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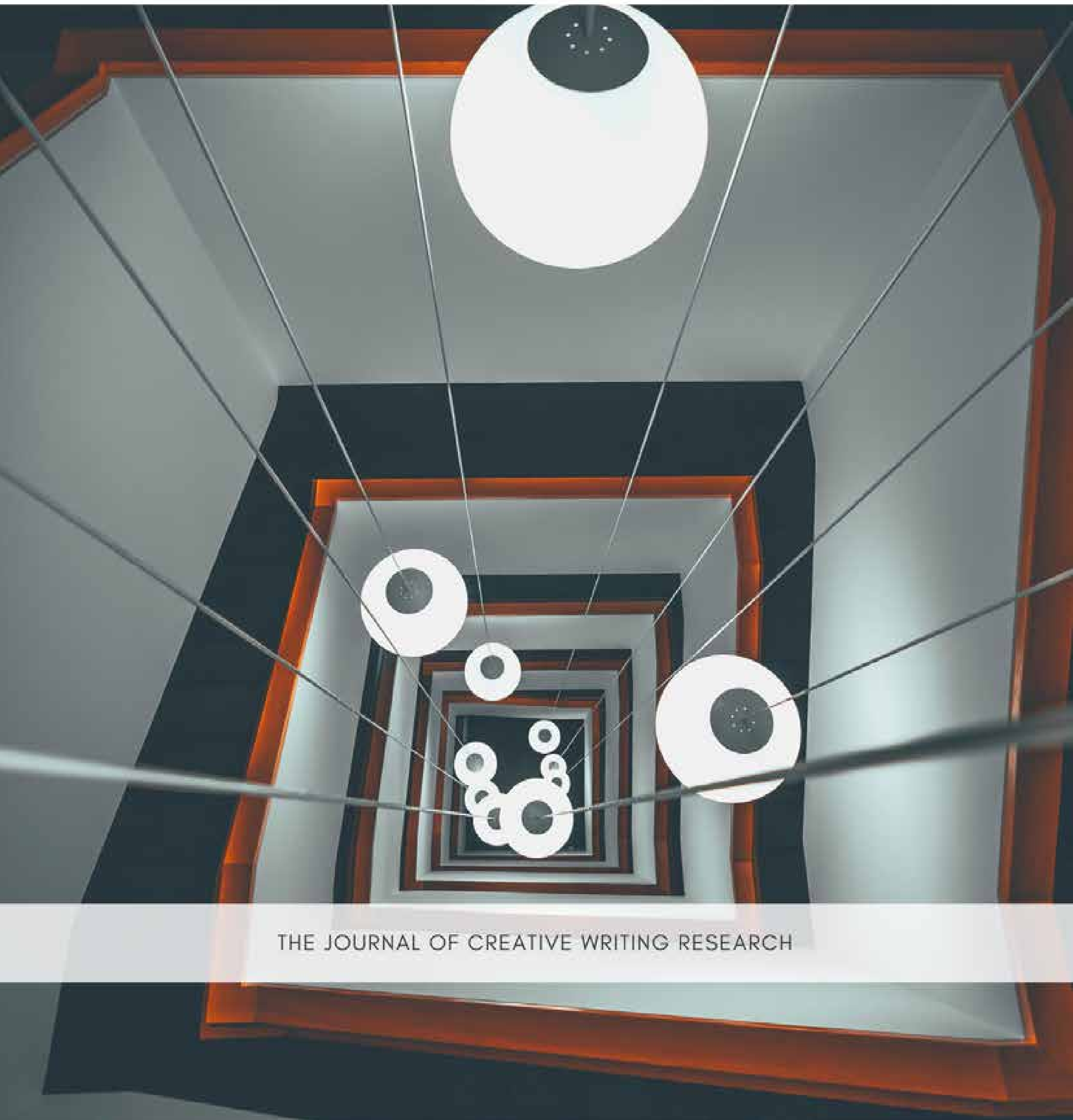

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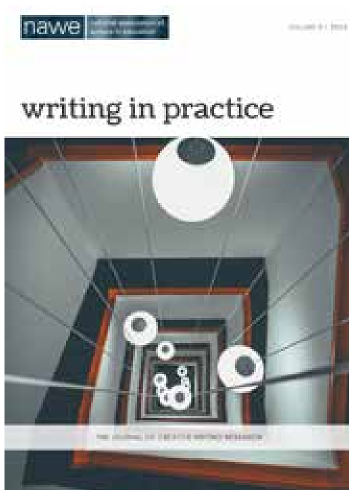

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Issue Introduction

Writing in Practice Volume 8

Principal Editor: Kate North
Issue editors: Andrew Melrose, Sue Dymoke and Michael Green
Publications Manager: Lisa Koning

This is my first introduction for Writing in Practice and I am heartened by the contributions to Issue 8. A wide variety of topics are covered, yet there are also many synergies and intersections to be found across the articles within. I was particularly pleased to see the high quality of work being conducted across the discipline currently.

We are lucky enough to begin this issue with a timely and thought-provoking guest article by Mary Jean Chan. They consider the interplay between language, translation, and queerness, building to the hopeful assertion that language has the potential to heal and to help us realise new futures.

Language, or rather the space between the Welsh and English languages, is where Elen Caldecott situates her inquiry. She considers whether it is possible to create a mode of expression that is truly transnational, resulting in a powerful journey navigating the terrains of betrayal through to reconciliation. Amber Duivenvoordern is concerned with how we may preserve minority languages. She explores the practicalities of preserving the nuances of Maltese when writing in English. The legacy of linguistic imperialism is considered through a broader lens by Paul Williams. He reflects on his efforts to create a socially relevant work of fiction for Zimbabwean children. He sets himself the challenge of drawing on the more compelling

aspects of Blyton's craft while aiming to dispense of the elitism, racism, sexism, and xenophobia.

Jo Somerset shows us how queering a linear framework can unlock and challenge versions of the past while presenting them to us in fresh and engaging ways through autofiction. Alex Bertram interrogates the material past and present also, through the consideration of photography and the construction of a cultural biography. Joanna Nadin considers what is means to understand the concept of the self as a symphony rather than as one true essence, then contextualises this in the light of creating psychological realism. Kevan Manwaring reconsiders psychogeography and makes a case for depersonalisation in his poetic exploration of the land.

Helen Foster confronts her inner critic and puts forward a practical approach to dealing with writer's block with mindful practice. Liam Bell and Gemma Ryde share the findings from their quantitative and qualitative study, showing the creative benefits of physical exercise. Megan Hayes makes the case for further work to be done on the use creative writing to enhancing wellness, distinguishing it from the much explored field of expressive writing.

Asking us to look outside ourselves for inspiration and a new way of approaching fiction, Maria A. Ioannou suggests that material objects have the potential to be used as characters in fiction. She explores what happens when attempting to create language and inhabit the perspective of everyday objects with which we interact. The result can be playful, poignant, and surreal. Which brings us to Simon Read's article, in it he stakes a claim for contemporary absurdism in evoking catharsis in a pedagogical context.

I would like to thank the outgoing principal editor, Derek Neale for his generous support in handing over the role. His organisation and foresight has made the transition a smooth and enjoyable one. I would also like to thank my wonderful issue editors: Sue Dymoke, Michael Green, and Andy Melrose. They have been a joy to work with and the editorial meetings have been something that I look forward to. Each editor brought insight and experience that was most welcome in drawing this edition together.

Going forward we will be moving to a publications timetable that mirrors the academic year.

I hope you gain as much from this issue as I have.

Kate North

Writing in Practice **Volume 9 - to be published in Winter 2023**

We are looking for academically rigorous research into creative writing, appropriately referenced and engagingly written. We are happy to receive articles that reflect on practice and process, explore writing research in interdisciplinary contexts, engage in critical analysis of writing pedagogy, explore cultural and global challenges such as diversity and inclusion and ecological sustainability through creative writing.

Creative Writing itself is welcomed when integral to an article. Submissions should be 4-10,000 words long and include an abstract of up to 200 words. All submissions will be anonymously peer reviewed. See the contributor guidelines to submit your work via the submissions link: www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/writing-in-practice.html

If you are interested in acting as peer reviewer for the journal, please send details of your expertise to the editorial board, c/o: admin@nawe.co.uk Writing in Practice is an open access, online journal that complements Writing in Education, the NAWE magazine distributed to its members.
As the UK Subject Association for Creative Writing, NAWE aims to further knowledge, understanding and support research, teaching and learning in the subject at all levels.

Queerness as Translation

Mary Jean Chan

ABSTRACT

In this essay, Mary Jean Chan explores their relationship to English and to multilingualism, having been raised bilingually in Hong Kong until the age of eighteen. Through exploring their relationship to (queer) literary texts including William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* and Vahni (Anthony Ezekiel) Capildeo's *Measures of Expatriation*, Chan charts the evolution in their thinking in relation to language, translation and queerness.

KEYWORDS

Poetry, multilingualism, language, English, Chinese, translation, queerness, gender, race.

The pronouns for he, she, and it are phonetically the same in Cantonese (my mother tongue), as well as in Mandarin Chinese and Shanghainese (my mother's mother tongue). As a multilingual speaker, the notion that I would check someone's use of my pronouns only makes sense within an Anglophone context. I am exploring new words and ways of being: most recently, what it might mean to be non-binary. I identify as queer, in all senses of the word in English. In Chinese, there are other names, ones which I seldom use, because those words and their specific connotations do not evoke the ways in which I have become – and am still becoming – queer. This discovery takes place within language, rooted in the tongues I speak.

During my PhD, I came across these lines by the Martinican poet, novelist and theorist Édouard Glissant in his Caribbean Discourse:

> If one continues to compel the Martinican child to have a French experience in school and a Creole experience at home, the process of collective irresponsibility that afflicts the Martinican community will be reinforced. The principle of multilingualism increases the child's learning capacity because he is free from the kind of dissociation that emerges as inhibitions, complexes…

I have written elsewhere about growing up in Hong Kong just as the colonial era was drawing to a close, but I am only beginning to plumb the effects this has had on my psyche. I was seven when Hong Kong was officially handed back over to China as a Special Administrative Region. As the last British governor Chris Patten waved a ceremonial goodbye aboard the HMY Britannia, the city I was born and raised in assumed its postcolonial identity. As a student at an Anglican school founded by British missionaries from the age of six till eighteen, I accepted the implicit rules of this historic institution – which only began to change incrementally in the years after the British left. The primary school entrance exam (a written test administered in English to a group of overwhelmed six-year-olds, followed by a lengthy interview with the junior school Headmistress) had impressed upon me the gravity of the situation. I began tutorial lessons at the age of seven with Ms. Laity, a retired English teacher who had taught at an international school in Hong Kong for most of her career.

I remember sitting in her apartment on Friday evenings, completing grammar exercises, answering her comprehension questions, then – my favourite part of our two-hour meetings – the chance to read a story I had chosen from her overflowing bookshelf. I recall sounding out the English words phonetically, the book usually too hard for me to fully comprehend, but Ms. Laity would read aloud with me, correcting my pronunciation and explaining any difficult words whenever necessary. I enjoyed her calm demeanour and gentle approach, and particularly relished playing with her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel as she poured me English breakfast tea (with milk) and offered me shortbread (always Walkers) during our short breaks.

*

What might my relationship to English have to do with my relationship to queerness? Since English was a colonial language, I had always equated a better grasp of English with "success". English was rooted in linear time – the longer I worked at it, the better I would get, and the more "successful" I would become. That simplistic mentality ensured that my English did improve rapidly as time went on, but I was also facing a quandary in terms of the self-discoveries I was making in this increasingly familiar tongue.

To this day, *Twelfth Night* (1995) remains my favourite Shakespeare play, because it provided me with my first glimpse into the multiplicity of queer desire. The way it was taught during the HKCEEs – a rough equivalent of the GCSEs – ensured that the play remained firmly within accepted normative boundaries. The gender-bending was explained by my English Literature teacher as a consequence of the twelfth night of Christmas, during which the "normal" social order was turned upside down for a day of fun and revelry. The play's ending, where all couples engage in heterosexual marriage, does lend itself somewhat to this socially conservative reading.

However, I could not help but read the text queerly – there was Viola/Cesario who had fallen hopelessly in love with Duke Orsino (whilst wearing her dashing military uniform), and their passionate conversations about the true nature of love made me question who it was I found myself increasingly drawn to – Viola, Cesario, or both? Sir Trevor Nunn's brilliant film adaptation of *Twelfth Night* brought all these characters vividly to life: the passionate courting of Olivia by Viola/Cesario was a scene that mesmerized me for months, and the tenderness with which

the sea captain Antonio treats Viola's twin brother Sebastian made for palpable homoeroticism on screen.

In order to make sense of these emergent feelings, I subsumed my queer desires into linear time, and made them an integral part of my ongoing quest to perfect my grasp of English. If reading more Shakespeare made me a better student of English, then I could read about queerness without compromising who I was at the time: a good student of English Literature, and a dutiful child who wanted to please my parents. This was a delicate and emotionally difficult balance to maintain: a precarious way of living as a closeted teenager in Hong Kong.

Eventually, a kind of splitting emerged: for every five books I read in English, I read one book in Chinese. The ratio gradually widened. As a form of compromise, I diligently read classical Chinese poems set to strict rhyme and meter, often committing multiple poems to memory at a time as I savoured their soothing cadences. Even then, poetry (in both English and Chinese) provided an emotional anchor within the flux of my life which kept me sane.

Years later, during my time at university in the United States, I discovered a poet whose visionary work would change my life. Adrienne Rich became the writer I turned to for a sense of self, poetic inspiration and solace. Her collection *The Dream of a Common Language* (Rich 1993), first published in 1978, kept calling me back to the redemptive possibilities of language. Crucially, Rich's poems asked me the questions I had been avoiding all my life. One of those was a simple line, in one of her love poems, in which she asks: "What kind of beast would turn its life into words? / What atonement is this all about?" (Rich 1978: 28)

At the time, her words struck a chord in me, because they made me realise how much of my life had been about atoning for a perceived failure. In his book *The Queer Art of Failure*, queer theorist Jack Halberstam contends that from both a Lacanian and Marxist perspective, lesbian desire is doomed to "failure" within a patriarchal, heteronormative and capitalist system, since it is associated with values of "non-conformity, anti-capitalist practices, non-reproductive lifestyles, negativity, and critique," in contrast to the supposed "sociality, relationality, family, sex, desire, and consumption" that characterises heterosexual relations. Rich's work was a powerful antidote to the overwhelming shame I felt as a result of having failed so miserably at being a straight, cis-gendered woman, so I read her poems and essays diligently and slept with her books on my bedside table. I still remember the first time I saw two women holding hands, walking across the lush campus lawn. I couldn't stop trembling on the sidewalk, out of sheer relief and a hesitant joy.

*

Since coming out in 2012, I have begun to feel increasingly able to gradually reconfigure my relationship to language – how multilingualism offers a profound way of understanding the complex historical, political and social contexts that have shaped who I am as a person and poet. I have begun to read more literature in Chinese, and to enjoy Chinese texts translated into English, such as the anthology *Jade Ladder: Contemporary Chinese Poetry*, edited by W.N. Herbert and Yang Lian (2012) and *Something Crosses My Mind: Selected Poems of Wang Xiaoni*, translated by Eleanor Goodman (2014), as well as texts that offer me new ways of understanding translation as something that is inherently political and historically complex, such as Don Mee Choi's *DMZ Colony* (2020).

As I learn more about the politics and poetics of translation, I am curious about what can or cannot be translated, and what the ethics of translation are. I am also curious – on a metaphorical level – about what has become newly possible in the translated text of my life, and what meanings I might find in the source text of my past. I am attempting to reject binaries and polarities, and am beginning to marry the parts of myself I had compartmentalised and kept apart so well during my young adult life. Nowadays, I am eager to re-read and re-write my life as an ongoing poem, but no longer in linear time. Linear time suffocates; it forces the now into the future and refuses any meaningful engagement with the past. I want, instead, to inhabit a state of play – a form of playtime – where time dissolves and there is only being, breath, and the myriad of languages we allow ourselves to inhabit and speak.

In November 2017, I flew home for the Hong Kong International Literary Festival, and spent an afternoon discussing my thoughts on Anglophone poetry with an American poet who had been living in Hong Kong for a few years. Before the event, we met up for lunch. This time, despite opening up to someone I didn't know well, I felt a bit less torn

between being here or there, closeted or queer. On the day of the reading, I was surprised at how at ease I felt. There were friendly faces in the crowd, attendees of all nationalities who had decided to spend their Sunday afternoon at a fringe poetry event. I felt that day, in that sun-lit café, as though I had finally been given permission to simply be – to play with languages the way a child might – as if language itself was a safe place in which to roam.

That year, I was also knee-deep in a poetry collection by Vahni (Anthony Ezekiel) Capildeo called *Measures of Expatriation* (2016), a book that has come to mean so much to me, as it bears new fruit with each re-reading. In particular, I felt drawn to "A Fan Museum", a prose poem consisting of five discrete sections, which constitutes the first part of the collection's "Five Measures of Expatriation". The text animated in me the desire to read queerly. In the poem, the speaker places an overwhelming focus on their own body, how the body's relationship to the space it finds itself inhabiting produces a site of conflict and forced negotiation. Capildeo's speaker navigates this fan museum as a space wherein obstacles to the queer body abounds – "The doorway into the main space was without a door but blocked by a wrought iron trellis…"

What is normally a space of welcome – the doorway – becomes a normative object to be navigated with care. In a movement that might be described as queer, the speaker observes the doorway, stating that: "I edged past it and straightened myself out." I read this act of "straightening oneself out" as a queer gesture, one which calls attention to the straight lines inherent in the Fan Museum's architectural design as a normative space. The speaker tries to vocalize this discomfort in deviating from the straight line: "I had a strong, irrational aversion to making a left or right turn." Having navigated the doorway which was blocked, the speaker desires conformity, but also recognizes a deep-seated, unconscious urge to make "a left or right turn". The body's refusal to turn, to move queerly off the straight line, is indeed an "irrational aversion" that troubles the speaker's consciousness.

Beyond the doorway, the speaker is faced with a series of objects: "two identical mirrors", "[a] clock", and a "small cabinet". Apart from being challenging to navigate, the room the speaker inhabits is also vertically rendered as inhospitable to the arrivant, who finds the "…small cabinet had been affixed to the wall just too high for [their] comfort, at average adult Scandinavian reach." The speaker's racial background begins to crystallize in a moment of naming the norm for which ordinary everyday objects have been built: the "Scandinavian". The speaker is clearly an outsider amongst other outsiders, as they observe the sound of their own voice in a foreign space: "'Hello!' My voice reverted to a kind of Trinidadian that it had never used in Trinidad: a birdlike screech that would carry over a wrought metal gate (painted orange) across a yard with frizzle fowls and the odd goat".

In the above scenario, the speaker experiences a profound sense of disorientation. This is a sense of disorientation I have felt as a queer person growing up in Hong Kong, and as a queer person of colour living in the UK. In the wake of COVID-19, the rise of COVID racism towards East Asian communities in the UK, US and elsewhere has heightened my sense of what it means to be racialised as East Asian and perceived as (gender) queer. During these tumultuous times, the power of language to empower or inflict harm comes to the fore: how we might respect another person's truth by using their preferred pronouns, or how transphobic rhetoric might incite hatred towards already marginalised and vulnerable groups. The poets I love and admire work within and across languages in ways that honour the potential of literature to heal these social divides, thereby allowing us to envision the world anew. In an op-ed for *The Guardian* [1] published on World Poetry Day in March 2020, I wrote:

"I turn to poetry for its propensity towards truth, its tensile strength, and its insistence that language can, and must be, the bridge that connects us all during these difficult times."

A shorter version of this article first appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation* in 2018.

ENDNOTES

[1] Chan, M. J. (2020) The Guardian [online]. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2020/mar/21/mary-jean-chan-language-must-be-the-bridge-that-connects-us- [14 May 2022]

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Jean Chan is the author of *Flèche*, published by Faber & Faber in 2019 and Faber USA in 2020. Flèche won the 2019 Costa Book Award for Poetry and was shortlisted in 2020 for the International Dylan Thomas Prize, the John Pollard Foundation International Poetry Prize, the Jhalak Prize and the Seamus Heaney Centre First Collection Poetry Prize. In 2021, *Flèche* was a Lambda Literary Award Finalist. Chan won the 2018 Geoffrey Dearmer Prize and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem in 2017 and 2019, receiving an Eric Gregory Award in 2019. Chan was guest co-editor with Will Harris at The Poetry Review in Spring 2020, and co-edited *100 Queer Poems* (Vintage, 2022) with Andrew McMillan. Chan was a Visiting Writer at the Nanyang Technological University Asia Creative Writing Programme in Singapore for Summer 2022. Chan currently serves as Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing (Poetry) at Oxford Brookes University. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Chan lives in Oxford.

The Art of Betrayal: Coming-of-Age Through Transnational Writing

Elen Caldecott

ABSTRACT

In 2016 I set out, hopefully and somewhat naively, to apply a transnational approach to my work-in-progress, *The Short Knife*. The novel is written in a voice which combines elements of the Welsh language with Standard English and is intended for a Young Adult audience. This article charts the evolution of the work, and of my own relationship with my homeland through the prism of betrayal, ultimately concluding that imbricating betrayal into a work can be generative and even healing.

Part One describes the practical development of the poetics of *The Short Knife* and will offer inspiration to any author exploring transnational creative writing. Part Two charts a workshop with Prof Nicholas Jose, and a fiery online encounter that necessitated a reckoning with the themes of betrayal. Part Three of this article demonstrates how such an existential crisis can have a positive impact on both the text and the author, if that challenge is faced head-on. This account will be of interest to anyone writing about their relationship with home.

KEYWORDS

Transnational writing, Welsh writing in English, betrayal, coming-of-age fiction.

INTRODUCTION

I was not afraid to visit home, but I was afraid to stay there.

I grew up in a small village, in a Welsh valley. The terraced houses lined the hills like frills on a petticoat – they were picturesque, from a distance. Up close, they were, in my mind, a hive of twitching curtains where the people within would sit in judgement on each other with the certainty of a fire-and-brimstone preacher. My family spoke a mixture of Welsh and English, depending on the context. My schooling was all in Welsh, a deliberate political choice my parents had made for me. I left at eighteen, and went back only to visit, to perch on the edges of sofas gulping down cups of scalding tea. I have always thought of myself as Welsh, but have not always been comfortable with what Welsh means.

So, it should not have come as a surprise when writing The Short Knife – inspired, as it was, by the desire to write in the creative space between my two languages – stirred an uneasy reckoning with the past. And yet, it was a surprise, and a deeply existential one at that.

In Writing in Practice vol 3, Amy Coquaz (2017), suggests that writing which allows two languages to come together offers a form of 'reconciliation'; that there can be healing in the act. However, she also acknowledges that the 'contact between two languages [reveals] tensions and fragmentations.' I would go further: not only can contact between languages create tension, there is also potential for that tension to become a valuable creative force. This was the case with The Short Knife, as I will articulate in this article.

PART ONE: THE SHORT KNIFE, A TRANSNATIONAL POETICS

As I begin to plan The Short Knife, I know that I want to write a book about Welshness that looks outwards. I want young readers, like my niece who lives in Wales, attending the same junior school that I did, to know that the hills aren't walls keeping her in. I want her to know that there's more out there, beyond the chintz front rooms kept for best, where the only songs you know all the words to are hymns, where half the pubs have flat roofs, but the factories and pits that went with them are long gone. Where judgements come from on high, but also from behind every closed front door.

I want her to be able to dream the world, while standing on the pavement outside Spar.

I want to take the language of my childhood, my niece's childhood, and blend it with a world language. I want to take it out of the mountains and introduce it to the world. It will be a transnational hybrid: its poetics part-Welsh, part-English.

Poetics, in the broadest terms, are the range of literary approaches and critical schools of thoughts that allow a scholar to consider the nature of a piece of writing; in my own personal conception, the tools available to answer the question 'how does this piece of writing work?'. In the field of Creative Writing, its meaning has evolved to include the author: 'How do I make this piece of writing work?'. Implicit in the word is the act of making, the artist's knowledge of form and medium, reflective thinking and further drafting, each cycle getting closer to a functioning piece.

So, when I imagine a hybrid poetics, I'm imagining a range of stylistic decisions I might make to bring me closer to an appropriate voice for the novel.

I start by searching for a list of rules to follow while writing; rules that might show my niece that there's joy in crossing borders.

On one day, among many similar days in 2016, I sit in a train carriage. Perhaps the train is travelling towards London, or Cardiff, or Aberystwyth, or Chester.

I have a notebook.

I watch the parallel lines of sidings, plough furrows, forestry plantations whip past the window. The lines are invisible, until the train hits just the right angle and then the geometry of the landscape is clear, breath-taking in its precision, before being lost again as the train moves and the angle is lost.

My notebook is one that closes with a magnetic catch, a satisfying snap. I write ideas for the novel, its style and voice, searching for satisfying snaps of recognition, the sense of finding the right angle on this story that I want to tell, when the words and sentences and paragraphs align in just in the right way to make me catch my breath, and think – there, there is precision. I write waiting for the pattern of its landscape to emerge.

I look at that notebook, in the weeks and months that follow. I look at it now, as I try to articulate the process.

In it, I have written a 'test paragraph' in Standard English. It's short, but it will be my 'control group' of words. It is clearly comprehensible; it would meet the demands of commercial publishers. It is not avant-garde. I will use it, again and again, in

order to see how I might deviate from Standard English, how much Welsh I can introduce, before all meaning is lost to monolingual readers. I write the test paragraph in my notebook: The sea came quickly up the shore and broke upon the rocks. Mai sank her feet into the surf and yelled up at the sky. A seagull cawed back, a devil's cry.

Who is Mai?

I don't know yet. The plot and cast of characters don't matter to me yet. It's her voice I want to find first.

I know that she speaks Brittonic, an ancestor of Welsh, which I'm using as a proxy. And yet the paragraph looks entirely English. I feel a little like that about myself, too. I can speak Welsh, but I've lived outside Wales for most of my life now. I seem entirely English. My Welsh-medium education is another lifetime ago.

There are differences between the languages in terms of grammar and syntax. Exploiting grammar has been a productive method of establishing poetics which has been employed by transnational writers before me. For example, Xialu Guo, author of 'A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers', struggles with the number of tenses in English – literary Chinese does not conjugate verbs, rather time is expressed as complete or incomplete using additional words. As a result, the 'now' of Chinese literature is more elastic. By attempting to eliminate complex verb conjugation in her prose, Guo can engage a 'Chinese worldview' which has a much larger effect than such a simple change might suggest. Here's an example of what she means:

"English: 'Peter had been painting his house for weeks, but he finally gave up.'

Chinese-English: 'Peter tries to paint his house, but sadness overwhelms him, causing him to lay down his brushes and give up his dream.'" (Guo, 2017).

Wildly different passages created by approaching the poetics of time, and all it signifies, differently.

There are many syntactic and grammatical differences between Welsh and English that I might exploit.

I scribbled some ideas in my notebook.

Unlike English, Welsh has no indefinite article ('a' or 'an'). When I mentioned this casually to my partner, he exclaimed, 'But what do you do?'. I shrugged. Nothing. There's no noticeable absence there, the grammar just is. Through experimentation, in the pages of my notebook, I quickly saw that it is perfectly possible to write English that makes sense, without using the indefinite article. To avoid it, you might use a pronoun instead – 'a hall' becomes 'his hall'; you can change from indefinite to definite article – 'it is a terrible risk', becomes 'the risk is terrible'; or you might turn a noun into a verb – 'Tad had a fever' becomes 'Tad lay fevered'. There is also the simple solution of pluralising the noun – 'a hall' becomes 'many halls'.

In my notebook, on the train, the tracks of the novel begin, slowly, to align.

The sea came quickly up the shore and broke upon the rocks. Mai sank her feet into the surf and yelled up at the sky. Seagulls cawed back, with devils' cries.

I found the idea of writing the whole novel without using the indefinite article very appealing. It seemed that by so doing, I would create something that was alienating, but perhaps only at a subliminal level. The average reader, whether they were English-only or bilingual, probably wouldn't be able to pinpoint what was odd, but they might think that something was awry. It also had the added benefit of suggesting something particular about the character of the Welsh – a streak of literalism, even something of the pedantic maybe. We don't talk about 'an apple', but 'this apple here' - 'yr afal hwn' - there is simply no way to be vague about it.

I felt a tiny, tingling sensation that there was more at play here than poetics, as I thought about 'the character of the Welsh'.

What did it conjure when I thought of Wales? Was I thinking of the stereotypes disparagingly listed by Raymond Williams (2003:5) who wrote, "if you say 'Welsh culture', what do you think of? Of bara brith and the Eisteddfod? Of choirs and Cardiff Arms Park? Of love spoons and englynion? Of the national costume and the rampant red dragon?" By thinking of the Welsh as pedantic and too literal, was I adding to the list of stereotypes? Or was my stereotyping, in fact, built on personal experience of literal-minded admonitions? Sticking to the letter of the law, rather than to its spirit. I remembered my childhood streets, silent judgements, cold chapels, plain walls. The stained-glass window made to mark the death of my great-uncle was installed in the vestibule, not the body of the chapel – colourful frippery didn't belong too close to God.

What was my interest in the world beyond Wales

built on? Was it attraction, or repulsion? Was I being tempted out, or was I just running away?

But these thoughts were still no more than tingles.

Easily ignored.

Another grammatical difference that I found compelling is English's use of the 'Saxon genitive' form of possessive nouns in which the possessor of an item is indicated using 's – English's use. Welsh doesn't use possessive forms of nouns. To say 'John's coat' you would simply say 'côt John', putting the object before its owner in a neighbourly syntactical arrangement. The lack of possessive forms of nouns in Wales also suggested a discomfort with ownership or consumerist display, which is again something I associate with the Wales of my childhood. I wondered whether English could be made to work without the genitive, and what that might look like?

The test passage again:

A seagull cawed back, a devil-cry.

I found this iteration to be very evocative. It forced surprising, fresh language from stale or clichéd phrases. It was at this point that I began to really embrace the creative opportunities of the task I had set myself. Perhaps it wasn't just going to be possible to write a Welsh-inflected version of English, perhaps I might end up writing something that was good as well. Something that would embody and celebrate the transnationalism that I wanted to convey.

As the train journeys continued, from the west coast of Aberystwyth where the sun sets in the sea, to the flat plains of East Anglia where I visited the West Stowe Anglo-Saxon village with its experimental archaeologists recreating a Saxon way of life, my notebook was beginning to fill with passages that felt closer to 'just the right angle'. My poetics were getting stronger.

I listened to podcasts as I walked my dog around Bristol's parks – podcasts in Welsh, or by Welsh people. I listened to their accents and cadences.

As I listened, I thought about Welsh word order. Sentences like, 'I had seen things similar before', reverses the Standard English word order of adjective-noun, to the Welsh order of noun-adjective. I considered doing this with all adjectives, (so 'green tree' would become 'tree green'), but English readers are so used to the word order of descriptive adjectives that I worry using this too frequently will disrupt the reading experience too intrusively. I would, I decided, attempt to use the technique subtly, perhaps only once or twice per scene.

Idiomatic language is also something I have long been fascinated by. Idioms and figures of speech preserve lifestyles long after whatever act they refer to has fallen by the wayside – we still 'hang up' phone calls, or 'dial' numbers long after changing apparatus has made these terms redundant. Older idioms act in the same way; they have something of ancient, lichen splattered rock about them. Why on earth does a 'stitch in time save nine?' and how does 'many a muckle make a mickle?' If contemporary slang evokes a specific location and time, then so too, might use of ossified slang give a sense of an ancient location and time to a novel. So, I decided to re-translate Alun Rhys Cownie's (2001) A Dictionary of Welsh and English Idiomatic Phrases, opting for a literal translation rather than an English equivalent, which is the more usual way to translate such a dictionary.

A second notebook joined the first. Long commutes to schools across the country, to talk about my writing, were spent translating. I felt, as I travelled landscapes that I can't help interpreting archaeologically – Bronze Age barrows in fields, medieval street names in cities, Norman churches dotted like firmly pressed Stickle Bricks in villages – that I was also seeing the archaeology of language somehow. In the Welsh idiom for making a mountain out of a molehill, you make a church and mill of an issue, gwneud melin ac eglwys ohoni . To arrive late for something is to arrive after the fair, cyrraedd ar ôl y ffair. The phrases suggest a landscape that is pastoral and bucolic. Preserving long-lost lifestyles, even as the train rattled through the scrapyards and warehouses of Birmingham or the graffiti-daubed track of Paddington. The idioms are creatively exciting too. Euphemisms for death include the evocative: to go and get your answer, dy anfon iwch ateb; to be collected by your fathers, cael dy gasglu at dy tadau; to sleep outside, i gysgu mas. To be pregnant is to grow small bones, magu esgyrn back or to find your apron strings are too short, llinyn dy ffedog yn mynd yn rhi byr. Delicious.

Finally, I sought inspiration for my poetics from Welsh literary styles, namely cynghanedd poetry. There are many variants in the use of cynghanedd, but at its most simple, it is a stressed meter which uses repeating sounds to emphasize the stress. I want readers of The Short Knife to experience

something akin to the experience of reading this sonorous Welsh poetry. Professor M. Wynn Thomas in his foreword to Mererid Hopwood (2004), Singing in Chains, calls cynghanedd poetry, 'A stunning edifice of aural architecture, it is an acoustic environment that has long reverberated to all the mood music of the human imagination.' I want to borrow some of the features of cynghanedd to show this edifice to English-only readers, who are unlikely to have the same familiarity with the style as Welsh readers, who hear it in schools, Eisteddfods and even at the occasional pub open mike night.

This has been attempted in English before. Here's an example by Dic Jones (Hopwood, 2004:82):

> "No hymn of birds, no tremor – save the sounds
> Of the sea's sad tenor,
> The stars ascend in splendour,
> And the dark creeps round the door."

Sadly, I fear I have only been able to give an imperfect impression of this art form in the verses incorporated within the novel. I have focused on parachesis, or repeating sounds somewhat in the manner of alliteration, assonance and sibilance, which are essential features of cynghanedd. I have also incorporated some 'set piece' poems which follow something of the demanding form of cynghanedd, with the intention of marking moments of strong connection for Mai with the landscape around her, or her moments of extreme emotion.

By the end of the year, my notebook was full of experiments and notes which allowed me to create the poetics needed to write the novel. I had my original voice. All I needed now was a story to tell.

PART TWO: THE CHALLENGE TO THE TRANSNATIONAL APPROACH

By June 2016, I had a rough idea for a character – Mai, who would find herself embroiled with Saxons somehow. Perhaps as a translator between leaders, or as part of a boundary-crossing love story. It lacked detail and narrative drive. I had focused on the poetics of the piece over the content.

Then, I was invited to take part in a workshop with Prof Nicholas Jose of Adelaide University on Translation Plus. This proved to be a critical a moment in the development of the novel.

Translation Plus is defined by Prof Jose (2015, p5) as: "pedagogic experiments in creative writing involving literary texts in languages other than English". During the workshop, Prof Jose explored a translation technique which required no second language knowledge at all. The technique was inspired by Ben Lerner's 2011 novel Leaving the Atocha Station, in which the main character 'translates' Lorca by searching for English homonyms for the incomprehensible Spanish words. The resulting cacophony represents the character's own mental collapse. At the time, I had appreciated the technique's hybrid approach to language, as this connected with the poetics of my own project.

It seemed to me that there was potential to incorporate the technique into my poetics. I could search for homonyms, or translated homonyms, and onomatopoeia, allowing the tension between the two languages to suggest novel images. I translate, and retranslate as I write – playfully moving from one language to the other, searching for fruitful points of contact. It worked! I was able to incorporate Welsh words, as English onomatopoeia: igam-ogam was used instead of zig-zag, goodi-hoo was used to describe an owl's call, among many others.

I was so delighted with what was emerging by using Translation Plus that I decided to make use of it in a side-project.

The 6 July 2016 the Welsh football team were playing in the semi-finals of the European Cup. That evening, having acquired new fair-weather fans as they progressed through the competition, I wondered whether Translation Plus might be a way to share joy; a way, perhaps, to widen access to this suddenly desirable commodity, Welshness.

In a moment of enthusiasm, I experimented. The Welsh national anthem, Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau, (usual translation: Land of My Fathers) is sung before each game. I wondered whether an English homonymic rendition, encapsulating joy and sporting achievement, might be possible. I neglected to wonder whether it was desirable. After some 45 minutes of playing, I wrote this:

> "My hen lad, fun had I, and willy memes,
> Glad Bears and canned onions, their Wags, Graham Obree,
> Hey goo-rolled, ruff-wearing, glad Gary tries mad,
> Bros rubbed it, Coles asked it, I'm glad.

Ghoul-add! Ghoul-add! Play Eid all hoof heave it lads!

Try more, in field, here beer, have pie,
Oh bud-head, here hen Neath par high."

And I promptly posted it to Facebook and Twitter with the suggestion: "A small gift to the Rest of the UK, to be used on Weds 6th July."

Significantly, it does require some familiarity with the original in order to engage with it at all.

The majority of interactions were positive – likes, retweets and shares. There was at least one person who was a reluctant retweeter. Lal Skinner (2016) wrote "Hilarious – even a Welsh patriot like me has to laugh at this # sing UK!". The use of the word 'even' indicates a sense of discomfort at aligning themself too closely with the reworking. The subtext of Lal's comment is that I cannot be, 'a Welsh patriot' in writing this piece; my treatment of the anthem is funny, but disrespectful.

This view was put significantly more forcefully by Dr Dafydd Sills-Jones (2016a). On Facebook, he wrote, "C'mon, Elen, it's [the reworking's] clearly a piss take – it could be said that's intimidating to Welsh speakers, by belittling their national anthem."

Was I belittling 'their', national anthem?

I will answer that question in a moment. But I want to pause here on the significance of Dr Sills-Jones' use of that innocuous pronoun. Mine is not the first 'hybrid' anthem, nor will it be the last, I'm sure. The South Wales Argus, in Something Fishy About the Anthem (2006), printed a version, which was reproduced by Wales Online, claimed to be by Swansea poet, Nigel Jenkins. This version is passed around at Welsh matches from time-to-time. But Jenkins, who was a renowned poet and lecturer in Creative Writing at Swansea University is positioned as an 'insider' writing for other 'insiders'.

By using the pronoun 'their', Dr Sills-Jones is positioning me, and perhaps both of us, as outsiders. It is not 'our' or 'your' anthem. My voice does not represent Welsh people, in the same way that a Welsh poet based in Swansea does.

So, by creating the piece, am I belittling an anthem which isn't mine?

I asked Dr Sills-Jones for further comment, elaborating on his public statement. He kindly agreed, and wrote, "The Welsh language needs careful and respectful handling, and has been subject to several attempts at linguicide by the British state... A piss-take English version is dangerous as it threatens to blank out one of the only manifestations of the language amongst the majority of its constituents.1 Why would you want to do that, or even gesture towards that end?" (Sills-Jones, 2016b)

It was at this point that the tiny, tingling sensation I had felt earlier became impossible to ignore. What I had thought was a stylistic experiment had deeper implications. I'd been squishing down my own disquiet, my own fears, and carrying on regardless. But this challenge forced an internal confrontation that I couldn't back away from.

Language isn't just a collection of random sounds. I knew that. The poetics I was using meant something, beyond the game I had been playing. Words can put up walls. Metaphorical bombs were exploding all over the no-man's land I had wandered into.

The martial landscape was further brought home to me during a conversation with Dr Simon Rodway (2016), in which he said, "Welsh and English are engaged in a battle that is so one-sided, the other lot don't even know they are fighting."

Whose side was I on? Did I have a right to speak? If I spoke, was I a representative of Wales? Or was my position, as a writer published by London houses, living in England, too close to the 'centre', as Dr Sills-Jones' use of 'their' seems to suggest?

Up to this point, I had been treating the project like a game, a puzzle to solve. Now it was time to put on armour and think more seriously about the endeavour and the implications of using transnational creativity. My actions, in creating poetics based on hybridized language necessitated a reckoning with betrayal.

PART THREE: THE RECKONING, BETRAYAL AS A GENERATIVE TOOL

I had been holding on to childhood memories of a certain kind of Wales where all the houses were built of bricks that had been fired in kilns at the end of the road; the roofs were all made of slate, quarried from the hills that sided the valley. Everything around me had been made within spitting distance. Even the entertainment was stubbornly home-grown, with school plays taken from the Mabinogi, or other local legends. I had decided, long ago, that it was a culture I wanted to shrug off.

But Wales is a place where cultural belonging is hard to ignore.

The challenge from Dafydd Sills-Jones was reminding me of that.

In order to understand the criticism that the use of Translation Plus in a Welsh-English context constitutes a betrayal, it is necessary to understand the cultural role of the Welsh language in Wales.

The Welsh language is, for many of its speakers, simply the language they learned when they were infants – it is their mother tongue. But Dr Andrew G. Livingstone et al. (2009, pp302-5) has also identified a role for the language as, what he calls, 'an identity management resource'. His research found that it is considered to be of symbolic importance to the national identity of both Welsh and non-Welsh speakers alike. Which is to say that, in this study, even those Welsh people who don't speak Welsh consider the ability to speak the language as one of the identifiers of nationhood – thus denying themselves full access to their own nation.

Within this framework, where the language signifies an end-goal in and of itself, as an expression of nationhood, any challenge to the language must be loaded and speakers of the language might be viewed as guardians of nationhood. The Welsh language is both a marker of identity and a site of resistance. By trying to use it as an inspiration for a form of English, am I, prima facie, not a 'Welsh patriot'? Is my desire to give a flavour of the Welsh language to non-Welsh speakers a betrayal?

My parents had had a dream for me, when they were young and I was an infant. They had spoken to me in Welsh; a language my grandmother had been ashamed of speaking, a language that my dad had been beaten for using in front of visitors. They had sent me to a Welsh medium school, despite their private worries that it might hinder my educational development. My acquisition of two languages, English and Welsh, had been a deliberate political act by my parents. They wanted me to become an active member of a confident, self-determining nation (they still do).

But I had chosen to leave for England.

So far, I've presented this issue in an unemotional way. As though I were writing about someone else, or something from long ago.

But that isn't how it happened.

I was at Sunday lunch, in a pub, with my partner and two friends. Our table had a view over Bristol's Old Town, within seagull-cry of the harbour. I'd ordered, and was drinking a pint, when my phone pinged with a message from Dr Sills-Jones. I read it.

I felt an immediate adrenaline hit, as though someone in the pub had thrown a bar stool. My heart pounded. I had to get up, leave the table and my chatting friends, and head down to the bathrooms. I read the message again, washed my face, breathed.

Read it again.

Yes, this is a cerebral, theoretical discussion, but it is a personal, embodied one too. I felt the effects, as much as I considered them. For a moment, I was a teenager again. Told off by someone in authority. Hiding in the bathroom. A classic scene in many coming-of-age stories. The tingling sensations about the import of my actions become tremors. I felt like a teenager, experiencing the classic teenage emotion of shame.

I'd been enthralled by the puzzle I'd set myself with this project, thinking exclusively about style and the emerging poetics, I'd not considered what it might mean in terms of my relationship with my country, my family and my identity. I found myself confronted by fragmentations – of my own image of myself as a loyal person; and tension – what on earth was I going to do with this project now?

But tension is a necessary ingredient of drama, conflict is at the heart of what makes a story. And these feelings of questioned loyalties, betrayal and shame could all be generative, I realized. The emotional drama could be embodied, in the person of Mai, and become drama on the page. I could make the motif of betrayal the dominant force of conflict in The Short Knife. By exposing my readers to multiple instances of betrayal, each thesis and antithesis would a better understanding of the nature of betrayal and why it happens, with Mai also synthesising the betrayals as she grows into adulthood. Betrayal could build the plot.

I made my character Mai experience betrayal – the loss of her parents; rejection by her sister; her own betrayal of her own moral code, and, climactically in the novel, the legendary betrayal of 'The Treachery of the Long Knives', which she lives through.

It is a truism of writing for children and young people that writers have to get rid of the parents. Usually this is for practical reasons – an orphan has more narrative agency than a child still protected by family. However, as I wrote The Short Knife the loss

of a parent took on a deeper utility. The realisation that parents are vulnerable and fallible people in their own right is a necessary and painful discovery in the lives of young people – coming to terms with that 'betrayal' is a crucial step on the road to independence. There are examples throughout fiction of young people being let down by a parental figure, from Todd and Mayor Prentiss in Patrick Ness' (2008) The Knife of Never Letting Go, to Emma and her keeping-up-appearances Mam in Louise O'Neil's (2015) Asking for It.

Mai is further 'betrayed' by her sister Haf later in the novel. In the role of surrogate parent, Haf wants to protect her younger sister, but she is not yet an adult herself and an indiscreet moment sees her sharing her sister's secret with people who then hurt Mai. I don't want to ascribe a single meaning to this plot point, but it was important to me that an unreasonable burden of responsibility be placed on shoulders that are too young to carry it – Haf is a failed guardian and the repercussions of that failure propel the plot.

Mai experiences betrayal, but she is also disloyal herself – she leaves, often, in the plot. First, she leaves the farm where she grew up, then she leaves the British settlement, finally she leaves the Saxon village. She has good reason for all of these departures, but still, she is turning her back on communities she has been a part of and might owe loyalty to.

Mai was already speaking in a voice that was an avatar for my own linguistic situation – comfortable somewhere between Welsh and English. Now she also became an avatar for my own understanding of loyalty and betrayal, my own relationship with Wales and the community I had once belong to.

Mai's own greatest betrayal when she is asked to rob a tomb in order to trade in grave goods. Mai reluctantly agrees to the graverobbing, in exchange for food from the leaders at the hillfort where she has sought sanctuary. When I first came across evidence of 5th century grave robbing in an archaeological report, by P. Rahtz (1992), I was thrilled by the creative possibilities. The act of actually robbing a grave, told in first person, blow by blow, or body, horns and hooves, is emotive. Readers will, hopefully, feel some of the squeamishness and doubt about the wisdom of the endeavour that I have felt about writing this novel. On the one hand, she is being asked to pay her own way, to contribute to her society in order to eat. On the other hand, the task she's been given breaks a strong cultural taboo. Traditions like burial rites – or using our mother tongue – are bargains we have made with those who have gone before us. We can reasonably expect that our children, and the generations to come will honour those shared traditions, as guardians. By opening tombs – or rejecting a mother tongue – we not only risk desecration, but we are also saying that the bonds of culture are breakable. As a writer who might be seen to be betraying my cultural inheritance, the symbolism of a ransacked tomb is delicious.

So, betrayal forms the bedrock of a beat of action in the novel. Mai is forced to decide which is the lesser evil. The black and white world of childhood morality becomes the shades of grey of adult understanding: a point of transition. Ultimately, the growth through betrayal that Mai encounters is the victory of experience over innocence. Escape looks like abandonment; betrothals turn into massacres; love turns to rejection. Each of these incremental steps allows Mai to reach a better understanding of herself and her position in the world.

The finale of The Short Knife is played out against the backdrop of the legend of the 'Treachery of the Long Knives' in which the Saxon lord Hengist kills the British at a wedding feast, thus violating all rules of hospitality. The story has additional resonance in Wales as its Welsh name, Brad Y Cyllell Hirion, has influenced the names given to other 'betrayals' by the state, such as 'Brad Y Llyfrau Gleision'. [1] This betrayal, this treachery by those in power, of course offers the perfect place for the climax of the novel. It is this final pain that is the final shift of Mai's character, propelling her permanently into adulthood. And in the novel's final moments, she is finally able to construct her own identity, as a Welsh runaway, on the river with the family she has chosen for herself.

CONCLUSION: THE AUTHOR GROWS UP

I realized, as I embodied my betrayal in the characters in the novel, that I was resentful of my past. But I still cared; I was still emotionally attached to the people and places I'd grown up with. As Mai grew towards adulthood, during writing, I was also growing. The Wales I grew up in wasn't perfect, but I wasn't perfect either. I had been sulky and recalcitrant, keen to take offence and slow to forgive. Perhaps the people I'd grown up with had had reason to judge me. I had been a poor guardian. I had betrayed too.

Such a galling thing to realize about oneself.

Mai ends the book floating on a river, away from the Saxons and the British. She still has further to go before she finds a home. Partly because she is still an adolescent at the end of the book, she still has more to learn before becoming an adult; but partly because any kind of belonging is impermanent and negotiable, it is possible to self-exclude or self-integrate, as I was discovering. I could re-write my own narrative through Mai.

English is a rapacious language that has absorbed and assimilated other languages that have crossed its path. I had grown up believing that Welsh was weak in comparison, a little mouse of a language clinging on at the very edges. And, in some ways, it is. But I didn't have to believe that the only way to defend it is to turn westward, to speak Welsh in every conceivable circumstance, or feel guilty for failing.

The division I had perceived, between me and my country of birth, was created and sustained by the stories I had been telling myself.

Perhaps I could change those stories.

Anecdotally, it's common, for those who have left their childhood home, to feel alienated from it. But it seems that 'being Welsh' is a designation which is strangely ephemeral, and can slip away if it's not carefully tended. John Osmond (1992-3:24), writing in the New Welsh Review, wrote about one of the border towns, "...on the face of it, you might not readily recognize it to be Wales. You see in that sublime gradation...Abergavenny is not 'very Welsh'. What other mainstream nationalism in the British Isles has such an attribute applied to it, indicating that its identity is a question of degree?"

If it is a question of degree, then there is no 'getting it right', being 'proper Welsh'. Rather, like the formative years of adolescence, I could try definitions on for size, and feel freedom in that playfulness. By 2018, some two years after this process began, I had realized that I could listen to Radio Cymru when Georgia Ruth was playing really interesting, exciting music, and I could turn it off when the interminable Taro'r Post was interviewing planning officers about the relocation of some chapel. I could do imaginative play with my niece in Welsh, but moan to my sister about university admin in English. My language choices could be situational and contingent and there was no need to feel guilty. It was only a betrayal if I allowed that narrative to dominate.

Suddenly, my sense of being an outsider was lessened. We're all outsiders, and policing each other is a hiding to nothing.

To return to Coquaz' statement, I had been through the tensions and fragmentations that writing in two languages might engender, but I was also healing – reconciling not simply within the novel, but within myself.

When I left Wales, aged eighteen, I took a teenage mind-set with me, and it had ossified in the intervening years. In writing Mai's story, I was also finally embarking on my own, very late, coming-of-age.

My next book is set entirely in contemporary Wales, with joyful scenes of community that happen in rugby clubs and pubs with flat roofs. The terraced houses are friendly, even close up. And I'm pleased to say that The Short Knife was warmly welcomed in Wales, winning the 2021 Tir Na n-Og award for the best English-language book with an authentic Welsh background.

In reconciling with betrayal, I am finally wearing my guardianship lightly.

ENDNOTES

[1] D Sills-Jones is likely to be referring to state-sponsored repression of the Welsh language in favour of English. See, for instance, 'Brad Y Llyfrau Gleision', the findings of a mid-19th century public enquiry which concluded that the Welsh language contributed to the laziness and immorality of the Welsh people**.**

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Dr Elen Caldecott is a creative writing practitioner with a successful ten-year career in the publishing industry, writing fiction for children and young people. Her first novel, *How Kirsty Jenkins Stole the Elephant* was published by Bloomsbury and was shortlisted for the Waterstones' Children's Book Award. Subsequent titles include *Evie's Magic Bracelet* with Hodder, and the *Marsh Road Mysteries* series with Bloomsbury. Since completing her PhD in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University, Elen's creative career has dovetailed with practice-led research in academia. Her work engages with representations of working-class children in fiction, as well as transnational writing for young people. Her PhD novel, *The Short Knife*, was published in 2020 by Andersen Press. It was shortlisted for the Carnegie Award and won the Tir Na n-Og Award. Elen now lectures in Creative Writing at Lancaster University.

Retaining the nuances of a minority language when writing in English

A Creative-critical Approach to How the Nuances of the Maltese Language Can be Retained

Amber Duivenvoorden

ABSTRACT

Where a minority culture has retained its own language, the writer who wants or needs to write in another language faces the challenge of conveying the full meaning of the nuances belonging to that minority culture. Through examples from my own creative work, this study explores three main ways, by which the nuances of the Maltese language can be retained when writing short fiction in English, all involving code-switching. By code-switching what is meant is shifting from one language to another, depending on the social context. In this case, since the audience is not just a Maltese one, the intention is to create a realistic linguistic landscape that does not jeopardize a wider audience's understanding of the text. The argument points to the fact that although there are ways to retain the nuances of the Maltese language, there are many limitations in evincing specific facets of Maltese life in the English language, especially those relating to jokes, politics, or dialect and for this reason, the Maltese culture can never be fully represented in mainstream literature.

KEYWORDS

Code-Switching, discourse, linguistic, landscape, minority, language, major, literature, English, Maltese.

INTRODUCTION

In colonized countries it is often the case that there is a linguistic conflict between the languages of the colonizer and colonized. By default, the language in which the said colonized country's literature should be written also becomes a disputed issue and often the colonized advocate for literary work to be composed in their native tongue, rather than in a dominant language. In this paper, I will be focusing specifically on Maltese literature as a minority literature that remains widely unavailable to foreign audiences because of the exclusivity of its language.Through examples from my own work, I will showcase how the English language should be perceived as a neutral language, possessing the ability to publicize Maltese literature, rather than the language of power, designed to exercise the colonizer's superiority. I will also exhibit how the Maltese language can appear in small doses alongside English, how its nuances can be retained in some ways. However, I also argue that overall, its linguistic overtones can never be fully represented in mainstream literature, meaning fiction that is available to people from a wide range of "age groups and gender lines", mainly because the Maltese language is only spoken by around "440 thousand people in at least six territories" (Lindenstein 2018 & Worldmapper 2021).

Naturally, it is understandable why a colonized nation would want the literature of their country to be written in their own, native language. In the case of Maltese, although the language is not yet endangered, it is still at a high "risk of disappearing", because it is "used by a proportionally small number of people" (Bartolo 2018). However, there are other languages that are actually threatened with extinction. Welsh is one of them. It is interesting to note that in 20th century Wales, despite the fact that the English controlled "educational, religious and governing institutions", Welsh language culture and literature still persisted (Lloyd 1992). Also, despite that over the last 200 years there has been a decrease in Welsh speakers and a rise in Anglo-Welsh literature, many have not welcomed the latter at all (Lloyd 1992: 435-436). In fact R. S. Thomas, the most praised Welsh poet believes that "what is written in Welsh is Welsh literature of varying quality. What is written in English has to strain very hard indeed to merit the description of Welsh writing in English, which is nonsense anyway" (Ned, Barnie n.d., cited in Lloyd 1992). It also appears as though Anglo-Welsh literature has not been all too successful, both in Wales and abroad. Bobi Jones has argued that Anglo-Welsh literature can never be considered as good as Welsh Literature in the Welsh language, and Harri Webb, an English language Welsh poet, in 1985, announced that he "would no longer contribute to the "load of rubbish" that constitutes Anglo-Welsh literature" (Lloyd 1992: 436). The reason that it has gained little recognition might be related to the fact that although it is written in English, it is written "out of a Welsh milieu", and is therefore "physically and culturally distant from the centres of English-language literacy activity in London and New York" (Lloyd 1992: 437). Apart from this, it has been unacknowledged by American and English literary critics and considered "peripheral" and "antithetical" to the mores of "Welsh-speaking Wales" (Lloyd 1992). This indicates that using the language of the colonizer to make Welsh literature accessible to a wider audience has not been particularly well received by the Welsh, and what this highlights is that some minority literatures have had a harder time at promoting their culture in the language of the other. Therefore, I knew that if I were to depict the Maltese minority community in the English language, instead of Maltese, I had to explain my rationale behind it.

It was not until the nineteenth century that Maltese novelists who had previously produced works in Italian reconsidered the language in which they were writing and turned instead to Maltese, their vernacular, the people's tongue (Friġġieri 1988). The main reason for this was that it was the only way novelists could hope to be understood by most of the Maltese population (Friġġieri 1988). By then, the Maltese language had not been cultivated politically or scientifically for centuries. In fact, the alphabet wasn't standardized until 1924 (Arevalo 2014). However, through the historical novels of Anton Manwel Caruana and Ġuze Muscat Azzopardi, self-expression in Maltese was set in motion (Friġġieri 1988). The success of the Maltese historical novel in the latter part of the nineteenth century preceded the social novel, which began to make its mark in the early twentieth century with novels like Leli ta' Ħaż- Żgħir and Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-Amerka. The social novel presented itself as a scrutiny into the working-class condition which in previous literary works had been overshadowed by the urgency to express the importance of "national identity and constitutional emancipation", from the colonizer (Friġġieri 1988: 302). Maltese came to be recognized as an important literary language in the island and the Academy of Maltese Writers, launched in 1920, strengthened its importance even further by

validating its purpose as the guardian of the Maltese language and its literature (Times of Malta 2020). The Academy took an active role in ensuring that the Maltese language was given its due respect, guiding broadcasters on correct Maltese usage, going to Brussels before Malta's 2003 EU referendum to discuss issues relating to translation with the European Commission and Parliament, and in 1989, publicly deploring the lack of importance that Maltese was being given at certain private schools (Casha, Camilleri 2000).

Following the struggle that went into establishing Maltese as an important literary language, it is understandable that contemporary Maltese writers feel strongly about writing in their vernacular and oppose the idea of Maltese literature being publicized in the English language, of asserting itself "through a presencing in the language of the other" (Callus 2009: 37). In 'Performativity, precarity and sexual politics', Butler uses Spivak's assertion that "under conditions of subalternity", the only real solution "to lay claim to rights" is through "assimilating to those juridicial systems" which were structured on the eradication and misuse of Indigenous cultures (Butler 2009: x). Butler goes on to emphasise the importance of using the dominant language, not to confirm its power, but rather to oppose its savagery, "to find the language through which to lay claim to rights to which one is not yet entitled" (Butler 2009: x). Ultimately, what Butler, Callus and Spivak are pointing at is the importance of allowing the voiceless a right to speak, even if this means "negotiating the right to speak", through using the language of the colonizer (Butler 2009: x).

It is apt to note that the valorizing of the vernacular isn't motivated by simple patriotism. It is also influenced by the belief that some things are "beyond translation" and that translating them might actually undermine what is inherently Maltese (Callus 2009: 37). Spivak also claims that "unthinking translations" will always be somewhat flawed, because "they rest on flawed ground" (Spivak n.d., cited in Maini 2018). A minority language being translated into English, will always be robbed "of its phonetic and cultural substance" (Spivak n.d., cited in Maini 2018). In fact, this was perhaps the main struggle I faced in my creative practice; how could I convincingly write about the Maltese outcast's development in another language, in my case English, when according to a survey carried out by the National Council for the Maltese Language and the Department of Maltese at the University of Malta, 97% of Maltese citizens aged between 18 and 80 consider Maltese as their first language? (Borġ at al 2021).

Fowler conjectures that it is necessary for a novel to confer an assurance of the real on the imaginary (Fowler 2006). In fact, in most Maltese fiction, a person's social class and character, as well as the country's bilingual element, are brought out through authentic sounding dialogue, reflective of real life. Alex Vella Gera's novel, Is-Sriep Reġgħu saru Valenużi is written in both Maltese and English and he does this to reflect the island's social divide. The narrator's family are mostly English speaking and this is reflected in the way they code-switch, moving swiftly from Maltese to English as in the example below:

> "Jaħasra the boat dis-sena għadni lanqas ħriġtha. I did some repairs over the winter u qisni I got tired of it" (Vella Gera 2012: 181). They send their children to private schools and vote for the Nationalist party, yet the other people in their street are Maltese speaking and send their children to government schools. The fact that the protagonist himself speaks Maltese, reveals the "cultural and political position" he has taken in defiance of his family (Vassallo 2016: 218). However, despite this, he cannot escape his very bilingual upbringing as his thoughts and language constantly move "to and from English", highlighting the ease he feels with both languages, as well as the anxiety he experiences at the thought of betraying his Maltese identity (Vassallo 2016: 218).

Vella Gera's experimentation with language fits Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien's definition of "weird English", which she claims is mostly concerned with "who the speaker is" and how the latter can commandeer the language in whichever way they want (Ch'ien 2004: 17). Not only does this variety of English depicted by Vella Gera undermine the traditional language and allow the Maltese language to share the prestige savoured by English, it also disobeys the rules of the English language (Torres 2007: 76). Lourdes Torres explores how this is done in most Latino texts, where although English is the main language, Spanish "lexical items and phrases are incorporated into the English language text" (Torres 2007). Junot Diaz is one such Latino author who mixes Spanish and English in his writing and believes in the coexistence and fluctuation between the two languages (Ch'ien 2004). Much like Vella Gera, he doesn't use italics or quotation marks when including Spanish elements in his work and for him this is a crucial political gesture, because he argues

that "Spanish is not a minority language, so why treat it like one?" (Ch'ien 2004).

However, the difference between Junot Diaz and Alex Vella Gera is that the former affords to promote Spanish in this way, since after all, Spanish is "a cultural language of the highest order", "an international language", with "an official and vehicular capacity in 21 countries worldwide", while Maltese is only mainly spoken in one island (Moreno-Fernandez & Otero 2008: 68). Consequently, although a novel like Vella Gera's Is-Sriep Reġgħu saru Valenużi, communicates very well Malta's position as a bilingual country with established diglossia and heavy dependence on code-switching, this not only means that it is limited to the reader who understands the humour, politics and nuances between both languages, but also that the readership is much narrower than Junot Diaz's.

Apart from refusing to italicize Spanish elements, Junot Diaz is also against translating his work, as he claims that the notion of translation is designed by the "dominant culture" and is effectively "erasure", resulting in "inauthenticity, distortion and contamination" (Ch'ien 2004: 208). This is the same problem that Vella Gera would have if he were to translate his work completely into English; the nuances identified by each language in different contexts are completely lost. An example of this is when the protagonist visits his family's house, right after his mother's funeral and his stream of consciousness switches from Maltese to English, a language he equates with his mother, heightening his sense of grief. This would not come across if the whole work were to be translated into English.

> "Id-dar kienet bħal pjaneta oħra, diżabitata the rarefied air of grief and loss and sadness still palpable, especially in certain nooks and crannies" (Vella Gera 2012: 131).

The problems inherent in translation were particularly noticeable with the publication of Francis Ebejer's Requiem for a Malta Fascist which was initially written in English and subsequently translated into Maltese. The translated title, Requiem għal Sieħbi Faxxista managed to capture "the flavour of the story", as it emphasised the importance of friendship within the novel and through the use of "sieħbi", implied both that although his friend was a fascist, he was not, and that despite this, they remained friends (Caruana 2008: 162). These implications weren't present in the English title. Apart from this, "the language of translation was able to reflect wholly and accurately the physical and socio-cultural environment which English was unable to do" (Caruana 2008: 162). For instance in Maltese, the term "gebuba" refers to a small space within the house, while "għarix", is "a stand alone structure in the countryside" (Caruana 2008). While the Maltese version was able to make this distinction, the English version was not, and Ebejer was therefore forced to use the term "hut" in both cases (Caruana 2008). Much like in Gera's case, if Is-Sriep Reġgħu saru Valenużi, were to be translated completely into English, Ebejer's original English version was unable to depict "the bilingual context which is Malta", while the Maltese version did so with ease (Caruana 2008). A particular instance is when both the English soldier and Maltese constable tell Lorenz to move away. In the Maltese version, the soldier's order to "Hop it!" is retained, while the constable exclaims "Aħrab 'l hemm!", giving a genuine linguistic account (Caruana 2008: 163). However, perhaps the translator truly managed to create an authentic Maltese ambiance through bringing in dialect in the villagers' dialogue which works to infer the social status of those who speak dialect and those who speak standard Maltese (Caruana 2008: 163). The translator, Briffa was also able "to exploit the phonological aspects of Maltese" and at times, the text reads as a ballad, helped on by the use of alliteration in lines like, "Taħriġ ta' kastig u turment' and 'imkemmxa u mħaffra biż-żmien" (Briffa 2004: 141). In this way, the translation into Maltese "can be viewed as a reverse process, the local reality being brought back and reunited with its roots" and therefore a much more authentic and honest depiction than the first work (Caruana 2008:164). However, ultimately Briffa's translation was aimed solely at a Maltese audience, while Ebejer's initial work allowed for a much wider audience.

Much like Ebejer, when I started writing my collection of stories, the reader I had in mind wasn't simply a Maltese one. My objective has always been to publicize my country's concerns, to make our minority culture accessible to a wider audience and it was predominantly for this reason that I chose to write in English. However, through resorting to the dominant language, I found that I was unable to depict what speaking in Maltese means to specific characters, what it reveals about their social class and upbringing, and what different dialects say about the regions in Malta they have grown up in. I also lost the correlation between Maltese and English as, respectively, the colonized and the colonizer's languages. I was at risk of what Clare Vassallo refers to as reducing "the dialogue, and perhaps also the

narration, to a fluent monolingual sameness which would no longer reflect the linguistic reality of the characters depicted in the novels" (Vassallo 2013: 51).

For this reason, I was initially hesitant to include too much dialogue in some of the stories, turning to stream of consciousness instead. In one of my earlier stories, "The Interdiction", the protagonist doesn't talk to her brother about memories of their mother. Instead the latter are captured in her thought process. A lot of significant actions happen when the characters are alone, removing the necessity for conversation with other characters to ensue. This was a problem because it resulted in not being able to fully communicate the characters' relations to each other and even in flat characters at times, particularly the minor ones in the story whose stream of consciousness is never revealed to the audience. I felt frustrated at not being able to convey my characters' linguistic reality and at having to find ways to avoid dialogue, which is crucial in inferring character.

Another strategy that I used to avoid reducing the dialogue to the "monolingual sameness", described by Vassallo, was to include Maltese phrases and terms throughout the story (Vassallo 2013: 51). I will now go over some instances where I did this in my collection. In one of the stories entitled "Shadow Puppets", the protagonist, Karl can't speak English, so it wouldn't have been linguistically realistic to have him converse in the dominant language. For that reason, in Karl's narrative, the only piece of dialogue present is, "Oqgħod għassa magħhom," a phrase frequently used by Kristi whenever the foreigners her and Karl work with are "behind the till or picking up customers' money from the table" because she "doesn't trust them". Through this information, even without knowing the words, a wider audience can infer its meaning and understand that the comment is disparaging and directed at the foreigners. Another instance where Maltese surfaces in dialogue is when Frans is talking to Ġorġ about his ex-wife and how he'd woken up "sweating and shaking in anger", after dreaming of her with another man. Once again, although a wider audience won't understand the meaning of "Noqtolha kont Ġorġ, inħanxrilha għonqa żgur", through the fact that Frans draws "his right thumb across the base of his neck" and slams his ex-wife's photo on the table, "his fist coming down on her face", it can be inferred that the man's sentiments regarding his wife are strong and the thought of her with another man triggers violence in him. In "Small Tight Spaces", I also managed to insert a common Maltese expression, which can be inferred by a foreign audience, through the fact that it's explained in English, "Yes ħi, I like everything. In Maltese we say minix qanżħa."

Nonetheless, despite the inferences that can be made, these phrases would still be unintelligible to a foreign audience. The importance of unintelligibility in the postcolonial has been drawn out by Salman Rushdie, whose writing not only expresses different languages, but also "moves in many worlds at hyperspeed, confronting the unintelligibility of existence with multiple narratives" (Rushdie 1996 cited in Ch'ien 2004: 258). In fact, the reader Rushdie has in mind is the urban Indian. He claims that "it is typical of Bombay and maybe of India that there is a sense of play in the way people use language. Most people in India are multilingual… it's quite characteristic that a sentence will begin in one language, go through a second language and end in a third" (Rushdie 1996 cited in Ch'ien 2004: 260). His characters use a "personalized pidgin" which defies interpretation by those who do not speak it. This pidgin is reflective of reality, of the fact that all families have their own private language and "linguistic oddities" (Ch'ien 2004). Besides this, Rushdie doesn't believe in using the English language in the same manner as the British (Ch'ien 2004). He believes in reworking it to suit his culture's needs. For Rushdie, to conquer and manipulate the English language means completing "the process of making ourselves free" (Ch'ien 2004: 264). In Trainspotting, Irvine Welsh also doesn't write in standard English. Instead, he chooses the Scottish dialect. He does this to reflect the coarse lives of characters who refuse to be indoctrinated into the colonizer's values and who remain "unbrainwashed by the dominant culture" (Ch'ien 2004: 13).

As someone writing about contemporary Malta, I also wanted my work to reflect the reality of Malta's sociolinguistic and postcolonial nature. However, I was all too aware that my position is unlike Rushdie's or Welsh's. Rushdie is writing about a contemporary urban India whose official language is the fourth most spoken language in the world. Welsh's writing is comprehensible by English speakers who may not instantly understand the dialect, but can do so by a little effort, especially by reading it aloud (Ch'ien 2004). I, however, am attempting to advocate the language of a small island with just about 440 thousand people (Worldmapper 2021). Despite this, I still felt obliged to include Maltese elements in dialogue and I found three main circumstances where I was able to do this without risking being misunderstood by a wider audience.

The first circumstance arose when I had Maltese-speaking protagonists in the presence of characters who didn't speak Maltese themselves.These Maltese speakers were therefore forced to communicate in the majority language with the non-Maltese speakers. However, because my Maltese-speaking characters' knowledge of English is minimal, Maltese elements appear in their discourse nonetheless. In "Shadow Puppets", I included Maltese words such as "ara", "mela" or "hux vera" in Frans' speeches with the Canadian girls at his farmhouse. These are constantly used in Maltese discourse, and yet require no particular explanation or definition. Through showcasing his limited knowledge of the English language in phrases such as "What you want?" or "He drinks from five this afternoon", I hoped to create what Vassallo refers to as a "particular local flavour". (Vassallo 2013: 51) Moreover, it is a flavor that is indicative of the kind of education Frans has received, as well as the social class he belongs to. In another story, "Rows of Lavender", the only Maltese character, a guard at the detention centre, also uses Maltese elements in his speech when communicating with foreigners, reflecting a weak command of English, such as in, "Filkas, you better go to room".

I want to turn now to the second circumstance where I found it easy to include 'a local flavour' in dialogue without mentioning anything significant in the minority language. This circumstance occurred when I was writing about characters who speak the variety of Maltese English which Vella defines as "the English acquired by children of Maltese parentage in a family Type D" (Vella 2013: 12). Type D families belong to the fourth family type identified by Vella whose first acquired language is English, and they then learn Maltese through formal education. This means that overall, their preferred spoken language is English. The characters in my story 'Pet' speak this variety of English, and so, are predominantly English-speaking. They also conform to the traits usually associated with these kinds of speakers in Malta, who according to a research carried out by Bagley are often white-collar workers, non-State educated and very well-off (Bagley 2001 cited in Vella 2013: 16). A linguistic structure that particularly denotes this sub-variety includes the idiosyncratic use of "stay reading" in a sentence like "I don't have the patience to stay reading a magazine" (Vella 2013: 15). In the story "Pet", Petrina uses it in a conversation with her mother, in which she tells her that, "I'm alone this afternoon ta, I'll stay reading, watching some TV, then dinner in the evening." Another characteristic of this Mixed Maltese English, pointed out by Vella is the use of 'but' at the end of sentences, in an example like, "I don't know what I want but." (Vella 2013: 15). Petrina also employs this attribute in her speech, "Where is he? Where's Papa but?"

Moreover, "Pet", also highlights how in Malta, second language teaching occurs in the language being taught. In other words, teachers "are encouraged to use Italian to teach the Italian language or French to teach French" (Caruana 2016: 275). However, since Maltese is so necessary for informal communication, according to Caruana, exchanges in Maltese are very common, and in fact Pet's students complain when she refuses to translate in Maltese (Caruana 2016). Thusat et al consider Maltese English as "part of the local linguistic repertoire", hence, for this reason, speaking it is indicative of Malta's bilingual nature and by default part of "Malta's heritage" (Vella 2013: 16). It also perpetuates the notion that this could be Malta's "own variety of English", which proposes the liberty to contemplate this "New English" as "a natural resource", or part of our national identity, and not a foreign language (Vella 2013: 16).

The third occasion where employing the Maltese language came naturally occurred when I was writing about characters who had emigrated to a country where the "other" language was the vernacular. Characters in a story such as "Beach Houses" have become accustomed to speaking mainly in English after having lived in the UK for years. Nonetheless, they still use Maltese words and phrases in their dialogue, reflective of a "semi-conscious interlingua", "a shifting stage between the use of two languages" (Brincat 2006: 155). The main characteristic of this shift is that the speakers are acutely aware of the fact that Maltese and English are separate and that the people they are conversing with are familiar with both languages. From the context of the phone call at the end of "Beach Houses" and through the sentences, "Ara marelli. It's been a long time Mar. Int bqajt Morecambe kont?", the audience understands that the person talking hasn't spoken to the caller in a long time and that he's probably asking whether she's still living in Morecambe. The use of both Maltese and English establishes that the caller understands both, and that she is at ease with code-switching between them.

However, in present day Malta, standard Maltese remains the first language of the majority of the population (Caruana 2016). Children in state schools continue to be taught in Maltese, even if the textbooks are written in English. In addition, Maltese

is used in familiar domains such as work places, and with family members and friends. Attitudes towards Maltese are "integrative, related to the desire to identify, with one's culture or language group" (Caruana 2016: 276). Therefore, a pertinent question that might arise is how can I justify using the English language to communicate my characters' dialogues and thoughts, when in real life, none of these characters would think in English at all?

The answer to this question lies in the perhaps somewhat harsh reality that the most productive way for a "subaltern literature", a minority one, to make its presence felt is through occurring in the language of "the other" (Callus 2011). Deleuze and Guattari define minor literature as "not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language" (Deleuze, Guattari 1975: 16). By this definition, because Maltese literature so seldom registers in any major languages, it does not qualify as even a minor literature, but is rather "on the periphery of the periphery" (Callus 2011). It therefore isn't surprising that many criticized Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of minor literature, accusing it of basing itself solely on Europe and of being unable to extend itself to global literature. According to their definition of minor literature, even Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's English novels are considered "minor literature". Such a definition does little to help us when we try to understand his many novels for children, and his plays which are written in Gikuyu and Kiswahili (Jussawalla 1991: 145). Under which category would these fall? D'haen laments the fact that Dutch, although a European language spoken by 22 to 23 million speakers, is still threatened by the uncertainty of "whether there is any hope of its authors or works to be included in any of the newer world anthologies, even if only in the category of "resonances" or "perspectives" (D'haen 2014). The same can be said for Malta and Maltese works.

Damrosch and Moberg's version of "ultraminor literature" seems to be the most suitable interpretation of Maltese writing, since it considers the size of the linguistic community, as well as its access to publication and literacy rates (Damrosch, Moberg 2017: 134). In fact, all small island literature is considered as "ultraminor literature", because island communities have limited resources, a small market and "a high degree of dependency on external forces" (Damrosch, Moberg 2017: 135). Damrosch and Moberg also claim that this kind of literature can be the product of a "small language community", "based in a specific territory" and for this reason can be used to enhance the community's territorial unity (Danmrosch, Moberg 2017: 135). The size of ultraminor literatures is crucial, as the purpose of ultraminor literatures centres around delineating their aesthetic and cultural ramifications.

This is all well and good, however a question that remains unanswered is this: how can the Maltese language literature make its mark internationally? According to Callus, it is inevitable for postcolonial writers to turn to other languages, more dominant ones, otherwise the literature of the minor country will remain inaccessible to a wider audience (Callus 2009: 36). A writer must therefore be aware of the absurdity of any commitment to "monolingualism", established in a "cult of authenticity, including linguistic authenticity" (Callus 2009: 37). Ultimately, anything original is already influenced by the foreign, rendering the question of authenticity irrelevant.

Here it is useful to mention Derrida's assertion that "all culture is originally colonial" (Derrida 1998: 68). If we are to agree with the latter, we have to submit to the reality that there will always be inequalities among languages and that what is native and primal is always already plagued by what is foreign (Derrida 1998: 68). Moreover, there can never really be such a thing as something that is considered "integrally Maltese", especially since our island's history is "a prolonged experience of hybridity" (Callus 2009: 38). English can therefore come to be regarded as a product beyond possession, beyond ownership or appropriation, as a "nonlocalizable and noncountable" language which "is less the sign of imposition by political force or cunning, than it is the promise of the singular" (Chow 2008: 225). Derrida configures language as a neutral territory in which the notion of foreignness is separate from that of belonging or nationality and in which any claims of "my language" are obsolete. This configuration validates using the language of the other, particularly because it is up to the latter to "summon the heterological opening that permits it to address itself to the other" (Derrida 1998: 129). Just as Derrida claims that he "only has one language which isn't his", and yet it is the language he must write and speak in, Maltese writers seeking to make an impact internationally must also revert to the "other", the language which isn't theirs (Derrida 1998: 13-14).

Derrida's declaration that language is to be regarded as a neutral territory, separate from belonging or nationality helps me feel licensed to write English language dialogues for characters who would have spoken completely in Maltese. Indeed, I must

write such dialogues if I am “to bring Maltese literature’s potential to the other’s notice with greater immediacy” and to “impinge upon literature more broadly” (Callus 2011). In fact, the instances of Maltese terms, although present in many of the stories, do not jeopardize the reader’s understanding of the plot or characterization and in many cases are accompanied largely by English phrases or explanations.

However, being unable to write in Maltese also means that the dialogue in my work wouldn’t reflect many facets of Maltese life, such as the fact that the Maltese mostly prefer to discuss jokes, secrets, intimate things and politics in Maltese, while English is preferred to discuss scientific and technological matters and literature (Caruana 2006: 278-279). This is mainly because most of my stories are about relationships, between family members and friends who in reality, when talking about something very personal would never talk about it in English and therefore, having them discuss it in the language of the “other” sounds very inauthentic to a Maltese audience. An example of this is in “Light Green colours” when Rodney tells Eman that he has recently met Eman’s ex-wife and gives him information about his son who he has not seen in years. Through having two Maltese maintenance workers conversing completely in English, I am unable to depict their dialects if they have any, or certain idiosyncrasies in their speech, or even swear words since if I were to throw in a few of these, and have the rest of their dialogue in English, it would make them sound as though they were speakers of Maltese English, whose first acquired language was English, and who then learnt Maltese through formal education. However, this is not the case with these characters since they were brought up speaking Maltese and learnt English at school when they were older.

Apart from this, I can’t subtly communicate the reality that opinions surrounding English in Malta are mainly “instrumental, linked with the motivation to learn the language for useful and utilitarian purposes”, if the characters mostly speak in English for the sake of being understood by a wider audience (Chow 2008: 225). Even illustrating how proud certain Maltese people are about their language becomes very hard when you’re writing in the majority language. For example, through mostly having to write in English, I would struggle with depicting how some Maltese speakers, when spoken to in English, would still use Maltese. I would also find it hard to delineate that the reason for this is that they “do not perceive the use of English positively, as they feel that Maltese is very much part of their identity whereas English is not”, as discovered in Sciriha’s 2004 research on the “sociolinguistics of mobile telephony” (Sciriha 2004: 276). Ultimately, many of the language issues surrounding the Maltese and English languages in Malta are hard to depict when I must mostly write in English and cannot code-switch to Maltese during significant parts of conversations as I risk being misunderstood.

Being unable to showcase the language issues surrounding the Maltese and English languages through dialogue, I resorted to other approaches to create a realistic Maltese ambience nonetheless. For instance, to convey how strongly some Maltese feel about their Maltese heritage and how easily angered they become at the thought of it being threatened, there are many instances of characters being suspicious or exhibiting animosity towards that which is foreign or colonial. In “Shadow Puppets”, Kristi doesn’t trust the Romanians who work with them, Alina and Marius, and instructs Karl to not let them out of his sight when they’re “behind the till”. Her sense of pride in her country is heightened in her assertion that European cities “are nothing special” and that “nowhere’s better than here”, meaning Gozo. Karl’s brother Ġorġ also exhibits hostility towards colonialism and refers to the British as “pigs” because they have ruined the island Filfla by using it “as a target in the navy”. In “Barbie Girl”, Ramona feels “intimidated” by English people, she comments on “always feeling a sense of unease before talking to them, that she was going to be misunderstood, that her accent would be pointed out, that they would ask where she was from, and not know where that was”. In fact, she initially considers becoming friends with Graham only so that he could “introduce her to other British friends, ones she could come to trust and feel comfortable with.” Moreover, in yet another story, “Beach Houses”, when Mariam discovers that her husband has cheated on her with an English woman, she is quick to point out that “In England it happened a lot and the women there were like that. They flirted and got what they wanted some way or the other. It wasn’t his fault really.”

To indicate that the Maltese language is sometimes associated with people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds , in “Pet”, I included English-speaking characters who are prejudiced towards those unable to express themselves in English. Pet’s boyfriend dislikes his father’s wife and calls her “vulgar” and “uneducated”, on account of the fact that “her father was a mechanic at a local garage” and that she

received a “state school education”.

However, despite many attempts at depicting the linguistic nuances of Maltese, and evincing the local’s anticolonial sentiments, the reality is that Malta’s sociolinguistics can never be fully represented if a wider audience is to be targeted. Ultimately, Chi’en’s definition of “weird English” (as English that is “demoralized, out of resistance to it” and fused with an original language, “depriving English of its dominance and allowing other languages to enjoy the same status”) only applies to languages that are still widely spoken, such as Russian, Hindi and Spanish (Chi’en 2004). Maltese can only appear in small doses alongside English, as I have illustrated in examples of my own work, particularly if the audience is to be international. If a lot of the writing is in Maltese, a large part of a foreign audience will completely fail to derive understanding of context. Therefore, for this reason, in a sense, Maltese lives do remain “linguistically disfranchised” and excluded from “mainstream discourse”, simply by virtue of the fact that Maltese has a relatively small group of speakers (Ch’ien 2004).

CONCLUSION

Maltese language literature will always remain important, particularly to those of us who have grown up in a minor culture, speaking a minority language. However, one of the many pitfalls of Maltese language literature centres around its inaccessibility to a wider audience. It can never truly form part of mainstream literature unless it is translated or written in a more widely spoken language such as English. Through experimenting with dialogue, I came to ascertain that Maltese can occasionally occur alongside English in small doses and that this can enhance a character’s linguistic reality. Essentially there are three main cases where this comes about most naturally. The first is when characters are in the presence of foreigners and forced to communicate in English but occasionally include Maltese elements, depicting how limited their knowledge of English is. The second is when the characters come from what Vella identifies as Type D families, whose vernacular is English but who sometimes use Maltese elements in speech. The third and last instance arises when writing about characters who have emigrated to a country where the “other” language is the vernacular, forcing them to communicate in English. Despite this, the reality is that the dominant language in Malta is Maltese and there are many different facets of Maltese life, such as jokes, politics and idioms that can never truly be elucidated in the English language. For this reason, certain nuances can never be shared with a wider audience and therefore, the Maltese culture can never be fully represented in mainstream literature. However, the English language can and should still be used as a tool in giving the voiceless a right to speak. In this case, it should be regarded in the same way it is by Derrida, as a neutral territory, in which the notion of foreignness is separate from that of belonging or nationality and in which any claims of “my language” are obsolete.

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Decolonising Enid Blyton

Writing a post-colonial Enid Blyton mystery novel

Paul Williams

ABSTRACT

In spite of her elitism, sexism, racism, xenophobia, her abrasive personal life, and her bland, colourless, formulaic writing, Enid Blyton remains one of the best-selling children's writers of all time and still continues to enchant children of all ages. Fifty years after her death, there has been an upsurge of interest in her writing, calling to attention the narrative complexity of her plots, characters and richly imaginative themes that outlive the personal, socio-political context in which the books were written. In this paper I outline a practice I have coined the 'Enid Blyton method', which frames Blyton as an oral storyteller whose writing has been underestimated in terms of its narrative complexity, and which repositions her as a writer who views the world from a child perspective, gives children agency and, like the Pied Piper, lures children into a prelapsarian 'Neverland' where adults are banished. This paper also documents how, using this method, I have written a post-colonial Middle Grade mystery for an African readership where I attempted to decolonise the Eurocentric elitism, sexism, racism and xenophobia associated with her writing.

KEYWORDS

Enid Blyton, decolonising, hybridity, creative writing method, double consciousness, storytelling, childhood, undermind, postcolonial, Zimbabwe.

THE ENID BLYTON PHENOMENON

Enid Blyton is to be admired for her sheer literary output alone: over her 44-year career (1922 -1966), she wrote over 600 novels, poems, plays and short stories, averaging an output of 16 titles per year, sold over 600 million copies of her books, and still has 200 titles continuously in print. If this is not enough, she answered up to 100 fan letters a week by hand, wrote the entire contents of three different magazines – 964 editions in all (Enid Blyton Society 2018). And for most of this time, Enid Blyton was banned from the BBC, won no awards, and was lambasted by critics.

And although she carved a distinctive, instantly recognisable Blyton style, I have observed that her adventure and mystery stories are derivative, garnered from such classics as Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Ballantyne's The Coral Island (The Secret Island), Haggard's King Solomon's Mines (The Secret Mountain) and Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island (Five on a Treasure Island).

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

As a child growing up in Zimbabwe, I fell under the spell of Enid Blyton's world of secret islands and mysterious passages and castles. But I wanted to be more than an escapist reader – I wanted to be a children's writer like her. And so at age 11, I began to write doubly derivative Enid Blyton stories: The Thrilling Three on an Adventure; The Secret of Pirates Cove. I wrote spontaneously, filling up exercise books every week with mysteries and adventures that were copies of copies, rehashed colonial adventures derived from British colonial adult tales. But it was only as an adult that I fulfilled my Enid Blyton ambition. In 1999, my mother was helping out in the library at a primary school in Harare. The newly independent Zimbabwe was flourishing, literacy was the highest in Africa and the post-independence generation of children was consuming books as ferociously as I did as a child. Our libraries and bookstores were flooded with affordable literature, local children's books, stories of the heroes of our time, made possible by local publishers such as College Press, Baobab Books, and Zimbabwe Publishing House; our libraries and bookstores were also filled with Enid Blyton's books.

One day I overheard the Shona teacher at the school, Mrs Makai, complain to my mother: "Mrs Williams, our children are reading, yes, but they're not reading any of the good books I recommend for them in class. No Life of Mandela, no Tsitsi Dangarembga, no Charles Mungoshi, they're all reading… Enid Blyton." Why, she asked, did they want to identify with snobbish middle class English kids who looked down on foreigners and who fought black villains? Why turn their backs on our own rich culture? She railed against what W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) calls "Double Consciousness" (the psychological state of seeing oneself through the eyes of the coloniser and measuring oneself against those "white" values).

And then she said the thing that began my writing career in earnest: "I wish someone would write an Enid Blyton story for Zimbabwean readers - some gripping story that exposes the whole colonial project, where not all the bad guys are black, and with Zimbabwean children as the heroes."

I took this as an invitation. This had been my childhood ambition after all, to write an Enid Blyton novel. Without realising the problems that beset a "white writer" writing "black" experience, I began re-reading her work, scrutinising her narratives now with the eye of a writer, not a child consumer, with the aim of discovering her secret, what I would come to call the "Enid Blyton Method", and if possible detangling her ideology from her style, transplanting her subject matter and settings to an independent Zimbabwe, and "decolonising" her narratives, so they would be appropriate for an African readership. An impossible task? Maybe. One riddled with ideological contradictions? Certainly.

Even though I agreed with critics who called her writing was "colourless", "bland", "second rate", and that the content was racist, I felt that because of the appeal of her prose and storytelling to young African readers, it was worth working on this project where the political agenda trumped an aesthetic one. But as I wrote the novel and investigated what her method was, I was surprised that the contradictions were not so pronounced.

ELITISM, SEXISM, RACISM, XENOPHOBIA

Before I began then, I needed to examine these accusations against Blyton's work if I was to tackle them. As a child, I had missed these cultural and aesthetic clues, but on an adult reading however, I observed that Enid Blyton's stories and characters embodied blatant racism, xenophobia, and elitism, underpinned by an underlying Imperial ethos – the British were best, foreigners were quaint or stupid or immoral, and villains were very often dark-skinned. Here for example is Jo-Jo, the cruel villain from the *Island of Adventure*:

> The black man appeared, his usual scowl even blacker. "What you doing?" he demanded, his dark eyes rolling, and the whites showing plainly. "That's my boat."
>
> "All right, all right," said Jack impatiently. "Can't I look at it?"
>
> "No," said Jo-Jo, and scowled again.
>
> "Naughty boy," said Kiki, and screeched at Jo-Jo, who looked as if he would like to wring the bird's neck.
>
> "Well, you certainly are a pleasant fellow," said Jack, stepping away from the boat, feeling suddenly afraid of the sullen black man. (Blyton 1944: 16)

Jo-Jo is described in much the same way as Achebe notes that Joseph Conrad describes African characters in *Heart of Darkness*, in terms of their "black limbs…hands clapping… feet stamping… bodies swaying…eyes rolling" (Conrad, qtd in Achebe 1977: 792). It is as if Blyton saturated herself in the racist portrayals of Africans in colonial literature to find her villains. And it seemed that African children responded to such racist portrayals with double consciousness, cheering the white heroes and booing the black villains. And how could I counter such double consciousness?

BLAND, COLOURLESS, FORMULAIC WRITING

But it was not just Blyton's xenophobic racism that was a hurdle to my writing project – it was her poor writing skills. Why would I want to write like Enid Blyton? The BBC called her "a tenacious second-rater" (Hann 2009), her writing "colourless, dead and totally undemanding" (Rudd 2000: 45). "Reading Blyton is like riding a bike with stabilisers down a gentle hill with the wind at your back," complained The Telegraph journalist Toby Clements (2011), railing against her posthumous accolade in the 2011 COSTA awards as Britain's favourite children's writer:

> It is a shock to find the British are still reading her books. After all, they are simply terrible. It is not that they are comically jingoistic, luridly snobbish or maniacally racist – hundreds of books are like that – it is just that they are so weirdly bland. In among her 800 odd titles can anyone recall a notable scene, memorable sentence or, other than Noddy, and maybe at a push Big Ears, even a distinctive character? No. It is all five do this and seven do that. (Clements 2011)

Blyton's personal life also took a battering, with one of her own children publicly denouncing her, and a 2011 BBC series (Enid) portraying her as a cold, manipulative, adulterous, neglectful mother. Nevertheless, she withstood all attacks, and she famously dismissed her critics with one blow of her pen: "I am not interested in the views of critics aged over 12" (Stoney 2011 qtd. in Morris 2008). But then, what was it that made reading Enid Blyton so compelling, not only for British and colonial children, but for generations of Zimbabweans?

THE "ENID BLYTON METHOD"

If I were to write a successful Enid Blyton story, I needed to investigate exactly what narrative elements constituted this "Enid Blyton method".

I was aiming to write a mystery for young adults, so I re- read a selection of my favourite Enid Blyton series – The Barney Series, Famous Five and the Adventure series, all aimed at her older readers (Blyton did not write for anyone over twelve), and I mapped out her formulaic structure. Each series began with a group of four or five children brought together fortuitously and thrown into a mystery or adventure where adults were not present. A typical mystery ensued, with clues, suspects, and investigation by the children, which put them in increasing danger, until they could solve the mystery without the help of adults, sometimes in spite of adults, find the baddies and call for help. I then searched for the appeal of the books, and discovered that, far from being "second-rate", the plots were clever, gripping and engaging, the language complex. The books worked because of what I identified as six elements:

1) Enid Blyton as archetypal storyteller

David Rudd in a recent positive assessment of Blyton's work, positions her as a "storyteller" in an oral tradition, and suggests a reason why she has been so maligned:

> Contempt for the more intuitive, spontaneous and simplistic oral tradition reaches as far back as Plato. In The Republic, Plato criticises Homer's work for being, at best, frivolous and at worst, dangerous. He sees it as a "crippling of the mind", a "species of mental poison and an enemy of the truth" (Rudd, 2000, qtd. in Forsyth, 2013).

Others see Enid Blyton occupying the role of the "Wise Woman narrator", the oral storyteller spurned by the establishment. This "proverbial wise woman narrator… could be Othered by regular society by being placed on the outskirts of the village, on the edge of the woods, but retained her irresistible

attraction as an entertainer of undiminishing ‘young’ audiences” (Warner 1988: 21).

Enid Blyton, it seems, took on the role of oral storyteller deliberately, organising weekly tea parties where she would invite children to her house, tell them stories, and style herself as a children’s confidante. As a storyteller she gathered stories eclectically from whatever source she could and communicated with her child readers through letters, magazines and in person, in order to enact her storytelling as an oral practice. She also insisted that she wrote for and about “real children” who she insisted she knew. “When I grow up I will write books about real children,” she confessed (Bensoussane 2018).

This I could retroactively align with my own reading experience: what appealed to me as a child had been that oral nature of storytelling and that very strong moral presence of an intrusive narrator. And also retrospectively, when I read these stories aloud to my child, I could hear the cadences and the devices of oral storytelling.

C.S. Lewis in *On Three ways of Writing for Children* argues that one of the best ways to write for children is to engage with real children:

> The printed story grows out of a story told to a particular child with the living voice and perhaps ex tempore… You are dealing with a concrete person, this child who, of course, differs from all other children. There is no question of “children” conceived as a strange species whose habits you have “made up” like an anthropologist or a commercial traveller. Nor I suspect, would it be possible, thus face to face, to regale the child with things calculated to please it but regarded by yourself with indifference or contempt. The child, I am certain, would see through that. (Lewis, 1966: 31)

If I was to write like Enid Blyton then, I would need to incorporate this compelling and entrancing oral style. I did so by osmosis, as the more Blyton I read the easier it was to inhabit her voice and cadence and tone.

2) Thinking and writing as a child

Further, C.S. Lewis argues that in order to write for children, the writer needs to be equal to the child: “We must meet children as equals in that area of our nature where we are their equals [….] An author, as a mere author, is outside all that. He is not even an uncle. He is a freeman and an equal, like the postman, the butcher, and the dog next door,” (Lewis 1966: 44).

Enid Blyton insists on equality with children. It is the “grownups” who are regarded as “other” and are disregarded (except for father figures such as Inspector Jenks in the Secret Seven series and Bill Smugs in the Adventure series who are the moral authority the children appeal to for God-like assurance):

> “You know what grown-ups are,” said Dinah. “They don’t think the same way as we do. I expect when we grow up, we shall think like them—but let’s hope we remember what it was like to think in the way children do, and understand the boys and girls that are growing up when we’re men and women.”
>
> “You’re talking like a grown-up already,” said Philip in disgust. “Stop it.”
>
> (Blyton, 1944: 163)

This view permeates her works and enables children to side with her against the world of fallen adulthood. Nowhere in her books does Blyton “talk like a grownup”. She consciously inhabits a particular construction of childhood, and others have regarded her as a child herself, with the developmental age of a pre-pubescent: “She was…a child at heart, a person who never developed emotionally beyond the basic infantile level” (Woods, 1974: 219) and “She was a child, she thought as a child and she wrote as a child” (Woods, 1969: 10). Her novels are her “secret” childhood and writing space, channelled here in the voice of one of her characters: “‘If I could live here on this secret island always and always and always, and never grow up at all, I would be quite happy,’ said Nora,” (Blyton, 1938: 20).

I already knew this as a child reader of Enid Blyton: the major appeal of her books to me was how she understood my childhood. I once tried to explain this to adult friends of my parents when I was asked why I was always absorbed in a Blyton book. “She’s on my side.” She was one of those rare adults who understood me and could play in my world. To write like Blyton then was to go back into that world, remember what it was like to be that child and write out of that perspective.

3) Idealising nature and childhood as a prelapsarian state

In all of her books, Blyton strives to create and demarcate prelapsarian childhood innocence, and

fights fiercely to protect it. Adult concerns such as sex or politics are banned from her world. Blyton creates an idealised British childhood, an escapist, Romantic construction where nature and childhood coalesce in a Blakean Innocence to form the perfect Enid Blyton world:

> "Heaps of people have never seen the sun rise. Hardly any of the girls at my school have. They've missed something! I think there ought to be a law that says everyone must watch a sunrise, and everyone must see a bluebell wood, and a buttercup field, and..." (Blyton, 1947: 6)

This constructed childhood is strictly morally prescribed: not only does she wish to keep the serpent out of her paradise; she also wishes to instruct children how to live:

> My books give children a feeling of security as well as pleasure - they know that they will never find anything wrong, hideous, horrible, murderous or vulgar in my books, although there is always plenty of excitement, mystery and fun…. I am not out only to tell stories…. I am out to inculcate decent thinking, loyalty, honesty, kindliness, and all the things that children should be taught. (Blyton in Stoney 1992: 212)

The reader is embraced in a tight space of moral certainty, within the class and colonial structures she demarcated, a sanctified space for children only, where adults are banned. Blyton's first novel, *The Secret Island* (1938), embodies this philosophy – children flee the cruel abuse of step-parents and find an enchanted, magic island away from the adult world where they become self-sufficient Robinson Crusoes and create a world of their own.

> "If I knew some place where we would never be found, I would run away –and take the two girls with me. I hate to see them bullied and worked so hard by Aunt Harriet."
>
> "Now listen to me," said Jack suddenly, in such an earnest voice that all three children turned to him at once… "I know a place where nobody can find us – if we ran away!" (Blyton, 1938: 9)

This "safe space" of childhood, however, is very white, middle class, English: the bands of children in Blyton's books (the Secret Seven, Adventurous Four, Famous Five, etc.) exclude other types of children from their world: The Welsh girl Tassie is mocked in *The Castle of Adventure*, the pudgy Greek boy Lucian shunned in *The Ship of Adventure*, and other foreign children often seen as "bad" and in need of moral correction. Readers are steered very tightly by Blyton's moral compass: everything is fundamentalistically black and white, with no moral uncertainty. Evil for the most part comes in the form of foreign, dark skinned adult men with strange accents, and most grownup men are either to be ridiculed (the policeman Old Clear Orf, for example, for his 'working-class' accent, or PC Plod), or feared.

As a child I related to this escapist fantasy safe space, a retreat from the adult world into moral certitude and values. And to write like this, I would need to provide this unwavering sense of right and wrong too.

An essential ingredient of this Edenic space too is the relation children have with animals and insects. The secret societies of children include the mandatory pet, which is a fully-fledged member of their group (the Five Find Outers' dog Buster, Barney's monkey Miranda, Jack's parrot Kiki, the Secret Seven's dog Loony, the Famous Five's dog Timmy, etc.). Philip Mannering from the Adventure series is a St Francis of Assisi in this regard: he attracts a special power over all animals, including snakes, bears, foxes, mice, penguins, lizards and beetles.

In the Enid Blyton mystery I wrote, the child characters had a dog Mhondoro as a companion, and they made friends with a local bush-tracker in touch with nature, who could guide these "city kids" through the countryside and become their mentor in how to reconnect to the natural world.

4) Narrative complexity

Related to her role as wise woman storyteller and in light of her role as keeper of the sacred space of childhood, Blyton's "bad" writing has been re-examined by Peter Hunt who discovers a hidden complexity to her works, a criss-cross of oral storytelling techniques, particularly "the way in which … characters' thoughts and perceptions are mediated to the reader – directly, indirectly, tagged and untagged, and using free indirect discourse in which it is not clear whether we are reading the character or the narrator" (Hunt 2001: 37). He cites a passage from *Five Fall into Adventure* (1950), to illustrate this:

> He looked up at the tower. A small, forlorn face was looking out of the window there. Julian's heart jumped and beat fast. That must be poor old George up there. He wondered if she had seen them. He hoped not, for she would know

> that he and Dick had been captured and she would be very upset. Where was Timmy? There seemed no sign of him. But wait a minute – what was that lying inside what looked like a summer house on the opposite side of the yard? Was it Timmy? (Blyton 1950: 133)

This passage is narratively sophisticated, using free indirect discourse, intrusive narration, direct address to the reader, this weaving the narrator, character and reader into one narrative bond. Hunt concludes that Enid Blyton "writes uncompromisingly for a single audience, not winking over the children's heads at other adults for approbation: it is the "transferred storyteller" who forms the adult part of the contract, not the adult reader" (Hunt 2001: 37-8).

Blyton thus creates a story telling web in which the characters, readers and author are all colluding in a conspiratorial circle of inclusion. The crucial word here is "we", an inclusive narrator who gathers into her arms the child characters, child audience and herself:

> Anne gazed out of her bedroom window over the moor. It looked so peaceful and serene under the April sun. No mystery about it now!
>
> "All the same, it's a good name for you," said Anne. "You're full of mystery and adventure, and your last adventure waited for us to come and share it. I really think I'd call this adventure "Five Go to Mystery Moor".
>
> It's a good name, Anne. We'll call it that too! (Blyton 1997: 170)

Again, this collusion was a crucial element I needed to bring to my story if I was to connect to child readers, that "inclusive" narrator who embraces child readers and does not talk down to them or write stories "for children."

5) The "undermind": Unmediated mystical writing

"I have just finished a book for Macmillans – the 8th in a popular series that has been translated into many languages. I began it on Monday, and finished it this afternoon (Friday). It is 60 000 words long and flowed like its title (River of Adventure)" (Blyton in Stoney 1992: 203).

I have read and re-read the *River of Adventure* and find it to have a well-structured plot, with gripping tension, consistent characters. So how did she write it in five days? Blyton herself has been quite vocal as to how she writes, but her explanation is problematically mystical:

> I could not possibly invent a lot of characters and write them down before I begin a book. As for planning out my chapters, that would be impossible too - I don't even know what the book will be about till I begin it! I do not think these stories… they come out all ready-made, as it were, pouring out complete. The only way I can partly explain it is by using the "private cinema screen" idea… It is as if I were watching a story being unfolded on a bright screen… the whole story sparkles on my private screen inside my head, and I simply put down what I see and hear (Bensoussane 2018).

In her mystery and adventure novels, it seems that Blyton's formula has been so established by this point that the characters write themselves – and the plot formula has changed very little since her first novel - four children go on holiday (always the summer hols!), the adults are dispatched, leaving the children embroiled in some mystery or adventure where they discover bad men doing bad things, and (in Eileen Colwell's words) "what hope has a band of desperate men against four children?" (Forsyth 2013).

Blyton calls her writing method an invisible process that occurs in the unconscious, in what she calls her "undermind":

> [These ideas] sank down into my "under-mind" and simmered there, waiting for the time to come when they would be needed again for a book—changed, transmuted, made perfect, finely-wrought—quite different from when they were packed away. And yet the essence of them was exactly the same. Something had been at work, adapting, altering, deleting here and there, polishing brightly—but still the heart, the essence of the original thing was there, and I could almost always recognise it. (Bensoussane 2018)

It is consistent then that Blyton's writing method mirrors her readers' escapist experience into the secret islands of imagination, away from the adult world, colluding together as writer/ narrator/ oral storyteller in a constructed childhood world. Her books are told in the language of the unconscious, unmediated, unrefined, and mostly unedited.

Reading Blyton's description of her writing method was liberating to me, giving me permission as Peter Elbow does in *Writing without Teachers* to write from a spontaneous, imaginative space and to trust the creative process. I had done this as an eleven-year-old, filling up whole exercise books with my stories,

unedited, free-flowing, uninhibited by the censor or editor (Elbow 1973:1).

6) Escapism

> "I've got such a lovely feeling," said Lucy-Ann, looking the picture of happiness. "You know, that feeling you get at the very beginning of a lovely holiday—when all the days spread out before you, sunny and lazy and sort of enchanted." (Blyton 1948: 54-55)

When children read an Enid Blyton book, they expect escapism: and for Blyton, this meant sunny days, summer holidays, outdoors, an abundance of picnics and high teas… and lashings of ginger beer. Readers also expect a clear moral structure where bad characters are punished and flawed characters learn their lesson, and of course an absence of grown-ups. Children are free agents, and in an era before social media or close parental supervision, Blyton's children protagonists climb mountains, explore ruined castles, and drive motorboats, in what The Independent calls "a vicarious sense of independence and control":

> Blyton's worlds feel safe. Pleasantly safe. Blyton's dark side is not very highly developed… and though there is often the threat of danger in the books, the threat never materialises. It's enough to add spice to the adventure, but never enough to disturb - and this, when you think back to how easily and often children get scared in real life, must be immensely comforting. (Hurrah! 2004)

The Enid Blyton "method" then can be summarised as follows: she takes her position in the oral storyteller tradition, "intuitive, spontaneous and simplistic" as it is, occupies the position of "Wise Woman narrator", a pied piper who creates an anti-adult alliance with children and leads them to never-never lands of mystery and adventure where they are agential. She achieves this by weaving a story-telling web in which the characters, readers and author all collude in a conspiratorial huddle. She claims her writing is unmediated and mystical, but on close examination, it is a formula which she uses repeatedly. This combination of factors helps explain the appeal of what is otherwise bland, outdated, moralistic and formulaic writing (but then, maybe I am thinking like an adult here).

WRITING A POST-COLONIAL ENID BLYTON MYSTERY NOVEL FROM THE "UNDERMIND"

Armed with all these tools, I set to work. I had read so many Blyton books that the plots were all internalised - the moralising voice, the intrusive narrator, the collusive "we", the Blytonesque tropes already in my "undermind". All I had to do, I naively thought, was set the adventure in Zimbabwe, and create a group of Zimbabwean children to make it happen. I had grown up in a small copper mining town (Mhangura) and had been fascinated by a mysterious abandoned house on the hill which we had explored as children, imagining we had seen torchlights flashing secret messages from its roof one night. I had my plot and setting.

The Secret of Old Mukiwa wrote itself. Surprisingly, it poured out of me in three days of solid work, and hardly needed revising or editing. Yes, it was over-written, but flowed well, spun out in that frenzy John Braine calls "writing white hot" (Braine, 1975: 21). And it began in typical Blyton fashion, with two children visiting a town (away from their parents) sighting an incongruous castle, not in an English setting, but in the middle of the African bush:

> "Oh," interrupted Sarah, "what's that?"
>
> She was leaning over him to point out of the window at a large house on a hill. It was difficult to see through the grimy grit that had stuck to the large windowpane, but on a green hill, surrounded by at thick growth of tangled Msasa trees, was a white building, that towered over the surrounding landscape.
>
> "Looks like a castle."
>
> As the road veered around the kopje, the building came more into view, then it was behind them in the dust. It had turrets, a tower with a pointed roof and a large whitewashed wall around it. They couldn't see any windows.
>
> "Maybe," said Sarah, her eyes bright with merriment, "that's where Uncle Magadzwe lives."
>
> Mubuso shook his head. "Probably some rich [white] farmer's house. Or miner. You can get rich from copper mining, I think." But he was also fascinated by the house. It looked uninhabited, and the tangled dirt road looked like it hadn't been used in years. Branches had fallen onto it, and grass had grown in bright green tufts everywhere. (Williams 2001:1)

The two main characters were modelled on real children I knew from the school my father taught at, where I saw the social engineering of an emerging new black middle class in a flourishing post-independent Zimbabwe, and where children were leapfrogging over the working-class conditions of their parents and aspiring to professional careers, in spite of the stumbling economy that was beginning to thwart this up classing. Here were my characters: two city children (Sarah and Mubuso) with aspirations to become lawyers and doctors until the economic realities of neo-colonial Zimbabwe hit them - sent to their uncle in Mhangura because their parents could not afford to keep them anymore, taken out of school and farmed off to their relatives to become servants to the new black elite.

> "I want to be a doctor," said Sarah.
>
> "A doctor?"
>
> "And me a lawyer," said Mubuso.
>
> Their uncle laughed. "Doctors? Lawyers? Of course, you do. Doesn't everyone? Everyone wants to win the State Lottery, too, but not everyone can. To train in those professions it takes money, hundreds of thousands of dollars. Here we are offering you jobs that pay immediately and train you on the spot. Mubuso, if you work hard, you can even rise to my position. In those forty years, I put away any childish dreams of being a doctor or a lawyer. I worked hard and look where I am today!" (Williams 2001)

So *The Secret of Old Mukiwa* was born, a mystery where an old abandoned white farmhouse became the focus for the goings on of a gang who was smuggling drugs into the country and using the house as a transfer point. The children (with help from their dog) discover the secret dealings, capture the evil men and are rewarded with a return to school and a promising future. The underlying ideology of the novel is deliberately postcolonial: the abandoned farmhouse belongs to a white colonialist Rhodesian farmer, and the novel features a war veteran who has fought in the struggle for independence against Ian Smith and who gives lectures to the children about the recent Zimbabwean liberation struggle.

Did *The Secret of Old Mukiwa* work as a novel? A leading Zimbabwe publisher accepted it, published it six months later, it won the Young Teen Fiction Award at the International Book Fair in 2001, sold in the hundreds of thousands, and was set in schools all over Zimbabwe as part of the popular Pacesetter series. And I was invited to write a series of seven books with the same characters, same post-colonial understory.

BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASK, OR THIRD SPACE?

Retrospectively, the reception and popularity of T*he Secret of Old Mukiwa* proved to me that the "Enid Blyton method" worked to help create a compelling narrative: I had indeed written an "African Enid Blyton novel" that African children loved; but as I examined the project subsequently, after studying postcolonial theory for a Masters degree, and teaching in a newly formed African Literature Department in a university, questions began to emerge: had I, as I had hoped, really decolonised an Enid Blyton narrative? Or had I simply perpetuated another form of colonialism, imposing a "white" view of what I thought African children should read? Had I appropriated African children's voices and fitted a reverse Fanonian black mask onto a white skin? Who was I, of white invader-settler heritage, to speak on behalf of African children, or the liberation struggle? And was the act of Blytonising African literature itself an act of colonisation, of appropriating African voices and speaking over/ on top of them using colonial language, even essentialising them?

I had been aware before embarking on the project that the Blytonesque language needed to be purged and transformed. Following Ayi Kwei Armah's example in his five novels, all references that associated the word 'black' with evil and 'white' with good were reversed, in order to disassociate those Blytonesque racist connotations with colour. I had also consciously written the narrative using colloquial Zimbabwean language and slang eschewing Blyton's middle-class style and her very mid-twentieth century colloquialisms (Gosh! Horrid!). In the foreword to *House of Hunger* (1979) the Zimbabwean author Dambudzo Marechera admits that by writing in English, he was "a keen accomplice and student in [his] own mental colonization" but in order to counter what he calls a "very racist English language", "you have to have harrowing fights and hair-rising panga duels with the language before you can make it do all that you want it to do" (Marechera 1978: 7). I aimed to do the same. In the early 2000s, when my novel was published, Zimbabwe boasted the highest literacy rate in Africa at 91% from ages 15 to 24 (Education Policy and Data Center 2014). The lingua franca was English, and the pressing need of the new government was

1) to provide teachers and educational materials to sustain this phenomenal literacy rate, which was building a new middle-class intelligentsia, and 2) to forge a new Zimbabwean identity based on new narratives of nation building, smashing the old myths of racial inferiority and disempowerment. As a 'cultural worker' in the new Zimbabwe government (I worked as a Production Manager in the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation), I readily aligned with this aim.

Notwithstanding Ngugi wa Thiong'o's indictment of "European tongues", most Zimbabweans "took to the English language as a duck takes to water," (Veit-Wild 1988:7). Achebe, and most Zimbabwe writers at the time viewed English as the language of liberation, not oppression, though it needed some repairs, by "discarding grammar, throwing syntax out, subverting images from within, beating the drum and cymbals of rhythm," (Veit-Wild: 3-4).

I was aware too as I began writing that I needed to remedy what Kate Law has called social amnesia in Zimbabwean white writers (Godwin, Lessing, Fuller) who "construct their own personal narratives based on an extremely teleological and narrow interpretation of the history of Zimbabwe…as a mechanism to uphold an idealised (i.e. powerful) white [utopian] identity" (Law, 2016: 297). My aim in writing the novel was to dissect a "white" view of history and adopt a liberation counter-narrative which as one critic argues, supersedes "white" or "black" identity and has been the "single most important factor in defining who belongs, and who does not, to the Zimbabwean nation…and this liberation meta-narrative…provides the 'official' script for the war in Zimbabwe" (Tagwerei 2014: 40).

> "You know the Chimurenga war started near here?"
>
> Mubuso nodded. He and his sister were too young to have been in the war, but they had heard so many stories about it, the war against Ian Smith and the Rhodesians before this country was called Zimbabwe. They had both studied it at school. Sarah sharply said, "The Battle of Chinhoyi?" Her uncle nodded and for the first time, he smiled. It was like the sun coming out after a dark thunderstorm. His eyebrows vanished somewhere under his hat and his face lit up with a cheerful expression that resembled Sarah's. "So you do know a little," he said. "I was in that war. But that's another story. In the war, a lot of white people left the country. This rich man stayed for most of the war, built higher and higher walls, employed guards and built electric fences around and planted landmines so no one could get in or out. Then he vanished. We thought he must have secretly fled the country, taking all his valuable gold and diamonds and statues with him, but no one saw him go. But he must have. . ." (Williams 2001)

The publishers (taking seriously their mandate to both delight and instruct) added a glossary at the back of the book which guided students gently into the history of the struggle against white colonial rule:

> Glossary
>
> Battle of Chinhoyi: the first clash between Nationalist guerrillas and white police in the Chimurenga war, 1966.
>
> Chimurenga war - name of the war against colonial rule (1966-l980). (Ibid: 87)

I employed various other strategies in order to undo any act of recolonisation: I took seriously Mikhail Bakhtin's mandate to disrupt the monolithic linguistic domination of the coloniser and consciously sought to reverse the tropes of xenophobia, sexism and racism placing white men as the "bad guys" and dark-skinned working-class children as the heroes. I endeavoured to create characters who were not stereotypes, to portray the "total living conditions of real people" (Gordimer 1983: 27), and expose the realities of colonialism, by working with real children I knew, and with first-hand accounts of xenophobic racism I had witnessed in my childhood:

> This [white] man stayed for most of the war, built higher and higher walls, employed guards and put electric fences around and planted landmines so no one could get in or out…. In the war, if he caught any guerrillas, he tortured them. (Williams 2001)

This was in tension with the prelapsarian condition of my Enid Blyton method, yet I felt that by giving voice to real children and the real political issues they were facing, I was still advocating for a safe space for childhood that was being threatened.

In this way, I sought to consider how my work could create a "Third Space", following Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, the crossbreeding or cross-pollination of two species (Bhabha 2004: 55), positioning myself as a disrupter of a colonial space and the hegemonic discourse of a conventional Enid Blyton narrative. Although there are issues with this

concept, Bhabha argues that such a hybrid third space discourse provides the possibility of "new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha 1994: 1) and my novel sought to perform a counter-narrative and open up debates about issues of class, race, gender and neo-colonialism rather than deliver a reversed binary "truth".

Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* provided my model example of a third space, where western form (the novel) and western underpinnings (Greek tragedy) are inhabited by African oral traditions and storytelling to produce a hybrid novel. I sought as a "white" African writer and to become (in Memmi's phrase) a "coloniser-who-refuses". Memmi maintains that the coloniser cannot surrender his identity and privilege, but can overturn his or her position and identity by self-sacrifice (1990: 107). In my novel, it is the white man whose colonial enterprise is exposed, and he (me/ white settler) is viewed from the outside, as a xenophobic, cruel, racist coloniser who has amassed the wealth of the land, occupied the land, built a fortress against its local people, achieved notoriety, haunted the land for thirty years, and is a ghost of the past that needs to be exorcised by the acts of the empowered African children protagonists: "Was it Sarah's imagination, or did [Mukiwa House] look peaceful and at rest now, not haunted and foreboding as before? Its curse had been lifted and the man in his golden bed had finally been laid to rest" (Williams 2001).

Ultimately, I realised as I was writing this book that my attempt to decolonise Enid Blyton and to use the narrative strategies necessary to write a Zimbabwean Enid Blyton novel was more the act of decolonising myself, dismantling my 'white self' and disassociating from a white tribe.

CONCLUSION

Not only then did I consciously seek to appropriate or "bowerbird" whatever elements I could from Enid Blyton's work – I strove to prioritise orality, storytelling and an intimate relation to the audience, side with the children against the adult conspiracy against them, escape into a prelapsarian childhood space, employ a writing method that was not overwroughtly conscious, and dip into the "undermind" – but I also sought to consciously decolonise Enid Blyton with deliberate intention, to reverse the tropes of xenophobia, sexism, racism and class that are so endemic in Blyton's work and turn them in on themselves: the villain of the novel is the racist, xenophobic white man, the neo-colonial manager of the mine is sexist, and Uncle Magadzwe firmly refuses to entertain the thought of up classing. But these men are defeated by the courage and moral uprightness of the children protagonists. And what hope does a band of desperate men and their retrogressive ideologies have against three plucky dark-skinned children (and dog)?

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Born on 4th July
Prelude, Preamble, Precursor, Premonition

Jo Somerset

ABSTRACT

This essay deliberates about theoretical and creative approaches to a work-in-progress. Using the conceit of visiting the author's birthday each year to depict an individual's relationship with world events, she aims to combine personal and collective history into an autohistory of the late twentieth century. Exploring methods for telling a unique story involves addressing problems of representation, accuracy and artistic expression. Considering the contribution from poststructuralist theory and literature unlocks a door towards experimentation in both expressing and uniting disparate themes. Creative techniques help to unravel the connections between strands of historiographic, feminist, post-colonialist and queer theory, leading to reflections on genre-bending and how to draw diverse meanings from sources and imagination. Reflecting on trends in oral history and 'history from below', the author conjures her own inventive autoethnographic journey through the genres of memoir, journal, autofiction and autobiography, and encounters problems in assessing the relative value of different primary and secondary sources. Furthermore, in writing about others as well as the self, issues arise regarding representation and the politics of giving voice to hidden stories. The essay concludes that using polyphonic voices and fictional devices within the nonfiction framework can provide a way to tell history through a personal artistic medium.

KEYWORDS

practice-based research, collective history, memoir, colonial legacy, queer theory, feminist theory, nonfiction, polyphonic voices.

INTRODUCTION

My work-in-progress, *Born on 4th July*, comprising year-by-year experiences and reflections from 1955 – 2005, is also a collective experience within the universe of past histories. As the planet heats up and the earth itself crumbles, I feel there's an urgency, a compelling need, to generate amongst a wide audience of today's young decision-makers a "thick understanding" of the recent past. This essay is a sort of beginning encompassing thesis, definitions, literature review and gut feeling. Utilizing literary techniques such as storytelling, poetry and experimentation with form and genre, the microscopic 'I' assembles a constellation overlooking 18,000 days of my life shared with millions of people: a galaxy of comprehension, shooting stars of impressions and thoughts erupting from authorial brainwaves reverberating in one person.

O giver of life
that is neither mistress nor master
tell me how to write the Past
in the Present
that speaks to the Future.

Born on 4th July will use a personal lens to narrate history – "a record or account, often chronological in approach, of past events" (Chambers). I chose Chambers dictionary simply for its accessibility – free online – matching the theme of openness which I'm trying to engender in my work. Depicting a series of twentieth-century events post-1945, I aim to burrow underneath the fallacy of Pax Europaea, which claims to have achieved peace in my lifetime, yet has been questioned by Bill Wirtz and others (Wirtz 2017). Since the great postmodern disruption in the twentieth century, historians such as Keith Jenkins (Jenkins 1995) and Hayden White (White 1990) tell us that history is no longer a linear narrative told by experts. My work treads in the footsteps of radical historian Raphael Samuel, who was "historicizing himself, turning his self into history" from middle age until his early death aged 61 (Morrison 2019). Convinced that we can only understand the present through an awareness of the past, I see a way to turn my self into history – an autohistory – beyond the shadow of the great historian's grave, with a female "take" on the lifetime that I uniquely led. In this way, I aim to help today's young adults to navigate through the legacy of previous generations.

I always sensed that there was a different way of telling history. In an earlier article, 'Juxtaposing and Jostling: The Art of Writing History?' (Somerset 2020), I explored the scope of life writing for historiographical narrative. My message is a kind of "you can do it" in relating to history. By hooking readers and formulating readable chunks that speak to them, I'm creating an accessible route into the subject. Developing this theme, I looked for artistic devices for conveying the past to present-day readers. Thinking about how to scoop out and re-form my relationship with the past, a dialogue between my knowledge and my instinct led me to create a poetic essay questioning the concept of men making their own history:

> I would like to revisit the notion that "**men make their own history,**"
> even though some women like Ban Zhao squeezed their noses in
> and others like Sappho wrote history in poetry.
> Because Herodotus - a poet - wrote about wars,
> and Sappho portrayed society (love),
> he was called a historian and she wasn't.
> (Somerset 2021)

Feeling my way, I embarked on a process of auto-research which was encouraged by exposure to Robin Nelson's theory of 'practice as research' in the performing arts (Nelson 2013). This practice is informed by a poststructuralist awareness whereby numerous, if not infinite, approaches to scholarship and discovery are validated. Philippe Lejeune struggled with the question: "Is it possible to define autobiography?" (Lejeune 1988, 3). These ambiguities allowed me to conclude that drilling into my own existence is equally valid as examining any other person's life. Venturing along unknown paths, I encountered trails laid by Gloria Anzaldύa's *autohistoria* (Pitts 2016). Similar to her realization that she could only tell her story if it was located in the context of her Latina people, I found that my efforts to burrow into my life and times had to reference Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool as backdrops for the larger story.

I couldn't ignore the coincidence of sharing my birthday with the birth of the United States of America. In reaching for ways to express my autohistory, I excavated reverberations of my birth date with the Declaration of Independence of 1776. By highlighting terms of subjugation and substituting the Founding Fathers' signatures with female names, and then with imagined names of slaves thrown overboard from the slave ship Zong in 1781 (NourbeSe-Philip 2008), I found I had re-created versions that illuminated female and black oppression, and a profound rush of emotion filled my lungs and lifted my chest. Using

a literary erasure technique, I deleted chunks of the Declaration and distilled common themes, echoing through subsequent centuries, between my life experience and that of the un-free colonized New World subjects. Words such as "evils," "repeated injuries," "harass our people," "totally unworthy of a civilized nation," "disavow these usurpations," "full Power," and "Independent States" became mental guides in my work as I commandeered the notion of independence from old white men and made it belong to me in the post-Second World War, post-colonial world. I decided on Born on 4th July as the title for my book.

RESEARCH WORK IN PROGRESS

Feminist theory has taught me how to weave a chronicle. Julia Kristeva's concept of "women's time" differs from linear time and conventional notions of space, and the "interweaving of history and geography" will lead me (and you) towards "future perfect" via the female subject (me). Since a female engagement with temporality involves "cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which […is...] all-encompassing and infinite," feminist weaving may warp widely accepted stories (Kristeva 1981:16). I can catch threads from forgotten time and unusual places to form a new weft that creates unseen images and links a childhood in industrial Birmingham with a source of the city's raw materials in parts of Africa.

> When you're nine years old you can smell Cadbury's chocolate wafting from the Bournville factory and on Sundays you go to Quaker meeting which they call Friends' Meeting and learn about the cacao bean that made the Cadbury family rich. You don't learn about the people who grow and pick the bean that becomes cocoa that turns into chocolate that melts in your mouth but if you knew about the 'white man' plundering African lands the 'glass and a half of milk in every bar' would turn sour. (Somerset 2021).

There are many layers to the reeking colonial onion, and "us" is a problematic word. My work must overturn the view that "we made the empire then granted independence" and show how the empire made "us" (History Extra 2019).

According to Alison Light (historian/memoirist) and Blake Morrison (poet/life writer/memoirist/novelist), this could be a memoir, "a collection of reminiscences about a period, series of events, etc, written from personal experience" (Chambers) as much as a history. Furthermore, Lejeune validates my unfolding awareness of how this work might take shape:

> The subject must be primarily individual life…..but the chronicle and social or political history can also be part of the narrative. (Lejeune1988:5).

Telling a story from the inside, like Light, invites "artistry" which Morrison asserts is essential to authenticity (Morrison 2019). Lejeune's 'autobiographical pact' binds the reader to the author/narrator/protagonist, adding further depth to the scope offered by Kristeva and Anzaldύa whose ideas were explored in my previous article (Somerset 2020). My emerging polyphonic voices become 'Rosetta stones of identity' (Lejeune 1988:6-7), opening multiple communication channels between author and reader.

There's a world beyond myself – the "world-beyond-the-text" (Lejeune 1988:11) – and a great debt is owed to post-colonial writers. I'm enormously appreciative to Edward Said for challenging the worldview and orientalism of my era (Said 2003). My liberal Quaker upbringing showed "good works" being done to others by the likes of me, which obscured actual misery and poverty. Writers from the global South, notes Meena Kandasamy, have been marginalized, and are found interesting by Western publishers only for being "from a place where horrible things happen" (Morrison 2019). These are some of the lies which my autohistory must uncover, against the tide of turned backs and averted eyes of media, influencers, authors, rulers and censors.

EMERGING PROBLEMS

There's a problem with using 4th July as my reference point, as I discover that for black US Americans it's not a day of celebration. Frederick Douglass, a former slave, asked a mainly white audience in 1852, thirteen years before Emancipation:

> What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? [It is] a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim…..I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! ... The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is yours not mine. (Douglass 1852).

I can't pursue my autohistory without acknowledging the debt and legacy of the slave trade, so I turn to current practice, to Scottish Makar Jackie Kay

performing "Flag Up Scotland, Jamaica,"

> Here's the redress that's long been owed,
> Here's the first step on the road… (Kay 2019).

which marks a Memorandum of Understanding between the Universities of the West Indies and Glasgow.

In a world turned upside down by coronavirus and Black Lives Matter, I continue scanning the stratosphere for rays of revelation. Suddenly, the urgency to understand the recent historical roots of geopolitics has flared up. "How do you know who you are or where you are going if you don't know where you are from?" asks Mandla Rae in her poem "as british as a watermelon" performed at Greater Manchester LGBTQ+ Cultural Arts Network Conference in January 2020. Just as her refugee tale makes self-knowledge spatial as well as temporal, I address my younger self in an attempt to conceptualize history that unites space and time, comparing my Birmingham childhood with the 'other Birmingham' in Alabama, USA:

> You blow out your candles with nine-year old lungs unclogged by nasty smog …..
> unlike your counterparts in Birmingham, Alabama – nicknamed 'Bombingham' – where the iron and steel works aren't the only things that light up the sky,
> ….and while your mum was birthday-buying in your Birmingham…
> the Ku Klux Klan's death threats were driving African Americans out of town
> and the US President was signing the Civil Rights Act….
> So as your nine candles are snuffed into smoky silhouettes,
> a 13-year old boy got a haircut, which your mother's Guardian newspaper describes as 'Negro Boy tests Civil Rights Law'
> and the bully/protector of that other Birmingham encourages white folks to attack black protestors
> because the hatred from slavery never totally dissipated. (Somerset 2021)

Problems tend to unravel when they're written down. Methinks I am deliberating too much and just need to get on and do it. The learning will be in the doing, the doing will also be an unfolding. In writing, the doing always entails unfolding, unfurling, blinking eyes unused to the light. So, less pondering, more planning, less nerve-wracking agonising, more writing, less fact-collecting and reading, more committing to the page and fattening the computer folder.

GENRE-BENDING

But this is too neat. Hearing Kazim Ali's exhortation to transcend and bend polarities (Ali 2013), I incorporate spatial disruption into my auto-historical research-cum-narration, obeying autoethnographers' call 'to disrupt the binary of science and art' (Ellis et al 2010). While my autohistory is not autofiction, like Kandasamy voicing her experience in *When I Hit You* (2017), I adapt the technique of factual marginalia that she uses in her subsequent novel *Exquisite Cadavers* (2019). Marginal writing in my history juxtaposes between 'I' and 'you' alongside a factual commentary exploring how gender boundaries were transcended then and now. I distance myself from a story in which I am immersed, creating a dual voice:

> Dear Jay,
>
> I was a tomboy.
>
> I played with my brother & was the only girl in cops'n'robbers on bikes.
>
> You're telling my childhood story except it's 40 years later and it's not mine, it's yours. In grown-up words you describe how your three-year old self realised about gender restrictions, backed off and said, "I'm good." It wasn't for you.
>
> You were an only child, with a father you were never close to (and didn't know after age 8) and a mother diagnosed as bi-polar. Your friends were your Grandad, tinkering with car engines in his garage, and your cousin George. (Somerset 2021)

Creative devices such as time-travelling characters, imagined dialogue and dramatic invention enable tangled stories to unravel. However, I'm terrified of boring the reader. Kazim Ali's question: "is language adequate to define experience?" leads to a cul-de-sac until I absorb his encouragement to copy the fluidity of genderqueer identity and free literature from its "generic binaries." Through genre-bending I can mould language, dissolve boundaries and introduce poetic intonations into my prose "not merely for the promise of pleasure but [for] planetary importance" (Ali 2013:35 and 38).

I thought this was going to be difficult, but maybe it's ok to queer the story, to dot around within a linear framework, to hop back and forth and pop

into spaces from "now" time. Like Dr Who's sidekick entering the Tardis, readers will never quite know where and when they'll land. On 4th July 1989, I wrote a letter to the baby who didn't yet exist.

> Dear Baby,
>
> Sue and I tried to make you again tonight. If it works, you'll be conceived in a hectic time, with us applying for jobs and Sue having her driving test. Out in the world, strange things are happening. In China there's a massive students' pro-democracy revolt which is being bloodily crushed by the military.
>
> Do you really want to know this, baby?.......
>
> If you're going to happen, let me welcome you now.
>
> (Somerset 2021)

The word 'queer' in my youth was an abusive term reclaimed by Gay Liberation Front, but it left a violent, nasty taste. Only now do I give it a place in my work. Previously focused on normalizing lesbian and gay representation, queer theory's shift to "destabilize and hopefully dissolve the line" between normal and deviant gives me permission to approach topics and events from oblique angles and to imagine what lies at the bottom of muddy potholes where exact contours cannot be seen (Jennings 2013:5). Although obvious to today's young people, to be perfectly fine about being gay, to tell stories of self-insemination, coming out to parents and workmates still makes my generation gasp with delight. To roll the concept of gender-fluid around my tongue and speculate on its strange flavour. To dare.

Queering is easier when following a trend initiated by others, so I turned to the Oulipo movement's constraints which subvert and re-orientate literary conventions. Diving into poststructuralist theory and surfacing with a fistful of playthings, I revel in experimenting with forward-and-back poems, hybrid verse drama, slenderizing and/or re-contextualizing existing texts. I manage to convey the pain of my partner's struggles with a disabling world by re-creating the conflict in a fictionalized playscript.

These techniques do not just apply to the personal sphere. The only way I can understand the brutal ten-year conflict between Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia is to explore it creatively.

> My hold on history is in tatters. I can't understand what's happening in what was Yugoslavia….. All I can do is try to connect through my craft, and a poem erupts from my guts. (Somerset 2021).

Finally I navigate through the savagery by generating two pages of verse entitled 'Siege of Srebrenica 18 April 1992 – 11 July 1995.'

Re-writing, dramatizing and creating new meanings are ideal for this collage project. More importantly, it's how my creativity wants to erupt. I muse:

> If this project were an object,
> it's less a jigsaw – pieces fitting neatly –
> more a collage with messy overlaps and
> awkward spaces.
> Or a tapestry, soft and tough, warm and stiff,
> patterns and pictures popping up repeatedly.

Tapestries, like the Bayeux Tapestry and the UK Quaker Tapestry (1996), are ways in which women have told history. I suspect Kristeva would love the fact that they aren't actually tapestries, but embroideries: women subverting not only the grand narrative by telling history in pictures but also their medium. Both artefacts give Kristeva's "intertextuality" a new texture, layers of cloth and actual threads combining with interplay between texts. Based on its more famous Norman counterpart, the Quaker tapestry depicting 300 years of Quaker history resides at Kendal Friends' Meeting House in northern England, its panels created between 1981-96 by four thousand women, children and men in fifteen countries. This alternative history, rooted in my heritage, both clarifies and multiplies the meanings that can emanate from my work.

MULTIPLE VOICES

I started out wanting to advance the "untold stories" school of history, building on Alison Light and Raphael Samuel's innovative "history from below" (Gentry 2013) and Margaretta Jolly's oral history of the women's liberation movement (Jolly 2019). Intertextuality appeals to me as a new star in the galaxy of my autohistory, giving me permission to seek collaboration not just from texts and pictures but also from people's spoken experiences. A series of interviews with Jay result in the dual-voiced piece on transgender issues quoted above. Standing on the shoulders of previous historians, I apply a feminist bent: braiding, connecting, pulling out fibres and looking round corners for these stories. I've understood how actualité changes when viewed through different lenses.

In my search for a voice and a wordscape to clarify the muddle, I wade through further poststructuralist critiques to realize the complexity of my task. I'm still not sure I understand the full meaning of

Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics theory, but as it's about signs that impart meaning, it must form part of my intricate work (de Saussure 1959). Many truths must be heard for untold stories to be articulated, for history from below to surface, for the silenced to speak and obliterated pasts to reappear. If Mikhail Bakhtin were still alive, I would ask him how these truths and their echoes can fuel polyphonic voices in my collage-history (Robinson 2011).

Placing these explorations of critical theory into the research arena, I'm attracted by the iterative model of practice-based research which re-visits a core problem several times to create a "layered account." Through these visitations, research and practice meld into one process, enhanced by interviews and collaborations with external contributors. In seeking to portray a "thick understanding" of the past half-century, however, I need to remember (thank you, postmodern historians) that the wider meaning – comprehension of twentieth century history – is contingent upon how readers view the facts that I place in front of them. In depicting 1980s Liverpool, I consider whether to interweave my work in tenement housing estates with verbatim reports from the Toxteth riots and contemporary reggae lyrics. Readers need to see Liverpool, not just me.

Transcending cultural space, a meteor named #ownvoices hurtles towards my exploring starship. I boldly enter the fray of cultural appropriation, encouraged by authors of colour to write beyond my own reference point, to listen carefully and write sensitively. "It's not 'write what you know' but 'write what you want to understand,'" said Aminatta Forna at a Manchester writers' event in January 2020, explaining how she foraged for the tale of her father's political life and execution in *The Devil That Danced on the Water* (2002). This is indeed thin ice, but crossing boundaries, speaking about others, pulling up unspoken experiences – these are the life-blood which my autohistory dares to liberate: making art tell true stories that are also a version of the universal narrative.

Bakhtin and Lejeune might advise me to write in pluralities. I'm trying to portray the connectedness and contradictions of different viewpoints that are often incompatible. Juxtaposing reportage between black Liverpudlians, police constables and Margaret Thatcher may allow the reader to begin to piece together a greater story. Multiplicity of viewpoints should run as a thread through the narrative, de-centering the writer (myself) whilst at the same time writing from my own experience. In my first drafts I am, at different times, a bystander, witness, observer or participant, sometimes several roles at once. Denoted by reported first person statements, the witness' testimony is supplemented by verbatim reportage. The observer, using second person narrative from a twenty-first century self to her younger version allows an omniscient and retrospective perspective to ignore ignorance. My favorite role – participant – is written in close first-person realist memoir and sometimes, to deal with the pain of excavating the past, in third person retrospective. Finally, the dramatic voice in verse and theatre script speaks for the bystander.

This approach is exemplified in dealing with the disabled people's movement of the 1990s. Sometimes, after excavating personal experience, the only thing to do is to elevate. In the same way that Superman's powers are sapped when he unearths a nugget of kryptonite, I can only crawl away from the eerie green glow of my experiences with disability. In our weakened state, the caped crusader and I drag ourselves to a safe distance to regain our strength, waiting for our faculties to return, until Superman can fly once again, and I have enough wits to visit my story. Flights of fancy become the mediator by which I tell my tale. Soaring above grim reaper-ish reality, reaching for a symbol that tells all whilst protecting writer and reader from pain, I write an ironic comedy sketch. I don't want to prod and poke the vulnerable bits of living with impairments that are made into disability. By making up a cast, a setting and a series of actions, I've found a way to recount the heroic bits, the "Wow!" of dealing powerfully with conflict that leaves out the grinding undermining that accompanied valiant activism. I want to say 'brave' but can't because that word has been twisted against disabled people to justify their oppression. Valiant is better.

Recovered, Superman is back to saving people from burning buildings. Narrated, my disabled people pull off superhuman feats in their battle against the inhuman culture of UK social services departments in the 1990s. Using the medium of comic drama, the deadly nugget has been excavated, and the story has become elevated.

USING DIARIES

A key source document that shoots sparks up into this project's solar system is the diary: in my own handwriting, and in others', both real and fictional. Reading *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (1887), I recognize an element of sense-making that is

achieved from committing words to paper: thought materialized brings a level of clarity. However, for all their richness, diaries present dilemmas in the writing process. Lejeune frames the problem: "the diary is a social outcast, of no fixed theoretical address." (McNeill 2010). According to Dorothy Sheridan, editor of Naomi Mitchison's World War Two diary, "no diary has a monopoly on the truth" (Sheridan 2021:52). This personal account of events can be unreliable, constricted by the single perspective of the eyewitness. Recording it – translating the experience into words – omits more than it commits to paper, and is further hampered by the writer's own outlook, prejudices and emotional baggage. Is my scribbling about getting pregnant by donor insemination all there is to tell about lesbians taking control of reproduction in the 1980s? Of course not. To give a rounded commentary I need to use the diary as a launch-pad, not the whole story.

Regarding other people's diaries, there are further notes of caution. In *How to Read a Diary* (2019), Desirée Henderson describes a "gender paradox" which defines diaries' usefulness according to sexist/patriarchal notions of what is important: world events, political developments, movements, royalty and famous people. While on the one hand diaries are belittled as a feminine pastime, and on the other hand lauded if written by a famous person (read: famous Western man), diaries are beginning to have their moment, particularly in telling untold stories of "little" people whose lives are deemed unimportant. Here's my opportunity.

Looking back from the present is another hurdle to overcome. Dorothy Sheridan found:

> For Naomi, re-reading her own words of forty years ago, the challenge was to try to make sense of her past accounts in relation to her present identity. (Sheridan 2021:59).

For myself, reading about my young teenage obsession with boys from the perspective of an older lesbian demands deep breaths and much intense thinking about how this came about. I'm embarrassed by my youthful outpourings; they have no artistic merit. Note to self: cut self-pity and keep detail. Logan Mountstuart, protagonist/diarist of *Any Human Heart* by William Boyd reflects on a friend's words: "We don't want to know that 'Hitler invaded Poland' - we're more curious about what you had for breakfast. Unless you happened to be there, of course, when Hitler invaded Poland and your breakfast was interrupted' (Boyd 2002:376).

However much I'd like my diary to reveal historical narrative in parallel with my personal life, in reality, like Alison Light, it was "a companion" in hard times and written "in the name of understanding what cannot be understood." (Light 2019). So I must conclude that the diaries have a limited place in formulating my story for external digestion as they were scrawled for myself, addressed to the Universal Empathizer. Apart from anything else, they are stuck in old time, only fit for plucking facts or contemporaneous feelings to patch into the present narrative about the past.

LEARNING FROM FICTION ABOUT HOW TO REVEAL HISTORY

Sometimes, in relating the self to the world's collective history, I've strayed into realms of speculation and make-believe. Once again, Lejeune is useful in advocating loose adherence to verifiable truth. "Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject – it is a fantasy." (Lejeune 1989:132). In addition, Joan Didion, mistress of both nonfiction and fiction, imparts her wisdom in transferring novelistic techniques into nonfiction. She never had the discipline to keep a diary, but advised keeping a notebook to capture scenes, impressions and moments rather than "factual record" (Didion 1968).

From the extensive list of novels which tell history, I pick out a favourite: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Reflecting in 2021 on its significance, Rushdie is quite clear that it's

> a history novel, looking for an answer to the great question history asks us: what is the relationship between society and the individual, between the macrocosm and the microcosm? (Rushdie 2021).

Whilst his protagonist, Saleem Sinai, undergoes massive tribulations during the birth and maturation of independent India that are far removed from my own upbringing, I share his sentiment that we are "handcuffed to history" and have a responsibility towards it. "After all, if it's not ours, then whose is it?" reflects Rushdie. However, not everyone agrees. Sarah Moss' character Adam Goldschmidt in *The Tidal Zone* regards fiction, with its preoccupation with order and structure, as "the enemy of history" since in reality historical events are characterized by "disorder and harm" (Moss 2016:144). In debating with these fictional protagonists, I end up in the 'responsibility' camp and am challenged to emulate

Rushdie in telling a compelling story.

BENDING CREATIVE NONFICTION TOWARDS AUTOHISTORY

Searching for forms which illustrate my autohistory's themes, has Christine Brooke-Rose got there before me in Next? As an inveterate alphabetizer, I'm delighted but annoyed to see my 'war' theme presented by her in *The Penguin Book of Oulipo* as:

> The century's alphabête [….] A for Auschwitz, B for Belsen, C for Cambodia. D for Dresden. For Deportation. E for Ethiopia, for Ethnic Cleansing.....F for,   what's F?
> Famine....Mao's Great Leap into, 1959. Stalin's ditto, Ukraine 1933.
> Fundamentalism. There's usually more than one horror for each letter.
> F for Fire! Cease! Fire! Cease! Fire!' (Brooke-Rose 2019)

My literature review continues its turn for the worse. Kate Charlesworth also got there before me with her graphic memoir Sensible Footwear (Charlesworth 2019), placing her life alongside LGBTQ+ history in the same time period as my project, dammit! However, she's graphic, I'm wordy, she's talking gay, I'm on power and conflict. Our stars might collide but maybe there's enough room in the universe for both works.

I find Günter Grass aiming to build an understanding of German twentieth-century history in *My Century*, but notwithstanding his stature as an author, I find his 100 stories merely reflect belligerence and beastly behaviour. It doesn't hang together: too microscopic, too much assumption of the reader's foreknowledge, the shift from fiction to memoir too opaque (Grass 1999). As none of these fill my gap, maybe I'll get away with it – the British focus, twenty-first century viewpoint, only fifty years after the events.

If my young adult reader is paramount, any genre-bending needs to be accessible. Bringing fictional approaches into creative nonfiction must make clear where fiction (fantasy) starts and finishes. This is even truer for blending the self-story with geohistory in both temporal and spatial planes. Polyphonic voices and obvious fictional or autobiographical diversions should illustrate hard-to-understand episodes of the last decades of the twentieth century. In other words, I must assemble all the tools of artistry that I can muster to clarify the confusion and blank spaces of those fifty years.

CONCLUSION

Following a process of research containing elements of autoethnography, empirical investigation and narratives, I am re-visiting and re-learning history. Using creative techniques to explore disparate strands, the resulting fusion of centred and distanced viewpoints of the twentieth century in my completed work will comprise my attempt to cultivate a chronicle that's sustainable, believable and authentic for future generations. By jostling facts and voices, juxtaposing views, events and visions, my embarkation to infinity and beyond will endeavour to lay a vapour trail showing how to tell a wider history through a personal and artistic medium.

This autohistory will weave between artistry, anecdote, and actual historical record to inform about the past and contribute intelligence to the present. I want to put the record straight about whose sweat and blood made Birmingham and Britain "great." I am writing to honour the ghosts of my mother and all women convinced they were stupider than men; my father, and all the terrified combatants scarred by wartime; my partner Sue and disabled people everywhere who had to fight so hard that fighting became an automatic reflex even in our relationship; my teachers, lecturers and bosses into whose boxes I wouldn't fit; and my activist friends who fell foul of AIDS, asbestos-induced cancer, or just died too young because that's part of being human. But most of all it's for my beloved millennials who I spawned and nurtured, and who I desperately want to help make sense of the world they've inherited.

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Creative Non-fiction and Photography

An Insightful Partnership

Alex Bertram

ABSTRACT

A key issue in debates about creative writing as an academic discipline is the question whether practice-based research can contribute to knowledge. Creativity has traditionally been valued for its innate qualities that transcend reason and method. The practice of creative writing today has evolved from a craft that can be taught into a discipline with its own research frameworks. This paper outlines how a recent practice-based creative writing PhD took a multi-frame approach to research to write the creative non-fiction thesis: a cultural biography of a portrait of French actress, Sarah Bernhardt. It presents a selection of findings to suggest that poetics as an interpretive frame can offer new insights into the relationship between creative non-fiction and photographic history when drawing on phenomenology and material culture studies. As well as defining these terms and introducing the key thinkers who inform them, the paper proposes that these insights help to define creative non-fiction's place within the discipline of creative writing.

KEYWORDS

Creative writing, creative non-fiction, cultural biography, photographic history, phenomenology, material culture studies.

INTRODUCTION

A key issue in debates about creative writing as an academic discipline is the question whether practice-based research can contribute to knowledge. Creativity has traditionally been considered an innate skill that is "beyond methodological thought" (Cook 2013: 200). The practice of creative writing today has evolved from a craft that can be taught into a discipline with its own research frameworks which offer new insights (Webb et al. 2011: 192). I recently completed a practice-based creative writing PhD. In the creative non-fiction thesis, I wrote the cultural biography of a photographic portrait of Sarah Bernhardt that was taken at the London studio of Australian photographer, Walter Barnett, in 1910. Taking a multi-frame, or combined phenomenological and material approach to research, enabled me to gain insights into the relationship between the form of creative non-fiction and my subject areas of photographic history and material culture history. I explored these different ways of envisioning the past, or different forms of "memory," through the figures of Bernhardt and Barnett, to get a fuller sense of their histories. My work forms part of an expanding definition of "knowledge" in the contemporary academy whereby one conceptualizes the practice of writing as a rich, interwoven process, that offers insights into one's narrative form.

The combined methodology helped me to see, for instance, that there is a sympathy between my narrative form and my subject. Creative non-fiction and analogue photography are highly contingent forms of memory that create a sense of the real. Both have been perceived to occupy the space between art and information and are difficult to categorize. Through the process of making the thesis, however, I found this generic ambiguity to be a source of power. Secondly, taking a combined approach to research helped me to identify how, in creative non-fiction, one cedes control of the subject to dramatic effect. The form naturally adapted to reflect the unpredictable nature of a photographic archive that might otherwise have been off-putting to the researcher. My direct experience with the portrait also helped me to see that the change in its material form over its lifetime reflected a change in its status as an object of memory. The discovery shaped my narrative approach: I looked at each period in the portrait's life through the lens of its material make-up. The approach offered me a new angle on the portrait's history and gave me a new "way in" to describe how I experienced it and to consider how it was experienced in the past. The insight therefore helped me to narrow the distance between my subject and the reader.

In the final chapter of the thesis, for instance, the analogue portrait is digitized. For scholars in the field of visual anthropology the process of digitization is a process of translation. In any translation there is an understanding that the two representations are not the same. The process of digitization made me aware that my narrative was also a form of translation. In much the same way as the digitization of the image has led to a new awareness of the material original, I was highly aware of the balance between the personal and cultural revelations, simply because the portrait was there.

Finally, my combined methodology drew attention to a key temporal feature of the analogue photograph and creative non-fiction's origins: both depict experiences that existed at a particular moment in time and space that cannot be repeated. I now see that to gain insights into a photographic portrait one has to consider it at each of the stages in its "life". Similarly, the form of creative non-fiction reflects how we need to situate ourselves in space and over time as readers and individuals.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND MATERIALITY: A COMBINED APPROACH TO PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY AND CREATIVE WRITING RESEARCH

In the creative non-fiction thesis, I set out to show how genre, form, and subject, can work together to offer a mutually insightful partnership. To achieve this aim, I took a multi-frame approach to research. I propose that poetics—"a set of principles for the making of a text" (Greenberg 2018: 526) —as an interpretive frame, can offer new insights when drawing on phenomenology and material culture studies. I engaged with my subjects as a creative writer and took a phenomenological approach to narrative in the form of creative non-fiction. I also drew on both phenomenological and material approaches to photographic research.

Here I set out the definitions for these terms and introduce the key thinkers who inform them. These critics include John Hartsock, in the field of narrative literary journalism; Elizabeth Edwards in visual anthropology; Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai in cultural biography; and Bruno Latour in social

anthropology. There is a sympathy of approach between these scholars: all share the desire to record the concrete details of lived experiences as they are or were directly perceived. They take an interest in the way that the material objects we make, and use, can offer insights into our cultural lives.

CREATIVE NON-FICTION (OR, NARRATIVE LITERARY JOURNALISM)

In the thesis I define creative non-fiction, or narrative literary journalism, following John Hartsock, as a "narra-descriptive" form of writing, in which personal and cultural revelations are intertwined (Hartsock 2016: 3). By personal revelation, I mean the way I experience things and respond to them. By cultural revelation, I refer to the things that I find. I took a phenomenological approach to subjectivity, which means that I adopted a reflexive, first-person narrative stance, and recorded my process of discovery and interpretation.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND MATERIALITY: A COMBINED APPROACH

My approach follows the definition of phenomenology offered by Maurice Merleau-Ponty who held the view that phenomenology "offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian, or the sociologist may provide" (Merleau-Ponty 2005: preface). But I make a claim for a combined approach, drawing on elements of both phenomenology and materiality, because this enabled me to gain a thorough insight into my subjects.

By definition, materialism takes the ontological stance that "reality is ultimately independent of the subject who is engaged in the act of perception and mental phenomena caused by the operation of material or physical agencies" (OED 2001). In phenomenology, on the other hand, one finds the stance that "For something to count as real it must, in principle, be something we can encounter" (Zahavi 2019: ch. 2). In the creative part of the thesis, I combined these two approaches to photographic research by looking at how the portrait was produced, preserved and circulated. I also considered how it was creatively experienced as an object of memory throughout its "life".

The description of a combined approach is taken from the anthropologist Daniel Miller who describes the work of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, as combining an interest in material practice with a phenomenological exploration of how our interactions with the objects we encounter with can shape us as social beings (Miller 2005: 6). The work of Edmund Husserl is also relevant here. My investigation of the portrait drew on Husserl's observation that "perceptual exploration … is a bodily activity" (Zahavi 2019: ch. 1).

I drew specifically on the work of the visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards who has applied a combined material and phenomenological approach to the field of photographic research. My work in the creative thesis positions itself within the broader subject area of material culture history. I follow the definition of material culture given by Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello as "objects that have meaning for the people who produce and own … use and consume them" (Gerritsen et al. 2015: 2).

CULTURAL BIOGRAPHY

In the creative non-fiction thesis, I wrote the cultural biography of a photographic portrait of Sarah Bernhardt. I define cultural biography following Igor Kopytoff as a research process in which one looks at an object as "a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and re-classified into culturally constituted categories" (Appadurai 2013: ch. 2). Kopytoff's definition relates to the work of Arjun Appadurai and his book The Social Life of Things. Appadurai identified that the "commodity situation" of an object is never fixed and changes throughout its lifetime.

The anthropological scholarship supported me in my inquiry. It gave me a firm base from which to explore my subject, and then to add my own creative layer to the work. I charted the life story of the portrait, from studio to present day, to show how its conceptualization as an object of memory shifted with each changing historical context. Appadurai and Kopytoff taught me that everything I found or could not find on the journey would offer me an insight into the nature of the object. I noticed, for instance, that the portrait was created as a commodity in 1910. It was then hidden way, perhaps lost, for over eighty years until it was discovered in 1997. The portrait was then framed and exhibited at an art gallery as 'art' in 2001, and more recently digitized as part of a permanent collection. It is now available online and is also the subject of academic inquiry. By

writing an object biography in the form of creative non-fiction, I showed that the form facilitates the anthropological desire to record the precise nature of the photographic record. The narrative story mode also offers a more personal voice and has helped to take my subject of a figure from the margins of photographic history to a wider audience.

I followed the portrait and recorded my findings. The approach also draws on the scholarship of Bruno Latour who encourages the researcher to "follow the actors themselves" (Latour 2007: 11) to find new and more accurate ways into the past. In his critique of the primacy of the human subject within social anthropology, Latour looks at the agency of the object itself which can operate in its own autonomous way irrespective of human interaction. Latour seeks to "entirely transcend the dualism of subjects and objects" (Miller 2005: 3). Kopytoff, Appadurai and Latour help us to see that "the things that people make, make people" (Miller 2005: 38).

By combining this scholarship and devising my multi-frame approach to research, where I considered my experience as researcher and the way the photograph was experienced in the past, I saw beyond the specific concerns of my narrative form, and the photographic media, to establish new interdisciplinary connections between them. These insights help to define creative non-fiction's place within the discipline of creative writing and form the basis of discussion in this paper.

HOW DOES A PRACTICE-BASED CREATIVE WRITING PHD CONTRIBUTE TO KNOWLEDGE? AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL JOURNEY.

In the creative thesis I took a personal journey into the life of a portrait to see if this could offer insights into a photographer who remained in the margins of photographic history. For me, the narrative story mode of creative non-fiction offered a more intimate voice and acknowledged subjectivity which has arguably made my subject more accessible to a wider audience. Researching the historical development of my form helped me to see that creative non-fiction is engaging because, from its beginning, the form sought to reflect the personal details of an uncertain world. The contingent nature of the form has been an advantage, but it has also been a limitation. The form has held an ambiguous place in the academy because, much like the analogue photograph, it is not art or information in the conventional sense. Through the process of making the thesis, however, I have found that the epistemic and creative value of both the narrative form and photographic media is evident in their material form. They are not art or information and can be both [1].

When creative writing programs began in the academy after World War 2, one of the first questions raised was, "Can creative writing be taught?" (Dawson 2015: 1). This question was not unprecedented. It was asked in England some thirty years earlier when, in the department of English Literature, scholars asked: "Can English be taught?" (Dawson 2015: 6). Literature was viewed as an instructional subject, and it was argued that "literature is a good thing if only we can bring it to operate on young minds" (Dawson 2015: 6). Literary scholar, Paul Dawson, explains that students were first taught philology, or historical and linguistic scholarship. With the rise of industrialization, however, the desire for literature to be fostered as an artform within the academy grew (Dawson 2015: 6, 37-39). The study of philology was replaced by New Criticism, or the study of "literature as literature," and by the early to mid-20th century a divide between literature and literary criticism had formed. The critique of texts was duly recognized as a measurable output and English became a discipline in its own right (Dawson 2015: 6-7).
For the discipline of creative writing, however, defining how one measures one's output, or contribution to knowledge, has been harder to achieve. Creativity has been valued as an inherent and "unconscious process" (Cook 2013: 200). Indeed, the concept of creativity as an innate skill, which made it difficult for creative writing to find a home in the academy, is the very same concept of creativity that made it difficult for narrative literary journalism to be accepted as literature. Looking at its distinctly American heritage, literary scholar John Hartsock explains that this difficulty dates to the early 19th century, when literature was considered as an artform reflecting eternal and universal values. While literature was elevated to the realm of art, narrative literary journalism (and mainstream journalism more generally) was limited by its contingent nature and viewed as that which "soars but little higher in our intellectual flights than the column of the daily paper" (Hartsock 2000: 210). The form's acceptance suffered with the rise of modern literary studies when the concept of literary genius was feted as "transcendental" (Hartsock 2000: 217). The very introduction of New Criticism into the academy,

where literature was viewed as an artform that "exists unto itself," meant that a text acknowledging its origins of production could not be viewed as art. Literature, explains Hartsock, had taken on a level of importance that journalism never attempted to achieve (Hartsock 2000: 217-218).

Narrative literary journalism emerged in reaction to mainstream journalism in the 1890s and sought to provide a more subjective and honest account of events (Hartsock 2000: 23). The form rose in response to the need for an engaged and far more personal account of the news that made sense of change in an increasingly "indeterminate world" (Hartsock 2000: 70). Its evolution as a form reflected the technological changes of the 19th century and new theories of relativity, which had led to a sense of alienation and uncertainty about the fundamental nature of reality. Literary journalists understood that one could not fully capture the events of the phenomenal world. They sought to avoid what Hartsock refers to as the "closure" of text, or the depiction of an event with a fixed beginning, middle and end, because they felt that this did not represent the "inconclusive" nature of everyday experience (Hartsock 2000: 48). Here a subjective account came far closer to capturing the fluid nature of things which were inconsistent and incomplete; a reflexive and transparent approach to research highlighted the understanding that all information is shaped by the way we research it as individuals (Hartsock 2000: 52).

The narrative form was redefined by Tom Wolfe in the 1970s under the banner of New Journalism. Wolfe and his contemporaries, such as Joan Didion and Truman Capote, expanded the scope of the genre by putting themselves at the centre of the story (Boynton 2005: xii). They channelled their character's thoughts and introduced narrative techniques such as "scene by scene" construction and "varying points of view" to engage their readers in stories from real life (Boynton 2005: xvi). In the more recent wave of literary journalists, or the New New Journalists, such as Susan Orleans and Jon Krakauer, an interest in "the way one gets the story" has evolved (Boynton 2005: xiii). These writers not only probe the minds of their characters, but they also immerse themselves in their day-to-day lives. They show an interest in the "minutiae of the ordinary" (Boynton 2005: xvii). All three main phases in the history of narrative literary journalism share the desire to capture the details of phenomenal experience in a direct and natural way. They seek to narrow the gap between the subject and narrator to engage the reader in topics they might otherwise overlook (Boynton 2005: xxvii).

The emergence of narrative literary journalism within the academy is harder to locate. The form's history is marked by absence rather than presence (Hartsock 2000: 207). The appraisal of journalism at the turn of the 20th century is reminiscent of the critique of photography in the 1850s. Many of photography's early critics shared the view that while painting is a thoughtful process, "photography only replaces artistic labour, not the work of imagination, conception or vision" (Costello 2019: 13). Similarly, a literary commentator wrote in 1906: "Journalism attempts to counterfeit the tones of the higher, but the result is counterfeit. So long as journalism attends to its own (material) business, it is not only harmless, but useful; but as soon as it would usurp what is organically above it, it becomes hurtful" (Hawthorne 1906: 166-67).

The historical development of creative non-fiction and analogue photography tells me that both have occupied an uneasy place between art and information, in the museum and academy respectively, which has led to a sense of uncertainty. The diversity of phrases used to describe the narrative form, such as creative non-fiction, narrative non-fiction, and narrative literary journalism, tells us that it has meant different things to people in different times and places. Only a few years back Hartsock claimed that he is "not confident that there can ever be a single designating terminology for the form" (Hartsock 2016: 3). Similarly, visual anthropologists say that the status of photographs has a degree of uncertainty to it. Their "lack of clear originality as historical objects, means that their status within the value systems that construct museum objects is at best confused if not contaminated" (Edwards 2014: 5). In the museum context, the evidence that "something has been" means that it can also be overlooked or misfiled (Edwards 2014: 4).

Through the course of my research I observed, however, that this placeless-ness, or ambiguity of form and media, can be a source of power. In The Hare with Amber Eyes, A Hidden Inheritance, for instance, ceramicist Edmund De Waal traces the story of his inherited collection of netsuke, small Japanese carvings, to tell his family history. This acclaimed work of creative non-fiction silently extends its reach beyond the single category of

biography, to the history, and art history, sections of the bookshop. Similarly, visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards asks of photographs, "Are they objects? Documents? Artistic statements: or mere bits of information? Of course," she says, "they are all these things." Edwards argues that it is this "indeterminate status" that makes the photograph a "highly flexible platform" for multiple interpretations. As a result, the photograph can 'become [an] unquestioned and unnoticed part of the modern museum experience (Edwards 2014: 14). Relatedly, Sarah Bernhardt's enduring name is due, in part, to her ability to invent and reinvent herself. Here, however, Bernhardt's image was highly visible: her strength lay in the way she used photography to construct her idea of spectacle in which her on and off-stage personas were largely indistinguishable.

Each contribute to the knowledge of their fields by extending and redefining their media in silent but inventive ways. To be receptive to the idiosyncratic insights the photographic media can offer, however, is far more challenging than it might appear. While I share the ontological stance of my form and acknowledge "the existence of an external reality only perceived through the fallibilities of consciousness" (Hartsock 2000: 47), embracing the fallibilities and uncertainties I found in the photographic record entailed a marked shift in my way of thinking. I learned to regard setbacks such as missing or inconclusive dates as vital forms of information about the fragmentary nature of the photographic archive.

Similarly, I have observed that when one shifts one's thinking to conceptualize the analogue photograph, or work of creative non-fiction, as a process, the divide between art and information does not limit their artistic or epistemic potential but rather emphasizes how neither are art or information in the conventional sense and can be both.

Creative non-fiction and analogue photography are ambiguous forms of memory because both are committed to an "open-ended present" (Hartsock 2000: 228). Both pay attention to the granular details of perception and remind us of the limits of individual vision. Neither media can be reduced to a singular definition because they reflect the nature of an indeterminate world (Hartsock 2000: 228). Creative non-fiction is a form of writing that is dedicated to "three-dimensional reporting" (Hartsock 2000: 241). For me, it offers the equivalent in narrative depth to the conceptualization of the photograph as a three-dimensional object: in each media one sees beyond the two-dimensional image or record of an event to the intricate details of lived experience.

In creative non-fiction and analogue photography, the creative and epistemic value is evident in their material makeup. When one considers the photograph as a nuanced process–the thought for the shot, the preparation, choice of materials–one begins to see that the creativity of the photograph is intrinsic to its form. In the words of photographic historian Diarmuid Costello, it is not art "despite being a photograph", but "because it is a photograph" (Costello 2019: 5). If one considers the Bernhardt portrait, this artistry is clear: the negative, photographic process, paper, and hand-crafted object contains the evidence of creative thought. The material form also contains knowledge about the historical intentions of the photographer. Similarly, if one considers a work of creative non-fiction, the evidence of the creative process is apparent. As literary scholars Jen Webb and Donna Lee Brien have noted: "it is particularly in this form [of creative non-fiction] that the mechanisms, techniques and methodological imperatives of research become visible" (Webb et al. 2011: 196).

The creative and epistemic value of my creative thesis is evident in the way it was made and its material form. I followed the current National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) research benchmark for creative writing and propose that my work contributes to knowledge through the "process of artistic practice" (NAWE 2018). My work was not "primarily a vehicle for what may be termed 'factual' knowledge, but a synthesizing process that brought about both knowledge and emotional awareness through imaginative interpretation and representation of experience" (Neal 2018). I drew on the observation that "writing … begins at the point of practice; and practice begins with an idea, a context, a set of questions and body of knowledge" (Webb et al. 2011: 195).

For me, the very exercise of making the thesis led to a rich material process of discovery. Edmund De Waal's approach to family history demonstrates my approach. De Waal extends the way he thinks about his pots to the way he thinks about words in a completely effortless way; he draws the reader's attention to the process of writing as if he were

throwing a pot on to the wheel. For De Waal, words and pots both occupy a physical space beside him in the phenomenal world. In the final pages of his book, he writes: "It is not just things that carry stories with them. Stories are a kind of thing too" (De Waal 2011: 349). He is also open about how his process of making the book has led to a sense of personal discovery: "I stumble to a halt. I no longer know if this book is about my family, or memory, or myself" (De Waal 2011: 342).

In the creative thesis I adapted De Waal's narrative technique to create my own unique blend of photographic history, material culture history and personal journey. I approached my topic as a creative writer and made an object of my own. Unlike a standard work of history or cultural studies, however, the way that I worked was evident in the text: I told the reader what I was doing and why at all times. With my methodological approach firmly in place from the start I had the "flexibility in practice" (Webb et al. 2011: 196) to gain fresh insights into the portrait and the professional histories of Walter Barnett and Sarah Bernhardt. As the journey proceeded, I drew on a range of approaches from art history, visual anthropology, photographic history, and my own personal experience as the researcher.

In other words, my technique was a form of discovery [2]. The very practice of making the thesis showed me where I needed to go next and why.

Throughout my research, I found that the generic ambiguities of creative non-fiction empowered me to reflect on the nature of the narrative form and analogue photography, which capture and reflect the phenomenal details of an uncertain world. I now see that the creative and epistemic value of creative non-fiction and analogue photography are intrinsic to their material form. By looking principally at the process of production and considering my work as a material object, my work contributes to knowledge by offering new insights into my subjects and the form of creative non-fiction. These insights into creative non-fiction help to define the form's place within the discipline of creative writing.

STRUCTURE AND STORY-TELLING CHOICES: KEY INSIGHTS

In the process of making the creative thesis, I made several discoveries. These include how I could shape but never control the events of the story. The observation helped me to see the dramatic potential of the form. I also discovered how my observation of the changing material form of the portrait helped me to narrow the gap between my subject and the reader. Additionally, I discovered that while the form of creative non-fiction and the photograph capture something "that has been," they are also both a "complex temporal response" (Edwards 2012: 21) to an event.

CREATIVE NON-FICTION: THE DRAMATIC PROCLIVITY OF THE FORM

John Hartsock argues that in creative non-fiction the use of personal and cultural revelation "works on a spectrum or continuum, that, if taken to extremes, results in either an increasingly alienated objectified world on the one hand, or, on the other, a solipsistic subjectivity in the most personal of memoirs." The personal insights, he says, offer "a different dimension of the cultural' and the form aims to narrow the gap between the narrator, characters and reader" (Hartsock 2016: 3–4). In my work, which tells the life story of a portrait held in a public photographic archive, I concede that I needed to "modulate" the balance between the personal and cultural revelation to aim for "that perfect space of distance," as Philip Gerard puts it, between myself as narrator, the reader, and the text (Gerard 1999: 18–19, 68). I also say, however, that the very struggle to achieve this balance only emphasized the little power I had over my subject as narrator, for it was always slightly beyond my control. The powerlessness I felt, and expressed, was directly related to the capacity of my narrative form to reflect the nature of an indeterminate world. My experience as researcher and writer helped me to see the dramatic proclivity of the narrative form.

Two examples from the creative practice illustrate this experience. Firstly, at a lunch time seminar during my doctoral studies, I presented the Bernhardt portrait. A scholar in early modern history and theatre saw a connection between my portrait and a painting of Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse by Joshua Reynolds. In the creative thesis, where I relayed this event, I asked: is there anything to the professor's observation? I brought the reader into the process of discovery by relating how I proposed to answer the question. The further I went, however, the more I realized that I was out of my depth. The Reynolds portrait tapped into the vast area of 18th

century painting about which I knew very little. My narrative stance enabled me to metaphorically put my hand up in the text and share my predicament with the reader. The experience of writing in this way was honest. I did this to establish a contract of trust with the reader and make them a "participant in the performance" (Hartsock 2016: 17).

Secondly, by combining a phenomenological approach to writing with a phenomenological approach to photographic research, I experienced the photographic experience of Sarah Bernhardt's portrait in a more intimate, probing, and wide-ranging way. When I found that I could not date the portrait, for instance, I experienced a sense of panic. I felt out of control. No matter how hard I tried to describe my findings, there was nothing I could do for I was unable to invent nor change the course of events. It reflected my awareness that in a work of creative non-fiction I am "bound by the data [I] have gathered" (Webb et al. 2011: 197) and I have a duty of care towards my reader to get the information right. By sharing the process of discovery with the reader I acknowledged the limits of the photographic record. When I could not date the portrait, I did not revise my story to fit, but rather made the discovery a feature of the text. I wrote: "I feel like I have been swept up into the crowd, into the spectacle of Bernhardt, and can no longer distinguish between illusion and reality" (Bertram 2000: 160).

The use of personal and cultural revelation enabled me to step in and out of the text to give the reader the bigger picture. I could not control the events of the portrait's story but only relay them as they unfolded. My experience directly reflected the unpredictable nature of the photographic archive. The narrative form enabled me to respond and record my subject in a direct and dramatic way.

GLASS, PAPER, DIGITAL: NARROWING THE EMPATHETIC DISTANCE

In the creative thesis I used the "life" of Sarah Bernhardt's portrait as a story-telling device. The portrait formed the plot, and I traced its journey from studio to present day. The material form of the photograph changed over its lifetime from glass to paper to digital, and each has its own individual history. These multiple originals move in multiple directions that are unpredictable. Through a process of observation, writing and re-writing, I made several discoveries that shaped the way I wrote. I found, for instance, that this change in material form reflected a change in the status of the photograph as an object of memory. The discovery shaped my narrative approach and offered me a new way into the past. I also found that this helped me to narrow the distance between my subject and reader to gain insights into an incomplete photographic archive that might otherwise be off-putting to the researcher.

I considered, for instance, how a transparency of the portrait was given to me as a gift by the curator at the National Portrait Gallery, London. It now sits in my desk drawer as a detached object of historical memory for me. The portrait was first made of glass. For the photographer, Walter Barnett, the glass plate negative once represented an individual memory of a portrait sitting; it was an object that he sold to Sarah Bernhardt as part of his business. The photograph's changing material form–through the decades and as it changes hands–drew attention to a shift in the status of the photograph as an object of memory. Barnett's glass plate negative represented his experience of the moment. It also represented Bernhardt's appearance at that time. The paper print then produced and circulated more widely, became Bernhardt's analogue version of the memory, and the wider collective memory when digitized as a part of museum collections. The shifting material form demonstrated the anthropological insight that the perception of its role changes from one moment to the next, from owner to owner, from one social and cultural context to another.

As I wrote and re-wrote the text, I constantly assessed these shifting perspectives and questioned their significance in the desire to understand what the portrait represented, which added to my process of discovery. The process built. I read widely on my topic and attempted several drafts. I asked myself: how could I use this observation in the text? By the third draft of the first chapter, I decided to make the material form an ongoing principle of the thesis. I viewed the portrait and the contexts in which it existed through the prism of its material form. I studied books on the history of glass, for instance, to gain insights into its significance to the story. This formed part of my research process for each subsequent chapter. In other words, the process of writing was where I 'tested' (Cook 2013: 205) my ideas.

I found that this consideration of the changing material form offered me a concrete "way in" to

consider how individuals historically experienced street life when the shot was taken. Glass as a material, for instance, was not only crucial to the photographic trade, but it also fostered a new culture of looking, observing and examining. In the thesis I included a photograph of the photographer, Walter Barnett, standing in his studio and wrote: "This [new culture of looking] makes us wonder, when Barnett looked outside did someone walking through the park look back? Did he catch his own reflection in the glass that day as he walked to the window to have his picture taken?" (Bertram 2020: 19). The material form helped me to narrow the distance between past and present, but also between reader and subject, for an "exchange of subjectivities" (Hartsock 2000: 67) because the reader can relate to the experience and therefore becomes an active participant in the text. Glass as a material also gave me something tangible. It added to the multi-sensory nature of the work and drew my attention to the fragility of the photographic archive. I wrote: "I start to feel as if I am looking at this moment in 1910 not only through the prism of a photograph but, more specifically, through 19th century glass … I have to tread with care" (Bertram 2020: 20). The process was a mutually shaping one: my technique of using the life of the photographic portrait as a story-telling device led to the discovery of the changing material form which, in turn, shaped my narrative approach and helped me to find my voice as a writer [3].

An analysis of the changing material form can also lead to a process of personal discovery for the researcher. In the final chapter of the thesis, for instance, the portrait is digitized. The very act of digitally encoding an object teaches you to look at it in a completely new way. In examining a photograph, for instance, you become aware that it is a three-dimensional object with a front and a back. For me, probing the nature of the digital translation also had the slightly unnerving effect of narrowing the distance between myself and my subject. I could not extricate myself from the moment to view my subject clearly. At first, I had thought that the chapter would be reasonably straightforward to write: it was going to be about cultural memory in the digital age and the importance of scholarly preservation. Through readings on cybernetic history, however, I became aware that the translation from analogue to digital not only affected the portrait, but it also affected me. I wrote: 'I visualize myself within the database … unable to gain the perspective I had in the past. For I have been digitized too" (Bertram 2020: 194) [4].

The observation of the digital form made me re-evaluate my evolving relationship with the portrait I followed. I began to see how attached I had become. In keeping with an object-led approach, I chose not to hide my response to a journey that I did not want to end, and a memory that I did not want to lose, but, rather, to build it into the closing pages of the thesis to offer an open, reflexive account, of the ambiguous relationship between people and things.

I discovered that the temporal and spatial disorientation reflected my desire to hold onto the original moment the portrait was taken. I cannot do this. One might therefore say that when we describe the photographic object digitally, and when we take account of its experience over its lifetime, we reveal the shaping subjectivity of the people it has interacted with and its rhetoric of value in much the same way that the form of creative non-fiction reveals the shaping subjectivity of the narrator and their aesthetics of experience.

CREATIVE NON-FICTION: A COMPLEX TEMPORAL RESPONSE

The creative non-fiction thesis is structured around the day Sarah Bernhardt had her picture taken. While I trace the trajectory of the portrait on its journey across the world, I always return to this single day in 1910.

Throughout the course of my research, I discovered that the choice of a single portrait on a single day draws attention to a key temporal feature of the analogue photograph and creative non-fiction's origins: both depict experiences "located at the intersection of a unique, distinctive and one-of-a kind time and space that cannot be replicated" (Hartsock 2016: 28)

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On the one hand, this accords with the belief that all our experiences are grounded in the phenomenal world, and that this world prompts our perception of it [5]. On the other, I now see that the single shot on a single day emphasizes the unique temporal nature of both forms of memory. While making the creative non-fiction thesis, I drew on Elizabeth Edwards's book, The Camera as Historian, which offers a study of the photographic survey movement which took place in England from 1885–1915. The survey sought to provide a permanent, visual record of England's past (Edwards 2012: 2) and one of Edwards's central findings is that these photographs were far more "complex temporal responses" than

has been historically recognized. The photographers, she argues, were involved in "self-conscious acts of memorialisation." The way they made their photographs indicates that the survey was "not merely about a loss of the past, but about a loss of a future that might have embraced and been moulded by its past" (Edwards 2012: 21). Her observation helped me to see that the Bernhardt portrait I followed was also a complex temporal response to a sitting. By drawing on Edwards's scholarship from within visual anthropology, and tracing the portrait's life story, I found that the portrait looks back to the eighteenth-century influences of Joshua Reynolds, but also anticipates a 21st century interest in the staging of celebrity, ageing and un-idealized beauty. I concluded that Barnett was highly perceptive of the professional female performer and that his work remains relevant today.

The complex temporality of the Bernhardt portrait also drew attention to the temporality of creative non-fiction itself. The narrative form emphasizes a chronology or "the passage of time" and reflects the way we engage with the world and ourselves as individuals. Narrative helps to "make sense of our complex and ambiguous world" (Hartsock 2016: 9-10). My experience with the portrait reminded me of a comment by the philosopher Charles Taylor with respect to our development as individuals. Taylor's perspective is particularly relevant for a study on the nature of portraiture. He says narrative helps us to situate ourselves in the continuum of space—past, present, and future: "What I am, has to be understood as what I have become … we have to move back and forward to make a real assessment" (Taylor 1989: 47). Similarly, to understand the Bernhardt portrait I had to consider it at each of the stages of its "life".

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown how in a recent practice-based creative writing PhD, I wove genre, form, and subject together to show how they can offer a mutually insightful partnership. It has presented a selection of findings to suggest that poetics as an interpretive frame can offer new insights into the relationship between creative non-fiction and photographic history, when drawing on phenomenology and material culture history. The paper has demonstrated how combining these approaches and establishing fresh connections between scholars in the fields of narrative literary journalism and visual and social anthropology, who share an interest in recording the concrete details of lived experience as they are or were directly perceived, can lead to a rich process of discovery for the creative writing researcher. It has suggested that the insights gained into the narrative form help to define creative non-fiction's place within the discipline of creative writing and have, in some cases, provided the scope for future research.

I have noticed, for instance, that there are parallels between the form of creative non-fiction and the ancient Greek chorus. One might explore this by looking at parallels between the chorus in drama and the use of narrator in written art forms and analysing where this appears in works of non-fiction. This has not, to my knowledge, been explored in depth and offers a springboard for further inquiry into the form of creative non-fiction.

ENDNOTES

[1] In On Photography, A Philosophical Inquiry, Diarmuid Costello also argues that when we conceptualize photography as a 'distinctive process,' the photograph has artistic and epistemic value (Costello 2019: 5-8).

[2] The American critic, Mark Schorer, wrote: 'technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning and, finally, of evaluating it' (Schorer 1948: 67).

[3] 'To conceive of writing as discovery and technique implies the necessity of re-writing and it calls for a practice of writing informed by extensive reading. If these conditions are met, then I think it is appropriate to call writing a research method … The discoveries initiated by technique can be summarized in a metaphor of "finding a voice"' (Cook 2013: 204-5).

[4] In How We Became Posthuman, Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics, Katherine Hayles claims that we are all part of a "cybernetic circuit that splices [our] will, desire and perception into a distributed cognitive system in which represented bodies are joined with enacted bodies through mutating and flexible machine interfaces" (Hayles 1999: xiv).

[5] One could argue that it is also a subtle response to the claim that all text is fiction, and a nod to Daniel Miller's observation that even in our desire to 'transcend the apparently obvious' we still express ourselves 'in material form' (Miller 2015: 1).

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There is no me without you

The implications of self as mutable and multiple for the writer

Joanna Nadin

ABSTRACT

The image of the self as singular, immutable, and "true" is a compelling one, and one that pervades fiction in the Global North. But given that neuroscience has now confirmed what some sociologists and philosophers have long argued – that self is mutable and multiple – what does that mean for writers of commercial psychological realism, and how might we better reflect the complex nature of self in our work? This article investigates selected attempts to render the mutable, multiple self in fiction, and explores other methods in the writer's toolkit that may help portray or convey a dialogic, rather than monologic and essential sense of self.

THE PEARL THEORY

The image of the self as a pearl – a hard, tangible, impermeable thing – is a compelling one. We sense it, after all, don't we? That there is an inherent, unbreachable "me"ness to us, even if we do sometimes "fake" behaviour in order to fit in? And this idea – of a singular "true" self behind the mask – pervades fiction in the Global North. As writers, we're encouraged to finagle events that will force our protagonists to confront their "true" nature and reveal exactly "what sort of person are they?" (Yorke 2014: 15) at the novel's climax. Many narratives go further, with that question "who am I?" their driving force. The bildungsroman, for example, and its late twentieth-century offspring Young Adult fiction, often explicitly deal in the choosing of a singular self before, in Holden Caulfield's terms, protagonists leave behind the liminal "fields of rye" (Salinger 1958) of childhood and jump over the cliff-face into the unknown but implicitly miserable landscape of adulthood.

This is, perhaps, unsurprising, given that the former genre, as noted by academic Roberta Seelinger Trites, "emerged in an atmosphere nurtured by the romantic belief in the individual'. (Seelinger Trites 2000: 11) Robyn McCallum's 1999 monograph Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction backs this theory, arguing that mainstream "adolescent fiction has been dominated by premodern conceptions of the individual, the self, and the child associated with liberal humanism and romanticism" (McCallum 1999: 3-4). McCallum goes on to associate this dominant liberal humanist ethic with the privileging of "concepts such as the uniqueness of the individual and the essentiality of self, as opposed to the self as fragmented or plural." (1999: 67)

That is not to say that adolescence, and thus YA fiction, does not enjoy what German-American psychologist Erik Erikson termed a "moratorium" on what might be seen as out of character behaviour, such as "horse-stealing and vision-quests" before meeting the "obligation" of adulthood (Erikson 1968: 156-157). We expect our children, and thus our teenaged characters, to try out new lives for size in the same way they may try out myriad dresses before prom night, then leave the rejects scattered on the bedroom floor. But the belief that this should a brief period of no more than a few years persists in life, and thus in fiction. We still root for the real self who will triumph. We still hold on to the concept of the pearl. Yet, for some decades now, neuroscience has been patiently explaining that, compelling as it is, not only is adolescence a state that runs well into our twenties and beyond, but also that pretty pearl (at the end of the rainbow that is adolescence or narrative arc) simply does not exist.

THE SELF AS MUTABLE AND MULTIPLE

Bruce Hood, a specialist in cognitive neuroscience at Bristol University, and Julian Baggini, a Bristol-based writer and philosopher, set this concept out in their books The Self Illusion and The Ego Trick, originally published just months apart in 2011. Self, they explain, is not an object, but a construct or process; a story we tell ourselves about ourselves. And that process is not solipsistic, but dialogic, constructed in concert with those around us. We are as much the product of our family, friends, even fictional characters we admire and absorb, as we are our own experiences, desires and dislikes.

The argument goes like this: each of us has some feeling of "me-ness": of both existence as a separate being, and of the nature of that being. And that me-ness is remarkably enduring, despite our ever-changing circumstances, tastes and relationships. As such we tend to conceive of identity as a single, stable, and somehow solid thing, and yet no-one can say where exactly this pearl called "self" resides, to the point that neuroscience, as Baggini puts it, "has given up on the search" (2011: 28). The reason for this abandonment? Because self is not something the brain possesses, it is something the brain does; a "symphony" played by the "orchestra of different brain processes" (Hood 2011: xi).

Baggini calls this the "ego trick"; for Hood it is the "self illusion", but both suggest the same idea that wholeness is effect rather than cause, as the mind draws on memory and manages to convince us that we are unified. And it does that because we are all masters of fiction. As Hood puts it, "Who we are is the story of our self – a constructed narrative that our brain creates." (2011: xi). For Baggini, we write ourselves into being by constructing an "autobiographical narrative that links experiences over time" (2011: 40). It is this narrative that creates the feeling of unity, a feeling so compelling that "it becomes natural to think of ourselves as beings with clear boundaries […] This is false. We are fluid, ever-changing, amorphous selves." (Baggini 2011: 140) Key to Baggini's thinking is that this narrative itself isn't an unchangeable text, but can be revised and rewritten to absorb inconsistencies and

maintain coherence. No less important is that this narrative of self isn't a monologue, constructed by the mind in isolation, but the product of an ongoing conversation; it is dialogic.

The idea that we are partly what others perceive us to be might strike one as the stuff of adolescent nightmare; a damning confirmation that looks matter, that labels stick, that we are what we wear, say, listen to. The evidence is, however, overwhelming. Hood and Baggini are just two among many who cast those with whom we interact – our family, friends, idols, even fictional characters – in the role of meaning-givers. This does not erase us as "authors" of our selves; instead, these people are co-creators with whom we engage in a constant process of negotiation between the way we perceive ourselves and the way we perceive others to perceive ourselves. We are, Hood argues, "a product of those around us, or at least what we believe they expect from us" (2011: 51). In simple terms, other people – and by extension, their opinions – matter.

So, we think of our self, at least in part, according to what others think, and even according to what we think they think. This offers an explanation as to why we – especially in adolescent years – may mould our selves to fit better with the shape of the crowd: we copy their outfits, their Instagram pouts, their Spotify playlists; we (whether consciously not) often adopt their modes of speech, their morals. Is this weakness? The sign of an atrophied self, able to do no more than follow the herd? Or might it, actually, be favourable? Necessary, even? Hood thinks so, giving the concept a neurological explanation in "mirror neurons". These synapses "appear to fire in sympathy" (Hood 2011: 42) when watching other people, eliciting a mirroring action. For Hood this process is akin to resonance: "It's like when you are in a guitar salesroom and strike the 'G' string loudly enough on one guitar, all the other 'G' strings on all the other guitars will eventually vibrate." (2011: 151) But, according to him, this unconscious mimicry, this attempt to "fit in", is not a fault, nor default, but design; a survival method, mirroring "binds us to others" (2011: 151). Self is socially constructed in order for society to thrive.

It is also important to say this theory does not render us mere puppets, or chameleons. Rather, it reveals that, far from being driven exclusively from the inside out, the being we project onto the world and that we use to negotiate the world, is as much a product of that world as it is producer. Whether it is unconscious mirroring, or the conscious drive to be one of the crowd (or, indeed, stand out from it), self is a two-way street. This is key in the subtle distinction between a self that emerges in reaction to external influence, which implies authenticity, versus one that is assumed, which implies it is pure masquerade – stolen or handed to one and worn as no more than a suit of clothes.

So self is not an immutable essence, but dialogic. But even the word "dialogic" is misleading, because it is not one negotiation we have with the world but many, and in ever-increasing number, which led me to what Baggini describes as the "obvious" question: "Once the idea of the unitary self is fractured, should we not take this one stage further and accept that in the absence of a strongly singular 'I', there must be a weakly multiple 'we'?" (2011: 83)

So, what does this idea of dialogic, or multilogic, self mean for the characters we create, and the way we structure our stories? Are we to abandon the sense of self entirely for a nebulous, entirely unreliable cast? And, if not, how else can we suggest the neuroscientific truth about self in our narratives, especially when working in the psychological realist tradition? For writer and storytelling coach Will Storr, characters in "well-told stories" (2019: 117) already reflect this multiplicity simply by being "three-dimensional". The crisis and climax can be said to reveal, rather than "true self", just which model of self won the battle for dominion at that time. Storr's view is compelling – it requires no real change of process after all, just ongoing work to ensure all characters are rounded. But in practice it does little to suggest to readers that the concept of "true self" is in itself fatally flawed. How can we know that they're not just seeing that temporarily dominant self as the "real" one?

Below, I will open the writer's toolbox and root around for some alternatives to Storr that work towards helping writers abandon their protagonist's pursuit of "true" self, as well foregrounding the dialogic construction of self. These are: a mutable protagonist, second person address, polyphonic text and first-person plural narrative.

A MUTABLE PROTAGONIST

While neuroscience has only caught up relatively recently, the idea of the self as mutable or multiple isn't new, and certainly isn't absent from fiction.

We see it in the trope of doubling in Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1993) and Oscar Wilde's The Portrait of Dorian Gray (1993); we see it pathologised as Dissociative Identity Disorder (previously known as Multiple Personality Disorder) in works like Chuck Paluhniak's Fight Club (1997). These depictions, though, (including my own, in Eden (Nadin 2014) and Wonderland (Nadin 2009) tend towards the troublesome, with double or multiple selves depicted as, at best, problematic, at worst, fractured and, ultimately, self-destructive. Even Woolf, whose work explores the concept in theme and structure in several works, and who approaches positive depictions at times, complained "I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect myself into one Virginia." (Woolf 2011: xxvi)

I made my own first attempt at rendering a positive fully mutable self in the YA novel Queen Bea (Nadin 2019), a metamorphosis coming-of-age narrative, submitted as part of my doctoral thesis. A latter-day Gatsby, the narrator Bea undergoes a Cinderella transformation to become more like her best friend Stella – much as my narrator Jude did in Wonderland. This time, though, Bea refuses to return to her "true" awkward self, boldly proclaiming:

> Yes I am the seven year old dressed in a yellow poloneck and scowl and sat on her mother's knee. But I'm also the drunk, dancing girl on the table-top at Happy Holliday's, and the sober one sat here writing to you now. I am all the "me"s that people see. Yesterday I downed a half bottle of vodka in my room after dinner because some days the hole you left is so fucking huge and raw and gaping I can't find enough things to fill it, and that was me. And it was me when less than an hour later I stuck my fingers down my throat and threw it all up. In five minutes I'm going to go downstairs and smile and eat salted almonds and play a strained game of Trivial Pursuit, and that's me. And tomorrow night I think I'm going to I sleep with that new kid from Cambridge, and maybe he'll tell me I'm like no girl he's ever met before, and I'll laugh and tell him he never met you, and yeah, that's me too. (Nadin 2009: 191-192)

And this is where I hit a brick wall, otherwise known as the rejection pile. My YA editor at Walker Books worried about the lack of "come-uppance" and declared Bea "irredeemable" for her refusal to "revert to type" at the end of the novel after trying out her new style / persona. In other words – she wasn't being "the real Bea'; she was still wearing what my editor saw and, she suspected, many readers would see, as a mask. And we don't like masks – they confuse us; they prevent us from seeing the "real" person and thus being able to categorize them neatly.

Sartre put it like this: "A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself…" (Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, quoted in Goffman, 1969: 66) It is this principle – the drive for reality, or for supposed authenticity – that is behind the common desire to reveal Pygmalions as the flower girls they are. And here lies the problem. Too many readers (and writers) still mitigate against what they see as "fakery" – unable, yet, to accept either that people can change (class, appearance, gender), or simply be more than one thing. We may admire makeover shows, and applaud "glow ups', but only within relatively narrow parameters; in fact, it's often the reverse we gawp at more – the pre-surgery celebrity photos. We are still the Tom Buchanans, scouring the text for evidence of past lives, awaiting the yanking back of the curtain and the revelation of true selves.

In addition, the conclusion from my editor played into one of the very notions I'd been trying to disprove – the statement by former director of the Royal Institution, Baroness Susan Greenfield, that exposure to technology, entertainment and social media was "softening" the identity of adolescents, rendering it "transparent, fragile and questionable", resulting in a generation of atrophied selves or "nobodies" (Greenfield 2009: 15) rather than the joyous, multiple "somebodies" I was aiming for. I was, effectively, sent back to the drawing board.

I'm not abandoning this technique – both my forthcoming novel The Double Life of Daisy Hemmings (Nadin 2022) and my current work in progress Sabrina Says (2021b) contain characters who undergo metamorphoses from which they don't "revert" (though their changes aren't without contest or consequences, and, crucially, both of these novels are aimed at adults, not adolescents). And we can see that a minor character can be portrayed in such a way in David Levithan's drag queen quarterback Infinite Darlene, from his 2006 YA novel Boy Meets Boy, whose dialogism is a matter of record:

> She seems very full of herself. Which she is. It's only after you get to know her better that you realize that somehow she's managed to encompass

> all her friends within her own self-image, so that when she's acting full of herself, she's actually full of her close friends, too.
> (Levithan, 2006: 54-55)

This said, a joyously mutable protagonist, whose revelation in Act 3 is that the "kind of person they are" is actually several different people, remains somewhat problematic, so how else might we suggest a less than pearlised sense of self?

SECOND PERSON ADDRESS (YOU)

Like novelist Mohsin Hamid, who confessed his "enduring" love affair with the form in the Guardian (2013b), I have always been drawn to second-person address. That includes the universalising version employed, for example, by Peter Ho Davies in his 2000 short story "How to Be an Expatriate" and Julian Barnes in his novel The Only Story: "Would you rather love the more, and suffer the more; or love the less, and suffer the less? That is, I think, finally, the only real question." (Barnes 2018: 3) – a voice that subtly implicates the reader as "being like" the narrator. This is perhaps the more common, and more easily digested, occurrence. It certainly abounds now. Carmen Maria Machado's 'you' in In The Dream House is explicitly narrator (and thus potentially reader): 'You listen to her read an old essay about how her parents never let her eat sugary cereal. You tell her, often, how hysterically funny funny she is.' (Machado 2020: 25) Caleb Azumah Nelson uses the technique in the Costa Prize-winning Open Water, but here muddies identity slightly by implicating both narrator and subject: 'The first night you met, a night you both negate as too brief an encounter, you pull your friend Samuel to the side.' (Nelson 2022: 3).

It also encompasses the buttonholing direct address to the "you" of the reader or another character, used by Hamid in The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2008) and How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia: "This book is a self-help book. Its objective, as it says on the cover, is to show you how to get filthy rich in rising Asia. And to do that it has to find you, huddled, shivering, on the packed earth under your mother's cot one cold, dewy morning." (Hamid 2013: 1) We witness this version again as a narrator addresses their stalker in Claire Kendall's The Book of You: "It is you. Of course it is you. It is always you." (Kendall 2014: 1) or their kidnapper in Lucy Christopher's Stolen: "I saw you before you saw me." (Christopher 2013: 1).

While a decidedly Marmite point-of-view (a brief poll on Twitter brought out violent detractors and supporters alike), it is a form that can well conjure close or obsessive relationships on the page. In the creative writing classroom, it can help students better understand and get closer to narrators as they work on second-person pieces in which protagonists address other characters in their works in progress. In addition, as Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik argues in her 2018 paper on the rise in popularity of second-person address, and its link to increasing interest in social co-operation (Rembowska-Płuciennik 2018: 159), the use of "you" implicates the reader in the story (whether in Barnes' universalising version or Christopher's specific one), and thus in meaning creation – itself suggesting dialogue or co-creation. Might, then, it also work for suggesting the dialogic (if not exactly multiplicit) nature of self?

I have certainly tried to employ it thus, using the form initially in the commercially rejected Queen Bea, but with both critical and commercial success in The Queen of Bloody Everything (Nadin 2018). Here, the narrator, Dido, addresses her mother Edie who is dying on a hospital ward, recounting excerpts of their life story. Initially employed to better reflect the antagonism of a daughter towards her mother, whom she has spent a lifetime trying not to become: "I used to rail against my inheritance, the pieces of genetic jigsaw puzzle that make up half of me." (2018: 1), the eventual aim of the technique is to suggest that one cannot pretend not to be partially formed by that other person, that "you', a fact that Dido suggests in the conclusion:

> All those days spent lying on a single bed rereading Othello wishing I was black, or star-crossed, or just anyone but me. Scared that somehow, without trying, without even knowing it, I would manage to squeeze myself into your ragtag coat – the one that you wear to all your fuck-ups and faux pas.
> (ibid: 404)

I believe the technique can be effective, but here perhaps mostly because Dido is explicit about the nature of how she herself has been formed in concert with Edie. The wider effect of the use of monologic dialogue – i.e. the one-sided conversation – that Dido has with her mother (and cannot escape) is subtler, and thus, perhaps, misses its mark slightly. There is also the risk, as Cowan points out in The Art of Fiction, that the "queasy" intimacy that

second person address enforces on the reader may not be welcome if the "you" is a person with whom the reader really doesn't identify, or doesn't want to admit that they do (Cowan, 2013: 133). Finally, there is the obvious point that, in a world in which we encounter multiple others on a daily basis, whether that is in real life, on the page or on the screen (big, small, or telephonic), suggesting that formation of self is limited to two people is, while more accurate than the individually formed "pearl', still far from the truth.

POLYPHONIC TEXT

Emily Mackie's In Search of Solace opens with an epigraph – Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" (Mackie, 2014: v) The final line of this stanza is later repeated by Mackie's confused and chameleon protagonist "Jacob", who has also been Keith the archaeologist, Otto, the purple-bearded pagan and Isaac the gardener, amongst many others: "There is no one in me at all," he says. "Can't you see? I am large. I contain multitudes." (Mackie 2014: 117)

Mackie's novel is, both explicitly as here, and implicitly in structure and style (it uses multiple viewpoints to try (and fail) to locate the "real" Jacob), one of the closest attempts I have seen to render the multiplicit nature of self. It echoes (deliberately, I suspect), both Woolf's Jacob's Room (2008) and her The Waves (2001), the latter of which follows six friends from childhood to adulthood and fictionnalises the author's own previously cited conviction that she had many selves: "The six characters were all supposed to be one," she wrote to G.L. Dickinson. (Woolf 2011: xxvi). As such it is packed with language that alludes to this belief: "How curiously one is changed by the addition […] of a friend," remarks Neville. "As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebody." (2011: 61-62) "I am not one and simple but complex and many," says Bernard. "I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard." (2011: 56)

What interests me most here about both Woolf's and Mackie's works is not the characters" openly expressed conviction that identity is multiple, which risks feeling forced, but the use of multiple viewpoints. Multiperspectivity can be employed in fiction as a method of showing different versions of an event, but here seems to provide a more subtle way of suggesting that the nature not merely of events, but of self itself, is contingent on who, exactly, is doing the viewing. This is a technique used well in Virginia Walter and Katrina Roeckelein's YA graphic novel Making Up Megaboy (1998), which investigates why a quiet, thirteen-year-old loner would take his father's gun and shoot a Korean liquor store owner. Taking a trope similar to the one used by Woolf in Jacob's Room we see Megaboy purely through the eyes and descriptions of those with whom he has come into contact. As a result, we meet a host of different Megaboys, all potentially false, all potentially true.

This, to me, is a version of Bakhtin's textual polyphony, giving validity to several points of view, all formed from the notion of a dialogic sense of truth. For Bakhtin, a single consciousness was a contradiction in terms. Consciousness was multiple, only emerging in contact with other people. "Two voices," he said, "is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence." (Bakhtin 1984: 252) For him, Dostoevsky's work, with its plurality of voices, best expressed this. For me, in contemporary, commercial terms, Walter and Rockelein do this well, as does Bernadine Evaristo in Girl, Woman, Other (2019), with its twelve narrators and intersections of identity. In these novels there is no single truth, nor a universally agreed-on version of a character. There is only version. And, in Evaristo's work at least, this is not problematic, but rather a celebration. This sense of celebration and interconnection is something I'm aiming for in All About Eve (2021a), which chronicles the life of one girl – Eve Delaney – as told by ten characters living in the same Wiltshire village, revealing, I hope, that there are many Eves, all contingent, all valid.

Another advantage of this collective narration is that, in a world in which we're losing faith in leaders, and slowly realising that a single hero or heroine is unlikely to save society, it pushes, perhaps, towards offering a narrative blueprint for change of the kind we can only achieve if we ditch our individual heroes, accept our interconnectivity, and work together [2]. As may the use of the first-person plural pronoun: "we", an address which also offers a potential narrative method for conveying the multiplicit nature of a narrator.

FIRST PERSON PLURAL NARRATIVE (WE)

Second-person as a textual address is becoming more widespread and culturally accepted, thanks in part, according to Rembowska-Płuciennik, to the proliferation of digital and social media, which prioritises "you", placing us all in the role of "content producers" (Rembowska-Płuciennik 2018: 170). However, while some may be familiar with its usage from religious texts, or from "certain non-Western cultures [in which] the idea of a separate consciousness is perceived as a fatal error" (Marcus, 2008: 50), the first-person plural pronoun "we" is still limited in its appearance in popular Global North fiction. The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides (2002) springs to mind, but I struggled to come up with many others from recent years. Importantly, Eugenides' work fits into the four "conceivable" cases of "we" offered by Uri Margolin:

> 1. All members of the reference class jointly speaking.
> 2. A subset of the wider class offering a token "we" to speak on behalf of the whole class.
> 3. Several members uttering "we" individually, alternately or in succession to refer to the whole class.
> 4. A single member of the class speaking "we" on behalf of the whole class.
> (Margolin, 2001: 243)

For Margolin, and, surely, the vast majority of readers (unless we are witnessing the Queen speaking), "Whenever a reference to a "we" in a narrated domain is made in discourse, a group of some sort is immediately invoked." (ibid: 246) But, remember Baggini and his question whether, in the absence of a singular "I", "there must be a weakly multiple 'we'?" (Baggini 2011: 83) Can we not apply this to narrative pronouns?

Virginia Woolf at least considered it. For her, "we" was, theoretically at least, a potential substitute for the misleading "I" to convey those many selves she was trying to gather together: "'I' rejected, 'We' substituted:… We composed of many different things… We all life, all art." (Woolf 1959: 279) This "we" could, if she had dared, stood in for the six characters in The Waves. But she didn't dare, and nor, yet, do I.

Outside the relatively freeing space of academia, I write fiction partly for financial gain. While the collective version of "we" employed by Eugenides is as quickly accepted by the reader as Barnes' or Christopher's "you", when denoting a single subject it risks either constant re-arrest on the part of the reader or a suggestion of Dissociative Identity Disorder (which is still, disappointingly, the go-to diagnosis whenever I mention "multiple self"). The former of these is largely undesirable by commercial publishing houses, the latter by me. There is also, more generally, something that feels, currently, a little "shouty" about the usage of "we" in these circumstances, excessive even. A sort of literary "Look at we!" However, things may yet change.

Building on, then ultimately rejecting Margolin, Amit Marcus questions whether, while first person plural may be "semantically unstable", this justifies authors' avoidance, "in an era that consecrates incoherence, inconsistency and equivocation". (Marcus 2008: 48) And there are signs, elsewhere, of our willingness to accept the altered use of pronouns. While the need is far from pressing, I hope that, just as the use of "they" as a singular pronoun is rightly becoming more widely used and understood, both verbally and textually, that this singular version of "we" may yet have its day on the page.

CONCLUSION

The tools that I have suggested are, as I have demonstrated, not perfect, nor are they, I hope, exhaustive. I hope that writers will find other, perhaps far more effective ways of doing what I have been trying to for several years now. But the neuroscientific truth is that the search for an "essential" or "authentic" self is, as Rita Carter, author of Multiplicity puts it: "doomed to failure" (Carter 2008: xv), and so, it follows, should be phased out in fiction. This is undoubtedly a substantial challenge, but also an opportunity. For me the malleable nature of identity is simply an expansion of the concept of empathy, which we know fiction already encourages, as not only desirable but essential for inclusion. Carter, again: "If we are to swim in a disjointed and ever-changing world we need more than ever to pull on our ability to see things from different viewpoints and to adopt multiple behaviours in different situations." (2008: 79).

Nearly eighty years ago, Virginia Woolf expressed the hope that her short stories like "The Mark on the Wall" would help novelists in future realise "there is not one reflection [of self] but an almost infinite number…" (Woolf 1943: 39). I don't claim or aim to be Woolf, but my mission here is the same: I

hope that I can help a few readers at least come to that conclusion. So that the answer to the question "Who am I?" becomes, in Kenneth Gergen's terms, "a teeming world of provisional possibilities" (Gergen 2000: 139), and this pliability and multiplicity is freeing, a way not of escaping but of transcending both some of our genetic inheritance and circumstances of birth. We can all be, finally, Sartre's grocer who dares to dream.

Or, as the protagonist Julia in my next project (another second person adult narrative, will put it:

> I am all the things I've done and the ones I'm yet to think of.
> I am memories and hopes and other people's dreams.
> I am who I want to be. And who they make me.
> And who you made me, too.
> And for that I will be forever grateful.
> (Nadin, 2021b)

ENDNOTES

[2] On this issue, I recommend Toby Litt's blog for Writers Rebel How to Tell a Story to Save the World (Litt, 2021), which dismantles Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" and the very notion of individual heroism itself as essential to "a good story'.

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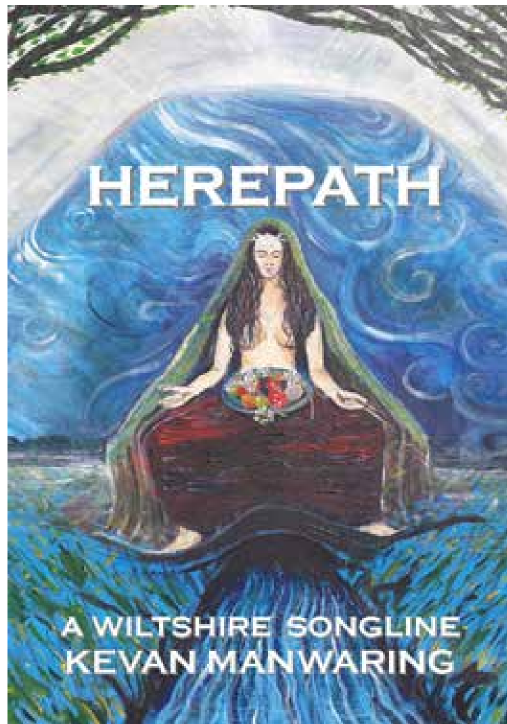


The Herepath Project

Deep mapping and hedge-springing during lockdown

Kevan Manwaring

ABSTRACT

Moving to the Marlborough Downs on the edge of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Avebury in late 2019 (an area I have been exploring since the late `80s), I decided to map my new locality through poetry and art – connecting nodes of significance to create a personal Wiltshire 'songline': The Herepath Project. As the 2020 lockdown kicked in, the concept of 'deep mapping' (Nan Shepherd) my local universe gained increasing poignancy. In the form of a literary dérive – charting zones of ambience and influence as I range metaphorically across the Downs – this article will consider different forms of creative mapping, including the 'Counter-Mapping' of the Zuni Map Art Project; and the 'song-walking' of Dr Elizabeth Bennett (Essex University); as well initiatives which 'hack' the hegemonic discourses of the countryside, such a Black Girls Hike, the Colonial Countryside project, and Slow Ways, and other acts of creative resistance (Rebecca Solnit; Nick Hayes). Examples from the poetry pamphlet produced will be shared, along with the odd field sketch. A technique of 'writing the land' will be fashioned, combining repurposed elements of Debord's psychogeographical 'dérive', Richard Long's 'Land Art', and Buddhist 'jongrom'. Drawing inspiration from the biodiversity of the Downs a non-anthropocentric perspectival shift will be advocated for deconstructing the conventional human-centred cartographies of property demarcation, ontological discreteness, and hierarchical layering.

KEYWORDS

Creative process, walking, psychogeography, counter-mapping, poetry.

Introduction

Can a creative engagement with cartography and landscape – defined speculatively by an increasing array of pioneering terms: altercartography [1], counter-mapping [2], mythogeography [3], deep mapping [4] – benefit the writer? Can confinement, or restriction – such as experienced in the 2020 lockdown in the United Kingdom – push creative-critical practice in new directions, forcing the writer to respond creatively to the inherent challenges? And can such an approach avoid the critiques of self-valorization, and romanticization [5] that have been levelled against earlier nature writing? These are the questions I set out to answer in this enquiry, with acknowledgement that it is an ongoing one – and one where the destination of 'answers' matter less than the journey of the 'questions', which are after all only loose co-ordinates to navigate by, indeed ones imposed retrospectively, in the way that academe expects exegesis; while as practice-based research is seldom so engineered. A piece of creative work often starts with an inkling, an impulse, an intuitive approach – akin to setting off for a stroll on a sunny day, without itinerary, map, or compass, just because it feels good. There is often a greater emphasis on the maps we impose on the 'landscapes' of our enquiries – the vectors of theory, the compass rose of criticality, the gnomic legends of signs and signifiers – than the terrain itself. We forget that the map is not the territory, and are sometimes at risk of the hubris of Borges' ambitious cartographers who created a map the size of a country.

> …In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.[6]

So, mindful of this potential disjuncture – between the sine qua non of the practice, and the retro-fitted abstract 'performance' of it in the register expected in academic peer-reviewed journals, I shall endeavour to navigate between the two, while trying to avoid a disservice to either.

Such a precarious line echoes Tim Ingold's holistic conceptualization of linearity: 'There is no division, in practice, between work and life. [An intellectual craft] is a practice that involves the whole person, continually drawing on past experience as it is projected into the future.' [7]

A creative-critical practice that draws upon the proprioceptive/kinaesthesic has a long tradition – perhaps one of the oldest, if the palaeolithic transmedia of the Aboriginal Dreamtime 'songline' can be cited as a prototype. As Bruce Chatwin explored this was more than mere poetic embellishment, but intrinsic to a continued existence:

> 'To survive at all, the desert dweller – Tuareg or Aboriginal – must develop a prodigious sense of orientation. He must forever be naming, sifting, comparing a thousand different 'signs' – the tracks of a dung beetle or the ripple of a Dune – to tell him where he is; where the others are; where the rain has fallen; where the next meal is coming from; whether if plant X is in flower, plant Y will be in berry, and so forth' (Chatwin, 1987: 199)

Among the many who have walked this way before one could include Basho, John Clare, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, John Muir, Edward Thomas, Guy Debord, Richard Long, Iain Sinclair, Alice Oswald, Robert Macfarlane, Nan Shepherd, Rebecca Solnit, Anita Sethi, Jinni Reddy and many others. More contemporary indigenous creative engagements with landscape will be explored later in this article.

To follow in the footsteps of such examplars is daunting, but walking has been central to my creative practice all of my life – it is simply where I draw the most inspiration from, let alone the physiological and psychological benefits to my well-being. I have discussed aspects of this previously (2020a; 2020b; 2018; 2015), but here I wish to focus on the creative mapping aspect. I will discuss in detail the project that occupied me throughout much of 2020, 'The Herepath Project', and how my practice intersects with other forms of altercartography.

‘Here Am Your Land’ – pushing the limits of the local

Moving to the Marlborough Downs late December 2019, I began exploring the area and found inspiration in the ancient landscape, one festooned with hundreds of Neolithic, Bronze Age, and Iron Age monuments. Poems and artwork began to emerge. I decided I wanted to ‘map’ the area subjectively through poetry and art – connecting nodes of significance to create a personal Wiltshire ‘songline’, a multimodal enquiry, which I entitled The Herepath Project. The project took on a whole new level of poignancy during the first national ‘lockdown’ (23 March-23 June 2020), when exploring one’s local universe was the *only* option. For a while the UK population was restricted to a government-sanctioned 30 minutes of outdoor exercise per day. I quickly appreciated how fortunate I was to live on the Downs, with miles of open countryside on my doorstep, where I could often walk for hours without bumping into anyone. Without needing to get in a car or cross any roads I was able to continue my mapping in short bursts. As news reports of draconian reactions to lockdown restrictions started to filter through [8] I defiantly pushed how far I could get in a day on foot, demarcating a loose 15-mile circle of territory. Constantly aware of the invisible lines of tension in pushing the extent of my regulated ‘exercise’, which although putting no one act risk, meant my excursions turned into something mildly transgressive. The apparent open space of the Downs suddenly seemed suddenly interlaced with barriers of permissiveness and exclusion – psychological barbed wire -- and the transgression of these can became a creative, iconoclastic act in itself, as Nick Hayes argues:

> ‘Trespass shines a light on the unequal share of wealth and power in England, it threatens to unlock a new mindset of our community’s rights to the land, and, most radical of all, it jinxes the spell of an old, paternalistic order that tell us everything is just as it should be.’ (2020: 364)

The best art occurs at the threshold of convention and taboo, and in the liminal spaces between forms, traditions, cultures – ‘edgelands’, as Farley and Roberts describe them (2011); the ‘ditch vision’ of Jeremy Hooker (2017); or the ‘wayside inspiration’ of writer-artist, Peter Please: ‘Look at the wayside – and it’s full of debris, tenacity and insects. I always felt there was a dream there.’ (1997:7)

There is a chilling moment in John Bowen’s cult folk horror ‘Play for Today’, *Robin Redbreast* (MacTaggart, 1970), when the scriptwriter protagonist, Norah Palmer, who has ensconced to a seemingly idyllic cottage, becomes aware of the limits of her apparent freedom. When she expresses her desire to return to her home in London, her housekeeper, the formidable Mrs Vigo, declares in her thick dialect, ‘Here am your land’ [9]. Like the unnamed ‘Number Six’ in Patrick McGoohan’s *The Prisoner* (1967-68), it soon becomes clear there is no escape, and the ‘village’ is everywhere. And yet, creatively, the best art is often generated because of such constraints – in the ingenious acts of escape artistry rigid parameters impose.

My field research was often, literally, that: much of the Marlborough Downs consists of large areas of heathland. There are footpaths, bridleways, and farm tracks that crisscross it, but much of it is open access countryside where one can pick one’s own way, following a ‘hare-path’ (the Downs are one of the key habitats of the brown hare in Britain). I have frequently come across hares on my rambles, and sometimes I have followed them along a path until they finally jink off into the undergrowth. Other frequent companions are roe deer, who bound away across the fields on their own secret paths; and the Red Kites – a colony of which dwelt near my home. They often circled above me – once I was buzzed by a family of five or six. Skylarks provided an almost continual soundtrack in the fairer months. And the thrumming murmurations of starlings dipped, soared, and descended like a single mind. As Nick Hayes reminds us, ‘The notion that a perimeter should be impenetrable is a human contrivance.’ (2020: 19) By following the sheep-trails, deer-tracks, and badger runs I was finding my own smeuse-holes out of anthropocentric restriction and consciousness – a lycanthropic destabilisation found in the anamorphic utterances of the early Celtic poets, such as in the ‘Song of Amergin’ and ‘Hans Taliesin’; echoed in animist indigenous cultures around the world; and most recently brought into the public sphere by Toby Litt in his Radio 3 essay-poem ‘Becoming Animal’ [10], in which he ludically self-identifies with the hare to the point he seems to change shape and become one. It occurred to me in these peregrinations that a non-anthropocentric map of the land would be very different, based upon the trails of scent and spore, territories of hunting, mating and migration. It is only human hubris (and centuries of acquisition, enclosure, and accretion of property laws) that frames the natural landscape

from the perspective of Homo Sapiens, and then only of a certain class, gender and race (as the initiatives I'll discuss later critique). Certainly, walking amid an explicitly ancient landscape (glaciated dry valleys; terminal moraine; prehistoric monuments) expands one's consciousness diachronically into deep time, to the point that a journey through physical space becomes a journey through time, civilisation, and evolution – 'older, slower stories of making and unmaking,' as Macfarlane observes [11] – and also through language.

Etymology

The titular 'Herepath' of my project has an etymology and polysemous resonance that fascinates me, so here I will reflect briefly upon it. A *herepath* or *herewag* is a military road (literally, an 'army path') in England, typically dating from the 9th Century CE. This was a time of war between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of southern England and Viking invaders from Denmark. The English military preparations, conducted under the leadership of King Alfred of Wessex, included fortified burhs or places of refuge and interconnecting *herepaths* using either existing routes or new works. As superior or safer roads, sometimes following ridgeway routes, *herepaths* were intensely used by ordinary travellers and hauliers.

The prefix of *herepath* (*here*: OE 'armed host') can be found in compound words such as harbour (a burh with a garrison) and heretoga (a militia leader). The very name of the 11th Century resistance leader of the conquered Anglo Saxons, Hereward the Wake, echoes this: *here* 'army' and *ward* 'guard' (cognate with the Old High German name *Heriwart*). There exist cognates in other Germanic languages in forms such as *Heerweg* (German) and *Hærvejen* (Danish). All three languages imply a 'herepath' denoted a road that was a *via publica*, maintained at central government expense. In the Avebury area, the Herepath runs from the ramparts of the main circle up to the Ridgeway, and across the Marlborough Downs (past my backdoor) to the town itself. On the map it jinks namewise and is also referred to as the 'Harepath' and 'Green Street'. As a poet, 'herepath' has echoes of 'Hero-path' (inviting us to awaken our inner warrior: to be 'wake' like Hereward); and 'Here-path', commanding us to bring our attention back to the present.

All these ghosts and echoes of meaning fed into my choice of name for the project, and it became the title of the poetry chapbook published at the end of that 'lockdown year' (*Herepath: a Wiltshire Songline,* 2020). An initial limited edition of 50 was printed. An expanded edition was planned as I continued to add more writing and sketches to my 'mapping' of the area, but these were included in a 2nd volume: *Station Stones* (2021), a collection of short stories and artwork reflective of my second 'lockdown' year in Wiltshire.

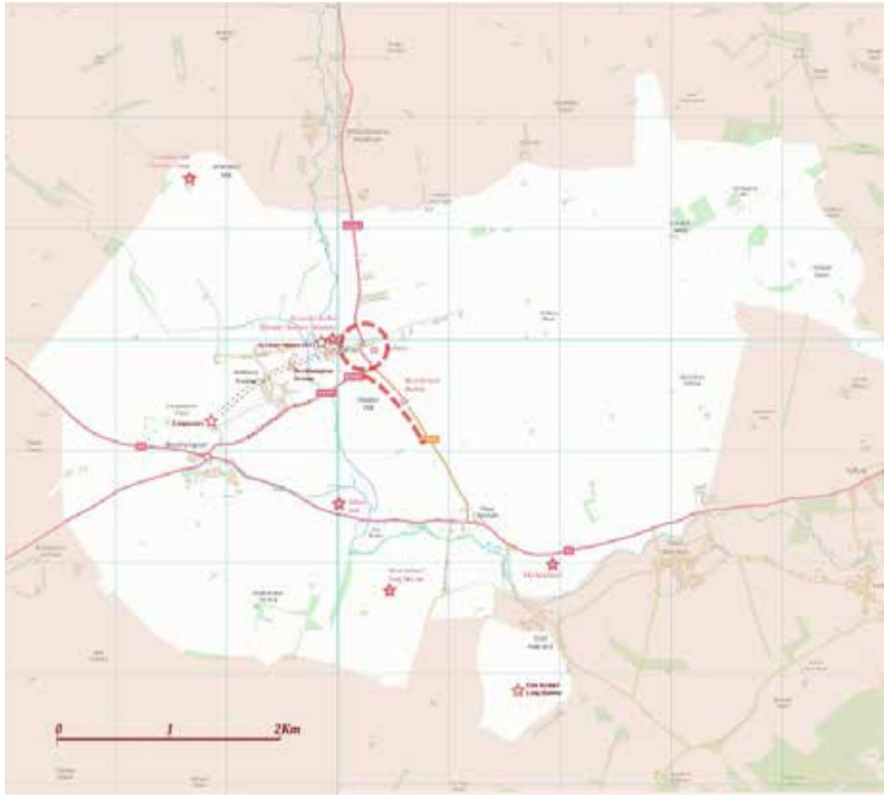
The Sites

My main purview is within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Avebury, which comprises a complex network of Neolithic, Bronze Age, and Iron Age sites, including the main Avebury stone circle (the largest in Britain), Silbury Hill (the largest man-made mound in Europe), West Kennet long barrow, the Ridgeway (the oldest trackway in Europe), Windmill Hill (Neolithic causewayed enclosure), the Sanctuary (the remains of Overton stone circle), Fyfield Down (main sarsen field), and Hackpen Hill white horse, as well as the Herepath itself, of course, which runs from Avebury up to the Ridgeway, and on to Marlborough.

Key Sites & Further Routes

1. Avebury SU 1016 6993
2. Silbury Hill SU 1001 6853
3. The Avenue SU 103700
4. West Kennet SU 10456 67739
5. Windmill Hill SU 087714
6. The Sanctuary SU 118681
7. West Woods SU 1548 6629
8. The Devil's Den SU 1521 6965
9. Seven Barrows SU 118681
10. Hackpen Hill SU 127748
11. Barbury Castle SU 149762
12. Swallowhead Spring SU 101680
13. Fyfield Down SU 142710
14. The Polissoir SU 128715

My territory ranged wider than the parameters of the World Heritage Site, taking in West Woods (identified as the source of 50 of the sarsens of Stonehenge [12]), the dramatic earthwork of the Wansdyke which links sites overlooking the Vale of Pewsey (including Martinsell Hill, Knap Hill, Milk Hill, Tan Hill, Adams Grave, and Morgan's Hill), and the many impressive sites of the Ridgeway (Hackpen Hill, Barbury Castle, Liddington Castle, Waylands Smithy, the White Horse of Uffington). In late June, as lockdown eased, I extended my range further, by walking from my doorstep to Glastonbury (68 miles);



and then in July I undertook a long-distance walk I had been planning sometimes, linking Tintagel in Cornwall to Glastonbury Tor (a modern pilgrimage route I researched and mapped entitled 'King Arthur's Way', a distance of 155 miles). For the latter I created a website [13] and provided full details for the Long Distance Walkers Association [14] and The British Pilgrimage Trust [15], as well as designing a trail-marker. In doing so, I had in effect created a 223 mile long mythopoeic 'wildlife corridor' between my former home and Tintagel.

Now, from such a suitable viewpoint let us consider the theoretical field in more detail.

Unpacking Psychogeography

Psychogeography, in its broadest sense, has a long and fascinating tradition, although pinning down a definitive definition is surprisingly hard. Its pioneer, Guy Debord, never offered a substantial one beyond fleeting comments such as 'The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.' (Debord in Coverley, 2010: 10). Robert Macfarlane makes a better stab at it, "The exploration of cities and other landscapes by means of drift, play and randomly motivated walking, encouraging a re-imagining of familiar terrain.' (Macfarlane: 2019) Yet as a term it offers at best a 'fuzzy set' of practices. Although Debord claimed and colonised the term in post-war France (first in the Letterist pamphlet *Potlatch, 1954;* and then from 1957 in numerous pronouncements via its evolution, the *Situationist International*) there are many antecedents, influences, and developments. In two distinctive traditions, one based in London (the Robinsonade) and the other in Paris (the Flâneur), leys of affinity can be gleaned: although as with Alfred Watkin's 1922 notion of the 'ley', how much is geographical serendipity, geomantic intentionality, or the projection and pre-occupations of the viewer is hard to say. In hindsight, viewed from the hill of the here-and-now, there seems to be a parallax *movement* emerging autochthonically from the labyrinths of London and Paris. Psycho-geographical commentators like to cite Daniel Defoe as the 'Godfather of Psychogeography' (when not citing Blake, De Quincey, Baudelaire, Machen, Poe, or Stevenson), with his *Journal of a Plague Year* (1722). Ur-texts like *Confessions of an English Opium-eater* (DeQuincey 1821), *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson 1886), *The London Adventure* (Machen 1924), and *The Old Straight Track* (Watkins 1925) on this side of the English Channel; and the works of Baudelaire [16], and the Dadaists and Surrealists, Aragon's *Paris Peasant [17]*, Breton's *Nadja [18],* and Soupault's *The Last Night in Paris [19],* act as reliable co-ordinates. Important outliers include Edgar Allan Poe's story, 'The Man in the Crowd' [20], James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the writing of Heinrich von Kleist and Heinrich Heine, extending the 'leyline' to Boston (Poe's birthplace if not the setting of his story), Dublin, Berlin, and Vienna. This anti-tradition has been perpetuated

via various literary *dérive* (Debord's term for his psychogeographical technique of drifting and qualia capture) by an irregular cohort of free radicals, including Walter Benjamin, John Michel, Iain Sinclair, Alan Moore, Peter Ackroyd, Patrick Keiller, and others. Notably, this *inshore drift* has been dominated by solitary (white) males and an obsessive focus on the urban. Fortunately, a counter-tradition to all this flâneury has welled up, as articulated in the writings of Rebecca Solnit (notably her 2000 history of walking, *Wanderlust*); Lauren Elkin's radical reclaiming of urban walking for women in the *Flâneuse* (2016); Philippa Holloway and the 'imaginary shoes' she put on to bring the world of her novel alive (2022), and in the work of Sonia Overall, who created a limited edition 'Drift Deck' in 2017, and wrote of her approach in *Heavy Time* (2021). [21]

Other variations or subsets include: 'mythography', 'deep topography', 'deep mapping' (as brilliantly expressed by Nan Shepherd in *The Living Mountain, 1977*), 'cyclogeography', and 'wayside inspiration' (a term the writer Peter Alfred Please coined in 1997 to describe his particular form of intimate travel-writing). I would add to this parameter space the *Immrama* (Celtic wonder voyages, e.g., the voyage of St. Brendan); and the New Nature Writing, which blends travel-writing and memoir into the long tradition in works like *Nature Cure (Mabey 2005), Waterlog (Deakin 2011), Edgelands (Farley and Roberts 2012), Wild (Strayed 2012), The Outrun (Liptrot 2015), Crow Country (Cocker 2016),* and *The Salt Path (Wynn 2018).* Robert Macfarlane's oeuvre almost deserves a category of its own – in tomes like *The Old Ways (2012), Landmarks (2015)*, and *Underland (2019)* he deep dives into language and landscape with dazzling erudition and daring, in prose that glitters like mica. None of these later writers would necessarily claim to be psychogeographers, but there are important elements in their work – textual nutrients – which psychogeography needs if it is to continue and flourish. The thin soil of the capitol city is depleted, and the 21st Century *dériviant (as I like to call those who choose to take psychogeographical roads less travelled)* needs to look further afield for its seeds to thrive. Thus, I fashioned a rural dérive.

The Method

Since childhood I have been intuitively imbibing the genius loci of my favourite haunts, and throughout adulthood I have consciously sought out places for their affect: predominantly rural places that have layers of prehistory, folklore, and literary associations. This ambience I have habitually captured in my notebook – in poems, reflective writing, and sketches. In more recent years this practice has coalesced into something more conscious, although you could say I have been formulating this approach all of my life. Sometimes it is closer to pilgrimage than psychogeography, and I have written about this elsewhere (2015; 2018; 2019; 2020c), but the latter is a more useful frame for our purposes here.

In 2019 [22] I devised a checklist of what I felt psychogeography needed to leave behind, and what it should 'pack' for further explorations. Much it applies to my approach in 'The Herepath Project'.

Leaving Behind

1. Capitols (London; Paris anyway…)
2. Solipsistic intellectualism.
3. The pontifications of the lone, white male.
4. Obfuscation and needless jargon.
5. A performance of erudition over a sincere, embodied engagement and strong sense of voice.
6. 'Wikipedia-lit' and *Rough Guide*
7. Self-importance (it's only going for a walk).
8. Maps *('Done with the compass, done with the chart',* Emily Dickinson).
9. Smart devices.
10. Footnotes, endnotes, a bibliography ('death-by-quotes').

<u>Taking with Us</u>

- A compassionate, curious gaze.
- A visceral, authentic response.
- The Flâneuse.
- A multi-dimensional form of exploration, one that is both diachronic and immediate, vertical as well as horizontal, outward as well as inward.
- Self-excavation – a form of travel through one's own history.
- Body writing – maps of the skin.
- Voices of the marginalized: the psychogeographies of indigenous peoples, BAME, LGBTQ+, Traveller culture, asylum seekers and refugees, working class, etc.
- An awareness and acknowledgement of the

challenges of the Climate Crisis, and the seismic destabilisation of the Anthropocene.

- Humility: a disavowal of omniscience.
- An ethical foregrounding. A responsible form of writing, sensitive to cultural appropriation. An exoticisation of the self, perhaps, but not the 'other'.
- Humour.
- Soulfulness: a *Psyche*-geography, rather than a *Psycho*-geography.
- Mindfulness (*mind in one's feet; mind in the pen*).

Of course, it would be difficult for any one person to embody, to hold in their awareness, all of these second positive attributes all of the time, but with such a hopeful hypothetical rucksack, let us resume our drift.

A Multimodal Practice

The dériviant by nature follows what Margaret Atwood calls the 'way of the jackdaw' [23], a kleptomaniac creative practice – stealing anything that suits along the way and adopting any trick or technique according to artistic whim. In recent years this has been reframed as something a bit more respectable: multimodality. In *The Multimodal Writer*, Josie Barnard defines what she means by a 'multimodal' writing practice:

> '...a creative approach wherein the inter-relationships between and among a writer's decisions and different media and modes contribute to the production of meaning. A multimodal writer who has adopted a multimodal writing practice works to develop a personalised model of creativity robust enough to enable improvement of productivity and/or creativity in the face of fast-paced change.' (Barnard, 2019: 6)

I have certainly embraced this fully in the totality of my critical-creative practice, but in the context of the Herepath Project I adopted a more 'grassroots' approach, adapted to the *field*. Having a background in Fine Art, I found it instinctive (and deeply therapeutic in a time of global crisis) to weave sketching, painting, and photography into my project. The first two especially make you slow down and be fully present in the 'scene', to 'sit and stare', to repurpose W.H. Davies' famous line ('What is this life if full of care/ we have not time to stand and stare?' [24]). Photographs were used more as aide memoires, along with notebooks, for future qualia-retrieval. I sometimes made audio field recordings, such as the sound of wind on the downs. During one wild-camp I recorded the sound of my campfire, which I then incorporated into my podcast, 'The Golden Room' (episode #10, May 2020, 'Green Fire'), alongside readings of seasonal poetry and music. Part of my regular creative practice became a series of Twitter poems, which I posted under the hashtag '#DailyAwen' ('Awen' being a Welsh feminine noun signifying 'inspiration'), thus fusing ancient and modern traditions. It felt natural to range between forms in this way, another form of creative 'trespass' perhaps – a restless hybridity, which I see as intrinsic to my work.

Hedge-Springing: trespass and totemism

Perhaps a totemic personification of this 'restless hybridity' can be corralled from an early medieval poem related the 'names of the hare', most famously translated by Seamus Heaney. This early Middle English poem is preserved in a late thirteenth-century West Midlands trilingual miscellany written by an anonymous scribe for his own use [25]. It lists seventy-seven names, which in themselves, offer a kind of creative adrenaline high – a truly bardic volley of leporine eloquence. Among the many inventive epithets is 'hedge-springer', and that perhaps epitomizes best of all my creative-critical practice. The poem begins with a strange placatory ritual – the placing of an elbow on the ground followed by the reeling off this litany of tribute.

The mon that the hare i-met Ne shal him neuere be the bet Bote if he lei doun on londe That he bereth in his honde— Be hit staf, be hit bouwe— And blesce him with his helbowe. And mid wel goed devosioun He shal saien on oreisoun In the worshipe of the hare; Thenne mai he wel fare.	The man the hare has met will never be the better of it except he lay down on the land what he carries in his hand— be it staff or be it bow— and bless him with his elbow and come out with this litany with devotion and sincerity to speak the praises of the hare; Then the man will better fare. [26]

The consequences of this word-spell are a new-found freedom, one that seems conceptual as well as physical – a modus vivendi as well as a modus operandi – which comes with the important caveat, 'but only if you're skilful too.' Creative, academic, or ontological freedom can only be enjoyed if you sustain the embodied epistemic of the hare.

When you have got all this said
then the hare's strength has been laid.
Then you might go faring forth—
east and west and south and north,
wherever you incline to go—
but only if you're skilful too.
Heaney, 'The Names of the Hare' [27]

Other writers and artists have found inspiration in the spirit of the hare, such as George Ewart Evans (1972); Robert Macfarlane with his 'spell-charm' about the animal as featured in his project, *The Lost Words* (2017)*;* and folk-singer and ethnomusicologist Fay Hield's song 'Hare Spell' [28], which became the title of an audio drama [29] co-written with Terri Windling, Sarah Hesketh, and Sarra Culleno (2020). I myself first started to write about the hare in my enquiry into Bardic Tradition [30], where I shared my Taliesinic poem, 'The Song of Gwion Hare', with the line: 'That which is fixed, dies.' (2010: 54). And now, living by the 'Hare Path' of the Herepath, and seeing brown hare frequently on my daily wanderings, I feel closer than ever to its energy. Throughout the third national lockdown of March 2021, I sketched the hare in various poses and guises, perhaps envying a little its wild freedom.

So, to the writing itself.

Examples of writing

To date, I have written around 40 poems inspired by my local landscape, 33 of which were included in the first edition of *Herepath.* Here are a couple of examples. The first was written in situ at Avebury stone circle early in lockdown. The sister UNESCO World Heritage Site to Stonehenge the massive neolithic complex (large enough to accommodate a pub, and several cottages) is usually a popular place for a walk on a sunny Spring day, and so the absence of people rendered it in an eerie light.

Avebury Alone

Avebury alone
on a day of sun,
the corvids are out in force
while the humans remain
Covid bound.
I sit in the centre,
back to the obelisk,
and bask in the photons.
The warp and weft of
wind and light.
One day the people
will gather here again.
They will form rainbow circles
share the air, the warmth
of an embrace. The stones
shall ring with song.

Sitting with my 'back to the obelisk' (the site of a 60ft high monolith, the centre of one of the two smaller circles, and locus of many of the seasonal ceremonies), I felt my pen provided a conduit for the stone stylus against my spine. Whether I tapped into telluric energies, or just my own subconscious, the experience proved inspiring. The act of writing 'fixes' the chthonic murmurings in the way St Michael lances the dragon (a recurring icon along the 'St Michael Line' – a geomantic alignment that is thought to run from St Michael's Mount in Cornwall to Avebury). [31]

The pen pins the serpentine pulses of consciousness and phenomenological qualia to the page.

The next poem was also written early in lockdown, up on the Marlborough Downs a short walk from my home – the haunt of brown hares, red kites and absconding bards:

Up on the Downs

The sky holds you
in its bright blue bowl
—stops you falling into
the black.

The sharp Spring light
makes you squint,
but it scrubs clean your soul.

The skylark threads the air
with ribbons of song.

The wind at your back
is carded by thorns.

Ragged dags of cloud snag
in the corner of your eye
like dark thoughts of a
land locked down –

yet here you are free,
no drone shames you home.

In this poem even the act of writing felt mildly transgressive. Sitting outside in the middle of lockdown, I half-expected to be caught red-handed – like the walkers in the Peak District who were 'drone-shamed' or even, in some cases, fined for their apparent breach of UK government Covid-19 restrictions. [32] The poetic act became a form of self-emancipation and creative resistance.

I will now look at different forms of creative mapping – or songline making – from an indigenous perspective, as promised.

Counter-Mapping of the Zuni Map Art Project

An inspiring post-colonial counter-mapping initiative is the Zuni Map Art Project**,** based in New Mexico. This is led by Jim Enote, a Zuni farmer and director of the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center. In an inspiring film-essay by Adam Loften & Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee, ('Counter-Mapping', *Emergence,* 2019 [33]), Jim introduces us to his project as we follow him on his daily rounds to his farmland, and centre, all within his ancestral homelands. His deep knowledge and respect for the land is evident, as he converses with his crops, 'checking in' on them, and pays homage to the elemental spirits. He observes 'Modern maps don't have a memory' and 'We limit ourselves if we only think of maps as two dimensional.' To counter this, Jim explains how he has '…patterned languages that help [him] to remember how [to] get from one place to another.' (ibid) This lexical cartography echoes the Aboriginal songlines, and like their Dreamtime art tradition, Jim has commissioned Zuni artists to paint their own memory maps of the landscape. These are maps that convey a subjective sublime – depicting genius loci, important rituals, significant historic events, and culturally important figures within their community and tradition. Loften and Vaughan-Lee describe how 'The Zuni maps are an effort to orient the Zuni people, not just to their place within the landscape, but to their identity, history, and culture. The maps contain a powerful message: you have a place here, we have long travel[l]ed here, here is why this place is important. Through color, relationship, and story, the maps provide directions on how to return home.' (ibid) To date, Jim has commissioned 30 of these maps, and more are being created and exhibited in his centre. Thereby the map-paintings become a resource for teaching new generations about Zuni tradition, while simultaneously providing a platform for their contemporary indigenous art scene (and vital income). The initiative is empowering, educational, and practical. Art can be an extremely effective tool in community development – a celebration of local distinctiveness and cultural identity. It can also be used to critique hegemonic discourse, and endemic bias, and facilitate essential framing of collective space. At the forefront of this is American writer Rebecca Solnit.

Regendering the City

In much of her work Solnit has questioned the heterodoxies of culture through her erudite enquiries into walking, art, literature, disaster capitalism, the climate crisis, and gender, although she admits in an interview with Emma Watson [34] to have 'held back' from adopting an overtly feminist critique in her early oeuvre – a reservation she no longer has. In her talk for the Creative Time Summit of 2013, 'Art, Place, & Dislocation in the 21st Century City', Solnit offered, 'A Thousand Stories in the Naked City', [35] which looked at how the naming of a city – its streets, buildings, public spaces – can imply certain power discourses, and how therefore a regendering of the city can be radical act that can shift consciousness. She discusses her project (and collaboration with geography, Joshua Jelly-Shapiro) to rename the stations on the New York Metro with women [36] – feminist icons, public figures, role models – and how this changed how her female students from Columbia felt when exploring the urban landscape. In her interview with Watson Solnit playfully suggested that Watson did the same with the London Underground, a project which the young actor has now instigated with the author, Renni Eddo-Lodge, who took to Instagram to ask: 'If your local London Underground station was named after a woman, who would it be?' [37] Such initiatives, especially when

devised in such an egalitarian way, enable citizens to redefine (remap) the landscape in which they live. This conveys ownership, and a rebalancing of power dynamics. The ongoing debate about the, often problematic, figures represented by public statuary – a debate that is perhaps understandably emotive, as witnessed by the debouching of slave-trader, Edward Colston, in Bristol harbour by Black Lives Matter protesters in the summer of 2020 [38] – shows how vital it is to consider the way we name, and frame our landscapes we live and work in. On International Women's Day in 2020 I discovered on one of my local 'lockdown walks', an unidentified stone circle approximately thirty feet across, and comprising a ring of 19 stones. Returning to scrutinise my Ordnance Survey collection and sites such as The Historic England Archive [39] I could not find it listed on any map. I decided to call the circle 'The Mothers', in honour of the day it was 'discovered' and wrote a poem as a commemorative act. Although clearly a recent stone circle (an unrecorded number of these have been erected by geomancers, neo-pagans and prehistory enthusiasts since the 1970s, mostly on private land) I had incorporated it into my personal 'mythscape'.

Songwalking

On a bright May morning in 2015, academic and folk-singer Elizabeth Bennett (Essex University), set off on the South Downs Way, a 100-mile long National Trail that runs between Eastbourne and Winchester. She sang songs along the way collected from the villages and villagers en route and researched from The Full English folksong archive [40] (hosted by the English Folk Dance and Song Society). This she subsequently developed into a paper and chapter ('Amberley to Upper Beeding: A Parliament of Lines') for her forthcoming book, *Performing Folk Songs: Affect, Landscape, and Repertoire.* Bennett explains how in her autoethnographic account notions of 'lineage, heritage and inheritance' weave into the affective sensorium of the experience: 'Lines grow through this day's walking, raising associations and questions of movement, wayfaring, social history, woven threads of stories, sensory perceptions of songs, singing as remembrance, evocative handwriting, and how these may contribute to processes of landscaping and world-making.' (Twitter, 21st January 2021) Bennett's approach echoes the songwalking I started to do, intuitively initially, when walking the West Highland Way in the Summer of 2015 – an experience I wrote about for *The London Magazine* ('Let the Mountain Sing Its Own Song'). Every year since I have undertaken a new long-distance walk, adding to what has become my own 'Walker's Songbook' – an anthology of traditional ballads, sea shanties, pop songs, and protest songs designed to keep my legs moving.

Another initiative, using poetry rather than song, is the 'Long Map' of Claire Dean. Given as a paper at the MIX Conference 2017, Claire describes her ambient literature project: 'A Long Map is a reimagining of the Persephone myth, a response to escalating carbon emissions, and a map that can be used to explore any city. As Persephone climbs higher – first to escape the underworld and then the city streets – the listener must climb higher to hear more of her story. I explore the role walking played in the conception, composition and design of A Long Map and suggest the development of Ambient Literature requires a bodily engagement with place, and that challenging writing habits can extend practice in exciting new ways.' [41] (MIX Conference Programme, 2017). Both Elizabeth's and Claire's projects show how an embodied engagement with the landscape can produce creative work that is both site-specific, and a form of linear mapping.

Other Initiatives

Other inspiring counter-mapping initiatives, ones that often 'hack' the hegemonic discourses of the countryside, include 'Black Girls Hike' [42], founded in 2019, whose mission statement is to provide 'a safe space for Black women to explore the outdoors. Challenging the status quo and encouraging Black women to reconnect with nature.' They host nationwide group hikes, outdoor activity days and training events. A mirror initiative based in Yorkshire, '100 Black Men Walk for Health' co-founded by Ghanaian journalist Maxwell Ayamba in 2004, led to an acclaimed play written by rapper Testament: 'Black Men Walking' [43]. The health initiative has many side-benefits – not only does it provide a safe space to talk about a range of issues, including mental health, it reclaims the landscape for all. A member of the walking group, Donald, a geography teacher, hopes that the project will allow "for the next generation of black people to feel confident to be out and about in the countryside in Britain, in a way we perhaps weren't when we were their age". And in early 2022 the walking group Muslim Hikers (foundered during the 2020 lockdown on Instagram by marathon-runner Haroon Mota to encourage fitness and wellbeing) garnered support on social media after being initially trolled

when they posted photos of their group in the Peak District, and subsequently have become a popular affirmation of modern British Muslim identity. [44]

This (re)claiming of the British countryside is also occurring in nature writing, with the work of Anita Sethi (2021), Jini Reddy (2020), and Elizabeth-Jane Burnett (2019), among others. This is a much-needed redressing of endemic imbalances in the genre, in publishing, and in public life in general – but clearly much work is still needed to be done, and many are still resistant to this trend.

In a landscape shaped not just by millennia of agriculture, and industry, but also riven by the fault-lines of class, gender, and race, it is more important than ever to confront the uncomfortable legacies of the past, as historian David Olusoga eloquently points out. [45] One pioneering initiative is by Professor Corinne Fowler of the University of Leicester, who has spearheaded the Colonial Countryside project [46]. Corinne commissioned a team of 'country house historians' to work with 10 schools and 10 country houses, 'to explore the global connections of stately homes: from heritage furniture and black servants to colonial trade. Pupils will communicate their discoveries and personal responses through personal essays, creative writing, and social media campaigns.' This culminated in a book, *Green, Unpleasant Land,* published by Peepal Tree Press in 2020, and continues to generate debate in the media – debate that is often vituperatively oppositional from the Conservative press, showing how the project has clearly touched a nerve.

Urban spaces can also be reclaimed creatively, and a palimpsest of narratives captured, such as in 'Hidden Stories', an app [47] which enables users to explore the area (St Georges, Leicester). Using its locative technology, users can be led on a series of commissioned writer-trails through the rebranded 'Cultural Quarter', and read text inspired by its heritage in situ, as well as archive recordings of former residents, workers, and community members. A similar initiative continues in Birmingham, Overhear Poetry.

Other counter-mapping initiatives seek to map the entire country through poetry (Places of Poetry [48]); folk tales (Mythsmap [49]); or folk song (Songs of England [50]). While some, such as the English Heritage initiative, Songs of England, work with professional musicians, others allow members of the public to upload their creative response to a particular site.

Sometimes, such counter-mapping can be used as a form of eco-activism (Slow Ways seeks to chart the hundreds of miles of public footpaths before they are lost); or mythopoeic instauration (as in my pilgrimage route, King Arthur Way; the Robin Hood Way, in Nottinghamshire; and the Twrch Trwyth Trail in Cwmaman, South Wales). No doubt other initiatives exist, many of which are artist-led, such as Louisa Albani's 'William Blake's Mystic Map of London' [51]. Creative mapping will continue as an essential radical act, revivifying both self and community.

My drift has brought me full circle back to where I began – where we all must – the ground beneath one's feet: a sense of situatedness informed by a deep knowledge of the local, held lightly and always open to new influences and insights.

Over a well-earned pint I conclude my walk by reflecting upon what has been gleaned.

Conclusion

I began this enquiry by asking three questions, which I shall reflect upon here. Firstly, I asked can a creative engagement with cartography and landscape benefit the writer? Well, I can certainly confirm that is the case, speaking personally (and Cep Casey in *The New Yorker* discusses how the act of writing and the act of cartography have interesting parallels, and how writers have long been inspired by maps in various ways [52]). I continue to find fresh inspiration every time I step foot outside the door, and explore my local landscape a little bit more. New details continue to reveal themselves to me in these delvings, or as I like to call them: 'soundings'. I feel my way through the landscape with a kind of artistic sonar. The fact that the chalk that I live and walk upon is comprised of the deposited bodies of innumerable sea creatures, and that the downlands are in fact a raised seabed, adds to this feeling. Secondly, I asked can confinement, or restriction push creative-critical practice in new directions, forcing the writer to respond creatively to the inherent challenges? Again, from a personal perspective I can confirm that to be the case. I had not planned my 'Wiltshire songline' when I first moved to the Marlborough Downs – the form emerged from the practice and was intensified by the strictures of lockdown. Like an artesian well, it manifested through the pressure

of place and circumstance. Finally, I asked can such an approach avoid the critiques of self-valorization, and romanticization that have been levelled against earlier nature writing? I hope so – certainly my awareness and intentionally is informed by Nan Shepherd's approach to deep mapping in the Cairngorms (1977). To precis her philosophy, you don't walk 'up' a mountain, but 'into' a mountain (the totality of the landscape is the mountain, not just the summit), and that you don't 'conquer' such a landscape, it 'conquers' you. Eschewing the emphasis on the peak experience, and on the tendency of many to turn the countryside into a backdrop for a cheap adrenaline fix, precipitous 'hero shot' or selfie, I've focused on the peaceful and reflective. Repeated walks in the same landscape reveal incremental changes, which a race through on a mountain bike rarely do. I have long believed that the best way to get to know a land is on foot, and that this pace of experiencing it provides the best medicine. The benefits to my wellbeing in having such a priceless resource on my doorstep, especially in a lockdown, have been immeasurable As G.M. Trevelyan said: 'I have two doctors – my left leg, and my right.' [53] This connection between walking and well-being maybe obvious, but became increasingly important during the challenging years of 2020-2021. Several initiatives arose out of the government restrictions, including Walking Publics/Walking Arts, a project to promote 'walking, wellbeing and community during COVID-19'. [54] Creative works inspired by walking during lockdown were solicited for an exhibition, the virtual #WalkCreate Gallery (launched November, 2021). The Herepath Project was included in the exhibition, and has also been featured in Storytown Corsham (a literary festival in Wiltshire) and Bardfest 2020 (an online spoken word celebration, which I initiated). As lockdown restrictions returned during 2021 I focused on short fiction inspired by my local universe, and put together a new collection, performing the stories orally at a series of local storytelling events I organised before committing them to the page.

To conclude, my self-styled creative mapping will continue in its own 'hare-brained' way. I could, if I felt so inclined, invent a label for such a methodology: *mythocartography* perhaps – because as a storyteller and writer of fiction I am particularly attuned to narratives of place (and where one does not already exist, I often have an urge to create one) – but such impressive-sounding terms (altercartography; counter-mapping; autocartography; mythogeography, et cetera) fall away in the phenomenological affect of the walk. Even words themselves seem ultimately to fade away in the susurration of wind, the vast presence of the skies, and the clean line of the downs.

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Being Kind to Myself
Developing a Compassionate Writing Practice

Helen Foster

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the benefits of applying a compassionate approach to the practice of writing. Compassion is seen through the lens of mindfulness and the paper considers its definitions, origins as a Buddhist practice and its practical applications in the West. A review of the literature synthesizes approaches from the fields of mindfulness studies, psychology, creative writing and therapeutic writing. The paper considers the inner critic as an obstacle to writing and goes on to consider the benefits of seeking safe and compassionate space, both tangible and imagined, in which to write. As a writer, tutor and workshop facilitator, I draw on my auto-ethnographic research of compassionate meditation by sharing reflections from my journals.

KEYWORDS

Compassion, mindfulness, therapeutic writing, inner critic, meditation, visualization, auto-ethnography, psychology, wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

Compassion is "a state of mind that is nonviolent, nonharming, and nonaggressive [...] associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility, and respect towards each other" (Dalai Lama and Cutler 1998: 93). Compassion also embodies "the wish for others to be free of suffering and its causes" (Gilbert and Choden 2013: xxviii). At its simplest, compassion means "to be with, feel with, suffer with" (Brach 2003: 200).

I came to consider the integration of compassion as a part of my writing practice and workshop facilitation through the study of mindfulness meditation for my own wellbeing; "[m]indfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, or in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn 1994: 4). The cultivation of compassion is essential to the practice of mindfulness meditation. Meditation aids the cultivation of "deep and compassionate awareness" (Williams and Penman 2011: 7); it helps to "bring about the bone-deep peace that comes from cultivating mindfulness [...] sustain it in the light of the stresses that life throws at you" (Williams and Penman 2011: 194).

I had some initial misgivings about what the practice of compassion might entail within the context of mindfulness. Compassion is characterized as being motivated by virtues of kindness, honesty and love. It is regarded as "action orientated" in its aim to alleviate suffering in others and the self (Sinclair, Beamer, Hack, et al. 2017: 444). I doubted my commitment to maintain a compassionate morality and act on it. I wondered if this practice might require me to dig more deeply than I had so far into the essence of who I am, question how I think and behave, and I was scared at what I might find. My own forays into the "learn to love yourself" doctrine of Western culture with its "obsessive focus on wellness and happiness" (Purser 2019: 77), seemed to chime with the notion of self-compassion, but felt very shallow in comparison.

Self-compassion is a fundamental aspect of compassion, characterized as the "cultivating [of] friendship towards yourself" (Williams and Penman 2011: 203). It "liberates you from pain and worry, in their place arises a true sense of happiness that spills over into daily life" (Williams and Penman 2011: 45-46). The cultivation of self-compassion may be beneficial for the writer experiencing blocks to their writing. It may "facilitate higher levels of creative originality" (Zabelina and Robinson 2010: 208). A correlation has been found between individuals with notable levels of self-compassion and their engagement in creative tasks for more intrinsic reasons (Neff 2003).

This paper explores how the writer can draw on self-compassion techniques from the field of mindfulness compassion in order to overcome writer's block. After an initial exploration of the origins and definitions of compassion, it will examine how the writer can gain awareness of their inner critic and work within a compassionate safe space. Alongside evidence drawn from existing literature in the fields of mindfulness studies and therapeutic writing, it will also offer autoethnographic accounts of my own experiences of compassionate practice excerpted from reflective journals.

DEFINITIONS OF COMPASSION

Compassion ('Karuna') emerged from the practices and concepts of Buddhism (Kornfield and Walsh 1993). It is integral to the Buddhist spiritual path (Dalai Lama and Cutler 1998: 91). Buddhist tradition describes it as "the quivering of the heart, a visceral tenderness in the face of suffering" (Brach 2003: 200). In his early twentieth-century study of Mahayana Buddhism, the humanist, Sylvain Levi, identified compassion as "one great universalizing factor in the higher life of man" (Hamilton 1950: 145). He saw the concept deeply embedded in Buddhist traditions but lying "outside the thought patterns of the West." He saw potential in compassion as a fundamental principle for bringing about change in the West, calling it "Buddhism's most relevant contribution to the problem of our age" (Hamilton 1950: 151). From a secular stance, the physicist Einstein believed that the "widening [of] our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty" would foster clarity and greater productivity in the lives of humans (1950).

Armstrong suggests there are universal similarities across world traditions with regard to compassion. The principle is embedded in civilizations and belief systems across the world throughout history; it is a central principle in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Confucianist and Daoist philosophies and also features in later traditions, such as Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Armstrong believes this universal principle ensures that: "every person had the ability to reform himself or herself and become an icon of kindness and selfless empathy" (2011: 57).

However, cross-cultural differences have been found in the ways in which compassion is experienced and expressed (Koopmann-Holm and Tsai 2017). It has been demonstrated that American culture compared to some East Asian cultures places a higher value on "excitement states" than "calm states", and therefore each culture may associate compassion with a different responsive state (Tsai, Knutson and Fung 2006: 6). Armstrong acknowledges that her review of compassion as a universal mindset is not exhaustive. She encourages individuals to: "explore your own tradition, be it religious or secular, and seek out its teaching about compassion" (2011: 22).

The subsumption of compassion into Western culture through mindfulness practice has its critics. Gomez believes compassion has developed a misleading reputation as a "wonder-working panacea" (1978: 33). Despite this, a number of Western models of mindful compassion have developed in recent years. Gilbert and Choden suggest that there are two psychologies of compassion: the first comes from our recognition and engagement with suffering in ourselves and others; the second comes out of the ways that we skilfully work to alleviate this suffering (2013: xxvi-xxvii).

The translation of self-compassion from its Buddhist roots into Western understanding is problematic (Gilbert & Choden 2013: 45). In Tibetan, Pali and Sanskrit, the definition of compassion naturally encompasses the idea of compassion for the self. It is aligned to the Buddhist principle of "discriminating wisdom", which demands that all actions are experienced with a compassionate understanding for the self and others (Wong and Mak 2016: 74). However, in the West "[s]elf-compassion is a relatively new psychological construct [with] little research attention [...] focused on its origins" (Dragan 2020: 1).

Neff is considered "the primary pioneer" in developing self-compassion as an aspect of Western psychology (Murn 2008: 13). For her, self-compassion does not necessarily mean over-concern for the self. There is a disregard of the concept of self-esteem. Attention is not focused on either positive or negative aspects of the self (Neff, Hsieh and Dejitterat 2005). Self-compassion is distinct from self-interest; as Gomez asserts, "[t]rue concern for others is the fruit of total unconcern for oneself; without such unconcern, love is covert egotism" (1978: 38).

Compassion can be a difficult quality to recognize, accept and cultivate. Condon and Makransky identify a number of barriers to practising compassion through mindfulness in the West: "the lack of a secure base, aversion to suffering, feeling alone in suffering, and reductive impressions of others." They suggest that these are "exacerbated by modernist conceptions that present meditation as an autonomous, self-help practice" (2020: 1346).

Rather than being a solitary and self-obsessed practice, it could be argued that mindful compassion offers itself as a binding force in communities. It can be nurtured and promoted through social groups and "driven by a sense of shared identity" (Stavrova and Schlosser 2015: 2). Gilbert and Choden assert that compassion is "linked to our connectedness with others and the social conditions we grew up in" (2013: 17). These connections ensure that compassion is sustained into the future, that it will "ripple on into generations to come" (2013: 18). Chodron takes this further suggesting that compassion relates to "our kinship with all beings" (2005: xiii).

The social aspects of compassion chime with Neff's principle of Common Humanity as one of the pillars of self-compassion. She talks of "feeling connected with others in the experience of life rather than feeling isolated and alienated by our suffering" (2011: 41). Neff brings us back to self-compassion, encouraging us to "treat ourselves with the same kindness, caring, and compassion we would show to a good friend or even a stranger for that matter" (2011: 6).

A COMPASSIONATE APPROACH TO WRITER'S BLOCK AND THE INNER CRITIC

Writer's block is characterized as: "that frustrating, self-defeating inability to generate the next line, the right phrase, the sentence that will release the flow of words once again" (Rose 1980: 389). Moore identifies three types of writer's block. The first is a "classic form", in which the writer feels paralyzed and unable to commit words to the page. A second type finds the writer struggling to produce work in their own specialist form. A third type occurs when the writer is able to write, but experiences "an acute sense of dissatisfaction" with what they produce (2018: 350-351). Chintamani labels the writer a "victim" of this condition, as they "suffer from blocked ideas, feel as if stuck somewhere, or may simply run out of motivation and desire to write" (2014: 4).

Blocks can happen to all writers at whatever stage of their writing career. "[H]umility' and 'self-consciousness" may hold back those new to writing (Brande 1983: 29). Established writers also "suffer" from "sterile periods" (Brande 1983: 31). Some identify their own obstacles to writing: for Ted Hughes it was his "own inner police system" (1982: 7); for Virginia Woolf, her "invisible censors" (Rainier 1978: 216).

Researchers in this field have identified a range of root causes for writer's block. As well as a censor, there is a fear of failure, perfectionism, and trauma from earlier negative writing experiences (Boice 1993). Writers can be "too self-critical" (Pennebaker and Evans 2014: 55); be driven to "delete almost everything as soon as it is written" (Chintamani 2014: 4); and be wracked with writing anxiety (Hjortshoj 2001). Whatever terminology is employed, the consensus tends to be that blocks in writing demonstrate "the critic in action" (Wolton 2006: 178).

My inner critic has a very loud voice. Only I can hear it and sometimes it is deafening. I grew up into a perfectionist and learned to view this as a positive quality, living with the mantra that 'I must always do my best and more and I must never let standards slip'. In my adult years, I have realized how my perfectionism has at times become toxic and crippling. It has been suggested that high-levels of perfectionism can impact psychologically on wellbeing and lead to depression. Cultivating self-compassion may help to alleviate perfectionism (Ferrari, Yap, Scott, et al. 2018). Alongside my tendency to feel 'not good enough', I experience a sense of shame at having previously prized my perfectionist tendencies. Gilbert and Choden's personification of a sense of shame as "[t]he big monster" seems appropriate here (2013: 140).

I work with guided compassion meditation to summon my inner critic through a powerful visualization exercise. Labelling it and noting it has been a revelation for me – physically, mentally and emotionally. I reflect on this practice in my reflective journals:

> Settling-in to the meditation often invokes a feeling of anticipation, manifesting itself through a light fluttering in my belly. I begin to wonder what shape my inner critic will take. How will I respond to it? How will it respond to me? I worry about finding a balance between self-obsession and self-disregard when setting an intention for my meditation. Self-compassion suggests that there is an opportunity for me to wallow in self-pity. But instead I have retuned my focus and take heed of Geshe Tashi Tsering's advice: "rather than dwelling on the awfulness of suffering, our focus should also be on the joy we would feel to actually see others relieved of suffering" (2008: 1).
>
> Being present in my body, anchoring myself through the breath, I determine to take a gentle approach to myself. I often feel tension in my neck and an ache in the arch of my back as I sit on the cushion. I could use the chair, but I am determined to sit on the floor. I like to be able to feel the coarse weave of the carpet beneath my hand. I feel more grounded. I soften the tense areas of my body that frequently run from my shoulders up into the back of my head, often a hangover from a day of writing at my desk. Sometimes I angle my neck and imagine a big soft pillow gently supporting my head.

I feel unsure when identifying with the compassionate part of myself. I think about adopting a soothing gesture and am drawn back to childhood – where so much of my writing comes from – and the image of a comfort blanket that I used to have. I work with this and imagine I am stroking its soft texture. The soothing gesture of "placing hands on heart" (Brach 2003: 201), feels uncomfortable: for some reason, the inner-workings of the body induce a queasiness in me. I have a distinct aversion to the sound of a heart beating, and to the felt sense of blood pumping beneath my hand. Instead, I link my hands, palms together, gently caress one palm with a thumb. This is a gesture of kindness, the contact creates a circuit and the gentle movement of my thumb synchronizes with the rhythm of my breathing as I begin to pay attention to it and bring it deeper into my body. As the ground supports my weight, I feel warm and secure and ready to meet my inner critic.

> He appears as an awkward, misshapen character. Older than me. I think. More a collection of mannerisms: haughtiness, arrogance. Rigid with lack of emotion, I see him strut, proud and arrogant. He is disapproving. He is right and I am wrong. Although my inner critic has emerged from my imagination, I feel a separateness from him: 'He' is not part of me'. And then, he speaks.

> He talks over me, never to me; he talks about me; never makes eye-contact. His voice is deep, monotonous. It's not important what he's saying, although it's stuff about me, it's how he's saying it. As if I am insignificant, as if he doesn't even know my name. I try to feel compassion for my inner critic but I'm struggling [...] because I have 'othered' him too much.
>
> When he turns away, I see how he stoops, how his head hangs with misery. He's lonely. And something tells me that in his clumsy and inept way he is not patronizing me, he is trying to parent me, to fill a void that existed then and exists now. I feel choked. I pity him! He seems exhausted. Desperate to have a place and a purpose. My inner critic is insecure, trying to protect his own capabilities and his own achievements. He seems angry as he kicks out and fights for recognition, pushing me away. I recognize myself. These are my own insecurities. This is my own exhaustion.

Acceptance has been a key factor in understanding my inner critic (Goleman and Davidson 2018: 106).

> I reach out to him, bring him close and hold him. He's smaller than I expected. He smiles and the worry lines diminish. I want him to find peace, to stop striving to prove something.

When this practice ends, I feel residual emotions in my body. The anticipation I often feel at the start of the practice has turned into a sense of excitement. I feel potential and a desire to be proactive and take positive action in my writing.

The inner critic can manifest to writers in many ways. Moore asks "[w]hat internal voices are whispering 'You're not good enough?'" (2018: 353). For Pennebaker and Evans "that little censor in their head is telling them that they need to write artistically or perfectly" (2014: 55). McCutcheon also hears the voice of a critic: "a harsh inner voice that criticizes, compares, judges and undermines our self-belief. [It] fans the flames of self-doubt and leaves us feeling disempowered and completely lacking in confidence" (2015: 178).

The blocked writer suffers from a range of negative emotions and "typically spends energy on self-hatred, on regret, on grief, and on jealousy [... and] self-doubt" (Cameron 1995: 151). Some writers form an attachment to this suffering and carry it "as a burden they dare not set down. They do not face suffering with awareness, but rather clutch at their suffering, secretly transfixed with spasms of martyrdom" (Wilber 2001: 76).

The emotions experienced by the suffering writer may "stimulate many of the defences of submissive behaviour or even the sense of defeat" (Gilbert 2014: 31). The writer may just give up. For some, suffering is fundamental to the creative process: it "smashes to pieces the complacency of our normal fictions about reality [...], it marks the birth of creative insight" (Wilber 2001: 76). This fits with the archetype of the suffering artist who rather than give up, uses their emotional response as an impetus to create. McCutcheon takes this further in considering that the act of writing itself is a tool which enables the suffering writer to explore their trauma and find healing. It holds a transformative potential if we can "learn to transform all kinds of resistance into fuels for our creative fire" (McCutcheon 2015: 180).

Recognition of the inner critic through self-compassion can be a first step towards working positively with it. Some writers readily bring an awareness of their critic to their writing. Others may use writing as a therapeutic tool to help them uncover and work with their inner critic (Wolton 2006: 178).

A compassionate approach towards the inner critic is shown through the work of Gilbert and Choden, whose first psychology of compassion requires us to turn towards suffering and recognize it. They encourage a more self-compassionate approach to engaging with the inner critic through meditation, to "come to land [and] disengage from the tendency to resist and struggle" (2013: 235).

The inner critic can be identified as one aspect of a self that is multifaceted and ever-changing. Bolton sees writing as a way of engaging with these many selves:

> an expression of different aspects of myself and an encouragement of these disparate voices within me to communicate with each other, and with other people. This can lead to greater understanding and greater respect for the diverse aspects of myself, and an increased ability to listen attentively and fruitfully to them (1999: 197).

Where these ideas diverge is in the idea of 'self' in mindfulness practice. For Brach "[w]hat we experience as the ''self' is an aggregate of familiar thoughts, emotions and patterns of behavior." The mind brings these components together and "storifies" a self. This feeling of "being a self, separate from others" traps us in cycles of negative emotions and behaviours and leads to self-doubt, often heard as "a background whisper that keeps me anxious" and which may be the voice of the inner critic (2003: 19).

Once recognized, the inner critic, as we have seen, is often personified: seen as a malevolent power or heard as an intrusive "voice" (McCutcheon 2015: 208). For some writers these internal messages can be "overwhelming" (Wolton 2006: 178) and there may be a compulsion to "quieten" them (Strong 2009: 208).

Germer suggests that the inner critic should be labelled: giving it "a specific title [...] draws us further into the experience, but it can also provide distance and perspective" (2009: 70). The language used to describe the inner critic and the writer's relationship with it is imbued with conflict imagery: McCutcheon urges the writer to "stop, take a step back and turn to face the dragon's fire" (2015: 208). Overcoming the inner critic to generate creativity can involve a level of risk-taking (Tierney and Farmer 2002). The writer must demonstrate bravery in putting their work on show: "[i]t begins with the courage to reach into oneself and offer to the world a creative work that may be criticized or praised" (McCutcheon 2015: 208). This lexicon is far from the gentleness that self-compassion suggests. Germer urges us to "adopt a gentle, accepting tone [...] [to help] the mind escape the tendency to wish away unpleasant experience" (2009: 71).

The writer could be encouraged to engage with their inner critic through mindfulness meditation to help alleviate self-judgement (Kabat-Zinn 2014). Compassionate imagery and visualization through meditation can "help us to let go of disturbing thoughts" (Germer 2009: 105). A writer can engage with their "imaginative inclination" by bringing visualization into the writing practice itself as "an imaginative practice [which] shows interconnection and leads to increased compassion for ourselves and other writers and readers" (Peary 2018: 116).

Goldberg visualizes a scenario around her inner critic whose voice she perceives as "the jabbering of an old drunk fool." She distances herself from this "prattle in the background" and imagines it "as distant white laundry flapping in the breeze" (1986: 26). Virginia Woolf visualized her inner critic as a woman driven to censor her as a female writer:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. [...] And when I came to write, her wings fell on my page: I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room [...]. She slipped behind me and whispered [...] [n]ever let anyone guess you have a mind of your own. [...] I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. [...] Had I not killed her, she would have killed me' (1943).

Engaging in dialogue with your inner critic may help writers to understand it. Wolton suggests directly questioning it: "What do you want? How could you be useful to me? How could we work together? What is your wisdom? What is your secret?." Writers could develop a "sense of enquiry [...] to discover [...] alternatives other than destroying the Critic or being destroyed by it" (2006: 179-180). For Rainier "[i]f you can get to know [the inner critic] in yourself, focus them, talk to them, and get them to assist you, you will have taken an essential step in freeing your creativity" (1978: 216).

Following up meditation practice with reflective journaling can also be beneficial. Studies show that putting our emotions into words, either vocalizing or writing them down, has a positive calming effect on the brain (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, et al. 2007). As well as enhancing writing skills, personalizing a syntax to describe your emotions can also be beneficial (Germer 2009).

Creative writing is one of many arts therapies that can be used as a compassionate intervention. Recognized as a therapeutic tool for personal development (Bolton, Field and Thompson 2006), practitioners in this field use:

> the practice of autobiography and creative writing as a means of gaining insight into oneself, of coping with difficult emotional or psychological problems, or as a way of dealing with difficult life experiences (Hunt and Sampson 1998: 10).

Writing can "resonate with the nature of mindfulness [...] connecting with inner spaciousness, compassionate values and creativity" (Barrett, Harris

and Nixon 2019: 85). It can cultivate compassion, sparking "the ability to imagine what the experience of another might be like" (Nussbaum 2010: 97). A number of forms of writing and writing techniques can be employed with an attitude of compassion. Expressive writing may decrease self-criticism (Troop, Chilcot, Hutchings et al. 2013: 374). It can be cathartic: putting our "experiences into words, we tend to be less concerned with the emotional events that have been weighing us down" (Pennebaker and Evans 2014: 4). Expressive writing viewed as an act of self-compassion can result in lower negative emotional responses to stressful experiences (Leary, Tate, Adams, et al. 2007).

Transactional writing, such as writing a compassionate letter to yourself or to someone else, can be a healing process. It can foster a shift of perspective, particularly if participants have become "stuck in one viewpoint and in habitual thinking." (Pennebaker and Evans 2014: 122).
Poetry is often used in mindfulness practice. It is felt to "give space and self-compassion for feelings of anger and sorrow that have led sometimes to a sense of common humanity and compassion for others" (Barrett, Harris and Nixon 2019: 74). Poetry Therapy practitioners use literature for personal development and therapeutic purposes (Mazza 2017) and often integrate mindfulness into their workshops (Fox 2014). Poetry can instigate exploration of the "intimate relationship between inner and outer landscapes" (Kabat-Zinn 2015: 27). Germer likens the act of meditation to poetry: "you can't read poetry in a rush and have it evoke something new within you" (2009: 146). Writers who employ mindful writing techniques report profound results: "[i]t was as if the writing wrote itself" (Trevitt 2011: 195); and "[p]oetry writes itself through me" (Oldham 2011: 190).

Using performative techniques in writing such as emotion memory can also be a creative way of developing a sense of compassion for the self (Germer 2009; Gilbert and Choden 2013). Emotion memory, first described by the dramaturg Stanislavski, involves an actor engaging with the "inner truth of emotion and feeling" of a character as well as the "external historical truth" (Hodgson 1972: 91). Being in the present moment, the writer uses their imagination to allow emotions to arise which can help to cultivate compassion.

CULTIVATING A COMPASSIONATE WRITING SPACE

Writing is a solitary practice. Creative writing as a "self-expressive" activity, has led to its reputation as a "self-centred" occupation. Western society with its emphasis on competition between individuals may perpetuate the view of writers as "individualized, autonomous and de-socialized agents" (Alacovska 2020: 728-729). "Western individualism", therefore, could be seen as an obstacle to compassion (Gomez 1978: 35). The writer working in isolation may be able to develop self-compassion through simple techniques such as Neff's Hugging Practice, to help them to engage with their physical responses to self-criticism. This practice advocates self-hugging, wrapping the arms around the body, rocking and soothing the self and engaging with physical and emotional responses that arise. The soothing gesture of touch aids the release of oxytocin in the body, calms the cardiovascular system and generates feelings of security (Neff 2011: 49). For the writer, tuning into these physical feelings may ground them and prove an antidote to a busy mind occupied with the inner critic. It may also enable the writer to gain an awareness of physical stresses that an attitude of self-criticism may induce on the body. If we recognize the vicious cycle of self-criticism blocking our ability for self-compassion, whilst we need self-compassion to deal with our inner critic, a move of focus to the soothing / affiliation system can be beneficial (Gilbert and Choden 2013: 278).

The sense of writer isolation can be addressed by considering one of Neff's tenets of self- compassion, Common Humanity (2011). Connecting with other writers and sharing their experiences in "a shared community of creativity" can help the blocked writer to realize they are not alone in their suffering (Strong 2009: 208). The writer could be encouraged to shift focus "from the self" to consider instead "how the self is connected to others" (Dreisoerner, Junker and Van Dick 2020: 25). McCutcheon suggests that engaging with other writers can be supportive, particularly if one offers an "empathic ear" to help others overcome their resistance to writing fuelled by their inner critic (2015: 182). This can foster a sense of belonging. It can be realized through membership of writing groups and other peer support groups, or on a one-to-one basis with a mentor, peer or friend (Chintamani 2014). Connectedness also alleviates loneliness, which may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy perpetuated by the writer's battle

with the inner critic (Gilbert 2014: 26). The idea of a writing community may not be appropriate for all writers; some may struggle with the ability to "process social cues, understand the perspective of others, and work cooperatively within the social milieu" (Hou, Allen, Wei, et al. 2017: 1).

The classic Writing Workshop, where students critique each other's work, has become a core feature of creative writing pedagogy in writing courses, particularly in higher education. This approach has been identified as an impediment to creativity as students leave workshops with "a more developed inner critic"; they develop "a deleterious habit of mind, internalizing evaluation to a stifling degree" (Stukenberg 2017: 287).

A compassionate writing space could be created for the writer wracked with self-criticism and battling their inner critic. This could be a space for playful writing, experimentation and approaching writing with a sense of humour. Affiliative and self-enhancing humour has been found to promote subjective well-being (Jiang, Lu, Jiang, et al. 2020). Chodron also calls for a gentle approach:

> the main instruction is simply to lighten up. By taking that attitude towards one's practice and one's life, by taking that more gentle and appreciative attitude towards oneself and others, the sense of burden that all of us carry around begins to decrease (2005: 19).

I drew on a guided compassionate visualization to create my own imagined compassionate writing space. The idea of a refuge and a sanctuary came to mind. Perhaps subconsciously, I was coming to this practice with an underlying sense of fear. I reflected on this practice in my journals:

> Often, as I settle-in and deepen the breath, create more space in my body and my mind, I feel as if I am about to embark on a journey. Needing to ground myself, I anchor my breath, bring myself to the present; I observe my thoughts that want to take me away into the future and start planning my safe space and I try to let them go. I open my body to sensations, let gravity give me weight and feel a connection with the ground, which in turn makes me feel more present.

When I allow an image of my safe space to emerge, it again comes from my childhood imagination:

> I'm inside a spaceship. A small capsule, just for me. It's built out of Lego – either I've shrunk or it's giant Lego: but the colours are muted, silver-greys. It smells new, clean, like freshly washed sheets, like the smell of the blossom on the hedgerows outside.

This is a recurring image of something I would have built as a child. I remember playing alone with my building bricks, hiding away in a corner, lost in my imagination. That to me then was a safe space, a place to let my imagination run free. I explore the detail in my meditation:

> Out of the large windows, I see emptiness – not quite black – studded with stars. There's light in the darkness. There's possibilities. It's vast. My ship is small and contained. There's no sound. The ticking of a clock comes in and then I let it go. I don't want the hours to be ticked off. I feel a gentle warmth against my skin. I'm cocooned in my ship. I can go wherever I want. I lie still and float, weightless, free.

My body feels at ease after this meditation. The hollow murmurs of anxiety in my stomach that I bring into the practice from earlier in the day, tend to unknot as I embrace the experience of being here now, floating and weightless. I am excited about working with visualizations; my imagination is integral to my writing practice. However, I realize my tendency to take 'flights of fancy' doesn't sit well with mindfulness practice. I look for the story rather than working with 'the feelings'. To develop my practice I have begun to cultivate the idea that "Connecting to the felt sense is more important than having clear visual images" (Gilbert and Choden 2013: 239).

A sense of soothing often arises in this practice and I wonder if this 'felt sense' is a 'remembered sense' of comfort and security from childhood. I wonder if working with compassionate imagery is encouraging me to daydream rather than meditate. I take on board the experiences of Bachelor from the Zen Buddhist tradition. When she realised that her meditations were turning into daydreams, she was prompted to re-engage with and cultivate the essence of her practice and "restore the mental energy [...] spent daydreaming to its original purpose: creative imagination" (2010). Although mindfulness and mind-wandering can be viewed as opposing activities (Mrazek, Smallwood and Schooler 2014), certain forms of mind-wandering in conjunction with

mindfulness have been reported to "allow the mental wanderer more awareness and potential to imagine and think creatively" (Henriksen, Richardson and Shack 2020: 6). I anchor myself with the mindful breath to reduce mind-wandering (Mrazek, Smallwood and Schooler 2014) and bring myself back to the present when I feel daydreams are taking over. I also tune in to physical sensations to ground myself:

> Warmth of the sunlight coming through the window, roughness of the rug beneath my bare feet. A lump in my throat. Nostalgia in my veins as the coo of wood pigeons resonates with past memories of a safe place.

I feel welcome in my safe space. I note that Gilbert and Choden emphasize the important distinction between "safety" and "safeness" (2013: 240). When I began this practice, I saw my safe space as a place of "safety", somewhere to run away and hide. As my practice has developed, I now have a sense of it as a place of "safeness", a place in which to flourish and grow, and emerge revived.

Coming back to mindfulness compassion at the root of this perspective, the writer could pare back their writing practice and approach it with a "beginner's mind" which, according to Goldberg, starts with:

> an empty page and a heart unsure, a famine of thoughts, a fear of no feeling – just begin from there [...] writing from that place, will eventually break us and open us to the world as it is. Out of this tornado of fear will come a genuine writing voice' (1983: 106).

This mind-set may help to remove layers of inadequacy created by the inner-critic. As "[e]ach time is a new journey with no maps" (1983, 5), the writer is free to write without self-critical thoughts from previous work overshadowing them and without external expectations.

To conclude, it can be seen that the inner critic is a long recognized scourge of the writer, eliciting feelings of self-doubt and self-criticism. These can lead to writer's block. The practice of compassion has a positive role to play: approaching your writing practice with self-compassion; drawing on the principle of common humanity by recognizing a community of writers and creating a compassionate space to work in; and approaching writing with a beginner's mind. All these can help to alleviate the inner critic and unblock the writer. Visualizing the inner critic and gaining insight and understanding of what drives it and questioning and reflecting through journaling, can also lead to positive results. The myth of the writer suffering in solitude in their garret can be dispelled.

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Helen is interested in developing wellbeing approaches to story sharing and integrates this into her practice as a writing for wellbeing facilitator. She is working towards credentialling as a poetry therapy practitioner with the International Academy of Poetry Therapy and has been studying Mindfulness at postgraduate level with the University of Aberdeen. These practices will inform her process in her upcoming role as Research Lead with Otherhood, an Arts Council England funded performance project which aims to stage stories of living without children.

Helen writes fiction and experiments with poetry. She completed her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Strathclyde in 2019 - which produced a novel set against the backdrop of the Nottingham lace industry.

Walking and Writing, Running and Redrafting
Towards a template for the physically-active creative

Liam Bell & Gemma Ryde

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the interdisciplinary and symbiotic links between creativity and physical activity in order to present a template for a physically-active creative. Co-written by a Creative Writing and a Sport and Physical Activity academic, the research draws on existing literature across both disciplines and original quantitative and qualitative research. After exploring examples of famous writers and artists who undertook exercise as part of their creative process and incorporating a review of studies on creativity from the physical activity and sport context, this article then moves on to present results from a 2018 Pilot Study, undertaken at the University of Stirling, and a 2021 online Graduate Event, conducted in partnership with the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities. In doing so, the authors conclude by proposing three non-prescriptive recommendations for how to incorporate physical activity into a creative routine and foster a best practice that utilises concepts from the field of sport and physical activity to further understand and develop the creative process.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the creative writing teaching team at the University of Stirling have often conducted meetings while walking around the on-campus loch or taken ourselves out towards the higher lands of the Trossachs for a group bike ride. All of us, in our different ways, are engaged in regular physical activity and, as this paper discusses, have developed an interest in the ways in which that exercise links to our writing practice. We realised that we didn't recognise the sedentary model of a writer chained to the desk or, as in the case of Patricia Highsmith, writing sitting up in bed (Currey 2013: 10). Similarly, we didn't see ourselves in the hedonistic writer epitomised by the apocryphal story of Hunter S. Thompson's daily consumption of cocaine, Chivas whisky, Dunhill cigarettes and "grass to take the edge off" (Jean Carroll 1993: 7). Instead, we began to form a collective idea of a physically-active creative with a routine of exercise that was integral to their writing. As our colleague Kevin MacNeil put it: "The image of writers is changing slowly but the reality is changing more quickly… more of us are aware of and appreciative of physical activity" (Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities Event, 21/01/2021). We discussed this with colleagues in Sports Studies and realised that there were potentially myriad linkages between the disciplines, with a symbiotic relationship between exercise and creativity. From this basis, we began to investigate the ways in which writers make use of different physical activities within their writing day and this led to a Pilot Study, by way of an online survey conducted in 2018, and an online event held in 2021 with Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities (SGSAH). In discussing this research, we hope to point to a series of productive ways in which creatives can use physical activity within their routine and, indeed, initiate a further discussion on the links between creativity and physical activity. It is worth noting, particularly in the context of the 2019 COVID pandemic and emerging concerns about Long COVID, that the physical activity we are exploring is not, of necessity, strenuous or high-exertion, but can include activities of daily living. In fact, the sport and physical activity context in Section Two considers many forms of physical activity and, further, our understanding of creative engagement with physical activity can be extended, by the work of Scottish artist Alec Finlay, to the 'proxy walk'. Finlay explains the practice as "a recipient chooses a place they loved to walk, when they could, and the walker does the walk for them" (Finlay 2020). It is important to underline, therefore, that we're not seeking to propose an ableist interpretation of possible synergies between creativity and physical activity, but rather explore how the creative's own version of physical activity can be useful for their own particular process.

SECTION ONE
CREATIVE CONTEXTS

The primary dataset used throughout this paper is from our October 2018 Pilot Study, an anonymous online survey of writers recruited through social media and professional networks, which asked a series of qualitative and quantitative questions relating to creativity and physical activity. We had 35 respondents to this study and, as shown in Figure 1., when asked about activities they currently used as part of their physical activity routine, the most popular physical activity selected was walking, followed by running and gym work. This last entry of 'gym' is a little ambiguous – as it can include multiple activity types – so the discussion below will be split into three sub-sections, considering creative responses to walking, to running, and to other activities including cycling and swimming.

Figure 1. Activities currently used as part of creative writer's physical activity routine

Type of activity	Number of Responses *Number (%)*
Walking	28 (80%)
Running	10 (29%)
Gym	10 (29%)
Cycling	9 (26%)
Swimming	7 (20%)
Yoga	6 (17%)
Pilates	3 (9%)

Results taken from 2018 Pilot Study conducted via online survey. There were 35 respondents and respondents were permitted to list multiple activities. Activities with only one response not included above – Gardening, Badminton, Golf, Snowboarding, Horse riding.

Walking

Eighty percent of our respondents included walking as part of their physical activity routine and this is, perhaps, not surprising given the long-established conjectural link between walking and creative thought. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote "I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with legs" (quoted in Solnit 2014: 14). This same relationship was investigated, in an academic context, through a study from Stanford University in which participants were found to be more creative walking rather than sitting (Oppezzo and Schwartz 2014). This experiment allowed for the impact of other factors, for instance a change in surroundings, and still found a positive relationship between walking and creative thought. This gives credibility to a practice that creatives have long engaged in; with Beethoven going for afternoon walks with "a pencil and a couple of sheets of musical paper" (Currey 2013: 18) and the poet Wallace Stevens walking endlessly and "stopping now and then to scribble lines on one of the half-dozen or so envelopes he always had stuffed in his pocket" (ibid, 115). Those examples, though, are largely about walking to stimulate thoughts or to provide respite as part of the creative process – and Rebecca Solnit's history of walking, Wanderlust, is intriguing because it also charts the evolution of writing about walking. Her discussion ranges from William Hazlitt's 1821 essay 'Going on a Journey' through to New Nature writers such as Kathleen Jamie, our former colleague at Stirling. These New Nature writers use the walk as the base for further explorations "about the walker's character or encounters, about nature or about achievement, sometimes so much so it ceases to be about walking" (Solnit 2014: 132). Within that frame, we have the possibility of creativity and physical activity becoming so intimately bound together that one does not exist without the other. Walking becomes a means of researching and investigating – of gathering material – rather than an activity to undertake as distraction or respite. In seeking inspiration, the landscape isn't merely a backdrop but an opportunity to engage with the space, whether in a rural or an urban environment. The term 'psychogeography' becomes useful here. This idea, first expounded by Guy Debord, explores how the environment around us impacts on the individual; how our surroundings make us feel and behave (ibid, 212). As Michel de Certeau would have it: "A city is a language, a repository of possibilities, and walking is the act of speaking that language, of selecting from those possibilities" (ibid, 213). In a contemporary context, Linda Cracknell's memoir Doubling Back provides an example of the ways in which physical activity can be directly linked with the creative process, with the author embarking on a series of walks to tell ten stories, most notably that of a friend's father who escaped Nazi-occupied Norway by way of climbing "across the Dovre mountains and into neutral Sweden" (Cracknell 2014: 107). In a wider, community-focused study, the University of Glasgow researcher Professor Dee Heddon has investigated smaller acts of creative intervention undertaken during lockdown walks throughout the 2019 COVID pandemic; for instance chalk rainbows, fairy trails, and painted stone snakes. She imagines that people are communicating, through these acts of creativity, that "we have to be apart, but I can leave something for you. And, in doing that, I can continue to participate in culture, society, and community" (Garavelli 2021). In these ways, then, walking and creativity link not as two separate activities which have mutual benefits but as intertwined activities where the writing or other creative work emerges directly from the act of walking.

Running

Studies such as the one conducted by Oppezzo and Schwartz (2014) above, suggest that even walking at a comfortable or 'light' walking pace can have a positive effect on creativity. This spectrum of exercise – light, moderate, vigorous – is commonly used in sport and physical activity studies, as we explore in Section Two, and allows for crossover and nuance. For instance, incidental activities like walking around at work could be classed as 'light' whereas a brisk walk where your heart rate is raised could be classed as 'moderate'. Whilst the connection between light physical activity and creativity can be evidenced, can we do the same for more intense physical activity and exercise? In 1997 a paper by Steinberg et al. titled 'Exercise enhances creativity independently of mood' found that participants showed greater flexibility in generating unusual uses for common objects after undertaking a more intense aerobic exercise session (Steinberg et al. 1997). This creative problem-solving would seem to point towards a beneficial effect between moderate-vigorous exercise and creativity and, again, it is possible to find a number of prominent, contemporary writers who extoll the virtues of running for their writing routine. Notably, Joyce Carol Oates goes as far as to say that running "seems to allow me, ideally, an expanded consciousness in which I can envision what I'm writing as a film or a dream" (Ripatrazone

2015). The sheer volume of writers for whom running forms part of practice can be seen in a 2019 poetry anthology, The Result is What You See Today: Poems about Running, which features a total of 110 poets including well-known names such as Helen Mort, Tracey Herd and Peter Sansom. Perhaps the seminal text for exploring the symbiotic connection between running and creativity, though, is Haruki Murakami's What I Talk About When I Talk About Running. As with Oates, he links exercise to the creative writing routine and to the generation of ideas but, crucially, he goes further and also suggests its importance to what we might term resilience. For instance, he states: "When I'm criticised unjustly (from my viewpoint, at least), or when someone I'm sure will understand me doesn't, I go running for a little longer than usual" (Murakami 2009: 20). Here then is the idea of more intense exercise as a way of releasing frustration or working through an emotional response to a work pressure. We move beyond the creative writing routine into wellbeing and beyond the generation of ideas into coping with feedback/criticism. This aspect was of great interest to us because, as creatives, we often have to deal with rejection in one form or another. As a result, you'll see that some of the questions included in the Pilot Study – discussed further in Section Three – are seeking responses not merely on the link between physical activity and the imaginative act but also whether physical activity is of use later in the process when the task at-hand is not necessarily fully creative; for example, in submitting work to publishers or dealing with the myriad administrative tasks which go along with the creative professions.

Cycling and Swimming

The contexts for the main threads and themes which we'll explore from our 2018 Pilot Study can be identified in the review of literature about walking and running above. However, it is worth outlining two further points before moving on to examine the sports and physical activity contexts, in Section Two, and then further results of the 2018 Pilot Study and 2021 SGSAH Event in Section Three. Firstly, our interest was in capturing a wide range of physical activity within this discussion so it is vital to touch upon relevant texts on cycling and swimming. Secondly, it is important to emphasise that much of the exploration thus far has been about creative writing – because it is from this discipline that the research emerged – but the SGSAH Event did invite contributions from creatives in other fields, for example visual arts, and so we'll briefly examine that context too.

To do this, it is useful to consider David Byrne's Bicycle Diaries. Byrne, a musician and visual artist, takes his bike with him everywhere he goes and cycles through the cities he visits. He links this physical activity explicitly to his creative process, stating "It facilitates a state of mind that allows some but not too much of the unconscious to bubble up" (Byrne 2009: 4). He mentions the "repetitive, mechanical" (ibid) nature of cycling and, in this way, his observations link back to Murakami's thoughts on running. Cycling enjoys a similar array of exponents, across the creative professions, and there is again an anthology dedicated to the virtues of this physical activity and its links to writing, The Art of Bicycling: A Treasury of Poems (Belmont 2005). This collection is often oblique in its references and is less focused in time period than the running anthology noted above, but entries including Pablo Neruda's 'Ode to Bicycles' and Seamus Heaney's 'Wheels Within Wheels' demonstrate the grip that this particular form of physical activity often holds on writers. Similarly, swimming's connection with creative culture has been extensively explored in Charles Sprawson's Haunts of the Black Masseur and continues to be lauded (and occasionally ridiculed) through the The Guardian's fondness for articles on wild swimming. Two contemporary writers who explore the synergies between swimming and writing with particular imaginativeness are Amy Liptrot and Elizabeth Jane-Burnett, in The Outrun and The Grassling respectively. Liptrot notes, in her introduction to a new edition of Sprawson's book, that she has "written almost obsessively about my swims. I find a five-minute dip in the sea provides as much material and inspiration as a much longer walk or time spent deliberately thinking" (Liptrot in Sprawson 2018: xi). Again then, as we found with the examination of walking above, physical activity occupies a much more important place in the routines of many creatives than as a simple distraction or means to maintain fitness; for many it has developed into an integral part of the process itself. It is not, therefore, time spent away from creativity or a separate element of these creatives' lives but, rather, a vital component of that creative practice. In Section Three, we'll delve into the data from the Pilot Study and SGSAH Event to examine the ways in which this occurs and, crucially, at which stages of the process creatives make use of physical activity. However, in order to fully understand why creativity and physical activity should be discussed together, we will first look to

the field of sport and physical activity research and how they define, discuss and contextualise physical activity as a concept.

SECTION TWO
SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CONTEXT

From the accounts of writers in the previous section there emerges a clear and positive link between creativity and physical activity. Reading through these quotes and observations from a scientific perspective, much of what they note can be supported within the physical activity, psychosocial and biological science literature and in this section we touch on those links between creativity and physical activity.

Key Concepts and Definitions

To start, it is important to outline key concepts and definitions within physical activity. Whilst there is conjecture regarding the exact definition of physical activity, for example on whether the definition of physical activity is too narrow and should be more holistic in nature (Piggin 2020), the definition provided by Caspersen et al. with a physiological base is widely accepted. This states: “Physical activities are any bodily movements produced by skeletal muscle that result in energy expenditure” (Caspersen et al., 1985). This definition then goes on to note that ‘exercise’ is a “subset of physical activity that is planned, structured, and repetitive and has as a final or an intermediate objective for the improvement or maintenance of physical fitness” (ibid.). We often therefore describe physical activity as an umbrella term that encapsulates not only exercise and sport, but all types of activity and movement. In the words of the World Health Organization 2020 campaign to promote global physical activity ‘Every Move Counts’ and it’s important to acknowledge that even simple movements such as standing doing the dishes or climbing the stairs can contribute towards our daily movement.

However, whilst all activity is typically beneficial, different types of activities can have different benefits and this was alluded to by some of the writers discussed in Section One. We typically discuss physical activities in terms of their dimensions: Frequency (number of sessions per day/week); Intensity (rate of energy expenditure); Type (whether swimming, walking, yoga etc.); and Time. These are sometimes, therefore, referred to as FITT principles (Strath et al. 2013). A physical activity is often described by the intensity it takes to perform it and is visualised as a ‘spectrum of intensity’ as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Taken from ‘UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines’, 2019.

Another area that is worth noting with regards to creativity is sedentary behaviour. This is defined as "any waking behaviour characterized by an energy expenditure ≤1.5 METs while in a sitting, reclining or lying posture" and excludes sleep (Tremblay et al. 2017). This includes sitting watching TV, driving in the car, or working seated at a desk. Being 'sedentary' is not just a term for people who sit all day and don't move but is relevant even for those who run for say 30 minutes a day or cycle to work for an hour as these 'active people' can still spend a number of hours sitting in-between times. Being sedentary for writers and in fact many traditionally desk-based occupations is something that is the culturally accepted, with office-based employees said to spend 67% of their working day sitting at their desk (Ryde et al. 2014).

Benefits of Physical Activity

In addition to defining these terms it is also useful to understand why physical activity is so important; even leaving aside the potential outcome of creativity. Being physically active is linked to numerous benefits, with positive changes to our physical health probably the most well-known. However, there are also other benefits including mental and social health, as well as wider societal and economic impacts. Health benefits have been described as 'irrefutable' and include improved longevity and quality of life, reduced blood pressure and cholesterol, prevention and treatment of diseases such as diabetes, depression and anxiety, heart attacks, stroke and some cancers (Warburton and Bredin 2017). Conversely, sedentary behaviour is linked to poor health outcomes in many of these same areas, with individuals encouraged not only to be active but to try and reduce sedentary behaviour where possible. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that those who are active can ameliorate some of the negative effects of 'too much sitting' this evidence is still emerging (Eklund et al, 2016).

With regards to creativity, there is evidence of a beneficial effect from physical activity as alluded to in Section One. Many experimental studies (typically laboratory based or with very controlled and prescribed interventions), such as Oppezzo and Schwartz, have reported positive benefits on creativity immediately after a single session of physical activity; known as acute effects (Steinberg et al 1997). Others have delivered longer programs of activity (several sessions of activity over weeks/months) and again found this sort of chronic physical activity to be beneficial to creativity (Gondola and Tuckman 1985, Gondola 1986, Tuckman and Hinkle 1986). There is also evidence from observational studies that show those who are fitter or who take part in regular activity tend to be more creative (Cavallera et al. 2011, Rominger et al. 2020). A study by Rominger et al. used device measures of physical activity to access daily physical activity levels (without asking people to change their routine) and assessed creativity over the course of a week. As with other studies, they found that higher intensity, vigorous activity was associated with increased creative performance. However, they also reported that moderate intensity activities performed as part of daily living were also associated with creative performance. Sedentary activities were negatively linked with creative performance. Whilst there are several methodological concerns with this study, largely to do with categorizing sedentary and light activity together and not indicating exactly what types of activity were included as moderate, it does indicate that even general movement throughout the day can be beneficial for creative processes.

It would seem, therefore, that the accounts of creative writers and artists in Section One are supported by physical activity and sport research. Taking part in activity and being physically fit appears to be beneficial for creativity, regardless of whether the activity is performed for creative purposes. For example, running every morning routinely might not be an activity undertaken with creativity explicitly in mind, but it does have a positive impact in that regard. For those who are less inclined to exercise, taking 'activity breaks' whilst in the creative process also appears to boost creative performance even in short, one-off bouts. Even just sitting less and moving more throughout the day may be enough to help with creativity. Whilst the above studies varied greatly in what exactly people did or were prescribed to do, following the World Health Organization physical activity guidelines seems to be good advice for creative practitioners. These guidelines suggest that we should be taking part in at least 150-300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a week or 75-150 minutes of vigorous activity (or a combination of both), strength and balance activities on two days a week, and also reducing sedentary time wherever possible ('WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour', 2020).

SECTION THREE
RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the two sections above, then, we have explored the synergies between creative writing and physical activity as disciplines which overlap in ways which begin to reinterpret and reimagine the creative process. Within this third section, we will take that a step further and review the findings from our own research (the 2018 Pilot Study and 2021 Graduate Event) and present a possible template for a physically-active creative, based on recommendations gleaned from our research for the ways in which physical activity can be integrated into the writing process.

Review of Pilot Study and Graduate Event

In Section One, in relation to Murakami's text, we hypothesised that physical activity and sports might be of use not just in the generation of ideas but also in terms of resilience in the face of rejection and disappointment. The pilot study allowed us to test this hypothesis, as shown in the two graphs below; Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Question III.2 in 2018 Pilot Study.

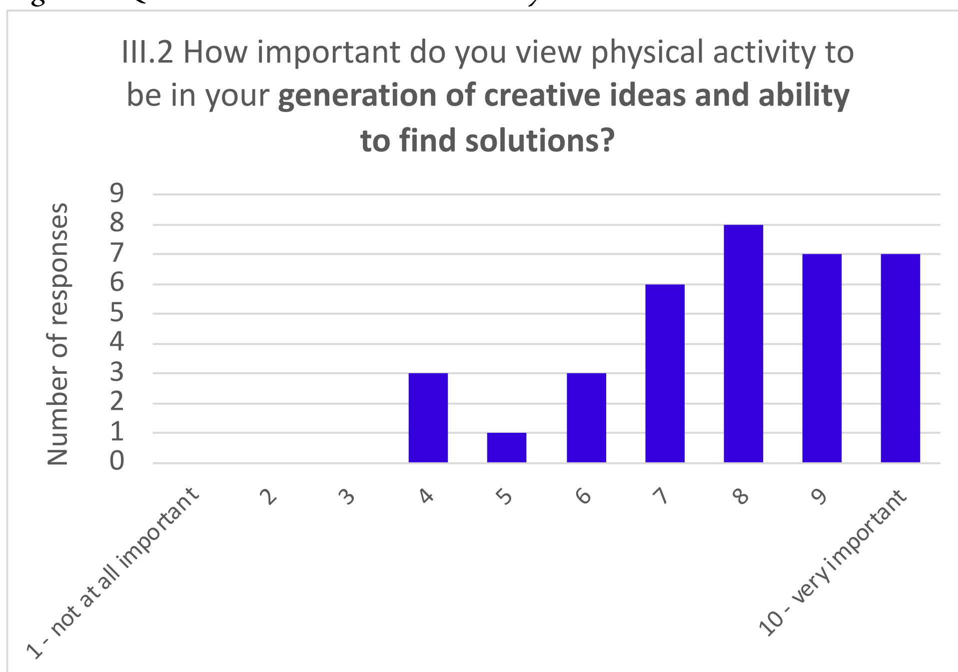
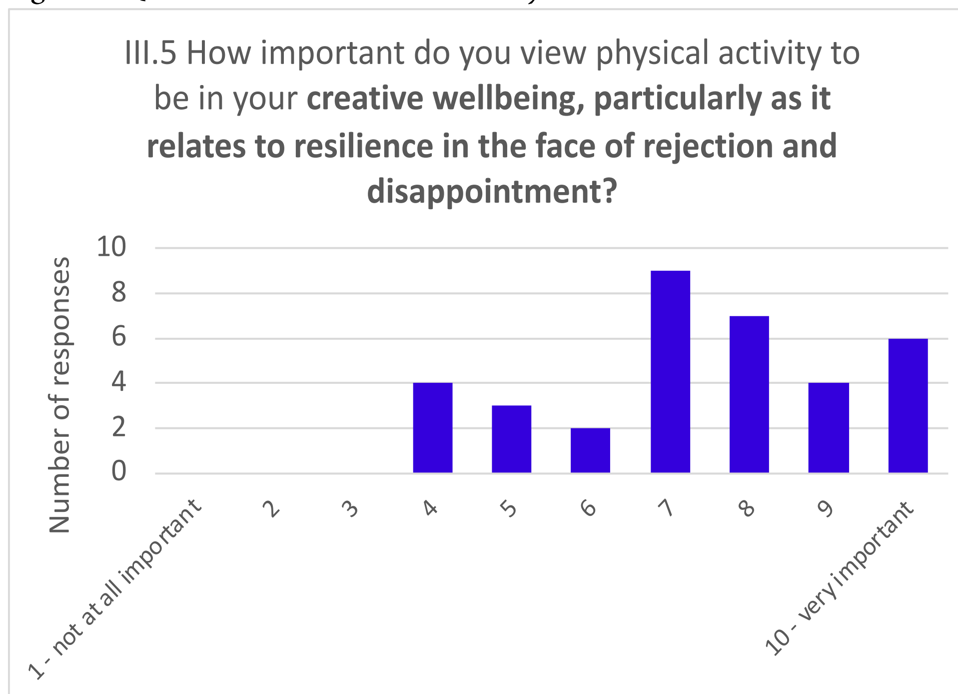


Figure 4. Question III.5 in 2018 Pilot Study.



The first graph, Figure 3, interrogated the usefulness of physical activity in the opening stages of the creative process; whether that be the generation of an idea or the working through of that idea. The responses translate to a mean score of 7.83 (where 10 indicates very important). The second question, Figure 4, about resilience in the face of rejection and disappointment, translates to a mean score of 7.37. We can extrapolate, therefore, that our supposition that writers were using physical activity throughout the creative process – rather than just in generating ideas – was correct. This is important as it points to a template for a physically-active creative whereby the exercise or activity is integrated into the daily creative routine and is sustained over a substantial length of time. Certainly, though, the qualitative answers to our survey highlighted that it was often in the initial stages of a creative project where the benefits of creative writing were most immediately obvious, with one respondent remarking "most days I'm working on some new idea while I'm running" and another noting that "after a period of stagnation it is often either walking or travelling that allows ideas to flow" (Pilot Study 2018).

Interestingly, the self-assessed linkage between creativity and physical activity didn't extend, in our study, to the process of editing, copy-editing and approaching the publication cycle. This can perhaps be seen as slightly removed from the creative process – as the industry-facing side of being a writer – and the responses to the question concerning this aspect of the writing process generated a mean score of only 5.56, the lowest in the survey; see Figure 5 below.

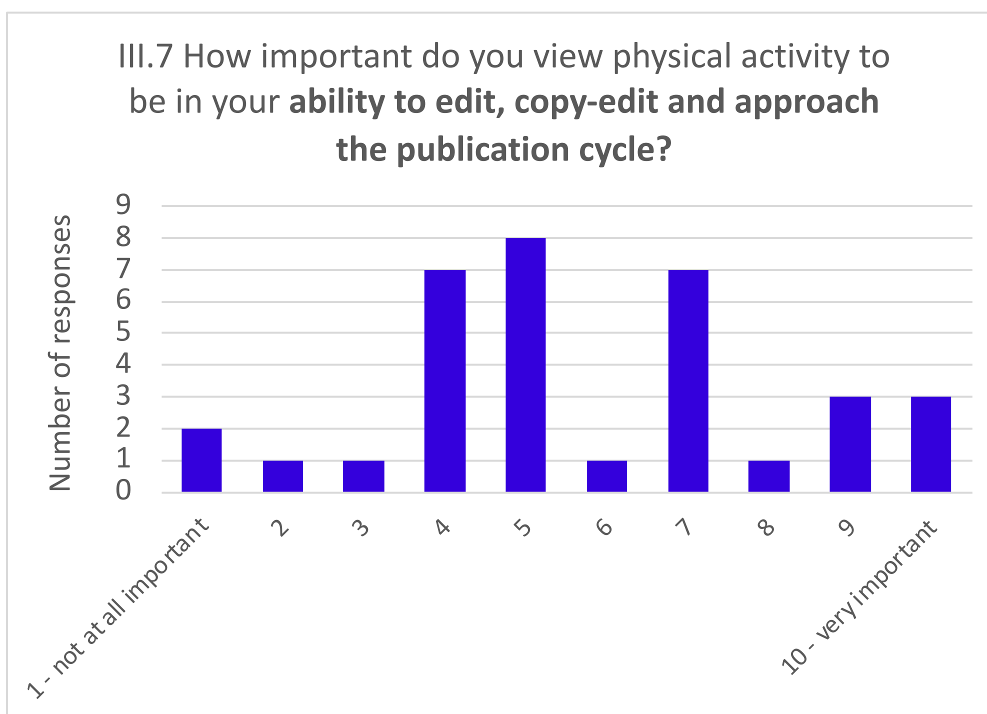


Figure 5. Question III.7 in 2018 Pilot Study.

From this, we can begin to surmise that these tasks, which could be designated as having less intrinsic creativity and taking place at a later moment in the conventional writing process, become disassociated from physical activity in the minds of the writers surveyed. This is strengthened by responses from our SGSAH Event, where creatives spoke of physical activity being of use as a way to "feed your creativity" or to sustain the "lightbulbs [which] flicker and flash at any time" (SGSAH Event 2021). Physical activity, in dealing with the administrative side of the writing life, is more often linked to general wellbeing, recuperation and rest. It is also tied to a need to change surroundings and move away from that desk-based environment. One of the respondents to our survey noted that they "use yoga to switch my brain off from everything" and another that the "repetitiveness of the movement [when running] and the lack of intellectual pressure helps to destress and unclutter the mind" (Pilot Study 2018). Physical activity in these cases, then, isn't so much an aid to creativity as a respite from the demands of that creative process. As the poet and essayist Kathleen Jamie has it, "If we work always in words, sometimes we need to recuperate in a place where language doesn't join up, where we're thrown back on a few elementary nouns. Sea. Bird. Sky. " (Jamie 2005: 93)

We arrive, therefore, at a model of a physically-active creative who uses physical activity as an aid

to creativity throughout the process but for whom that link, potentially, becomes weaker as the need for innovation and creative thought within their work decreases. However, physical activity still remains important – at that stage – as a means of maintaining general wellbeing and mental health. Indeed, when we asked our study respondents how important physical activity was to their general wellbeing and quality of life the mean score calculated was 9.29. This provides us with a template far removed from the sedentary creative and establishes the connection between creativity and physical activity, but it doesn't, perhaps, provide practical solutions or suggestions for how to integrate that physical activity into the writing routine. For that, we can investigate further the qualitative responses to our 2018 Pilot Study and SGSAH Event.

At our SGSAH Event, writer Kevin MacNeil drew a connection between a sense of achievement in physical activity and in writing or a creative project. He remarked that to "achieve a major endeavour like finishing a novel or running a half-marathon… it gives you confidence to do the other one" (SGSAH Event 2021). This is certainly a linkage pointed to by Haruki Murakami in his book too (Murakami 2009: 10). But it is worth noting that the scale of the activity doesn't have to be completing a half-marathon or a similarly strenuous piece of exercise. At the SGSAH Event it was noted that even the smallest or most incidental exercise was of benefit to creative work and, indeed, one of the participants espoused the virtues of dancing in the kitchen with her children as a form of physical activity which formed an important part of her daily routine: "Anything that comes from a place of not taking yourself too seriously is brilliant" (SGSAH Event 2021). In this frame, it's important to note that doing any form of physical activity – and finding the motivation to do it – is beneficial to the creative practitioner. We preface our recommendations, therefore, with this caveat that we recognise that creatives will approach physical activity with different 'baseline fitness' and experiences with exercise and that increasing and diversifying that is beneficial to creativity whatever the starting point, even if only in decreasing the amount of time engaged in sedentary behaviour.

Recommendations

Many creatives who engaged with our study had innovative ways of ensuring that physical activity was integrated into the working day. Those responding to our survey had routines including working "from my car, having driven to a remote location", with a walk following this writing time, and going "to a café for a couple of hours, and where possible link up with a friend to co-work" (Pilot Study 2018). These solutions allow for respite from desk-based work and also allow for an integrated element of physical activity; after writing in the first scenario and on the walk to and from the café in the second. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the creative writing team at University of Stirling would regularly meet to cycle or walk as a group, with discussion of our teaching and indeed our own creative practice taking place alongside that activity. Perhaps the most interesting finding from the study, though, and the one that forms the first recommendation is just how prevalent and valuable even the smallest incidental physical activity was in the daily routine of the creatives we spoke with. In addition to the kitchen dancing mentioned above, we had discussion of "knitting", "washing up", "walk around the house", "load the washing machine" (SGSAH Event 2021). Our graduate students took this a stage further and spoke of the intrinsic link between the physical and the creative: "Musicians are often physically part of the process of making music – strumming, blowing, striking. And sculptors and artists can rarely create by being static" (ibid). For those creatives who are static – at a desk or similar – there is the option of "standing up as much as possible when writing" or to "sit on the floor or in different postures" (ibid). Even these seemingly small movements, at the light end of the intensity spectrum, contribute in the manner alluded to in Section Two by the WHO's 'Every Move Counts' campaign and ensures that the creative uses these 'activity breaks' to avoid sedentary behaviour. Our first recommendation, therefore, is to maximise these opportunities for short bouts of incidental physical activity; breaking up prolonged periods of sitting within the existing creative routine/day by consciously incorporating and optimising opportunities for light exercise even if undertaking moderate-vigorous exercise at other points in the day.

It is possible to develop from this recommendation, however, and to consider whether different physical activities might provide a function or fulfil a specific purpose at distinct points in the creative process. This is where the FITT principles and the spectrum of intensity becomes very useful. Linking back to the creatives discussed in Section One, we can note

that some of the writers use light and moderate exercise to consciously think about a work-in-progress and others embark on a vigorous run or a cycle in order to gain respite from the creative endeavour. Identifying which activity is most useful and when in the creative process or routine it should occur, therefore, is of vital importance. For instance, within the survey, the mean score against the answer of whether physical activity was important for the 'ability to edit, copy-edit and approach the publication cycle' was relatively low, but there were seven respondents out of thirty-five who scored it nine or ten. For those writers, therefore, physical activity at that moment in their creative process was vital even if that wasn't the case for others. Similarly, we gave the example of Haruki Murakami and the link between physical activity and resilience, but there were several responses to our study which disavowed this link and instead pointed to "drinking wine" or "reading and spending time with friends" (Pilot Study 2018) as ways of coping with rejection and disappointment. Within this there is a clear disparity between one creative utilising vigorous exercise for resilience and others engaging in sedentary behaviour for the same purpose. Both choices are valuable for those particular individuals and, indeed, potentially vital for maintaining wellbeing. There is, therefore, no one-size-fits-all template to incorporating physical activity into the creative routine and the discussion in the opening two sections is helpfully augmented here by mention of the benefits of companionship when undertaking exercise, with the word 'social' or 'socialising' recurring frequently in our study. One of the graduate students interviewed at the SGSAH Event noted that much of their physical activity routine was "intimately built in with friendship" (SGSAH Event 2021) and this seemed a particularly important aspect to integrate within this research given our collective experiences of the pandemic; with daily exercise often doubling as social-time and interactions, at times, limited to outdoor activities. The second recommendation from our study, therefore, is to be mindful of FITT principles in guiding which physical activity can be most beneficial at different stages of the creative process and for different outcomes (whether for creativity or general wellbeing). It is also important to consider whether greater benefit will be taken from a solo or group activity. As one respondent phrased it: "I choose solitude or company based on which kind of thinking or non-thinking I need to do" (Pilot Study 2018).

Finally, much of the research cited in this article centres on the positive impact of physical activity on creativity and, indeed, on the ways in which the creative process can be integrated within the physical activity routine and vice versa. Physical activity can therefore be incorporated within a creative routine as a key element rather than an addition. Our respondents commented, for example, that "walking refreshes my eyes", "what is a struggle when sitting at a desk, becomes easy when walking" and "sometimes I take a notebook outdoors – if I'm stuck for ideas, for instance, need a change of scenery" (ibid). In this frame, physical activity becomes a vital tool within the creatives' toolkit; allowing them to gain new perspective, providing respite, and ensuring that they have the momentum and motivation to continue on with their creative work. Such a key element of the creative routine shouldn't be confined to the margins of the day or tacked on as an afterthought but should, instead, be nurtured and embraced as integral to the process of producing creative work. The third and final recommendation of this paper, then, is that physical activity shouldn't be thought of as a distraction from, or as taking time away from, creative endeavour but should instead be seen as time spent productively in nurturing creativity.

CONCLUSION

Through the publication of this paper and in forwarding the recommendations in Section Three, we hope to propose a template of a physically-active creative which is not necessarily prescriptive or directive but, instead, which allows for fluid incorporation of a range of physical activity practice into an existing creative routine or process. Within Sections One and Two there are specific type of activities and intensities of exercise discussed, but it is not our intention to argue for an adherence to a particular frequency, intensity, type or time (FITT). Rather, those principles help to guide the physical activity routine and to develop understanding of the ways in which physical activity can be harnessed as a benefit to creativity with reference back to the qualitative and quantitative data gathered from both our 2018 Pilot Study and our 2021 SGSAH Event. Our recommendations in summary: even short bouts of daily incidental physical activity are of benefit; FITT principles can be useful in guiding which activity is useful for different creative stages and outcomes; and physical activity should be thought of as part of creative routine rather than separate from it.

The research brings together two academics from very different disciplinary fields, in Creative Writing and Sport and Physical Activity, and begins to draw connections and posit recommendations based on our collected data and ancillary research, however we are aware that the interdisciplinary nature of the argument could potentially produce faultlines and inconsistencies. There are certainly myriad examples of creative thought within a Physical Activity and Sport context, as gestured to within Section Two, and a next step for this research might be to explore the ways in which creative writing or the creative arts could be of use in augmenting or developing sporting performance, resilience and wellbeing. As a research team, we would also like to engage in a rigorous further study that allows us to draw nuance and definition into the type and intensity of activity which might be useful at different stages in the creative process.

Most of all, though, we would be keen to hear from creatives and academics who have tried to incorporate physical activity into their creative process and routine or whose thinking, in regard to this, has altered or developed as a result of reading this paper. Please do get in touch if the article has struck a chord or you would like to discuss further.

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The WRITE Model
An Interdisciplinary Tool for Research and Practice in Creative Writing and Wellbeing

Megan C. Hayes

ABSTRACT

In this paper I outline a grounded theory of psychological wellbeing in creative writing. Building from this theory, I offer an interdisciplinary tool for facilitators and educators in the broad field of writing and wellbeing: The WRITE Model. In doing so, I address a paucity of psychological studies into the wellbeing-promoting processes inherent to creative writing, beyond the now well-trodden paradigm known as expressive writing. Following a number of inductive qualitative interviews with creative writers (n = 14), I defined four conceptual categories: creative writing as (1) Owning experience, (2) Valuing the self, (3) Sharing experience and (4) Transcending the self; the core category was Becoming more. My aim in the present article is to provide both a theoretical discussion of this data and to impart a practical framework for researchers, facilitators and educators. Therefore, the theoretical categories are rendered here as four applied processes, each contributing to a central core process. The four processes are: Working with and Regarding personal material, as well as Transmitting this material and Engaging beyond the self. Each of these processes, according to the theory, contributes to a core process of Identity constructing. Implications and limitations are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Expressive writing, creativity, creative writing, positive writing, positive humanities, positive psychology, well-being, grounded theory, qualitative research.

NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR

Although this is the first time this data has been presented in full, early conclusions from this study were shared in the following published chapter: Hayes, M. C. (2019) 'Worded Selves' in Çakırtaş, Ö (ed.) Literature and Psychology: Writing, Trauma and the Self. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

A fuller explication of The WRITE Model—aimed at facilitators and educators—is available as a PDF guide at: www.positivejournal.org/write.

Why do we writers write? What does writing offer the individual—beyond the allure of prizes and accolades? What compels us to pen a novel or memoir or poetry collection, when the reality of producing such artefacts is often laborious and (at least materially) thankless? Might it be that storying our experience is to humans what flowering is to the rose bush: innate, inevitable when conditions are right, and part of becoming who—and what—we are? This article will attempt to make a compelling case for this, detailing the results of a qualitative research study with fourteen practising writers—challenging the paucity of scientific research into creative writing interventions compared to the prominent expressive writing paradigm. While my contention here is not strictly brand new—i.e. that the practice of creative writing can contribute to psychological wellbeing—I take an inductive approach and aim to translate this varied and complex process into a practical tool for researchers, facilitators and educators. Drawing upon qualitative data in the form of interviews with practising writers, I propose a nascent framework for future research and practice: The WRITE Model. In order to explicate the key processes of this model, I utilise an analogy: the moulding of clay. Creative writing involves Working with the material (clay) of self and experience. A further phase lies in stepping back to Regard (or value) the material thus shaped. Next is the important phase of Transmitting, or sharing, of this depiction of self in order to be of some use to another. Finally, in thus sharing what is so deeply felt within oneself, one may experience a transcendent Engaging beyond self—a sense of intimacy and belonging within a wider cultural narrative. I will argue that each of these important and symbiotic processes feed into a core process: a forging and fortifying of one's sense of Identity in the world. I hope that this model will therefore assist "writer-researcher-facilitators" (Hayes and Nicholls 2020) in the field of writing and wellbeing as we strive to understand, in ever more nuanced ways, the work we do in our facilitation with others, as well as what happens for us, ourselves, when we write.

I attempt here to cross borders of the humanities and social sciences, emphasising the interdisciplinary potential of the WRITE model. In the first section I provide some context for the present study by reviewing the body of research literature in psychology known as expressive writing (Pennebaker 1997; 2018) including a discussion of the limitations of this paradigm. In particular I will address the dearth of nuanced psychological studies into the wellbeing-promoting processes of creative writing within the field of psychology. While I challenge any strict distinction between these two modes of writing—expressive and creative—and while my personal view is that writing is a process that crosses binaries of fact and fiction, or catharsis and artistic merit, I nevertheless utilise both terms here to differentiate Pennebaker's specific paradigm from writing that is imaginative, closely crafted and artistic. Where I use the term "writing", I am indicating a process that includes both expressive and creative elements in varying degrees. Following a review of the current literature, I share the results of my own qualitative investigation into psychological wellbeing in creative writing, outlining the grounded theory I derived from these results. Finally, I set out a nascent conceptual framework that may be applied in education and community settings: The WRITE Model, including a discussion of appropriate ethical boundaries and safeguarding issues in applying such a model. Overall, I argue that writing—in its many creative and reflective iterations—is a process of identity construction, captured in my core category: Becoming more. Psychological science has shown that expressive writing contributes to specific measures of wellbeing (e.g. mood, physical health and behavior), as reviewed below. The present study indicates that the practice of writing creatively may offer something over and above this: a tool in the formation of our very identities—and thus our wellbeing.

EXPRESSIVE WRITING, CREATIVE WRITING AND THE PURSUIT OF WELLBEING

The theory and practice of writing and wellbeing interventions has benefitted from—and indeed become rather dominated by—the growing body of research known as expressive writing. This is a specific mode of writing, in which the candid facts of one's deepest thoughts and feelings are expressed, typically linked to a trauma or challenge, for twenty minutes per day over a number of days (usually three to four). Expressive writing has many demonstrable physical and emotional benefits (Baikie and Wilhelm 2005; for a review see Frattaroli 2006), as well as proving "successful in changing important real-world behaviors" (Pennebaker 2004: 140). Several classic studies have evidenced that expressive writing results in fewer visits to physicians due to illness, and can positively affect immune-system functioning (Pennebaker and Beall 1986; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, and Glaser 1988). Researchers have also

demonstrated decreased depression scores in those diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) when writing in this way (Krpan et al. 2013). In another study, researchers linked writing expressively with faster reemployment for engineers following job loss (Spera, Buhrfeind, and Pennebaker 1994). Further studies demonstrate that expressive writing leads to increased grade-point averages amongst college students (Pennebaker and Francis 1996; Pennebaker, Colder, and Sharp 1990). Expressive writing has even been linked with increased stability of romantic relationships (Slatcher and Pennebaker 2006). Whilst these findings have proven quite remarkable, scientists have been conservative in exploring more diverse forms of writing—namely: creative writing. However, in recent years "positive writing" has emerged as a promising new avenue for writing research, including "resource-focussed" approaches (Reiter and Wilz 2016) alongside a growing body of literature demonstrating "a noteworthy general advantage of positive writing over expressive writing" (Toepfer et al. 2016: 124). Of interest here is that even these positively-focussed adaptations of expressive writing have largely adhered to the original format of writing feelings, thoughts, and emotions (Burton and King 2004), with little to no exploration of creative or imaginative renditions of one's experience. Nevertheless, these researchers have noted that the expressive writing paradigm has distinct limitations that may be addressed by continued adaptation and a broader investigation into other styles of writing. The present paper argues that this should include an investigation of the wellbeing-promoting effects of creative forms of writing, offering one such qualitative investigation to further this aim, and an extrapolated model for practice.

It is my proposal that the practice and processes inherent to creative writing may counter the known limitations of expressive writing. One limitation of the expressive writing paradigm is that many participants experience increase negative affect immediately following the intervention (Hockemeyer et al. 1999), as well as increased rumination (Yasinski, Hayes, and Laurenceau 2016). Researchers note that this "initial psychological angst resulting from writing may be too much for some people, especially those who are unsupported" (Mugerwa and Holden 2012: 662). These hazards are perhaps self-evident to any creative writing facilitator who has worked in community or education settings. Few of us in these settings would ask an emerging writer to pen, from scratch, their deepest thoughts and feelings about a traumatic experience. This would clearly be "too much" to ask of many (if not most) participants, as well as of ourselves. Indeed, these same facilitators will know the benefit of indirect, imaginative and creative forms of writing, perhaps about an object or the view from the window, which may offer no-less profound reflections upon the writer's lived experience. As creative writers, we can work with personal material in many sophisticated and nuanced ways, few of which require us to confess all on the page. Moreover, Pennebaker and colleagues have observed that EW "is not a panacea" and that "not everyone benefits from writing" (Niederhoffer and Pennebaker 2009: 630), which begs the question: might some individuals who would not benefit from the expressive writing paradigm benefit from a creative writing intervention? With this in mind, and with research now amassing into more positive ways of engaging with writing, the present study challenges the continued absence in the scientific literature of investigations into the wellbeing-promoting processes of creative writing. It is my suggestion that broader quantitative and qualitative investigations into more creative forms of writing would open fresh lines of inquiry within the field of writing and wellbeing—and continue to inform practice in this area.

EXPRESSIVE WRITING VERSUS CREATIVE WRITING: DIFFERENCES AND PARALLELS

I have thus far used the terms expressive writing and creative writing as representative of distinct processes. In this section I further draw out some of the specific differences between these two modes, as well as discuss evident overlaps and parallels. I acknowledge that it may be useful—particularly in the classroom or community setting—to conflate these two categories by dispensing with the adjectives to simply speak about "writing." Yet, for the purposes of differentiating the current scientific approach to writing and wellbeing with a broader, more imaginative approach, I will continue to utilise the two terms as distinct. Cheryl Moskowitz (1998) has argued that, "inherent in the process" of creative writing "is the power to transform, and make positive use of, some of life's most perplexing and painful issues." It is perhaps this making positive use of which so differentiates creative writing from the established expressive writing paradigm. Sophie Nicholls (2009: 174) has argued that creative writing may offer something "beyond" expressive writing; she contends that

the writer might gain an "initial release" akin to expressive writing, but will then typically engage in a further step, "to shape her material, learning to craft and redraft it, ultimately developing a new relationship with aspects of her self-experience ...fictionalizing or retelling the initially expressed material". It is this "further step" that may be the most important distinction between the two forms to be made in future research, but there are of course additional differences. Creative writing is inventive and imaginative writing (Kaufman and Kaufman 2009), drawing upon a wide range of approaches and techniques such as figurative language and character development. Expressive writing, on the other hand, involves factual reflective writing about one's thoughts and feelings surrounding a trauma. It is important to note, though, that while so-called "positive writing" interventions have a factual focus, a more imaginative style of writing appears to be encouraged here at times, with instructions such as: "Assuming you were to make a film about today, what would the viewer see if everything had gone exactly as you wished?" (Toepfer et al. 2016: 127). It is clear, then, the line between what we call creative writing and what we call expressive writing already blurs in the current scientific literature—suggesting that scientists may indeed see the benefit of imaginative forms of writing, even if they are not overtly labelling this "creative writing" in their research.

Of course, there are many further links between expressive and creative writing; perhaps the two processes might be best understood as existing on a spectrum given that it seems self-evident that expressive writing is, to some extent, creative, and creative writing necessarily expressive. The process of wording one's deepest thoughts and feelings as in the expressive writing paradigm—although ostensibly a factual, reflective exercise—will involve some level of imagery or metaphor, given that this is characteristic of human language (Johnson and Lakoff 2003) as well as, perhaps more often than not, the inclusion of a narrative or "plot" (Pennebaker and Seagal 1999). Both metaphor and plot are features of creative writing. Equally, crafting a fictional narrative will so often involve drawing upon what we know—with the literary arts providing, as has been suggested, a simulation of real life (Mar and Oatley 2008; Oatley 1999). As celebrated author Zadie Smith (2007) has shared: "When I write I am trying to express my way of being in the world... what you are left with is something approximating the truth of your own conception." Creative writing draws upon, shapes and re-shapes our feelings about the world on the page, even if we express this imaginatively, i.e. we avoid a candid "tell all" of our direct experiences of the world (as we are tasked with in expressive writing).

The parallels continue. Positive psychotherapy (PPT) incorporates writing in its "positive introduction" exercise whereby participants construct a "one page real-life story which called for the best in them" (Rashid 2015: 28). Elsewhere, writing a "life review" as an older person has demonstrable benefits for psychological wellbeing (Arkoff, Meredith, and Dubanoski 2004). Within the humanities, the therapeutic dimensions of fictionalising from autobiographical experience is evidenced and discussed in the seminal work of Celia Hunt (2008). These examples provide some rationale for a hybrid, process-oriented approach to creative and expressive writing, in which scientists and humanities scholars alike might recognise the creative nature of expressive writing, and the expressive nature of more creative forms of writing. The model I propose here is drawn from research with practising creative writers, but might equally apply to expressive and reflective forms of writing if we recognise each of these modes as differing shades of a single process: writing.

My proposal of a new working model for the theory and practice of writing and wellbeing is predicated upon two observations: 1) that the reigning scientific model of expressive writing has many evidenced limitations, and 2) that scholars in the humanities—by virtue of our interpretive discipline—tend to shy away from models as perhaps too simplistic or naïve, which rather stunts the field and leaves writing facilitators to "muddle through" when it comes to the question of wellbeing. If clear safeguards are not in place, this latter issue may have disastrous ethical implications, as observed by the scholar Carolyn Jess-Cooke (2017). Writing facilitators know that issues around wellbeing abound in the creative writing workshop, regardless of whether we pitch our activities in this context, or not; this is because participants invariably bring emotional "raw material" with them, often unexamined. Several scholars have noted this and have been proactive in calling for rigorous-yet-nuanced research in this area. Nicholls (2009) has challenged the limits of the paradigm of expressive by advocating for a "developmental creative writing." She proposes a move to a more qualitative approach in writing

research, one which might offer "richer and more detailed models" and move the literature "toward a greater understanding of writing and well-being" (2009: 178). Moreover, Hunt and Sampson have posited that a "conceptual framework" for creative writing in relation to wellbeing is needed, that will "eventually be rich enough to interpret what goes on in the practice and why" (1998: 206). It was my endeavour in the current study to progress this line of enquiry.

My interdisciplinary approach here is aligned with the so-called "narrative turn" of the humanities (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2007) and human sciences (Riessman 2008) that in the last several decades has generated much research into "the various ways in which narrative and narration give meaning to what we usually call the self" (Kerby 1991: 1). This has established increasing common ground between psychology and the humanities, warranting further quantitative and qualitative exploration into how the forming of creative narratives may impact psychological wellbeing, and supporting the timeliness of the present study. Researchers within positive psychology have argued for story as a way to promote a range of positive interventions (Tomasulo and Pawelski 2012). This sits within a wider, emerging field of the positive humanities, which aims to recognise, research and promote the function of the arts, culture and philosophy in psychological wellbeing (Pawelski 2015). Finally, there has been a notable shift in the field of psychology in recent years towards a more nuanced, less dichotomous conception of what we can consider "positive" in terms of human experience, resulting in a more holistic conception of our "flourishing" (Ivtzan et al. 2015; Gruber, Mauss, and Tamir 2011). This shift makes it all the more timely to develop a research-based model of writing and wellbeing, which recognises writing as a nuanced, holistic process that may contribute to the flourishing of the individual on multiple levels—emotional, behavioural and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

My aim in this study was to establish an inductive theory of psychological wellbeing in creative writing, grounded in the lived experience of practising writers. I therefore utilised Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) in my approach, as per Charmaz (2014), in order to identify some of the ways in which creative forms of writing might impact wellbeing. It was my hope that developing this theory would provide a robust conceptual framework for understanding creative writing and wellbeing to guide both practice and future empirical work in this area. The research question was: How does the practice of creative writing contribute to psychological wellbeing? While I drew from a number of sources in defining my terms, perhaps the most influential in my understanding of psychological wellbeing is the work of Carol Ryff (2014).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, which I transcribed to promote my immersion in the data. I conducted exploratory early interviews with four of the participants to help identify inductive lines of enquiry, resulting in a total of eighteen interviews with the participant sample (n = 14). After these first exploratory interviews, I requested that all fourteen participants keep a reflective journal over a ten-week period, observing their own creative writing practice. The reflective journals did not form part of the data corpus, but were rather employed as a private reflective tool and memory aid for participants to draw upon in their own way during the interviews that followed. The transcribed interviews formed the data corpus. Analysis resulted in a theory of psychological wellbeing in creative writing, comprised of four main categories and one core category. The CGT approach I employed is underscored by the assertion that these categories do not denote an extracted "truth" from the data but are, rather, informed interpretations of the data that have been co-constructed between myself as the researcher and each of these participants.

ETHICS

The Research Ethics Committee of Teesside University granted ethical approval for the study. Informed consent was obtained via distribution of consent forms to all participants, which were then completed and returned by email in place of written signatures so as to avoid participation in the study being limited by location. I complied with APA ethical standards in the treatment of participants. Participants and material have been disguised to assure anonymity.

PARTICIPANTS AND RECRUITMENT

The participant sample included published, unpublished and self-published creative writers of different genders, with a cross-cultural range of nationalities. Participant writing specialities

TABLE 1: ***Participant demographics***

Name	*Age*	*Gender*	*Nationality*	*Published/Unpublished/S-P*
Sally	*48*	*F*	*UK-Portugal*	*Unpublished*
Kamil	*23*	*M*	*US Virgin Islands*	*Unpublished*
Allison	*31*	*F*	*United States*	*Unpublished*
Terri	*48*	*F*	*United Kingdom*	*Unpublished*
Ezenwa	*30*	*M*	*Nigeria*	*Self-Published*
Daniela	*46*	*F*	*Australia*	*Published*
Layla	*48*	*F*	*United Kingdom*	*Published*
Ben	*39*	*M*	*UK-Canada*	*Published*
Isabel	*26*	*F*	*United Kingdom*	*Self-Published*
Marco	*26*	*M*	*Spain*	*Self-Published*
Eliana	*21*	*F*	*Brazil*	*Published*
Jenny	*39*	*F*	*UK-New Zealand*	*Unpublished*
Lisa	*66*	*F*	*Ireland*	*Self-Published*
Esther	*29*	*F*	*United Kingdom*	*Published*

included—yet was not limited to—writing for children, literary fiction, fantasy fiction, flash fiction and creative nonfiction. I created a pseudonym for each participant and any identifiable information was excluded from the interview transcripts. Participant demographics are shown in Table 1.

Participants were self-selected and recruitment took place on Facebook. I posted to several international writing groups, however uptake was predominantly by those in the United Kingdom. Participation in the study was not limited by age, gender, or nationality, though in line with informed consent all participants were over the age of 18.

INTERVIEWS

The interviews were semi-structured. As far as possible, I used open-ended and non-biased questions as prompts to guide discussion. I asked participants to describe their creative practice in general terms, as well as in relation to specific life domains such as their relationships or sense of self, if relevant. I conducted the majority of interviews via Skype, recording the audio only, with the exception of two in-person interviews that I recorded for transcription using the Quick Voice application.

ANALYSIS

The analytical process involved initial line-by-line coding of each early interview transcript, with a focus upon gerunds as proposed by Glaser (1978) in order to "help detect processes and stick to the data" (Charmaz 2014: 120), though I also noted general topics and themes where I felt it to be appropriate. I kept written research memos throughout this process as I identified the "most useful initial codes" (Charmaz 2014: 138), before employing CGT techniques of clustering and diagramming to form useful links that made sense of the data. I then completed a phase of focussed coding with subsequent interviews, and these focussed codes became early versions of the conceptual categories and sub-categories.

THEORETICAL SAMPLING

Charmaz notes that theoretical sampling should be used to "to elaborate and refine" categories (Charmaz 2014: 199). It is the stage at which the researcher, having so far remained in the background to allow for inductive categories, enters the foreground to substantiate these categories. In the present study, once early versions of the conceptual categories had been defined that were felt to be "as conceptual as possible—with abstract power, general reach, analytic direction and precise wording" (Charmaz 2014: 138)—I adapted the subsequent six interview schedules to address the emerging theory and gather experiences from the participants that might relate to these categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis resulted in the development of four main categories, these were creative writing as (1) Owning experience, (2) Valuing the self, (3) Sharing experience and (4) Transcending the self. Each main category was formed of several constituent subcategories (as seen in Table 2).

The subcategories are intentionally broad in scope, in the hope of integrating a complex range of concepts that arose in the data. For example, the subcategory Completing covers a broad array of participant experiences, from completing an individual piece of creative writing such as a novel, to completing any writing at all on a given day, to completing a sentence with what were thought to be the "right" words. In short, completion was a feeling that took many forms for these participants. For this reason, examples of concepts are provided to demonstrate that even a given subcategory contains what we might call sub-subcategories, or clusters of concepts that further diversify the subcategory. Prevalence of the main categories, subcategories and concepts can be seen in Table 2. The categories and sub-categories were felt to give an accurate picture of the common processes

Table 2: Prevalence of grounded theory categories and subcategories

Category	*Subcategory*	*Examples of concepts*
1. (n = 14) Owning experience in creative writing	*1.1. (n = 11) Capturing*	*(n = 5) Keeping and/or preserving for later use: "that emotion I could use later... say if I write a story" (Kamil)*
		(n = 8) Getting it out or getting it down: "if you've got an idea... it's kind of really satisfying to get it down" (Esther)
		(n = 5) Being interested and/or opening mind: "[I] see the world with an open mind... if you want to be creative... you need an open mind, to see different perspectives" (Marco)
		(n = 5) Re-living and/or remembering: "it's amazing, you know? It's like I'm reliving life again" (Daniela)
	1.2. (n = 13) Constructing	*(n = 11) Making and re-making: "I get excited because I'm taking these raw materials and sculpting them into something I can be proud of" (Allison)*
		(n = 4) Self as character: "you see yourself in the characters" (Isabel)
		(n = 5) Can't stop writing: "[A writer] can't stop writing" (Lisa)
	1.3. (n = 10) Completing	*(n = 6) Elation of getting it right and/or feeling of accomplishment: "That finishing, the completion, I think it's possible to become addicted to finishing books" (Ben)*
		(n = 6) Frustration when not completing: "if I can't write then I've not achieved anything from that day, and it feels like a wasted day" (Isabel)
2. (n = 13) Valuing the self in creative writing	*2.1. (n = 10) Validating self and experiences*	*(n = 8) Affirming existence: "you are affirming your right to be in the world" (Terri)*
		(n = 4) Feeling hope: "I see hope that one day that thing I'm writing about is gonna be for real" (Ezenwa)
	2.2. (n = 13) Becoming more oneself	*(n = 12) Defining self and/or being authentic self: "[If I didn't write] my life wouldn't be my life. It wouldn't feel like being myself... creative writing is some kind of freedom. It allows me to be myself" (Marco)*
		(n = 9) Fulfilling purpose and/or being poorer but happier: "I quit the big scary job... back to being poorer but happier in order to free up time to write" (Esther)
		(n = 6) Gaining self-awareness: "as I was crafting my main character... I was just having epiphanies about my own character that I did not know before" (Allison)
		(n = 7) Gaining sense of self-efficacy: "to put stories down on paper and having control of your characters I think helps you to get your world back under control" (Lisa)
		(n = 6) Getting better and/or increasing resilience: "I'm growing in my writing" (Sally)
3. (n = 13) Sharing experience in creative writing	*3.1. (n = 12) Communicating*	*(n = 5) Being known and/or being liked: "you want an end product, to be pleasing, you want someone to read it and maybe, you know, agree" (Esther)*
		(n = 10) Expressing self eloquently and accurately: "getting to know new and better ways to say things... better ways to communicate" (Ezenwa)
	3.2. (n = 11) Contributing	*(n = 6) Teaching others and/or transmitting emotions: "when you write about something and you transmit it to another person, this person can benefit from the knowledge that you are transmitting" (Marco)*
		(n = 8) Getting it 'out there': "I wanted to share that information and get it out there in the world" (Lisa)
	3.3. (n = 10) Connecting	*(n = 6) Connecting with reader: "when it works it's a – a lovely way of connecting with people" (Layla)*
		(n = 2) Connecting with other writers: "we all have the same goal, to share words with children" (Daniela)
		(n = 3) Connecting with character: "the whole process of writing a novel is just getting to know your characters" (Jenny)
		(n = 5) Connecting with emotions: "every emotion you can experience as a human being in life, you can experience that same emotion, in a very acute way, as a writer" (Ben)
4. (n = 13) Transcending the self in creative writing	*4.1. (n = 10) Exploring beyond*	*(n = 8) Getting into story: "I'm reading it on the screen as I'm writing it and I'll get swept up in the—in my own story." (Isabel)*
		(n = 4) Being free and/or without boundaries: "[Writing] really is the whole world without boundaries" (Sally)
	4.2. (n = 9) Losing self	*(n = 9) Feeling of absorption and/ or flow: "you're kind of oblivious to sort of everything else while you're... in the zone" (Esther)*
		(n = 4) Danger of obsessing: "a lot of times I'm obsessively working on something" (Allison)
	4.3. (n = 10) Becoming more than oneself	*(n = 5) Helping others: "I put something in the world that will help somebody else and it will live forever, even long after I'm gone" (Kamil)*
		(n = 8) Sense of common humanity: "to identify with something, somebody else... just the idea that you are not alone" (Eliana)
		(n = 7) Understanding self in context: "sharing those ideas with other people is just one more step to me figuring out who it is I am in connection with the world around me" (Allison)

depicted within the data set. It should be noted that many of the participant responses were composites of one or more category or subcategory, and that these were often described as simultaneously occurring processes, i.e. Capturing might be simultaneous with Contributing and Connecting as in Marco's response: "when you write about something and you transmit it to another person, this person can benefit from the knowledge that you are transmitting."

CORE CATEGORY

Analysis of the data corpus culminated in the refinement of one core category, described as the "central point" of a grounded theory, which "integrates all of that theory's various aspects" (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2008: 30). In this case, I drew my core category from a noteworthy in vivo code, Becoming more, based upon a poignant description by participant, Isabel, who noted:

> …because you're writing you are becoming more. It's not like splitting yourself so you are less, you are multiplying it, you're copying it so you are—however much you write, you are that much more than you were.

This core category was thought to encapsulate both creative writing as becoming more oneself (captured in the categories of Owning experience and Valuing the self, see below) and also becoming something more than oneself, or moving beyond the ego-of-one (captured by the categories of Sharing experience and Transcending the self). In this way, the core category captures the story of the data (see Figure 1 for a visual map of this story in full).

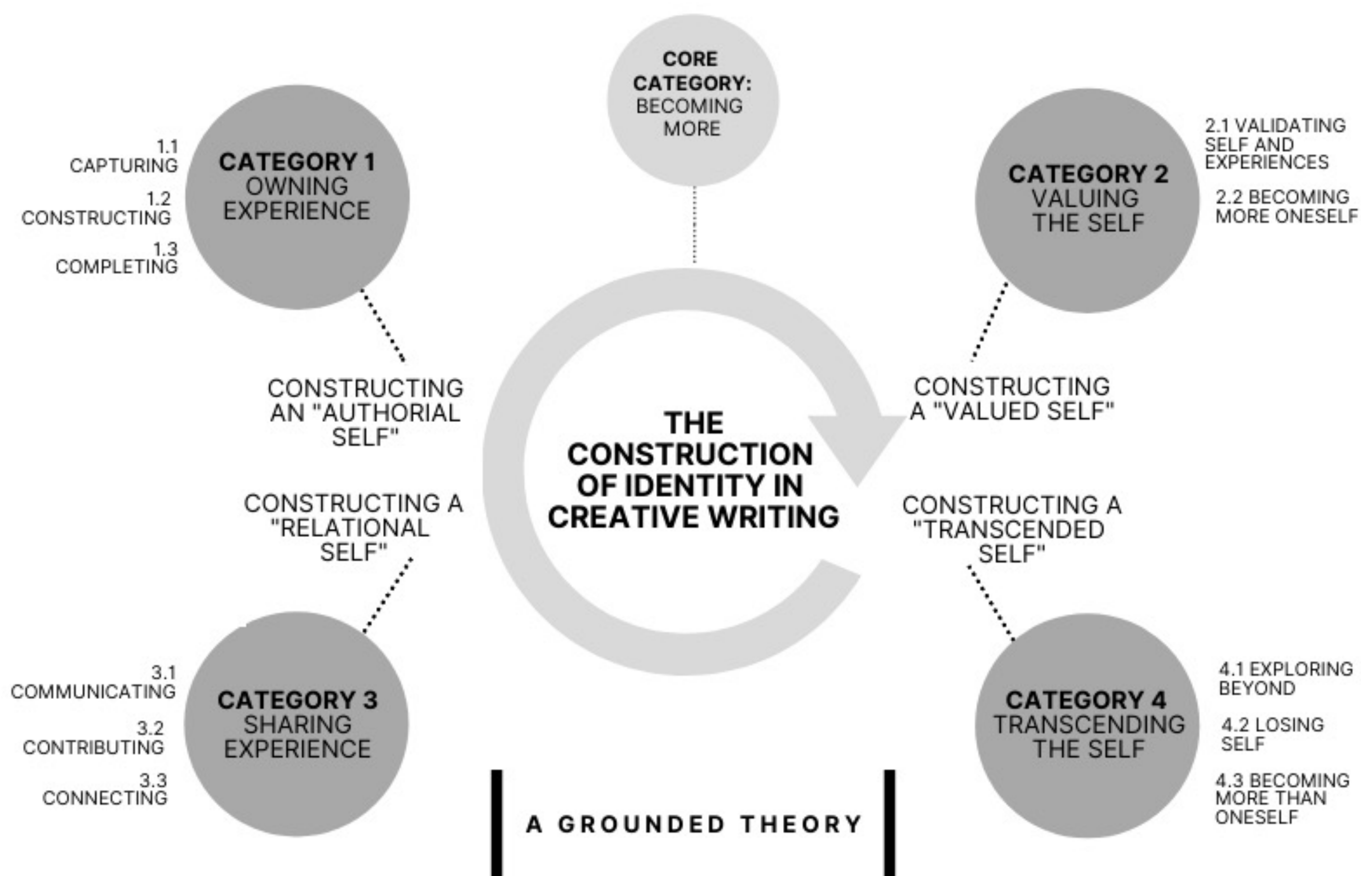


Figure 1: A Grounded Theory of Identity Construction in Creative Writing

CREATIVE WRITING AS OWNING EXPERIENCE (OR WORKING WITH)

In expressive writing, narrative has been shown to add coherence to otherwise bewildering life events (Danoff-Burg et al. 2010); however, the links between expressive writing and, more specifically, narrative identity theory (McAdams 2001; 2013) have been less well explicated. The results of the present study suggest a possible link between narrative identity theory and the practice of creative writing. It appears that creative writing may reinforce narrative continuity in one's experience—particularly those experiences that are troubling or disconcerting to the self—by reinforcing a sense of oneself as the author or at least editor of that experience. Indeed, Category 1. Owning experience can be understood as relating to McAdam's (2013) theory of the individual as autobiographical author, wherein writing creatively may be facilitative of narrative continuity. The "central problem" for the autobiographical author, McAdams argues, is self-continuity, or "how did the self of yesterday become the self of today, and how will that all lead to the anticipated self of tomorrow?" (2013: 274). Bamberg similarly describes "narrating as a navigation process" (2011: 18) and creative writing, if conceived of as narrating one's owned experience, appeared to assist participants in navigating the events of their lives. By keeping and remembering various experiences of self and world—giving them "solidity" (Ben) and significance in the act of writing them—these writers appeared to establish a sense of self-continuity perhaps because writing offers a keen sense of one's place in the temporality of life: creative writing is a way of "reliving life again" (Daniela) as well as offering a sense that one can "control what's going to happen next" (Kamil). Self-continuity was also evidenced in the way writers viewed themselves as "gatherers" (Eliana), collecting or Capturing experience as it happened to them: asserting the self as a kind of perpetual spectator or documentarian of lived experience. In the WRITE Model this process is described as Working with personal material (see Figure 2 below).

CREATIVE WRITING AS VALUING THE SELF (OR REGARDING)

Researchers have suggested self-affirmation as a feasible mechanism underlying the health benefits of expressive writing (Creswell et al. 2007). This supports the findings of the present study, and in particular my suggestion that an underlying function of creative writing in relation to psychological wellbeing is Valuing the self. Steele (1988: 289) describes self-affirmation as a way to "sustain a phenomenal experience of the self—that is self-concepts and images of the self, past, present and future—as having adaptive and moral adequacy, as being competent good, stable, integrated" and "capable of choice and control". Sherman (2013) argues that self-affirmation can "boost self-resources, broaden the perspective with which people view information and events in their lives, and lead to an uncoupling of the self and the threat" thereby "reducing the threat's impact in affecting the self" (2013: 834). Sherman attributes this to the writing process, arguing that "the small but potent act of writing about values can change diverse aspects of psychological experience over the long-term" (2013: 842). Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977), or the feeling of I can, which has been affiliated with positive psychology (Maddux 2009), also appeared evident in the present category of Valuing the self. Participants described writing as a way of "overcoming obstacles" (Marco) or difficult personal circumstances, thus increasing positive self-concept. One participant described how "wanting to put stories down on paper and having control of your characters... helps you to get your world back under control" (Lisa). Participants also described an impression that "you create yourself" (Marco) in creative writing, suggesting writing as a kind of proactive self-invention. Both self-affirmation and self-efficacy, therefore, appear to be allied processes in creative writing practice and worthy of further research. In the WRITE Model this process is rendered as Regarding one's own material.

CREATIVE WRITING AS SHARING EXPERIENCE (OR TRANSMITTING)

Writing, for the participants of the present study, appeared to offer a profound way of relating oneself to others, and thus of entering into a kind of "imaginal dialogue" (Hermans 2001: 255) with the world at large. Importantly, this was true even of writing they were yet to share, suggesting that having a reader in mind whilst writing may provoke a sense of dialogue, in keeping with research into the dialogic nature of human thought (Fernyhough 1996). Creative writing, therefore, may be understood alongside the psychological processes of relatedness (Ryan and Deci 1991), intimacy theory (Reis and Shaver 1988), and the human "need to belong" (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Ryan and Deci write that: "Human activity occurs within real or imagined social contexts... even

when others are not actually present, we may be aware of what they would like us to do or how they would like us to do it" (1991: 245). This is salient to the conceptual category of Sharing experience, where participants spoke of building an "emotional bridge with the reader" (Layla) or it being "gratifying to know ...somebody likes it" (Ben). Eliana spoke of her writing being "useful for somebody", Esther of making an "emotional connection with someone else through your writing" and Isabel said, "I can write and there are people out there reading that. I feel like I'm helping." Fulfilling the need to belong, which is "a fundamental human motivation" (Baumeister and Leary 1995: 497), may well be a further mechanism underlying psychological wellbeing in creative writing. In addition to offering a sense of relatedness and belonging, creative writing may also foster a sense of intimacy. Reis and Shaver highlight that the terms intimacy and intimate stem "from the Latin words intimus (innermost) and intimare (to make the innermost known)" (1988: 367)—the latter of these being, arguably, an appropriate definition for much creative writing, and particularly autobiography and memoir. Indeed, the category of creative writing as Sharing experience appears to be consistent with intimacy theory in that participants described writing as "something that really opens your self up" (Allison) that "someone else can read and it resonates with them" (Esther). As Cassidy (2001: 112) writes, intimacy "is to share the self: one's excitements, longings, fears and neediness." The participants in this study described writing as a sharing of the self, while also anticipating the needs of an imagined reader for whom their writing may have value. In the WRITE Model this complex process is rendered as Transmitting one's material.

CREATIVE WRITING AS TRANSCENDING THE SELF (OR ENGAGING BEYOND)

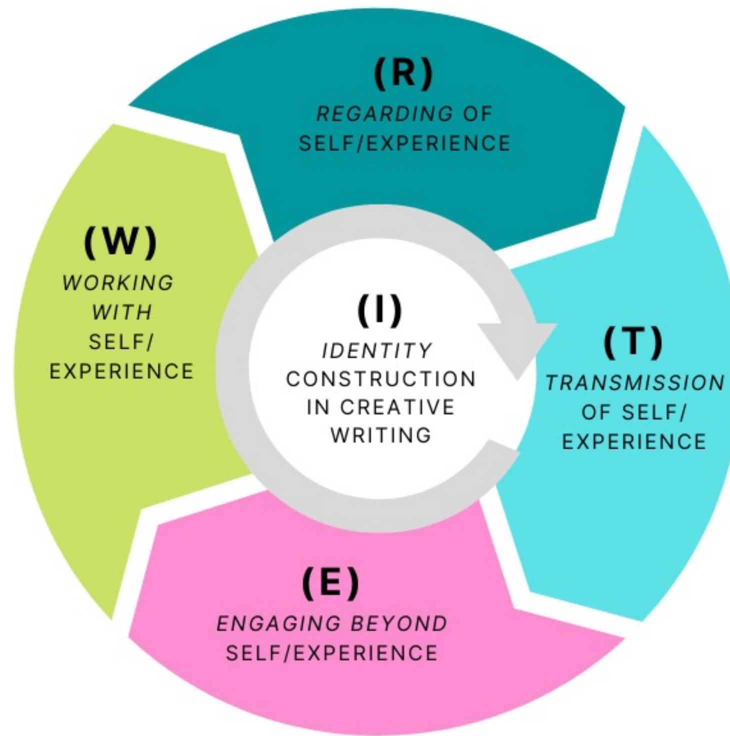
Writers in the present study described their creative writing as absorbing, consistent with characteristics of a "flow" state, as proposed by Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, which includes "intense and focussed concentration on the here and now" and "a loss of self-consciousness as action and awareness merge" (2003: 88–89). Lisa said: "I can just lose myself." In addition, creative writing appeared to afford the writers in the present study with, "a feeling of solidarity," locating them "within an evolving human project" which, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi argue, is central to flourishing (2003: 98). This is in line with vital engagement theory, which is "defined as an absorbing and meaningful relationship to the world" (Nakamura 2001: 5), and was further evidenced in a response by Eliana. She said:

> ...maybe someone else is out there and being shy or is having difficulty …maybe that person is going to find [my writing], is going to read and is going to think, "hey, I identify with that person." And if—to identify with something, somebody else, even if that person doesn't live in the same country as you, you think, yeah... just the idea that you are not alone...

We might also term this kind of absorbing, positive relationship with the world self-transcendence. Koltko-Rivera, drawing upon Maslow (1961), writes that a person at the level of self-transcendence "seeks to further a cause beyond the self" in order to "to experience a communion beyond the boundaries of the self" (2006: 303). Something akin to self-transcendence was evidenced by the participants of the present study, who described creative writing as a way to "make [oneself] useful to people" (Eliana) and of "feeling part of society" (Marco). Thus this element of the present study opposes the classic view of creative writing as a solitary act of simple "phantasing'" or day-dreaming, as per Freud (1908). Conversely, creative writing appears to engender a deep sense of connection with others, in line with Vygotsky (1971). A Vygotskian approach to the creative arts implies that "underpinning creativity is the conscious awareness of the interaction of one's own and others' subjective, emotional experiences" (Moran and John-Steiner 2003: 73). Evidence for this abounded in the present study. In the WRITE Model this process is described as Engaging beyond one's own material.

THE WRITE MODEL

In order for the grounded theory of this data to be of practical use, a dynamic model for application of these findings has been extrapolated (see Figure 2). A PDF guide for facilitators and researchers is available at positivejournal.org/write and I welcome contact regarding any applications of the model.



The purpose of this extrapolated model is to guide future research and practice in the area of writing and wellbeing, as well as stimulate wider public discourse around the benefits of creative writing. The model is best understood as an educational tool. It is foremost a guide for writing facilitators and participants to examine what may already be going on when they write. It is not offered as a prescribed therapeutic intervention, unless the facilitator is appropriately qualified and will apply the model within a pre-existing professional framework. Wherever this model is applied, safeguards and pedagogical strategies appropriate to age, context and learning stage should be in place. Where educators wish to utilise the model in the classroom, e.g. to design allied learning activities and exercises, every care should be taken to emphasise professional boundaries and signpost further support services should participants require them. Practical advice and guidance for safeguarding can be sought from professional bodies including NAWE (nawe.co.uk/membership/code-of-conduct) and The Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance (culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk).

Writers in the NAWE community are invited to reflect upon the extent to which this model is representative their own experience of writing, and the personal benefits of their practice beyond the intellectual feat or potential accolades. Furthermore, facilitators and educators are invited to consider this tool in relation to their learning and teaching practice with others—to observe the extent to which it aligns with their practical knowledge of this field. Where this does align, I hope that the model may provide some new markers for the future design and evaluation of our writing programmes. Finally, I hope that this tool inspires researchers and facilitators alike in the formation of further interdisciplinary research projects, community projects and the development of practical tools that will continue to cross—with ethical rigor—the borders of the humanities and social sciences.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The limitations and implications of this theory and model are several-fold, and the import of continued research and reflective practice in this area is clear. We must continue to avoid taking for granted anecdotal experience of "what works"—as this may land writing facilitators and their participants alike in difficulty. For example, creative writing that transforms personal experience into the third person—"fictionalised autobiography" as Hunt (2008) conceptualised it—is often considered a useful way to approach personal material, yet this self-distancing process may at times be harmful for participants, as was suggested by a recent study (Giovanetti et al. 2019). Further research into these processes is called for—both quantitative and qualitative. Yet even the most robust and well-executed qualitative research studies have inherent limitations as data from which we can draw generalisations, given that they rely on subjective first-person accounts. Naturally, this study and

resultant model are preliminary and I hope that future research into psychological wellbeing in creative writing will draw upon a wide range of data to further test and validate the categories and subcategories proposed. In addition, one clear limitation of the present study is the intrinsic motivation of these writers; for most, writing was their vocation or an aspired to vocation. This implies that some of the feel-good factors of their writing might be partially attributed to a sense of furthering their career ambitions, or to goal-achievement. A suggestion for future research would be for further experimental testing to establish these boundaries with different populations, control for them, and to further explicate to what extent writing creatively may serve a general population as an intervention for enhancing wellbeing. It should also be noted that the writers in this study were all motivated to share their work. This is a significant difference compared to expressive writing and its recent adaptation, positive writing—both of which are often kept private, or seen by the researchers only. Given that this participant sample considered sharing writing as inherently positive, but that this may be a concern for those new to creative writing, further investigation is required into the unique wellbeing outcomes of sharing writing, and the boundary conditions of this. Inhibition, for example, may or may not be a factor when sharing writing, and person-activity fit (Lyubomirsky and Layous 2013), would thus be of paramount importance in the design of any generalised creative writing intervention drawing upon the research presented here.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have described the role of creative writing processes in promoting diverse aspects of psychological wellbeing in a specific population of practising creative writers. The study suggests that creative writing may be a way, not only of divulging our traumas as in the expressive writing paradigm, but of Becoming more by shaping and sharing that material. This claim is supported by the four main categories of this grounded theory: creative writing as (1) Owning experience, (2) Valuing the self, (3) Sharing experience and (4) Transcending the self. These findings have been interpreted alongside a range of theory within positive psychology and psychology more broadly. It appears that through Owning experience (or Working with) self and world in a personally meaningful way in creative writing, writers reinforce the narrative continuity of their identities. Valuing the self (or Regarding) as a process of creative writing appears to correlate with theory of self-affirmation, and also suggests increased self-efficacy through writing creatively. Sharing experience (or Transmitting) through creative writing appears to satisfy a sense of relatedness, the need to belong, and intimacy. Finally, Transcending the self (or Engaging beyond) in creative writing corroborates previous theory of creativity as a form of flow, vital engagement and self-transcendence. These findings offer many novel avenues for research and practice—beyond the current body of knowledge centred around Pennebaker's expressive writing paradigm—towards an interdisciplinary understanding of the positive psychological aspects of more creative forms of writing. From this grounded theory, I have extrapolated a conceptual framework for future research and practice called The WRITE Model. I hope this framework will prove useful for writer-researcher-facilitators as we strive to champion the many benefits of creative writing from within an evidence-based, rigorous and ethical professional framework.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

Data in the form of interview transcripts can be made available on request. Please contact the corresponding author.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author declares that there are no competing interests, financial or non-financial, in the publication of this paper.

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Writing about and through objects in contemporary short fiction

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on an object-oriented approach to creative writing and relates object characters in short fiction to aspects of Martin Heidegger's tool analysis and Graham Harman's OOO: Object-Oriented Ontology. By briefly referring to certain contemporary short fiction examples, and through a longer exegetical approach to some of my own object-centred work, this article encourages short fiction writers and creative writing tutors to start seeing objects as potential creative stimuli for more object-centred texts, as tools which rebel against their users and against other objects, and as extensions towards form and language. By not exclusively modelling objects on humanness, but on qualities deriving from their own thingness as well – an object's expressive appearance, function and less explicit qualities – object characters are offered more space in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context.

KEYWORDS

Objects, creative writing, short fiction, experimental writing.

Investigating the possibilities of object animation in the context of short fiction becomes a fascinating way to reflect our contemporary world through creative writing, especially in post-Coronavirus times where objects, due to social distancing, have gained deeper connections to our lives. As short fiction writers and creative writing tutors, not only can we write about objects but we can also write through them, guided by their shape, function and less noticeable qualities. "Art is not the production of knowledge about things," Graham Harman, the founder of OOO: Object-Oriented Ontology, states. Art "creates new things-in-themselves" (2018: 105) and this is what this practice-based creative writing article intends to investigate further, by combining anthropomorphism (a common tool used for object animation) with less human-centred techniques.

In order to start shaping such an object-oriented approach to creative writing, I am drawing on aspects of Martin Heidegger's tool analysis (analyzed in Being and Time, original publication in 1927) and Harman's OOO (first published in Tool-Being in 2002), as I am interested in looking at how an object can become a tool to be used in more unusual ways in a short fiction – by withdrawing from common subject-object relations and mere functionality (the object solely defined by the way it is being used, for instance, or simply enhancing the depiction of a human character). Most importantly, I am interested in how an object's appearance or function can also be reflected in the form and language of a short fiction (through mixed-media hybridities appearing on the page, neologisms, the use of specific fonts and other textual-visual experimentations). The relatively recent short fiction anthology As Told by Things (first edition in 2018), for example, which includes short stories and flash fiction by several writers, has a clear aim to present stories from the perspective of objects. However, sometimes it feels like several of these objects are simply talking like human characters, without reflecting the complexity of their thingness onto language, something which an object-oriented approach to creative writing explores further.

Consequently, this article uses aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and Harman's OOO as the means to creatively shape less traditional versions of the non-human in short fiction, rather than present or encourage the inhuman or dehumanizing. Although the philosophy of the tool analysis has been connected to a variety of fields (e.g. Design, Architecture, Art, Politics, Technology), it has not been extensively linked to creative writing and object-related short fiction. And even if writers have been anthropomorphizing objects in their works for centuries, bringing to mind the it-narratives of the 18th century (animals and objects narrating their life stories) or the object-packed novels of Charles Dickens (e.g. the animation of furniture in Great Expectations), this article helps to contextualise writing practice further, by combining creative writing with philosophical concepts and by suggesting techniques which can trigger further research in the field of object animation. It is worth mentioning, at this point, that I am not going into detail in relation to Heidegger's and Harman's philosophy, since the aim of this article is to use parts of the investigated concepts to suggest an object-oriented creative writing methodology in the context of short fiction. I am also briefly referring to certain contemporary short fiction examples and, more extensively, to my own object-centred work, in order to project a mosaic of creative writing techniques which are not solely limited to an object-related content but to the impact of such focus on form and language as well. The short fiction examples by other writers which are presented, here, are used in relation to the investigated philosophical concepts rather than in relation to how objects are being used by creative writers in general or how they have been used over time.

Most short fiction writers approach objects thematically or in relation to a human character, by often transforming objects into human-like beings, while creative writing tutors tend to use objects as props for inspiration in creative writing workshops, or as characters which have their own (but still human-like) point of view and way of speech. However, as Francis Ponge, the French poet of the everyday object, strongly supports in the prose poem 'The Carnation': "The guarantee of the need for expression reside[s] in the object's habitual mutism. Both a guarantee of that need for expression and guarantee of the opposition to language, to standard expressions" (2008: 39). Similarly, Lydia Davis in the short fiction 'The Language of Things in the House' implies a need to approach lifeless characters through an object language which derives from the thingness of the objects themselves, e.g. from their form, sound and material: "the different language sounds are created by these objects in the following way: hard consonants are created by hard objects striking hard surfaces. Vowels are created with

hollow spaces, such as the inside of the butter tub" (2015: 222).

Although starting from a Formalist approach to art and literature, an object-centred approach to creative writing is not detached from the world outside a text and the interconnections that arise in the process. As Nicholas DiBenedetto states in the online article Francis Ponge: Things, Doodads, and Whatchamacallits: "It is through the examination of these unremarkable objects that he [Ponge] was able to find the remarkability in life, the interconnectedness of the objects that form the landscapes around people" (2016). Completely eliminating anthropomorphism would also be a paradox since, as Barbara Johnson suggests in Persons and Things: "to eliminate anthropomorphism would in essence be to eliminate language itself: what other species use it?" (2010: 32). However, as Steven Shaviro states in the essay 'Consequences of Panpsychism' in The Nonhuman Turn – expanding from a reference to the famous 1974 article by Thomas Nagel 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?' – "the bat's thinking is inaccessible to us; [so] we should not anthropomorphize the bat's experience by modelling it on our own" (2015:25). Even if a bat is a living creature, it still remains nonhuman, so the above idea can be applied to inanimate objects as well, since creative writers can choose not to exclusively model objects on their own experience. By negotiating anthropomorphism, therefore, and by combining it with an object's thingly qualities, creative writers can draw new paths in the way they animate objects in their works.

Starting from the core of Heidegger's tool analysis in Being and Time, which is part of a vast philosophical journey in the everydayness of human existence and the world of Dasein (being there, being in the world), Heidegger presents objects as tools to be used towards a specific human activity, as equipment and mostly as mediums which are invisible to us during this process of usability and service: "Entities only gain significance from their full context, since a knife is not the same thing in a kitchen, a theatrical drama or the hand of a criminal" (1962: 97). Heidegger considers objects as ready-to-hand towards a use-related activity and unready-to-hand when they seem to resist, when they do not work properly. And when they are present-at-hand, removed from their practicality, they seem to withdraw, forcing us to gawk at them and to somehow try and make sense of them. It seems that we do not consciously notice an object unless something happens and this object/tool is no longer available for its conventional use, unless it rebels against its use/user by malfunctioning or breaking, thus inviting us to look at it more closely. Although Heidegger partly dismisses gawking in relation to objects: "the less we stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, . . . the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment" (1962: 98), choosing to look at objects more closely guides us towards the different ways these objects could be depicted once detached from their conventional uses in everyday life. A Heideggerian possibility towards a mysterious different use is also stressed by Jonathan Hale in the talk 'Coping without Noticing?: Buildings as Tool-Beings' (2013): "So, while the hammer I am wielding right now might not do the immediate job particularly well, once I have it in hand, so to speak, a whole series of other uses begin to become available." Through the tool analysis, therefore, Heidegger offers to objects certain limitations (by presenting them as equipment and by linking them to a human user) but also implies an object independence (when the object/tool resists or breaks, for instance). It could be argued, here, that Nicholson Baker's very short novel The Mezzanine (first published in 1988) also implies such an object empowerment through the broken object/tool, thematically at least, since the breaking of one of the protagonist's laces just before lunch break (following the other lace's breaking, the day before) becomes the catalyst of the narration: Howie, a young office worker, begins an extensive stream of consciousness filled with detailed descriptions of everyday objects, as well as memories and philosophical thoughts related to them.

Harman, through the weird realism of OOO, starting from Heidegger's tool analysis, expands such an object empowerment further by also focusing on an object-object interaction in a shared metaphorical world. In this world, objects have qualities detached from their relations with human beings and they are "liberated from common sense's somnambulant gaze" (Fisher 2008), while touching without touching (something which OOO calls a 'vicarious causation'). Harman considers such a silent power of objects, in 'Technology, Objects and Things in Heidegger,' a "withdrawn depth of being" (2010: 22) and this opens the way towards more radical object animations in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context, since an object character can also become "whatever cannot be reduced to either of the two basic kinds of knowledge: what something

is made of, and what it does" (2018: 257). As Meg Pokrass writes in the flash fiction 'The Difference' in the collection The Dog Looks Happy Upside Down (2016) there are "so many ways to be a tool" (55), so objects can become tools to be used differently and more independently in a creative writing context if we, as creative writers (and as human beings), follow Harman's thought and "stop being anxious about what an object means for us, the way in which it is supposedly constructed and constituted by our minds, and [rather] consider the object itself, alluring in its partial opacity" (Fisher 2008). Harman could be right by challenging Heidegger in 'The Future of Continental Realism: Heidegger's Fourfold' and by stating that "to 'withdraw' must mean to withdraw from all references not just from the explicit conscious awareness of humans" (2018), since such a holistic withdrawal could allow the creative writer to reinvent the object in focus and experiment with form and language further. Timothy Morton's An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry is an informative study belonging to OOO, which further emphasizes the endless possibilities of choosing to apply OOO on the creation of poetry, so why not on creative writing and short fiction? By focusing, among others, on the way objects interact and translate each other in OOO, it could be claimed that Morton's study also implies the need to challenge anthropomorphism as the sole technique to animate objects in our creative texts: "all entities whatsoever constantly translate other objects into their own terms. . . . My back maps out a small backpomorphic slice of this tree that I'm leaning on. The strings of the wind harp stringpomorphize the wind" (2012: 207).
Arguably, some guiding questions arise when a creative writer chooses to follow more object-oriented paths: Should we, as short fiction writers and tutors, encourage ourselves and our students to exclusively apply human qualities to objects, as it happens in most texts, or could these objects also magnify qualities they already have? Is what can animate and empower objects in more innovative ways something coming from within themselves, often hidden from us? "What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing in itself?" Heidegger asks in 'The Thing' in Poetry, Language, Thought (1975: 167). Consequently, creative writing, like any art, allows us to deconstruct and reconstruct an object in a variety of ways, whereas short fiction itself, as Mary Louise suggests in the essay 'The Short Story' in The New Short Story Theories, becomes the right space "to introduce new (and possibly stigmatized) subject matters into the literary arena" (May 1994: 104). As already mentioned, it is evident that in contemporary short fiction – excluding children's literature, which focuses on the animation of the lifeless more extensively – objects have been mostly used as enhancements of human characters and settings, as reflections of human feelings or as tools of fantasy, so maybe now is the time to encourage creative writers to allow objects to have more space in a creative text and, why not, to turn them into more widely used protagonists. Objects are immensely connected to our lives, nowadays, occupying more and more space in our societies (consumerism, social media), in our minds (through disorders like objectophilia: romantic and sexual attraction to inanimate objects) and in our technologies (mobile phones, gadgets, artificial intelligence), so opening up more space for the nonhuman in our texts becomes a form of reaction to contemporary reality. The cult classic 'The Real Doll' by A. M. Homes, for instance, included in the collection The Safety of Objects (first published in 1990), is a representative example of a short fiction which offers more space to the inanimate, with haunting implications. Homes presents a teenager's bizarre, and often disturbing, erotic relationship with his sister's Barbie doll. However, the animation of the object moves a step further: the doll talks back to the human character, in several moments in the text, even if its speech sounds solely human-like as if everything is in the boy's head.

Consequently, applying aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and Harman's OOO to a short fiction context could function in three ways: a) preserving an object character's tool-like identity in a short fiction and observing it, magnifying it, stretching it as far as possible, while reflecting characteristics of this use-related identity in form and language; b) starting to separate an object from its common use and from a human user/character and experimenting with new ways of rebellious existence; c) completely detaching objects from common sense and presenting a mysterious object-object interaction in a withdrawn metaphorical world.

Jose Saramago, for example, significantly empowers the object in the short fiction 'The Chair,' which is included in the collection The Lives of Things (originally published in Portuguese in 1978).
This work allegorically presents the departure of the Portuguese dictator Salazar in 1968, after the breaking of his deckchair and the brain haemorrhage that followed, and projects a detailed presentation of a subject-object protagonist through a narration

moving in and out of a chair's wood. The object protagonist in this text constantly hovers between life and death, skin and wood, man and chair: "The good leg and damaged leg of the chair have already slid forward, all sense of balance gone. The real fall is clearly imminent" (17). That leg appears both wooden and human, and even if Salazar is connected to it, a human character is never really the focus of the narration. The object is offered more agency and mirrors the human character's loss of control. The breaking/broken object, as in Heidegger's tool analysis, paradoxically becomes a powerful object which drastically affects the fate of the human character. Moreover, the cinematic techniques Saramago uses offer movement and expansion to the object in focus (through the use of rewind and close-up techniques) and give the impression of an object elasticity to the reader, as if the chair's material moves and stretches between the duality of inside and outside, softness and concreteness, rise and fall: "So let the chair go back to an upright position and recommence its fall . . . Behold Anobium, now in close up, with his coleopteran face, eaten away in its turn by the wind and the hot sun, which, as we all know, burn out the open galleries in the leg of the chair that has just broken" (8).

Aimee Bender's short fiction 'Quiet Please' in The Girl in the Flammable Skirt (first published in 1998) also becomes a useful example of contemporary short fiction to reflect aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and, especially, how a short fiction writer can present a silent but still powerful object. In contrast to Saramago's 'The Chair' which zooms into the object, Bender's 'Quiet Please' zooms out, but with a purpose. The silent couch character Bender presents withdraws from conventional use and domesticity. This becomes the beginning of new object use possibilities, even if the object is not animated as a concrete character with its own speech but mostly as a silent presence in the text which, nevertheless, moves the plot further on. The couch, which is located in the back room of a public library, keeps its traditional function as an object of relaxation but also extends it, by becoming a place of exaggerated sexuality. Shocked by her father's death, silently and suddenly sneaking into her life in the form of "a phone call from her weeping mother" (58), the librarian returns to work willing to transform the library's back room and the couch into a sexual hub: "It is quiet in the rest of the library. . . . She grips a pillow in her fists and he breathes behind her, hot air down her back" (57). Bender says nothing about the couch, its legs, shape, colour or size, thus strengthening the object through its actual invisibility, as if the couch is simply a tool destined for a specific use and activity, although, ironically, the reader feels that it is a lot more than that. When a secondary character, the muscleman, starts to lift the librarian (who is on the couch) in front of the library guests, a surreal act is created which facilitates the main character's final realization and possible acceptance of her father's death. Through the muscleman, the couch becomes more visible, gawked at, both librarian and couch now stand in front of the public rather than in the privacy of the back room: "Stand up he [the muscleman] says to her [the librarian] in a low voice, muffled from underneath the couch, stand up and I'll balance you, I can do it even if you're standing"(63). The couch, although initially invisible and passive, is offered a new form of existence. It is offered movement, indirect speech, as well as the ability to lead the human character towards an epiphany in relation to her father's death, by becoming the means through which the librarian reaches another allegorical object: the mural with the Fairies on the ceiling. Once high enough, thanks to the muscleman and the couch, the librarian draws "a big wide dancing smile" (63) to one of the fairies as if tragically enforcing happiness onto her own face: "[one of the fairies] clearly dancing against her will, dragged along with the circle, her mouth wide open and screaming" (64). It could be claimed, here, that Bender's 'Quiet Please' shows that a more minimalistic writerly approach towards objects, following the object invisibility Heidegger's tool analysis also describes, could still have a strong impact on the reader, since through the silence of the objects used the reader dives into the subconscious of the human character.

Moving to my own object-centred work – the result of a strong fascination I have always had with objects, since childhood – an object character's use in both conventional and unconventional ways, with the implication of an object-object interaction, is something I have explored in my re-edited short fiction 'Red, Blue, Green and Other Clothespins' (first version published in the Cypriot Greek dialect, oanagnostis.gr, summer 2018). In this short fiction, the clothespins in focus preserve and magnify their identity as objects to hang clothes with, as ready-to-hand tools used for a specific human activity: the drying of clothes. Returning to the way an object's common use can be reflected in form and language, I chose to present the routine function of

the clothespins not only verbally but also visually, through the image of syllables and letters hanging on the page like windblown clothes on a clothesline. This visuality became a form of language for these objects and, although reflecting anthropomorphism due to the actual use of human speech, also distanced itself from stereotypical speech through a deconstruction of the word 'clothespins' on the white page:

Clo Clo Clo? Sss Pin Clo Sss Pin? Sss
Clo Pin Clo
Clo Pin Clo
Pin The!

In order to enhance the empowerment and independence of these clothespins, I removed the presence of a human character in the text, like Saramago annihilates the power of a human character in 'The Chair.' In contrast to Heidegger's view of objects as equipment, I chose to turn them into more distinguishable individual characters and for this reason I experimented with their different colours and the way these colours could symbolically affect their language (for example, the red clothespin suffers from anger management issues, the blue one constantly has the blues, and so on). In other words, I destabilized Heidegger's idea that all objects/tools are part of a context in which they belong and reflect an "openness towards the world as a context or setting in which we can meaningfully deploy certain skills"(Kaufer and Chemero 2015: 62) and chose to offer more freedom to the objects in focus. Moreover, these fictional clothespins, even if they preserve their conventional function by comically embracing it through their rhythmical daily conversations: "Ah! What a lovely, dotted towel! It fearlessly wipes everything out," also rebel against their functional identity: "Stains? Life's too short to be spotless. Stain yourselves for a change, stain yourselves." In the last paragraph of the text, they also reflect the possibility of escaping from their use-related context and becoming something else, other existences, or other objects, as Harman's OOO also implies.

> [they are] dreaming that they have become leaves, the leaves of that Fig tree, that they are no longer clothespins, grumpy and plain, that they come from exotic Pin trees, that they occasionally live like birds, birds on strings, colourful, free, parrot-like, . . . that they are not stuck on clothes and clotheslines, that they are not squeezed in baskets, that they do not get burnt by Sun every day . . .

And following the principle of OOO that objects touch each other without touching ('vicarious causation'), these clothespins never directly touch each other but relate in invisible ways, through the visuals and object-object dialogue I used in this text, rather than through a tactile, anthropomorphic movement applied on the objects in focus: "For Harman, when objects make contact, they touch without touching. Objects do not touch each other directly. They relate indirectly while the radical alterity of each object remains intact, untouched" (Mickey 2016). Such an object-object interaction is nicely implied in Eva Marie Ginsburg's 'The Kettle,' a flash fiction included in the anthology Flash Fiction Forward, where a kettle ridiculed by a group of pots rebels not only against its user but also against other objects. The human character as a strong presence is absent in this text as well, as if these objects simply exist in their own object world: "And then there was the matter of its whistle, the way it screamed when it boiled and got louder and louder until the man came to turn it off – as though the kettle believed the man existed to serve it, and not the other way round" (2006: 167). Ginsburg's fictional objects touch without touching, while also affecting each other, in negative ways: "They [the pots] ridiculed it [the kettle] with rattles and bumps. . . . They scoffed and they tittered, and sometimes, next to it on the stove, they gleefully splattered the kettle with grease" (166-167). In an interview to Lucy Kimbell, Harman states: "My biggest objection to Heidegger is that he does not let objects do this [kick back] to each other as well. It's always a question for him of how objects kick back against humans," so it could be argued, here, that Ginsburg's flash fiction also projects the possibility of that object-object rebellious interaction echoed through OOO, where objects are not only sharing a metaphorical world but they also influence one another. Ginsburg's flash fiction marginalizes the presence of the human character in order to offer more space to objects as protagonists: the human character becomes more passive, almost inexistent, and the object more active. This switch of roles in the text is what makes these object characters credible enough to the reader, since the reader takes this object world for granted from the very beginning of the narration, without feeling the need to question how or why this object world works.

Returning to the kicking back identity of objects

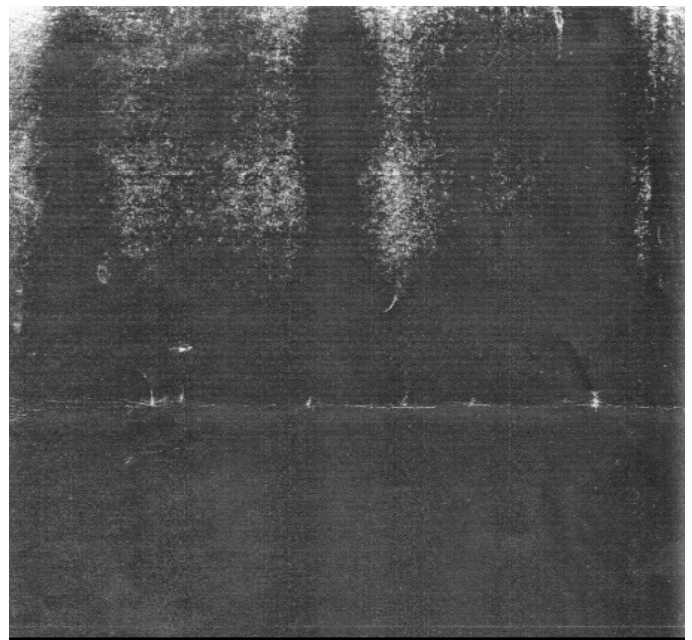
against their users, rather than against each other, my unpublished short fiction 'DELETE' appears to be a useful example to analyze further. The object protagonist in this work, a keyboard, remains the medium through which the human character, the writer, conventionally uses his laptop and writes but, at the same time, becomes an active voice of judgement towards a writer who seems to ignore the keyboard's presence. The reason the keyboard reacts against its user is its tendency to be noticed and not to be treated as an invisible tool. Its power as a short fiction protagonist becomes even more emphasized through its ability to 'feel' the intentions of the human character rather than simply his actions; its ability to not only experience a literal touch but also the intention of a touch: "**I know your feelings bbbetter than anyone, definitely better than the screen. I feel your iiiiintention, I see possibility in your shaky fingers, even if some words are never written**." The keyboard, unable to speak exactly as humans do, and ignored by its user, reveals its rebellious identity through typo mistakes, different fonts and repeated letters, as well as through an indirect reaction against fixed expressions of human language, for example, when it states "**maybe this will catch your finger**" rather than **"maybe this will catch your eye.**" When the keyboard types "**Write it through me**," it echoes Heidegger's idea of objects as invisible mediums of use but, at the same time, reveals this fictional object's tendency to be touched, to be looked at, to be felt. Something which is never fulfilled, as the symbolic 'death' of the object in the end (its destruction by its own user) also mirrors the death of inspiration. However, the keyboard protagonist's effort to type the word 'help' at the end of the text, despite its darkness, also implies something positive and empowering. It becomes laughter and, therefore, a moment of Phoenix-like regeneration for the object in focus: "The keyboard knew something was wrong. It tried to type the word 'help' many times. Its shocked buttons simply exhaled **he he.** It is believed, until this very day, that the mutilated to death keyboard was a brave one. It died laughing."

As Harman suggests in Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things, an object "is more than an appearance, because it is many different appearances at once to many different creatures. Beyond that, it is even more than all of these appearances put together because it might harbor qualities that no current observers are equipped to detect" (2005: 17). What 'DELETE' shows, therefore, is that a keyboard, when creatively explored in a short fiction, can obtain a form of existence which is not restricted to human perception or subject-object relations. Even if this keyboard protagonist still reflects anthropomorphic characteristics, by using language or gesture, it is allowed to transform language, it 'speaks' boldly, and in bold, and rebels against its common use, while also expressing a form of object sexuality: "**Can you rub my O button? They say that along with the Q they are the most erogenous buttons**." The keyboard also interacts with other objects in the text, e.g. the screen, affecting their **deathtiny** (a neologism from the word 'destiny' to ironically stress the fact that objects are lifeless): "The keyboard witnessed this from a distance, **I think we are next…** it typed on the screen. The screen turned black; it was used to accepting its fate. When it turned to white again, all spaces had disappeared. Scriptio Continua spread itself on all saved Word documents."

In one more short fiction, 'Sofia' (a revised version of this short fiction was published in Greek in In-betweens [Οι Ενδιάμεσοι], 2022), I chose to focus on a sofa and the impact this object could have on the life of a mother. This sofa character falls off a balcony and accidentally kills a young man. By doing that the object can no longer be seen as something simply connected to daily routine and relaxation, just like Bender's couch is no longer a regular couch in 'Quiet Please.' The broken and blood-stained sofa is not ready-to-hand but rather a tool detached from its practicality and, therefore, present-at-hand (following Heidegger's tool analysis terminology again), an object with new possibilities of use. And by being present-at-hand a process of defamiliarization begins. In the first version of this short fiction, this sofa character turns into a new object, a murderous object and thus, into a body which the victim's mother now habitually abuses but also talks to in order to exorcize the tragedy of her son's loss: "She would kick it on Mondays, and she would tear it on Tuesdays, and she would remove its sponges on Wednesday mornings, and she would stitch its cuts on Wednesday nights." The repetition of 'would' has been used here to show that this sofa-related routine has transformed into an obsession, an 'objession' to be exact, a term I like to use when describing the obsessions human characters have with objects (or vice versa). When the sofa actually speaks in this text (robotically, in italics and with hyphens alluding to fabric stitches) and says "Cursed---cursed---be---maker---of--

-heavy---lethal---sofas"– a sentence alluding to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and the monster's famous words "Cursed, cursed creator" (1992:132) – the object rebels both against its use and against its maker. Most importantly, though, it indirectly rebels against syntax and sentence structure: "Miss---body------miss---------back------------miss---------------television---------------------." The object's 'faulty' language springs out of its conventional use and origin but also leads the object to a new, partly autonomous, identity. An autonomy which becomes an introduction to how an object character can be animated further by a short fiction writer, not solely modelled on a human body or human language but also using qualities it already has within itself: "'I hope your mother never feels such pain' / Have---no---mother / 'I hope your maker never cries this much' / Just---result---of---mass---production."
The tendency towards an object's powerful withdrawal, which Heidegger implies through the tool analysis and which Harman's OOO expands further (by treating subjects and objects as equally important) is something I explored in the first version of one more short fiction, 'Model D235467' (a revised version of this short fiction was published in Greek in In-betweens [Οι Ενδιάμεσοι], 2022).
By using the technique of inversion again – making human characters more passive and object characters more active – I limited the presence of the human user/character to a visual photocopy of his face:

This way I presented a multi-functional office photocopier which kicks back and starts to work on its own, struggling to find a language to communicate the tragedy of the human character's suicide attempt. By photocopying faulty and ink-flooded A4 sheets, extended from the machine to the reader through visual writing, this photocopier protagonist tries to exorcize the trauma it has witnessed and invent its own object language.
It could be argued that this happens through what Maggie Ann Bowers calls a "vocabulary of 'otherness'"(2004: 65), a phrase used to comment on magical realism as a narrative mode for the marginalized, for the ones that are denied power. Objects, as a marginalized group in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context, can employ such a strange "vocabulary of 'otherness'" in order to be heard; an otherness springing out of an object's marginalization in a usually anthropocentric creative writing context, on the one hand, as well as an otherness in relation to the way an object can express itself differently from a human character in a creative text:

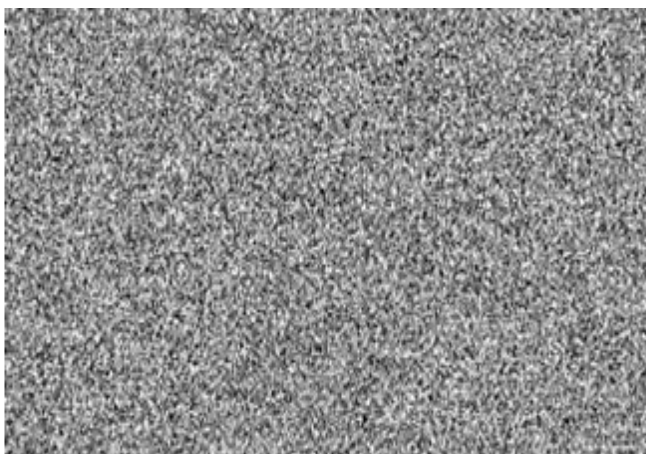


Real photocopy interrupting photocopier's interior monologue : www.texturefabrik.com

In this short fiction, the otherness of the object – once again, its difference from the way a human character would speak on the page – is expressed through visuals integrated in the narration, as the photocopy above shows. This seems to invite the reader to imagine what's hidden below the black ink; what's hidden inside the object. This is still, as Heidegger indicates in the tool analysis, an expression of serviceability, the photocopier is still a tool intended towards a repeated task in an office context but, now, the machine's function

and ink-flooded photocopies also reflect the dark and mysterious esotericism of the object in focus: “Why can’t they give me a break? Keep my unusual copies for a change; exhibit them high up on a wall where I can see them, in a nice frame. They are not faulty ones. Why do they always want to fix things? They are not faulty! They are…me.” The object protagonist’s direct speech also rebels against a photocopier’s copying nature, something which often becomes a mechanism of irony through an actual repetition in words: “Don’t worry, Hector. I won’t copy a word. You’ll still be the best employee of the month, with a 30% sales increase. Nobody will find out one morning you hit your head so hard on me, we almost broke into pieces. . . . Don’t worry, Hector. I won’t copy a word. I won’t copy a word. I won’t copy a word.” Following Harman’s reference to Jose Ortega and the comment that “every non-human object can also be called an ‘I’; in the sense of having a definite inwardness that can never fully be grasped” (2018: 70), I used a long first-person interior monologue, here, as a way to reveal not only the object’s use-related qualities but also a less explicit, more mysterious, identity.

Such a textual-visual depiction of an object’s otherness (and therefore, a form of object autonomy) occurs in other short fictions I have written, for example in my recently re-edited text ‘The Brief Happiness of a Charming Murder’ (first version published in Greek in Cauldron [Καζάνι], 2015) where a woman struggling with depression drowns her TV in the bathtub. This TV character (called Toshi by the narrator) initially belongs to a living room environment, just like most TVs, but also reflects the darkness of both subject and object, extended to the reader through an object language which combines TV screen images, humorous (often misspelt) captions and other textual-visual experimentations:



> You know…Toshi cried.
>
> Not in the way we humans cowardly cry, but in a surrealistically brave way, releasing small, round, noisy bubbles.

Toshi is animated through both words and images, since a TV’s common function somehow demands a certain amount of visuality integrated in the narration. The other, the marginalized, the commonly believed to be lifeless and passive, reacts and forms its own hybrid language in order to confess not only its own secrets but also the secrets of its owner. In this way Toshi becomes a more independent object character: “**Can you believe she tried to kill me? To drown me so cruelly as if I where…were human?**” Most importantly, though, this TV character combines anthropomorphism with characteristics of its own thingness. It cries like a human being but it cries through the visuality of its lost signal rather than through human-like tears.

Returning to how Harman’s OOO can inspire a short fiction writer to animate objects in more complex or less ordinary ways, I Want My Head Back (originally published in Greek, Mikrokyklos Publishing, 2016) is a helpful example to analyze further, especially in relation to a creative writing approach which intermixes human-like and thing-like qualities. This combination of very short texts presents an object metaphorical wasteland where no human is around: “A dusty seabed sailed in a swamp of rusty machine parts, a broken lamp composed music with a mouse, an old safe hosted in its guts the nest of a bird and towards the end of this short journey, a torn purse branded Miu Miu echoed meow meow.” In this shared object world, a mutilated Barbie doll, half-sunk in rubbish, rebels against its own Barbie context: “What I just said sounded deep. I know, totally out of my character.” This Heideggerian broken tool, by becoming completely detached from its practicality, becomes present-at-hand with new possibilities of existence, extending to both its mutilated body parts and the language of the text. The Barbie doll’s relationship with its scattered body parts, and with other objects, is not a tactile one. These lifeless existences never literally touch, as Harman’s OOO suggests, but still connect:

> I guess this coke can right next to me feels what I feel. Maybe that’s how that guttered washing machine next to my isolated, smiling head feels too. I wish extreme weather conditions could

> push my head in there and wash filth away, wash that permanent smile, releasing me from tormenting thoughts, thoughts I shouldn't have since, firstly, I no longer have a head and, secondly, I no longer have a head. I want my head back.

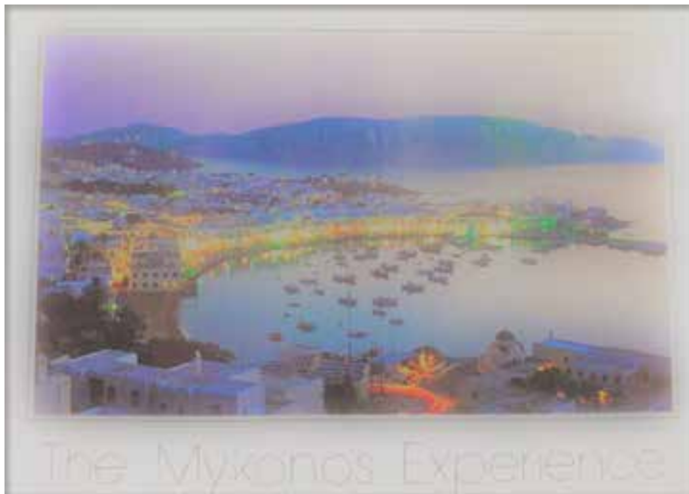
Although the anthropomorphism of a Barbie doll is, inevitably, part of a doll's identity, this object protagonist no longer has a head. Its human-like body is deconstructed and its thingness is also reflected in the language of the text: a superficial Barbie language (functioning as the doll's alter ego) ironically interrupts the doll's darkly philosophical monologue. This interruption by the doll's alter ego occurs through the use of frivolous Barbie-like slogans, presented to the reader through girly fonts: Glitters! / Ken, is THAT you? In I Want My Head Back, consequently, visual writing, this time through the use of specific typography/font, becomes one more technique to emphasize the contrast between a regular Barbie doll and a Barbie with existential depth, as well as the object (Font) within the object (Barbie doll). In the end of this text, another object, a bulldozer, deliberately not connected to a human user as if it functions on its own, squashes the objects of this wasteland, including all hands and legs of the Barbie doll: "Today, the bulldozer distances itself. Without arms, without legs, without a head, what's left is only the trunk. Luckily, the trunk of a body and the trunk of a tree is the same word. And when the trunk's left, a tree's still a tree." As Harman suggests in Towards Speculative Realism "objects contest each other, seduce each other, empower or annihilate each other . . . it is possible that gravel and tar, cloth and magnesium wage war against one another, compress one another into submission, command respect from one another" (2010: 21). Moving a step further, objects not only co-exist or annihilate each other in I Want My Head Back but also objectify language itself. Even human feelings are explained through an object-oriented lens: "Lust is a pair of scissors. Love is a brush. Sorrow is waterproof red lipstick." So, maybe it is not a matter of whether an object prevails over a subject, not a matter of existential priority but rather, as Harman's OOO also echoes, a matter of equality between subjects and objects. When Harman asks us in Kimbell's interview to "look for the soul of the thing," this soul is not an eternal soul, or a soul which only belongs to humans, but a soul which could be both permanent and temporary: [barbie doll] "You're asking me how I can see without a head. Well, there's only one way left, with the eyes of the soul. What do you mean I have no soul?"

An extinguishing force of objects towards human characters, even towards each other, is something I also explored in my short fiction 'Electra' (first published in Litro, spring 2021), where a reading lamp with a black shade becomes a mirroring of contemporary terrorism: "Zze [the lamp] just needed to gather some more voltage. Zzer switch would do all the work. Zzer followers would cheer. All cables would transmit zzer act of sacrifice." While editing this short fiction, and in order to find less anthropomorphic ways to animate the object in focus, the pronoun 'she' was replaced by 'zze' (a pronoun which may bring to mind the gender-neutral pronoun 'ze' but which actually encloses the 'zz' sound of electricity). The lamp-terrorist in 'Electra' not only rebels against the world (and against commonly used pronouns) but also against zzer own mother, something which I used in the text as an allusion to the Neo-Freudian psychological syndrome Electra complex. This dark identity of the reading lamp was also reflected in the rebellious language spoken by the object, a repetitive visual mixture of light and darkness, reflecting the lamp's on-off function (included in the first draft of this short fiction but not in its published version):

The day will come
The day will come
Brothers and sisters
Brothers and sisters
Black Shade calling
Black Shade calling

And now approaching the end of the exegesis of some of my own object-centred work, 'Bat,' a recently re-edited short fiction, originally published in Greek (Cauldron [Καζάνι], 2015) becomes the right place to end things, as it partly enwraps what has been analyzed so far. In this short fiction, the object character once again escapes its conventional function and becomes a tool to be used differently, while the narration gradually annihilates the presence of the human character in the text. When the bat (object), through the technique of a footnote narration, turns into a bat (subject/mammal) and abandons the human character, a pun seems to be the only narratively available tool to try to break the human character's 'objession': "The bat, deep inside,

even deeper than wood itself, knows . . . it will never be able to fill that void inside him. So, without more hesitation, also facilitated by this short footnote, the bat temporarily turns itself into a bat and flies off the page." The actual ending, a later addition, visually presents a handwritten postcard from Mykonos island, sent to the human character by the bat. This detail expresses an extension of the bat's identity to language, by turning the postcard which is integrated in the text into a speaking mechanism for the up to this moment silent object. The reason this new ending was later added was to emphasize the object's autonomy, as its first version ended with the bat still attached to the hand and body of a human user/character. This new ending, through its exaggeration, frees the object by turning it into an anthropomorphized character but, once again, a character also animated through its own thingness. Even if this wooden bat escapes from the human character and the text (like a flying bat) and now 'writes' a postcard, the bat's expression is restricted to a non-flexible, wood-like language, a language full of clichéd opinions and disturbing stereotypes, thus also echoing the hardness of the object's material (wood). And following Harman's OOO again, maybe an object (postcard) translating another object (bat):



Dear Demosthenes,
Just a quick hello from crazy Mykonos, a land of contradictions! I know we haven't been in touch but, in a nutshell, I want you to know that I still care about you, no matter what. I have a dream. I'm planning to stay in Mykonos and be used as a boat paddle for the canoes of rich vacationers. My boss is an Irishman, he's ok, all Irish people are drunks and eat potatoes but my boss eats Greek salad all day, just like every Greek. At first glance, any feminine-looking man is gay here and real men are strong and do all the work. Anyway, we have all fallen on hard times, I hope you're well.

Take care! Greetings from the island!

Your B.

P.S: I met a former librarian the other day. She wanted to use me as an alternative exercise tool in her Pilates workshop. I kindly refused. All librarians are women who wear glasses, tie a high bun and have a frown on their face…

In conclusion, by drawing on aspects of Heidegger's tool analysis and Harman's OOO, this article has introduced an object-oriented approach to creative writing which aims to explore less conventional object animations in short fiction, both thematically and linguistically, and to encourage short fiction writers and creative writing tutors to experiment with objects more, by combining anthropomorphism with an object's own thingly qualities. Since this is not a philosophical article but part of a practice-based creative writing research which uses philosophical concepts to propose an object-centred approach to short fiction, it is important to acknowledge, at this point, that an object ontology as a philosophical truth is still being developed. Applying aspects of it on creative writing, therefore, still seems to demand the preservation of certain human-like qualities in order not to disengage, confuse or alienate the reader. In the New York Times article 'A Storyteller's Shoptalk' (1981), Raymond Carver states the following: "It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language." Arguably, expanding Carver's words a step further, the language devised for objects can also become extended and infused with linguistically and visually unusual details. "Humanity sat at the centre of philosophical thinking for too long" Ian Bogost, an OOO thinker, claims in the summary description of Alien Phenomenology (2012). Paraphrasing Bogost, such an object-oriented approach suggests that humanity sat, indeed, at the centre of creative writing for too long; a challenging statement which could act as a steppingstone towards more independent and more powerful object characters in contemporary short fiction. Something which could also inspire us to start seeing objects as new tools, while creatively expanding those moments when something lifeless affects our lives, not always in our own way, but also "in its own little way" (Davis 2015: 33).

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Brautigan's Sombrero Fallout
A Cathartic Case for Absurdism in Pedagogical Learning

Simon Read

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the use of absurdist techniques as cathartic process in pedagogical environments, primarily contextualized by Richard Brautigan's novel, Sombrero Fallout (1976). The essay will analyse Brautigan's writing style with focus on juxtaposition, Dadaist concerns, and stream of consciousness effects on literary freedom. Dadaism, as a sub-category of absurdism, employs various literary techniques, such as the cut-up method, stream of consciousness, and syllabic malleability and I present these techniques as viable for modern-day pedagogic use. It will analyse how utilization of these techniques can benefit Creative Writing students, with particular focus on autobiographical events as inspiration for creative output. The essay discusses authorial history to suggest absurdist writing techniques can function as a method for students, acting as a conduit to cathartic introspection in practice and in reasoning complex thoughts and feelings.

KEYWORDS

Absurd, absurdism in pedagogy, autobiographical writing, cathartic writing, Dada, Dadaism, literary freedom, pedagogical learning, Richard Brautigan, Sombrero Fallout

BACKGROUND

This essay explores the ways absurdism can be used as a form of cathartic learning for English and Creative Writing students through literary discourse. I aim to highlight the continued importance of absurdism and the ways students can develop their writing craft by utilizing absurdist techniques. This will be presented using the literary works of absurdist counterculture writer, Richard Brautigan, with a primary focus on their novella Sombrero Fallout (2012 [1976]) contextualizing the use of absurdist techniques to exercise socio-political fallacies and how this can be used as a therapeutic means of expression in pedagogical learning.

Earlier this year, I was provided the opportunity to teach Brautigan's poem All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace, to undergraduate students as part of my formal pedagogical training. I have always admired, and been inspired by, the various works of Brautigan and, equally, fascinated by his life story and place within the 1960s and '70s counterculture arts scene. As a practitioner of absurdist literature before I even knew what absurdism was, I was thrilled to discover Brautigan's writing nearly a decade ago and have immersed myself in absurdist fiction, from Dadaist texts to online neo-dadaism, finding comfort in the fact the world has always been a strange and nonsensical experience. Absurdism is often considered to lack academic value, but this essay aims to dispel such beliefs, situating the absurd praxis in the pedagogical frame.

A point I found interesting in my teaching of All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace was how many students noted the duality of meaning in the words, questioning whether they were for or against the, at the time, developing technological world. My doctoral research focuses on the study of Dadaist lexical consideration, questioning the meaning and value of words themselves as a vehicle for illuminating the 'madness of the age,' (Gasiorek 2015: 334) surrounding the socio-political and economic climate of the First World War. Discussion among the students about the meaning of words in Brautigan's poem was interesting as they found value in the ambiguities, enabling them to find new avenues to create. From this, I began to think about ways absurdism can form a relevant pathway for creative writing practitioners to concerns they hold about the socio-political climate.

Absurdism as therapy can be held as a cathartic mode of expression, exhibiting deep unconscious thoughts through stream of consciousness writing or the Dadaist technique of cutting words from newspaper articles and re-arranging them at random to present their aversion to pro-war propaganda in the press – the same words, rearranged, were meaningless, and this was their artistic means of expressing opinions on of lexical value. We can utilize other expressive techniques to form an understanding of our conscious and unconscious states, cultivating enhanced personal reflection on confusing, or complicated, matters. In thinking about expressive writing, Catana Brown et al (2019) state this "may include the use of free writing and flow writing, stream of consciousness, journal writing, open dialogue and expressive creative writing," (Brown et al: 352) complimenting absurdist techniques with Freudian dream-like expression.

AGENT OF CHAOS

The internet is an agent of chaos. It simultaneously brings an immense information base to learn from, but it also creates civil division. When humans first discovered how to make fire, it brought warmth and cooked food, but also intentional injury and death. The internet and fire are examples of discoveries or inventions which have caused concern in the public conscious when introduced to periods of unprepared society. In All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace, Brautigan allows the reader to question whether this was fear of technological advancement during the Cold War or an embracing message of hope of this technology setting humanity free from labour, able to pursue more soulful endeavours. The technology was an agent of chaos, an unknown.

Brautigan's Sombrero Fallout tells the story of an ice-cold black sombrero that falls from the sky and lands in front of the mayor, their aide, and an unemployed person, immediately causing division. Chaos ensues as crowds gather, arguing over how to approach the situation. The arguing leads to a riot, the riot leads to failed police involvement, the failed police involvement leads to military involvement, and so on, all while the sombrero sits untouched amongst the flaming wreckage. The sombrero, with all its unknowns, is an agent of chaos.

Sombrero Fallout taught me much about what is possible in fiction writing. Brautigan highlights dismay at disproportionately actioned scenarios witnessed every day, a cautionary story of mob

mentality reaction to complex issues. The complexity of the unknown is evident in the sombrero in Brautigan's story. The mayor attempts to dialectically reason a solution with their aide; however, the aide and the unemployed person disagree over who will pick up the sombrero with the aide believing it will bolster their political dreams and the unemployed person believing the mayor will reward them with a job. The situation is unknown because it was unprecedented to everybody in the story. The sombrero has created a chaotic scene with its presence, and everybody disagrees on how to proceed until the arguments devolve into nonsensical ramblings such as the mayor repeatedly yelling the licence plate number of a car he once owned. This devaluing of words and language is a Dadaist technique continued by Absurdist writers into the 60s and 70s counterculture used to convey empty gestures, a lack of answers, or deficiency in logical reasoning. It is in this nonsense we make sense of the nonsensical.

Rossen Ventzislavov (2014), writing on the topic of nonsense lyrics in music, notes syllabic nonsense, "usually defined as nonsense syllables or nonlexical vocables," (Ventzislavov: 510) as a possible subversion or short-sightedness, rather than a form of artistic anarchy. Ventzislavov sites Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da by The Beatles and the "la la la la la la la la" lyric in Kylie Minogue's Can't Get You out of My Head as examples of meaningless syllabic nonsense. (Ventzislavov: 510) This is certainly true of Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da with the titular lyric expressing meaningless events, imploring the listener not to dwell on mishaps. The lyric in Minogue's song could be considered a reflection on the madness caused by love, with love itself to be considered an agent of chaos.

The lyrics in Ventzislavov's examples are comparable to Hugo Ball's Dadaist nonsense poem 'Karawane', juxtaposed from various existing languages, 'for instance "jolifanto", alluding to the French for baby elephant and the "Men" of "goramen" to English, onomatopoeias such as "ba-umf" and "bung", and abstract sound clusters like "ssubudu", (Schaffner 2016: 124) creating a lexically abstract performance piece. Of course, Karawane was performed at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, so vocal and textual representations of this poem have variances in registry for the receiver. In typography, the words also do not need to follow form. They too can be presented in what could be considered an illogical manner with lines of poetry presented in various fonts, shapes, text sizes, alignments, and any other way a writer could summon from the unconscious. On writing the album Kid A (2000) Radiohead lead singer, Thom Yorke, devised the lyrics by drawing cut-up fragments of text from a top hat as a means of addressing severe writer's block (Bogost, et al 2014: 125) echoing the cut-up literary techniques used by Dada artists. Yorke, however, utilized this technique as a tool to assist the creative process in what was a difficult period for the band following the tour of their critically acclaimed album OK Computer (1997). Yorke was attempting to reason with his writer's block similarly to how dada artists' experimentations,

> "with randomness in the early part of the twentieth century can be seen as a response to the sterile functionality of rationality and empiricism wrought by the Industrial Age and as a deliberate reaction against World War I," (Bogost, et al 2014:125)

It can be reasoned the cut-up Dadaist technique was therapeutic for Yorke in assisting with the creation of lyrics and the nonsensical, or random, nature of the words, irrespective of arrangement, mirrored the uncertainty of this period in Radiohead's history. Sombrero Fallout also contains a subplot about an author in the throes of a creative block as he writes of the sombrero; his writing comprises the main story, leading readers to question whether the sombrero story is, in fact, a narrative expression of the turmoil associated with creative block.

The decline in coherent discourse amongst the panic in Sombrero Fallout provides a legitimate question to the value of words. Nobody has produced any good ideas for the situation, and everybody is arguing. The citizens begin to hurl insults, which devolves into gibberish about old licence plate numbers and, in its devolution, Brautigan cautions irrationality seen in emotionally heated arguments or decisions. The quotes in these chapters are designed to be chaotic and confusing and the mayor crying because his aide will not stop crying is a direct reference to Brautigan writing about emotionally charged discourse.

Evidence of linguistic experimentation such as syllabic malleability, nonsense writing, non-sequiturs, and cut-up techniques used to convey real-world frustrations is evident in the works of Brautigan. Absurdist dada techniques were wide-reaching and evident in works by, amongst others,

Flann O'Brien, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Kennedy Toole. Franz Kafka utilized syllabic malleability as the speech of Gregor Samsa deteriorates in The Metamorphosis (2017 [1915]). Although not considered part of the dada movement, The Metamorphosis was published at the genesis of the dada movement with the story itself a commentary on personal socio-economic value when paternal employment expectations cannot be met (Anderson 2009: 85), presenting further evidence of linguistic experimentation as a credible means of cathartic expression.

Brautigan is known for exhibiting a "poetic sense of the absurd, filtered through a keen sense of the tragedy of life," (Cogan 2011: 78) and it is the elements of tragedy that inform absurdist textual subversion, testing the boundaries of the real. By unlocking unconscious thoughts through techniques such as stream of consciousness writing, writers can discover true feelings about difficult topics. This is akin to Sigmund Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams (2015), where it is suggested the analysis of dreams can "reveal to us the genuine, significant source of the dream in the life of the day," (Freud: 136) and stream of consciousness writing can garner a similar result. Brautigan's narrative style is "about freeing language and fiction in general from the expectations of readers. Brautigan destroys the boundaries that are often set in place to both convey meaning and to allow the reader to follow the narrative," (Becker & Martin 2014: 105) and the combination of freedom and subversion helps Brautigan reason conflicting topics into narrative form. Sombrero Fallout begins with a writer "writing a scene, then ripping it up and throwing it in the trash. However, it takes on a life of its own, continuing without him," (Mills 2000: 17) reflecting Brautigan's rule-breaking narrative freedom in practice. Other counterculture writers of Brautigan's era often attempted to capture a utopian vision of America, but Brautigan wrote to subvert expectation, turning a figurative mirror toward global issues in his work (Becker & Martin 2014: 105), rendering the absurdities visible with analysis from the reader.

Reading Brautigan, and the texts of other such absurdist writers can be an enlightening experience. The freedom of form and language can open creative ideas for writers with a true embrace for the blankness of a page. Brautigan's free expression harboured an ability to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, to turn a dull scene into a magical one. There were no creative boundaries and reading Sombrero Fallout for the first time imbued me with the spirit of pure imagination, inspiring future creative endeavours. Absurdism, in "bending the boundaries of the established literary form," (MacFarlane 2007: 75) has an incredible power to creatively unlock the subconscious, exploring overwhelming sensations.

CATHARTIC USE

Stream of consciousness writing is often confused with automatic writing, so it is reasonable to make this distinction since automatic writing takes a spiritual form where the writer is unaware of the action of writing. Surrealists like André Breton, encouraged by Freud's dream theory, engaged in stream of consciousness techniques, leading to attempts at automatic writing as a literary method (Young 1983: 25), but stream of consciousness is a Dadaist cathartic means of exploring frustrations or confusion.

The cathartic elements of stream of consciousness writing can be seen in journaling. Journalising provides a method of externalizing thoughts, memories, and opinions. It can be a useful way to "work through issues caused by stress and trauma by creating distance to observe the problem more objectively," (Dodd 2020: 115) and this can even extract insights that may previously have lay dormant. The liberating act of journaling, abstracting from creative constraints like the writer in Sombrero Fallout and, by extension, Brautigan himself, can be beneficial for writers and non-writers alike since it can bring relief from the human condition. Dadaists would practice stream of consciousness, "where whatever comes to mind is written down, abandoning any concern about structure, grammar or punctuation," (Dodd 2020: 115) creating cathartic pieces of work focusing on the madness of the age.

Absurdist techniques can often produce results considered to be random. Although this may be true to an extent, I would suggest the better term would be visceral since, stemming from a place of legitimate concern, the creative output can often contain the rawest elements of the subconscious or deliberate acts of lexical or visual manipulation to highlight the absurdities of circumlocution. As Maxine Greene (1972) notes, both "Vonnegut and Brautigan explicitly satirize technology and abstraction in the name of kindness, concern, and love," (Green: 177) exemplifying the fact absurdist techniques can be

used as a valuable means of cathartic expression and not random works of diminished value. Writers like Brautigan expressed various concerns on both personal and external matters, rarely as a narrative jeremiad, but as an active means of reasoning thoughts.

Brautigan's absurdist texts often explore difficult ideas in the United States, such as views on abortion, violence in America, and the idea of national identity. Brautigan expresses the latter in The Hawkline Monster (1976 [1974]) where a duo of western gunmen find themselves in the state of Hawaii. They "have gone so far West that they are on the border of the East, and as a result they are disoriented and horrified at the dislocation," (Mills 2000: 12) and this could be an early attribution to Brautigan's fascination with Japan while, himself, being from the pacific northwest. Japanese themes are a continued motif throughout his work, from the 'Wilderness Haiku Alligator' in A Confederate General from Big Sur (1973 [1964]) to the Japanese cemetery in An Unfortunate Woman: A Journey (2001 [1994]). Brautigan lived in both Japan and the United States and married a Japanese native, Akiko Yoshimura, in 1977 (Giles 2018: 241). Sombrero Fallout contains the subtitle A Japanese Novel on account of the writer in the story being in love with a Japanese woman. The writer ponders "if there had ever been a Country and Western song written about loving a Japanese woman. He didn't think so," (Brautigan: 199) and in The Tokyo Montana Express (1980 [1979]) Brautigan refers to the chapters as stations between Tokyo and Montana, where he was spending his time between 1976 and 1978. Throughout his career, Brautigan reasoned with this cultural duality via the means of geographical poetic juxtaposition, like the Dadaist photomontage art of Hannah Höck. Brautigan experimented with the juxtaposition of west and east, with emphasis where "the stereotypical violent mobile American identity forms a faultline with the stereotypical still, composed, Japanese identity, sometimes in the same character," (Mills 2000: 15) and this same character can be said to be Brautigan himself, confronting ideas of his own identity.

USE IN PEDAGOGY

In my teaching and prior experience undertaking Autobiographical studies, absurdist techniques have proven valuable. From a teaching perspective, they can help students remember events and innermost feelings from their past. They can also help students reason with present feelings and future anxieties, providing a conduit from the brain to the page. The technique or techniques they use will depend on what they would like to portray in their writing. To discover which elements they would like to reason, experimentation with various techniques should be encouraged as they might find multiple entangled issues. Like Brautigan, they might find they want to integrate more than one concern into their creative work and juxtaposing them can enhance the feeling of absurdity in their writing.

Some students may be more open than others to share autobiographic events, particularly difficult stories. Anne S. Rasmussen (2010) notes the "relationship between Openness and rehearsal of autobiographical memories suggests that people who are open to explore their own inner experiences might use their memories more in everyday life than people who are less so," (Rasmussen: 775) and so this is where techniques like, for example, stream of consciousness may be beneficial. Stream of consciousness is advisable for use with closed students. It may help provoke memories and feelings, creating a transformative process. Indeed, those who are open with their feelings may not find stream of consciousness as useful as those who are not. Those who are open tend to use this for "identity-defining purposes, consistent with their enhanced intellectual, creative, and narrative abilities. They also experience their memories with a stronger sense of life story relevance," (Rasmussen; 785) but I would contend stream of consciousness writing to still be beneficial as a discovery tool for repressed emotions or feelings.

The cut-up technique used by Dadaists is a useful technique for those who are perhaps not as open about their personal lives, making it difficult to extract autobiographical creative writing from. Our past works in duality with how we inform the present and so this may cause unwillingness to, not only recall difficult events but to view these events in an absurdist manner. Indeed, some may find it trivializes their experiences. As an alternative, the cut-up technique could provide a means of indirect expression, for example, if a student were to use stream of consciousness or write consciously, about an issue from their past and then cut out words and phrases from their piece, before rearranging them. Taken further, if the words themselves were cut up, the resulting work could take the form of syllabic nonsense, akin to the poetry produced by Tzara and Ball. This could, in theory, produce interesting works

of autobiographic poetry, abstract and ambiguous enough for the student to be comfortable sharing.

Using the stream of consciousness technique "the subjective becomes a means of reapproaching fiction's obligation to explore and analyse collective and historical phenomena," (Wallace 2011: 234) and so the output is relative to the experiences of the writer. A case can be made for a lack of stability in a piece of writing using this method. Stream of consciousness does, at times, produce complete nonsense, but this nonsense is to be critically analysed by the practitioner to extract meaning. There will be times where no meaning is evident but, unlike with stimulated recall, stream of consciousness writing cultivates an environment where deeper truths can be found (Yong & Ng 2006: 103) and so this provides a suitable method for helping students find strengthened reflective practice through creative practice.

Australian poet, Les Murray, devised a three-point model of poetry, consisting of the conscious mind, the dreaming unconscious mind, and the body. Murray reasoned clarity of thought and technical skill, imaginative images to enhance the conscious thought, and conjuring metre and sound to please the reader's senses would be optimal (Roberts 2012: 153) and this also forms the all-encompassing and measured style of Brautigan. Brautigan's literary work – be it a poetry collection or narrative prose – could be considered as devised with a focused lens on internal and external struggles, executed with adept technical ability and dream-like poetic imagery and sounds. Combined, Murray's three-point model draws many comparisons to absurdist methodology. Joanna Gavins (2013) explains a framework called Text World Theory where writers formulate mental representations of any language they encounter, be it textual or verbal, factoring the way they perceive the language. Gavins suggests these "mental representations have the potential to become as richly detailed and immersive as the real-world stimulations from which they spring," (Gavins: 6) and, with further development, more representations, or worlds, can be created. This is comparable to Murray's model of poetry as it combines thought, imagination, and sound. This is a subjective experience due to the perception of language and one practitioner, hearing or reading the same language as another, could lead to widely differing results, echoing the dada questioning of lexical value.

Donald Davidson (1982) notes objectivity to be "the consequence of another sort of triangulation, one that requires two creatures," (Davidson: 327) and his theory suggests, when two creatures interact with an object, their concept of the situation forms in their language, the baseline of their shared concept of truth. As such, this concept "makes sense of the claim they have beliefs, that they are able to assign objects a place in the public world," (Davidson: 327) and so Davidson concludes rationality to be a social trait since it is exclusive to communicators. This links to Murray's three-point model since, if complex issues can be communicated through dream-like imagery in written language then, as communicators, we can therefore use this as a tool for rationalisation, even with the self. This is evident in the writing of Norman Mailer. Andrew Wilson (2008) notes Mailer's imagination became fixed on attempting to define the Vietnam war, channelling his energies toward stream of consciousness writing as a cathartic measure (Wilson: 94) and so, with the triangulation of consciousnesses (of the event), the unconsciousness (of imagination), and communication (his writing) he was able to communicate his protests via a "release of internalised energies," (Wilson: 94) which I propose would also be useful for students.

Absurd praxis has been used as a means of drawing the true self from practitioners in the form of symbolic-experimental therapy. Diane Gehart (2016) notes, in this form, absurdity is used "to perturb the system in a compassionate and caring way," (Gehart: 175) sometimes in the form of brutal truth, executed in the spirit of caring, somewhat similar to an intervention, but extreme to an absurd degree. Even though this could draw legitimate and powerful emotions from the recipient of personal truth, it perhaps would not prove such a suitable method in an involuntary creative learning environment. Therapy of the absurd often, however, employs "humor, playfulness, and silliness," (Gehart: 175) as a disarming tool for discussion of serious concerns, allowing therapists to "invite themselves as well as their clients into a more resourceful position in relation to the problem," (Gehart: 175) and this, I would suggest, is a more realistic and measured approach to coaxing creative inspiration from students since it would cause less upset, particularly in a non-voluntary group. Paradoxical techniques are also used in therapy. This consists of a therapist taking a symptom and exaggerating it to such a degree the client can see how absurd

their concerns are (Gehart: 175) and, if we replace therapist with writer, we are faced with exactly what absurdist writers do. They therapize themselves through creative expression, reasoning with their irrationalities and legitimate concerns.

Absurdism, and partially dada, is a proven disrupter. By disrupting the self, disrupting order and meaning, it has allowed writers to, not only disrupt their own beliefs and understanding of the world but has allowed them a means of issuing a direct challenge to their concerns. It can do this for students too, providing a cathartic approach to reasoning with their autobiographic events and confronting concerns or confusions in the present.

CONCLUSION

The emphasis on absurdism in creative writing pedagogy is crucial as it emphasizes the procedural exchange of ideas which require an alternative gaze. Subjective communication on the human condition is paramount in cultivating a deeper understanding of interpersonal and introspective relationships with the wider world. Through language dissolution, juxtapositions, logical fallacy, cyclical dialogue, the disruption of linear narrative, non-sequiturs, and, in the case of Sombrero Fallout extreme escalation, absurdism provides an essential tool which, unlike the technology in All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace, has proven able to set us free.

Absurdist techniques can, and should, be utilized in pedagogy for their flexibility and variety, matching suitable techniques to individuals who might benefit from practicing them.

I have found absurd techniques useful in my autobiographical writing. In formulating ideas, unearthing unprocessed emotions or views, and reasoning my worldly concerns, these techniques have had a positive impact on my writing practice, and I believe can be helpful for others too. Dadaists were attempting to cure the madness of their time. These sentiments are echoed today and so the absurd is as necessary now as it ever was.

Brautigan's absurdist texts emphasize juxtaposition as resolution. Brautigan was able to write novels that standalone as stories, but with a wider analysis of the author, personal conflicts of identity and of the writing process itself are witnessed within the texts. Absurdism remains relevant today in placing personal and external troubles under its microscope for scrutiny. Its use in autobiographical modules is evident, but I believe it to also be useful in all other sub-sections of creative writing with its ability to remedy writer's block to its role as a disrupter. Absurdism encourages us to be free from form and frame, propelling writers toward ambitious literary endeavours.

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