



## A POETICS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

—NADINE CHAPMAN  
WHITWORTH COLLEGE

*One day somebody “identified” me. Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers there): “Can you describe this?” And I said: “Yes, I can.” And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face.*

—Akhmatova (1985, p. 87)

Anna Akhmatova places her great elegiac poem, “Requiem,” in the years of the Yezhov terror, during Stalin’s purges, when she spent seventeen months in prison queues, trying to see her son, Lev. Out of great fear, which relegates people to suspicion of one another and a depraved anonymity, comes this face-to-face expression, the giving of oneself in relationship to another. The openness expressed here in speech is not yet a conceptual act based on the will, but an attitude in response to the other person. Akhmatova responds to the woman’s turn to her with the word, spoken and poetic. In so doing, she takes responsibility for her own presence and acknowledges the other, as well as the vulnerability of the woman before her. She then moves to the knowing, moral act of using the word in a particular form. She leads through her poetic response, as a voice for human dignity in the midst of mass terror. As a poet, she fuses this need to speak out with the fullness of language.

Many leadership models address the importance of language and value various creative language forms, especially storytelling, on some practical level. Recognizing that human beings understand their relationship to the



cosmos and one another through narrative, Wheatley (1998) emphasizes the importance of storytellers. She writes of servant-leadership and changes in organizations as a new story, a tale of life beginning with a dream that creates a world image (pp. 340, 344, 348). Greenleaf (1977/2002) cites Alfred North Whitehead's call for understanding language's link to imagination, seeing it as a critical facility for the leader (p. 18). In "Bearing Witness," Autry (1998) finds the language of everyday work and lives inadequate for the expression of feeling and meaning. He explains the need for a more metaphorical view (p. 311). Greenleaf (1977/2002) offers a poem by Robert Frost, "Directive," as a way of sharing the leadership journey. He assigns the poem's power to the use of symbol, for "all symbols are potential sources of new meaning" (p. 316). He continues to acknowledge creative language's impact on his thinking in "My Debt to E. B. White," noting White's ability to see the whole (1998, p. 235).

In the essay "An Inward Journey," reprinted in this second volume of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*, Greenleaf (1977/2002) writes that reading "Directive" with understanding involves awareness, "letting something significant and disturbing develop between oneself and a symbol" (p. 316). He encourages us to risk being moved by symbols that "cry out to speak to us," for interacting with them offers meaning and the possibility of new creation. It is often the underlying symbol that allows the poet to express something as abstract as the meeting place between human feelings and the universe. Inspiration does come from the impact of the natural world as symbol. Even a tree stump gives something beyond itself in meaning, in transcendence through poetry.

For Greenleaf, the inward journey "Directive" involves "radical, searing losses," symbolized in the poem as that which is "burned, dissolved, broken off" (p. 327). It also means, according to Frost, following a guide "who only has at heart your getting lost" (p. 318). Yet this is the path of great religious traditions, the path of seekers. Encountering the unknown seems a necessary step to finding oneself. Rather than marking tragedy, such painful losses "are seen as opening the way for new creative acts" (p.



327). Greenleaf believes that the willingness to grasp the opportunities loss presents requires faith, humanity, and spiritual growth. It can lead to the greatest gift possible: love. Society's rejected—the misfits and the undesirable—may move ahead on this road to spiritual growth with more ease than those lauded as upright citizens of good works. Awareness, for Greenleaf, “is infinite and therefore equal in every human being,” but it requires consciousness of uncompensated personal losses and the errors of cultural inheritance (p. 328).

*Your destination and your destiny's  
A brook that was the water of the house,  
Cold as a spring as yet so near its force  
Too lofty and original to rage. (p. 322)*

Within Frost's use of the water, “the great symbol of wholeness,” Greenleaf identifies the need to look at the past, but not for security and comfort (pp. 322-323). Instead, the seeker also risks drinking from the cup of new and fresh ideas.

*Here are your waters and your watering place.  
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion. (p. 326)*

Robert Pinsky (1999), United States Poet Laureate (1997-2000), focuses on a past presented in “Directive” as “mysterious spiritual reality” attained through a journey (p. 70). Pinsky believes that, moving beyond the individual, Frost's poem suggests that the destiny of a people rests on “the fragile, heroic enterprise of remembering,” the act of historical recovery (p. 70). Here memory serves as the source of wholeness, and Frost challenges us to engage in this cultural work of recovery that helps shape us as a people.

*The height of the adventure is the height  
Of country where two village cultures faded  
Into each other. Both of them are lost. (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 321)*



Greenleaf and Pinsky see this memory quest as challenging, but critical to knowing ourselves. Beyond our personal journeys of growth, as responsible people, is the grace of sharing our symbolic experiences with others and receiving their understanding and guidance.

In exploring poetry's role in leadership theory, Wheatley (1998) and Greenleaf (1977/2002) provide an important doorway. The phenomenological investigations of Levinas (1989a, 1993) and Ricoeur (1976, 1991a, 1991b) further open the view by connecting poetry to ethical response. Meaning level (an aspect of our understanding and our ability to grant it symbolic function) becomes paramount and is accessed through poetry, lyric fiction, metaphor, and imaginative narrative fiction. Ricoeur (1991a) understands poetry "not only in the sense of rhythmic and rhymed forms of language, in the broad sense of the word lyric fiction," but also as narrative fiction "in the sense that the plot of narrative is a creation of productive imagination which projects a world of its own" (p. 452). The poetic preserves and enlarges language's capacity for meaningfulness often through the power of figurative speech. Original metaphors the poet creates bring to language the implicit semantics of the symbol and help lead us to symbolic understanding (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 59). Ricoeur (1991a) demonstrates that there is not just an epistemological and political imagination, but a more fundamental linguistic imagination that generates meaning, especially through the power of metaphor (pp. 448-462). As a poet, I am called by the face of the other, by the vulnerability and need shown in the other's face, to respond from this linguistic depth. Such an ethical relation, the one-for-the-other, comprises the central movement of Levinas' philosophy (Levinas, 1993, pp. 96-97), and it is the ground from which this essay proceeds. Levinas even prefers the word sanctity or *après vous* to ethics, where sanctity "is the principle of an ethics whose foundations rest on the priority of the other and on 'my' finite responsibility" for her or him (Hansel, 1999, p. 169). In this essay, servant-leadership is explored by describing the initial ethical movement in the poetic response to others found in the work of each of four poets.





### *Dangerous vitality*

Greenleaf (1977/2002) views the servant-leader as one willing to “create dangerously,” a phrase taken from Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus’ last lecture (p. 12, 48). Such a person has some foresight or intuition for the unknowable that comes of listening to others and putting their priorities first (p. 17). Wheatley (1998) finds that the servant-leader gives voice to a story of life that serves the human spirit and nurtures it. It is relational, based on “the nature of life to move toward one another” (p. 349). Servant-leaders “act in service to the great creative desires that each of us carries” and possess the courage to tell the story (pp. 349-350). Servant-leadership begins with the movement toward service, and “then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 13). But Greenleaf sees one “limitation on language”: the need for the hearer to make “that leap of imagination that connects the verbal concept to the hearer’s own experience” (p. 18). The leader’s generous and creative response proves critical to the hearer’s leap of imagination and to leadership theory in that it serves “as an indication of the way” (*Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971, p. 1588). Such an indication, forged of reflection, awareness, discernment, and inspiration, occurs prior to any model.

The ability to lead entails going in advance—taking a risk for the other person with the willingness to speak out in the fullness of language. Such a position suggests a foundational role for poetry, including lyric fiction, in theories of leadership, especially servant-leadership. This role deserves study for many reasons, notably poetry’s expressions of ethical response and responsibility, transcendence, and semantic innovation as important for new possibilities of thought. The leader often relies on the poet’s figurative language ability to project a sense of vision and moral imagination, to speak and write in depth of a fresh approach, or to propose an altered path. To appreciate these dynamic connections involves unmasking the interrelated nature of ethical movement, poetic language, and thought as they find expression in responsive, responsible leadership.



Connections between servant-leadership theory, Levinas' transcendental ethical philosophy, and Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology, as well as poetry and literary theory, can form an important nexus of life-philosophy, contemplation, and action. In the following section, key terms that appear in the essay are defined, showing how terms traditionally associated with specific disciplines are used in the present context.

#### GROUNDWORK

A phenomenological starting point, where phenomenological inquiry begins and philosophical orientation occurs, is "the conviction that a radical interrogation of meaning requires us to penetrate beneath the established concepts of empirical, logical or scientific 'objectification' (what Husserl called the 'natural attitude') to that concretely 'lived experience' of . . . temporal and historical *being-in-the-world*" (Kearney, 1984, p. 7).

*Hermeneutics.* In a general philosophical sense this term implies a theory, method or approach to interpretation. As Ricoeur (1974) notes,

hermeneutics involves the general problem of comprehension. And, moreover, no noteworthy interpretation has been formulated which does not borrow from the modes of comprehension available to a given epoch: myth, allegory, metaphor analogy, etc. . . in Aristotle, *hermeneia* is not limited to allegory but concerns every meaningful discourse. (p. 4)

Ricoeur also insists that "every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others" (p. 17). By overcoming the distance between the person and the text or signs, the person can "appropriate meaning" to herself or himself (p. 16).

*Meaning.* In phenomenological approaches to understanding one aims to explore meanings. Poetic images allow us to read meaning into images, though "we *see* some images only to the extent that we first *hear* them" (Ricoeur, 1991b, p. 128). Expressive meaning, such as that derived from



poetry, is “meaning obtained from contexts that express, and thus elicit, such things as mood, feeling, emotion, values. . . Expressive meaning may also have cognitive or other kinds of meaning associated with it” (Angeles, 1992, p. 180). For Levinas (1993), the other person gives sense to expression, and it is only by her or him that a phenomenon as a meaning is, of itself, introduced into being (p. 95).

*The face.* Levinas’ description of “the face” and his references to its “appearance” refer to a dimension of the other person. This term is fundamental to Levinas’ philosophy. With an allusion to Plato’s idea of the Good, Levinas characterizes the face as coming from on high. Some other metaphors he uses characterize “the other as a stranger, as naked (not clothed in the cultural paraphernalia that make us similar), as destitute or marginal, as an orphan or widow” (Peperzak, 1998, pp. 114-115). The focus is not on representation but on vulnerability. Peperzak notes that aside from these negative qualifications,

the only way to express the impact made by the other [the face] in positive terms is to use ethical language: the other reveals a command; to address me (in looking at or speaking to me) is to reveal my being-for-the-other in the sense of serving, respecting, and honoring the other’s “height.” As other—not through any deed or wish or will—the other deserves my devotion or dedication to or responsibility for him or her . . . Here a kind of ought is the only possible correlate of the manifestation of the “being.” My obligation to serve the other coincides with my being what I am as revealed by the other’s presence before me. (p. 115)

Many connections exist between poetry, philosophy, ethics, and leadership, and the ethical movement of language, which knows no boundaries, precedes all such demarcations. Boundaries tend to preserve influence and authority through spheres of power. Drawing from the metaethical philosophy of Levinas, psychologist George Kunz (1998) argues that such a Darwinian approach or thesis “is challenged by the thesis that is beyond any thesis: *ethical responsibility*” (p. 23). The idealistic myth of individual



freedoms over individual responsibility falls to the call from the weak for “the strong, especially as a community, to protect them,” for “conscience is not a private whisper; it is knowing together” (p. 23).

As a writer of poetry, in a heightened way, I may respond to the face of the other person in need. I can never live in some hiding place of inwardness. My words express not only content as knowledge, but the interhuman debt, our vulnerability to one another. I am concerned with language that sees, hears, and touches the particular person. Such concrete, sensory detail avoids abstraction and fights against dehumanization. Of special interest is my unique opportunity for an expressive response that accepts the call for an ethical answer. This is not a disembodied moment, but requires movement of one human being toward another within the contingencies of daily life.

As a fine art, creative writing is *praxis*. Freire (1993/2001) finds that a “true word” is not only reflection but also *praxis*, capable of transforming reality (p. 87). Without this dimension, language becomes empty. The oppression of voice eventually leads to resentment, depression, and even rage. The poet’s voice and relations with the world become an invaluable force in society as ethical leadership (Guare, 2001, pp. 82-87). Wheatley’s (1998) new tale for servant-leadership moves from the old mechanistic story of domination and control, which engenders fear, to “autopoiesis—self-creation—from the same root as poetry” (pp. 342, 346). Leadership as the author’s voice crying out through poetry in the literal face of injustice participates in this critical movement.

Poets consistently lead through their art without organizational authority, and Heifetz (1994) finds certain benefits in this type of leadership, including the ability to a) “deviate from the norms of authoritative decision making,” b) “more readily raise questions that disturb,” c) have “more *latitude for creative deviance*,” and d) live “closer to the detailed experiences of some stakeholders in the situation” (p. 188). Again, the echo of Camus’ voice is heard: create dangerously! In this context, several examples of how the poet’s ethical response and the language of poetry may prove inte-



gral to leadership theory can illuminate the process of poetic leadership and its global range.

#### FOUR POETS

*The world is not a horse you can bridle,  
To be mounted and ridden at your pleasure.*

—da Todi (1982, p. 181)

Italian poet Jacopone da Todi sent this warning to Pope Boniface VIII while imprisoned from 1278 to 1303 (Peck, 1980, pp. 125-131). Jacopone's religious poetry is marked by its lack of moderation and by intemperance of language that scandalized conventional critics. He made sport of the corruption around him and railed against the flagrant abuse of ecclesiastical power, especially that of Pope Boniface VIII, who excommunicated Jacopone and sent him to a subterranean cell, where he suffered solitary confinement for almost five years. In his prison poems, "without rival in the literature of his time for their mocking self-scrutiny, an astounding variant of Franciscan humility, Jacopone marked the beginning of a *vita nova* and a new poetry" (Hughes, 1982, p. 57). In his first letter to Boniface, *Lauda* LVI, he says two shields protect him against the Pope's anathema and excommunication:

*For I have two shields, and unless I lay them aside  
No steel can pierce my flesh, per secula infinita  
The first shield is on the left, the other on the right.  
The one on the left has been proven as hard as diamond,  
No weapon can penetrate it:  
This shield is my self-hatred, bonded to God's honor.  
The shield on the right is of ruby;  
It blazes like fire, flames leaping high:  
It is made of ardent love of neighbor.  
Step closer and you'll feel its heat with a rush.  
Do what you will, this love will overcome you.*

(1982, p. 178)



As poet and mystic, Jacopone da Todi leads by offering a poetic response to those of his time. Composing his poetry in the familiar Umbrian dialect, considered coarse by the elite of his day, rather than Latin, immediately connected Jacopone to the common people, and this linguistic affinity for them was rewarded with their deep affection (Peck, 1980, pp. 180-181). One prison poem, marked by an ironic realism that voices the poet's resolve, so captured his near contemporaries that he is pictured in the prison on a fifteenth-century manuscript, and a fifteenth-century mural shows him with a book open to the poem's first line. His poetry was known widely before the first printed edition appeared in 1490 (Lawrence, 2003, p. 237). He is also a poet of the present age in many ways. As a well-educated young businessman, Jacopone (1230-1306) would have shared in the economic boom that swept through north and central Italy in the last half of the thirteenth century. According to Peck (1980), this period saw a revolution in food processing and marketing, clothing, trade, and public works, such as paved streets and squares, and water and sewer systems (pp. 19-23). In the midst of new wealth and commercial progress with its intense interest in law, money became "the complicated and fascinating new toy of the urban classes" (p. 46). But Jacopone turned away from all this and became a "fool" for God, willing to suffer ridicule and jest, willing to say or do anything as long as he could live in Christ's love.

As an itinerant preacher and a Friar Minor, his poverty acted as a symbol or pledge for an emptying of self. By discussing the soteriological implications of Jacopone's radical Franciscan poverty, McKenna (1997) helps the modern reader understand why this poet was willing to suffer ecclesiastical persecution rather than abandon a life of economic destitution. As north and central Italy rapidly moved from a gift economy to a profit economy with "increased reliance on money, which set a more universal and less personal value upon goods and services rendered" (p. 273), Jacopone's life and poetry cried out for the intensely personal value and allegiance of the gift. Radical Franciscans identified the gift's value with Christ's generosity. The economic dilemma of separating the person from



the product is no less critical today, and the need for the poetic response as a true voice of leadership appears no less urgent.

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a seventeenth-century Colonial Spanish nun of the Order of Saint Jerome, Mexico, wrote secular and religious poetry, plays, essays, scholarly research, and religious treatises. Her intellectual biography, *Response*, written in 1691, is a major statement of women's intellectual freedom. The danger the male clergy perceived in a woman so skilled in logic and poetry pervaded her life. In "Primero Sueno" or "First Dream," Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1997) used the Baroque Latin American style as a poetic challenge to traditional concepts of the Catholic Church and women. Merrim (1999) notes that "from the first lines onward," the poem "associates knowledge with the feminine" (p. 237) and voices Sor Juana's response to her own persecution and the injustices done to the women around her. With its indomitable will to know, the Soul treasures

*the Spark of the Divine she hears within,  
judging that she is nearly free of all  
that bind her, keeps her from liberty,  
the corporeal chains  
that vulgarly restrain and clumsily  
impede the soaring intellect that now,  
unchecked, measures the vastness of the Sphere.*

(de la Cruz, 1997, p. 93)

Sor Juana suffered enclosure and silencing for assuming roles that challenged traditional gender systems, but her response to injustice often confused her contemporaries because she fought for women's rights through the subtlety of poetry (Stavans, 1997, p. xli). Despite the forces against her, this autodidact, writing from within a convent, brilliantly defended women's learning and intellectual freedom in the New World's patriarchal, misogynist culture. Sor Juana's work reveals the important link between creative expression and philosophical inquiry as evidence of developing an activist consciousness within a leadership that serves and heals the world. Many of the goals Sor Juana sought mirror the still unmet desires of



women at the beginning of the twenty-first century, making her dream and its world-image changes for women a still unfolding story of leadership.

Twentieth-century Russian poet Anna Akhmatova lived in poverty and peril throughout the Stalinist period. The government expelled her from the Soviet Writers' Union because of her belief in the power of poetry to move from ethical address to justice. A premiere example of what Levinas calls the ethical moment occurs in the beginning of "Requiem" when Akhmatova (1985) describes waiting in a queue outside the prison to see her son. A woman turns to her and asks if she can describe this (p. 87). "Requiem" is that famous poetic response. The poem's narrator later describes the horror of the situation:

*Someone should have shown you—little jester,  
Little teaser, blue-veined charm-  
er, laughing-eyed, lionized, sylvan-princessly  
Sinner—to what point you would come:  
How, the three hundredth in a queue,  
You'd stand at the prison gate  
And with your hot tears  
Burn through the New-Year ice.  
How many lives are ending there! Yet it's  
Mute, even the prison-poplar's  
Tongue's in its cheek as it's swaying. (p. 90)*

In the end, the poet bears witness, not just for the one woman, but for the many silenced by totalitarian force:

*I have woven for them a great shroud  
Out of the poor words I heard them speak. (p. 95)*

Akhmatova does not turn away from the danger in this form of servant-leadership. By connecting the horror of the concrete experience in the here and now with the symbolism of evil through her metaphors, the poet manages to express what remains buried in ordinary language. In the pro-





cess, Akhmatova reinterprets the symbolism of evil for the twentieth century. Her creative language of integrity becomes a moral act of resistance.

Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, the first Latin American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, helped organize Mexico's entire rural education system after the revolution. She accepted the 1945 Prize as "the candidate for women and children" (Tapscott, 2002, p. 236). In her introduction to *Poemas de las Madres* or *The Mothers' Poems*, Mistral (1996) writes about walking on a street in Temuco and seeing a passing man make a crude remark to a poor pregnant woman sitting in a shack's doorway. At that moment she felt profound solidarity, "the infinite pity of woman for woman" and posed this question: "If the purpose of art is to make everything beautiful, with an immense mercy, why haven't we purified, for the eyes of the impure, *this*?" (p. 3). Writing with what she described as almost religious intention, she gave the world *The Mothers' Poems*. One of these, "My Prayer," says,

*Like the women who place jars  
outside to gather the evening dew, I  
place my breasts before God; I give  
Him a new name. I call Him The One  
Who Fills, and ask Him for the liqueur  
of life. My child will arrive thirsty,  
looking for this. (p. 13)*

Gabriela Mistral's words give poetic expression to women whose voices gender and poverty severely blunt or deny. Through a new set of metaphors or other types of imaginative language, the poet leads us to an altered experience of the world by making visible what was not seen. The role of mother, a central motif in Mistral's writing, highlights a vision of women in the public sphere, bonding nature to nation (Marchant, 1999, p. 50). She becomes the voice of the disempowered—indigenous poor women and children—and their desires. Mistral's view of the poet as servant of the people is reflected by the inscription on her tomb: "What the



soul does for the body so does the poet for her people” (Agosin, 1997, p. 19).

The poet’s role in serving the other person by first responding to the call of the face, and then using language to bear witness, constitutes a critical act of ethical leadership. Leadership that moves from ethical response to a responsive and responsible moral imagination has struck some as being so attuned to unspoken longings and the provocation of thought that those who exercise it do so at a risk. Totalitarian societies strive to silence their great poetic voices, for the poet’s vision, expressed in metaphors and images, has the power to suggest new ways of knowing and feeling. In a counterpoint form of despair, democracies based on capitalism marginalize poetry by trivializing poetic expression. Is there any reason to think that the technological world of power would respond more graciously to a challenge than the world of secular and ecclesiastical greed did in Jacopone da Todi’s time?

Many political entities have considered poetry dangerous or subversive because of its strong resistance to the mere functional or utilitarian use of language (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 449). The poet who cannot turn away from injustice or from attempts to falsify the original intention of the discourse cries out in the fullness of language. The face of injustice is a specific human face. Servant-leadership theory is founded on such responses.

#### POETRY AS CENTRAL TO LEADERSHIP THEORY

Ethical leadership and language begin with openness to the other. Peperzak (1991), writing on Levinasian ethics and the turn to hermeneutics, describes how the author presents herself and espouses herself “to the benevolence or violence of readers” over whom she has no power (p. 59). By offering a word, the poet opens herself. This openness does not constitute a message, but an appeal, a call or provocation to which the reader may respond with words of his or her own. Poetry moves out of this exposed, expressive voice, childlike in its lack of self-defense, as it has not yet learned to dissemble or deceive to protect itself. In its orientation toward



the other person, a work of art, such as poetry, may constitute an impulse without guaranteed remuneration. Levinas (1993) describes this generous impulse, moving beyond the same or self in time, as “liturgy” in the Greek sense, for it “designates the exercise of a function which is not totally gratuitous, but requires on the part of him who exercises it a putting out of funds at a loss” (pp. 92-93). Being more attached to the life of the other than one’s own life and giving voice to that relationship is the first value. By offering a word, one “in a sense prays” (Levinas, 1989c, p. 149). Ethical movement dwells in this initial poetic impulse.

This position honors the subject over the object and orients Levinas’ philosophy, which rests on the ethical appeal and responsibility of the human voice. Levinas’ (1989a) call for ethics as first philosophy offers a new depth, orientation, and language perspective to leadership theory. For Levinas, ethics precedes freedom. Responsibility as an obligation to respond to and for the other person “is prior to my own liberty” (Hansel, 1999, p. 171). This is radical servant-leadership, based not on a moral quality, value system, or the highest point in a hierarchy of virtues, but upon speaking out.

The transcendence practiced in poetry, as an initial generous impulse that goes beyond the self in response to the face of the other, is not full of grand plans or actions. It realizes itself as endurance and patience, despite rejection, for “instead of an ascension by means of elitism and originality, it demands a descent to service and devotion” (Peperzak, 1991, p. 63). Such a movement does not preclude the idea of moral freedom and choice, however.

As Reinhold Niebuhr observed, moral imagination is necessarily a responsive and responsible imagination, constituted in dialogue, capable of answering (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996, p. 151). While moral leadership is cited as a key issue in leadership studies, Mangan (2002) says scholars do not agree on how to define terms like *morals* and *values*, which they, nevertheless, find crucial to understanding leaders (p. A10). Polley (2002) argues that servant-leadership as a model “cuts across various leadership



theories and provides a foundational philosophy for theories that emphasize principles congruent with human growth” (p. 125). Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) address differences between servant-leadership and other charismatic, transformational models, and review literature suggesting that servant-leadership exceeds such models by “its recognition of the leader’s social responsibilities to serve those people who are marginalized by a system” (p. 62). Spears (1998) identifies deep awareness as one characteristic of the servant-leader. He notes the servant-leader’s place in understanding issues involving ethics and taking the risk of response (p. 6). Greenleaf (1977/2002) states: “awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener” (p. 28). Ethical leadership as the author’s or leader’s voice crying out through speaking and writing in the literal face of injustice actively participates in this critical movement.

The risk of figurative language the poet uses is real. Metaphor revels in polysemy, giving words multiple meanings that refuse containment. Thompson (2000) finds a leader’s ability to communicate vision is not a matter of “charisma . . . or a way with words,” but is the capacity to use *symbol and metaphor* to convey layers of meaning beyond that accessible to mere rationality and its word-forms” (p. 191). No researcher should deny the troubling, even volatile nature of such disparate interpretive potential. When Greenleaf (1977/2002) honors Camus and admonishes servant-leaders to create dangerously, he acknowledges such factors. But taking this risk with language seems essential for leadership theory, in part, because “the first danger to our present culture is a kind of reduction of language to communication at the lowest level or to manipulate things and people,” for then language becomes merely instrumental (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 448). Poetry can challenge the status quo because it has the capacity to create new worlds, new ways of thinking.

Some caution in the linking of language and leadership theory is warranted here. The call for a universal language as a means of cross-cultural communication remains potent in scientific-technological society (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994, p. 88). Newman (1982) dispenses all



notions of one language serving as well as another. If languages are not even equal in adapting scientific symbols, how can they be equal in metaphorical richness, force, musicality, precision of thought? Revelations of objective truth do not cease being subjective, precisely because they are written by a person (p. 215, 218). Wyschogrod (2000) notes that language itself “already refers to the one who hears and the one who speaks.” But the one who speaks does so against a *lifeworld*, “so one can never summarize all the contexts of language and all the positions in which interlocutors could find themselves” (pp. 153-154). For Ricoeur, the polysemic nature of language, specifically poetic language, rules out all absolute interpretations. He also notes that while scientific language operates more or less directly, literary or poetic language “operates in a more subtle, more indirect manner, inasmuch as the chasm between language and reality has reached much greater depths” (Ricoeur, 1998, p. 86). The images of poetry lead us farther than we know. In saying the image or hearing it, the listener participates in the sound which carries her or him away. In this moment, there is no longer a oneself, but rather a passage beyond self. For Levinas (1989b), such is the captivation or incantation of poetry (p. 133).

While some important thinkers in servant-leadership studies address poetry’s contribution to leadership theory through works of literature and specific creative writers, the foundational role creative language can play in leadership’s conceptual and expressive range, including its vitality, is most often neglected. Therefore, samples of poetry that express a poet’s ethical response to others serve as primary documents for future study. Secondary sources include literary analysis of the historical periods and poetry types by literary scholars.

Key questions emerge from these considerations. How do the poet’s voice and response to another person or persons in oral and/or written creative expression prove valuable, even critical, for servant-leadership theory? What meaning does this reveal? How does poetry take leadership theory beyond the mere functional or utilitarian use of language to make ethical vision and linguistic imagination possible?



## CONCLUSION

This essay attempts to describe the meanings the poet and poetry have for leadership theory, especially servant-leadership theory. Such an investigation can add to the field of leadership studies by articulating important links between poetry, ethics, and leadership. From the convergence of Greenleaf, Wheatley, Ricoeur, and Levinas, we begin to build an awareness of servant-leadership theory's rich and powerful connection with language studies, especially creative language and ethics. This points leadership theory away from the economic profit model and toward a creative synthesis that elevates personal and collective vulnerability, sincerity, authenticity, and responsibility. Many more studies of language and leadership theory are needed.

The profound notion of poetic voice suggests an ethical response to others and demands a radical role and vision of service. Just as the congregation gives meaning to the cantor's voice through their answering verse, and audience response to the author becomes an integral part of the poem, so the servant-leader relies on the voices and journeys of those he or she serves for vision and guidance. Poetry's unique ability to speak metaphorically, to point toward the symbolic depth of meaning between people and between people and the natural world, suggests a subtle, important, even dangerous role for the poet's voice in servant-leadership studies and for the servant-leader's voice in society.

Knowledge as rational thought will never capture the movement of love, for love begins in faith, believing that love without reward is valuable. Semantic innovation, transcendence and responsibility for the other reside together in the world of the poetic word. But first comes the response to the stranger, the lost one, the disenfranchised person as gift. And this is love, giving oneself in physical and verbal, then written, sound and form. Poet Elizabeth Jennings (1989) writes:



*Love is the argument, the lyric moment,  
The care for ritual, the need for growth  
And cities rise above the misty mountains  
Before the sunlight loves them with its gold. (p. 49)*

Greenleaf (1997/2002) tells us love can fill the vacuum of loss, every loss we can imagine, but he does not discount suffering on the servant-leadership journey (p. 327). There is a cost for ethical response and for interaction with a symbol that creates new meaning and requires responsibility for the suffering of others. That cost may lead us into *the harsh realities of* loss, leaving us dissolved, burned, broken off. Yet the cost of servant-leadership inherently also leads us to meaning touched with elegance and loveliness, as well as legitimate power and greatness. In that meaning, in the face of every loss, we discover that not only are we well-loved, we become love.

Nadine Chapman is a poet whose work has appeared in literary journals and other venues throughout the United States. Described as a “gift of voice, story, and memory,” her recent chapbook of poems, *On Solitude*, is noted for both its subtlety and its evocative understanding of the human condition. She teaches at Whitworth College, Spokane, Washington, United States of America.

#### REFERENCES

- Agosin, M. (1997). Introduction: Gabriela Mistral, the restless soul. In G. Mistral, *Gabriela Mistral: A reader* (pp. 17-24). Fredonia, New York: White Pine Press.
- Akhmatova, A. (1985). *You will hear thunder* (D. M. Thomas, Trans.). Athens: Ohio University Press.



- Angeles, P. A. (1992). *The HarperCollins dictionary of philosophy* (2nd ed). New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
- Autry, J. (1998). Bearing witness. In L. C. Spears (Ed.), *Insights in leadership* (pp. 308-313). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (1971). (Vol. I-II). Glasgow: Oxford University Press.
- da Todi, J. (1982). *The Lauds* (E. Hughes & S. Hughes, Trans.) New York: Paulist Press.
- Daloz, L. A. P., Keen, C. H., Keen, J. P., & Parks, S. D. (1996). *Common fire: Leading lives of commitment in a complex world*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- de la Cruz, Sor Juana. (1997). *Poems, protest, and a dream* (M. S. Peden, Trans.). New York: Penguin.
- Friere, P. (1993/2001). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum Publishing.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977/2002). *Servant-leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1998). My debt to E. B. White. In L. C. Spears (Ed.), *The power of servant-leadership* (pp. 235-261). Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.: San Francisco.
- Guare, R. (2001). Educating in the ways of the spirit: Teaching and leading poetically, prophetically, powerfully. *Religious Education*, 96(1), 65-87.
- Hansel, J. (1999). Utopia and reality: The concept of sanctity in Kant and Levinas. *Philosophy Today*, 43(2), 168-175.
- Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Cambridge: Belknap Press
- Hughes, S. (1982). Introduction: Toward a first reading of the *Lauds*. In J. da Todi, *The Lauds* (pp. 1-65). New York: Paulist Press.
- Jennings, E. (1989). *Tributes*. Manchester: Carcanet PL.
- Kearney, R. (1984). Introduction. Appendix. *Dialogues with contemporary continental thinkers*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. I-II, 127-133.
- Kunz, G. (1998). *The paradox of power and weakness*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Lawrence, V. (2003). Translating Jacopone da Todi: Archaic poetries and modern audiences. *Translation & Literature* 12(2), 231-251.
- Levinas, E. (1989a). Ethics as first philosophy (S. Hand & M. Temple, Trans.). In S. Hand (Ed.), *The Levinas reader* (pp. 75-87). Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Levinas, E. (1989b). Reality and its shadow. (A. Lingis, Trans.). In S. Hand (Ed.), *The Levinas reader* (pp. 129-143). Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.





- Levinas, E. (1989c). The transcendence of words. (S. Hand, Trans.). In S. Hand (Ed.), *The Levinas reader* (pp. 144-149). Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Levinas, E. (1993). *Collected philosophical papers* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Mangon, K. (2002). Leading the way in leadership. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 48(38), A10.
- Marchant, E. A. (1999). The professional outsider: Gabriela Mistral on motherhood and nation. *Latin American Library Review*, 27(53), 49-66.
- McKenna, T. (1997). Jacopone of Todi and the soteriological implications of poverty. *Downside Review*, 115, 271-279.
- Merrim, S. M. (1999). *Early modern women's writings and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Mistral, G. (1996). *The mothers' poems* (C. J. Kyle, Trans.). Cheney: Eastern Washington University Press.
- Newman, J. H. (1982). *The idea of a university*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame.
- Peck, G. (1980). *The fool of God, Jacopone da Todi*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press.
- Peperzak, A. (1991). Presentation. In R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley (Eds.), *Re-reading Levinas* (pp. 51-66). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Peperzak, A. (1998). Levinas' method. *Research in Phenomenology*, 28, 110-125.
- Pinsky, R. (1999, October). Poetry and American memory. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 284, 60-70.
- Polley, M. (2002). One university's response to the anti-leadership vaccine: Developing servant-leaders. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 8(3), 117-130.
- Ricoeur, P. (1974). Existence and hermeneutics (K. McLaughlin, Trans.). In D. Ihde (Ed.), *The conflict of interpretations* (pp. 3-24). Evanston: Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1969)
- Ricoeur, P. (1976). *Interpretations theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1991a). Poetry and possibility. In M. Valdes (Ed.), *A Ricoeur reader: Reflection and imagination* (pp. 448-462). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1991b). The function of fiction in shaping reality. In M. Valdes (Ed.), *A Ricoeur reader: Reflection and imagination* (pp. 117-136). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1998). *Critique and conviction* (K. Blamey, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Senjaya, S. & Sorros, J. C. (2002). Servant-leadership: Its origin, development, and



- application in organizations. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(2), 57-64.
- Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R. B., & Smith, B. J. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization*. New York: Currency Doubleday.
- Spears, L. C. (1998). Introduction. In L. C. Spears, *Insights on leadership* (pp. 1-12). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Stavans, I. (1997). Introduction. In *Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz: Poems, protest, and a Dream* (pp. xi-xliii). New York: Penguin Group.
- Tapscott, S. (2002). Translator's remarks. In G. Mistral, *Selected prose and prose-poems*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 235-246.
- Thompson, C. M. (2000). *The congruent life: Following the inward path to fulfilling work and inspired leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Wheatley, M. (1998). What is our work? In L. C. Spears (Ed.). *Insights on leadership* (pp. 340-351). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Wyschograd, E. (2000). *Emmanuel Levinas: Revisioning moral philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.