In my research I use poetry and narrative to explore representations of genius, giftedness and exceptional talent in the cultural imagination, and experiences of learners identified as highly gifted and talented. For the following poems, I drew on two documentaries about Canadian musician-icon Glenn Gould, one from 1959 and the other from 2006, as well as, the screenplay for Thirty-Two Short Films about Glenn Gould...
Born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, pianist and composer, Glenn Gould (1932-1982), gained renown in the 1950s for his recordings of Johann Sebastian Bach, his technical mastery, especially of contrapuntal form, and “his eccentric piano technique and personality”. (“Glenn Gould.” In Wikipedia). The word eccentric comes up in even brief public discussions about Glenn Gould (as for example, “Glenn Gould.” In Wikipedia). In this way normalcy is reified at his expense as talk of so-called eccentricity is woven through talk of his talent.

Watching footage of Gould in interview as a young man, I am reminded of many young people I encounter in my work and research with adolescents identified as gifted. I dwell on his precise diction and his expansive vocabulary; bask in his intensity and idealism. Gould’s musicianship was rooted in his deep emotional response to music, in a conception of art as spiritual and ethical, in his humanity itself. Gould abhorred the tradition of applause during a musical performance and spoke of the audience as evil. They watch performers risk so much, he said, without needing to risk anything themselves. Psychiatrist and poet, Kazimierz Dabrowski, postulated that highly creative individuals possess psycho-neural “overexcitabilities,” which serve as catalysts for their psychological and moral development (Piechowski, 2002). Gould’s eccentricities, such as wearing gloves most of the time, rarely eating in the presence of others, feeling ill easily, were perhaps just a highly sensitive body’s response to the impact of the world; signs that he experienced himself in the world acutely and sought reprieve. The word eccentric (from late Latin and Greek ekkentros, ek- meaning ‘out of’ and -kentron meaning ‘center.’) has its origins in late Middle English and means a circle or orbit not having the earth precisely at its center (Hawkins & Allen, 1991).

As I progressed through the writing of these poems, I touched my own heart as an observer. I observed my emotions in relation to his performances, interviews and depictions of his being. Using this felt sense of relativity, experiencing the emotions that rise up in the space between, I felt I understood his situation and my own better. I doubled and tripled back through these poems, expressing this perpetual (e)motion between self and other. I signaled connections, layered fragments, and associated words and meanings across the page to convey the polyphony of experience over time, the resonances and dissonances in my shifting sense of self in relation.

I have spent a lifetime in Special Education. The year I was identified for my first gifted program as a child is the same year Glenn Gould died. Some days, poetry helps me to hold my present as a researcher-educator and my past as a gifted-child in the same body. Within these poems, I played in a field of emotion, memory and relationship and found new possibilities in these places. There is no one clear path through, the poems invite permutation but do not demand it. I wish to invite the eye and inner ear of the reader to stretch, to take in as much as possible, and to perform, like Glen Gould, an expression of living complexity.

**No. One**

Minutes after his death
they crack open his head, 2
polyphonic outpouring
liquid crystal sound.

Forget harm/ony,
Gould cries.
piano like me was born
for counterpoint:
its strings, my nerves,
its keys, my bones.
A body of complex music.

Thirty-two short films about
Glenn Gould, \(^1\)
genius refracted:
still - life pulsates,
close-up of a hand \(^4\)
(not) growing
old on the keys.

Start, finish,
start again,
the music spins out,
a hundred and one webs
and Gould an ancient
spider plays alone
on the silk lines.

\(^1\) i watched images of you at twenty-seven body feline
over the piano emotions funneled pinhole exposure, a lunar eclipse.

sweet sadness of
re-cognition bubbles
up around my heart.

\(^2\) my image of you inert under scrutiny seems un-feeling un-poetic now I knew this once my image of you a bruise a spot
of darkness over tenderness.

soft flesh of
my heart
re-members.

my image of you \(^2a\) inert just a bruise a spot of dark- ness my image before i turned like the moon-turns (it is time & how you keep it) my image of you over tenderness it is time & how you bend it.

i resonate (I knew this once)
a raison d’être (like the moon turning)
my heart now fuller.

2a When the drill leaves his temple out spills a fluid polyphony. The clinic fills like a rain barrel during a sonic monsoon. Every vibration that Steinway on spindles ever uttered. Polyphony run amok, liquid crystals line dancing. The doctors bob like apples in waves of sound.

One recalls a childhood garden, lavender fingers, gladiola arms, raspberry cane knees, thumb-sized centipedes drunken bumblebees. Crouched beside a Monarch butterfly, she held her breath. Touch him and he dies! Another remembers how he stumbled upon 4 a rabbit in a snare, the feeling of the trembling body, his hands too small too big how he turned away, but wept at dinner when his Dad carved the Sunday roast.

When the music ends they know only what they have forgotten.

**Stroke of genius**

Gould despalled of those who paid attention to him instead of his music. He opposed applause.
He composed 
*The Solitude Trilogy.*

A slap on the back
like a hammer like
a hammer like a
hammer on
a wrong note,
made him ill & off balance
for weeks. In 1964

he stopped performing
publicly, retreated
to the studio
until

he suffered a stroke
on his 50th birthday. Died
days later.

At Fran’s in Toronto
he ate scrambled eggs
every night at 2am.
He could not eat with others.
He hungered while they slept.
I remember this along with
how he left the stage
halfway through life.

The piano repertoire
exhausted, he
aspired to conducting
and poetry.

**Found Scene: Glenn Gould On and Off the Record. NFB, 1959/1999**

**PHOTOGRAPHER**
(approaches Gould at an angle):

**GOULD**
(at the piano):

*How do you feel
about photographs?*

*Must I?*

**PRODUCER**
(disembodied voice)
over the speaker):  

**GOULD**  
(begins to play):  

Get him to put the gloves  
on the piano  
and to put on that scarf.  

No!  
I’ve had just about enough now  
of that type of picture!

**PHOTOGRAPHER**  
(moves in close  
for a shot).

**Blessed**

A truck stop  
at the edge of town,  
a waitress in love,  
no music like this  
on Earth, except here.  
Gould³ in a booth for four,  
clink of porcelain &  
icicle cutlery, voices  
swirl, accumulate.  
Wool-swaddled fingers,  
subtle body held  
close, infinity close  
at hand.  

Gould in a bell jar,  
space-born sounds,  
nearal net charged  
bring him to God.  
Shoulders stooped towards  
his heart, he musics  
the landscape.  
This is what the music  
means. He lives the Earth  
into cosmic sound.  
³ First name Glenn,  
comes on strong  
ends with a purr.  
A name to gasp  
& linger upon.  
Oh Glenn! A hook
sunk in my river.  
I would if I could  
murmur Oh Glenn!  
in your super-sonic ear.  
But I can’t Oh Glenn!  
You keep your distance creatively.  
Another Glenn with 2 nn  
was John Glenn,  
the first astronaut  
to fly around  
the earth.


References


About the Author

Pamela Richardson is a PhD Candidate in Special Education at the University of British Columbia, and an Instructor in the Faculty of Education at Vancouver Island University.
Her work focuses on writing and the literary arts as a means of inquiry into the experience of identities such as genius and gifted. Her dissertation research involves the use of digital stories to explore radical early-entrance to university. She is curious about cyborgs and other complex metaphors that help us relate to transgressive forms of human learning and being.