, was mesmerized by the possibilities of other prepositions.
Like Silas Marner my heart was stone, but light still found the crack.

So last summer we walked the beach in Robinson's where we once walked
often, where the ocean sweeps everything into indecipherable shapes
and lines, and I took photographs for writing in winter in Steveston, faraway,
and now July salt air blows hair across your face, and your hands are full

of stones, shells, and driftwood, while your eyes hold potent dreams,
writing always with the heart's light, even this poem written in the light heart.

Thank you, Pauline, for the privilege of collaborating in wondering and wandering, amidst questions and tangled spaces, honouring always the heart's rhythms.

Always in fascination,

Carl

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Dear Carl,

I am so energized to receive your letters! I saw your email this morning but could not get to it until the evening and all day I've been excited to see what you had written. I feel a real authenticity about this collaboration—a sense that truth and transparency allow the work to write itself. Thank you to you as well, for your commitment to this request.

I believe eros creates and performs a playful space that is charged, erotic in its possibilities for awareness in its liminality and being on the edge (see Phelan, 2005). I have taken your poem to Lana and played with the form and words to create a poem written by fictional character Julia, the writer of my book *Seeing Red* (2007). You discussed in an earlier letter that love is everywhere—in our imagination, in dreams, in words. She writes the poem secretly to her husband Luke, about her newfound love Red. In looking back, I realize that simply by playing with words, I learn so much about myself, about relationships, about love. You mention Silas Marner in your poem. I researched that reference and found a broken-hearted character in love with Eppie, an orphaned blond child he takes under his wing. So I've included Eppie as an underlayer in my poem. The joy of the learning space of eros is the freedom to insert between the spaces, to extend the said along another pathway, or to share and commune so that research and knowing are no longer owned and encapsulated individual commodities, but public porous offerings presented with a spirit of gifting. Only because of our relationship can I take what you have done and play with it to learn in my way.

WRITTEN IN THE DARK HEART

(for Luke)

I have never known another so constant through seasons, even decades
We met at the Flight Kitchens washing dishes for airlines when people still used china
in the skies. I was twenty, wearing a smile. Joy-filled. You laughed always

You asked me to play basketball, impressed I could drive standard
Rosalind told me—you loved me before we met
I saw it in your hello, eager to please, I tried to hide

Secrets like plumb lines, hanging from my pores tangling with movement

laughter unsafe heavy with dread, of exposure

The unbearable memories, physical pain, unstoppable, powerless, defenselessness
My dark red blood, his crisply ironed Sunday shirts, hands around my neck
Scabs on my wrists, guilty as charged, accepted

My whole world had been a martyr, a true Pentecostal believer
Believed I needed to forgive, believed I could overcome, change his history
Didn't know then we were put into a stream, water running, new, but belated too
I was too late, too young, believed unquestionably in love
You took me away, torn from the past, from him

Years ago on Saturdays we strolled Water Street and Gas Town
went to the old Woodward's for sweet deals dreaming of rings and designs
South African diamonds and happily ever after
and married, at twenty-five, ready for the world.

Except I wasn't as ready as you. I knew this was better, you loved me all
I said three words without understanding, I knew no other choice, tried not to think
Only saw your love for me, foreverness in our ease
understanding the words our bodies spoke higher and louder than all
understandings I knew, understood this as love
Time on a wing flew, light and free we dreamed

My faith was shattered slowly, mesmerized by life's possibilities
Memories and unspoken bitterness gone like Silas Marner's Eppie
I was grateful and walked in golden glow

Until last fall, I walked the beach at Jericho
I lay on the grass like never before, where the ocean
sweeps everything into indecipherable shapes and lines
and Red took my breath for living through the seasons
fingers tracing my hair, now faraway

and now November salt air blows hair across my face, and your hands are full
of laundry and dishes to wash and a thermal coupling to replace
and you kiss me and you touch me while your eyes hold potent dreams
unaware that I'm writing always with a darkened heart
to the one who has torn me in two. I am tied with grief
even this poem written in the dark heart

Pauline

*

Dear Pauline,

I hold your words close in the midst of each day's busyness, as I continue to learn to live love in the intricate interstices of longing that knows no bounds. Yesterday my daughter Anna was ill, and so Lana and I picked up our darling granddaughter and spent the day with her. We will soon celebrate Madeleine's first birthday. We spent a wonderful day full of play and adventures, all steeped in love. Being a grandfather is akin to being immersed in loving and learning about love. Like scholars immerse themselves in lifelong devotion to researching their disciplines, I have now immersed myself in a course of study and practice that is intense and joyful, a course of learning about love so I can live love wisely and hopefully as Madeleine's grandfather. Yesterday, as I sat on the kitchen floor playing with Madeleine playing with the pots, she leaned over and kissed me. Madeleine smiles and waves at the world; she kisses with bountiful enthusiasm; she lives with love's faithful generosity.

Love's possibilities are inexhaustible. And even if I don't know much, I have lived long enough to know at least that much. While acknowledging some of the limits of love we wind around the ways of love with modifiers like amorous, brotherly, communal, desirous, erotic, filial, Godly, maternal, paternal, romantic, and sexual, I grow more convinced that we need to narrate love with a creative and pedagogical commitment to love's confusing complexity, labyrinthine dangers, healing efficacy, indefatigable optimism, and inimitable imagination. We need to learn to be, sometimes in stillness, sometimes in bursts of activity, always full of love, always ready to receive the kiss when it is offered.

With love, always, all ways,

Carl

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