

Blog post

At the intersection of philosophy and poetic inquiry

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The relationship between poetry and philosophy is ineluctable (unavoidable and inescapable) and widely understood. Although in this blog post we won't go as far as to claim, like [Coleridge](#), that a poet and a philosopher are the same, we will, however, draw attention to the opportunities poetry and poetic inquiry offer and how these opportunities can underpin the work of philosophy and research methodology. This blog post provides context for a [BERA Conference 2024 and WERA Focal Meeting](#) Symposium titled 'At the Intersection of Philosophy and Poetic Inquiry'.

Poetry and philosophy overlap in many areas. Poetry is concerned with the exploration of human experience: the physical and metaphysical world, issues of ethics and morality, universal questions about existence, knowledge and meaning; reaching for transcendental or universal truths; and so does philosophy. Poetry and philosophy both place a high value on the precise use of language: philosophers strive for clarity and rigour in their arguments, while poets often seek to evoke emotions and imagery. Both use metaphor, ambiguity and symbolism to convey meanings and appreciate the power of form to convey complex ideas, emotions and aesthetics. There is a tradition of philosophical poetry, where poets explicitly engage with philosophical ideas. Examples include the works of [John Milton](#), who explored themes of free will and divine justice, and [Wallace Stevens](#), who contemplated the nature of reality and imagination. Several philosophers have also been poets, contributing significantly to both fields. Notable examples include [Plato \(c. 427–347 BCE\)](#), [Rumi \(1207–1273\)](#), the Indian polymath, [Rabindranath Tagore \(1861–1941\)](#), [Fernando Pessoa \(1888–1935\)](#), the Portuguese poet whose work blends poetry with existential and metaphysical themes, [T.S. Eliot \(1888–1965\)](#), and [Kahlil Gibran \(1883–1931\)](#) the Lebanese writer, poet and philosopher best known for *The Prophet*.

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Although the focus of our individual research is different, each of us embodies the practices of turning to

use of language: philosophers strive for clarity and rigour in their arguments, while poets often seek to evoke emotions and imagery.'

poetic methodologies to respond to philosophical questions and applying philosophical perspectives to inform poetic inquiry. Pithouse-Morgan and her colleagues, Daisy Pillay and Inbanathan Naicker, harness poetry's power for reflexive thinking

and knowing to explore how Ubuntu – an indigenous Southern African philosophy of interdependence – can enhance social cohesiveness and justice in higher education. Intertwining Ubuntu with the 'productive ambiguity' (Eisner, 1997) of poetry, opens up methodological and epistemic possibilities for fostering complex, multifaceted understandings of social cohesiveness and justice, offering a productive resistance to segregated and exclusionary higher education (in South Africa and elsewhere), as illustrated in the first stanza of the poem 'Methodological Inventiveness and Poetic Knowing':

The method is critical, different, fluid,
Illuminating *our* stories in *theirs*:
Entangled, evocative, imaginative,
Evolving, unfinished, provisional.

Smith's doctoral inquiry with mothers of disabled children was underpinned by Blanchot's idea of infinite conversation as 'plural speech' (see Bojesen, 2018), where *witness* is prioritised over *aboutness*. The evocation of the magic of poetry draws attention to everyday experiences of inclusion and exclusion in a way that is haunting and affective 'that bit of otherness about us', as a poem by one mother states. The result is a rhizomatic dance between expression and movement of thought where new feelings and understandings can emerge from existing data and maternal recollections.

For Ekpo, the idea of the self as craftsmanship is exemplified in the use of poetic forms to articulate and represent the self. Her work centres around the notion of critical authenticity, a concept which allows for an existential response that emanates from one's confrontation with tensions in the relationship between oneself and one's world, and the speaking in-to-being of ideas and actions geared towards navigating beyond binary definitions of self. Critical authenticity is understood as the careful exploration, understanding and articulation of self, and follows Foucault's discussion of the self as a work of art (see Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982), exploring how such art, could act as 'an effective tool to talk back to power' (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxxviii), and how it can help to 'expose, highlight and undermine power' (Leggo, 2008, p. 167).

As Leggo ((2008, p. 167)) states, poetry 'creates textual spaces that invite and create ways of knowing and becoming in the world'. Bringing together philosophical inquiry and poetic inquiry enables new knowledge to emerge that might otherwise remain unseen and unheard. In each of the inquiries mentioned above, this methodological approach was employed to draw attention to power, exclusion and oppression.

Poetry can infuse philosophical inquiry with creative potential, to move beyond what is already known.

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Dr Victoria I. Ekpo is an educator in Secondary English Education and until recently a senior lecturer at Edge Hill University, Ormskirk. Her research centres around questions of authenticity – the self and its ontology – and ways in which poetry provides space and opportunities for the critical processes and articulation of the self. Victoria has more than 23 years of expertise in teaching, curriculum development and teacher education. She is a co-convenor for the BERA Philosophy of Education special interest group (SIG). Victoria is also an award-winning writer and poet. Her recent publications include the poetry collection *Ask for Wings that Fly* by BookLeaf Publishing and ‘A Summer Prematurely Here’, published in the *Menopause* anthology by Arachne Press. Her paper on poetic inquiry won best paper at BERA 2022, in the Arts-Based Educational Research SIG.



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Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham. She specialises in professional learning, self-reflexive scholarship and arts-based educational research. Her recent book, *Poetic Inquiry for the Social and Human Sciences: Voices from the South and North* (van Rooyen & Pithouse-Morgan, 2024), is a resource for educators, scholars, students and practitioners interested in using poetry to enhance educational research. It is especially relevant for those committed to advancing educational research paradigms that value contributions from the Global South and foster meaningful transnational collaborations. An

advocate for leveraging the arts to promote educational development and social justice, Kathleen also co-convenes the BERA Arts-Based Educational Research special interest group. Currently, Kathleen leads a funded project on Poetic Research by Teachers in Higher Education, further exploring the synergy between the arts and academia.



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Sharon Smith recently completed her PhD at the School of Education at the University of Birmingham (July 2024). Her research interests relate to inclusion, education, the role of parents of children/young people with SEND, co-production, critical disability studies, risk/vulnerability, philosophy of education, post-qualitative inquiry, feminist materialism and post-human theories. Her PhD research was supported by the inaugural BERA doctoral fellowship.

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