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## LINGERING IN LEGGOIAN LIGHT: CONTEMPLATING CARL LEGGO'S MOMENTOUS MENTORSHIP

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**Anar Rajabali** is an educator, poet, and researcher. Her award-winning arts-based dissertation, (Re)turning to the Poetic I/Eye: Towards a Literacy of Light (2017), is a meditation on poetry, spirituality, and the quest for knowledge. Her research engages poetry (textual and spoken), song, philosophy, autobiography, and curriculum theorizing.

**Abstract:** My PhD supervisor and mentor, Carl Leggo, died of cancer on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019. In this essay, I trace the personal, poetic, intellectual, and spiritual journey of his momentous mentorship. In the absence of his physical being, there is still a profound presence, and what I have come to know as pedagogical light. On his passing, another lyrical lesson began for me on how what a teacher leaves behind can stay in the mind, heart, and soul for a lifetime. I have emerged knowing what it means to live poetically, as Carl was writing and teaching us all along. His mentorship is enduring and continues to shape the art of my own being into fullness as a poet, (re)searcher, and teacher. Here, through prose and poetry, I reflect on Carl's wisdom and how he saw the breadth of my pedagogical being—the whole of the moon.

**Keywords:** pedagogical light; educational mentorship; spirituality; poetic inquiry; arts-based research

*I saw the crescent/You saw the whole of the moon.*

—Michael Scott, *The Whole of the Moon*<sup>1</sup>, 1985

I first met Carl Leggo through his words, as he was attending to autumn light, winter light, moon light, and snow light, and the play of morning mist and fog—listening and leaning into the wind and noting the ways that the gulls and crows enter the wind—hanging still. I journeyed to the teacher I had not yet met as I lingered in his lyrical language like a sweet love song and felt stilled like the birds feeling the rush of wind against their white wings in the cloudless sky. I dwelled in his large imagination, ripe and rich with alliteration which was far-reaching, turning over stones and pebbles of poetry and prose, leaving his sandy footprints with a wellspring of poetic hope on the page, writing into both light and shadow.

It was 2011 and I had recently completed my master's degree when a professor and colleague, Dr. Laura Apol, wrote me a declarative note: "You must do your PhD!" She then invited me to apply to Michigan State University where I had completed my graduate degree. My research interests in poetry, spirituality, and education had fueled an intellectual fire, and I knew I had to keep on this infinite line of inquiry. I remember thinking at the time, as ideas and writing came surging forth, that I would find a way to do this work if I am meant to do it; as the poet/scholar Rumi writes: "Everyone was made for a particular task; desire for it was placed in his heart" (Chittick, 1983, p. 199). But doctoral studies seemed daunting, and I had family and job responsibilities in Vancouver, so I decided to explore local opportunities. I was searching the Language and Literacy Education Department at University of British Columbia when I came across a striking image of Carl. I was in a small office with no window and there was one corner lamp with a white shade which gave some soft comforting light for the evening. I paused and peered closely at his photograph now on my screen—long silver hair and bright white shirt against the background of blue sky (with a few clouds), eyes pondering into the distance, yet near, wise, his face beaming with light filling my room. My initial thought: *He looks like a Sufi*. In that moment, I started my journey to Carl through his words, bringing me into a world of language, opening my own heart-mind to the window of possibility.

Finally, in early October 2011, in that same office, late night, with his articles, poetry, and scholarship spewed on my pen-stained oak desk, a yellow notebook and strong black americano in hand, I wrote to him. In retrospect, I was bold, but his research held a posture of humility and humanity which allowed me to form a bridge. I somehow inherently knew that, if I was meant to be on this path, then it would unfold.

I include selected parts of that email here as it conveys the influence of his work in education and poetry and my desire for his mentorship. As I am tracing how the pedagogical, intellectual, and spiritual connection began, and all the gifts it held and

continues to hold, I am affirmed that certain people enter our worlds as emanating bright lights allowing us to learn, feel, know, and teach what it means to be human.

Dear Dr. Leggo,

I am writing to kindly ask if you would consider taking on a supervisory role in my humble pursuit of the PhD program in Language and Literacy Education. Even though I have not met you, I feel as if I know you through your work and I am inspired with your words. As you write in *Learning by the Heart: A Poetics of Research*: “Research is not possible without love, without the heart” (2006, p. 77) and I have felt the heart in your writing, revealing through your poetry and prose. My time at Michigan State University became a place of discovery and illuminated the pathway as a writer, teacher, and emerging researcher. Further, the act of research became a process of self-discovery and finding a voice that is authentic as you reflect in *Living Poetry: Five Ruminations* (2004) that all your writing is integrally connected to your experience.

Dr. Janine Certo nurtured and supported my work to creative heights as I explored ideas around poetry, education, and aesthetic teaching. She shared this about pursuing doctoral studies: *This is your way of being in the world, you must go forth*. Like Certo, I am passionate about bringing adult poetry to my young learners in meaningful ways sparking their own creativity, connection, wonder and wisdom. The field of poetic inquiry is where I see myself and what has been continuously affirmed, is that having students engage in the writing of poetry forges a path for them to deepen their awareness and appreciation of the English Language while stimulating their own sense of spirituality. You express it most poignantly when you write in *Calling the Muses: A Poet’s Ruminations on Creativity in the Classroom*, “Now, I seek to encourage my students to write poetry as a way to know their worlds, as a way to be, and become, in the world” (2010, para. 3). I am learning, too, that living poetically is the most humanistic way to experience life.

The idea of evoking text put forth by Louise Rosenblatt and her literary transactional theories is profound for me as you write in *Teaching to Wonder* that “Students are energetic and imaginative performers of text” (1997, p. 37). The notion of living through text inspires me to foster inclusive pedagogical practices in giving voice to the plurality of minds and hearts in the classroom. I resonate with your ideas about *Writing Truth in the Classrooms* in that “Writing opens up the possibilities for identity formation and plural truths” (2007, p.33).

Dr. Leggo, I have attached a teaching project entitled: *Opening Silent Wings: Exploring Rumi Poetry in the Classroom*. Rumi has been a great source of illumination in my own life and helped me through times of darkness. Bringing him to the classroom was a sheer joy and solidified my own ideas about poetry, spirituality, and pedagogy. As Rumi writes: “When I stop speaking this poem will close and open its silent wings” (Barks, 1999, p. 66).

Kindly let me know your availability and thoughts,  
Anar

I leaned back, exhaled, lingered just a bit with these words, and then sent it. There is a feeling one has when standing at the edge of something about to emerge—to be atop a cliff before taking that leap into the euphoric wind. I closed the notebook, turned the screen down for the night, switched off the light, softly shut the door, and walked out with this leap of faith. A week later I received Carl's response:

Dear Anar:

Thank you for your lovely message.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your paper which is thoughtful, poetic, and compelling. I read a collection of Rumi's poetry in August, and I was again deeply moved by the beauty and the wisdom of Rumi. I am glad to hear that you are planning to apply for the PhD in LLED at UBC and I am happy to support you as a supervisor.

In Autumn Light,  
Carl<sup>ii</sup>

In autumn light, I walked a coniferous path on the university grounds, passing a stoic Ponderosa pine, to meet Carl in his office at Ponderosa Annex E, an unremarkable small building nestled among the trees. I waited in the high school-like narrow hallway on a small chair, heart full of anticipation, and then his door opened. We greeted each other. I took in his office with one window and a view of the trees, evocative titles of books—*The Heart Aroused*, *Threading Light*, *The Way of Love*—a tidy desk with one sharpened yellow pencil and family photographs of weddings and grandchildren. Carl's full face came into view as we sat across from each other at his brown desk. The conversation took shape as we talked about the program, its competitive nature, my interests, and then, a bit more personally.

He asked: "Are you Ismaili Muslim?" And I said, "Yes," and he then spoke of his respect for the faith, for the Aga Khan, and of Ismaili students for whom he served on doctoral committees. He shared his own Christian background and our common beliefs. A bridge was forming as he asked, "Why do you want to do this PhD? What are your goals? Do you seek an academic position?" I readily replied from a voice deep within, without much thought but with an underlying conviction that surprised even me, "Well, this is part of my spiritual journey." Thinking about it now, I believe that any other potential supervisor might have had doubts about my intentions and abilities. But he did not. I believe Carl saw light and potential—a seeing of a soul. And, if anything, Carl embodied and understood intellectual pursuit as a spiritual endeavour, an extension of Faith; I did not know the breadth and scope of his belief until much later. He leaned forward and said, "Well, we must put in the application." I did not apply anywhere else

and felt that the work would find a home, in whatever form, as it did. A memory comes to mind from that first meeting where he said that he had come to UBC looking for a home for his poetry, and I was also doing the same. He re(minded) me to bring my Ismaili ways of being to the work, to the program and to the field. And I replied: “It is always with me with every breath of my being!”

Like two birds ice skating in the open sky, Carl’s mentorship was a pedagogical dance of a lyrical leading and following, leaning forward, and leaning back, a hand on the shoulder, a hand letting go. Mostly, he gave wisdom and witness, as he inherently and intuitively knew that “when you push someone to become what she’s already becoming, you get in the way...” (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 76). As I was moving through the program slowly, steadily, and soulfully, Carl metaphorically exclaimed in his spirited way: “You have come out onto the ice and performed several triple loops!”

This momentous mentorship manifests with the mentor doing the self-work, and, for Carl, poetry was his soul work. Poetry polished his soul toward living with wellness as he wrote:

The fundamental inquiry of my work is—how can we live well? Poetry is the heart of all my research and teaching. Poetry is a way of attending the personal, but poetry reminds us that we always live in relationship with others, with the vast network of creation.<sup>iii</sup> (Leggo, n.d.)

I lived and learned well with Carl, and, in wellness as wholeness, like the illuminating moon, my scholarship conceptually enacted a vertical space as I wrote into the sky of inquiry. Our meetings were formative; they formed the work into the shape of me as I forged a poetic, personal, and pedagogical path on the page. Carl provoked me to dream, and I contemplated like a mystic musing with the stars.

Palmer (2003) poetically writes, “a teacher has the power to compel students to spend many hours living in the light, or the shadow, of the teacher’s inner life” (p. 4). Carl travelled an inner terrain that maximized the light, and he was both light and shadow, knowing that one could not exist without the other. I know, too, that *I only know light because I know dark*. Carl was complex and shared his past and life openly, always candid about those darker personal moments. As I focus in on the light, there were shades and shadows in the experience as in any human relationship. And were there dark moments between us, grey areas? With a personality as large as Carl’s, it could have been easy to stay in his shadow. There was a time I went dark, riddled with imposter syndrome in my first year, sweating through my shirts in a doctoral course with scholars I felt intimidated by, with their language and quantitative knowledge. I held on to my arts-based ways and courses, finding a sense of belonging there. I inherently knew my methodology had to be my personal odyssey and that I was to be a pilgrim of poetry. Carl had said of the arts-based community that perhaps we are all lost souls that have found each other.

One winter evening, after finishing his narrative class in a basement classroom of the old concrete Neville Scarfe Building, Carl was erasing the board; I lingered behind

him as his hands moved steadily removing the words, the board becoming white. I waited for the classroom to empty. I remember his slightly tattered leather brown briefcase open on the desk. Years later, when I entered his office after he passed away, that same briefcase sat on his office desk, holding his words. It was closed. But here, back to that moment in the dimly lit classroom, I approached him. I do not remember what I said, but I remember my angst. He continued to clean the board and his response, in part, was: “Be yourself, Anar” and then “I wish I could hold up a mirror so you can see who you are, what I see.” It was a brief encounter, but one that stayed with me. I went into the chilled air, my breathing making cloud-like patterns, disappearing then forming again; I was walking with these words.

The humanity of the mentor/mentee relationship started to breathe with an honesty and humility, a living pedagogy that worked first at the level of the soul. What I have learned about teaching, learning, and living is that you lead with soul by giving it and gifting it to others (Bolman & Deal, 2001). In Leggo’s (2008) language: “The effective mentor fires the hearts and imaginations of others . . . with the model of a life committed to learning and teaching, to risk-taking and experimentation, to journeying and growing” (p. 57). With Carl’s wellspring of wisdom, he (em)bodied the values and vitality of how we can learn well together. And this was far-reaching and resounding in those around him. This was simply a way of being in the academy as he wanted it to be, always in hope and in humanism. He spent his life’s work provoking standardized ways of teaching with a ripe imagination, wholehearted intention, and a keen sense of intuition. And remarkable things were achieved by his students, with this effectiveness he wrote of, and the creative commitment he modeled and mirrored—a living pedagogical promise.

As I was lingering with these words and unfolding this piece, I struggled to bring the fullness of his mentorship to the page. I recognize that there is so much that I simply cannot write, but that is felt deeply in a place beyond words. This was Carl’s teaching, not something one could just pinpoint or bring down to organized steps. His own mentor, Ted T. Aoki, of whom he often spoke, fondly, and lovingly, believed that the teacher is the teaching (1992/2005). For Carl, everything was always in process (as his email signatures would often say), always becoming.

While writing this article, I received an email from a dear colleague, Pauline Sameshima, with the subject line, *Remembering You and Carl*. I had not heard from her in a good few years, and, uncannily, just the evening before I had been reflecting on a pivotal moment with Carl during my PhD journey. It was 2014 and I was presenting at a Canadian educational conference at Brock University. My research was starting to take shape and I created a poetic presentation extending my master’s work to new realms. So, with conviction and creativity, I compiled a paper presentation entitled: *Opening Silent Wings: Poetry, Pedagogy and Pluralism*. The room was filled with kindred arts-based researchers whom I admired and read and who had forged the path for me. Since Carl was presenting after me that morning, I had expected that the session would be well attended. I held my papers nervously and stood stiffly beside my images on the screen; I started a bit meekly as I was to share poems and theories about my teaching,

students, and my learning. Carl was seated across from me on a long table in the brightly lit classroom. With each word spoken, some *thing* was emerging in me as I felt affirmation from the audience with nods, note taking, smiles, and gestures. My voice and body stronger as I moved forward, no longer lingering by my slides, I could feel my own wings moving me intellectually, spiritually, and physically. I was *becoming*. Carl was also becoming light-filled and beaming. I now see this as a giving of light that witnesses the mentee coming into her own light, and out of the shadows. Like a moth to a flame, I was held by that light. A colleague later exclaimed: “His chest was puffed out like a proud papa!” I ended my presentation with a poem that I had written for Carl’s narrative writing class.

When I penned that poem it had come quickly, the night before the final assignment was due. I was at my desk reading a bit of Mikhail Bakhtin while my husband Karim was watching Bugs Bunny. My attention turned to the television and the childlike way Karim laughed; there was a keen moment, here, a convergence of flickering images carrying the past and the present from the boy to the man. In the throes of this epiphany, I readily held the pen for the waterfall of words rushing out until the waters were still. When I initially shared the poem with my narrative writing class, Carl loved it and exclaimed animatedly: “I almost shed a tear!”

As I poetically ended my presentation in the classroom on that May morning, I looked up and felt that everyone in the room was with me, and Carl, as poet, was lingering in the echoes of words, knowing intimately the power of poetry to give meaning and healing. Afterwards, Carl clapped high in the air and then turned around, still clapping, to acknowledge my husband, Karim (When Carl met Karim for the first time, he had said to me: “Karim is stability and light!” Another moment where he saw the fullness of the person—not just the crescent but the whole of the moon). And so this email from Pauline left me in wonder and I have come to understand the synchronicity of things; there are guides from beyond. My pedagogical relationship with Carl continues, one that has gifts that I am still encountering with the paths and people he has touched and left behind. In his passing, and in the absence of his physical being, there is still a profound presence. I am learning to be with Spirit.

Pauline eloquently wrote to me:

I write now, remembering beautiful, good times with Carl and the way he smiled at you presenting that day. I felt fullness seeing his love for you and seeing your love for your husband, like a beam of love moving around the room. ♡

I imagine Pauline’s beams of love as rhizomatic lines of pedagogical light, in that room and in other rooms, where Carl was present. I understand why Carl loved my poem, *Karim*, as it was love that guided my pen; as Wiebe (2020) reflects “The integrity of his poetry was an integer of fullness because it was filled out with the language of love” (p. 34). In poetry as an epistemology, knowledge entails virtue and love, as “the heart is always there. I want to seek and fire and grow the heart in my writing. Knowing

it is always there, I want to reveal it as there, pumping and bloody and life-giving”  
(Leggo, 1999, p. 124).

**Karim<sup>vi</sup>**

I am reading Bakhtin<sup>vii</sup>  
His words spewed  
Across my desk  
Rendering another Sunday lost  
In a dense sea of language

Karim is watching  
Bugs Bunny cartoons  
Rising laughter of a 45-year-old man  
With the tender soul of a child  
Innocent to a fault  
Wanting of love

A young boy leaving Africa  
With his uncle shot in the field  
No clothes, no photographs, no returning  
Only memories of a previous life  
May endure

Not knowing . . .

The snow that is Montreal  
A young boy who looks  
From the tiny plane window  
To a white blanket  
A dark face  
A white place  
A family displaced  
And the rising angers of that house

His father loses his fingers  
To a merciless machine  
In a factory he despises  
A once wealthy man now poor  
In spirit

This same hand that used to  
Beat the boy



With sticks  
 For loving  
 All new things  
 For wanting change  
 For music, for cartoons  
 The fingers never recovered  
 A relationship disjointed  
 As the hand is

Now  
 He is wanting of love

He looks to me  
 With his cartoon heart beating  
 Outside of his chest

*What's up Doc*  
*Would you like some tea?*  
*It may help you*  
 Yes, I say, Yes

Never being in love with him more  
 Than I am  
 Now.

I remember profoundly when I completed the last line of my dissertation draft: "You will ask me what this (re)search is and all I can tell you is that I have written into the Light" (Rajabali, 2017, p. 206). I was in my small office again with the pen-stained desk, no window, and a corner lamp emanating some comfortable soft light. I leaned back, let out a sigh and then my shoulders dropped and tears came. *What just came through me?* There was a sense of liberation. What was this flight, this pure leap into the air? And now, feet firmly planted and strongly rooted with rhizome strength, my tree of life and light, both arms reaching up from the earth, of what I have come to know as the conjuncture of horizontal and vertical. I sent Carl the draft and a note, turned off the light, and walked into the night, noting the crescent moon like a comma, the night mirroring my intentions, pausing with me.

Carl was expecting a chapter and I had submitted the full work. When he attended to the draft, he wrote to me to take a deep breath and open the document alongside this note:

You have made remarkable progress! I wondered a few times if I should have responded earlier to a few sections of the dissertation, but by the end of my reading, I recognized that this draft represents your process. You immersed

yourself in the work and created this body of writing. Now, you will continue the process of revisiting your work as you shape it into the lyrical, poetic inquiry you are living.<sup>viii</sup>

And as I moved through each of his suggested edits and his bubbles with comments that peppered the pages, it was clear how Carl saw the fullness of the work and understood my internal process in a dissertation that I felt wrote itself. When he asked me questions that led me to tie the threads of thesis together, his mentorship shone light on the pages. As I was working through it all, I never felt alone and his comments were generative; I grew as a scholar as we dialogued in text and white space together. As I was immersed in this process, I met Carl at a colleague's defence; he said that each bubble was created with care, love, and wisdom, and that he had spent hours in the work. He knew this thesis was lived in. In *The Mentoring Relationship: A Poetic Perspective*, Carl writes "Language as performance invites collaboration and conversation, and a keen sense of confidence that we are engaging together in creating intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic possibilities" (Leggo, 2008, p. 57).

It was snowing softly and surprisingly as Karim and I made our way to the university on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the day I defended my dissertation. We drove through the morning mist on the long road leading to the grounds lined with tall trees and a ghostly monochrome sky that had some light peeking through. I felt spirited and supported and Karim reminded me of the day, five years prior, when I had that pivotal meeting with Carl who had informed me that I was accepted into the program. That day, after the meeting, I waited for Karim at the bottom of the steps at the Museum of Anthropology and then bounced up quickly to him when he appeared at the top. He reminded me how we hugged, and he lifted me up. In the final steps of my journey, I could see Carl did not look too well but his eyes were bright. Moments before I was to begin, I went to take my tasbeeh (rosary) from my purse to place on the podium. These beads had been with me since the first meeting with Carl where we had spoken about faith and how he wanted me to bring my Ismaili sensibilities to the work. What is fundamental here is that he not only led with soul but led me to my own. For this reason, the work was strong poetically, personally, and pedagogically, as "Soul-oriented teachers need wisdom rather than information and a strong imagination. They have to be open to the deepest archetypal thrusts at work in human life and also focused on the absolutely unique individual in front of them" (Moore, 2005, p. 15). Carl provided a space where the soul felt welcome to show up. I presented my thesis earnestly, creatively, and critically.

After a spirited defense and rigorous questioning from the committee and examiners, Carl made a comment that surprised me and stayed with me: "Your writing is the closest to mine." When I had completed this path to merge into another road forward, I would often turn to his words, lean into, and listen for his spiritual wisdom revealed in poetry and prose as playful as the warm whirling whistling wind. Our paths crossed like sparrows in mid-flight, calling to the world lovingly, leaving lines on the same vertical path, upwards.

A year later, I went to visit Carl in his new office in Ponderosa Commons where I passed a prodigious Ponderosa pine on my path. For Carl, there was living pedagogy in the pine trees that shared the land as he reflects in his poem “Pondering the Ponderosa Pine”: “Ever green, ever rooted, ever patient/ever willing to teach us if we are willing to learn/teach us to remember we are guests/on an ancient land with ancient stories/teach us to walk tenderly with one another” (Leggo, 2016, p. 363). In contrast, the inside of the large building was stark and white, but his office had a window to let some natural light in. We had spirited conversation and spoke of poems, family, his wife, Lana, grandchildren, Karim, and my sisters who he had come to know through my animated stories of growing up, and then, of his illness. He signed his new book, *Hearing Echoes*, with: “Anar, thank you for the poetic journeys in light and in love!” As our time together had ended, Carl walked me out down the hallway and then gave a comforting embrace. I remember amid walking away, looking behind me for a moment, and he was gone; the hallway was empty.

Carl passed on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019, and it dawned upon me later that I had defended on the same day just two years before. There was also a fall of surprising snow the day he left. I imagined the Ponderosa pine touched with white on the needles, reaching up for the one who walked this path as we grieved for the gregarious, gentle, gracious guest of the Earth who taught us to walk tenderly with each other. As the title of the poetry book he gifted, Carl’s lilting lively lyrical voice was still strong and heard and echoed as we turned to his poetry seeking comfort and connection. His words resonating and vibrating and alive. Carl lived with the language of love. This love stays eternal.

I took the long road to UBC to present at a conference honouring his work: *The Many Faces of Love*. That moment was the true end of the journey. I could not see a world without Carl Leggo, but that day another pedagogical lesson began: what a teacher leaves behind goes beyond physical presence and stays in mind, heart, and soul for a lifetime . . . still teaching . . . still learning. This was the power of his momentous mentorship. And, as I was among the sea of faces, of those who Carl had loved and taught to love, I learned the most human lesson of all, what Carl was teaching us all along: *How to live well and love well with others*. His Spirit hovered over us like hues of a rainbow filled with colour and beaming with love. We were listening.

In the middle of mountainous grief, I (re)turned to his words where something remarkable happened. As I lingered in his own treatise on light, I felt a keen sense of communion with his creative spirit and Creation; he lived the path of his poetics pulsating in a sensual world as

I listen to light, smell the line of a heron startled into slow motion by my presence, taste the screeches of eagles and hawks, poke with the roots and alders and aspens into the black earth, see the scent of the seasons. (Leggo, 1999, p. 117)

I wandered in and through his scholarship as I connected with Carl in another space, a liminal place. We met in the in-between of earth and sky and dark and light. This was not a bridge but a crossing over as I wrote the words to a poem that became crisscrossing light lines of lyrical love. Here, through his words and mine, my mentor

was still part of my becoming. What had started as a found poem became a duet of diction where Carl's words took me to my own poems and images, and, as I presented what is to follow at the conference, I could hear him echoing. And when my vision was compromised, where sight was slight, Carl invited me to listen.

In *Research as Poetic Ruminations: Twenty-Six Ways of Listening to Light*, Carl Leggo (1999) writes "My research is an invitation to listen to light, to savour it on the tongue, to rub it in the hands, to roll naked in the light, to smell the light, to know that light is a language, revealing and concealing" (p. 124). I take this invitation to embark in this lyrical light play, with no longer a primacy of seeing but listening, touching, feeling, and sensing. In understanding the soul of Leggo's scholarship as held in this seminal piece, I perform a poetic boomerang enacting the resonances in between his lilting voice and words and my own, as I seek to know the texture of this Leggoian Light. <sup>ix</sup>

### He is the One Who Attends to the Light

He is the one who attends  
to the Light—  
autumn light and winter light,  
sunlight, moonlight, and snow light  
where snow becomes light manifest  
hushing the Earth *with verb exuberance*  
*reducing the world* but expanding the white  
of snow felted signs of life  
beneath the covered brown branches peeking out  
promise of perennial petals (spring always comes)  
I yearn to listen to the silence of the snow now  
bow breaking and cracking under the weightiness  
A lightness that envelopes the brown mundane ground.

He tastes winter with a *lover's appetite*  
carving letters in the caked snow  
savouring the bone deep cold no longer numb to the world  
(no fingers required)  
His heart writes  
*A Winter's Alphabet* shaping a poet's imagination  
I remember . . .  
My pink baby tongue tasting crystals  
A little red jacket in the white pristine,  
A snow angel  
(I am one wing you are the other)  
forming into the shape of me  
poetry is the inquiry  
feeling the melting I listen to the memory

of the quenching cold  
 colouring my *monochrome world*  
 like the snow in the mountains  
 homing in the *creases and the cracks*.

He is the one who *leans into the wind*  
 noting ways  
 the *gulls and crows hang still*  
 to its caresses entering body with an invisible light  
*swirling sensual sea on the inside*  
 like the Dervish who moves to her heart's rhythms  
 attuning to the Hu (Allahu, Allahu!)  
 and the hue—  
 listening for the spaces in-between the beats  
 elongating the breath and the breadth  
 in poetry pulsating with the tones of a transforming being  
 I see a rainbow playing patterns on his soul  
 flickering through the I/Eye  
 A light that lights the worlds spinning  
 a silky web of words, *a tangled life*,  
 rhizomatic revelations in *Newfound* lands<sup>x</sup> of discovery  
*zigzagging over essence* like the zigzagging low tide  
 I walk on Rathrevor Beach meandering  
 for a day in the veritable blanket of butterfly shells and placid  
 pools of reflective waters.

He yearns for *research that is long*  
 like the winding Fraser River that purposefully  
 finds its way to the Pacific Ocean  
 meeting waters at Stevenson<sup>xi</sup> (*a poetic part of the world*)  
 carrying salt, sludge, seaweed, and sediment  
 and life forms  
 in the murky depths  
 invisible to the eye  
 but he listens  
 to the lingering waves  
 of words revealing in the frothy ebb and flow  
 rolling to the rhythm of the tide  
 onto the shores of poet's peaking mind  
 carried by continuous conjunctions  
 (and, and, and . . . )  
 I throw a rock into the river  
 and watch it skip twice and thrice

radiating sudden circular lines outwards  
 like the sun that tenderly plays diamond light  
 on the water's surface  
 which quickly disappears back into smoothness now  
 undisturbed—  
 I learn to listen for the reciprocal reverberations of a landscape  
 language that is lyrical and calling like a lover's song.

He plays in the mischievous mist and fog  
 hovering low between the green mountain trees  
 in the early morning  
 along the edges of the sea  
 wings of grey that frolic and tease  
 a dawning of desire creeps upon the morning  
 dew that holds his poetry  
 unfolding words to the seamless sky  
 He is the one with lifted eyes  
 and I grew up looking up too  
 Dad would say: Anar, come, look at the moon  
 it is so full and luminous  
*burning cold in the river*  
 and I want to press my face against the moon  
 and know the star's shining  
 of what I cannot hold in my hands  
 but sheds light over me in this *lyrical lunacy*  
 Rumi writes: Both light and shadow are the dance of love<sup>xii</sup>  
 Carl knows: *No light without shadow/no shadow without light one*  
 Poetry is his shadow coming in between the rays of light  
 casting words behind him  
 silhouetted in syllables, consonants, and long vowels.

And Leggoian light like Van Goghian light—  
 lines crafted with the hand that tenderly paints  
 colour in the bending emerald green grass  
 with the subtle wind like a whisper  
 and poetry starts with a whisper  
 I am listening . . .  
*Like a sparrow who lines light in its flight*  
*calling to the world lightly*  
 I remember the Blue Jay  
 trapped in my living room  
 coaxing beating bloodied body toward the window  
 into the soft sun

And like your sparrow  
 I imagine her suspended in the air  
 feeling the wind against her vivid wings  
 rushing of freedom  
 before finding the beaks of her young  
 this deep call to duty  
 like your poetry  
 doting over words  
 for freedom flickering light  
*in the cracks, gaps, and spaces*  
*emanating through research as rumination*  
 an invitation to hear Carl's heart beating  
 on the outside.

*Why are you here?*  
 He once asked.

*This poetry, this work, it must be my spiritual journey.*  
 I say.

*Well then, come, we will find a home.*  
 And this has been my *teacher's way*.<sup>xiii</sup>

As I end echoing the title of a poem Carl wrote for his own mentor, Ted Aoki, I step into eternity, a place where the pedagogical light of the teacher endures beyond time and space. I have emerged knowing what it means to live poetically, shaping the art of my own being into fullness as a poet, researcher, and teacher. Carl saw the fullness of my pedagogical being—the whole of the moon.

Like the north star, his words become an eternal guide for those who pledge to live well with others and the Earth, breathing hopefulness and happiness. Carl's (re)search explored the galaxy of his own being and those who journeyed and learned with him grew alongside. Teacher and student are no longer alongside but meet in between earth and sky—between the horizontal and vertical—with poems. My office now has a large rectangular window, and my street is lined with trees and a view of the distant mountains. The sky is everchanging here, moment by moment, clouds creep in, blue sky appears, stars shine near, stars shine far away like shards of diamonds, birds linger on the wire, birds cross through in patterns. The sun is bright and crimson, the sun disappears and evening settles. Nature's colours create a palette of paint in hues I cannot describe but fill my soul with splendour. I have attuned to the beauty of the nuance. I am learning to be literate in light.

But what is most remarkable is the moon—sometimes it sits like a comma, a pause in the sky, a sliver of crescent beauty. Sometimes it hides behind the towering, silhouetted Douglas fir trees where I can see glimpses of its shape and light. But the

moon is often full, here, and hanging outside my window. And as I witness its wise mystical light and dream of people and places, I am filled with gratitude for Carl—the one who cleared the path forward and brought me to light. Teacher, *I am shining*.

### **When Night Comes**

When Night comes  
I leave the curtains undrawn  
And hope to see your lyrical moon gracing my window  
Full and luminous speaking in love's language  
There are no borders to her light  
No worlds separating us  
*Beaming*  
She enters my room illuminating  
my paper and my pen  
As I write into the play of light and shadow  
And I imagine you *whirling* somewhere  
There  
Beneath the magnificent moon  
Casting your poetry to us below  
Beautiful. Boundless. Bare.



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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> These lyrics are from a song by the band The Waterboys. I am inspired by their 1987 surprise performance for a group of school children in Ireland. I believe Carl would have loved this clip and the vigour in which the students sing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLAPOxpXGkU>

<sup>2</sup> C. Leggo, personal communication, October 11th, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> From an interview with Carl Leggo featured on the Faculty of Education website at the University of British Columbia: <https://educ.ubc.ca/professor-carl-leggo/>

<sup>4</sup> Bug Bunny is a beloved animated cartoon character created in the 1930's and appearing on Looney Tunes. Known for the catch phrase, "What's up doc?"

<sup>5</sup> Used with permission

<sup>6</sup> Poem previously published in book chapter: *The Melody of My Breathing: Toward the Poetics of Being*. Canadian Curriculum Studies/ A Métissage of Inspiration/Imagination/Interconnection, p. 276. 2018. Used with permission.

<sup>7</sup> I refer to Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986) work on *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. I am inspired by his notions that "I live in a world of others' words" (p. 143).

<sup>8</sup> C. Leggo, personal communication, August 3rd, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> I have italicised Carl's words, phrases and titles from his poetry and prose that inspired me.

<sup>10</sup> Carl was a Newfoundlander by birth and many of his poems and writing vibrate with the geography of his growing up.

<sup>11</sup> Carl lived in Stevenson, British Columbia, which he called a poetic part of the world as surrounded by mountains, oceans, sky, and birds.

<sup>12</sup> From Rumi's poem *The Meaning of Love* as translated in D. Chopra's (1995) *The Love Poems of Rumi* (p. 50).

<sup>13</sup> Carl wrote a poem for his own mentor, Ted Aoki, titled *The Teacher's Way*. Carl's eloquent and evocative reading can be found here as he received the 2012 UBC Killam Award for Excellence in Mentoring: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLCx6BFUxpY>