

***Bipolar Magpie: A 21st Century Embodied
Eco-Feminist Poetics***

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Eco-Feminist Poetics***

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Abstract

This mad-informed creative-critical thesis provides an alternate view of eco-poetry, focusing on my experiential knowledge of bipolar disorder and the influence this exerts on my hybrid writing about the environment, with eco-feminism at its core. Ancillary to the emergent critical discipline of mad studies, I introduce the bipolar magpie approach as a mad eco-feminist critical mode. I am seeking to communicate my observation of the changing climate/environment and the impact of mental illness on the body through the medium of hybrid works: journal/poem poetry and the critical analysis. This thesis utilises the writings of, amongst others: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Elizabeth Bishop, Anne Sexton, Charles Olson, Audre Lorde, Diane Di Prima, R D Laing, John Ashbery, C.D Wright, Selima Hill, Sophie Collins, Sally Barrett, through to Zoe Skoulding and Harriet Tarlo of the recent Radical Landscape Poetry movement. These poets inform a feminist, experimental, embodied, mad, hybrid eco-poetics. This is a poetics rooted in interrogating the very nature of current eco-poetry and landscape via my concept of the chronic illness inspired domestic as landscape, intersecting with themes of place and eco-feminism. My work also highlights the importance of the oft neglected flora and fauna of liminal, edgeland urban/suburban areas.

Preface

The research and poetry composition for this timely creative/critical thesis began in October 2015. This document a collection of eco-poetry focused on the gendered mentally ill body. This concept builds upon current feminist thought surrounding the body and eco-poetics, layering over this groundwork, my positionality as an eco-poet with bipolar; the action of manifesting an invisible illness in bodily sensations. The complimentary discourse on the unique eco-poetics informing the poetry, situates it within a historical, and prevailing panorama of plural poetic disciplines, including but not limited to; eco-feminism and poetry about mental illness. These properties mark this document as a significant contribution and unique in its field.

The hybrid text journal/poem form and the idiosyncratic punctuation used allow the poetic text itself to be affected by bipolar. These qualities diverge from my previously published work, this includes three full length collections¹²³, and a pamphlet⁴ while these works do contain some poems written for this project, thematically, and stylistically they are all an assemblage of concerns. There is no uniform sense of poetics, form or aesthetics uniting them. Seedlings can be derived therein, as the genesis for this project. There have always been elements of feminism, mental health, and the environment in my poetry. The impetus behind applying for the PhD was to embark upon a large body of work with one focus: mental health and the environment. Unrestricted by the concerns of marketability or the mores of performance poetry, under the tutelage of my esteemed supervisory team.

¹Percy, A. (2013) *Livid Among the Ghostings*. Salford: Flapjack Press.

² Percy, A. & R. Audra Smith (2016) *Lustful feminist killjoys*. Salford: Flapjack Press.

³ Percy, A. (2020) *Jumping Into a Waterfall*. Salford: Flapjack Press.

⁴ Percy (2016) *Follow the Stag and Learn to Fly*. Sheffield: Three Drops Press

This thesis attempts to allow itself to be informed, shaped, and enriched by my condition rather than resisting the effects of difference. The thoughts and experiences of being mentally ill are not linear, narratively neat, or even real or realist. When I become cognitively impaired, this affects my writing. Brain fog narrows my extensive vocabulary, basic sentence structure, grammar, dissolves with the alterations of mood states and fatigue. At times my writing becomes unintelligible to anyone but myself, during the most catastrophic breakdowns I become unable to read and write entirely. Examples of impaired writing exist within the poetry and the appendix. My practice of attempting to write *through* all the mood states I experience, all the attendant effects of medications, altering my cognition and ability to write; led me to align my work with experimental poetry. Through not making sense I make sense of my experience.

Radical landscape poetry is the main area of experimental poetry I found to map out my own poetics. RLP as it will now be referred to throughout for reasons of space, has carved within the landscape tradition, a lacuna, for forms of linguistic innovation within eco-poetry. RLP's confrontations of language gave license to my own probing of the notion that language itself and furthermore, the changes in my grasp of language, can fail to communicate the experience of the gendered mentally ill body. In contradiction, these breakdowns in syntax and sense are more revelatory than perfectly composed poetry. The loss of language or failure of communication is an effect of both my medication and my condition itself. Experimental poetry's stylistic broadness allows for a wider range of poetic expression, and a liberation to express mental distress and cognitive impairment through text. Scattered words represent scattered thoughts, brackets as punctuation and disjointed syntax express cognitive disruption.

This thesis is intended to provide illumination to; eco-poets, mad identified scholars, writers of place, those attuned to poetry of madness, anyone with an interest in mental health or the environment, people and academics concerned with expanding the definitions of these categories and broadening inclusion for writers of madness, the environment and place.

Previously Published Poems

Poems from the poetry manuscript appeared in the following publications:

*No.8 Farrow Road Confingo*⁵

*12th September 2016*⁶

*June 2018 Poetic Postcard*⁷

*9th October 2019 (as In the Face of Rejection)*⁸

*Leap Day 2020 (as Leap Day)*⁹

*6th June 2020 (as Unlawful Touch)*¹⁰

*Wilderness*¹¹

*My Workshop Exercise: Write about: The Ugly Distasteful or Banal (as Wanton Wants)*¹²

*April 7th 2018 (as The Weight of Grief)*¹³

⁵ ed. Tim Shearer (2018) *Confingo* Manchester.

⁶ ed. Kinsman, J (2017) *Riggwelter Press* [online] [accessed 15th January 2025]
https://issuu.com/riggwelter/docs/issue_2

⁷ ed. L. Gibson (2022) *Foxglove Journal* [online] [accessed 15th January 2025]
<https://foxglovejournal.wordpress.com/2022/04/04/arran-postcard-anna-percy/>

⁸ Percy, A (2020) *Jumping into a Waterfall*. Flapjack Press Salford.

⁹ Percy, A (2020) *Jumping into a Waterfall*. Flapjack Press Salford.

¹⁰ Percy, A (2020) *Jumping into a Waterfall*. Flapjack Press Salford.

¹¹ Percy, A (2020) *Jumping into a Waterfall*. Flapjack Press Salford.

¹² Percy, A (2020) *Jumping into a Waterfall*. Flapjack Press Salford.

¹³ Percy, A (2020) *Jumping into a Waterfall*. Flapjack Press Salford.

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Appendix

1. *Textperiments: Images of Acetate Poem Art*
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Poetry Collection

Punctuation Key:

[] = Short Breath

[] = Longer Breath Variable Length

October 2015

October and only just the first fogs and fireworks air permanently smoked search the sky for a cigarette stub sun.

and already being told to fear the snow

there hasn't been an all covering snow boot deep for years

the roads around my 2nd floor flat unsalted it hung around for weeks

the guilty stain of red wine vomit after exiting a cab and all my footsteps

each of my shoe treads preserved memory of having managed to leave the house

every time it got more difficult my feet had made it out the door and back again

the faith the greengrocer has that all his produce will still be there when they return from afternoon prayer warms me as the sun

it is the time of year I clothe myself in velvet a soft shell as I rock my feelings shut drink too much wine and skin my knee.

(circa October 2015) Hitchcock Blonde

my boots adhere perfectly to the pedals [] I can count the cars on my hands [] there is the
right amount of rain on the road [] I take my cautious grip off the brakes spinning through
leaves in the night [] I am the fearless child who wanted to fly

I am tired it has rained all day
todays deluge and wind

my socks are puddled a filthy shock
unexpected plunge into winter

the bus lake ripples as the driver sets off
my skin looks scalded

Unfurled in the paper a readers sunflower

the trees are confused

I am checking and rechecking
the contents of my bag warning sign slippage
grief magnifies all loss the silver locket.

I dreamed of picking blackberries
too late outside of polytunnels.

half were softly rotten
in my grip

I am dressed in Grayscale
as Hitchcock dressed his blondes

to indicate something off kilter
this herring bone not out of place on
celluloid

Stirred Poetry Birthday Workshop poem October 2015

Wilderness

I am dreaming of trees [] of more trunks than humans [] find small green comfort in the miniature gardens sown by the guerrilla gardeners of Whalley Range [] round the tree the square plots of earth offering more flowers than should be possible [] breaking up the monotony of tarmac

I know the peace of hundreds of pines [] never a silence the wood harmonica plays it's tune in the rustling of leaves scurrying of squirrels [] mice and beetles [] slower the mushrooms swell and play a long low deep note

The way the grain of a tree can calm a hand [] how seeing the multiplicity of the shapes of nature makes the curves of your own body miraculous [] the body which can view the glorious canopy which filters sunlight delicious

feet are transport [] your body a vessel [] its successes depend only on it taking you across the leaf carpet [] on being able to see and not touch the fairy rings of fungi

words become less important [] your mouth often an astonished oval [] words foiled before forming you are blinking in the glare of the sun when it breaks through

and this dying smell [] the mulch of flowers leaves moss and animals something rich to feed next year's growth [] it is a smell which promises return.

(circa October/November 2015)

I am waiting for the bus [] having broken my 1983 Raleigh [] Wisp [] the gears worn through the chain and I slid off into leaf mulch on the pavement [] I see Bridget spin by on Flash the bike from a jumble to mother to me [] my first taste of freedom from bus time tables [] that day I rode to the seven miles to Norwich [] the fixable nature of bikes even those who lose a wheel and grow a thicket around the frame reminds me to carry on as I worry a Kirby grip in my pocket

it is raining hard [] a man on the bus has placed a canary flannel on his leather trilby

The Jehovah's witnesses in Piccadilly gardens are brandishing copies of the Watch Tower with god and war on the cover [] there are more than a hundred dead in Paris [] their opportunism appals I swear under my breath at the gall of it

I am tired it has rained all day [] my socks are puddled [] a filthy shock [] the bus has a lake it ripples as the driver sets off

unfurled in the paper a reader's sunflower the trees are confused. Today's deluge and wind an unexpected plunge into winter my skin looks scalded by it

I dreamed of picking blackberries [] too late outside of polytunnels [] half were softly rotten [] in my grip [] I am dressed in Grayscale [] as Hitchcock dressed his blondes to indicate something off kilter [] this herring bone wouldn't look out of place on that celluloid

I am checking and rechecking the contents of my bag [] warning sign [] a slippage [] grief magnifies all loss the silver locket [] my talisman of grief [] mislaid by mother for months [] the pearl ring she bought me [] found today by the cleaner jewellery reminds me of her love

21st November 2015

I have slathered two layers of mimosa moisturiser [] a woollen headband I knitted last year [] with this years procrastination snood [] faux bear coat and clear sunglasses to see through rain [] at the stand a man [] who looks like he would never be cold [] is leaning on the next one [] he asks me about my bike [] wants to surprise his wife for Christmas [] I fumble the padlock [] his hands are huge and marked [] it looks like filigree jewellery in his palm []

I haven't been touched in days

January 7th 2016 First Week of January and Still No Frost

At the lights an old man on a red moped compliments my hand signal and says it is about to snow [] I reply that the sky looks like it

when I woke in the morning [] I saw that snow promise and it lied [] I have been dreaming of snow [] of flurries [] of drifts of ice that cracks like eggshells

I have been hoping for a yardstick of snow [] to hold some of this deluge of rainfall keep it from somebodys door

I have never taken a ground floor flat or room since 2004 in Carlisle [] the water reached the end of our street [] our only damage a burglar alarm that went off during a party till the battery ran out

all the cows and sheep in Bitts Park gone [] the score marks in the plaster in houses near Caldewgate

they used words like ‘unprecedented’ over a decade ago [] now regular [] a new seasonal marker [] our winter slides

At the lights I can taste the snow [] we are hungry for the snow [] for great blizzard mouthfuls of it [] for the order of the seasons to fulfil the patterns of our memories

Online a photo from six years ago [] a lurcher climbed to the top of a snow pile [] I remember the thickness [] plastic packing noise it made underfoot [] my bootprints hung around for weeks

10th January 2016

The second week of January has brought frost and death
pavement glitter [] I am not so giddy as I once was
dancing [] tracing fingernail hearts on car windshields
I have disbelieving the cold [] tested puddles with
my heel [] found them cracked
the mild winter has gifted many flowers
for your shabby memorial
in a place we never met [] or waited [] or existed in our friendship
there were daffodils in supermarkets in December
a beaming blonde woman [] brandished sheaves of them
in a technicolour photo in the metro [] comical trumpets
sounding the end of spring as we all knew it
most of my life a totemic grief flower
its appearance on my fathers grave [] the end
of my regular Persephone like slump
there must be enough lingering on for you
the promised snow has not fallen in Whalley Range
when I called my mother [] between my tears she told me
it has in Norwich [] surely not a flurry [] a drift the down to the ground
school closing [] snow blindness [] we got all got lost in
a light covering [] for plastic wrapped bunches in the bus station
as senseless as all the rest of it

(circa January/February 2016)

The snow comes all at once [] I don't expect any to settle [] around the Arndale and up
Deansgate it evaporates on contact [] too many humming buildings and humans [] reach
the junction and the roads are filling with it [] I have sunglasses on to keep it out of my eyes
[] my mouth is filling with snow [] I have been hungry for snow for months [] for years []
I am trying not to think about how dirty the snow is [] acid snow [] city snow [] I had
forgotten how it feels when your sinuses freeze [] I am thrilling [] I am scared [] my basket
is full of cider [] I am going to topple over in the snow [] caught in the spokes [] I am trying
to breathe through my mouth [] when I breathe through my nose it mists the glasses [] it
keeps coming [] flurry on flurry and the traffic lights are kaleidoscope [] I can hardly see and
my breath is loud and visible [] I am slow and ponderous with each pedal stroke []
all this snow lasts a day [] how many till my last?

1st February 2016

The crow who roosts in the eaves [] at the corner of my window [] cawing [] wakes me []
when he takes flight is back [] halfwaking [] I think he has beaked his way through the glass
[] and is about to peck my ear

14th February 2016

the market traders with their shopping trolley stalls added plastic flowers
it is now after six [] there are desperate people on every street
my emotions are too close to the surface [] my eyes are brimming
it snows [] minute flakes [] for thirty seconds [] or more [] time is stretching
the pavement glitter is too bright [] a bad sign [] my perception is wavering
tinnitus is back [] warning klaxon [] as long as I cannot see shapes in the floor
I can pull back from this [] loosening of my tongue [] the drinking
I have been cycling and not remembering the journey [] if I fell
not taking enough of my medication [] I am not yet beyond sleep
I have been wracked with mother nightmares and waking at 5am
a yawn cracked my lip and I pained [] exhausted [] bled onto the pillow
the train station is haloed by cigarettes [] and I cannot be still

4th March 2016

I wake and my pillow is wet [] convince myself I spilled a glass of water in the dark [] it
snows for an hour [] or more [] large flakes [] it is a treacherous radiator [] I am to wait
indoors [] while the snow turns to rain [] by the time I venture into the park [] the crocuses
are battered [] the snow is rendered overworked lace

14th March 2016

The sunset is startling [] neon pink [] aching [] the beginning of the month there was snow [] now I sweat in a coat [] the rain has stopped [] the flooding has stopped [] for now [] in the greengrocers on Clarendon road [] with the sign 'different varieties of chapatti flour available' [] marker pen [] I buy potatoes and onions [] the hand written signs give no provenance [] I only know that they are cheap [] I am already counting coins this week [] it is at times like this [] I have to not see the produce as running with blood [] I can almost convince myself the potatoes were dug from rich fen soil

April 5th 2016

I saw a woman cycling [] carrying a swathe of white Lilies in a backpack [] their open mouths speak the language of death [] but she smiled as she carried herself onward [] I am bleeding and smiling in the sun [] woman's bodies are contradictions.

Last night there was screaming [] I pressed my nose to the window [] breath obscures three foxes [] two are boxing [] one keeping watch [] I had never heard this before [] they belt their tuneless racket [] while circling each other [] then rise up [] I take the side of my fist to the glass [] I cannot imagine they can hear this human rattling after such a sound [] a fox looks up and they disperse

On the telephone [] my mother asks what flowers I want her to take to your grave [] we decide to plant cottage garden seeds [] in hope that bats will alight there [] when the holly hocks open yearly [] an ecosystem next to a dual carriage way [] overlooked by marble

12th April 2016

The chill is off the air [] despite my bicycle being blown sideways [] leather jacket become bat wings [] my trachea closes [] my breath is raw and ragged [] my wheel dips the whole tyre [] more into a pothole at speed [] as I rise up out of it wavering [] without falling my breath stops [] my heart badums [] badumbdadumdadums [] blood in my ears [] I am grateful for the navy leather gloves [] returned to me by a friend [] my bones have been chilled for weeks [] thrusting fists in pockets at traffic lights [] near my door the blossom is out [] uneven on the trees [] they have not recovered from the early false start [] spring made in December [] I can tell the temperature has risen because I can smell the stench of the wheely bins [] kindness outshines the cold today [] my heart is warming up

22nd April 2016

A peregrine falcon perches atop a letter [] jutting from a corporate building [] eyeing up
where the shoppers have discarded chips [] there congregate pigeons [] successful as foxes in
cities [] even when it is as grey as this [] sometimes it snows in April [] amid the blossom
[] and I am as the wind gathers tears

(circa April 2016)

Dividing lines of traffic [] a concrete rimmed island [] where as I cycle past in my tulip skirt
[] those same flowers have bloomed in shades of sunset [] as the daffodils wither []someone
from the council is cutting the grass [] I am overwhelmed by that greenness in my nostrils []
I am back to Crostwick [] with the thick swathes of it [] waiting for the bus [] sat on the
defunct wishing well [] later on the train to Crewe [] through the open windows [] spills
sunlight [] the scent of the cows [] I am no longer on the train.

17th of May 2016

You stopped answering calls [] shaved your head [] TEXT: I ended up in a police cell [] I rang [] it cut off [] you sounded more out of it than I have ever heard [] you were admitted to a psychiatric unit somewhere near Bethnal Green [] I do not ask questions [] I know the putrid pastels [] metal framed beds [] you are conscious of this [] you tell me you are sleeping but not if they gave you anything to do so [] I am attempting to ground you with the weather [] with my living body [] TEXT: My feet hurt it is grey [] TEXT: is a strange place [] TEXT: It most certainly is [] I have slurred the bits of my story I can face [] (psychosis can keep some secrets) [] over shared dark bottles [] on that greasy sofa [] when everyone else was asleep [] TEXT: I am doing washing [] going to cycle outside later [] it is sunny [] TEXT: It is sunny here [] So I know you have seen a window [] but not if they let you outside [] or how many of your freedoms you have given up [] I am drinking green tea [] I tell you this [] hope you remember cups I made you [] grasped oil handed [] last summers canvas shoes lose their mould on the spin cycle [] I forget I put them in [] suspect intruders [] the windows are open and I am dancing [] SINGS: tonight we make love only in words [] I run the dried up fountain pens under the tap [] the ink splots turn to dove feathers on the porcelain [] almost nothing stained and used up looking is beyond purpose [] I want you to remember and pick up your guitar

June 3rd 2016 Written During the Train Journey Over Several Hours

On the long train to Norwich [] before getting on this service [] without a cycle reservation [] which on this route is akin to taking a flying leap without a safety net [] I got my Dr's letter [] to prove I have the condition I have had all my adult life [] I collected my prescription [] collected a clothes order [] only terrible thing is [] electric will surely run out before I get back [] I am dreading what state the freezer will be in [] could not be helped [] I only made the train on time because kind people let me queue jump at the station [] only one ticket machine was working [] it was very sunny [] so much so these sunglasses are too clear for the intensity of the sun [] I have on the American flag Keds [] which annoyed C. she called them fascist (I think I left sandals at mums) we are having [] well she's having it at her house a BBQ [] they said they will be doing lamb or something [] there will be drinks and naughty smokes no doubt [] I hope the sun holds out [] I could do with just sitting in the sun for a bit [] as I have travelled south we have now passed Nottingham [] cloud has rolled across the sky [] there are beautiful wind turbines [] the land is flattening [] T is still in the psych ward [] I find myself spilling out that secret knowledge I have locked up [] how not to dress up for wardround [] or wear what is appropriate for the weather [] the fact that everyone above the nurses is a hopeless [] uncaring [] incompetent [] I hope they realise he does need to be there [] he needs help before he selfdestructs [] I will try and use this trip to be calm [] its strange how even getting a Hoover and being able to properly clean the flat [] I will never be tidy but it had got revolting [] I felt so much better about K coming over [] after [] I do definitely need to get some critical writing done [] if only to start the final two chapters [] I should have brought books with me [] I will see what the local library system provides [] mum may have her alumni card from the art school [] I do not have a Sconal card [] I should at least be able to get hold of CD Wright's poetry at a bare minimum [] I have just over two hours left on this train [] my phone is dying [] this notebook is tiny [] I have no book to read [] I did not plan this trip as well as I could [] but I got the last train I could on a super off peak ticket [] I started the journey and tonight [] after I cycle to mums bungalow [] I can relax [] I probably will not have to cook tonight [] there may be wine [] I hope there is wine [] I will go and get some if there is none [] or cider [] I was half tempted to buy a drink on this train [] but decided a Sprite was more sensible and marginally cheaper [] I will attempt to do some sewing [] there is stuff kicking about [] I will hope mum has planted lettuce in the garden [] we are rattling into Grantham [] these trains truly are crap [] the sky is clouded over but not grey [] I am not currently expecting rain [] the weather could be different in Norwich [] phone has died [] I would have had a nap earlier but someone was sat next to me [] I had my bag on my lap [] hardly sure its worth is now [] not far to Peterborough [] I suppose the journey has gone quicker than anticipated [] being not hungover helps [] this journey sucks [] when I am hungover [] the land is still rippling [] we are not that near [] the hills are lowering [] but it is not flat yet [] I think Peterborough is next [] my stubble rash has calmed down [] I may have to ask him to shave or leave it next time [] but considering I am just going to a gig in Hebden Bridge next time [] I guess not [] there is a girl either using her phone as a mirror [] or preparing to take a selfie [] I am glad much of our teenage went unphotographed [] there was enough as there was [] camera phones would have been intolerable [] passing cars and these fishing tent shelters [] there are people who spend all day there in rows [] on the river bank [] as we move towards Peterborough the land sharply flattened [] the

horizon expands [] there are more and larger fields [] plenty of pylons [] always is []
I am hoping this is the service which avoids Wymondham [] all the other titchy stations [] I
think it just goes to [] Thetford [] Ely then Norwich [] it is not so far after Peterborough [] and
so I come to the end of this notebook [] I really should have brought another [] I will ask mum
if she has any going spare [] I have collected all the spare paper in my bag [more to type up
here]

23rd June 2016

To vote in the EU referendum I walk through Manley Park [] which has just been mown clean of flowers [] I have timed it wrong [] the primary school polling station is teeming with small bumblebees [] there is no queue [] I recognise the people manning the station [] think this is odd [] I am anxious [] I already came later than intended [] made myself eat hummous [] before coming here [] lest low blood sugar make me make a mistake [] the sky is lightly clouded [] it is temperate [] not humid [] the air is not stifling still [] yet today feels cataclysmic [] I cannot be calm the repetition of her voice and how it has stopped me from picking up a pen to write with until nearly 2.30 [] am how long her reach her shriek [] the anxiety that has stopped me eating dinner [] how small my world is to become [] all my pleasures will be gone [] travel difficult and expensive [] I am weighted by all this [] the thought [] I will never be left alone to write [] that there are those who seek to harm will always try to poison [] that I wasted the weather indoors fretting and drinking cold green tea [] in between loading the washing machine [] this between stints in front of the television [] a bright spot [] TEXT: (thinking of you) I have taken an extra sedative [] have gone to bed [] before I stay awake and try to wait for the result [] when I looked at the sky I thought about the reduction in pollution made by EU policies [] wonder how long smog takes to form [] there was a loud hailer on a vehicle 'vote remain vote for the union' [] it is too late [] the decision is to made by people my parents age [] because there are more of them [] they vote [] I go into spirals of war [] loss of the hedgehogs [] bats to white nose syndrome [] being trapped here forever [] with no doctors [] finally I lie down [] there is nothing more I can do [] my anxiety will not change a single vote

24th June 2016

It is grey [] the rain is starting its subtle metallic noise on the windowpane [] my cheek still smarts from when I thwacked it on the pavement [] taking the curb wrong after too many pints [] I had hoped would swallow my anxiety [] that gnaws at my throat and stomach [] makes my skull buzz [] I do not want my mother to call me today [] she said she wanted to vote leave [] I just cannot bear it [] her misinformed vote [] just one of hundreds her age [] no security left for any of us [] this is June and there have been hardly any sticky tarmac days [] I cannot see why they voted leave [] when the seasons have slid into one another [] there will be no EU flood funding the next time the river's banks burst [] I don't even have the money to stockpile French wine [] like the older generation who own their own homes and voted leave [] my grazed face feels itchy and tingles [] my face is the focus of these minor hallucinations [] it chooses spots of anxiety [] the eczema round my mouth [] this scab makes it livid and distorted [] in my mind [] I am regretting not having travelled more [] not going to see my aunt near Lyon more often [] I am regretting how small and island bound my life has been [] I have been governed by fear and access to quetiapine [] the fear of losing my mind and not knowing the language [] I know the words but they are all being used differently [] I have already weathered a recession and do not know how to survive another [] when I have already sold all the gold I had passed down [] the cracked opal ring and the crumpled brooch [] went on rent and a Eurostar ticket [] I am worried [] that they will now be able to use any pesticide they choose [] based off efficacy and price [] that we will finally wipe out the bees [] I am worried I will never travel [] I am worried I will have to find the money for my medication [] when they privatise the NHS [] I wish I had taken a back pack [] folded up my fear [] bought a rail ticket when I was younger [] I should have drunk more champagne [] my father like his sister who lives there loved France [] how my mother has got so confused by the rhetoric [] that it will somehow mean more money will come into our economy [] rather than flow out [] as it has now [] is beyond me [] the sky is grey and I do not know what to do

16th July 2016

This is the wettest July I can recall [] I have been soaked nearly every day [] or splashed by the puddles [] I bemoan the state of the roads [] I am in Piccadilly Gardens [] it is not hot enough for people to be rowdy [] police do half-hearted rounds [] a womans quiet shy voice shocks me [] I forget how southern people sound apart from my own voice sometimes [] hesitant as I am on anxious days [] she asks me to sign a post card to save a rainforest [] I smirk at the irony [] but I sign and notice she smells of patchouli [] is wearing patterned hippy pants with her Greenpeace T shirt [] idle gestures [] wasting resources [] when the climate change cabinet is dissolved [] my head buzzes with inequity [] I do not know how we will survive the next few years [] the structures are all being dismantled [] the rain makes me dream of floods [] I visualise all this water that is coming down from the sky [] will not settle in the water table

18th July 2016

I wake [] a drip over my bookshelf [] I bolt up and save my books [] put a yogurt pot under it
[] call the out of hours repair guy [] fall into a fitful sleep on the sofa [] where floods
destroy my books and notebooks all my poems [] everything is broken [] when I wake the
kettle is broken [] I am having a day where I cannot see this is a life worth living [] a crummy
flat [] where everything breaks [] I cannot help ruining things [] I found a tiny notebook in
the pile of paperbacks in large capitals [] 'HELLO ITS ANNA' [] what manic grip was I
under to write that myself? these notebooks are a dialogue with myself [] the pulling me out
of my delusions and shocking me with the range of selves I have set down [] I am wary of
the variation in handwriting [] the harsh tone on notes [] today it was funny [] I had to
write a workshop [] send more job applications into the void [] each sunny day I spend
inside I feel will be the last [] it is hot [] the pasta salad I made a day ago [] has grown
fur overnight [] the deluge continues nearly every day [] I want to feel the southern sun [] I
find any excuse to sit outside [] I miss a garden [] the yard with its concrete and moss is not
meant for resting [] I am still sleeping [] I find each new piece of news [] of killing or
political disaster [] of Boris Johnson [] drives me to drink [] I am taking days off [] still eating
[] I have not reached the point of my tongue rejecting food [] I don't know whether this
turbulence [] this thirst is justified or a warning sign [] the situation seems desperate [] I am
trying not to read the news [] read Pratchett and Le Guin worlds where the dragons all get
slain or never really existed [] I want to throw out everything in my flat and live out of a
bag [] have no past I know wanting to cut all ties is unsafe [] I would rather set fire to
the kitchen than clean [] I am down to £1.90 gas money on the meter [] can I wash my hair
again for that? I haven't written anything I have liked in weeks [] pushing this pen feels like a
heavy weight [] I look at my right hand to see if my writer's callous is still there [] I have not
been writing enough

22/23rd July 2016

I have reduced my quetiapine to 75mg at night 3 X 25 mg ☐ none in the morning ☐ I am wearing my sunglasses to cycle at night ☐ to protect myself from the traffic lights ☐ I am not sure if this is myself coming to surface ☐ or dangerous.

5th August 2016

I have slept [] I am no longer hearing telephones ringing [] when there are none in sight [] the air is not buzzing [] I am back to my usual level of light sensitivity [] the sky is blue and it is as warm as I expect August to be [] the cumulus clouds are so well shaped [] perfectly spaced [] they look stencilled from the train window [] the earphones bring me 'here comes the sun' [] when I am depressed I have to skip this song [] the journey to Bramhall offers little in the form of landscape [] it is largely red brick terraces and a vista of Stockport [] trees [] a moving from a large sprawl to a smaller hamlet [] but no large swathes that are unbuilt on [] we are still travelling at chimney level out of Levenshulme

8th August 2016

It is hot again [] I feel the air pressure in my sinuses and brow bone [] the burn like eczema reaction could to passers-by be sunburn [] I cannot remember having hayfever this late last year [] the hot weather heavy feeling of the air and my sore eyes [] make me think of the fields surrounding hill house [] where the grass grew high and full of flowers and shambling mxy rabbits [] I knew to alert my parents to their presence [] would mean a spade to their skull [] a sense of duty had been instilled along with closing gates and not standing behind horses or picking wildflowers [] the sense of how I was to behave in a place where streets had thinned to foot paths and plants outnumbered concrete blocks

10th August 2016

I find strata of things among the books [] matches from when I always needed to smoke half filled [] a badge from The Green Room [] now gone [] I find the carriage clock from Farrow Road behind the curtain [] I hoard out of fear of impermanence and a faulty memory [] all things are precious [] ticket stubs [] notebooks [] T shirts [] silver necklaces [] all have a memory capacity and a value [] a shock behind the brass door of the clock it is battery powered a cheap copy of something grander [] whose idea? mothers? or father and his love of kitsch [] I have dreams in which I throw everything away or I lose or ruin all my things and feel bereft [] I do not know if my thoughts are clear yet [] I am drinking sleepy tea the kind with camomile and limeflower and other such herbal inducements to sleep [] I have set an alarm for late [] on the small green wind up alarm clock J. gave me a trial run for my next time away [] I have nothing to get up for bar tidying the house and collecting Quetiapine [] there is a two week heatwave predicted [] I am to go camping by Waxham [] for the first time in 12 years [] a disastrous visit muddled by pre psychosis and R. [] I am hoping this time I will be more present and as my lungs are not filled with smoke every waking moment [] as they were then [] I will clearly smell the sea and maybe see a seal [] I have small hopes for pleasure [] still my capacity to break things dulls the joy [] the padlock that fell apart in my hand [] these small disasters grow large [] signify a lack of luck [] a personal defect [] I remember telling someone how many poems I have written since October and their congratulations [] I fear mania or something close to it [] writing too much is dangerous [] not writing at all is worse [] the living with a condition where the act of creating in all its forms is both a salve and a symptom [] I am still sleeping [] I am trying to focus on that [] camomile tea and Pratchett novels [] cleaning the mess that has gathered in my sleepless weeks.

August 19th 2016 Waxham Beach

I had forgotten [] the fineness of the sand [] a more yellow colour [] there have been a dozen or more seals bobbing up [] leaping through the waves close to the waves [] unafraid or uninterested in us [] the sea is clear when it washes over my feet [] the waves roll small and fast and now nearly six oclock [] you have to raise your voice slightly above the roaring ripple the waves make as they crest into foam [] it looks from here greenish like hard soap [] C. has after our kirs swum out farther than I would have dared [] had I remembered my polka dot swimsuit [] we filled a bucket with cava Chambord and laughed at dogs barking at rocks [] there are gale force winds on the campsite and more ominous clouds [] but here sheltered by the concrete sea defences [] graffitied in the mildest of Norfolk ways [] WAXHAM SUMMER 2016 KEATING WOZ ERE HAMWAX [] it rained lightly for ten minutes or so we passed it [] and it passed us [] the wind is moving the clouds past [] I have the sensation that is satisfying of being in the warm rays of full sun [] the sands glow golden [] while looking at dark grey storm clouds[] which have moved far away[] I spot the third of todays rogue balloons [] a red one fell onto the sea [] an hour or so later a pink one followed [] and now a blue one is bobbing down the beach [] the sun is still just above the marram grass where the dunes bank [] above the concrete [] an elegant curve [] with two steps for people to sit on [] C. has gone to tent to roll [] the entire sky behind and to my left and right opened up blue again [] the clouds are small and less dense [] less opaque [] I spent so much of my life here looking up [] I walked into lampposts more than once [] a child has climbed over the dunes and shouts ‘should I jump?’ [] I calculate his height and the drop and say no [] there is little seaweed here [] only small dried out clumps of a seaweed [] I do not know the name [] so there isn’t the smell of oodles of bladderwrack drying in the sun [] the salt scent of the sea is mild [] there are a few sounds realising as the sand there moves [] and now another fully inflated balloon has made its way onto the beach yellow this time

August 2016 Sea Palling

mum drives us to Sea Palling [] we pass Hill House they razed it to the ground and kept the name [] she says [] the blue flag flying verifying the continuing cleanness of the beach reminds her of my father [] his job at Tidy Britain Group [] we read in partial sunshine me [] Larrys Party by Carol Shields [] with lush shrubbery between the pages [] both enjoying the sound of waves on this day [] gentle [] she keeps recounting the news [] of scores of people dragged out to sea in this weather [] unused to rip tides on this coast and their lives lost [] she instilled a respect of the water [] today we content ourselves with digging our bare feet in the sand [] take turns to walk along the coast towards Waxham [] she returns [] says she found no seaglass this is her most precious object [] echoes the poster we had crinkling in the kitchen 'leave nothing but foot prints' [] because of both of them I find beauty in seaglass and worn ceramic [] I only take the things which do not belong [] I bring her green and blue [] half a cup handle of smoothness [] these small finds remind me that broken things can beautiful given time and the right conditions

Saturday 27th August 2016

Bishopgate west exit of Liverpool Street station London [] Caffè Nero drinking a carelessly made cup of green tea [] waiting for T. to traverse London I have forgotten where the rehab facility [] is he apologised for being late and told me to find somewhere comfortable to wait and not to be intimidated by people asking for money [] like I have not done this journey before [] the early journeys where we changed here and went to Paddington [] usually via the natural history museum and then onto grandmas in Twyford [] school trips [] later teenage excursions to the Tate Modern [] gigs [] he probably knows what I know [] that I have the right face and profile to be sympathetic [] Joni Mitchell is singing her high plaintive call 'will you take me as I am strung out on another man' [] the umbrella he suggested I bring seems at this moment [] where the sky is lightly clouded and patches of blue persist [] pointless [] Joe warned it would be hotter here than in Norwich [] he will likely ask where I went tomorrow [] if it is near any of his old haunts [] the V and A was floated as an idea [] where Joe worked on the exhibition guides [] a guy in a yellow baseball cap is proffering some pictures in gilt frames [] I missed him and what they were [] I have headphones in and am scribbling furiously [] he must have thought better of asking me [] this Caffè Nero is resplendent with ashtrays outside [] my avoidance of home in sixth form [] sat outside in all weathers [] eeking out cappuccinos [] smoking with blue fingers [] I was unkind to my hands then [] there were times I wanted to watch my pale skin turn different hues of blue and purple [] make a hurt that would not last [] would not be noticed after the fact [] I have been letting the green tea made with too hot coffee maker water cool down [] before I work out how bad it tastes [] it could be better it is a sort of murky amber [] not ideal still it is tea [] and I was up early to catch a bloody rail replacement coach to Ipswich [] I did have a first class ticket for the next stretch of the journey [] but on Abellio Greater Anglia that meant little [] I heard an announcement that seemed to say there was no catering on board [] so gave up hope of my free cup of tea [] it was in this instance cheaper than standard class [] this is a strange meeting [] which will have its own negotiations [] planning has taken place and I am meeting A.G. this evening for decompression [] I felt I should bring him something [] I know the woeful selection of most institutions [] romance novels or at a push readers digest [] not to tax a mind [] I have brought a Carol Shields novel feminism writ large under the guise of social and relationship commentary and ever with her an emphasis on the horticultural [] inscription from me 'A reminder nothing is as it seems love Annax' [] a copy of Ariel I found at mums [] I have the restored edition [] The Yellow Wallpaper [] another slim volume [] I have a collected thick one of her writings [] The Ghost Road Pat Barker [] I never read trilogies in order [] I hope he will not mind [] a thought is he cycling? [] Though many baulk at cycling at Manchester and I admit to the very present danger [] I am not sure I could cycle in London [] wait [] he went to a meeting in Brixton [] my geography of London is pitiful [] usually dragged around by a friend or other [] or just going on the tube [] I can travel on that unaided [] still people without helmets hop on Boris bikes (will they be renamed when he causes an international gaffe?) [] without further thought [] the station this end is lime stone bricked [] arched windows [] picked out in red brick [] when I thought of this station I only thought of the inside [] its usually all I see before rushing to a tube line [] there is wind [] which will hopefully blow the clouds on swiftly [] it might rain later next to Caffè Nero there is Michaels Shoe Care [] for travellers whose shoes like mine have a tendency to fall apart [] I still have my sunglasses on [] have resigned myself at this point to my enduring sensitivity []

it is an affectation I can live with [] at worst late nights are assumed [] among my strange apparel [] it is possibly the least strange [] these are not cat eyes [] but black glasses with cat ears perched on top [] subtle silliness I could not walk past [] I have a child's heart shaped watch mother gave me [] a grape coloured purple stone round and set in silver [] a haematite bead bracelet and my childish plastic bead effort [] black stars and the words 'there is always poetry' [] a silver ring with diamonds of turquoise [] I am trying to wear things I can fiddle with [] so I can stop tearing at my fingers with my teeth [] old habits die hard [] my fingers have not bled [] unless I have whacked them on a door frame yet [] a few spots of rain have come down they may pass [] quarter of that most preposterous London building the gherkin [] is visible from here [] ok so now I can see rain and the sun

12th September 2016

I take up the knitting I put down months ago and am surprised my hands remember the action
[] unfaltering [] my eyes return to the film [] without looking at them [] the simple way I
spool out the black yarn [] like a good writing day [] when I wake and can find the words in
bed [] without my stopping them [] it will be a headband [] the hair shorn by myself needs it
[] always a late decision to take up the scissors in the bathroom [] in the moon mirror [] I
cannot see the moon from there [] the door is open [] as I live alone [] there is only a street
lamp visible in the window [] I am taking up knitting [] a small project to be finished
quickly [] a sense of accomplishment [] as it gives my hands something to do [] other than
chew them [] worried at by my lack of employment and deadlines [] if I had forgotten how to
hold the yarn [] create the tension it could be unpicked [] mistakes can be undone by my own
hands [] unlike outside and regrets [] like poetry it can be picked up at any time [] I think of
the roads outside [] their potholes that are never fixed [] the drivers who are all haste and no
mind [] when I am on my bike [] this city is anxious making [] the road is often all I can focus
on [] shards of glass and laughing gas canisters are puncture fears [] I get agitated by the
selfishness of those drunk on the obvious and summer [] who fling these items on tarmac and
forget what heavier vehicles and sunlight will do [] I want to ride on smooth roads [] look up
at the changing tree canopies [] like spooling wool into scarves [] like writing on a good day

26th October 2016

I spent yesterday on the phone trying to restore me on the university system [] I thought I was registered a month ago [] I am not registered according to it [] I have an email from the first time [] saying I have racked up fines since the 30th September [] next door someone is thumping through karma police on the piano one of the bands that soundtracked my teenage unease[] my pen has been stopped by work and looking for work [] the pennies dribbling unevenly out of my electric meter [] my breath is becoming ragged when I cycle [] the air has cooled enough that when it hits my trachea it closes [] air does not get into my lungs [] I have been given a flu jab and a strange inhaler [] I am unsure if this generalised sniffle is serious [] I have emergency amoxicillin laid in [] the other night as I locked my bike in the ginnel [] the sky was clear and all of Orion was visible [] a few steps to the left [] the street lamp at the other end sodium orange'd it out [] I am trying not to panic about the fine and money and the turn of the seasons and people who wish me ill [] the flat has become a mess [] staying warm has become the only priority [] today the sky is a dull pale grey [] already the world seems darker than a month ago [] I have switched to my winter sunglasses [] every word I write today seems pointless [] I cannot grasp the flurry of poems I wrote in August [] I am forcing this pen across the pages as I cannot remember writing this month [] I know enough now [] I know I must [] traveling for hours a day to go to a job where I call hundreds of phone numbers [] to try to persuade strangers to talk to me about things I know nothing about has worn me down [] I am not going in this week the train fare is too much [] a new job is starting but has taken a month of admin [] I am sleeping and have bought valerian tablets for nights [] I fear I will not wake from using them [] in dulled but not unpleasant fog [] I am going to work harder on not sliding under [] on not smoking [] I find this time of year I slip [] get drawn to smoke like those teenagers throwing fireworks in the alleyway [] I will sleep and stay warm [] today I will wash my hair [] not stick it under a hat [] I will drink the chipped mug of green tea and write

2nd November 2016

The meter fails to acknowledge the pound I scrambled together on the key [] it keeps wailing as it cuts out [] I am finding it harder to hold onto coins [] not that I have many [] I am selling my belongings online for small amounts and it is not enough [] I am not picking up a pen enough [] other than to make to do lists I fail to complete [] I am sleeping a deep heavy sleep and remembering all my dreams and wishing I had not [] the cold has got into my chest [] it is making it harder to breathe [] they have upped the steroid inhaler I forgot to take [] when I want to put more electric on the key [] to stop the wail [] to save the food in the freezer spoiling [] I walk through Manley Park [] mostly pink sky [] it has rained little [] the leaves that have fallen there are crisp [] there has not been a violent wind to shake them fully [] I am missing deadlines [] I am darkening mentally but trying to resist it [] I have got too drunk and fallen off my bike [] a stranger picked me up [] I am trying not to be careless with myself [] I have constructed a life where I can hide the dark moments of not caring and tears [] the nights I have drunk alone for something to do in this cold messy living room [] the throw is stained from several meals [] needs to go in the wash [] the hot water keeps running out [] so I put on a hat instead [] dye my fringe purple [] I am bored of every single one of these words as I am writing them [] I can see no value in any of the poems I am writing [] they are all clichés and poorly constructed [] or like this a maudlin diversion [] just to push the pen across the paper and pick up the thread of thought

9th November 2016

I wake and have fully lost my voice [] inflamed sinuses make inner ears throb [] I went to bed without noting the score [] check the news online [] the disconnection from my body created by the inflated feeling in my head deepens [] we have a climate change denier in charge of a main polluting nation [] one ear blocks [] existential dread manifests as a pain deep in my head [] blurred by pain and fear [] I smash a glass in the sink [] have no voice to swear [] faint sense of relief when I draw back my unbloodied hands [] I am still breathing with relative ease [] I leave the steroids in their packet [] I take my temperature and the end of it hurts my tongue [] I am all physical discomfort [] force myself to eat coughing [] between bites [] water came through the ceiling earlier in a loud drip and I could not face another leak [] I put a pot under the one in the living room and went out on Friday night [] I am fed up of all my words and am writing this under sufferance [] that I had to write something today [] thinking of the polluted air that I already struggle to breathe [] the central heating I have had to put on creaks [] half the radiators do not work [] I have intrusive thoughts that the floor is damaged [] I and this sofa and all the rubbish silted up here [] will fall through it [] that everything in these walls is broken including myself

13th November 2016

On the day we found out Leonard Cohen died [] I bumped into a friend in Chorlton we sat in the garden of the Dulcimer [] I smoked two of his cigarettes [] I could see he was surprised with the speed with which I can still roll [] he has never seen me smoke [] at home I cannot wash the smell off my fingers [] I do not smoke any more cigarettes [] I drink Johnnie Walker hot toddies [] listen to Songs of Love and Hate [] I bought it and Songs of Leonard Cohen on LP at King Bee [] I got on my bike after several days huddled under a blanket [] the leaves are now piles of mulch [] dangerous obstacles in the cycle lane [] I kicked crisp piles of them last week [] I am cycling out into the road to avoid them and puddles [] waiting for cars to honk [] there are now two off/on leaks in the flat [] I cannot cope with cleaning and spending a day on the phone to get them to care about my crummy flat and my small rent cheque [] there are still many leaves on the trees [] they fall unevenly though the temperature has dropped [] I have seen no frost yet [] I have slid nocturnal I am going to keep pushing this pen forward [] despite the downturn in my mood [] I am not sure I am ready for K. to see this side [] he has seen me up not that I said [] he thinks the best of me [] he is not clear eyed like my friends [] who know to ask if I am ok [] they see me sleepless and sullen [] can he love me in the depths of winter? [] I am still closed off and closed up [] dressing in blankets and sleeping half the day [] while rubbish piles up and I have got strange [] where my old poems are written by someone else [] who knows how to write poetry and not this scribbling whinge

26th November 2016

The fog that has descended entered my head and legs [] forcing my body to make a journey half an hour [] that took fifteen minutes a few months ago [] in a dull slow way I become aware of the ice [] of my bicycle seat under my hand [] notice it on other surfaces [] last year at this time my nerves were twanging [] I noticed everything I slept without setting an alarm [] pulled myself off the pillow [] when nearly all the light had gone [] there is a red patch of eczema on my right knee [] over where I skinned it months ago [] as I push my heavy legs I comfort myself [] ‘at least I am not manic’ [] the treacly slump is less dangerous [] confused today I went to the wrong place[] called my friend and turned back around [] on the way back [] I felt the cold air take hold of the outline of my lips

9th December 2016

My head is dull and heavy [] I am struggling to wake from dreams in which I upset everyone I love [] the roads are wet and strewn with leaf mulch [] my tiny amount of wakefulness is concentrated on the road [] ahead a large blue people carrier barrels across the road [] does not honk their horn [] my left hand wont move fast enough [] the old injury plays up in the cold [] I slide on the road and hit the side of the car [] it pauses and drives off [] leaving me shocked and shouting [] on the way back home I force myself to get supplies [] leave the library book in the pannier [] trudge back to get it [] decision making is hard [] ethics and considerations grow large [] as I lock the bike in the yard [] I notice the moss repointing the brick work [] the weeds growing out of the concrete [] they are beautiful and I breathe

16th December 2016

I have had to top up my electric key twice [] so the freezer will not grow mouldy while I am away [] I have lured myself off the sofa with a pint of ginger pale ale at The Nip and Tipple [] I have not packed [] tonight was spent typing the copious late student notes [] I fear are so late as to risk a penalty [] they are sent and my only responsibilities are to the flat and my future self [] who returns on December 30th [] who will not want a mouldy fridge and more mice attracted by the rubbish and recycling I have not taken out [] I will not see K till 31st December [] he checks on me every day [] I have not said that now I am low and slow and scared on the roads [] it means something even digitally [] oh this is a nice pint Little Valley Brewery [] tomorrow is packing a suitcase [] taking a bus and the four and half hour East Midlands train to Norwich [] I can only hope for as much calm as possible and mulled cider [] there is still the hope [] the history of the reality reminds me there will be some form of confusion and upset [] it is not actually that cold here [] there is rain and leaf mulch [] less ice on the roads [] most nights the ice is sparse [] almost intangible till the wheel slipped [] I am shaken by the car bump still [] today as several vehicles rolled onto the cycle path [] I flinched and shook [] I will not let fear take me off my bike [] I refuse to have my freedom curtailed [] even in the face of the news of the minister who cardoored a cyclist and said there are too many cycle lanes in London [] a woman was kicked down the stairs in Berlin and another attacked in Whalley range on Mayfield Road at 10 am [] something hasty and uncaring has been uncorked [] the masks are not worn anymore [] all it says that as a woman and a cyclist I am supposed to be scared [] by drivers with no care for my safety [] the liberty of my body[] the men who holler for me to give them a ride [] they know we are frightened and fright amuses them [] I am dreaming of cycling in Norwich [] where cycling can be less fraught [] I am hoping the fear will not follow me [] I am hoping to sleep less long [] for in my stopping the fog in my mind and bones to lift

12th January 2017

The news has crowed about snow which has not fallen here [] the window fully wet and obscured [] I wiped it with the curtain to find rain [] I have in the last month brushed ice off my bicycle seat [] solidity is impermanent [] it is fleeting frost that comes and goes [] the idea of weeks frozen went half a decade ago [] I am sleeping like a stone again I am drinking less than in December [] my subconscious revelling in the uninterrupted sleep raises up scarecrow distortions of people who have caused me distress [] they take my shouting as if their mouths were straw filled [] unlike reality and the vitriol I associate with their likenesses [] I wake shaking with adrenaline [] this jostling of my mind [] this expending of energy while I sleep [] is some form of necessary processing [] dreams are resolving what I cannot do on waking [] I can never make them shut up and listen[] would I dream this way in summer? the close dark days bring out my shadows [] these dreams happened all week [] I am tired [] I have cycled into the centre once [] I was scared with every pedal stroke [] two weeks cycling in Norwich lulled me [] the road surfaces alone [] I was gliding [] here every journey is fraught with potholes and fear of falls [] I got left in the middle of junctions here for what seems like ten minutes [] full of fear and rage that no one cares enough about my safety to let me through [] the selfishness of drivers is almost universal in Manchester and terrifies me [] I will not let fear win [] even if I am dry mouthed and asthmatic at traffic lights

26th January 2017

After weeks of mildness and damp my face aches [] I cannot get a full breath in my lungs after cycling to MMU and back every muscle below my waist aches [] the boiler works intermittently [] after several hours I lower myself into the tub [] I cannot relax [] I take every creak of the pipes to be the moment I crash through the ceiling [] unlike comedies [] my neck snaps [] wet [] naked [] dead [] in the living room below [] my under employed unalarmed sleep was interrupted by drills again today [] I think a voicemail from my mother means disaster [] I am chewing my fingers bloody and scrabbling coins [] I had forgotten how cold it could be [] the buds that are starting to unfurl will be confused

5th March 2017

I work out how to enter a string of numbers into the gasmeter for the first time in a fortnight [] stumbling cold and gamey [] washing goosepimpled parts [] I run a deep bath [] oil and Epsom salts [] as I rub and pumice my feet [] I remember I told a friend about the only time I made an attempt on my life [] sixteen years ago [] in the deepest bath I have ever known [] the woods out the window icy [] I took a knife [] knowing the roman methods too well [] it was too blunt for flesh and I laughed [] when I told her she laughed [] there is relief in knowing you will not be pitied [] taking ones own life [] is on our minds [] it has found her family [] the anniversary of my friends fall has come and gone [] K.s father reached a two decade deathaversary [] I offer him up as a hope of healing [] he spent that day dressed in black [] did not become so drunk he was incoherent [] this is surviving for survivors [] I listen to Lady Day [] whose blues consumed her [] the record I wrestled from my stepdad [] I considered it a good sign he clutched so many records back from me [] he has not forgotten the music of his youth [] yesterday I smashed the handle of the midnight blue teapot I have carried to every home since I was 18 [] I filled it then with black tea and whisky to write an essay overnight [] I read about it in an Irish Murdoch novel [] I smash items when I clean them [] then wonder why I prefer the homeostasis of filth

7th March 2017

I cycle to Vineta's in Chorlton [] she lives above a coffee shop [] in a flat which is all unfinished surfaces [] exposed brick she is returning to Latvia [] to live in her Grandmother's cottage [] with a well and plant a garden [] she makes yurts and puppets [] I tell her all the things I have grown in pots[] the many varieties of pear my grandmother grew [] I remember reaching up to feel the weight of them in my palm [] I am here to take some patterns and fabric off her hands [] I cannot make a tent or art but I can dress myself [] I can take decades old fabric [] make a dress and keep some money out of the wrong hands [] I return after she helps me pack the panniers [] praises the bike I am labouring in this weather [] my breath raw [] at my door [] someone has overfilled the bins with black bin liners of cans [] I am furious at the lack of care [] dealing with the binnery of living alone [] not knowing what to do to make people care enough not to inconvenience each other [] or give a shit about recycling [] I gave Vineta some money for three bags of fabric [] she said she will plant a tree for me [] I will hold onto seeds of kindness

8th April 2017

On a day like today it aches to leave Norfolk [] the sunshine and endless horizon [] I cleared and cleaned mothers patio [] a selfish act [] I have dreams of terrace writing when I housesit in May [] I miss the sun up north [] the clean air and earth [] I have been bitten all over by insects [] my blood used to be sluggish [] circulation poor [] when I smoked I was never bitten [] I have been bitten all up juicy veins [] the back of my knees [] a cluster [] I am having to wear sunglasses on the train [] the acres of green out the window as we approach Ely make me want to cry [] mothers garden [] the secluded suntrap designed by a wise builder in the 1950s is a magnet for bees [] she lets the weeds grow [] she named for me many varieties that were starting to blossom [] Aconite [] Forget Me Not [] I could identify Pansies I revived by watering [] Tulips [] a weed she could not name but has let be [] I saw the leaves of Geranium that will open later [] lazily the bees floated above the pots and beds [] their lax attitude to gardening protects the bees and the hedgehogs [] I use the word monoculture and tell them dandelions are the first food for bees [] my mother carries an encyclopaedia in her head [] I had not the time to wake her and ask what the dozens of birdsongs I heard were ringing out

May 31st 2017 Jean Sprackland's Workshop

Write About a Place in Childhood: No.8 Farrow Road Garden Norwich

I was always barefoot [] I knew all the surfaces [] including the crazy paving path [] badly planned concrete [] every piece felt different under the ball of my feet [] I eschewed shoes [] even after the splinter [] that required a Drs visit [] I chased the dog and laughed [] we were close then [] her short fur never far from my fingers [] I slept in her basket [] she was calm and did not bite [] I was allowed to wander anywhere [] except the far end with the decaying greenhouse [] crushed in the grip of ancient vines [] it created many dark tales in my head [] of what could happen among the broken glass and thick twisted branches [] there were yellow roses [] that I remember [] we cut some once [] made them take up blue dye [] above the fireplace [] the old gas fire [] I would pick rhubarb and sit on the step with a glass dish of granulated sugar [] the snap of the stem [] the sharp hardness of the plant and the textured sweetness in the sun [] when the garden was calm and the sun still reached me [] the garden was a space I was left alone [] even my anxious mother could not find her way to worry about me there [] despite my near permanent double plastered knees [] I was left to play the games small children play in the grass [] make my clothes smell of green [] an elaborate imagination could make worlds of daises and dandelions then

Write in a Space Nearby Multisensory Do Not Overlook Small Details or the Strange

By the Canal Just Past Sainsburys off Oxford Road

There are Jehovahs Witnesses on either side of the street outside no. 70 Oxford Road [] the sign speaks of the four horsemen of the apocalypse [] ‘how their ride affects you’ [] and on the other side they hide their purpose [] on a JW and ‘what is the meaning of life?’ [] I avoided sitting outside the station [] too many fretting memories there [] where I dubiously locked my bike [] had to put my sunglasses on immediately [] it is bright for me even in the shade [] as I walked down to the canalside [] the concrete steps reek of piss from inefficient kidneys [] I can smell the canal [] a faint rubbish wet smell [] an orange balloon and peach Styrofoam kebab tray [] a yellow kinder egg toy case and an empty funsize bottle of echo falls float by [] three joggers passed me on the canal path dressed in shades of pink and black [] all had headphones on so I could not tell if this was happenstance [] I can hear the buses and the zebra crossings and calls of children [] but muffled slightly [] here close enough to fall into the canal [] this is a place I would not dare walk alone at night [] I have not in fact ever walked down this path [] I am still afraid despite looking at this spot since 2008

June 1st 2017 Paul Evans Workshop After Being told: Go and Wander in a Beatnik Way and Find Flora/Fauna

I have a vague notion of going towards the library and realise I have resurrected the peace gardens in my mind [] nothing but manicured grass and stone war memorial there now [] there are many crossings [] it is cacophonous makes me aware of the sweat under my arms [] from being late and cycling [] I cross over the bridge and am aware of the stench of the canal and effluvia [] there homeless men asleep on the benches curved round the base of the library [] it is safer to sleep when it is light [] I pass the friends (quaker) meeting house and first want to pick one of the large white daisies outside [] decide against it [] residual quaker guilt [] there is a sign there saying something like 'everything is too unequal which is bad for everyone' [] towards the back of the city hall there is more noise and yellow rosettes tied on trees and lampposts [] setting up for MIF I suspect [] I had wanted to get at the plants there [] I start telling myself I picked a bad route [] I round the library with the trees that look unremarkable except in April [] when they support fantastical purple candles of flowers I keep asking people the name and forgetting [] all the trees on this route have been expertly tree surgeoned [] so that no one could climb them and I cannot get at a single leaf [] there is drilling and a lot of noise [] Manchester feels like an ever changing city [] any large building or green space can disappear at any time [] less dense with historical buildings than Norwich [] and poor town planning [] I have my mp3 player in my bag [] but today I am making myself listen to the din [] a girl is setting up to play her electric guitar [] with a small amp under the tree []s I have no watch and cannot see the big clock from here [] I cross the tram tracks and try and piece together St Peters Square in 2006 back together [] 1st St Peters Place was not there [] but an uninspiring Italian restaurant has box hedges [] that I have to check are real [] I grasp a top branch and put it in my pocket [] young people are wearing things we wore as teenagers [] it is the first time this has happened to me and it is unsettling [] even McDonalds has an I heart MCR sign outside [] and it makes me feel bilious [] I walk back on the other side of the road [] it is all stone and concrete and too well tended [] this corridor seen by all the tourists [] for plants to wreak their slow transformation [] back at no. 70 Oxford Road someone whispers that the bird singing is a blackbird [] my bird knowledge is limited [] I can identify a few by sight but not by sound [] I do not know what plant I picked is box hedge? [] you can hear the zebra crossing from here [] it keeps rattling my thoughts [] I am still not sure if it will rain [] the clouds were mixed and do not move as quickly as they do in Norwich [] where the sky blown about by gales [] changes in seconds [] the city smells of people and what they leave behind [] it could do with a rain [] there is wind and it is shaking branches outside the window and leaves [] makes the sound small rainsticks make when you tip them [] when I come back here [] I find everything too much and struggle to see and hear the green [] there are trees everywhere and they will always play that soothing song unasked [] the wind will always make it happen [] I cannot work out if the building opposite is occupied [] or which one it is [] it is very dirty and window sills are peeling [] many layers of paint [] dead plants in window boxes through the broken window and mismatched curtains in terms of length and pattern hang in the other [] cycling today felt difficult [] no one would let me turn out of the junction of Upper Chorlton road for minutes [] cars and trucks did not notice me [] the city felt enormous and uncaring [] well the drivers of the vehicles anyway [] I cannot see the sky anymore [] I am itching to look at it and determine if it will rain [] Norfolk gave me back the desire to sky gaze [] I think the trees making such beautiful sound are oak [] someone in the room collects leaves from the balcony

[] faintly I can hear trains coming out of Oxford Road Station [] the traffic is louder and the zebra crossing above that [] I am still looking for the beauty here [] not everyone can manage the wilderness [] fear dictates where I go [] Fallowfield Loop got added to the list [] tales of bikes grabbed from owners [] motivation too [] how do you get to the wilderness when you can't get out of bed? [] one of the bars tips out empties very close [] I would have found more plant life in Whalley Range [] the moss on the wall in the yard is luscious we leave our weeds be

2nd June 2017

It is raining as I leave the house [] it is June and I drank too much last night [] it is refreshing and does not sting [] I lumber up Seymour Grove potholes make this arduous [] I am angry the roads are such a state [] think of Norwiche's smooth city centre [] it was hard to leave the house [] I am regretting leaving it so late [] parents are struggling with reluctant children everywhere [] I do not feel like I have reinhabited my home [] I struggle to speak [] my accent clangs here [] the journey back is worse [] the rain has not stopped [] rain seems the wrong word [] it is too light [] somewhere between drizzle and rain [] it is a dark day and I fail to connect it with yesterday [] the sun at 7pm [] the corner near Lynwood Avenue is full of teenage boys playfighting[] several walk backwards into the road [] I shout I get called a silly bitch [] by all of them [] they see me turn into Lynwood Avenue [] I shake locking up my bike and try to calculate if they will see me unlock my door [] this is the way women's territories shrink [] leaving the house tomorrow will be harder

6th June 2017

I could have done with another blanket on my bed [] it has rained steadily [] unrelenting harsh rain you need protecting from [] for two days the wind makes the branches rattle the window [] alarmingly it feels dark as October [] I feel as if I have used up the bright days with worry [] I went out in my Pyjamas and velour jacket (I am wearing a jacket indoors) to tip out the recycling and it was cold [] I was supposed to go to the shop hours ago [] I have been driven indoors by the weather [] over the weekend I was driven to clean the bathroom [] scrub the lino behind the toilet [] face to it I can see how poorly it was cut [] someone rushing for a lunch break [] an addition to the litany of poorly fitted features [] it is hard to motivate yourself to clean something so flawed [] I have never considered moving because of the cost and the need to live alone [] avoid confrontation there is another [] I do not deserve a place that works [] is functional [] I can allow the stacks of books to sway [] slide [] hide my notebooks [] a place where everything falls off shelves and out of cupboards [] I need to buy more poison [] I still hear mice behind the bookcase

11th June 2017

I have not been able to sit still and concentrate all week [] the election has preyed on my mind and forced me on my bike [] out to drink beer on the pavement outside Sandbar [] the art students celebrating their end of year show in vintage I wore [] a girl is wearing the exact thin pinstripe velvet jacket I shrank inside in 2004 [] we drink beer in the sunshine [] all sleep deprived and hungover [] those of us not art students confused and elated [] we raise our glasses to the collapse of UKIP [] to Diane [] Fucking [] Abbot keeping her seat [] to Teresa May failing [] we do not know what will happen [] I stayed out till four am two days in a row [] rowdy dancing and slopping beer on each other to Yazoo and Gary Numan [] the future is uncertain [] I have fear and hope in equal measure [] the wind makes the trees make rapping noises on the window [] the weekend has continued muddled [] sun and rain and wind this does not feel like June [] wearing ankle boots seems sensible [] we can only hope for another vote [] we can only hope

April 7th 2018

Your gravestone is shored up

with a block of wood

shoddy against flecked granite

the tree that sheltered you all that time

fell

lies have been told about your last night

on your 26th deathaversary there was gin

and too much of everything

I smoked other peoples cigarettes

kissed a stranger and had an argument

there is no proper ritual to attend

the ghost I do not believe in

I cannot place daffodils above you from here

the weight of grief swings like the scales

I played with in our kitchen adding

and subtracting discs of ounces

I am yet to find the kind of love I would risk my life for

April 13th 2018

My most persistent intrusive thought/hallucination/misperception [] is that the futon bed [] flowered throw and all [] that the bath I am trying to enjoy [] singing along to Leonard Cohen [] 'touched her perfect body with your mind' [] is going to fall through the floor [] the bath one carries most water in my anxious mind [] there was a leak under the bath years ago[] unnoticed [] till the flat belows carpet showed it [] rotten joists come into view below me [] and I am naked [] injured [] skewered by pipework [] broken [] lipstick smeared [] moisturiser glass jar fragments [] greased [] cling to my skin [] ridiculous among the bubbles in the foundations

24th April 2018

Another young man I know has died [] likely by his own hand or misadventure [] that he did not mean it [] a mistake made in haste he could not come back from [] it is still the raining [] the window streaked blur [] I am still bleeding [] a vivid reminder my body is very much alive [] performing its functions [] I am about to go to the terrace house where his body was found [] if I believed in such things I would feel vestiges of a soul in the walls [] if a woman friend had given me the news I would have asked what to wear [] black is sometimes inappropriate [] I am bleeding and would be wearing black today in case of accidents [] I have called T. [] who was told by B. [] tried to use my unfortunate knowledge of these situations [] the terrible things I have known and felt have a use here [] a library of awfulness you check out on such occasions [] pass on the pertinent passages [] the body must be attended to [] a tampon sought [] the rest washed [] clothes whatever colour [] T. is coming up [] the realisation that many more reunions for this reason will happen

27th April 2018

The day we all knew it rained on and on [] puddled [] swirled [] overflowed [] it was not gentle [] we had coffee while staring at the posters of Prince [] Bowie [] Lemmy [] George on the disused leisure centre [] at the house I held people who cried [] said 'its fucking shit' like a mantra [] like a defiant cry [] against the unfairness of it all [] most days this week I have eaten once [] the boy with no bed [] who I kissed [] TEXT: to check on me [] I had not eaten by five pm [] at his behest I went to the kitchen [] put something in the oven [] I TEXT: 'death is inevitable [] life is pain [] we write poetry [] drink wine and carry on' [] your sarcastic moonface painting kept cracking us all up [] we laughed as much as we cried [] said the weather was right.

28th April 2018

Last night the terrace you died in was packed with love and anguish [] we went to the hobo house [] we smoked the weed you gave mushroom T.[] for walking in on him in bed with someone [] a ritual burning like sage [] your oldest friend gave me a quarter of a tab of acid [] he had a half [] which he sucked from my little finger [] already too wasted for dexterity [] they had pandas on and red something [] like a flower [] quarter of an ecstasy pill [] I sat high [] on the facing slumped sofas you struggle to get out of [] where we had many conversations [] your face was very present to me [] today [] Facebook memories presented me with 'tomorrow has got to be better' [] from 2010 [] you had failed to feel that [] that there will be a tomorrow [] and it has to be better than the bad day preceding it [] the paper cranes on the ceiling turned like a ballet [] while the feeling lasted [] today is the first sunny day since you died and I feel calm

June 2018 Poetic Postcard

Dear T.

I know you have cycled on the coast road [] where I bumped along on the bus [] I have not asked if you stopped here [] at Kildonan [] where seals are promised [] or whether [] in fact [] the flop of their sea adapted bodies [] fills you with the same glee [] a fortification crumbles in a dark stone on the hill [] a look out [] a warning place [] the first line of defence [] the current light house sits on an islet [] must be lonely have to row back and forth to find another body [] the sun has started to blaze and yet the sea froze my toes [] a swimming costume was a dare to the water [] the water itself is all subtle movement and glitter past the sand [] everything is bands of blue and white [] you would swim

3rd March 2019 For the Driver

He still knows he is slipping away [] gripping the kitchen counter to steady himself [] dog lead in hand [] as I chop chestnut mushrooms he says ‘while you’ve been studying I’ve become an old man’ [] the awareness of the slippage is grounds for hope [] having lost one father [] I know what to hold onto [] the night we stayed up sat in the silver Fiat for warmth [] in the field at hill house [] watched for shooting stars [] mum was asleep would not t have coped with the cold [] the daily lists he made on envelopes [] resting on the dashboard [] in early retirement he found work to do [] boilersuited [] making a computer desk from a chest of drawers [] painting it silver [] digging deep concrete foundations [] a walled garden [] I hotboxed the greenhouse [] he placed there a bucket of sand [] so I would not set fire to myself [] I added a few filter tipped roll ups for authenticity [] secrecy where mum could grow flowers [] uneaten by the rabbits [] that thrice razed an acre length hedge to the ground [] that he could never hit with the air rifle [] he has only just relinquished [] I did not know where it was locked up [] rhapsodised about his mothers rabbit pie [] gravy never to be tasted again [] the necklace chain that snapped near Oddest the beautiful labradorite egg set in silver bird claws [] I cannot replace [] he chose for me [] the pencil in his top pocket [] a habit from national service [] like the brushes with his army number on he still shined his shoes with [] when he taught me to lace my shoes two ways [] one for Sundays one for the parade ground [] the Frys Turkish delight bars we both snaffled in the car after school [] the uncomplaining way he waited napping [] outside a pub or club [] to drive us all to our house on the hill [] rowdy and as half cut as our lack of ID would allow [] eyeliner smeared [] miniskirted [] he enjoyed our rabble [] let me put on a mix tape Nina Simone nestled next to Placebo [] others whose fathers offered up less care [] asked ‘can we borrow Joe?’ he misses the driving [] says he’s been ‘gated’ [] more [] the talks later still [] his drives back from a Norfolk countryside jazz club mellowed by music and I suspected red wine [] he would want to hear of my poetry adventures [] deep in my cups [] as a teenager on weekends [] he would go up to Coltishall [] to fill the tank [] return unasked an apple turnover and a can of cherry coke [] play jazz on the downstairs speakers [] I would only hear [] in that thick walled house [] when I opened my heavy bedroom door past afternoon [] he wanted me to wake to a sweet thing [] he forgets my leavings now [] when he used to pack the boot [] lift the suitcase [] I visit him in his bedroom each time [] calmly reading [] smiling [] ‘are you going?’ [] when he was told hours before [] the bedside lamp is gentle as candlelight [] a cat is asleep atop him [] another at his feet [] the dog has become more watchful [] follows him everywhere beside [] I take the time to hold this as my last memory of him [] he is still reading [] there is still a sweet thing.

5th March 2019 For Leanne

Lit through vast ex church windows
wearing a grey furry hat eating
yeast extract by the spoonful
taking in nourishment and inspiration
looking like she stepped from the pages
of Where the Wild Things are
I want to imagine her forever
stepping out of the doorway of St Columbus
a plastic jug in hand to dig up clay
exploring the Isle of Arran unafraid
communing with the earth through Art

Friday 29th March 2019

I am sat in All Saints Park [] the sun is shining fully [] in a way that makes my sunglasses not stand out [] I am listening to an early smog EP [] it jangles [] I feel it all over my skin [] sensitivity gifts you these moments of extreme pleasure in the everyday [] 'where is the beauty I had once' [] Bill sings in my ear [] the sky is one glazed colour [] young women are all clad in jeans in a culotte style I too got lured into [] wondering if I am becoming ridiculous in dress at nearly thirty three [] who will love me when I dress like an embarrassing art teacher? [] Oh the scarves [] so many floaty things [] I never draped around my neck in my twenties [] bar that thin Jagger seventies zebra print one [] the useless slippery numbers of the early two thousands [] on the grass [] a young woman is bare shouldered [] I vest topped my way through springs and summers once [] have the sun damage and skin cancer scare to prove it [] now I maintain my pale and interesting look year round [] get mistaken for a vegetarian [] I have a new pamphlet to edit [] a thesis chapter to write [] on a day like this [] all I want to do is get stoned in the park and hug someone

24th May 2019 For the Dead

You have been dead for one year and one month [] you are still loved intensely by everyone who ever met you [] our love could not keep you alive and we suffer from feeling that if we had loved you harder [] more openly[] you would not have felt so much that the world would be better without you [] we now know that love and warmth cannot reach the deep corners of a mind [] they cannot find the bones [] that were burnt and scattered in the sea [] that were rubbed on gums [] the dust that was you [] how you were loved [] wanted to be ingested by someone who loved you [] the dust I dropped in the sea [] that was a whole human once [] which bit did I throw? [] a humerus [] a metatarsal [] part of an ear? [] you were not the first to bow out on your own terms [] nor the last [] sadly [] irrevocably [] I know too many gorgeous [] beautiful [] creative [] people whose brains are their own worst enemy [] L. has just gone and you would have loved her [] her heart [] her care [] for the planet [] she was strange and beautiful [] none of us could save her either [] it fills me with rage [] I burn up with it [] all over my skin and a desire to never [] ever [] ever [] hurt someone [] like your deaths have hurt [] which after the fact [] feel like they could have been avoided []we cannot go back and make you safe [] that is our tragedy [] we only ever wished for you to keep living [] for the heart to keep beating [] for the lungs to keep on doing what they had done unasked for you [] since you existed [] the world needed you [] all of you [] you were very much loved [] all of the dead who died by your own hand [] we only wish you had felt this intense love while you were flesh [] in the video for pure morning [] Brian Molko at his most adorable [] manages what we all hoped you would do [] he realises his mistake [] steps off the building [] walks impossibly at a 90 degree angle [] the step off is taken back [] he lives [] we all wanted you to live

Arran Poetry Adventure Saturday 6th July 2019

Last night as beds were scarce in the Barra bungalow [] I had to sleep in a pop up tent [] in the Middleton campsite in Lamlash [] Miles took me down and as he was concerned that the tent would blow away [] offered to put his spare car battery in it [] woke up to quite the shock [] left the bungalow at half past three [] was dreading it [] as soon as I turned the corner at the bottom of the hill [] saw the sun starting to pink wash the sky [] like hibiscus tea [] became drunker on the light [] I sent TH. TEXT: 'just to reassure you I did not become a selkie and joined the seals' last night [] to which she TEXT: 'although that would be badass it would be a bit sad' [] I have been making her jealous of the views [] after a grey sludge of a day yesterday [] today has been gloriously bright [] we have a porch at the house [] I am sat there now [] to the right [] partially visible through a hedge [] you can glimpse the sea [] in front of me [] hills roll to a thick wood of pine [] carpeting the summit [] I am going to make a mushroom lasagne for everyone and then we are going to stroll to the Pierhead Tavern [] I had to handwash the pillowcases in the kitchen sink [] as no linens have appeared in the cupboard we could see [] despite there being two hot water bottles in tartan cases [] in another [] having now had a washing machine for some years [] it was a somewhat pleasurable sensory experience [] reminded me of the strength of my grip [] the way she likes me to use the power in my hands on her body [] as I wandered round Lamlash earlier and now as I was cooking [] have been listening to Smog/Bill Callahan [] (Jackie Hagan) brought a massive speaker [] it is very apt [] as I discovered him as there was a cd of Knock Knock in Seabank

Thursday 11th July 2019

Perched on a rock [] the wind ruffling my hair [] like a drunk lover [] there are some boats buffeted around Kildonan beach [] that look like they belong in a bath [] rather than the sea [] the islet [] with its defunct lighthouse [] is right where I left it last [] along with the sense of peace [] broken by the racket of oyster catchers [] the seals have been avoiding the grey skies today [] mist has evaporated [] left bands of clouds [] gusts [] I am going to walk further from Kildonan Hall [] in search of them

July 2019 My Workshop Exercise: Write about: The Ugly Distasteful or Banal

I have had one shower this week [] only when the island filth covered me in a film so thick []
I was unable to assess how tanned the first sunny day made me [] when I got drunk on one
pint [] and the sky [] and ruined castle [] intoxicated me [] there is a sausage roll in my bag []
when affordable delicious things appear [] I have been shoving them into a totebag []
crumbling them off greased bags [] days later [] I want to lie down in the grass for an hour []
in the last of the sun [] I want to be totally adhered with my body [] to the green and sea air []
I want another can of Irn Bru [] I want it to be the end of the month already [] I want a day of
sun on a beach tomorrow [] to breathe seaweed

9th October 2019

In the face of rejection [] I decided to care for my body [] remind it of the joy of movement [] and that the restoration of bicycles is grounds for hope [] for my lacklustre frame [] with its own forms of rust [] I enlist a friend [] discuss all the men I have ever made fix my bike [] my step dads patient attempts to teach me to change an inner tube [] after I cycled seven miles home on a flat [] a lesson [] after he was incredulous [] I was hungover [] or stoned [] dogged in my pedalling the lanes to Hill House [] speed less of a necessity [] when plants outnumber cars [] when a hedge is more of a hazard than an engine [] later T. when I was attempting to fix him in return [] assess the damage while I made stew [] and now J. [] I am a bad feminist [] letting down those fierce velocipedestriennes [] who rode bone shakers brazenly [] I cannot fix my bike [] six months [] a year [] it has languished against the wall [] all moss mortared [] the spokes are entwined deep with growth [] I wince as I pull it from the roots [] we both relocate the spiders [] aware of the oncoming entomological apocalypse [] another one to add to the deck stacked against our future [] I mention the snails I crushed in the rain [] trudging home [] avoided one [] then crunch [] twice [] these pangs of guilt achieve nothing [] we can see spiders into the safety of a bush [] we can restore objects to usefulness [] repurpose clothing meant for landfill [] the futile gestures an individual can make [] in the face of multiple apocalypses [] I do not say any of this [] I am fearful I will have forgotten the rhythm of the pedals [] despite my clumsiness [] the bent arm [] my ponderous thighs and lungs [] my body feels like it is in exactly the right place on a bicycle [] my long legs know what to do [] after all this is a muscle memory not easily forgot [] from the lopsided tilt of the first red cowboy printed one [] my father gave me only one stabiliser [] a theory that it would be easier to remove than two [] not planning for his own absence [] my second father managed it [] encouraged me back on after I fell and snapped my arm [] I need to remember this about love you fall out/off it [] are hurt by the cycle [] your body still remembers how to do it effortlessly [] I am lost as to who is the bicycle and who is the rider today [] I do not know [] only that the wheels will turn [] there is something here about love [] about no one being so broken as to be unloveable

13th December 2019

It is Friday the 13th [] two months of rain seems to be falling in a week [] half the voters marked their cross for cruelty [] for empty rhetoric for broken bus promises [] thousands will die [] I knew it last night in the pub [] drunk on avoidance and cider [] people looked ashen faced and said [] ‘have you seen the exit polls?’ [] J. and I stuck our fingers in our ears and cuddled his greyhound Harpo [] we knew anyway [] my whole youth has been eaten by austerity [] my two most recent lovers are too fucked up to fuck me right now [] other men disgust me [] the nightmares of grasping hands are back [] I will not get out of bed today

Leap Day 2020

Yesterday you would have been seventy [] the East Anglian grave you have lain in for the last twenty-eight years narrowly avoided a tree [] felled by the recent storms [] the weather increasing its wild fluctuations [] last night [] I read a poem I wrote for you [] years ago [] in a flared jumpsuit like I stepped off the set of your favourite film [] Silent Running [] I was indulged [] poetry audiences understand the unending nature of grief [] I drank too much red wine from the Corbieres mountains [] my lower limbs hurt from dancing in platforms [] I did not cry [] my latest lover distracted me [] sent seminaked pictures from a ferry bound for Holland [] I walked past the house in Whalley Range today [] which has two ghosts that I know of [] where I nearly fucked someone I loved at one time [] there is a new white sofa in the living room [] the greasy slumps of furniture the ghosts reclined on [] have gone [] that house is like wandering through all my wasted twenties [] I want to know if J.s translations are still stuck to the walls [] if M.s bookshelf repurposed from a broken guitar [] which made T. hold his head in his hands [] is in the kitchen [] where I tried to feed him to wellness [] stave off him becoming the third ghost [] all the unspent love in the walls is unknown to anyone living there now.

Monday 16th March 2020

The day I decided to start avoiding the city centre [] and buses [] and people who enthusiastically kiss your face without fear [] I called my mother while a magpie warmed its feet on the chimney pot of the house opposite [] she like the magpie could feel something a casual observer could not see [] like when she knew L. was going to die [] the week before this happened [] anxiety [] experience or prescience [] she saw something coming and prepared her cupboards [] I am hundreds of miles away [] she wanted me to travel down on the train last week [] I had to explain how viruses live on surfaces [] by saying ‘someone could sneeze on a window’ [] the mortality of my parents has rarely been more obvious [] I have more books than I could ever read [] and will survive [] it is everyone else I am worried about

19th March 2020 (the c word diaries)

Today I took a parcel to A. [] who has had to put themselves in quarantine [] as their housemate has it [] they had no thermometer (and I typically had two) and no paracetamol [] I put in two bottles of cider [] a mint Aero [] Oreos [] a copy of The Commitments by Roddy Doyle [] a leopard print scarf (under the pretext he might run out of accessories [] hoping he would remember I blindfolded him with it [] and sprayed it with my Paul Smith rose perfume) [] some bread [] a can of beans [] two bananas [] one of those pasta mug shot things [] soap, handcream [] some looroll [] I have been out for probably the last time in a while [] I did run to buying several bottles of vodka and cider [] if the apocalypse is coming I do not want to face it totally sober [] hopefully this will end soon enough [] maybe it will not [] I have gone for filling the designated Brexit box with supplies [] I panic bought lube in case society collapses [] I had bought two boxes of XL condoms as A. was supposed to be coming round [] I was going to get shagged senseless before lockdown but lo and behold his housemate got it [] we might be on lockdown after quarantine ends [] we might not [] if he does make it over in twelve days time [] we can fuck [] he came over last Saturday even though I was surfing the crimson tide [] he knew and asked to come over and chill [] watch comedy etc like we do after fucking [] I have my new futon sofa [] we sat and watched films with Rik Mayall in [] drank a bit of cider smoked the last of my weed [] ate a chocolate orange |Aero [] some knock off frazzles and actually slept together [] I remember the first or second time we fucked and then slept [] I pulled him close to me to sleep [] curled up in each other and he said something like ‘I can’t sleep like this all night’ and then I asked a bit later if he wanted to move and he said he was fine [] and now we usually fall asleep close up to one another [] or at least touching feet [] he is slow to touch me when it is not sex [] he let me hold him while we watched films [] my impression is he waits for contact [] or is not as physical as me [] or he has been single for so long and no one he hooks up with wants physical intimacy [] we are a casual thing although I questioned what last weekend meant or if it even meant he wanted less rather than more [] he always kisses me hello and goodbye even if we have not slept together [] it might be two weeks it might be never again [] I might regret buying two packs of XL condoms after all [] any intimacy comes with a risk of disappointment [] even if it just involves taking your clothes off [] I started to take these chances properly and I felt things [] I feel like I have reinhabited my body again [] I dislike it less [] knowing its capacity for giving and receiving pleasure [] A. managed something last time we fucked no one has ever achieved [] he fisted me and it felt like nothing else I have ever experienced [] my eyes rolled back so hard in my head and I think that when my jaw became fucked up [] I opened my mouth so wide [] he fucked me so hard that time my earrings fell out. He likes to go for hours and every time I have had to give up and finish him off with my hands [] That time he TEXT: ‘raging and we are going at it when your bedroom door closes’ [] I TEXT: a picture of me in my bed waiting in a revealing top and he TEXT: ‘lose the underwear’ [] It was very hot indeed [] I will end on that note [] this notebook may end up being reflections on all the ways I miss being touched

20th March 2020 Alexandra Park

I stayed up till five am drinking vodka and trying not to panic [] my eczema flared up again [] that red inflamed outline to my lips [] the first part [] I had an antihistamine last night and will take the precaution of buying more [] much like Brexit [] it is the state of not knowing how bad it will be [] if there will be lock down from tonight or not [] I have cycled to the park [] as that as of today is still allowed [] my bike could use some oil on it but oh well [] it worked [] as soon as I got my arse in the seat and my thighs moving it helped [] the sky is very blue with the piles of fluffy white cumulus [] that calm my breath the tree branches have started to look bronchial [] the respiratory nature of the illness has made me aware of my breath [] I am trying to remember the chirp and caw of the birds [] that someone greeted someone they know from a distance [] a gloved hand patting the elbow of their coat [] saying [] ‘stay safe’ [] the mantra we are all repeating to one another [] digitally mostly [] hold onto the sound of the gravel under my shoes [] below this bench [] that the sun today has made my sunglasses practical [] the rumble of the traffic [] there might not be traffic next week [] I might not be allowed here next week [] the wind ruffling my hair [] the sun on my boobs [] a teenager in white robes [] school shirt tie and green blazer [] walked past with a supersoaker [] even though it definitely is not warm enough for that [] they had a hope it might be [] I should do a loop of the park and go home [] write on Sexton [] there is an idea forming my thesis [] might be more timely

24th March 2020

Came to the park to feed the ducks again and cycle [] worked out the health app on my phone and did 10km on Monday [] lot of people still out in groups of more than two [] going against the guidelines [] the sunny weather has not helped [] a guy sat outside his house sarcastically said 'you can only have one cycle a day you know' [] as I went past [] not a form of harassment I am enjoying [] currently a small child is shouting at the swans [] which is something neither I [] nor the swans appreciate [] they have scared them all away [] and why the parent is not explaining that I do not know [] not going to get involved and hope they move on [] I just want to sit and feed the birds quietly [] I already dropped the bag of brown rice from 2016 into the recycling bin on my way out [] as I dropped some plastic bottles in [] climbing into a recycling bin was not on my list today [] I will be having a shower when I get in [] so that is just as well [] people not social distancing and going out in groups of more than three [] people are still bloody irritating at this time [] perhaps more than ever [] for now A. seems symptomless in quarantine [] I still have no idea how serious the lock down will be [] when he is allowed out if he can risk coming to see me [] or if that will qualify for caring for a vulnerable person or not [] my state of mind is not the greatest and I am getting no work done [] I am hoping to get something done by the end of the week if nothing else [] I thought I hallucinated a bad smell last night [] turned out I accidentally turned on a hob and burned some left over soup to a pan [] that is vaguely encouraging [] I have not lost it yet [] today I brushed my teeth had a berry and banana and matcha smoothie and I have made it to the park [] oh and had a wank that helped [] I will shower when I get in and attempt to make cheese scones [] so many people have pointed out the apocalypse is mainly involving pyjamas [] existential dread [] drinking and boredom

22nd 15th April 2020

I haven't written anything that is not my thesis in over a week [] in the middle of a pandemic I spend most of my time drinking cider on my sofa [] watching cartoons [] tonight the guy I started fucking before this all kicked off [] fell asleep during our sexting [] he typed nonsense and trailed off [] I cannot complain I was so drunk at the weekend I fell asleep with my hand in my knickers and did the same to him [] typed my own nonsense and dropped off [] tonight like the night before I have chosen sobriety and a possible zopiclone over booze [] even if A.G posted me two litres of vodka on the condition I share them with the Putin cardboard cut out she sent me yonks ago by mistake [] I had to email the GP a picture of my elbow as my eczema has exploded from stress [] things I did not think I would be doing like washing my debit card [] so far the pandemic involves boredom [] sexual frustration [] worry and washing your hands [] rinse [] repeat ad infinitum [] that and despairing of the government [] I have fatigue on discussing it [] endlessly saying [] 'because they don't want to spend money and they do not care if people die' [] which is generally the answer to anything anyone has said about it [] like many British people [] I fucking miss the pub [] I even just miss going to the pub for a half and sit down and write [] like I sometimes did when motivation was very low and I needed to top up my electric key [] I am safe here alone [] I have food and tv and books and internet and a thesis to finish [] I am infinitely more lucky than a lot of people [] mostly I have been bored [] there was a week or two of near breakdown [] I feared I was going to full on start hallucinating [] I was getting little visual disturbances [] tinnitus and tingling [] I have come back from it [] I am stressed and my poor elbow and face show it [] but everyone is [] I will try and write again tomorrow

6th June 2020 Unlawful Touch

I direct you to the sink
after I unlock the door
a kiss over the threshold
bending like a willow
I say

‘you are the only risk I am taking’

I do not tell you that your touch
stopped the trees in Alexandra Park
being outlined in wavering neon light
grateful for a restoration of my sanity

I do not tell you when your house flooded
as you kissed my neck after a month of no one
bar a shopkeeper dropping change in my wary palm

I creamed my underwear

the nights you are not here I sleep with a pillow
nestled in the delicate spot at the base of my spine
a second cradled right foot over the left

the way we dream layered over one another
like the pages of this book

Tuesday 13th June 2020

I was writing in an A3 Sketch pad (and an A5 one in the park) [] when I have been writing [] during this time of corona virus/the world generally being on fire [] me seemingly seeing out the latest apocalypse from a sofa often drinking [] today I was going to work on the PhD chapter on the confessional [] the pressure in the air has made me nauseated and wibbly [] I have had to write off the day watch Bowie documentaries [] tidy what I can in the flat [] [] reassure myself even Bowie pissed off Warhol with his song about him [] the little mime he does to camera at the end of their filming session where he pulls his guts out because he is so upset [] this is a new pen from a parcel from mother [] with some flowered sandals in as I said my slippers had fallen to bits [] they have I am loathe to bin them as they are leather [] but the soles are bust and strange design that cannot be repaired [] I have bought another denim jacket off Ebay to do up [] to give me something to do [] to tie dye [] as has become my lock down activity [] In my defence it was fifteen quid [] is almost certainly 1980s [] Levis and beautifully worn in [] the stains have lifted out of the white denim [] (a man who never washed it the previous owner) [] I will be dyeing it anyway [] I will put black and white bow printed corduroy on the collar and yoke [] hide the wear [] new buttons [] most fell off [] dyeing things purple seems to be my coping mechanism [] I have avoided writing [] the pressure [] merely not to die [] or go mad [] and then to write something of lasting import [] it has stilted me[] I have been writhing in guilt [] for not worrying about a roof over my head [] not being in any of the groups of people the virus has killed [] the police are killing [] or the government is currently starving [] do I have anything to say beyond I have hardly written? [] I have been slightly mad to the point of hallucinating [] in the beginning before A.s house flooded that night [] part of what abated it [] sleep wrapped up in another human being [] guilt that others have been unable to say goodbye to loved ones [] we have most of us broken a rule or three in small ways [] I sleep better with him here [] He took two days off last weekend and spent three nights here [] gives a structure to the week and an impetus to keep the flat in a less disgusting state [] I will finish for today [] with a promise to return and a removal of my daft pressure to try and write anything good [] and only to write [] if only to keep the pen moving to untangle these thoughts

17th September 2020

There are still pleasures to be rooted out of the panic [] even now yesterdays baked potato with its wrinkled hide [] as I now have the time and inclination to roast one slowly for myself [] I found a birthday postcard my stepfather drew for me at 25 [] and not long lived in this place [] a rolled up sardine tin for a bed [] (a call back to his childhood joke of dreaded sardines for dinner) [] the way I can trace his handiwork around the walls [] back when his hands were steady [] not clawing at bookcases for escape [] the bathroom door he shaved down to stop it catching on the bath siding [] calm in his blue boilersuit [] the open boxes we painted together with the leftovers from the rainbow on my bedroom floor [] a sixth form present [] the boxes have been coffee tables in a Georgian hovel in Carlisle [] with an open fireplace I feared pigeons would fall in [] now carry records and multitudes of shoes [] overflows of books [] Anne Sexton [] Anne Waldman [] Madness and Sexual Politics [] I walked through Manley Park [] a middle aged woman smiled at my purple tie dye denim jacket and denim shirt combo [] the grass had not long been mown and was lightly warmed by the sun [] I was lifted back to languorously kicking my heels of the filled in wishing well outside the Crostwick White Horse [] the verge over the brooklet piled high with clippings [] while I waited for a possible but not probable bus [] too much time on my hands and feet [] I have launched a third book [] baked a new favourite cake [] vanilla studded with blueberry and white chocolate [] tonight I will be kissed and provoked to laugh [] this is enough

Note: I created and facilitated these workshops Via Zoom and wrote with participants

28th October 2020 Stirred Workshop Kate Bush

Freewriting from 'Take your shoes off and throw them the lake' (Hounds of Love)

Is something Diane Di Prima has surely done [] perhaps not lakes first [] in Brooklyn [] and
not a dainty shoe [] pirate boots flung into puddles [] or rivers later [] or other coasts []
gliding though the universe on LSD [] she would have danced barefoot and made love to the
earth [] the day the news of her death breaks [] the flat above leaks in my bedroom [] it
rains outside [] in thick [] heavy [] short bursts [] my hands are wrung cold by it [] white []
walking to buy a tarpaulin [] to protect my futon [] this flat has always invoked something of
her New York cold water flat [] where she slept in a pile of poets [] artists [] dancers for
warmth [] cooked them all vegetable soup

4th November 2020 Stirred Workshop Beat Women

Free Writing from 'I could travel around the world/writing you postcards' Janine Pommy Vega

I cannot do this in 2020 or 2021 [] easily [] our crossings our boundaries more dense [] than bureaucratic chalk [] I could travel around my flat [] writing you postcards [] the short missives [] I send to my stepfather in the locked ward [] the smallness of these messages [] limited to weather [] my hope for a walk [] the things he will remember to have an answer for [] a postcard [] a rectangle of art [] to keep in a beige place of few pleasures [] I cannot make him toad in the hole from here [] the surprise wild boar sausages [] I picked up from the Grove Road butcher [] hungover [] turfed off the first bus from Alysham [] a toad in the hole is usually rectangular [] I cannot shrink it to fit [] you will have to make do with an enigmatic Modigliani

Write your own Revolutionary Letter like Diane Di Prima

There is a time to write a letter to yourself [] that is not on the cards you have drawn today []
a person who spent half an hour hoovering bicarbonate of soda from the carpet does not
deserve an epistolary poem [] the damp leaked out my longing for the moon [] desire to waft
rose petal scent [] rocky outcrops of rescued books [] Vita Sackville West [] Patti Smith []
piled in the living room [] the record player splayed here [] after the drop on Joan
Armatrading vinyl [] the stuff that came out from under the futon [] the embarrassment of the
plumber finding out of date condoms [] among the odd socks [] soaked to do lists [] I woke
today again from a long way off [] a body that felt like I had left it down a well [] the coming
to [] I had to haul myself up in the bucket [] I am sure there is a pailsworth left down there []
among the frogs [] and moss of dreams

Take a maligned night-time animal and make it beautiful

Foxes

Although I have bemoaned the loud shriek of fighting/fucking foxes [] or how one made off with my compost bin [] handle in mouth [] a fox lunch box [] all packed up with bones [] fat and shreds of carrot [] the eyes of potatoes [] I thrill to see one burning up the pavement [] like there is a fire within the grubby fox fur [] which Whalley Range mizzle cannot dampen [] the muzzle with fur worn thin from expertly snouting binlids [] the way they race under your eye from one street lamp to another [] hopping pools of illumination [] I never saw a fox in my decade of living surrounded by pines at Hill House [] they are fully urbanised at least there in Norfolk [] the interloper retains his majesty you cannot question the spark of a fox

Ice and Queen

I have not done a daily watch for ice this year [] or a daily walk [] surviving involves remaining burrowed in as often as possible [] surveying the succulents and cacti [] the kitchen windowsill [] mourning the drooping of the lurid pink flowers [] not lacing up boots more than twice a week [] I had plans to wrap up in a big coat on cycle rides [] rack up miles on my phones mileometer [] this has happened rarely [] my feet still recall the pedals [] how I will fare on the ice when it comes [] I am still considering [] I used to cycle from the city centre in all weathers [] through a snow storm once [] nearly came off at the big junction for Hulme [] the thrill of it [] kept pedalling as my breath froze and I could hardly see [] have I lost my taste for dangerous cycling in this cautious year? [] the ice should not stop me [] I cycle slow now [] last time for gossip with D. and the ducks on a still liquid pond [] I forgot rice or peas for them queenly [] the ducks continued to glide [] as they did in March when they were the only being I communicated with outside these four walls

Are you wild in thought or mind in a Wilderness?

A wilderness can be found nearer to a bus timetable than you think and humans have trampled most of the places you have walked [] I have not been anywhere truly wild this year [] last year on Arran [] in mist I walked the waterfall trail [] filled a water bottle from it that tasted like the sweetest wine I had ever quaffed [] that whole island is like a wildness of mind [] this year I have traipsed miles round Alexandra Park [] fed old rice to ducks when seeing another human felt impossible [] the ducks on their lake islands do not exist in a wilderness [] the lake artificial [] I have not checked if the Suffragettes knew of the ducks [] when razing a greenhouse to the ground [] did not think of the ducks their lake may have manmade borders [] they exist wildly and quack freely [] the ducks will have to sustain me [] until I can see a seal do a full body smile on an outcrop of rocks [] until I can bathe my face in sea spray [] the sea makes me feel the wildling inside dance on the shore [] as I beach comb to find sea glass treasures and remove the more than footprints that others leave behind

A Poem with the Word Wilderness in the Last Stanza

I think about what to write on the next postcard [] to send my stepdad [] I asked mother if I could give him a Walkman to play music [] she paused before saying he would smash it [] this is the longest he has lived without Jazz [] the Modigliani was gratefully received a postcard cannot cause harm [] even when you are living somewhere with locked doors and your mind is as full of storms as his is now [] all the doors are locking in his cerebellum [] the arteries blocking [] the last I wrote was about the greyness of the weather [] keep concepts simple [] no longer the meandering chats that occurred over a Frys Turkish Delight [] from the glovebox after school [] the space is small and my words have been distanced and the illness [] I could find my way back from the wilderness of mind once [] when I was in a place I had no keys for [] I send postcards because he will not

The places where the trees thin [] leaves spill the dunes [] at Wells you are in two places at once [] canopied green hush [] hillocks of sand and crinkling noise of seafoam [] collapsing [] we camped there after our exams [] sunburn [] peeled [] noses [] climbed a tall dune [] cooled our cans of beer in its surface [] dug my black painted toes in [] passed smoke around [] till the sunset swirled [] layers of mauve [] orange [] red [] atop the horizon of the rest of our lives

After: Carrying Food Home in Winter

I am in love with my washing machine today [] I dyed more things purple in lockdown [] I have dyed everything purple [] a denim boilersuit went in without ceremony[] a viscose frilled blouse [] striped with rubber bands and white jeans [] buttons held together to form starbursts on my knees [] I did not follow the instructions to the letter [] the white parts have a blue haze to them [] the process of dyeing is not precise [] the colour [] the transformative act [] is the joy [] the way clouds darken a sky [] release rain and thunder [] to leave a blue glaze [] the way two bodies fold into each other [] it is never how you imagined [] perfection dulls all thrills

Writing Towards a Last Line: ‘and the weeping silver birch’ Jennifer Tonge’s Aperture

An apple tree was planted at Farrow Road on my birth [] it bore edible fruit without baking and sugar as we moved [] a transplant attempted I do not recall picking the fruit as a teenage [] or my interest waned [] or its fruiting halted by the move [] the conker lined avenues that lined the walk to both my primary schools [] the importance of the armoured shells [] the windfalls of them marking our autumn return [] a cycle that started to be disrupted after the heatwaves[] of molasses tarmac [] the melting circuitry that set off fire alarms [] the conkers were early or late after that [] the ethereal appeal remained [] with the gossamer covering of the trunk of the weeping silver birch.

20th January 2021

This is the first time this year I have written that was not a list [] a hastily scribbled phone number [] something that extends beyond a torn-up scrap [] Biden was inaugurated today [] I have not watched the footage [] I wanted to be sure he was safely installed before I read the news [] and now there is grounds for hope [] less fear of nuclear annihilation [] it is snowing again [] at such a volume it would be hard to walk through it [] I have not left the house since buying electric last week [] it has not snowed this much since I first moved to this flat [] more than a decade ago [] the weather altered during this pandemic winter [] we had snow on Xmas day [] which I spent alone drinking gin and baileys and mulled cider [] while I watched three versions of Christmas Carol [] culminating with the Muppets version [] I cried early [] putting on Joni Mitchells Blue [] to cook dinner [] was a rookie mistake [] resulting in damp parsnips

17th February 2021

I am taking cod liver oil capsules with vitamin D in [] my face remains some form of livid inflamed pink [] despite antihistamines and steroid cream [] I have stopped the psychiatric ward flashbacks [] reminded myself of the control I have over my environment [] that I did not possess then [] it is like a prolonged depressive episode this awful year [] it is safer to remain in leaden sleep [] despite my epic nightmares [] featuring abusive men of my past in ever more traumatic narratives [] for now the snowflakes grow larger [] large as goose feathers and I will not feel them come to rest [] on my skin [] my tongue [] I will not be intimate with the snow [] as has been my fervent wish in the past [] I have the notion the snow settling [] will settle me somehow [] today there was a small hopeful flicker and more snow than I have seen in years [] I have not seen the frozen lake in Alexandra park [] the mutation which has changed the virus [] has made me more fearful of others breath [] of what I cannot control [] within these four walls [] I control what comes in or out [] I do not know when it started snowing [] the flurry is getting denser [] rather than slowing [] the post box has a few inches on it [] I should have looked out the window earlier [] I should go outside tomorrow up close [] if it settles [] if I am settled enough

17th February 2021 Stirred Workshop Craft

Freewriting from the line 'It could be unpicked undone by my own hands unlike outside and regrets' (my line)

Outside has become treacherous [] even when there is no ice [] the woman who bellowed at me that [] I 'should wear a plaque' [] when I told her to get back [] as I am asthmatic [] the wearing of markers of supposed defects [] has not gone well historically [] this was what made my face burn under my mask [] that the walking around with an abnormal brand [] is not something to be taken lightly [] or humanising [] the cloaking we undertake as protection not easily cast aside [] that day my face burning with the history of her comments [] all the deaths wished upon people [] who do not fit her uncaring thoughts [] of who should be allowed to carry out their daily tasks [] who should be allowed out [] I did not look to see if there were snowdrops [] I am taking codliver oil capsules with vitamin D [] my face remains some form of livid inflamed pink despite antihistamines and steroid cream [] I have stopped the ward flashbacks [] reminded myself of control I have over my environment [] that I did not possess then [] it is like a prolonged depressive episode this awful year [] it is safer to remain indoors [] to remain in leaden sleep [] despite my epic nightmares featuring abusive men of my past [] in ever more inventive narratives [] for now the snowflakes grow larger [] large as goose feathers [] and I will not feel them rest on my skin [] I will not be intimate with the snow [] as has been my fervent wish in the past

Write a Self-Portrait in the Form of Something Crafted for you After: Dress Form by Brenda Shaugnessey:

I am the last jumper my mother knitted my father [] black and white variegated wool stitches up as a more complex pattern [] as my mother clacked her needles to avoid wringing her hands [] she told me later they hurt all that time from the action [] I sat by her feet spooling out wool from the ball [] I decided when there was enough and cut the length [] this left a small hole in one cuff [] I am that imperfect attempt to warm a dying mans bones [] I am still the hole in the sleeve [] the hole inside that has yet to be filled [] the jumper was worn after he died [] perfectly grunge on R.s frame [] I remember that cuff dipped in rockpools [] never returned [] whether that holey cuff remains [] I do not know [] I know of the hole I keep in a similar hidden spot [] but not how to close it

24th February 2021 Stirred Workshop Windows

Freewriting From a Line From my Poem 'rabbits avoiding the small square of dim light from my window'

The rabbits must still be there [] although Hill House is no longer [] solo parcels of land sold off [] must remove the isolation I felt there [] I have never loved being alone anywhere so much [] a house [] a field to roam in alone [] save for the rabbits and pheasants and quails [] the way the pine trees made music with the wind [] the opposite of urban is never silence [] although I did not live cheek to jowl as I do now [] at the end of a terrace [] sounds above [] below [] sideways woken by the neighbour playing Karma Police on her piano [] talking to someone in her beautiful mosaic mirrored yard [] her house has not been chopped [] this one is the only one converted to flats [] I never saw a fox at Hill House [] or a badger [] here they abound [] more crows and magpies drawn to warm roofs too

Write About an Action you or Someone Else Performs at a Window Every Day After Daisy
Aldan's poem Women at Windows

Due to being the cornice of a terrace block [] when I look out my bedroom window I
sometimes see a woman showering in the distance [] through pebbled glass [] faintly [] I
know that she is white and there is lather [] any other detail is obscured by the deliberate
modesty [] of the patterned glass and distance [] I do not know how opaque this bedroom
window looks from behind that surface [] if this woman has also seen me dressing or
undressing [] a blurry nude in the pane [] or if only the crow that besieges my dreaming state
by cawing on the sill [] is the only creature who has seen my vulnerable state [] I had to
relearn about windows and the way others can see you in the glass [] after years of being
sheltered by pines as a youth [] when the tree that blocked my living room window almost
entirely with its branches [] was cut down I had a sense of having a layer of protection
removed [] the way they tapped had become a meditative sound to me [] now there is a bright
light from far away [] or several streets [] that burns brighter than any other window [] like
Gatsbys green light [] it has grown in all possible significance [] beyond the ordinary people
who must live there

Write a Poem that Ends with the Word Windows

Today I have been slow wracked by intense dreams [] in which I wrung apologies from people who do not know how to utter them in reality [] the kind of dream that has become frequent in lockdown [] a shock a [] raking over of trauma [] and on waking [] knowing the mind [] deprived of stimuli [] is trying to offer me closure [] like the springs thawing [] bringing snowdrops and crocuses in Manley park [] how hard I have found sleep this week [] resorted to zopiclone the fuzziness it brings the next day [] its hypnotic effects make doing the washing up pleasurable [] I have not looked for the crocuses yet [] or daffodils [] I cannot see any from the windows [] I would have to get close enough to smell them

24th Feb 2021

Write a Poem that has a Grand Declaration with the Word Window/s in it and Not in the Body of the Poem After I Love You More Than all the Windows in New York City by Jessica Greenbaum

The police go by on horses [] past my living room window [] I hear the hooves and do not need to look for their fluorescent jackets [] there is a certain heaviness of hoof [] to a police equine [] searching no doubt for illicit parties [] I have in the past partied in many a basement disco round Whalley Range [] watching for flakes of white wash to drop in a plastic cup [] of whatever booze is left [] in a house party at three am [] the ceiling shaking with the beats [] I would not have chosen [] communal music reverberating in the breast bone has become a luxury now [] like the first gig I went to after I left the hospital [] I was so high on returning to a stage filled with the thrum of Interpol's guitars [] the heaving [] of bodies [] the mingling of sweat [] of possibilities of pleasure returning to my body [] to dancing with a plastic pint of Tuborg lager spilling on my red converse [] we will return to dancing with strangers

3rd March 2021 Craft Workshop #2

Free Writing From my Line 'it could be unpicked mistakes can be undone by my own hands unlike outside and regrets'

I have not been outside this week [] bar to empty bottles into the recycling bin [] I cannot work out if the upstairs tenant is still there [] unsure if she has moved the post [] to rest atop the box in the hallway [] by the shared door [] with its malfunctioning lock [] sometimes only responds to a slam [] I have thought about taking walks that are not to the post office [] to see the crocuses in the parks [] I have seen reports of recent daylight attacks on women [] the world outside has become less crowded [] this too brings danger [] a bike might be the plan [] a false sense of security [] I was never fast even when I cycled to the centre of Manchester every day [] I will shake off the rust [] from my bike and myself

11th January 2022

My bikes have been scrapped by men [] who had no idea how much of my freedom went along with them [] or of my crooked left arm [] an imperceptible fault from a distance [] making the replacing of a bike all that more difficult [] the ringing in my ears is back [] I have dosed myself up with zopiclone [] or valerian [] extra quetiapine [] on alternating nights [] halfawake [] when I push my ear into the pillow [] leaning against the radiator [] it sounds like the wind squalling in a bay [] I try to bring my mind back to the sea [] my summers trip to overcast Cromer [] swimming anyway T. was there and I could not give into the urge to avoid the cold [] month or so later splashing in bright sunlight at Mundesley with C. and B. [] mango sorbet on the sand [] I try to forget the time after I left the hospital [] when I was convinced that in my bedroom [] with rainbow on the floor [] the tinny sounds of the storage radiators [] conducting heat from concrete [] were a message [] there was something of import [] if I could just understand it [] I prefer this sea squall simulacra [] I can picture a landscape [] layered in blues and greys [] the sting of salt [] the way my chest expands [] just to be near it [] a promise of elusive seals [] I rarely swim in the sea or swim at all [] like riding a bike [] I do not remember learning how [] my body has always known how to do it [] to move on wheels or water

31st January 2022

Like that [] with an aqueous theatrical ripple down the cracked wall [] the month of sludge has rolled over me [] I have averaged getting outside in the dark once a week [] no light to verify reports of too early snowdrops in Manley Park [] between the extra quetiapine [] the burrowing that had to occur [] after I imagined the flat buzzer hammering in my skull two mornings in a row at six am [] I have somehow taken two men to bed [] one a disappointment in a single act [] a long-time acquaintance [] a quantity I thought I knew [] offered himself up [] without mention of entanglements [] to later say he is seeing someone [] I felt sluttish and disposable [] imagined some other girl [] he calls girlfriend [] a younger girl [] I am no longer girlish [] less mad [] who does not wear a black boiler suit and a dark star of India pendant swinging in her cleavage [] to meet a friend [] the truth less tragic [] a few dates [] he agreed I checked in after the kiss [] 'is this ok?' [] that he was impulsive [] like the water rolling down the plaster [] like a weeping willow [] tonight [] was a blocked sink [] a tap in need of a washer [] and the flow slowed [] my fears enlarged the danger [] I took my feelings and messaged another lover [] slid under the throw [] embroidered with olive branches [] patched [] from a smoking in bed incident a decade ago [] we overcame our mutual SAD [] septuple times [] I have learned a tidal wave can slow to a trickle [] that my intuition can trick me [] that my capacity for pleasure remains undiminished

15th February 2022

The way the energy saving lightbulb [] swaying in the kitchen [] covered in cobwebs [] flickers erratic [] then has a day of full brightness [] makes me think I am hallucinating [] its variations [] that I am the lightbulb [] winking in and out of usefulness [] that the electrics are faulty [] and I am going to perish in the night in a fire[] and no one will know [] all my notebooks will be burned [] all the poems unpublished [] gone [] that the washing up undone [] will still be discernible [] the fire engines at 1 am the other night [] did not help to dispel this delusion [] I saw a woman with a child wrapped in a grey striped duvet out the window [] there was no soot on her [] I opened the front door to speak to a firefighter [] after days of not speaking [] I struggled to locate the words [] on a tongue thickened by an extra 25mg of Quetiapine [] dulled from lack of use [] I did not ask after the woman [] searched for a phrase that would not waste his time [] 'what's going on there [] is it selfcontained?' [] I am assured [] close the door [] worry I came off cold [] hoped the lack of soot meant safety for everyone [] today I replaced the lightbulb [] have strung words together in rows [] that mostly made sense [] like a set of fairy lights in a forgotten attic [] some burned brighter than others [] confusion in the shop [] over a bag [] I cannot be sure if it was my muddled tongue [] or the mask [] I put in the bayonet cap [] in the dark [] by feel [] instep rising precarious [] off the step stool [] I did not think about snapping my neck

3rd March 2022

Today I am thinking about patterns and portents [] two of the avian kind [] alighted in my mind [] in recent weeks [] the magpie warming its feet again [] on the chimney pot of the house opposite [] just as I when I took the call in March 2020 [] from my mother [] to say she was not going out again any time soon [] a crow woke me on the futon for the first time in years [] I am bracing for a third [] the way my hedgerow witch of mother says [] ‘theres going to be a storm from how the birds are talking’ [] it is true [] the starlings and others roosting [] in the apple espalier [] in her garden [] are loudest before the sky turns dark [] at midday [] she trusts in her instincts absolutely [] having never slipped into the psychosis [] where I believe I can predict the future [] it was often small phenomena [] of my brick of mobile ringing before it truly did [] of the rust bucket train breaking down [] it still unnerved me [] I worry now over my worry [] were the magpie and the crow foretelling the storms [] that took down a fence in the alley [] or fear of a fallout cloud [] like the faint wisp of one [] that rolled over England [] on the day of my birth? [] I am of half a mind to cleave to the rational [] my mothers unwavering belief [] in what she divines from feathered calls [] disturbs me [] and yet I counted two portents and am waiting for a third

19th March 2022

On the corner of St Werburghs Road [] with the street sign stolen off its poles [] like an incongruous beautiful illusion [] a magnolia tree [] the size of a house in full bloom [] with fairy lights wound round the trunk [] a street away [] there is one more tree illuminated [] out of many unlit bare branches [] in the dusk [] I cannot be sure if they are waiting to bud [] or if I have missed the blossom [] I am still hovering in a suggestible state [] that tries to convince me that there is some connection [] between these two trees out of many [] bound in twinkling light [] a sign [] a message to be decrypted [] a trail to follow [] I can shake this delusion [] as I turn down the alley [] my back to the sparkling arboreal conundrum [] the cherry blossom tree [] outside my flat has a few white flowers half unfurled [] my eyes are widening [] I am able to look up and seek wonder

Coda:

4th November 2022

The hand clinic is staffed exclusively by women [] who exude tenderness and admonishment [] a colleague quips to the woman [] who is measuring the angles my little finger can reach after my flexor repair [] ‘I bet you can’t wait until lunchtime to get your hands back’ [] I think how strange it must have been in 2020 [] to be palm to palm [] to dozens of strangers [] and not kiss the ones you love [] I feel sheepish in here [] a lot of the patients are teenage boys [] who have been reckless [] or gruff men in thick coats [] with reflective patches [] hurrying back to a site [] I practically threw the knuckle duster splint and pastel [] blue [] foam [] sling [] at the nurse [] glad to be rid of the encumbrance [] on the tram to Chorlton [] I listen to Portisheads Glory Box [] a warmth blooms in my stomach and radiates out to a tingle [] like summer rain[] on my limbs[] music invokes this sensation [] or a variation of it sometimes [] and I am reminded [] of the man with schizophrenia [] who told me [] when we were in the hospital [] in October 2004 [] and I did not know if I would ever leave the white walls and styrofoam meals [] that he had voices[] that whispered kind thoughts to him [] and he would not be rid of them [] when my face tingles like nails are being dropped on my cheeks [] for hours [] I forget [] that a chord makes rain dance on my forearms

Introduction:

It must be stated from the outset; structurally, stylistically and content wise this thesis will be unusual; endeavouring to effectively communicate the peculiarity of the reality of living with bipolar disorder. The appurtenant effects on my experience of the world; process, and language necessitate these diversions from academic protocol. These self-same rationale as to why the poetry is hybrid in form, in an even-handed design, the critical writing displays these elements of hybridity of genre. My mind and body are unreliable narrators, they cannot be contained or accurately expressed by one form of writing or poetry. The research is weighted in favour of the creative work and is moreover deeply intertwined in my personal experience. The poetry collection bears the uttermost corollary of bipolar; there are considerably more poems than your average submission, the poems differ wildly in terms of length and subject matter. The agony, the humdrum and the ecstasy. My practice is necessarily open, the hybrid journal form and the sheer volume of poems serves to wholly peregrinate the aggregate of the landscape of my mind and mood states. If my body is a unreliable narrator, how do you catch one in a lie? You gather as much evidence as possible.

One of my major ethical concerns was the possibility that having to focus intently upon my mental health, in both the poetry and the critical writing, may have a negative effect on my mental state. I am writing out of the lived experience of bipolar disorder and therefore all the content is shaped by my symptoms. To provide clarity on how this has transpired; in the critical sections, extensive editing has occurred, for my writing to be understood. In the collection of poetry, where possible, the syntactic irregularities produced by my condition have been preserved, with minimal editing taking place, unless I was experimenting with

structure. The square brackets as punctuation within the poetry is a nod to Emily Dickinson's dashes, Audre Lorde's *The Master's Tools...* and Charles Olson's composition by breath. The blocks of journal/text with next to no punctuation were impenetrable. I have sought a solution that is legible, simple and truly aligned to the aesthetic, political aims of the poetry. The outcome is not all disorder, myself as magpie eye's view of bipolar is recalibrating the critical mode, redefining every area of critical thought I have come into contact with.

The research sprawls into manifold directions, within my brain affected by bipolar, they appear perfectly interconnected. The nature of this interconnectedness is explained in further detail in the section upcoming: *Embracing the Magpie Approach*. It has been decided that to acknowledge and celebrate the strange nature of this thesis to its fullest extent is the only way forward.

The following research questions will be largely answered by the body of poetry as the weighting for this project is 70% in favour of the creative work:

1. *What does eco-poetry look like when you can't get out of bed? (i.e., what does eco-poetry from a bipolar perspective look like?)*
2. *How can the tradition of the body in (eco-feminist) radical landscape poetry be built upon to include the gendered mentally ill body?*
3. *How does poetry of the gendered mentally ill body subvert or develop expectations of landscape poetry?*

The key research question for this project was: what does eco-poetry look like when you can't get out of bed? An addendum to this would be: how do you vivify the bipolar experience when you cannot remember it? This leads to a mention of the recursive nature of some of the poetry and thesis. There will be elements of repetition within both. This describes the nature of brain fog, of the mantra like phrases I use to talk myself out of negative thought patterns, of how I hang a thought to remind myself to come back to it, of the very nature of mental illness, the rumination that our thoughts tread in circles unbidden, the opposite of desire paths. During my recovery from my psychotic episode at eighteen I had no words for the brain fog I was struggling with or understanding why I needed to leave post it notes on my alarm clock to remind myself to carry out basic functions. I have discovered anecdotally my coping mechanisms for what I call sieve brain have a lot in common with those employed by people with brain injuries. This project has been in a sense about returning the whole of my experience to myself when I cannot remember it. The dailiness of the journal hybrid format, of writing in one session, one moment, seeks to provide a spectroscopic view of my life as it is lived.

To commence examining how poetry can function as research, at this point, I will elaborate on the concept of poetry as essay. This will be achieved by a reading of two poets, one from the twentieth century and one writing contemporaneously: R.D Laing and Sophie Collins.

R.D Laing's work as a revolutionary psychiatrist has relevance as a precursor to the emerging discipline of mad studies. The recent emergence of mad studies is touched upon in the next chapter: *Poetics of the Gendered Mentally Ill Body and Mad Studies*.

Laing's most famous poetic work is *Knots*, I will be using this work as an example of the singular way the structure of poetry can communicate ideas and discourse. Laing utilises

free verse and experimental text techniques including concrete poetry to expose the patterns in relationships that we as human beings are prone to falling into. A circle of arrows punctuates the lines

-----→ Jack
thinks Jill is –
because *mean greedy –*
because
mean greedy
 ←-----Jill thinks
Jack is¹⁴

The nature of concrete poetry allows for a sparseness of language. The shape of the poem carries the meaning between the few words, the fence post on which the poem rests. In the space of a short sentence, we are carried into the endless cycle of a couple's mutual negative thought patterns. These qualities particularly of experimental poetry, make it an apt medium for discourse, the physicality of the poem connotes the cyclical nature of the relationship drama enacted. In *Who is Mary Sue?* poetry allows Sophie Collins to switch interchangeably between more academic feminist discourse and deeply personal lived experience of misogyny and its impact upon women writers. A Mary Sue is a derogatory term used to imply that a woman writer has self-inserted herself into a text¹⁵ the implication being that women naturally lack imagination, a generative act only men are capable of. Collin's writes on how she believes literary circles perceive the limitations of

¹⁴ P.53 Laing, R.D. (1978) *Knots*. Harmondsworth Penguin.

¹⁵ *Mary Sue Dictionary.com*. [Online] [Accessed 15th January 2025]
<https://www.dictionary.com/e/fictional-characters/mary-sue/>

women's writing: 'a woman who tries to invent in literature will fail, whereas a woman who succeeds in writing is believed to have done so to the extent she has been able to accurately portray the details of her own life'¹⁶ grounded passages like this occur alongside more surreal elements. Collins creates a world of women unsettled by men who redefine it for them. The poems function both as separate rooms of thought and accrue meaning, when grouped together the collection allows Collins to create a discourse on women writers.

The Magpie Approach:

The magpie approach to poetics is a term I have devised to explain my personal practice, multitudinous and glancingly incommensurable influences come together to form my own unique poetics. My influences include but are not limited to: RLP, current experimental writing from Manchester, beat poetry, eco-poetry and poetry of madness/mental health. Thus far searches for other academics using this term in relation to poetics specifically, has furnished no results. Therefore, I am confidently asserting my right to define this term, in relation to my own eco-poetics. The name is a deliberate allusion to a creature in the natural world, found in all areas of the UK both urban and rural, as this thesis has an eco-poetry focus. For the reasons I will shortly be outlining, the magpie has innate qualities and connotations that make its use appropriate as an emblem of my poetic approach. The image of the magpie, with the reputed kleptomaniac habit (potentially a spurious claim) of stealing sparkling objects, is an apt device to describe my poetic practice. The magpie's attention careens in all directions, everything shines, tin and silver, all treasure to be brought back to the nest. This darting about of attention captures the essence of the bipolar: mindset/variety of mood states/attention span/brain fog/memory/memory loss/creativity.

¹⁶ p. 29 Collins, S. (2018) *Who Is Mary Sue?* Faber & Faber.

These processes can appear scatter brained, disjointed, the sense of skipping from one burnished object of interest, i.e., one form or style of poetics to another, which do not immediately to an outside observer have much in common. To me, all these stylistic elements have value in and of themselves and are moulded bricolage style, each different shaped stone of my poetics is supporting one another like a dry-stone wall.

While I was unable to find another form of criticism citing the magpie linked to any form of eco-poetics, Sue Ellen Campbell discusses the magpie as a basis to launch into an intertextual critique of the novel *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*, in the first chapter of *Writing the Environment*, a collection of essays on eco literary criticism. She describes the Magpie as 'inquisitive, curious and talkative, they are skilled in discovering things that are usually concealed'¹⁷ this description relates to my symptoms during manic states, the speeding up and elevated mood induce an interest in many subjects simultaneously. A manic state is characterised by what is referred to as pressured speech, an inability to stop talking. In more level moods many people with bipolar disorder have noted what I also experience, a constant skull chatter, there is an internal monologue that is never quiet. The qualities real or imagined that are overlaid upon the magpie by literature and folklore, interface with the fashion, that I, as a poet who experiences altered perception through extreme mood states and hallucinations, view the world distinctively. Through poetry I attempt to make opaque the altered world I inhabit. Furthermore, the magpie is a trickster in folklore and rhyme, possessing duality, of being both lucky and unlucky, refined of appearance and emitting a raucous squawk. I have found to be a person living with bipolar disorder is to be drawn to duality, to perceive it in oneself and the external world. I

¹⁷ p. 13 Kerridge, R. Sammells, R. (ed.) (1998) *Writing the Environment* London: Zed Books.

am for the purposes of this thesis, the poetry magpie careening around a vast poetic landscape, dipping my beak into any gleaming object of perceived appositeness.

The other constituent of Campbell's discourse on the magpie which is apropos pertains to description of the magpie's nest. The nest being a contrivance that epitomises the idea of intertextuality 'They make their living as generalists...they build amazing nests: huge, spherical, layered, intricately woven, incorporating hundreds of miscellaneous pieces. These nests are messy but strong'¹⁸ if the magpie is myself as a poet this document is my nest. It will become apparent when reading the poetry that not all the poems are in fact strictly adherent to the prevailing poetic aesthetic. Within the first few months of starting the composition process, the poems can be defined as hybrid texts, hybrid in this sense means the poems function as both a poem and a journal entry. The poems most often appear as prose poem in form, i.e., as a block of text with no line breaks. This choice was made to perpetuate the 'as written' sensation, of documenting the pages of my notebook as far as possible.

I revert at times to my previous modes of short lined free verse, or auxiliary postures which do not coalesce with the main aggregate of the poetry. I did present an edit of the poems where any that did not adhere to the over-arching mode of a hybrid journal/poem, or the themes were excised. It was decided that in removing all these poetic outliers that something vital was lost. In this sense my nest is messy but strong, these elements that do not match must be interwoven throughout the collection to bolster the whole. The magpie features in the poetry itself only a few times, I can only attribute this to the ever-present nature of the bird. In suburbia, the magpie is avian wallpaper. The first poem that features

¹⁸ p. 13 Kerridge, R. Sammells, R. (ed.) (1998) *Writing the Environment* London: Zed Books

the magpie tenders it as an omen of the pandemic *'I called my mother while a magpie warmed its feet on the chimney pot of the house opposite [] she like the magpie could feel something a casual observer could not see []like when she knew L. was going to die[]'*¹⁹ In this poem written in March 2020 the sight of the magpie appearing to dance on a hot chimney pot allowed it to penetrate my consciousness.

This magpie's approach to the poetry, alongside presenting this thesis as a nest of scavenged treasures, rectifies another issue. This framing aims to reflect my whole self, to myself, as a person and poet. A unified theory of poetics of the self, the aforementioned magnetic attraction to duality. The symptoms, drug side effects, the vast variations of mood states and effects of brain fog that are associated with bipolar disorder combine to produce a divided self. A self that feels unknown to the other selves it contains. My practice of writing poetry throughout all my mood states, can in effect, return to those states when they alter and view myself as a whole person with different facets.

Joinedupness of self, and the urge to resist writing poetry which is easily categorised has resulted in writing not only of the experience of being bipolar, but of the gendered mentally ill body. The gendered mentally ill body is the modus in which I/the body descry; the critical texts I have engaged with, the changing environment and climate. I did not want to present a work that would be viewed as unadulterated catharsis, that placed mental illness as its only and prevailing theme. An extended discussion of the assumed canon of confessional poetry, is also located in chapter three: *Poetics of the Gendered Mentally Ill Body and Mad Studies*.

¹⁹ P. 76 Poetry Manuscript A. Percy

I have composed the poetry with bipolar disorder acting as the smoked glass, the point of observation, through which I view eco-feminist poetics of the body and eco-poetry. That which is observed through this lens is altered by it. It has been difficult to find parallels of other writers who write feminist eco-poetry focusing on the body and are mentally ill, hence the diverse influences discussed herein. I do not identify as an RLP poet, or a beat, or a confessional poet, or a purely experimental poet, I am the magpie who delves for poetics that coruscate in each genre. The elements that scintillate as applicable to my poetics were taken back to my magpie's nest.. In my two decades of practice as a publishing and performing poet, I have always sought not to produce a direct simulacrum of my influences. While the magpie approach is beneficial in evolving a unique poetics, it has also provided an obstacle within the research. This approach, or rather the idiosyncrasy with which I instinctively perceive an interconnectedness with a wide range of poetry and critical texts, from a variety of disciplines, has frequently caused me to divert down diversiform avenues of research. Many of these, for reasons of space, time and maintaining cohesion have had to be abandoned but are given their due in the appendix. I had initially wanted to centre my longstanding practice as a poet who performs their work, it was decided early on that I already too many concerns to be discussing. I have covered this subject in brief within my discussion on the beats and my connection to them in chapter six. During my undergraduate research, for the contemporary culture portion of my study, this joining up of scattered points was a boon, intertextuality was the aim of that subject. It has been the dedicated work of my tutorial team throughout to keep me on course and shear off these many diversions.

As detailed briefly above, the magpie approach was also borne out of a deliberate attempt on my part not to consciously model my poetry upon any one poet or school of poetry, my practice has been a process of refining my own voice and perspective. This sense of there being an equality of ideas, that no one poet or approach has more value than another is linked to my background being raised as a quaker, a socialist, a feminist and in adulthood the discovery of intersectional feminism, that all voices, from all backgrounds are worth being read, and have important poetic knowledge to impart. The hybrid poetics of the project with its focus on poetry and journaling combined, and the ensuing research interest in hybrid texts occurred as result of attempting to resist categorisation within my writing practice. This has provided an opening up of the possibilities; for more fluency of composition when the onus is not on myself to write a poem as such, but merely to write. The poetry produced interrogates the boundaries between journaling and poetry, within this liminal space, the writing by its nature, exists in more than one realm and cannot be easily defined.

RLP has already unfurled as a key area of poetic and critical engagement for both the composition of the poetry and a space in which to position myself, (not slotting alongside the poets of RLP, sloshing in the same pond) in the current poetic tradition in the UK. The discovery in the course of in my research, of RLP which includes many women writers writing in a radical experimental way about women's bodies moving through landscape, is a vital component to informing how I would present my position in modern poetry. The techniques employed by women RLP writers offered space to interrogate an anthropocentric viewpoint in eco-poetry and radical alters what is considered landscape. My writing focuses partially on the domestic sphere as a landscape from which the environment is viewed, or even as a landscape itself into which nature intrudes. A radical

position, assumed as a consequence of chronic mental illness. It narrows my opportunities to view the rural vistas which are the traditional subject of landscape poetry. The poetry takes as its scenery, the suburbs of Whalley Range in Manchester, a neglected subject for eco-poetry.

The body as a concern of women writers, is established as a critical vector for feminist writers and critics. Therefore, an appropriate mount to the discussion of eco-poetry from a feminist perspective. This project riffs on RLP, an emerging subset of eco-poetry, to inform my poetics and my practice as a writer discussing the mentally ill body. In situating my work within this strand of eco-poetry, I am grouting my thought on the tiles of feminist literary eco-criticism and mad studies. To contextualise my work, I make use of the work of two key female poets who fit within this emerging tradition: Harriet Tarlo and Zoe Skoulding.

Within RLP I found women writers enacting a feminist reclamation of landscape poetry by redefining bodies as functioning, as moving through and experiencing landscape. This reclamation, of the objectified body is actioned through; the process of embodied poetics, serves to take the human feminine out of the landscape.

The conflation of woman and nature/earth/landscape comes from a misogynist perspective which seeks to define women as natural creators of children and not art. Kate Soper discusses this false construct succinctly; 'woman = reproduction = nature versus man = production = culture.'²⁰ Soper also discusses the ways in which women have been identified with nature:

'nature' has been represented as a woman in two rather differing senses: 'she' is identified with the body of laws, principles and processes that is the object of scientific scrutiny and

²⁰ Ed. Coupe. L (2000) *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Eco Criticism*. Routledge: Abingdon.

experimentation. But “she’ is also nature conceived as spatial territory, as the land or earth tamed and tilled in agriculture (and with this we may associate a tendency to feminize (sic) nature viewed simply as landscape- trees, woodland, hills, rivers, streams, etc. are frequently personified as female or figure in similes comparing them to parts of the female body)²¹

This act of conflating woman with nature or landscape denatures nature, dehumanizes and homogenizes woman, marks out our bodies as territory to be conquered, tamed and walked on. This mode of thought enables RLP’s focus upon how landscape is experienced, and through their experimental text techniques, found a process of interrogating the limitations of language to depict landscape and nature. Further, this experimentation of language and space, and the use of the term radical lead me to a reimagining of landscape poetry. This opening up of the definition of landscape itself offers possibilities for disabled writers to write about the landscape and nature they can reach, or in my case, even the view from the bedroom window.

I discovered within RLP women’s writing of the gendered body (gendered here refers to way in which society enacts gender, a social construct, upon women’s bodies) experiencing landscape. The poetry of RLP so far, in my discovery, did not turn up women who write openly about mental illness. I did find that I could associate with, or view in my interpretation, experiences of the anxious body I could relate to, RLP that depicted bodily sensations of anxiety or grief, this was a limitation I found in connecting my work to the women of RLP. I focused upon the possibilities created by the women writers of RLP, their opening up of landscape and eco poetry, for women’s bodies and writing. The lack of representation of mentally ill poets within RLP is complex, conceivably related to the stigma

²¹ed. Coupe.L (2000) *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Eco Criticism*. Routledge: Abingdon.

attached to bipolar disorder and other mental illnesses. This may result in writers writing in such a way to obscure their condition, to avoid it being officially known, or simply not wanting their writing to be perceived as writing concerning mental illness. For this reason, I have explicitly avoided discussing any poet's mental health, unless they have discussed it, this was an ethical concern of the utmost importance. This an apt juncture to introduce the concept of what I term the gendered mentally ill body.

The Gendered Mentally Ill Body

Bipolar disorder is variously described as a mental illness, a mood disorder, an invisible disability, a neurological condition, a form of neurodiversity, among other terms; between individuals the preferred label will vary. The choice of the term gendered mentally ill body is chosen here as mentally ill is broadly the most widely recognisable and agreed upon term among the many used to clinically, and colloquially, discuss bipolar disorder. I have also chosen as the fact is, the body itself is not bipolar, the body is affected by the mental illness of bipolar disorder. In this introduction to the term, I will explore the ways in which this is a suitable skeleton on which to flesh out the sundry discourses.

I realised that like many writers with a chronic illness, I am often in bed due to my condition, and as such I frequently scribble beneath my quilts, I could not (as explored further in the chapter: *The Madwoman in the Attic: Myself, Madness, 19th Century Women Writers*) immediately relate to writers who would be seeking to poeticise the wilderness conquered. Furthermore, I sought to explore a poetics of the gendered mentally ill body that revealed this reality of writing from the bed/window and challenged the notion of what

eco/landscape/place poetry could encompass. The characterisation of the gendered body as having gender enacted on it by structural sexism and the body othered by the fallacy of normalcy. Existing bodily academic discourses such as feminism and disability studies have elements which are participatory in the construction of the poetics of the gendered mentally ill body. The body as a site of discourse may have extensive roots within this tradition, gaps exist, none of them fully resonated with the singularity of my perspicacity. Into these interstices that I have sought to weave a new poetics.

Much as there are ongoing schisms within feminist thought and there currently exist a multiplicity of feminisms this fracture extends into disability theory. Within my reading I did not see my experience of a chronic, invisible, and varying mental illness fully represented. Within the disability studies texts I researched, mental illness was usually found in one chapter perhaps, and not always from the perspective of a writer/researcher with mental illness. Feminist disability discourse already has many viewpoints of the disabled body and feminism. These texts discuss society's overt and damaging focusing on the physical form we inhabit, a form othered by society, explored for several decades. Below, in an excerpt from the *Disability Studies Reader*, in her chapter *Feminist Theory, the Body, and The Disabled Figure*. Rosemarie Garland Thomson discusses the unique relationship between feminist discourse and the disabled body:

Many parallels exist between the social meanings attributed to female bodies and those assigned to disabled bodies. Both the female and the disabled body are cast within cultural discourse as deviant and inferior; both are excluded from full participation in public as well as economic life; both are defined in opposition to a valued norm which is assumed to possess corporeal superiority. Indeed, the discursive equation of femaleness with disability is common, sometimes in the service of denigrating women and sometimes with the goal of defending them...Feminists today even often invoke negative images of disability to describe the

oppression of women, as does Jane Flax-to cite a common example- in her assertion that women are “mutilated and deformed” by sexist ideology and practices.²²

Here, just as the historically occurring and continuing trope of depicting the earth as a woman’s body within some eco-poetry and criticism, a feminine body that is being acted upon violently by man as a metaphor for environmental damage> It is put forward by Thomson, that the theoretical concept of conflating the patriarchy with affecting women’s bodies as a form of mutilation, of disabling the body, creates layers of violence upon violence enacted in theory and in the case of disabled bodies a case of othering and attributing defectiveness. In both these cases the feminine body, the gendered body lacks agency and is reduced to an object having violence visited upon it.

Rather than simply conflating the disabled body with the female body, however I want theorise disability in the ways that feminism has theorised gender. Both feminism and the interrogation of disability I am undertaking challenge existing social relations; both resist interpretations of certain bodily configurations as deviant; both question the ways that particularity or difference is invested with meaning; both examine the universalizing of certain norms; both interrogate the politics of appearance.²³

Within my eco poetics of the gendered mentally ill body the phrase ‘politics of appearance’²⁴ bears significant weight, within the aesthetics of the eco-poetics of the gendered mentally ill body I decided that my appearance is of the least importance within the poetry, like the walking women of RLP I prioritised the experience of the body, what is noticed by the body, over its appearance. The trio of poems I present below are all focused on what is being sensorily or bodily experienced in the moment, or just before composition:

Saturday 27th August 2016

²² P.279 Davis, L.J. (1997) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

²³ P.281 Davis, L.J. (1997) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

²⁴ P.281 Davis, L.J. (1997) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Bishopgate west exit of Liverpool Street station London [] Caffè Nero drinking a carelessly made cup of green tea [] waiting for T. to traverse London I have forgotten where the rehab facility [] is he apologised for being late and told me to find somewhere comfortable to wait and not to be intimidated by people asking for money [] like I haven't done this journey before [] the early journeys where we changed here and went to Paddington [] usually via the natural history museum and then onto grandmas in Twyford [] school trips [] later teenage excursions to the Tate Modern [] gigs [] he probably knows what I know that I have the right face and profile to be sympathetic [] Joni Mitchell is singing her high plaintive call 'will you take me as I am strung out on another man' [] the umbrella he suggested I bring seems at this moment [] where the sky is lightly clouded and patches of blue persist [] pointless [] Joe warned it would be hotter here than in Norwich [] he will likely ask where I went tomorrow [] if it is near any of his old haunts [] the V and A was floated as an idea [] where Joe worked on the exhibition guides [] a guy in a yellow baseball cap is proffering some pictures in gilt frames [] I missed him and what they were [] I have head phones in and am scribbling furiously [] he must have thought better of asking me this Caffè Nero is resplendent with ashtrays outside [] my avoidance of home in sixth form [] sat outside in all weathers [] eking out cappuccinos [] smoking with blue fingers [] I was unkind to my hands then [] there were times I wanted to watch my pale skin turn different hues of blue and purple [] make a hurt that would not last [] would not be noticed after the fact [] I have been letting the green tea made with too hot coffee maker water cool down [] before I work out how bad it tastes [] it could be better it is a sort of murky amber [] not ideal still it is tea [] and I was up early to catch a bloody rail replacement coach to Ipswich [] I did have a first class ticket for the next stretch of the journey [] but on Abellio Greater Anglia that meant little [] I heard an announcement that seemed to say there was no catering on board [] so gave up hope of my free cup of tea [] it was in this instance cheaper than standard class [] this is a strange meeting [] which will have its own negotiations [] planning has taken place and I am meeting AnnaG this evening for decompression [] I felt I should bring him something [] I know the woeful selection of most institutions [] romance novels or at a push readers digest [] not to tax a mind [] I have brought a Carol Shields novel feminism writ large under the guise of social and relationship commentary and ever with her an emphasis on the horticultural [] inscription from me 'A reminder nothing is as it seems love Annax' [] a copy of Ariel I found at mums [] I have the restored edition [] The Yellow Wallpaper [] another slim volume [] I have a collected thick one of her writings [] The Ghost Road Pat Barker [] I never read trilogies in order [] I hope he wont mind [] a thought is he cycling? [] Though many baulk at cycling at Manchester and I admit to the very present danger [] I am not sure I could cycle in London [] wait he went to a meeting in Brixton [] my geography of London is pitiful [] usually dragged around by a friend or other [] or just going on the tube [] I can travel on that unaided [] still people without helmets hop on Boris bikes (will they be renamed when he causes an international gaffe?) [] without further thought [] the station this end is lime stone bricked [] arched windows [] picked out in red brick [] when I thought of this station I only thought of the inside [] its usually all I see before rushing to a tube line [] there is wind [] which will hopefully blow the clouds on swiftly [] it might rain later next to Caffè Nero there is Michaels Shoe Care [] for travellers whose shoes like mine have a tendency to fall apart [] I still have my sunglasses on [] have resigned myself at this point to my enduring sensitivity [] its an affectation I can live with [] at worst late nights

are assumed [] among my strange apparel [] it is possibly the least strange [] these are not cat eyes [] but black glasses with cat ears perched on top [] subtle silliness I could not walk past [] I have a child's heart shaped watch mother gave me [] a grape coloured purple stone round and set in silver [] a haematite bead bracelet and my childish plastic bead effort [] black stars and the words 'there is always poetry' [] a silver ring with diamonds of turquoise [] I am trying to wear things I can fiddle with [] so I can stop tearing at my fingers with my teeth [] old habits die hard [] my fingers have not bled [] unless I have whacked them on a door frame yet [] a few spots of rain have come down they may pass [] quarter of that most preposterous London building the gherkin [] is visible from here [] ok so now I can see rain and the sun²⁵

16th July 2016

This is the wettest July I can recall [] I have been soaked nearly every day [] or splashed by the puddles [] I bemoan the state of the roads [] I am in Piccadilly Gardens [] it is not hot enough for people to be rowdy [] police do half-hearted rounds [] a woman's quiet shy voice shocks me [] I forget how southern people sound apart from my own voice sometimes [] hesitant as I am on anxious days [] she asks me to sign a post card to save a rainforest [] I smirk at the irony [] but I sign and notice she smells of patchouli [] is wearing patterned hippy pants with her Greenpeace T shirt [] idle gestures [] wasting resources [] when the climate change cabinet is dissolved [] my head buzzes with inequity [] I do not know how we will survive the next few years [] the structures are all being dismantled [] the rain makes me dream of floods [] I visualise all this water that is coming down from the sky [] will not settle in the water table²⁶

8th August 2016

It is hot again [] I feel the air pressure in my sinuses and brow bone [] the burn like eczema reaction could to passers-by be sunburn [] I can't remember having hay fever this late last year [] the hot weather heavy feeling of the air and my sore eyes [] make me think of the fields surrounding hill house [] where the grass grew high and full of flowers and shambling mxy rabbits [] I knew to alert my parents to their presence [] would mean a spade to their skull [] a sense of duty had been instilled along with closing gates and not standing behind horses or picking wildflowers [] the sense of how I was to behave in a place where streets had thinned to foot paths and plants outnumbered concrete blocks²⁷

The kind of self-noticing in these poems refers entirely to being alone with a notebook or composing a poem while cycling or walking, I do not hold an image of myself in my head as

²⁵ p.38/39 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²⁶ p.30 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²⁷ p.34 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

such or wish to communicate one. In *Saturday 27th August 2016* items of jewellery get a mention as they are in direct contact with my skin and are providing feedback.

Within the aesthetic considerations of this appearance-based avoidance in conjunction with the mention of the physically disabled body. I find it imperative to note that my experience of the gendered mentally ill body is significantly different to those with a physical condition. My appearance as a white, blonde woman passes in public largely for not being disabled, my condition is invisible, despite it having physical effects upon the body, in public my body is gendered but in general not disabled by others.

Feminist theory and disability studies could both be characterised by the continuing ways in which discourse is rewritten and argued against to create an ever-increasing inclusion of differing viewpoints. This is how academics make space for themselves when they are not currently represented. I acknowledge the field of feminist, embodied, disability studies as an important area of research, through finding my experience not being reflected, this led me to conceptualise the gendered mentally ill body. Within another text *Disability Discourse*, I found a feminist discussion of depression as a disability, experienced in the body and the difficulties of the labelling of mental illness, disability and the body;

I am interpreting my experiences in the world through the medium of my body, viewing the body in feminist terms 'as a construct for understanding the human experience' (Cooey 1994: 5) and as 'the location and artefact of human imagination' (p.7)...As a creature with a liminal body, I am vulnerable to the instability of subjectivities...Only I can experience my body while living in or with my body...If, however I experience my body as a disabled body, regardless of what others think of me, then I am disabled...As a claim about my experience of myself and my body, it is a claim that only I can make²⁸

²⁸ P.41 eds. S. French & M. Corker (1999) *Disability Discourse*. Open University Press. Buckingham: Philadelphia.

The liminal body here, alongside interrogating the complexity of the body, experience, mental health, and labels, is of great consequence. My bodily experience is liminal, changeable, and never static. The fluctuations of my walking/not walking body are expounded upon shortly. The points about how mental illness is experienced in the body, as a unique and varied experience for every individual are salient. Despite the many valuable thoughts provoked by the discourse in this chapter I found myself disagreeing with a statement made by the author earlier on in this essay 'My medication is my wheelchair and rest is my wheelchair ramp'²⁹, just as feminism has found itself dividing into ever more specialised areas of discourse based upon differences of experience, background, and opinion, so too, must disability/mad studies. It must be redefined to acknowledge our intersections and differences. I am proposing that a fracturing of mad studies to include bipolar as a subset of critical thought is necessary. I do identify as having an invisible disability, (not all people with bipolar or mental illness define themselves as disabled) despite this, I view the conflating of my condition with the experience of those with physical disabilities as fatuous. I discuss these texts and my relation to them to parse the differences, to elucidate upon the decision to focus on the walking women of RLP-who so far in my knowledge do not experience mental illness or disability- rather than recent eco-poetry by women with physical disabilities. The spaces within RLP of radical experimentation and interrogation of the connection of (wo)man and environment provided inspiration for me to formulate my own eco-poetics, that of the gendered mental ill body pertaining to my poetry and life.

²⁹ P.39. eds. S. French & M. Corker (1999) *Disability Discourse*. Open University Press. Buckingham: Philadelphia.

There are two poems from this project, which were published together in a Zine entitled *Flora and Fauna* by Hoodwinked Mammal Press which most neatly espouse the concept of the body which has depressed, manic, level, and mixed states. The body which at times walks and others cannot walk, when elsewhere I refer to the walking/not walking body, a body which operates in many states of capacity and incapacity:

1st February 2016

The crow who roosts in the eaves [] at the corner of my window [] cawing [] wakes me [] when he takes flight is back [] halfwaking [] I think he has beaked his way through the glass [] and is about to peck my ear³⁰

This poem was written from my bed during a depressive phase of excessive sleeping and drowsiness. In this moment nature is not benign or beatific, it is an unwelcome intrusion on sleep and questions the reality of the half-awake poet. The unwelcome intrusion of nature upon the domestic is a recurring motif. These few lines are all that could manage to be written in this low mood, low energy state. The extreme contrast with a later poem that was partly composed in my head during a directed walk from a workshop by my tutor Paul Evans, then written down in the space of around half an hour in the workshop room and was published largely unedited, the poem spans over an A4 page:

June 1st 2017 Paul Evans Workshop After being told: Go and Wander in a Beatnik way and Find Flora/Fauna

I have a vague notion of going towards the library and realise I have resurrected the peace gardens in my mind [] nothing but manicured grass and stone war memorial there now [] there are many crossings [] it is cacophonous makes me aware of the sweat under my arms [] from being late and cycling [] I cross over the bridge and am aware of the stench of the canal and effluvia [] there homeless men asleep on the benches curved round the base of the library [] it is safer to sleep when it is light [] I pass the friends (quaker) meeting house and first want to pick one of the large white daisies outside [] decide against it [] residual quaker guilt [] there is a sign there saying something like 'everything is too unequal which is bad for

³⁰ p.17 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

everyone' [] towards the back of the city hall there is more noise and yellow rosettes tied on
 trees and lampposts [] setting up for MIF I suspect [] I had wanted to get at the plants there
 [] I start telling myself I picked a bad route [] I round the library with the trees that look
 unremarkable except in April [] when they support fantastical purple candles of flowers I
 keep asking people the name and forgetting [] all the trees on this route have been expertly
 tree surgeoned [] so that no one could climb them and I cannot get at a single leaf [] there
 is drilling and a lot of noise [] Manchester feels like an ever changing city [] any large
 building or green space can disappear at any time [] less dense with historical buildings than
 Norwich [] and poor town planning [] I have my mp3 player in my bag [] but today I am
 making myself listen to the din [] a girl is setting up to play her electric guitar [] with a small
 amp under the tree []s I have no watch and cannot see the big clock from here [] I cross the
 tram tracks and try and piece together St Peters Square in 2006 back together [] 1st St Peters
 Place was not there [] but an uninspiring Italian restaurant has box hedges [] that I have to
 check are real [] I grasp a top branch and put it in my pocket [] young people are wearing
 things we wore as teenagers [] it is the first time this has happened to me and it is unsettling
 [] even McDonalds has an I heart MCR sign outside [] and it makes me feel bilious [] I walk
 back on the other side of the road [] it is all stone and concrete and too well tended [] this
 corridor seen by all the tourists [] for plants to wreak their slow transformation [] back
 at no. 70 Oxford Road someone whispers that the bird singing is a blackbird [] my bird
 knowledge is limited [] I can identify a few by sight but not by sound [] I do not know what
 plant I picked is box hedge? [] you can hear the zebra crossing from here [] it keeps
 rattling my thoughts [] I am still not sure if it will rain [] the clouds were mixed and do not
 move as quickly as they do in Norwich [] where the sky blown about by gales [] changes in
 seconds [] the city smells of people and what they leave behind [] it could do with a rain []
 there is wind and it is shaking branches outside the window and leaves [] makes the sound
 small rainsticks make when you tip them [] when I come back here [] I find everything too
 much and struggle to see and hear the green [] there are trees everywhere and they will
 always play that soothing song unasked [] the wind will always make it happen [] I cannot
 work out if the building opposite is occupied [] or which one it is [] it is very dirty and
 window sills are peeling [] many layers of paint [] dead plants in window boxes through the
 broken window and mismatched curtains in terms of length and pattern hang in the other []
 cycling today felt difficult [] no one would let me turn out of the junction of Upper Chorlton
 road for minutes [] cars and trucks did not notice me [] the city felt enormous and
 uncaring [] well the drivers of the vehicles anyway [] I cannot see the sky anymore [] I am
 itching to look at it and determine if it will rain [] Norfolk gave me back the desire to sky
 gaze [] I think the trees making such beautiful sound are oak [] someone in the room collects
 leaves from the balcony [] faintly I can hear trains coming out of Oxford Road Station []
 the traffic is louder and the zebra crossing above that [] I am still looking for the beauty here
 [] not everyone can manage the wilderness [] fear dictates where I go [] Fallowfield Loop
 got added to the list [] tales of bikes grabbed from owners [] motivation too [] how do you
 get to the wilderness when you can't get out of bed? [] one of the bars tips out empties
 very close [] I would have found more plant life in Whalley Range [] the moss on the wall in
 the yard is luscious we leave our weeds be³¹

³¹ P. 55 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

The walking through an urban/suburban area and looking for signs of flora and fauna are another key element of the poetics throughout the poetry, the seeking to expand the definition of what is eco/landscape poetry, accessible nature in urban/suburban areas rather than a focus on a false conception of a wilderness untouched by humans. The last lines from this section also replicate the sense in a considerable number of the poems, that an element of self-soothing with greenery occurs. A form of volta, a turn in the anxious thought of an agitated mood state, writing has acted to calm the body.

The mentally ill body is physically impacted by the condition: unable to leave the bed, sleep too much or too little, be in pain, physically shake or hallucinate. The mentally ill body recumbent, viewing nature through the bedroom window, gives the clearest image of a majority of my life experience. Realising that many of the poems were written in my bed, noticing the outside world/weather/flora and fauna through my bedroom window, and reading Johanna Hedva's *Sick Woman Theory*, which discusses the politicisation of the disabled body, the question of where do we exist in political protest if we cannot be present in the street? It is the following quote that informed the first research question:

*'So, as I lay there, unable to march, hold up a sign, shout a slogan that would be heard, or be visible in any traditional capacity as a political being, the central question of Sick Woman Theory formed: How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can't get out of bed?'*³²

The combination of this thought: what happens to your contribution to politics/academia/eco poetry when you can't get out of bed? and nature writing being

³² J. Hedva *Sick Woman Theory* [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025]
https://tobyspgcertblog.myblog.arts.ac.uk/files/2022/05/SickWomanTheory_Hedva_2020.pdf

typified by a white man exploring a mythical true wilderness as the most recognisable form of eco-writing that altered the course of the thesis. The writer of this article has, among other chronic conditions, bipolar disorder, it discusses the fact that illness requires us to view the world from our bed, I realised this was the viewpoint of eco-poetry I have to offer.

As discussed in more detail in a later chapter Dorothy Wordsworth is a literary figure who suffered from various forms of chronic illness and wrote often from her bed, the stanza below is from Dorothy Wordsworth's *Thoughts on My Sick Bed* I quote her here to create a historical literary precedent for writing of the natural world from the bed due to illness and her practice as a walking woman writer. Here, she is focusing on what she can notice of the natural world from her window closely looking at the lane and what is visible and can be noticed and renoticed, and remembered:

*With busy eyes I pierced the lane
In quest of known and unknown things,
—The primrose a lamp on its fortress rock,
The silent butterfly spreading its wings,³³*

It is possible to experience the natural world through a pane of glass. Writing in my bed is a key part of my practice. Self-noticing practices are essential for living with bipolar disorder, it is to be noted that the language surrounding the condition is vital to me, I use the words experience and living with rather than suffering from or being bipolar. Rating yourself on a mood chart is among the advice offered – a form of taking your temperature for mood state. My writing practice developed as an artistic endeavour and as a therapeutic tool. I write in my bed because bipolar disorder is partly a sleep disorder in which we sleep too much or too little, I write from my bed to organise my thoughts before sleep or writing out

³³ P.120 Levin, S.M (2009) *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*. Mcfarland & Co.: London

how I am feeling following sleep/dream states. During my psychosis when I was first diagnosed with the condition, I developed graphomania and wrote all over the walls, my clothes, and bedsheets until I lost the ability to form letters. The following poem was the second written of this project. It is indicative of a significant crystallisation of the bipolar magpie poetics. The change in focus from the general to the personal, the long lines, which would eventually lead to the prose/journal hybrid text poem structure, the focus on the gendered mentally ill body and not avoiding the distasteful.

(2015)

October and only just the first fogs and fireworks air permanently smoked search the sky for a cigarette stub sun.

and already being told to fear the snow

there hasn't been an all covering snow boot deep for years

the roads around my 2nd floor flat unsalted it hung around for weeks

the guilty stain of red wine vomit after exiting a cab and all my footsteps

each of my shoe treads preserved memory of having managed to leave the house

every time it got more difficult my feet had made it out the door and back again

the faith the greengrocer has that all his produce will still be there when they return from afternoon prayer warms me as the sun

it is the time of year I clothe myself in velvet a soft shell as I rock my feelings shut drink too much wine and skin my knee.³⁴

This poem makes use of a large area of the page, as in open field poetics, discussed in the chapter six: *Scaping: Gender, Language, Landscape*. It includes the bodily experiences of

³⁴ p.9 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

vomiting, walking in snow, difficulty in leaving the house due to depression/anxiety and skinning knees; these details are a key element of my poetics, which aesthetically does not shirk the grotesque elements of the gendered mentally ill body. It describes how the body's movements are curtailed by mental illness, depicts weather and my local environment, these are the defining features of the poetics of the gendered mentally ill body for this project.

Poetics of the Gendered Mentally Ill Body and Mad Studies

I will be analysing poetry that has been previously grouped into the canon of 'confessional' poetry, depicting how this tradition developed the potential to produce what I will be terming poetry of madness. Specifically, fleshing out the features which draw upon the presumed and much discussed 'canon', as established by the poets of the 1950s and 1960s. I will discuss how the poetics of poetry of madness in turn diverge from the previously critically defined 'confessional' mode. Crucially, how poetry of madness uses experimental and hybrid techniques to attempt to provide a sense of how mental illness feels as it is being encountered, rather than imposing strict form to corral episodes into narrative sense after the fact. Bipolar disorder dictates the poetics rather than form being used as a crude tool to reshape the experience. To discuss these differences, I will be contrasting the works of Elizabeth Bishop and Anne Sexton with poetry from Sally Barrett, Selima Hill and Lucy Newlyn (see next chapter).

Bishop, Sexton, Barrett, Hill and Newlyn have each written about experiencing mental illness in ways that either embrace or reject form, seeking to conceal or reveal the symptoms of their conditions in text. The term confessional arose in the mid-20th Century and is defined within the essay *Confessing the Body: Gendered Politics* as having the following defining features:

Confessional poetry came to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s in the work of Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman and Allen Ginsberg, and continues as a force today in the work of such poets as Sharon Olds and Mark Doty. The mode transforms and comments upon the 'impersonal' poetics of the modernists who immediately preceded the confessionals. In developing their contrastingly 'personal' approach, the 1950s

*confessional poets utilized the methods of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, which had only recently gained wide acceptance in the US and with which they all had direct experience.*³⁵

I will be discussing poetry which has been labelled by critics as 'confessional', the definition appears to apply to poetry that takes the experience of being mentally ill, interaction with psychiatric treatment and its attendant language as its subject matter. It may use imagery and form to obscure the reality and create distance. In contrast to this, poetry of madness seeks to reveal, is written to expose the bodily sensations as they are/were experienced, rather than utilising strict form to order and reorder the experiences of mental illness later. This reordering may take place in more stable mood states, to impose a clear narrative sense for the reader. The focus upon how mental illness is embodied, as it is felt in the body, rather than the narrative events, also seeks to avoid providing a narrative of trauma.

People with mental illnesses are used to providing an easily digestible timeline of trauma to medical professionals, social workers etc, ad infinitum. This is a process which retraumatizes us and suggests we ought to have a story of tragic events we must confess to have our conditions validated. As an atheist it is also the notion that mental illness is something to be confessed that sits uneasily with the bipolar magpie poetics. By changing how our stories are told, by refusing to provide this trauma narrative, we can subvert expectations and appetites for the 'confessional'. We can construct our own poetic dialectic of madness that in the content, the poetics, aesthetics, the syntax, the form and punctuation, are sculpted by madness. Our trauma marmoreal, we can wield the chisel to hew only how and what we wish to reveal, like Hepworth we see beauty in the holes in a stone, or poem, or narrative,

³⁵ p. 33 Gill, J. and Routledge (2006) *Modern confessional writing : new critical essays*. London ; New York: Routledge.

made by brain fog, dissociation or psychosis. The term confessional, in broad terms, has been trowelled onto content of the work only, rather than there being any consensus on form, other stylistic or aesthetic characteristics being a criterion. I will however be focusing on how form was deployed by some poets considered to be in the confessional mode. I will be interacting with this label as this is how previous critics have engaged with these writers. There is tenuous evidence and a lack of a clear benchmark for the definition.

I set forth that the poetry of madness strives to radicalise form and syntax, utilising hybrid text techniques, i.e., that of journals/letters/interviews/prose or any writing traditionally regarded as non-poetic. To create poetry that melds together other forms of writing that the author has a long-standing engagement with, or practice in. The argument here is that the fluency within the form of writing the author has chosen to combine with poetry, enhances the poetry, by removing a layer of artifice.

The confessing that occurs within the supposed confessional mode is in part the confessing of marginalised bodies, of wresting from view an objectified position. In summation of my criticism of the term confessional: what crime or sin have marginalised bodies (of women, queer people and the mentally ill) committed to require confession? The women who were placed under the confessional umbrella did carry out a reframing of a body, one that moves and feels, has thoughts, an inner life, of a mind within a body. The experiential body, over the observed feminine body as muse. Within the essay *Confessing the Body: Gendered Politics* Elizabeth Gregory expounds upon this concern within Sexton's work, writing that:

Both Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton draw particular attention in their poetry to female bodies and to the physical aspects of womanhood, conventionally considered inappropriate not only to poetry but to public discourse generally. In so doing, both writers invite readers to notice that they, the poets, are women. They write poems about childbirth, pregnancy, miscarriages, abortions, and menstruation...In flaunting the daily elements of women's ordinary physical lives, these poets trouble the boundaries of the poetic gender map. Such

*troubling revalues the active (as opposed to the objectified) female body positively; it demonstrates that women have minds; and it implies that men have bodies*³⁶

Furthermore, this posits that women with mental illnesses writing embodied poetry, is a method of resisting gendered expectations, expanding understanding of the gendered mentally ill body. One of the unique, at the time, strengths of the presumed confessional mode is that it served to expand what was considered a suitable subject matter, for poetry. For women to expound upon the somewhat secret domestic dailiness of their lives. That poetry can concern itself with the household and women's place within it.

Sexton's work came directly and immediately from the language of mental health treatment, being borne out of a suggestion from her therapist to write out her thoughts. Phillip McGowan asserts in an article *Uncovering the Female Voice in Anne Sexton* that 'Her poetic career began as a suggested method of personal therapy, a way of reconstructing her apparently disintegrating life'³⁷ I will return to his commentary presently. The impetus here, is upon how her work evolved later in her career, moving from tightly constructed form to more experimental work. I will weigh an earlier work *You, Doctor Martin* with excerpts from *Letters to Dr. Y (1960-1970)*. McGowan also saw the value in comparing these poems, which are notable for both referring to her relationship with psychiatrists and being written at the beginning and end of her poetry career:

In the broader view, Sexton's published poetic career is bracketed by poetry which was written to or in relation with doctors and analysts. To Bedlam and Part Way Back opens with "You, Doctor Martin" and also includes works such as "Said the Poet to the Analyst." The first section of Words for Dr. Y is entitled "Letters for Dr. Y," a series of pieces written between 1960 and 1970 which Sexton deliberately withheld so that they could be published after her

³⁶ p. 38 Gill, J.(2006) *Modern confessional writing : new critical essays*. London; New York: Routledge.

³⁷ McGowan, P. (1998) 'Uncovering the Female Voice in Anne Sexton', *riull.ull.es* [Preprint]. [Online] [Accessed: 26 November 2023] Available <https://riull.ull.es/xmlui/handle/915/30505>

death. Comparisons between these two sets of texts is not only inevitable but also highly rewarding.³⁸

You, Doctor Martin and Sexton's work was an early and ongoing influence. I first encountered her poetry while reading *The New Poetry* at the age of fourteen it was one of the first collections of adult poetry I read and found of deep pertinence outside of school. Having belonged to my mother, has remained on my bookshelf and in use ever since, of especial resonance being the work therein of Plath, Sexton, and Thom Gunn. With my feminist collective Stirred Poetry, I led a workshop on the work of Plath and Sexton, drafting a poem that was later published in my collection *Lustful Feminist Kill Joys* inspired by *Her Kind* and running a live poetry event where work was shared inspired by both their poetry and their relationship. I will acknowledge Plath's profound influence on my poetry, her diaries forming the basis of some of my early research in this project. Here I focus on Sexton, in part, as she lived longer, and therefore had many more decades to develop a more experimental poetics.

Within *You, Doctor Martin* Sexton employs a rhyme scheme, obscuring imagery and carefully manipulated line breaks to distance herself from the experience of being in a psychiatric unit. The choice of the locus of the poem being a psychiatrist rather than herself, is indicative of an act of disconnection from the self. It is much like the other poets' use of form on this subject matter that I will be discussing later. A poetic act of imposing a narrative after the event of madness, rather than writing through the experience of it. The stark reality of the hospital life is contrasted with fanciful imagery

³⁸ McGowan, P. (1998) 'Uncovering the Female Voice in Anne Sexton', *riull.ull.es* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://riull.ull.es/xmlui/handle/915/30505> (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

*Out in the hall
the intercom pages you. You twist in the pull
of the foxy children who fall*³⁹

It is the process of weaving a fairy tale from terrifying madness, the psychiatrist is described as 'prince of all the foxes'⁴⁰ the patients transformed to snouted reverie and the Doctor crowned a prince. There are moments of bodily sensation, a grounding in the reality:

*I speed through the antiseptic tunnel*⁴¹,
*'We stand in broken
lines and wait while they unlock
the door and count us...*⁴²

*I make moccasins all morning...*⁴³

*the separate boxes
where we sleep or cry...*⁴⁴

My first attempts at writing madness were written sparingly and using such tight imagist constraints it was difficult for the reader to decipher what the subject matter was. It is patently a poem about a psychiatric ward in spite of that Sexton is veiling everyday horrors with fantastical imagery. It is the process of making sense of an experience that during the episode made no sense at all, of softening a medical professional who controls your freedom into a prince, an act of transference. Sexton acknowledges her regression within the poem 'what large children we are'⁴⁵ this poem is a couching of a period of mental illness and

³⁹ p.55 Alvarez, A. (1962) *The New Poetry, an Anthology Selected and Introduced by Alfred Alvarez*. London; Penguin Books

⁴⁰ p.55 Alvarez, A. (1962) *The New Poetry, an Anthology Selected and Introduced by Alfred Alvarez*. London; Penguin Books

⁴¹ p.55 Alvarez, A. (1962) *The New Poetry, an Anthology Selected and Introduced by Alfred Alvarez*. London; Penguin Books

⁴² p.55 Alvarez, A. (1962) *The New Poetry, an Anthology Selected and Introduced by Alfred Alvarez*. London; Penguin Books

⁴³ p.55 Alvarez, A. (1962) *The New Poetry, an Anthology Selected and Introduced by Alfred Alvarez*. London; Penguin Books

⁴⁴ p.55 Alvarez, A. (1962) *The New Poetry, an Anthology Selected and Introduced by Alfred Alvarez*. London; Penguin Books

⁴⁵ p.56 Alvarez, A. (1962) *The New Poetry, an Anthology Selected and Introduced by Alfred Alvarez*. London; Penguin Books

confinement in vagary. This narrative device, of overlaying a fairy tale on a horror is akin to the way a child attempts to make sense of and dissociates from trauma.

I found an oppositional analysis of *You, Dr. Martin* in *Making Bedlam: Toward a Trauma-Informed Mad Feminist Literary Theory and Praxis* by Jessica Lowell Mason. I agree with her commentary on the trauma invoked by psychiatric inpatient care and the patriarchal structures that are inherent to the system. I cannot find myself agreeing to this perspective with the whole argument hinging on the function of one word.

Sexton's poems in this collection touch upon the themes of hospitalization, madness, authority, and trauma—reminding us that they go hand in hand. The collection also reminds us that patriarchal power's operation through the mental hospital is an operation that produces trauma. Trauma, while not always obviously or overtly named, hits our readerly gut in Sexton's cutting and curt unsentimental anti-affirmations. Some of the bluntest of her anti-affirmations line up their blows in the first poem in the collection, titled "You, Doctor Martin." Sexton's contrary and precocious title invites her readers to join with her in a chorus of command: the calling upon of authority. Together, by virtue of reading the poem, readers are thrust into a confrontation with the system and find themselves calling upon the doctor by name. By placing the "you" before "Doctor Martin", Sexton implicates every reader by placing them in the role of the doctor, the "you." At the same time that she offers them the idea of themselves as the doctor and the system, she simultaneously thrusts them into an act of defiance against both—the readerly echoing act of taking charge in a hospital environment, conveyed through the "you", is an act of opposition against the power structure of the environment itself⁴⁶

As no two poets with mental illness will write poetry in the same way, so the case will be that no two mad identified feminist scholars will necessarily agree. I included this alternative view as I was interested to read another feminist mad scholar's perspective on Sexton. Their view is largely linked to disability justice, which is not my main focus their thesis also focuses on her earlier work.

⁴⁶ p. 7 -24 Mason, J.L. (2023) 'Making Bedlam: Toward a Trauma-Informed Mad Feminist Literary Theory and Praxis', *Humanities*, 12(2), [online] [Accessed 16 January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.3390/h12020024>.

Sexton's writing progressed throughout her lifetime; she found a way towards a more embodied, individual lyric. By the term embodied, I refer to a noticing of the self, the body, in her writing. This alteration from the discretionary lyric, the fantasy of *You, Dr Martin*, into *Letters to Dr Y*: a speaking of her own experience to the Dr., interspersed with the relating of the words of the Dr. She is addressing her own experiences of the gendered mentally ill body to him, not framing her madness around a patriarchal medical professional. There are many qualities to *Letters to Dr. Y* that have made it intriguing for myself and other critics.

McGowan notes that she withheld the poems until after her death, espouses the Sexton code, when discussing her previous poetry which relied heavily on form. I am not inclined to view any poetry as a code. There has been a smattering of research into the concept of depression causing cognitive distortion in poetry which takes this codified view, including *Cognitive Distortions in the Poetry of Anne Sexton*⁴⁷ and *Depressed Writing: Cognitive Distortions in the works of Depressed and Non-Depressed Poets*⁴⁸ and. I will start by mentioning that the second is an article published in 2007 and still used the term manic depression. Aside from being an outdated term it is clinically inaccurate, considered by myself and many of us with a bipolar diagnosis as a sign someone knows nothing about the condition. I was diagnosed in 2004 no medical professional has ever used the term. I usually only find it in use today when someone much older with the condition self-identifies with it, or in print when a writer who does not have the condition, uses it from a place of ignorance. In the first few paragraphs the author then goes on to use the term bipolar disorder without

⁴⁷ pp. 140–144 Wedding, D. (2000) *Cognitive Distortions in the Poetry of Anne Sexton, Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 30(2) [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-278x.2000.tb01072.x>

⁴⁸ pp. 204–218. Thomas, K.M. and Duke, M. (2007) *Depressed writing: Cognitive distortions in the works of Depressed and Nondepressed Poets and Writers, Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 1(4), [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3896.1.4.204>

making any reference to the fact that they are terms for the same illness, that one is archaic, this confusion of terms continues throughout. The first article ends by stating ‘Any therapist who will take time to explore the work of this poet will develop a deeper understanding for the ways in which Sexton’s cognitive distortions shaped both her poetry and her eventual decision to take her life.’⁴⁹ I mention these articles in *brevis* as an example of how the medical profession others women poets with bipolar disorder. These articles are overly concerned with discussing the number of poets who have mental illness who take their own life, with a particular fixation on the rates of death among poets with bipolar. I understand that from a psychiatry perspective, this is a diagnostic gauge. I am of the mind that these studies typify why mad studies, and this thesis needs to exist. The experience of poets with mental illness is so much more. As these articles are written from a psychiatry background, the analysis they employ is rather literal, linked to the supposed meaning of the lines of poetry as inferred by the researcher doing the analysis:

The seven cognitive distortions, taken from Wedding’s (2000) analysis of Anne Sexton’s poetry, served as the primary measure for the present study. No other known study has measured cognitive distortions in literature; thus, Wedding’s measurement was adapted. Definitions of the seven cognitive distortions, with examples taken from works analyzed(sic) in the study, are as follows: 1. Arbitrary Inference—forming conclusions without supporting evidence or in the face of contrary evidence (e.g., “The ends of the earth are met in darkness.” – Thomas Wolfe, Mannerhouse). 2. Selective Abstraction—overemphasizing selected details in a situation while simultaneously ignoring other facts that are just as compelling (e.g., “Phillips is dead, tis Pleasure then to die.” – Thomas Chatterton, “Elegy to Phillips”). 3. Overgeneralization—developing a general rule on the basis of isolated events and then applying the rule indiscriminately across unrelated situations (e.g., “All the days were the same.” – Malcolm Lowry, Ultramarine).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ pp. 140–144 Wedding, D. (2000) Cognitive Distortions in the Poetry of Anne Sexton, *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 30(2) [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-278x.2000.tb01072.x>

⁵⁰ pp. 204–218. Thomas, K. M. and Duke, M. (2007) *Depressed Writing: Cognitive Distortions in the Works of Depressed and Nondepressed Poets and Writers*, *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 1(4),

That I end this quote on the concept of overgeneralisation seems apt, the experience of reading these papers was extremely othering, I am glad I did not find them when they were published, at twenty-one I would have felt utterly doomed, by virtue of simply being a woman poet with bipolar. This does not reflect what I know, from my twenty years of living with the condition, that our lives are heterogenous. This form of analysis does not correlate to my interest in my writing, in observing the weather patterns of my moods, communicating how they manifest and how they affect my output in terms of lyricism and syntax. Not to mention a complete lack of embodiment, of the mind's effects on the body. There has been a total failure to consider the social model of disability⁵¹ (the idea that we are not defective, it is society's treatment of disabled people which disables people) in this analysis of the poetry and statistics regarding poets with depression and bipolar disorder who take their own life. To consider that we are driven to write to manage our symptoms. Instead of viewing our poetry as a code, reading it as communication of what we experience and how we experience it would be more valuable research. Many poets with bipolar disorder take their own lives due to how medical professionals and society others us, denies us employment opportunities and well-appointed housing. It is in most cases extremely hard to prove the pervasive effects stigma and mythologising our condition has. We struggle to exist in a society which both lionises and demonises our mood states and sensitivity. If the focus of research was placed upon our lives, and how they are lived, treatment and well-being would be much improved. The historical nature of the poets analysed has not been noted, Anne Sexton died in 1974, from a feminist viewpoint, the effects of a lack of agency

⁵¹ P.36 Davis, L.J. (2016) *The Disability Studies Reader*. Fifth Edition. | New York, Ny: Routledge, . Routledge.

and the restrictive nature of society (not to mention the dearth of treatment options and inherently misogynist psychiatry profession) fifty years ago cannot be dismissed.

Letters to Dr Y, was published posthumously in *Words to Dr. Y* in 1978, the second and last book to be published in this manner, making this the very last known work of hers. This series of poems has many vectors of comparison to my own poetry, firstly of most salience, is hybrid text. The poems employ dated sections throughout, in line with my emerging theories of poetry of madness and hybrid texts. The poems were written between 1960 and 1970, the poetry manuscript for this project is also given to the idea that hybrid text poetry (of the kind that engages with dailiness) can have a novel cumulative effect when read in its entirety. I do agree with McGowan's commentary that *Letters to Dr. Y* is less stylised and overly edited, which is more revelatory of her mental state at the time of composition:

"Letters for Dr. Y" operates as a sublimated text within the Sexton canon. Its short pieces function as parallels to the publicly released narratives that Sexton was producing at the same time and, by reading them, Sexton returns our attention back to the start of her career requiring the reappraisal of the earlier works. Furthermore, it is important to remember Sexton's own emphasis on the function of letters in her life. They provide textual space for the private writings of the individual and they open a channel of communication with only one other person. They are not the sites of stylised refigurings of the world which rely on an ordered use of metaphor and symbolism that are central to her authorial techniques of control and concealment. Moreover, Words for Dr. Y as a collection exists as a series of unedited poems. Sexton's death has left these as disordered moments which she had not fully encoded for general publication. Consequently, by reading her finished and public works in tandem with these more private and unfinished fragments⁵²

The other point in the above quote I would like to uphold is the notion that I refer to above, that hybrid writings are often informed by a type of writing in which the poet is most fluent, in Sexton's case, letter writing. It is these qualities of dailiness, of hybridity, of a mature poet

⁵² McGowan, P. (1998) *Uncovering the Female Voice in Anne Sexton*, *riull.ull.es* [Preprint]. [Online] [Accessed: 16th January 2025] <https://riull.ull.es/xmlui/handle/915/30505>

allowing works to remain somewhat as they are composed, that allow the mental disarray and joy to be disclosed. The difference in her poetry is so materially evident here that a tracing of a lineage back to the point of publication of *Letters to Dr Y.* can take place and therefore be viewed as a precursor to my own poetics of madness. This stepping beyond the previous boundaries of the forms she employed, her use of hybrid poetics is an arching over, reaching towards poetry of madness. Of plangency is her positioning of the importance of what is described, in this thesis, as a poetry of noticing. A noticing of both the gendered mentally ill body (the self), the domestic sphere, and the natural world outside the self.

Compositionally while a judicious use of line breaks is applied, these are applied like punctuation rather than being a stricture upon the text. This use of an established poetic device as a method, for preserving the disordered thoughts, while maintaining readability were influential on my decision to use square brackets as my main punctuation in the poems, to find a mad informed structural device. The dated sections are more easily identifiable as letters/journal entries in structure and composition. The lines and sections vary in length a great deal, imposing regularity in this sense has been abandoned. Further evidence of a light touch with editing. Sexton references the process of composing these lines as hybrid text in the section dated *January 1 1962*:

*I begin again Dr Y.,/
this neverland journal,
full of my own sense of filth.
Why else keep a journal, if not
to examine your own filth?*⁵³

⁵³ p. 565 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

This is a stark alteration and progression of poetics from *You, Dr Martin*. The process of writing through the experience of being mentally ill, it is no longer trauma masquerading as fantasia. Sexton was mired in and acknowledged, her own filth and fear. The viewpoint is the difference between a kaleidoscope and opera glasses.

The poetics of this last work of Sexton's closely align with my sense of facing and documenting the feminine grotesque, rooted in sensation, bodily sensory detail abounds throughout:

*Bravo, I cry,
swallowing the pills,
the do die pills...*⁵⁴

*We weep together
and make a bed for rain...*⁵⁵

*I feel the earth, its worms oiling upwards,
the ants ticking,
the oak leaf rotting like feces (sic)...*⁵⁶

*I put some daises in a bowl
with a weed that looks like baby's breath...*⁵⁷

*I move my thin legs into your office...*⁵⁸

*Urine and tears pour out of me...*⁵⁹

*She is my other face, grunting as I sigh, vomiting as I chew...*⁶⁰

*And yet my heart thumps like applause...*⁶¹

*Washing polio off the grapes when I was ten...*⁶²

⁵⁴ p.562 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁵⁵ p. 564 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁵⁶ p. 564 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁵⁷ p.566 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁵⁸ p. 567 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁵⁹ p. 570 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁶⁰ p. 573 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁶¹ p. 576 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁶² p. 576 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

*for Dr. Y held my hand...*⁶³

*Now tears run down me like Campbell's soup...*⁶⁴

The poetics of embracing the grotesqueries of the body are rooted in feminist reactions to the patriarchal ideal of the feminine body, sanitised for male consumption. The feminine grotesque is a form of resistance. By encompassing all bodily experience into poetry of the body, we resist the notion that our bodies are decorative. The most visceral depiction of the experiences of the gendered mentally ill body in this sequence, appears in this section from *March 14, 1964*:

*I remember my mother dying...
a strange feeling to know that life is just
going out of you with every breath.
Strange walls and colours.
The nurses coming and going.
White, white, mother I am leaving.
Faces, suddenly suspended above you;
faces that you think it's your business to love
if only you could remember their names.
Pain and never knowing you are getting ugly.
The fog of medication and old ether dreams.
White. White...*⁶⁵

Sexton appears to be setting down an attempt on her life and ensuing resuscitation, purely in the sensations experienced, as they happened into moment; narrative logic is not imposed. The notion of coming back from the brink of death is invoked by the memory of the mother dying, the breath leaving. Sexton returning to her dead mother and then leaving her to come back to the white walls and the living nurses. A further parallel within this work

⁶³ p. 578 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁶⁴ p. 578 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁶⁵ p.566 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

to my own poetry is the varying length of the entries/sections. *April 1, 1963* is one line 'This loneliness is just an exile from God.'⁶⁶ this is the only entry of one line, although others appear which are only a few lines this too exposes the variations of her illness and as such, her creative output. This is another feature of poetry of madness resisting form, regularity and embracing the disordered thought processes of mental illness itself. I have descanted on a number of the motives behind my hybrid journalling poetics, including the aesthetic and political motivations. This chapter obliges me to address in the work of Sexton et al, and my own poetry, the particulars of my personal history relating to psychiatric units, self-harm etc:

June 3rd 2016 Written During the Train Journey Over Several Hours

On the long train to Norwich [] before getting on this service [] without a cycle reservation [] which on this route is akin to taking a flying leap without a safety net [] I got my Dr's letter [] to prove I have the condition I have had all my adult life [] I collected my prescription [] collected a clothes order [] only terrible thing is [] electric will surely run out before I get back [] I am dreading what state the freezer will be in [] could not be helped [] I only made the train on time because kind people let me queue jump at the station [] only one ticket machine was working [] it was very sunny [] so much so these sunglasses are too clear for the intensity of the sun [] I have on the American flag Keds [] which annoyed C. she called them fascist (I think I left sandals at mums) we are having [] well she's having it at her house a BBQ [] they said they will be doing lamb or something [] there will be drinks and naughty smokes no doubt [] I hope the sun holds out [] I could do with just sitting in the sun for a bit [] as I have travelled south we have now passed Nottingham [] cloud has rolled across the sky [] there are beautiful wind turbines [] the land is flattening [] T is still in the psych ward [] I find myself spilling out that secret knowledge I have locked up [] how not to dress up for wardround [] or wear what is appropriate for the weather [] the fact that everyone above the nurses is a hopeless [] uncaring [] incompetent [] I hope they realise he does need to be there [] he needs help before he selfdestructs [] I will try and use this trip to be calm [] its strange how even getting a hoover and being able to properly clean the flat [] I will never be tidy but it had got revolting [] I felt so much better about K coming over [] after [] I do definitely need to get some critical writing done [] if only to start the final two chapters [] I should have brought books with me [] I will see what the local library system provides [] mum may have her alumni card from the art school [] I do not have a Sconal card [] I should at least be able to get hold of CD Wright's poetry at a bare minimum [[] I have just over two hours left on this train [] my phone is dying [] this notebook is tiny [] I have no book to read [] I did not plan this trip as well as I could [] but I got the last train I could on a super off peak

⁶⁶ p. 565 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

ticket [] I started the journey and tonight [] after I cycle to mums bungalow [] I can relax [] I probably will not have to cook tonight [] there may be wine [] I hope there is wine [] I will go and get some if there is none [] or cider [] I was half tempted to buy a drink on this train [] but decided a Sprite was more sensible and marginally cheaper [] I will attempt to do some sewing [] there is stuff kicking about [] I will hope mum has planted lettuce in the garden [] we are rattling into Grantham [] these trains truly are crap [] the sky is clouded over but not grey [] I am not currently expecting rain [] the weather could be different in Norwich [] phone has died [] I would have had a nap earlier but someone was sat next to me [] I had my bag on my lap [] hardly sure its worth is now [] not far to Peterborough [] I suppose the journey has gone quicker than anticipated [] being not hungover helps [] this journey sucks [] when I am hungover [] the land is still rippling [] we are not that near [] the hills are lowering [] but it is not flat yet [] I think Peterborough is next [] my stubble rash has calmed down [] I may have to ask him to shave or leave it next time [] but considering I am just going to a gig in Hebden Bridge next time [] I guess not [] there is a girl either using her phone as a mirror [] or preparing to take a selfie [] I am glad much of our teenage went unphotographed [] there was enough as there was [] camera phones would have been intolerable [] passing cars and these fishing tent shelters [] there are people who spend all day there in rows [] on the river bank [] as we move towards Peterborough the land sharply flattened [] the horizon expands [] there are more and larger fields [] plenty of pylons [] always is [] I am hoping this is the service which avoids Wymondham [] all the other titchy stations [] I think it just goes to [] Thetford [] Ely then Norwich [] it is not so far after Peterborough [] and so I come to the end of this notebook [] I really should have brought another [] I will ask mum if she has any going spare [] I have collected all the spare paper in my bag [more to type up here]⁶⁷

5th March 2017

I work out how to enter a string of numbers into the gasmeter for the first time in a fortnight [] stumbling cold and gamey [] washing goosepimpled parts [] I run a deep bath [] oil and Epsom salts [] as I rub and pumice my feet [] I remember I told a friend about the only time I made an attempt on my life [] sixteen years ago [] in the deepest bath I have ever known [] the woods out the window icy [] I took a knife [] knowing the roman methods too well [] it was too blunt for flesh and I laughed [] when I told her she laughed [] there is relief in knowing you will not be pitied [] taking ones own life [] is on our minds [] it has found her family [] the anniversary of my friends fall has come and gone [] K.s father reached a two decade deathaversary [] I offer him up as a hope of healing [] he spent that day dressed in black [] did not become so drunk he was incoherent [] this is surviving for survivors [] I listen to Lady Day [] whose blues consumed her [] the record I wrestled from my stepdad [] I considered it a good sign he clutched so many records back from me [] he has not forgotten the music of his youth [] yesterday I smashed the handle of the midnight blue teapot I have carried to every home since I was 18 [] I filled it then with black tea and whisky to write an essay overnight [] I read about it in an Irish Murdoch novel [] I smash items when I clean them [] then wonder why I prefer the homeostasis of filth⁶⁸

⁶⁷ p.26-27 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

⁶⁸ p.50 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

24th Feb 2021

Write a Poem that has a Grand Declaration with the Word Window/s in it and Not in the Body of the Poem After I Love You More Than all the Windows in New York City by Jessica Greenbaum

The police go by on horses [] past my living room window [] I hear the hooves and do not need to look for their fluorescent jackets [] there is a certain heaviness of hoof [] to a police equine [] searching no doubt for illicit parties [] I have in the past partied in many a basement disco round Whalley Range [] watching for flakes of white wash to drop in a plastic cup [] of whatever booze is left [] in a house party at three am [] the ceiling shaking with the beats [] I would not have chosen [] communal music reverberating in the breast bone has become a luxury now [] like the first gig I went to after I left the hospital [] I was so high on returning to a stage filled with the thrum of Interpol's guitars [] the heaving [] of bodies [] the mingling of sweat [] of possibilities of pleasure returning to my body [] to dancing with a plastic pint of Tuborg lager spilling on my red converse [] we will return to dancing with strangers⁶⁹

Coda:

4th November 2022

The hand clinic is staffed exclusively by women [] who exude tenderness and admonishment [] a colleague quips to the woman [] who is measuring the angles my little finger can reach after my flexor repair [] 'I bet you can't wait until lunchtime to get your hands back' [] I think how strange it must have been in 2020 [] to be palm to palm [] to dozens of strangers [] and not kiss the ones you love [] I feel sheepish in here [] a lot of the patients are teenage boys [] who have been reckless [] or gruff men in thick coats [] with reflective patches [] hurrying back to a site [] I practically threw the knuckle duster splint and pastel [] blue [] foam [] sling [] at the nurse [] glad to be rid of the encumbrance [] on the tram to Chorlton [] I listen to Portisheads Glory Box [] a warmth blooms in my stomach and radiates out to a tingle [] like summer rain[] on my limbs[] music invokes this sensation [] or a variation of it sometimes [] and I am reminded [] of the man with schizophrenia [] who told me [] when we were in the hospital [] in October 2004 [] and I did not know if I would ever leave the white walls and styrofoam meals [] that he had voices[] that whispered kind thoughts to him [] and he would not be rid of them [] when my face tingles like nails are being dropped on my cheeks [] for hours [] I forget [] that a chord makes rain dance on my forearms⁷⁰

These poems aim to provide some insider knowledge, of what being an inpatient at a psychiatric unit, is actually like, without retraumatising myself or anyone else. These poems reveal momentary recollections as part of a day's noticing: of the environment and the self.

⁶⁹ p.101 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

⁷⁰ p.108 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

The notion of dailiness in my poetry is reflective of a sense of trying to usurp the prevailing sensationalist narratives, around bipolar disorder, psychiatric units, and hallucinations. Our daily lives are filled with minutiae of the mundane and sublime like anyone else's. These are poems written about the process of living, not dying, of the attempt to survive (while being leery of the term survivor, I am surviving, I am not recovered) with a chronic mental illness. In the final section of the book there is an extended depiction of Sexton's enjoyment of a physical act of the domestic:

*I am happy today with the sheets of life.
I washed out the bedsheets.
I hung out the bedsheets and watched them
slap and lift like gulls
When they were dry I unfastened them
and buried my head in them...*⁷¹

*So this is happiness,
that journeyman.*⁷²

In this moment Sexton is experiencing joy in domestic task that her body can enact. A connection with the world, she is embodied fully in a physical act. The mind and body feeling joy in the moment. I have collated two of my own poems (they are rare) that revel in domiciliary activities:

Arran Poetry Adventure Saturday 6th July 2019

Last night as beds were scarce in the Barra bungalow [] I had to sleep in a pop up tent [] in the Middleton campsite in Lamlash [] Miles took me down and as he was concerned that the tent would blow away [] offered to put his spare car battery in it [] woke up to quite the shock [] left the bungalow at half past three [] was dreading it [] as soon as I turned the corner at the bottom of the hill [] saw the sun starting to pink wash the sky [] like hibiscus tea [] became drunker on the light [] I sent TH. TEXT: 'just to reassure you I did not become a selkie and joined the seals' last night [] to which she TEXT: 'although that would be badass it would be a bit sad'[] I have been making her jealous of the views [] after a grey sludge of a day

⁷¹ p.579 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

⁷² p. 579 Sexton, A. (1982) *The Complete Poems*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

yesterday [] today has been gloriously bright [] we have a porch at the house [] I am sat there now [] to the right [] partially visible through a hedge [] you can glimpse the sea [] in front of me [] hills roll to a thick wood of pine [] carpeting the summit [] I am going to make a mushroom lasagne for everyone and then we are going to stroll to the Pierhead Tavern [] I had to handwash the pillowcases in the kitchen sink [] as no linens have appeared in the cupboard we could see [] despite there being two hot water bottles in tartan cases [] in another [] having now had a washing machine for some years [] it was a somewhat pleasurable sensory experience [] reminded me of the strength of my grip [] the way she likes me to use the power in my hands on her body [] as I wandered round Lamlash earlier and now as I was cooking [] have been listening to Smog/Bill Callahan [] (Jackie Hagan) brought a massive speaker [] it is very apt [] as I discovered him as there was a cd of Knock Knock in Seabank⁷³

After: Carrying Food Home in Winter

I am in love with my washing machine today [] I dyed more things purple in lockdown [] I have dyed everything purple [] a denim boilersuit went in without ceremony[] a viscose frilled blouse [] striped with rubber bands and white jeans [] buttons held together to form starbursts on my knees [] I did not follow the instructions to the letter [] the white parts have a blue haze to them [] the process of dyeing is not precise [] the colour [] the transformative act [] is the joy [] the way clouds darken a sky [] release rain and thunder [] to leave a blue glaze [] the way two bodies fold into each other [] it is never how you imagined [] perfection dulls all thrills⁷⁴

As with Sexton these poems all find a moment of reflection on joy in domesticity for its own sake. There is joy to be wrung out of all sensory experiences -even the wringing of a pillowcase- given the right mood state or by the act of noticing, the sensations of the action. I can be moved to find joy and embodiment.

Bishop at first glance, with her tightly constructed oeuvre, does not appear to have produced much poetry to be compared to Sexton's body of work's engagement with her lived experience of mental illness. Sexton progressed and experimented continually throughout her career. Markedly it is in the handful of poems in which Bishop slips the mask, employing in its stead a hybrid poetics which allows her to act as a signpost on the road

⁷³ p.70 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

⁷⁴ p. 92 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

towards a more recognisable strata of mad poetics. This mask which she wore in its most opaque sense in *Crusoe in England*, featuring her donning a male persona, or in a more subtle sense, her disguising use of rhyme and form. This makes her later, looser, experimental, and more emotionally vulnerable works contained within *Geography III*, all the more striking. There are no earlier works in which she can be said to be writing in any variation of the confessional mode, *One Art* her most famous work could be said to hint at loss and instability; notwithstanding, these references are too vague to apply to the term poetry of madness.

Here I will instead discuss these later poems in which Bishop breaks free of both restrictive form and hiding her mental health issues. The first germinations of the poetics of the post-confessional and the gendered mentally ill body began with my study of Bishop's poetry during my MA in 2008/9. I began to draw the conclusions I set out here. The two poems I will be analysing are *12 O Clock News* and *In the Waiting Room*. First, yet another example of a hybrid text, the writer's desk is transformed by sleep deprivation, a liminal state, into a topography. The left-hand column lists the objects and the descriptive prose poem stanzas alight upon each one as a flight of fancy. There is no rhyme scheme or use of line breaks to manipulate the text, it is her most starkly experimental effort. This structure of a news reader describing a scene viewed from above allows an insight into the warping of a mental state late at night and lacking sleep. A sense of pessimism is evident from the opening section *gooseneck lamp*:

*here the moon/
seems to hang motionless in the sky. It gives very/
little light; it could be dead. Visibility is poor.*⁷⁵

⁷⁵ p. 174 Bishop, E. (1991) *Complete poems*. London: Chatto & Windus.

The moon is dim and no symbol of hope here throughout the poem death and danger loom for the imagined inhabitants of the desk/land indicative of a low mood state the viewpoint of the voice of the poem hovers over remains of a battle in the final section *ashtray*:

*they are in hideously contorted positions, all
dead. We can make out at least eight bodies.
These uniforms were designed to be used in guerrilla
warfare on the country's one snow-covered moun-
tain peak. The fact these poor soldiers are
wearing them here, on the plain, gives further
proof, if proof were necessary, either of the childish-
ness and hopeless impracticality of this inscrutable
people, our opponents, or of the sad corruption of
their leaders*⁷⁶

A morbid transformation of cigarette butts to bodies leads to the final declaration of hopelessness. Bishop's *In the Waiting Room* focuses on a memory of bodily dissociation/depersonalisation induced by fear of the adult female body, an intense physical sense memory. The poem opens by describing in detail the ordinariness of the dentist's waiting room in which the child Bishop is waiting for her aunt:

*'The waiting room/
was full of grown up people,/*
arctics and overcoats,/
*lamps and magazines.'*⁷⁷

It is a magazine, *National Geographic*, which takes Bishop out of the waiting room and out of her body:

*black, naked women with necks
wound round and round with wire
like the necks of light bulbs.
Their breasts were horrifying.*⁷⁸

⁷⁶ p.175 Bishop, E. (1991) *Complete poems*. London Chatto & Windus.

⁷⁷ p.159 Bishop, E. (1991) *Complete poems*. London Chatto & Windus.

⁷⁸ p.159 Bishop, E. (1991) *Complete poems*. London Chatto & Windus.

The adult female nudity shocks the child Bishop into depersonalisation of no longer knowing where herself begins or ends:

*from inside,
came an oh! of pain
-Aunt Consuelo's voice-
not very loud or long.
I wasn't at all surprised;
even then I knew she was a foolish, timid woman...
What took me by surprise was that it was me:
my voice, in my mouth/Without thinking at all
I was my foolish aunt
I-we-were falling, falling
our eyes glued to the cover of the National Geographic⁷⁹*

the next stanza features child Bishop trying to ground herself in the reality of the waiting room and return from the loss of the self as a clear concept:

*Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
What similarities-
boots, hands, the family voice
I felt in my throat, or even
the National Geographic
and those awful hanging breasts-
held us all together
or made us all just one?'⁸⁰*

The existential crisis of the loss of the self, the fear of becoming an adult woman with the developed body and fear of foolishness implied here by the child Bishop reaches its crescendo with the loss of reality affecting perception and the body:

The waiting room was bright

⁷⁹ p.160 Bishop, E. (1991) *Complete poems*. London Chatto & Windus.

⁸⁰ p.161 Bishop, E. (1991) *Complete poems*. London Chatto & Windus.

*and too hot. It was sliding
beneath a black wave,
another, and another
Then I was back in it*⁸¹

This ordeal ends this poem marks for Bishop an exceptional opening up of the experience of her internal distress. The book *Making Girls into Women American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* has a chapter on Marianne Moore and Bishop's relationship, there is a reference made to her comparative freedom of erotic expression in her letters vs. her poetry, the relevant section of the chapter *The M Multiplying: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and the Pleasures of Influence Part I* refers to *In the Waiting Room*. There is recognition of the destabilising of the self, the unwanted knowledge of impending womanhood:

*Lee Edelman, in his remarkable piece on Bishop's late poem "In the Waiting Room" (1976), delineates the ways in which the child in the poem is inducted into womanhood through a process of reluctant, almost forced identifications with the images of racially and nationally marked femininity she sees around her...the child resists this moment of self-construction, for she recognises that femininity and pain are in some ways linked, but she also realises that her own entrance into language, symbolized(sic) by her name, "But I felt: you are an I,/you are an Elizabeth,/you are one of them," makes it impossible for her to escape this incorporation*⁸²

The incorporation spoken of is that of being aware of; having a feminine body, the waiting room, the breasts, her aunt's yelp are all enacting gender upon a body. A body that previously did not question its future existence as an adult woman, and the assumption of a mantle of pain that would entail. *The Waiting Room* details a moment of psychic fracture caused by the act of realising you have a body society will enact gender upon. The works I

⁸¹ p.161 Bishop, E. (1991) *Complete poems*. London Chatto & Windus.

⁸² p. 176 Kent, K.R. (2003) *Making Girls Into Women*. Duke University Press.

have earmarked as potential linkages towards poetry of madness crucially came from both Sexton and Bishop's final collections, this development of poetics cannot occur at the beginning of a poet's career. It unfurls out of a practice of many decades and a confidence within the writer's own voice. My poetry of madness informed by the embodied poetics of the gendered mentally ill body have come out of my decades of practice as a poet; within academia, performance, and publication.

Modern Poetry on Madness and Eco-Anxiety

Diary of a Bipolar Explorer is a memoir by Lucy Newlyn that can be viewed in part, (although not as the author intended) to extend the hybrid poetics of Sexton and Bishop. Newlyn's memoir detailing her experience of being diagnosed with bipolar disorder during a psychotic episode. Akin to my own diagnostic experience, per contra to my early breakdown and resultant diagnosis, Newlyn's first diagnosed episode occurred much later in life. The book combines diary entries, poetry, short stories, and other forms of writing. In general, the writings appear to be composed after the fact, including the diary entries, composed in part from notes made at the time. Newlyn in the introduction describes the content of the book thusly:

*The rest of the book is a diary...It draws on a personal archive of medical records, emails, letters, and creative writings... Formal experimentation on the boundary between poetry and prose is also important to the kind of narrative I need to present. To be true to my life my writing must acknowledge the in-between and mixed states of mood disorder. The mental condition I describe does not accommodate itself to the tidy distinctions between forms, no straightforward narrative mode will do*⁸³

It is the last sentence regarding the notion that mental illness, and moreover the experience specifically of living with bipolar disorder, cannot be accurately portrayed within the confines of one form and a nod toward a hybridisation of text (although Newlyn does not refer to her experimentation as such) that is most congruent to my poetics. The book contains many different forms of writing as described above by Newlyn. Nonetheless what she defines as poetry is not experimental in form. It is in the intention behind the writing of the experience which perhaps restricts the poetry, in Newlyn's case. There is a lack of sensory detail, or

⁸³ p.6-7 Newlyn, L. (2018) *Diary of a bipolar explorer*. Oxford: Signal Books.

connection to the body throughout Newlyn's poems, the focus on the blank language, rhyme and form has stripped away the connection between bodily experience, breath, and mind from the work, as shown in this excerpt:

*It clings to me like a miasma;
It dogs my days like anger, envy, shame.
I could pass it on if it were less pervasive.
I could shuffle it off if it only had a name⁸⁴*

The emotions that arose during the heightened mood states of bipolar disorder are named, rather than described via bodily experience, a continued process of distancing from the symptoms and the body. The poetry is largely formal, or standard free verse with rhyming patterns, the sense is there of her attempting to tame the madness into poetry, the immediacy of the experience or what was actually felt in the moment is not accurately represented, the madness is being explained or translated into form, to both the reader, and herself, while in a more stable mood state where she is able to corral her words into strict form. I have followed as closely as possible, the rhythms of body, mind, and breath in the moment. The aims have been preserving sensations and making no attempt to edit out the ways in which my condition may alter or affect the ways in which I write. Changing syntax or sense within a line, following sound patterns as they occur in an irregular, but lyrical fashion:

21st October 2020

My notebooks have been closed more than open using two to prop up the laptop on the 70s zebra footstool an attempt at a flattering angle on zoom a book was edited yes one lockdown poem snuck in a book drains you like the obvious I was shagged out of poems for months how much of my scrawl I have written before how did I fill endless notebooks? A flurry of words kissing the pages lustily urgent poetry is lost to me for whole chunks of time like my other

⁸⁴ P.44 Newlyn, L. (2018) *Diary of a bipolar explorer*. Oxford: Signal Books.

*appetites it induces fear of the page of my thoughts the week and half late period that shook me I could not write that down till I cramped I came back to the white expanse.*⁸⁵

In this poem there is transpicuous evidence of composition by breath, tuning for sound the way in which the words: notebook/footstool/attempt/flattering are placed in first section then: endless/kissing/lustily/urgent and latterly: could not/cramped/expanse. The poem is composed of one thought process with its own rhythm for that day and moment. The pieces within Newlyn's collection of most interest are texts which appear to be presented, as they were originally written, during a mood episode. A form of hybrid text, recurring throughout the book, are the mood questionnaires Newlyn is tasked by medical professionals with completing, while in the most extreme mood states:

Depression

*I take more than 60 mins to fall asleep half the time
I awaken at least one hour before I need to and can't go back to sleep
I feel sad nearly all of the time
Most of the time I struggle to focus my attention and make decisions
I think almost constantly about major and minor defects in myself
I feel life is empty and wonder if it is worth living
I am often unable to respond to questions without extreme effort
At times I am unable to remain seated and need to pace around*

*

How is my sleep pattern going?

"Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care" – where's it gone? I look for it under every shadow of every wall, and in every corner.

What would help to get my sleep back?

"It's gone like the summer, gone like the snow (Leonard Cohen).

What does sadness feel like?

Acid Rain

What helps with focusing attention?

Attention to what, focus on what? Work of all kinds is impossible. Songs help, especially by Bob Dylan. So do poems-not on the page but said aloud. (In the middle of the night, when there's been no sleep for a long time, the focus is sharpest).

What defects do I notice in myself?

As this will keep us here all day I decline to answer.

Why does it take a long time to respond to questions?

⁸⁵ See Appendix

*I don't hear them or they're hard; they don't have answers: Why does "ravelled" mean the same as "unravelled"?
 Why do I get so tired?
 Why is everything so tiring?
 Describe something that would make life worth living.
 Being able to talk to Sally on the phone while looking at a pear-tree.
 Why do I pace around?
 To find somewhere else, away from myself, to be.'*⁸⁶

The extract above, is not defined by Newlyn as a poem. These are not intentional writings, they are mood questionnaires provided by a medical professional, questions provided and Newlyn writing an uncloaked response in the moment. Here she is unintentionally employing a found poetry technique, it does have poetic elements as a hybrid text, there is the sense that Newlyn is not attempting to translate or decipher the bipolar experience after the fact, I found these snippets the most effective poetic communication of a mood episode.

For another writer's take on depicting psychosis I read *They're Coming to Take Me Away* by Sally Barrett. I came across S. Barrett's work due to my engagement with the Manchester poetry scene and subsequently had a few of the poems from this PhD in Zines from their *Hoodwinked Mammal Press*. S. Barrett is open about her experiences with a psychotic illness from the title onwards. The title references the song *They're Coming to Take me Away* by Napoleon XIV released in 1966 which includes the lyrics:

*They're coming to take me away ho-ho hee-hee ha-haaa
 To the funny farm
 Where life is beautiful all the time
 And I'll be happy to see those nice young men
 In their clean white coats'*⁸⁷

⁸⁶ P. 102-3 Newlyn, L. (2018) *Diary of a bipolar explorer*. Oxford: Signal Books.

⁸⁷ XIV, N. (no date) *They're Coming to Take Me Away, Ha-Haaa!* Warner Brothers.

These lyrics became a pop culture reference to psychiatric inpatient treatment. The pamphlet unapologetically discusses S. Barrett's mental health and includes biographical information pertaining to this experience:

Sally Barrett was first diagnosed with psychosis in the mid-2000s though had struggled with some unusual experiences, including voice hearing, prior to that for many years. (She thought everyone had similar phenomena.) Currently she uses antipsychotic medication to help her cope with her mental health and has had one hospital admission, support from Community Mental Health Services and various types of therapy in her journey of recovery. Barrett has also had a long successful career to date, working in mental health and related services, using her experience to help others⁸⁸

I include this information to show that I am not speculating about S. Barrett's mental health.

The poem *Session Number 3* is a hybrid text in which the personal and the public realms are blurred. In my work, the private domestic realm of the diary is hybridised, in Barrett's poem a transcript of a counselling session or psychiatric assessment (it is unclear exactly who is asking the questions and their purpose, this ambiguity of situation and purpose appears to be deliberate and reflection of the fact that this is often the appearance of such a situation to the person being treated when dealing with psychosis and severe symptoms) the session is transcribed into the poem. The sense of the unsealing of medical records is an act of revelation, what occurs during a psychiatric appointment is shrouded in secrecy, this poem opens the door to a private and usually unobserved experience:

Session number 3

**name of client*

**date*

**name of worker*

-Hi, How are you doing?

-I'm ok thanks

*-good *pause*

*-Well, *giggle, not that good else I wouldn't
be here*

⁸⁸ Barrett, S. (no date) *They're Coming to Take Me Away*. Manchester: Hoodwinked Mammal Press.

-*smiles
 - the voices have calmed down
 -*nods
 -My thoughts are still going pretty fast and sleep's shit
 -Tell me a bit more about your sleep... ⁸⁹

There is another sense of hybridity in the works in this pamphlet, psychiatric terminology is blended with the intensely personal in terms of language and recollection. This is due to her expert knowledge as both a person who has experienced psychosis and worked within the mental health profession. Newlyn does not consider her inclusion of mental health questionnaires to be a form of found poetry, of experimental/hybrid poetry whereas S. Barrett does. This suggests to me, that Newlyn is unaware of that these could be considered poems in their own right. In her poem *My Face is Breaking*, S. Barrett employs another experimental form, using text from the abstract of her own MSc Synthesis. The list of words is provided at the end of the poem in bold as they appear in rest of the text

Acknowledgements to the words below, handpicked for the purpose, from the Abstract of my MSc Synthesis- MCMANUS (2011) HEARING VOICES A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION Leeds Beckett University:

VOICE/PHENOMENON/WEALTH/AGENDA/PERCEPTION/AIM/FUSE/POWER/CRUCIAL/DYNAMICS/MALLEABLE/MEDIA/ENHANCE/TIME/LESSER/SPACE⁹⁰

I include an extract of this text below:

*it's something like a VOICE PHENOMENON/
 The rich have a WEALTH AGENDA, obviously/*

*My PERCEPTION AIM is neutral/
 FUSE the POWER between us/*

*The CRUCIAL cruel necessity of DYNAMICS/
 MALLEABLE MEDIA watcher/*

ENHANCE the TIME we spend watching television/

⁸⁹ Barrett, S. (no date) *They're Coming to Take Me Away*. Manchester: Hoodwinked Mammal Press.

⁹⁰ Barrett, S. (no date) *They're Coming to Take Me Away*. Manchester: Hoodwinked Mammal Press.

This poem again has a found text and hybrid text element, using the words from a scientific thesis to compose the poem, to attempt to communicate the sense of the experience of hearing voices. This is a task poetry can perform more readily than a scientific paper. The rest of the pamphlet contains free verse, where the writing is at its most interesting is when S. Barrett employs hybrid text and experimental text techniques to reveal her experiences of mental illness. In both attempts to convey the experience of mental illness discussed above it is in the margins, in the liminal spaces between forms and types of text. In the breakdowns between them. Where clarity is not imposed on an experience, which by its very nature is confusing and unclear, that the work is most effective. The thought processes of people experiencing psychosis are not ordered or logical, writing depicting these states need not be orderly.

Selima Hill has written several collections focusing on her experience of mental illness, her approach is not narratively linear, her hallucinatory experience translated to a surrealistic approach. The book of most interest Selima Hill's *Lou Lou* takes place in a psychiatric unit and the poems are dated like a diary, aligning with the journal nature of the poetry I have written. The collection includes longing for landscape as part of mental illness. *Lou Lou* largely takes place within a psychiatric unit, the poems being mostly dated, diary poem fragments. The small poems in *Lou Lou* are vivid with animal imagery throughout. In the poem *In a Hedge July 25th* she has escaped the ward:

*This hedge
is like a nice airy tent
where I can take my overdose*

⁹¹ Barrett, S. (no date) *They're Coming to Take Me Away*. Manchester: Hoodwinked Mammal Press.

*in peace,*⁹²

In the nadir of mental distress and self-harm urges, Hill finds something joyous in the natural world beyond the confines of the ward, many of us have experienced this desire for nature. When I was first admitted to a psychiatric unit and was not allowed outside, a friend visited, I pleaded to be allowed to sit with them under a tree in full view of a window. When you are admitted to a psychiatric ward many freedoms are taken away, small escapes are necessary, even in the depths of madness and medication our connection to the natural world is unbroken.

I have provided an historical antecedent in the works of Bishop and Sexton. In this process, also by analysing Hill, Barrett and Newlyn's contemporary work, their approaches to writing about mental health, how they emphatically both connect and diverge from my poetics of madness and the gendered mentally ill body. I have defined how my poetics has been laid upon the substratum of 20th century women and moved beyond them. A key-point this chapter has made clear within the analysis of these varied approaches to poetics is that no two poets with bipolar disorder or mental illness will tackle writing of their experience in the same way. No one will experience or present with the same symptoms, even if their diagnoses are similar, and they go through some form of depressive and manic episodes. To flesh out the formation of the poetics in regards the mental health aspect, and further explain the rationale behind this unusual thesis, I present a magpie's eye view of mad studies.

⁹² P.29 Hill, S. (2004) *Lou-Lou*. Tarsnet Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books LTD

Mad Studies:

I refer to *Knots* by R. D. Laing, being a form of poetry as essay in the introduction. I make the case that the radical nature of Laing's approach to mental illness, the attitude he adopted to understand rather than medicalise madness, make his writings a precursor to the mad studies movement. Laing's work as a radical psychiatrist (one who could be argued to be vehemently antipsychiatry) resists categorisation, he included diagrams and poetry among lyric/essay and expanded this practice in his work of poetry, *Knots*. This became Laing's seminal and best-selling work on the tangled nature of interpersonal relationships. It is Laing's work with psychiatric patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, of the kind who remain among the most stigmatised, who are discussed in *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Laing's work focused on the nature of expressions of severe mental illness:

Some people labelled schizophrenic (not all, and not necessarily) manifest behaviour in words, gestures, actions (linguistically, paralinguistically and kinetically) that is unusual. Sometimes (not always and not necessarily) this unusual behaviour (manifested to us, the others, as I have said by sight and sound) expresses, wittingly or unwittingly unusual experiences the person is undergoing. Sometimes (not always and not necessarily) these unusual experiences that are expressed by unusual behaviour appear to be part of a potentially orderly, natural sequence of experiences. This sequence is very seldom allowed to occur because we are so busy 'treating' the patient, whether by chemotherapy, shock therapy, milieu therapy, group therapy, psychotherapy, family therapy – sometimes now in the most advanced places, by the lot⁹³

What we see sometimes in some people whom we label and 'treat' as schizophrenics are the behavioural expressions of an experiential drama. But we see this drama in a distorted form that our therapeutic efforts tend to distort further. The outcome of this unfortunate dialectic is a forme frustre of a potentially natural process that we do not allow to happen.⁹⁴

⁹³ P.102 Laing, R.D. (1972) *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Harmondsworth: London

⁹⁴ Laing, R.D. (1967) *The politics of experience and the bird of paradise. The bird of paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Laing expounded the idea that his patients experiencing madness were humans experiencing trauma, who deserved understanding and treatment beyond the chemical cosh of medication. Beyond subduing and attempting to normalise their behaviour, to encourage expression and healing. He suggested that these people, the most misunderstood in society, deserve inclusion and understanding. It is these features which link Laing historically to the work of the mad studies movement. It has been a profound experience reading Laing's work, published in the nineteen sixties. I have contrasted his language, which views a person holistically and my personal pitiful experience of psychiatrists. Most psychiatrists view patients as a case history, a trauma narrative to be regurgitated on their terms and (over) medicated accordingly. His writings remain radically humane.

Laing's belief was that 'Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and death'⁹⁵ there is abundant criticism that Laing romanticised madness. I would counter that when a condition such as psychosis, is still as stigmatised as it is now, for Laing to write of madness as having any kind of purpose was a necessary act of humanising despised individuals. The introduction to *Introducing Mad Studies* makes reference to the work of R.D Laing et al and links the antipsychiatry movement to mad studies and the main tenet that it is only those who have experienced psychosis truly understand it:

On the other side of the Atlantic, radical psychiatrists like R.D. Laing (1960, 1967), David Cooper (1967), and Franco Basaglia (Scheper-Hughes & Lovell, 1987) were at the leading edge of a transnational antipsychiatry school committed to Laing's "politics of experience," the challenging premise that madness could only be understood and engaged existentially and through the eyes of those who lived it. For the European anti-psychiatrists, the objectification of so-called "mentally ill" people under the guise of science was a deeply dehumanizing pursuit that required challenging through a wholesale rethinking of human

⁹⁵ Laing, R.D. (1967) *The politics of experience and the bird of paradise. The bird of paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

*consciousness and being. Whether psychosis was, or is, an exploration of selfhood or a journey to self-actualization may remain a contested idea.*⁹⁶

Modern mad studies commuted the phraseology of politics of experience to experiential knowledge. Discussion on the romanticisation of madness and the problematic notion that psychosis is analogous to all women's oppression is in the *Madwoman in the Attic* chapter. While I deeply regret having been allowed to become so unwell that I experienced a psychotic breakdown it was a breakthrough. It redefined every relationship in my life and my relationship to myself. Without my breakdown I may not have been diagnosed until mid-life like my mother and a large amount of other people with bipolar disorder. Laing suggests an upheaval in the way we pay attention to and derive meaning from breakdowns and madness. A recentring of madness as a process rather than a symptom.

My poetry of madness acknowledges the influence the mental health system has wielded over my life and poetry, while finding a poetic voice of dissent. Mad studies unleashes a new area of critical study, one which is actively declaring that the way that mental health is currently treated, (and consequently also how it is viewed by society) is a broken system and offers up a form of resistance. Experiential knowledge refers to knowledge obtained by the experience of living with mental illness, rather than knowledge obtained purely by academic research. The tenet is that the people best placed to write academically about mental illness are those who have experienced it⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ p.5 Menzies, R.J., Reaume, G. and Lefrançois, B.A. (2013) *Mad matters : a critical reader in Canadian mad studies*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. pp.1-22.

⁹⁷ P.172 Beresford, P. and Jasna Russo (2022) *The Routledge international handbook of mad studies*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, Ny: Routledge.

Traditionally academic writing and research about mental illness has been largely conducted by those who do not experience it. There are a multitude of reasons why this has occurred. One being that people with mental illness do not often progress to the highest levels of academia. Barriers include the stress of conducting research, lack of funding and additionally difficulties in the act of writing to an academic standard when experiencing mental illness, which impacts your cognitive abilities. In fact, when I joined the PhD programme no other candidate in the department had ever had a PLP (personal learning plan, co-ordinated by the disability team) just by signing up I was already breaking a barrier. To complete this thesis, I have worked with my endlessly supportive tutors, and MMU (who have been extremely understanding) to allow time to recover from mood episodes that have left me incapable of writing coherently. I include samples of previous drafts where this is apparent in the appendix. For my part I have had to explain the complexities of my condition and how it affects my cognitive abilities to many people at MMU. I hope that these interactions and the statements I have had to write in my favour, regarding the various suspensions of study I have undertaken, have informed those I have been in contact with. In a small way I hope I have changed the policies of this institution for the better.

Mad studies arose as a discipline in Canada and was born out of activism. It has forbears in the likes of disability studies, queer theory, and feminism. The move from activism into the academy is a necessary step in gaining traction for voices of marginalised people. As academics, we have our voices heard by an entirely new audience with a great deal of power. Academic research and writing shapes our treatment and policies which affect our day to day lives. *Introducing Mad Studies* traces a line from the antipsychiatry of the sixties and successive survivor movements to the first mentions of mad studies in academia:

*In his important 2008 paper calling for the establishment of Mad Studies as a new “in/discipline” (see also Reville, Chapter 12), Richard Ingram reminds us of the debt that Mad Studies owes to “disability studies perspectives based on a transformative revaluation of the category of ‘disability’*⁹⁸

Mad studies arose from criticism of the ways in which mental health is treated in psychiatry and health care in general. The failures of the mental health system for those who have been through it are well known, a process that often retraumatizes the very people it is supposed to be treating. These findings, are a form of research, conducted by anyone with a mental illness. This largely hidden resource composes experiential knowledge of both their own mental illness and the maladjusted systems and medical professionals engaged within it. It is vital for people with mental illness to become experts in their own condition, to advocate for themselves and in some cases, this becomes a life-or-death matter especially with regards to medications. Mad studies has slowly grown to include mad identified scholars writing about other disciplines, beyond psychiatry. Other artforms refracted through the lens of mad studies include mad visual art and efforts to challenge the relegation of it as merely therapeutic in *Resisting Regulatory Efforts by Inscribing Art as Political Practice*⁹⁹. Mad positive music in *Mad Studies and Mad-Positive Music*¹⁰⁰ discusses the role mad music can play in expressing experiential knowledge of madness and altering perceptions of it. Theatre criticism is informed by mad studies in *Method and madness: de/colonising scholarship and*

⁹⁸ Menzies, R.J., Reaume, G. and Lefrançois, B.A. (2013) *Mad Matters : a Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.pp.1-22..

⁹⁹ Reid, J. et al. (2019) *Mobilizing Mad Art in the Neoliberal University*, *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 13(3), pp. 255–271.[Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2019.20>

¹⁰⁰ Castrodale, M.A. (2019) *Mad Studies and Mad-Positive Music*, *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 31(1), pp. 40–58.[Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20239>

*theatre research with participants labelled mad*¹⁰¹. I located a mad studies article focused on Sylvia Plath, *Sylvia Plath and Mad Studies: Reframing the Life and Death of Sylvia Plath* James Macaulay McManus¹⁰² This article takes the form of memoir and uses Plath's journals and *The Bell Jar* to discuss in straightforward prose their experience of mental illness, self-harm and psychiatric care. The inclusion of first-person memoir of mental illness is essential for mad studies however I did not find this account to have relevance to either my own experience or writing. I refer to these texts glancingly as examples of the possibilities for mad studies to operate outside of its initial purview.

J Cosantino, a mad identified scholar used mad studies to discuss their poetics in *Hauntings of Longing: A Mad Autoethnographic Poetic Transcription 1*¹⁰³ focusing on their experiences as someone with a mental illness who is trans. I found the way in which they presented their poetry, of more interest than the poetry itself. I quote here from their abstract:

*Using an autoethnographic Mad and trans poesis, I seek to situate these grapplings within historical and present-day systems of power, privilege, and oppression, confronting the hauntings (Gordon, 2008) that arise from my simultaneous complicity in and disruption of these institutionalized structures of harm and violence that disproportionately target bodyminds that are deemed non-normative*¹⁰⁴

this concept of a body being haunted by trauma is an exciting conceit. The poetry itself uses a lot of found content from critical writing on mental illness. Combined with a lack of

¹⁰¹ Sutherland, A. (2017) *Method and madness: de/colonising scholarship and theatre research with participants labelled mad*, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 22(3), pp. 427–435. [Online] [Accessed January 16th 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2017.1326805>

¹⁰² Macaulay McManus, J. (2022) *Sylvia Plath and Mad Studies: Reframing the Life and Death of Sylvia Plath*, *International Mad Studies Journal*, 1(1), pp. e1-17. [Online][Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.58544/imsj.v1i1.5248>

¹⁰³¹⁰³ Cosantino, J. (2021) *Hauntings of Longing: A Mad Autoethnographic Poetic Transcription*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 41(2). [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v41i2.7669>

¹⁰⁴ Cosantino, J. (2021) *Hauntings of Longing: A Mad Autoethnographic Poetic Transcription*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 41(2). [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v41i2.7669>

imagery, sensory detail, lyrical flow, and a tendency to ‘tell not show,’ the poetry is not as effective as I would have hoped:

*My first experience in a mental health facility
was in college
not as a patient
but as a visitor
a voyeur/
a participant in a medical model of disability/
wherein "[a]ll of our bodyminds are judged/
in one way or another,/*
found to be normal and abnormal,/
valuable or disposable,/
healthy or unhealthy"/ (Clare, 2017, p. 69).¹⁰⁵

I failed to see what was embodied about the poetry when there was a distinct lack of sensory detail depicted therein. This poetry also remains firmly focused on the two factors of their identity, that of mental illness and being trans. There is no doubt these are worthy subjects for poetry-in their own right- I had hoped, for my own purposes, to find poets engaging with both mad studies and eco-poetry. My poem *17th May 2016* takes as its focus a very similar recollection, my reaction to a friend’s incarceration in a psychiatric unit. I believe that by stark contrast to J Cosantino’s work, my poem presents an embodied lyrical approach, which reveals more of the reality of inpatient treatment. It is entirely possible, as people with mental illness, to not just further political causes in our poetry. I do wish to inform the reader on an experience that remains due to stigma, shame (and the inaccuracies of fiction) wreathed in mystery. I have worked up a refined poetics of; noticing, composition by breath and body hinging on the cumulative poignancy that dailiness accrues in its details:

¹⁰⁵Cosantino, J. (2021) *Hauntings of Longing: A Mad Autoethnographic Poetic Transcription*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 41(2). [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v41i2.7669>

17th of May 2016

You stopped answering calls [] shaved your head [] TEXT: I ended up in a police cell [] I rang [] it cut off [] you sounded more out of it than I have ever heard [] you were admitted to a psychiatric unit somewhere near Bethnal Green [] I do not ask questions [] I know the putrid pastels [] metal framed beds [] you are conscious of this [] you tell me you are sleeping but not if they gave you anything to do so [] I am attempting to ground you with the weather [] with my living body [] TEXT: My feet hurt it is grey [] TEXT: is a strange place [] TEXT: It most certainly is [] I have slurred the bits of my story I can face [] (psychosis can keep some secrets) [] over shared dark bottles [] on that greasy sofa [] when everyone else was asleep [] TEXT: I am doing washing [] going to cycle outside later [] it is sunny [] TEXT: It is sunny here [] So I know you have seen a window [] but not if they let you outside [] or how many of your freedoms you have given up [] I am drinking green tea [] I tell you this [] hope you remember cups I made you [] grasped oil handed [] last summers canvas shoes lose their mould on the spin cycle [] I forget I put them in [] suspect intruders [] the windows are open and I am dancing [] SINGS: tonight we make love only in words [] I run the dried up fountain pens under the tap [] the ink splots turn to dove feathers on the porcelain [] almost nothing stained and used up looking is beyond purpose [] I want you to remember and pick up your guitar¹⁰⁶

It is these elements of a considered poetics that are diametrically opposed to the example above. While the use of found text is an experimental poetry technique, and I have discussed the possibilities of using this in the work of Newlyn and Barrett, J Cosantino regurgitates disability studies rhetoric wholesale. The case cannot be made for this as poetry as essay, this is poetry poaching essay. The quality of the originally composed lines are by any metric I personally use in my practice as a poet to determine the efficacy of a poem (i.e., that of; lyrical flow, sound patterns, assonance, sensory/bodily detail, specificity, emotional resonance, noticing of the setting, place, surroundings, environment, seasons, sensations) are lacking. It states the fact of a visit to a psychiatric unit and expects this to bear the entire weight of the emotional/political significance of the poem in and of itself. My poetics of the gendered mentally ill body aims to move beyond a poetry about mental illness that moves beyond a mere catharsis, a political call to arms and the very subject of mental illness. The

¹⁰⁶ p. 25 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

concept of a body (or bodymind as these writers refer to) being haunted by trauma as a theme is continued in *Care haunts, hurts, heals: The promiscuous poetics of queer crip Mad care*¹⁰⁷ by Lindsay Eales and Danielle Peers. In the poetry there are some wonderfully tender, close observations of queer disabled bodies:

*My hands come to rest on tired muscles,
fingers interlacing ribs/as I squeeze.
They let out small puffs.
Meditatively, my breath trains with theirs
as I press their ribs together
gently on the exhale
and invite them open
on the inhale*¹⁰⁸

These lines are interspersed again with quotations from criticism on disability. This technique, while the politics motivating it and the other aesthetics behind the reportage style are in my view sound, I again found little beyond the few truly embodied descriptions of interest. As with the previous poet this work remains in the realm of identity of the self. For bodies that are othered these are important subjects of that there is no ambiguity. I merely wished to engage in the environment beyond myself. So far, I am yet to know of mad studies criticism linked to any form of eco-poetics. It is this fusing of concerns, of mental illness/madness, eco-poetry and the body, and eco-poetry funnelled into the bipolar magpie approach which serves as my unique contribution in this work. The aim of this thesis is in part to effect change from within the academy. The aim is to alter what is considered an academic text.

¹⁰⁷ Eales, L. and Peers, D. (2020) *Care haunts, hurts, heals: The promiscuous poetics of queer crip Mad care*, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, pp. 1–19. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2020.1778849>

¹⁰⁸ Eales, L. and Peers, D. (2020) *Care haunts, hurts, heals: The promiscuous poetics of queer crip Mad care*, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, pp. 1–19. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025]

Audre Lorde (a contemporary of Diane Di Prima, mentioned latterly in the last chapter, they attended high school together) wrote poetry and literary criticism from her perspective as a Black lesbian feminist. Of her criticism, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* is the most well recognised. The essay is a response to attending yet another academic conference which programmed scant women of colour or lesbians. Lorde remains one of the most important voices for intersectional feminists, in general, not just for poets, due to her efforts in confronting the white monolith of second and third wave feminism. She focused her discussions on the importance of the contribution of difference, of the inextricable link between the personal and political, and the role of poetry in resistance. I will focus here on two points she makes in that essay. Firstly, I will note that I am utilising Lorde's perspectives on difference and changing the academy from my own perspective as a poet with bipolar disorder who is white. Although our life experiences are materially completely different, her arguments have relevance to anyone who lives with difference. In her opening arguments, Lorde discusses the damaging way the conference was structured:

*To read this program is to assume that lesbian and Black women have nothing to say about existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory, or heterosexuality and power. And what does it mean in personal and political terms when even the two Black women who did present here were literally found at the last hour? What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable.*¹⁰⁹

Here she begins to critique the ways in which academia invites her to participate in feminist debate, seemingly only allowing her access to discussions limited to what the academy deems as appropriate subjects for her. She begins to outline her key argument, that when

¹⁰⁹ p.1- 2 Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing Press.

difference is not represented within the academy it continues to perpetuate exclusion. I include this quote for another reason, her points that Black lesbian academics have much to contribute to other subject matters, than discussions related directly connected to their identity. This element of her argument is one of the catalysts behind this project, mental illness is not my only subject matter of import, by using my difference to redefine eco-poetry and eco-criticism.. I wanted to expand the possibilities of what a poet with bipolar disorder can contribute. The bipolar magpie approach is a critical mode which can have bearing on any number of subjects, it is my perspective, not my illness, which makes me an academic. I am writer with bipolar disorder who has sought to write poetry which acknowledges this difference, is not limited by it. I am a mad poet and writer and I have much more to write about than madness.

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor; who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.¹¹⁰

The purpose of connecting this thesis to the mad studies movement is to participate in a movement that is seeking to centre the experience of people with mental illness, in academic discourse about mental illness. The structure and execution of this thesis is unusual, it is bounded by bipolar disorder. While my research has turned up little directly melding eco-poetry and mad studies, there is another area of critical thought in its youth which relates to these subjects, that of eco-anxiety.

¹¹⁰ p. 2 Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing Press.

Eco-Anxiety:

Eco-anxiety is a relatively new term, describing mental health distress, causally linked to an invested interest in climate change, and destruction of the environment. The abstract for a study on students' experiences with eco-anxiety defines the term thusly: 'eco-anxiety—mental distress caused by climate change and environmental degradation—'¹¹¹ this would more accurately read, an awareness of climate change and environmental destruction. I include this definition from a scientific study as the poetry criticism I discuss latterly appears to assume it is a widely known phenomenon or utilises alternative language. This malady is still more widely discussed amongst academics and environmental activists than the general population. Eco-anxiety is not currently a term acknowledged within the DSM. The DSM is the diagnostic manual which specifies which conditions are currently widely acknowledged by the psychiatric profession. The DSM is regularly updated, and this is not to say that in the future, eco-anxiety could not become recognised as a disorder, or symptom within other diagnoses. While I was not aware of this term when starting this project, it accurately describes one of the imperative incitements of the composition. This sense of eco-anxiety has appeared in earlier poems from my other collections. These include depictions of anxiety over changes in weather patterns and link this to feelings of anxiety and grief. The most prevalent and earliest example of eco-anxiety appearing in my poetry is the simple act of noticing that the seasons, the weather are not as they were, in my memory. This act of noticing and comparing leads to anxiety. The anxiety manifests in that there is climate

¹¹¹ Kelly, A. (2017) *Eco-Anxiety at University: Student Experiences and Academic Perspectives on Cultivating Healthy Emotional Responses to the Climate Crisis* [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2642/

change occurring so rapid that it is noticeable by myself, someone without scientific training in the area. Eco-poets can meaningfully contribute, by bearing witness to what is noticed. This is a form of collecting and communicating evidence of the shifts of seasons. This noticing of climate/environment change in my poetry is not presented as empirical or infallible data. This is a skill particularly attuned in poets. It enhances our cultural knowledge of how climate change is becoming a noticeable phenomenon, we can communicate to a wider audience these changes.

In their article *Lyric Weathering: Reading Poetry in the Age of Bewilderment*, Jess Cotton, through engagement with current eco-criticism, and the work of John Ashbery, raises arguments harmonious with my own poetics. They discuss the possibilities of eco-anxiety as a form of continued engagement with climate change, and the value of eco-poetry at a slant, eco-poetry which engages with the poets' daily experience of the world that allows their general engagement with eco politics to reveal themselves through lyricism and sensory input rather than didacticism. Eco-poetry at a slant¹¹² I would further describe as eco-poetry which does not exist in the extremes of; scientific language, the anthropomorphic didactic, the elegiac, or at a casual glance be what is usually considered eco-poetry at all. In Ashbery's work there is the same sense of experiencing what is in front of him, not an antiquated view of unspoiled nature being aspired to or given religious significance. I consider my eco-poetics to exist in this space avoiding the binaries. Elsewhere I have discussed avoiding anthropomorphism. To further iterate, it is my belief that caring for the demise of the environment and living creatures should not require remaking them in our image. Cotton

¹¹² KÓNYI, J. (2011) *Tricks of the Trade: Emily Dickinson on Writing Poetry*. *HUSSE10-LitCult*, 27, p.53. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025]
https://real.mtak.hu/79881/1/Strobl_Petrarchan_Love_or_Politics_u.pdf

refers to eco-poetry and eco-criticism's tendency to cleave to elegy thematically. Latterly I discuss the role of grief in relation to the eco concerns in my poetry. While there is a thematic motif of a link made between grief for death of specific humans and a passage of time, I would assert that my poetry does not stray continually into the realm of (living) elegy for environment or creatures destroyed or under threat. Climate or environmental change in my poetry arises as an expansion of daily noticing, there is not a single poem entitled something like *Woe for the Hedgehog*. I found these chimes on hedgehogs and noticing environmental change:

23rd June 2016

To vote in the EU referendum I walk through Manley Park [] which has just been mown clean of flowers [] I have timed it wrong [] the primary school polling station is teeming with small bumblebees [] there is no queue [] I recognise the people manning the station [] think this is odd [] I am anxious [] I already came later than intended [] made myself eat hummous [] before coming here [] lest low blood sugar make me make a mistake [] the sky is lightly clouded [] it is temperate [] not humid [] the air is not stifling still [] yet today feels cataclysmic [] I cannot be calm the repetition of her voice and how it has stopped me from picking up a pen to write with until nearly 2.30 [] am how long her reach her shriek [] the anxiety that has stopped me eating dinner [] how small my world is to become [] all my pleasures will be gone [] travel difficult and expensive [] I am weighted by all this [] the thought [] I will never be left alone to write [] that there are those who seek to harm will always try to poison [] that I wasted the weather indoors fretting and drinking cold green tea [] in between loading the washing machine [] this between stints in front of the television [] a bright spot [] TEXT: (thinking of you) I have taken an extra sedative [] have gone to bed [] before I stay awake and try to wait for the result [] when I looked at the sky I thought about the reduction in pollution made by EU policies [] wonder how long smog takes to form [] there was a loud hailer on a vehicle 'vote remain vote for the union' [] it is too late [] the decision is to made by people my parents age [] because there are more of them [] they vote [] I go into spirals of war [] loss of the hedgehogs [] bats to white nose syndrome [] being trapped here forever [] with no doctors [] finally I lie down [] there is nothing more I can do [] my anxiety will not change a single vote¹¹³

¹¹³ p.28 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

August 2016 Sea Palling

mum drives us to Sea Palling [] we pass Hill House they razed it to the ground and kept the name [] she says [] the blue flag flying verifying the continuing cleanness of the beach reminds her of my father [] his job at Tidy Britain Group [] we read in partial sunshine me [] Larrys Party by Carol Shields [] with lush shrubbery between the pages [] both enjoying the sound of waves on this day [] gentle [] she keeps recounting the news [] of scores of people dragged out to sea in this weather [] unused to rip tides on this coast and their lives lost [] she instilled a respect of the water [] today we content ourselves with digging our bare feet in the sand [] take turns to walk along the coast towards Waxham [] she returns [] says she found no seaglass this is her most precious object [] echoes the poster we had crinkling in the kitchen 'leave nothing but foot prints' [] because of both of them I find beauty in seaglass and worn ceramic [] I only take the things which do not belong [] I bring her green and blue [] half a cup handle of smoothness [] these small finds remind me that broken things can be beautiful given time and the right conditions¹¹⁴

8th April 2017

On a day like today it aches to leave Norfolk [] the sunshine and endless horizon [] I cleared and cleaned mothers patio [] a selfish act [] I have dreams of terrace writing when I house sit in May [] I miss the sun up north [] the clean air and earth [] I have been bitten all over by insects [] my blood used to be sluggish [] circulation poor [] when I smoked I was never bitten [] I have been bitten all up juicy veins [] the back of my knees [] a cluster [] I am having to wear sunglasses on the train [] the acres of green out the window as we approach Ely make me want to cry [] mothers garden [] the secluded suntrap designed by a wise builder in the 1950s is a magnet for bees [] she lets the weeds grow [] she named for me many varieties that were starting to blossom [] Aconite [] Forget Me Not [] I could identify Pansies I revived by watering [] Tulips [] a weed she could not name but has let be [] I saw the leaves of Geranium that will open later [] lazily the bees floated above the pots and beds [] their lax attitude to gardening protects the bees and the hedgehogs [] I use the word monoculture and tell them dandelions are the first food for bees [] my mother carries an encyclopaedia in her head [] I had not the time to wake her and ask what the dozens of birdsongs I heard were ringing out¹¹⁵

Cotton believes the focus upon what is lost or soon to be lost in eco-poetry leads to

stagnation, 'I seek to make a case for imagining an ecopoetics and an ecocriticism that goes

beyond mourning and melancholia – and indeed Nature, one that centres instead the states

¹¹⁴ p.37 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

¹¹⁵ P. 52 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

of affective bewilderment and psychic flight that characterise the difficulty of engaging with questions of climate change in the present.¹¹⁶ Although anxiety may be a negative state in many respects, it opens possibilities for expressing the unknown. For the bewilderment that Cotton refers to, anxiety to my mind is a more active state than grieving, there is an energy at play. An eco-poetics of mourning knows we are all doomed, an eco-poetics of anxiety, by contrast is confident in its knowledge that I do not know what will happen and I am terrified. This psychic unease is not restful, we should not be resting, we should be constantly vigilant, anxiety allows for this constant state of engaged noticing, and moreover, a wider variety of eco-poetics to be expressed. Cotton further expands on this idea of an eco-poetics that:

seeks to reorient ecocriticism away from a mournful direction to grapple with the suprasensible character of our environment. Anxiety and bewilderment are, in this way, mobilised as affective critical lenses that might account for what cannot be tracked and measured,¹¹⁷

This reorientation is necessary for a discipline which has been focused on mourning since its inception. Grief is a circular thought process, a closed circuit, anxiety in its uncertainty is a mobilising force, carrying eco-poetry/criticism onward with unwavering attention. It is the concept of the sense of unknowing which allows for wider engagement. It allows for engagement with eco-poetry beyond poets with a scientific knowledge of climate destruction, it broadens the definitions of who can claim to be an eco-poet. In turn it broadens the definitions of who can be critiqued as an eco-poet, as Cotton does here with

¹¹⁶ Cotton, J. (2020) *Lyric weathering: reading poetry in the age of bewilderment*, *Textual Practice*, pp. 1–17. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236x.2020.1839946>

¹¹⁷ Cotton, J. (2020) *Lyric weathering: reading poetry in the age of bewilderment*, *Textual Practice*, pp. 1–17. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236x.2020.1839946>

Ashbery. I will discuss Cotton's critique of his work and set out a comparison of some of his work with mine. Cotton refers to Ashbery's negotiation of what is known/unknown by him:

*Far from a call to responsibility, Ashbery's concept of nature and naturalisation is rooted in a porousness between his understanding of clouds – those archetypal Romantic lyric atmospheric objects – and clouds, understood, contemporaneously, as hyperobjects that connect the sky to data clouds and network clouds.'*¹¹⁸ Cotton, when referring to 'a call to responsibility'¹¹⁹

is discussing Ashbery's avoidance of didactic rhetoric when writing about the environment.

There is also the acknowledgement of modernity, refiguring of familiar language that used to refer to the natural world. It is an act of contemplation upon nature and modernity rather than an elegiac lecture. Nature has been transmuted by human intervention and the language we devised to describe it has evolved in meaning.

Cotton proposes that Ashbery's lack of a specialism, in terms of attention, or knowledge of the climate/ environment change is not a detriment. This flitting of attention (reminiscent of the magpie eye's view of eco-poetry) does not equate to a lack of scholarly interest to

Cotton,

*To fully comprehend the stakes of poetry in thinking environmental degradation in the present, what is needed is a scholarly kind of attention that is, as Ashbery writes in his poem 'The Other Tradition', 'Studious as a butterfly in a parking lot': restless, light-footed, and unconfined to a particular scholarly location (this is not the same as insisting on interdisciplinarity): the incidental ecopoem invites just such an occasional model of ecocriticism.*¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Cotton, J. (2020) *Lyric weathering: reading poetry in the age of bewilderment*, *Textual Practice*, pp. 1–17. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236x.2020.1839946>

¹¹⁹Cotton, J. (2020) *Lyric weathering: reading poetry in the age of bewilderment*, *Textual Practice*, pp. 1–17. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236x.2020.1839946>

¹²⁰ Cotton, J. (2020) *Lyric weathering: reading poetry in the age of bewilderment*, *Textual Practice*, pp. 1–17. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236x.2020.1839946>

Here Cotton uses the term incidental eco-poem rather than eco-poetry at a slant, we come to the same definition. Uncertain times call for poetry of uncertainty. As we have established that there is a plausible overlap between our eco-poetics, I will discuss some of our similar enthusiasms, I am scrutinising Ashbery's collection *Wakefulness*, Cotton refers to late style Ashbery without providing a time frame for this definition. In a poet with such a lengthy career I posit that *Wakefulness* could be included in this. In at least two poems in this collection Ashbery references a change in the weather of the seasons, in *Deeply Incised* he asks, 'If this is July, why does it look like August?'¹²¹ and in *Shadows in the Street*:

*some time in the middle of July. Now the best time
of the year is around now, none can gainsay August*¹²²

A thread running through my poetry is noticing how the weather has altered. Altered in terms of what used to be expected for the time of year, and the resultant change in how flora and fauna are affected by this. Daffodils have always been a focus of my attention, as alluded to frequently in my poetry they were laid on my father's grave by me in April of 1992. From adolescence onwards the rumination on the date of his death and daffodils, created in me a unique focus on the memory of when these specific flowers used to be considered abundant. It is in this sense that my eco-anxiety is both tied to and perhaps amplified by grief (climate grief is a term analogous to eco-anxiety) and my condition. There is an inextricable link between the thought of the environment, flora and fauna and the rumination of grief and anxiety. As the daffodil is a recurring motif in my poetry from some of my earliest work, I include the following poetry chimings regarding daffodils and death:

¹²¹ p. 26 Ashbery, J. (1998) *Wakefulness*. Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited.

¹²² p. 34 Ashbery, J. (1998) *Wakefulness*. Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited.

10th January 2016

*The second week of January has brought frost and death
pavement glitter [] I am not so giddy as I once was
dancing [] tracing fingernail hearts on car windshields
I have disbelieving the cold [] tested puddles with
my heel [] found them cracked
the mild winter has gifted many flowers
for your shabby memorial
in a place we never met [] or waited [] or existed in our friendship
there were daffodils in supermarkets in December
a beaming blonde woman [] brandished sheaves of them
in a technicolour photo in the metro [] comical trumpets
sounding the end of spring as we all knew it
most of my life a totemic grief flower
its appearance on my fathers grave [] the end
of my regular Persephone like slump
there must be enough lingering on for you
the promised snow has not fallen in Whalley Range
when I called my mother [] between my tears she told me
it has in Norwich [] surely not a flurry [] a drift the down to the ground
school closing [] snow blindness [] we got all got lost in
a light covering [] for plastic wrapped bunches in the bus station
as senseless as all the rest of it¹²³*

April 5th 2016

*I saw a woman cycling [] carrying a swathe of white Lilies in a backpack [] their open mouths
speak the language of death [] but she smiled as she carried herself onward [] I am bleeding
and smiling in the sun [] woman's bodies are contradictions.*

*Last night there was screaming [] I pressed my nose to the window [] breath obscures three
foxes [] two are boxing [] one keeping watch [] I had never heard this before [] they belt their
tuneless racket [] while circling each other [] then rise up [] I take the side of my fist to the
glass [] I cannot imagine they can hear this human rattling after such a sound [] a fox looks up
and they disperse*

¹²³ P. 15 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

*On the telephone [] my mother asks what flowers I want her to take to your grave [] we decide
to plant cottage garden seeds [] in hope that bats will alight there [] when the holly hocks
open yearly [] an ecosystem next to a dual carriage way [] overlooked by marble ¹²⁴*

April 7th 2018

Your gravestone is shored up

with a block of wood

shoddy against flecked granite

the tree that sheltered you all that time

fell

lies have been told about your last night

on your 26th deathaversary there was gin

and too much of everything

I smoked other peoples cigarettes

kissed a stranger and had an argument

there is no proper ritual to attend

the ghost I do not believe in

I cannot place daffodils above you from here

the weight of grief swings like the scales

I played with in our kitchen adding

and subtracting discs of ounces

¹²⁴ p. 21 A.Percy Poetry Manuscript

*I am yet to find the kind of love I would risk my life for*¹²⁵

In the following poems my skin is a site of (eco) anxiety, both felt in terms of pain from eczema exacerbated by anxiety and hallucinations of both visual and sensation disturbances, the skin becomes permeable by reactions and sensations. Anxiety is felt in the body, noticing the weather leads to anxiety which causes physical pain, shortness of breath, intrusive thoughts of bodily damage, dermatillomania:

24th June 2016

It is grey [] the rain is starting its subtle metallic noise on the windowpane [] my cheek still smarts from when I thwacked it on the pavement [] taking the curb wrong after too many pints [] I had hoped would swallow my anxiety [] that gnaws at my throat and stomach [] makes my skull buzz [] I do not want my mother to call me today [] she said she wanted to vote leave [] I just cannot bear it [] her misinformed vote [] just one of hundreds her age [] no security left for any of us [] this is June and there have been hardly any sticky tarmac days [] I cannot see why they voted leave [] when the seasons have slid into one another [] there will be no EU flood funding the next time the river's banks burst [] I don't even have the money to stockpile French wine [] like the older generation who own their own homes and voted leave [] my grazed face feels itchy and tingles [] my face is the focus of these minor hallucinations [] it chooses spots of anxiety [] the eczema round my mouth [] this scab makes it livid and distorted [] in my mind [] I am regretting not having travelled more [] not going to see my aunt near Lyon more often [] I am regretting how small and island bound my life has been [] I have been governed by fear and access to quetiapine [] the fear of losing my mind and not knowing the language [] I know the words but they are all being used differently [] I have already weathered a recession and do not know how to survive another [] when I have already sold all the gold I had passed down [] the cracked opal ring and the crumpled brooch [] went on rent and a Eurostar ticket [] I am worried [] that they will now be able to use any pesticide they choose [] based off efficacy and price [] that we will finally wipe out the bees [] I am worried I will never travel [] I am worried I will have to find the money for my medication [] when they privatise the NHS [] I wish I had taken a back pack [] folded up my fear [] bought a rail ticket when I was younger [] I should have drunk more champagne [] my father like his sister who lives there loved France [] how my mother has got so confused by the rhetoric [] that it will somehow mean more money will come into

¹²⁵ p.60 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

*our economy [] rather than flow out [] as it has now [] is beyond me [] the sky is grey
and I do not know what to do ¹²⁶*

26th January 2017

*After weeks of mildness and damp my face aches [] I cannot get a full breath in my lungs after
cycling to MMU and back every muscle below my waist aches [] the boiler works
intermittently [] after several hours I lower myself into the tub [] I cannot relax [] I take every
creak of the pipes to be the moment I crash through the ceiling [] unlike comedies [] my neck
snaps [] wet [] naked [] dead [] in the living room below [] my under employed unalarmed
sleep was interrupted by drills again today [] I think a voicemail from my mother means
disaster [] I am chewing my fingers bloody and scrabbling coins [] I had forgotten how cold it
could be [] the buds that are starting to unfurl will be confused¹²⁷*

This chapter has sought to provide an insight into the nascent area of mad studies and eco-anxiety, how writing openly as a mad identified scholar helps expand definitions of what an academic text can be, and what it can contribute. This has potentially wide-reaching and life changing applications. Supporting more mad identified scholars could have a profound effect on mental health care and society's understanding of complex, chronic mental health conditions beyond enriching the academy. I have now set up one of the key pillars of thought behind this thesis and move onto another load bearing column of research, that of the historical context, in which both my poetry and RLP is situated.

¹²⁶ P. 29 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

¹²⁷ p. 49 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

The Madwoman in the Attic: Myself, Madness, 19th Century Women Writers

In this section I will discuss the domestic space as landscape, a landscape that is; insecure, unstable, destabilising, being intruded upon and appearing to collapse- a result of anxiety and hallucinations. The notions that are arrayed netlike, revealed by these experiences, are the notions of; a space being gendered, or enacting gender upon myself in the space, and how these situations provoke or expose symptoms of my mental illness. Within writing of my domestic space there is a sense of self confinement from the world, at the same time a domestic sphere where I shrug off the coat of gendered expectations, of how I move in the world at the door. This peace can be disturbed by internal and external forces, a crow is perceived to peck through the window:

1st February 2016

The crow who roosts in the eaves [] at the corner of my window [] cawing [] wakes me [] when he takes flight is back [] halfwaking [] I think he has beaked his way through the glass [] and is about to peck my ear¹²⁸

the glass appears to become permeable in my half-awake state. There are anxious notions the building itself will collapse beneath me, actual leaks in the ceiling, it is not a perfect sanctuary. Throughout nature intrudes, in an unwanted way on sleep/the domestic sphere. This is related to the way in which nature is depicted within RLP, moving on from the pastoral view of nature as a benign, moral force above human morals. My bipolar magpie eye's view transcends the notion of nature being traditionally regarded as a higher standard of being. To deliberate human's experience of nature as there are times when the natural world is unwanted, unexpected, or unnerving. The encroaching of nature on the domestic space is an invasion, this phenomenon is depicted here:

April 5th 2016

I saw a woman cycling [] carrying a swathe of white Lilies in a backpack [] their open mouths speak the language of death [] but she smiled as she carried herself onward [] I am bleeding and smiling in the sun [] woman's bodies are contradictions.

¹²⁸ p. 17 Poetry Manuscript Anna Percy.

*Last night there was screaming [] I pressed my nose to the window [] breath obscures three
foxes [] two are boxing [] one keeping watch [] I had never heard this before [] they belt their
tuneless racket [] while circling each other [] then rise up [] I take the side of my fist to the
glass [] I cannot imagine they can hear this human rattling after such a sound [] a fox looks up
and they disperse*

*On the telephone [] my mother asks what flowers I want her to take to your grave [] we decide
to plant cottage garden seeds [] in hope that bats will alight there [] when the holly hocks
open yearly [] an ecosystem next to a dual carriage way [] overlooked by marble¹²⁹*

Having grown up in the countryside where foxes have become less common, foxes and their sound are still shocking to me. The urban fox is usually heard not seen, or if viewed is scurrying. Here a scene is played out, sound penetrates the domestic space, there is an acknowledgement of the fact that humans cannot communicate with animals, this is an example of the ways in which the poetry attempts to decentre an anthropocentric view of nature. I cannot communicate with the fox; the fox exists on its own terms. A fox is a fox is a fox.

Water intruding unexpectedly into the domestic is an abiding motif. Water, whether it is rain through a leaking roof, or plumbing leaking, water attempting to be manipulated by human intervention, as a natural force breaking into the domestic space. In all instances the leak causes a severe reaction, a mood alteration for the worse, and they detail how these intrusions cause anguish, and in turn remind me of my illness and gender:

13th November 2016

*On the day we found out Leonard Cohen died [] I bumped into a friend in Chorlton we sat in
the garden of the Dulcimer [] I smoked two of his cigarettes [] I could see he was surprised
with the speed with which I can still roll [] he has never seen me smoke [] at home I cannot
wash the smell off my fingers [] I do not smoke any more cigarettes [] I drink Johnnie Walker*

¹²⁹ p.21 Poetry Manuscript Anna Percy.

hot toddies [] listen to Songs of Love and Hate [] I bought it and Songs of Leonard Cohen on LP at King Bee [] I got on my bike after several days huddled under a blanket [] the leaves are now piles of mulch [] dangerous obstacles in the cycle lane [] I kicked crisp piles of them last week [] I am cycling out into the road to avoid them and puddles [] waiting for cars to honk [] there are now two off/on leaks in the flat [] I cannot cope with cleaning and spending a day on the phone to get them to care about my crummy flat and my small rent cheque [] there are still many leaves on the trees [] they fall unevenly though the temperature has dropped [] I have seen no frost yet [] I have slid nocturnal I am going to keep pushing this pen forward [] despite the downturn in my mood [] I am not sure I am ready for K. to see this side [] he has seen me up not that I said [] he thinks the best of me [] he is not clear eyed like my friends [] who know to ask if I am ok [] they see me sleepless and sullen [] can he love me in the depths of winter? [] I am still closed off and closed up [] dressing in blankets and sleeping half the day [] while rubbish piles up and I have got strange [] where my old poems are written by someone else [] who knows how to write poetry and not this scribbling whinge¹³⁰

Domestic drudgery, the poem moves at the end, to fears of seasonal affective disorder and ultimately doubt in my own ability to write poetry, a sign of deep despair: 'I have got strange when my old poems are written by someone else [] who knows how to write poetry and not this scribbling whinge'¹³¹the syntax is distorted, and my natural lyricism is not present. Distress here has led to a poem that does not achieve the sound patterns of the other work; I am jaded by despond. Further analysis on depression and distortion in poetry is in the previous chapter.

Of these leak poems two that occur in 2016 and 2018 take different approaches, one culminates in a mention of the fear and the latter fully outlines it:

9th November 2016

I wake and have fully lost my voice [] inflamed sinuses make inner ears throb [] I went to bed without noting the score [] check the news online [] the disconnection from my body created by the inflated feeling in my head deepens [] we have a climate change denier in charge of a main polluting nation [] one ear blocks [] existential dread manifests as a pain deep in my head [] blurred by pain and fear [] I smash a glass in the sink [] have no voice to

¹³⁰ p.44 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

¹³¹ p.44 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

swear [] faint sense of relief when I draw back my unbloodied hands [] I am still breathing with relative ease [] I leave the steroids in their packet [] I take my temperature and the end of it hurts my tongue [] I am all physical discomfort [] force myself to eat coughing [] between bites [] water came through the ceiling earlier in a loud drip and I could not face another leak [] I put a pot under the one in the living room and went out on Friday night [] I am fed up of all my words and am writing this under sufferance [] that I had to write something today [] thinking of the polluted air that I already struggle to breathe [] the central heating I have had to put on creaks [] half the radiators do not work [] I have intrusive thoughts that the floor is damaged [] I and this sofa and all the rubbish silted up here [] will fall through it [] that everything in these walls is broken including myself¹³²

April 13th 2018

My most persistent intrusive thought/hallucination/misperception [] is that the futon bed [] flowered throw and all [] that the bath I am trying to enjoy [] singing along to Leonard Cohen [] ‘touched her perfect body with your mind’ [] is going to fall through the floor [] the bath one carries most water in my anxious mind [] there was a leak under the bath years ago[] unnoticed [] till the flat belows carpet showed it [] rotten joists come into view below me [] and I am naked [] injured [] skewered by pipework [] broken [] lipstick smeared [] moisturiser glass jar fragments [] greased [] cling to my skin [] ridiculous among the bubbles in the foundations¹³³

The leak, a break in the structure of the building has caused me to feel broken, this is a symptom of dissociation, of having a sense of not perceiving the boundaries between myself and the building. Whilst this poem goes some way to stating that the fear of collapse exists, this poem does not fully make opaque the altered perception/ hallucination as it occurs in the later poem, *April 13th 2018* focuses entirely on the moment of the intrusive thought. The second poem by graphically focusing on the details of how the intrusive thought manifests, more effectively communicates the sensation and achieves a rhythm not found in the previous poem. It is an attempt to explain how it truly feels in the moment to have this irrational (acknowledged as ridiculous) fear recur vividly and often. Within this selection of

¹³² P. 43 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

¹³³ P.61 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

poems focusing on the leaking, destabilised domestic space, the gendered aspect is found in the prospect of having carry out domestic tasks, to an outsiders' standards: Leak = someone coming into my space = domestic tasks required. The leak intrudes on my solitude and requires someone to enter to fix the initial intrusion of the water. For leaks to occur in my bedroom, where even at my worst, I am able to self-soothe, or achieve sedative induced rest is particularly devastating. The space is unstable, and I am also. I feel like a hysterical shrieking madwoman in the place where I should be able to find sanctuary from a world which frequently imposes gendered expectations and reminds me of my neurodivergence.

To situate my personal experience, my writing of the domestic space, gendered expectations, and mental illness, it is pertinent to investigate the history of women's writing on these subjects. To establish my poetry within a historical canon. I will discuss three 19th century women writers and their work upon these issues. The focus here is on Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Emily Dickinson, on both their work and lives. I have chosen these nineteenth century women writers for a myriad of interrelated reasons. Firstly, their work and the way in which they lived their lives can be regarded as feminist. Perkins Gilman is most notably regarded as a proto feminist, in the introduction to *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Writings*¹³⁴. Alexander Black makes reference to her extraordinary trail blazing career 'Gilman enjoyed a huge international success with *Women and Economics* (1898), the landmark feminist treatise in which she insisted that women could never reach their full potential as long as they were financially dependent on men'¹³⁵ Perkins had a unique perspective and output with her expertise spread equally between her creative and mathematical prowess. They all lived and wrote in ways that were not

¹³⁴ Perkins Gilman, C. (2000) *The Yellow Wall – Paper and Other Writings*. New York: Random House.

¹³⁵ p.16 Perkins Gilman, C. (2000) *The Yellow Wall – Paper and Other Writings*. New York: Random House.

expected of women at the time. All of them wrote about, or are regarded to have had, a form of mental illness, and in turn wrote about being confined to the domestic space as they were house bound by illness in one form or another. Furthermore, their writing focused on the domestic sphere itself, women inhabiting these spaces, were a concern of their work.

Within Charlotte Perkins Gilman's writing the domestic space is at times transformed to be monstrous and claustrophobic, as in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Wherein a woman in confinement (a semi-autobiographical work) is driven mad by being trapped inside a room and experiences hallucinations fixated on the wallpaper 'The front pattern *does* move and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it! Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around very fast, and her crawling shakes it all over'¹³⁶ it is arrestive that there is a woman/woman seemingly trapped within the wallpaper as she herself is trapped in the room. This experience of staring at a wall and experiencing hallucinations is akin to my first psychotic episode. I developed graphomania and wrote over the walls of my halls room, the bed sheets, and my clothes, as the psychosis intensified these writings started to move and swirl on the wall and in the air. The sensory hallucination that not even a wall is a static, reliable, entity is deeply unsettling. To a lesser extent the fear and perception of leaks in the poems included here are related. The view I have of the walls themselves can change as my mental state alters, leaks or cracks become more extreme in my perception than as they exist. Like Perkins Gilman, my writing was considered a factor in my psychosis, I was forbidden, by medical professionals to write for a period of time. In *Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of*

¹³⁶Perkins Gilman, C. (2000) *The Yellow Wall – Paper and Other Writings*. New York: Random House.

*Authorship*¹³⁷ there is discussion of the manifestation of Perkins Gilman's mental illness, confinement, and restrictions on her writing:

*Gilman...seems to tell the story that all literary women would tell if they could speak their 'speechless woe' The Yellow Wall-paper which Gilman herself called 'a description of a case of nervous breakdown' recounts in the first person the experiences of woman who is evidently suffering from a severe post-partum psychosis. Her husband, a censorious and paternalistic physician, is treating her according to methods by which S. Weir Mitchell, a famous 'nerve specialist', treated Gilman herself...confined her to a large garret room...and he has forbidden her to touch a pen to paper until she is well again*¹³⁸

This analysis does fall into the same bear pit of unintentional ableism as that of another contemporaneous critical work *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel*¹³⁹ which attempts to put forth a model for a feminist psychoanalysis of feminist literature disengaged from Freud. The extant debt still being paid to Freudian analysis is rightly denigrated and notably Laing is uplifted as an imperfect alternative. It is possible to draw upon the light which Laing shone upon the issues that existed, and still exist within traditional psychological practices, while acknowledging his weaknesses. These include but are not limited to; over romanticising madness, not addressing the gender disparities of psychological treatment and his seemingly overt criticism of mothers in general.

The language and ideology of orthodox psychology are useless for such a feminist analysis. However one of the few counter ideologies which does apply is that of R.D Laing. To be sure, Laing cannot be seen as essentially feminist having written very little about women, and then primarily depicting them as destructive mothers. He does not concern himself with the inappropriateness of psychoanalysis as applied specifically to women. Too, he has been accused perhaps justifiably, of romanticising insanity and thereby recommending withdrawal and paralysis, techniques antipathetic to feminists. Yet Laing's revolutionary approach to both philosophy and psychoanalysis can provide at least a terminology, a framework, convenient for feminist protest...In the absence of any other available and widely recognised

¹³⁷ Gilbert, S.M. and Gubar, S. (1978) *Madwoman in the Attic*.

¹³⁸ p.89 Perkins Gilman, C. (2000) *The Yellow Wall – Paper and Other Writings*. New York: Random House.

¹³⁹ Barbara Hill Rigney (1978) *Madness And Sexual Politics In The Feminist Novel*. *Studies In Bronte, Woolf, Lessing And Atwood*. Madison University Of Wisconsin Press.

*authority, then, Laing may serve to provide a base from which to begin a feminist psychoanalytic approach to literature*¹⁴⁰

It is in the humanist and holistic values of challenging the wholesale dehumanisation and subjugation of those experiencing madness in which Laing is most useful. He provided another way of considering the function and presentation of madness which remains radical and of value:

*Just as Laing perceives the psychotic personality to be a victim of oppression in search of a lost and divided self, so Woolf, Lessing, Atwood, in particular see their schizophrenic characters as at least quasi-religious figures, saints, or savants, questing for some form of truth*¹⁴¹

*Most feminists see madness, first as a political event. Female insanity, they argue, can in a majority of cases be explained by the oppression of women in a power structured, male-supremacist society*¹⁴²

In his revolutionary theories, Laing purports there may be a use for madness, or that it is a form of communication that is not readily understood, there is potentially a value in madness, in the way a breakdown can become breakthrough. The statements in the feminist criticism above appear to posit madness as a protest, against the patriarchy, rather than as a reaction to trauma and genetic predisposition. An argument can be made that madness is a sane reaction to oppression, that oppression leads to trauma, and the causes of trauma themselves are as a result patriarchal power structures and beliefs. It is categorically not a choice or a protest. I am uncomfortable with equating madness itself to enlightenment. The politics of madness are interwoven with the effects of male supremacy and patriarchal

¹⁴⁰ p. 7-8 Barbara Hill Rigney (1978) *Madness and sexual politics in the feminist novel : studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*. Madison: University Of Wisconsin Press.

¹⁴¹ p.12 Barbara Hill Rigney (1978) *Madness and sexual politics in the feminist novel : studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*. Madison: University Of Wisconsin Press.

¹⁴² p.6 Barbara Hill Rigney (1978) *Madness and sexual politics in the feminist novel : studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*. Madison: University Of Wisconsin Press.

structures that exist within psychiatric treatment. There is absolutely value in the concept that women's mental health is directly tied to the effects of a patriarchal society, and the paternalistic system of mental health is rightly derided, this point can be made without misconstruing the experience of madness itself. It is important to note that clinically, the uses within this book of both the terms psychotic and schizophrenic, are inaccurate. Madness, and presentations of psychosis and potentially schizophrenia are exhibited by some characters, within the novels being analysed. It is clear though that the main protagonists are not necessarily schizophrenic or even psychotic. In the main they are experiencing some form of breakdown and mental distress. It is a limitation of this ambitious attempt at constructing a feminist form of psychoanalysis which does not draw upon Freud, who is justly criticised. This misappropriation of stigmatised terms undercuts the arguments put forth. Freudian analysis is still predominant in literary criticism, which disregarding the manifold issues with the guiding principles of his theories, is anachronistic in the extreme. I would assert that if there was a clearer understanding of the parameters of what a psychotic state is and how it is experienced, rather than as presented here, as a crisis of self. It is beyond a shadow of a doubt, not a manifestation of a deeply felt frustration with a male dominated society. This would have bolstered this work exponentially. Psychiatric terms being bandied as a mode of internalised rebellion is at best misguided. At worst it affects those who experience psychosis as a devastating symptom not a philosophical awakening. It is ironic that the author critiques Laing for his romanticisation of madness while carrying out the same problematic behaviours.

An unquantifiable determinant is that; there is a point to be made, that the prevention of women going through severe psychosis from writing, by medical professionals, during the episode, is a feminist issue. In my case the graphomania was a symptom and a salvation

which my psychiatrists, like Gilman's doctor, failed to comprehend. I do not heed this advice; as soon as I could form letters, rather than the arcane symbols I ended up scrawling on every surface, I started journalling in secret. For women who experience psychosis writing about it remains a radical act.

Conversely with Perkins Gilman's writing the domestic can briefly be an idyll for women to carry out their own pursuits as in *The Cottagette*, so named as it is not quite the size of a cottage, in fact more of a chalet, it is the smallness and temporary nature implied by the name given by the protagonist. This peaceful haven shared by two women engaged in their own work, is spoiled by the presence of a man, presumed to be requiring traditional domesticity. Domestic spaces are gendered/ungendered by the presence or absence of men/their expectations, enacting gender roles on women within the domestic sphere. The domestic sphere in and of itself, may in fact, provide a retreat from the aggressively gendered world, yet it becomes a space in which women are reminded of the limitations imposed upon their gender. This occurs when men, or rather, the perceived expectations of men, enter and impose roles upon women. It is the pressure of domestic obligations as imposed by men or perceived to be imposed the imagined desires of men (internalised patriarchy), enacting upon women, which gender the domestic space.

Within *The Cottagette* it is the main character's friend, Lois, who suggests that the man she is interested in seeks domesticity 'What they care for most after is domesticity. Of course, they will fall in love with anything; but what they want to marry is a homemaker. Now we are living in an idyllic sort of way, quite conducive to falling in love, but no temptation to marriage'¹⁴³ this acknowledges the idyllic living situation the women have found themselves

¹⁴³p. 51 Perkins Gilman, C. (2000) *The Yellow Wall – Paper and Other Writings*. New York: Random House.

in will be altered by a man and the desires he is presumed to have. Within *The Cottagette* in the end it transpires the man himself can cook and wishes her to continue with her sewing he offers to marry her 'Because you are so truly an artist in your own special way, seeing beauty and giving it to others. I love you because of all this, because you are rational and highminded and capable of friendship, -and in spite of your cooking'¹⁴⁴ in this instance the comedy of errors resolves itself through communication unsullied by preconceptions. This is Perkins Gilman positing that a utopian living situation is possible with a man, through clear and effective communication and allowing a woman to continue practising her art.

Perkins Gilman, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Emily Dickinson offer several models, visions of domesticity for the 19th century woman writer both real and imagined. Perkins Gilman's stories show the despair of the gas lighting madness of confinement. Through true communication between men and women, ignoring the perceptions from society of what domestic life should be, she shows a utopian vision is also possible between husband and wife.

Dickinson's view of the domestic is discussed within *The Madwoman in The Attic's* chapter:

A Woman -White Emily Dickinson's Yarn of Pearl, there is the notion of having to give up one's writing and imagination to be a wife and fighting the belief even within one's own mind, that a woman should not be writing poetry. Dickinson reframes the act of writing poetry as a version of wifely duty 'she seems to have at first assuaged the guilt of verse writing aroused by transforming Romantic self-assertion as an aesthetic of female service modelled on Victorian marriage'¹⁴⁵ she posits writing as a replacement for or a contribution

¹⁴⁴ p. 55 Perkins Gilman, C. (2000) *The Yellow Wall – Paper and Other Writings*. New York: Random House.

¹⁴⁵ p. 587 Gilbert, S.M. and Gubar, S. (1978) *Madwoman in the Attic*.

to domestic service, the notion of committing to or marrying the imagination rather than a man. It is the idea that becoming a married woman means putting aside the playthings of imagination/writing verse that informs Dickinson's writing on marriage, that the institution:

transforms a half savage, and hardy and free' girl into a woman and wife by annulling the girl's 'first prospective of energy and imagination...

She rose to His Requirement-dropt/

The Playthings of Her life/

To take the honourable Work/

Of woman, and of Wife¹⁴⁶

In her poem she refers to playthings, meaning here the imagination of the girl must be given up, to carry out the work of a wife. This reference to playthings alludes to the enforced childlike sense she created, in belief that this was important to maintaining her imagination.

This came at a great personal cost:

on the other hand, while freeing her from the terrors of marriage and allowing her to "play" with the toys of Amplitude, the child mask (or pose or costume) eventually threatened to become a crippling self, a self in crisis of her gothic life fiction locked into her father's house in the way a little girl is confined to the nursery what was habit in the sense of costume became habit in the more pernicious sense of addiction, and finally the two habits led both inner and outer in habit ation- a haunting interior other and an inescapable prison¹⁴⁷

Remaining in her father's house, and childhood. becomes an escape from duty and adulthood. It is worth noting that the term 'crippling' is now regarded as ableist, in its place the words restrictive, limiting, or oppressive would be better suited in meaning. this suggests that Dickinson perceived a rejection of adult womanliness was necessary to create. Acknowledging the small scale geographically, of the life she had chosen to lead, Dickinson's secluded writer's life was at once both freed and self-confined, free for art at the cost of a

¹⁴⁶ p. 588 Gilbert, S.M. and Gubar, S. (1978) *Madwoman in the Attic*.

¹⁴⁷ p. 591 Gilbert, S.M. and Gubar, S. (1978) *Madwoman in the Attic*.

wider life outside the family home. Her writing and imagination within the limited domestic situation she inhabited remained a consolation described thusly 'she might then lack the crowning title that is the "sign" of achieved womanliness or wifehood, she would glow with the "White Election" of art'¹⁴⁸ her art made her whole in her own view. There is a consideration here that by remaining unmarried and as consequence childless, allowed her to not only create, but simply to live, in her time-period childbirth often caused death. A further consideration related to my own experience is that single women with mental health issues are forced into substandard accommodation, we cannot afford to live in safety and comfort, by remaining in her father's house she was safe, well cared for and able to create:

Her garden was a source of great joy as she wrote in a poem to her sister – in – law, might face the icy north, but it would offer the ambiguous consolation of oceans 'on every side'. By remaining in her father's house, a childlike Nobody (rather than becoming a wifely Nobody in a husband's house). She would have a least a chance of negotiating with Awe for the rank of Somebody¹⁴⁹

in her art she could create a self, attempting to be untroubled, while acknowledging the restrictions imposed, by gender obligations. Others have posited that Dickinson on the surface complied with normative ideals of virginity and femininity, a collection of work gathered following a conference does take into consideration that this was due in part to her mental illness. J. Dobson posits 'because of the urgent demands of her idiosyncratic psychology, seems to have lived, with an almost reactionary integrity, a life congruent with the conservative message of feminine domesticity preached by the women writers whose

¹⁴⁸ p. 591 Gilbert, S.M. and Gubar, S. (1978) *Madwoman in the Attic*.

¹⁴⁹ p. 590-91 Gilbert, S.M. and Gubar, S. (1978) *Madwoman in the Attic*.

progressive life styles she did not emulate'¹⁵⁰ progressive here refers to other contemporaneous women writers who were more active outside the domestic sphere and in promoting their work while espousing conservative values. There is another reason for her façade of husbandless paragon of virtue. In the recent retellings of Dickinson's life on screen there have been concerted efforts to reveal a fuller life. There is the very real possibility that she maintained this air of the perfect feminine to disguise her true sexuality, the virginal homemaker a mask of safety. Her letters were altered posthumously, to obscure the fact she was writing love letters to Susan, Martha Nell Smith calls these alterations mutilations:

Then in the sentences immediately following, "er" is removed and overwritten with "im" and the "s" is erased from the feminine pronoun "she" to masculinize agency:

I shant see him this morning, because [s]he has to bake saturday, but [s]he'll come this afternoon, and we shall read your letter together, and talk of how soon you'll be here seven lines erased.

The removals are of Susan's name and commentary about her. What we have been able to read shows that the erasures are at least in part discourses of desire. And, enacting absence creates a presence unknown to the writer Emily Dickinson but long affixed to the author "Emily Dickinson." The revision imposed by another on "Emily Dickinson" simultaneously removes her name as addressee and gives Susan a beard, leaving ample evidence of its stridently imposed transvestism. The illusion of a man haunts this letter just as a phantom man haunts the legacy of Emily Dickinson.¹⁵¹

I am reminded of being told, before the repeal of section 28 the classics class the year above me was studying the poetry of Sappho, and that the translations they were given clumsily made the poet who gave us the term lesbian present as straight. There were many reasons for Dickinson's self-imposed seclusion, all of which aimed to keep her safe and able to write.

¹⁵⁰ Juhasz, S., Cristanne Miller and Cairns Collection Of American Women Writers (1989) *Emily Dickinson : a celebration for readers : proceedings of the conference held on September 19-21, 1986 at the Claremont Colleges*. New York: Gordon And Breach.[PAGE NO. ?]

¹⁵¹ *Writings by Emily Dickinson: Mutilations* (no date) archive.emilydickinson.org. [Online] [Accessed: 16th January 2025] Available at: <http://archive.emilydickinson.org/mutilation/mintro.html>

We transition here to considering D. Wordsworth's journals. Within this thesis I will be referring to her throughout as D. Wordsworth, to avoid confusion with William Wordsworth, without enforcing the gendered effect of using her full name, she would be referred to by surname only if her brother did not exist.

Here follows a brief analysis of D. Wordsworth's *The Grasmere Journals* focusing on the recurring themes of her daily writings which have analogues to my own journal poetry. These include evidence of mental unrest and the writing about her domestic situation and tasks. Within the *Grasmere Journals* D. Wordsworth is in the position of joyful helpmeet, contributing writing and providing domesticity for another writer and revelling in it. References abound to baking, working in the garden and other domestic duties. In the entry 29th November 1801 we have a reference to 'Baking bread apple pies, & Giblet pie- bad Giblet pie- it was the most beautiful morning' ¹⁵² and of working in the garden in an entry from 4th June 1800 'I brought home lemon thyme & several other plants & planted them by moonlight. I lingered out of doors in the hope of hearing my brother's tread' ¹⁵³ the gardening, a pretext to wait for William to return and greet him.

The Grasmere Journals provide a fitting example of Dorothy Wordsworth's daily writings most useful are the references to her health and wellbeing, and their impact upon her writing. The index lists many references to illness, unwellness, headaches, toothache of her own and other people, largely her brothers, but also friends such as Coleridge and visitors to the door around fifty-two in all. for the purposes of this research, I have focused on references made to her own health and in some cases, relevant references to mental health

¹⁵² P.43 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵³ P.7 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

of others. There are many references to needing to take to her bed as result of afflictions and/or tiredness 'I was sadly tired, ate a hasty dinner & had a bad head ach(sic), went to bed & slept at least 2 hours'¹⁵⁴ in May 1800 and again on the 24th of that month 'I went to bed with a bad head-ache'¹⁵⁵ and again on the 'I had a bad head-ach(sic) – went to bed went to bed after dinner and lay still till after 5 – not well after tea'¹⁵⁶ these headaches do not appear to be triggered in the main by excess exertion or mood at least as recorded in all cases as these instances are often followed by 'a fine day'¹⁵⁷ and 'a delightful evening'¹⁵⁸ in other cases they are directly impacted by the weather 'I sate (sic) at the foot of the lake till my head ached with cold'¹⁵⁹ the physical pain required her to remove herself from the lake.

There are many references to exhaustion 'I was so weary I could not walk'¹⁶⁰ and 'in the afternoon from excessive heat I was ill in the headach (sic) & toothach (sic) & went to bed- I was refreshed with washing myself after I got up'¹⁶¹. The heat in some instances is the given cause for tiredness and headache 'I was obliged to lie down after dinner from excessive heat & headache(sic)'¹⁶² the frequency and volume of these complaints point to chronic illness.

The entries written from her bed, of distinct concernment here, the poet/writer who remains confined to their bed due to their various ailments.

There are references to insomnia 'went to bed late -& had a restless night'¹⁶³ and also 'I lay in bed all the day very unwell, they made me some broth & I rose better after it was

¹⁵⁴ p. 4 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵⁵ p. 4 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵⁶ p. 4 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵⁷ p. 4 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵⁸ P. 5 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵⁹ p. 13 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁰ p. 15 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶¹ p. 14 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶² p. 15 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶³ p. 38 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

dark'¹⁶⁴. Later in more opaque revelation of the fact her state of mind has caused both the insomnia and physical unwellness 'A sweet evening, I had a woful (sic) headache & was ill in stomach from agitation of mind- went to bed at nine O' Clock but did not sleep till late'¹⁶⁵ it is possible here to interpret the phrase 'agitation of mind' as symptoms of anxiety.

Sleeplessness is sometimes attributed a cause, a source of anxiety 'We opened C's letter at Wilcock's door we thought we saw that he wrote in good spirits, so we happily came homewards where we arrived 2 hours after we left home. It was a sad and melancholy letter & prevented us all from sleeping'¹⁶⁶ here distress at the mental health of Coleridge has caused upset to the point of insomnia. Coleridge's condition is frequently cited as a cause for mental anguish 'Christmas Day – a very bad day. We drank tea at John Fisher's we were unable to walk. I went to bed after dinner. The roads very slippery. We received a letter from Coleridge while we were at John Fisher's. A terrible night – John brought the letter. Coleridge poorly but better – his letter made us uneasy about him. I was glad I was not alone when I received it'¹⁶⁷ anxiety here clearly expressed and the effect this had on her mood, 'he came home with two affecting letters from Coleridge- resolved to try another Climate. I was stopped in my writing, made ill by the letters'¹⁶⁸ in this instance the distress was so great she was unable to continue her own writing. In another occurrence observing Coleridge's state of ill health affects her own state of mind 'Coleridge walked with us 6 or 7 miles. He was not well we had a melancholy parting after having sate (sic) in silence by the Road-side'¹⁶⁹ D. Wordsworth is deeply empathetic and affected by others. There are further

¹⁶⁴ p.38 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁵ p. 103 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁶ p. 45 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁷ p.52 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁸ p. 63 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁹ p. 119 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

references to insomnia caused by letters 'Cold & rain and very dark. I was sick & ill made sleepless by letters'¹⁷⁰ in many cases the anxiety or 'melancholy' she experiences has a direct outside cause from news of friends.

In another entry anxiety of the body is referenced, toothache is problematic on many occasions in this entry and the one following, self-image is discussed 'my tooth broke today. They will soon all be gone. Let that pass I will be beloved – I want nothing more'¹⁷¹ the following day a man wearing 'a Beggars wallet over his shoulders'¹⁷² comes to the door and 'I talked a while to him, & then gave him a piece of cold Bacon & a penny – said he 'You're a fine woman'' I could not help smiling. I suppose he meant 'You're a kind woman'¹⁷³ the inability to acknowledge the compliment is perhaps related to mourning of her teeth and a signifier of youth in the previous entry.

There is throughout the journals concern frequently expressed for others wellbeing. There are more specifically allusions and direct references to the deaths of women 'she had taken to drink but 'that was better than is she had taken to something worse' (by this I supposed she meant killing herself)¹⁷⁴ the plight of other women with vanishing few options is a recurring point made.

D. Wordsworth relates the story of a woman who drowned herself and the hearsay this action brought forth 'the funeral came by of a poor woman who drowned herself, some say because she was hardly treated by her husband, others that he was a very decent respectable man & she but an indifferent wife. However, she had been only married to him

¹⁷⁰ p.117 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷¹ p. 103 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷² p. 103 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷³ p.103 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷⁴ p.52 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

last Whitsuntide & had indifferent health ever since she had got up in the night & drowned herself in the pond'¹⁷⁵ the women are spoken about compassionately rather than the gossiping tone used by others in her vicinity. Another possible reference to another woman taking her own life occurs and is marked by a stone inscribed by exhortations to consider the circumstances which lead her to that end 'there was another stone erected to the memory of an unfortunate woman (as supposed, by a stranger) the verses upon it expressed that she had been neglected by her Relations & counselled the Readers of those words to look within & recollect their own frailties'¹⁷⁶ there is the attempt here to foster greater understanding of the woman's situation. To express sympathy for the feelings which drove her to taking her own life, rather than judge the unknown woman for the decision she made.

For anyone with a form of mental illness or more specifically depression we are likely attuned to noticing to the sadness of others and specifically in this case someone taking their own life, even if like myself we do not often experience self-harm ideations. During the course of the project, many people I knew including poets/people with bipolar disorder, are believed to have taken their own life, for the sake of the memory of those concerned, the room for doubt, as is often the case, is necessary.

There is recognition of the depths of depression and the fear my own illness could take me in such a direction, the rate of attempts on their life among people with bipolar disorder is high. There is a triptych of poems that focus on one of these deaths. My uncertainty of how their life ended, and how I attempted to process the grief of yet another young person dying

¹⁷⁵ p. 65 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷⁶ p.126-127 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

and the probable cause, their mental illness. There is also a reference in a poem to my one juvenile consideration of an attempt on my life in the poem *5th March 2017* I start with an act of self-care, of pumicing my feet and connect it to that other bath when I had that dark thought:

5th March 2017

*I work out how to enter a string of numbers into the gasmeter for the first time in a fortnight
[] stumbling cold and gamey [] washing goosepimpled parts [] I run a deep bath [] oil and
Epsom salts [] as I rub and pumice my feet [] I remember I told a friend about the only time I
made an attempt on my life [] sixteen years ago [] in the deepest bath I have ever known [] the
woods out the window icy [] I took a knife [] knowing the roman methods too well [] it was too
blunt for flesh and I laughed [] when I told her she laughed [] there is relief in knowing you will
not be pitied [] taking one's own life [] is on our minds [] it has found her family [] the
anniversary of my friends fall has come and gone [] K.s father reached a two decade
deathaversary [] I offer him up as a hope of healing [] he spent that day dressed in black [] did
not become so drunk he was incoherent [] this is surviving for survivors [] I listen to Lady
Day [] whose blues consumed her [] the record I wrestled from my stepdad [] I considered it a
good sign he clutched so many records back from me [] he has not forgotten the music of his
youth [] yesterday I smashed the handle of the midnight blue teapot I have carried to
every home since I was 18 [] I filled it then with black tea and whisky to write an essay
overnight [] I read about it in an Irish Murdoch novel [] I smash items when I clean them []
then wonder why I prefer the homeostasis of filth¹⁷⁷*

There can be laughter in the dark. Here one failed attempted becomes linked to three other cases my own grief and that of others affected. Tension between the living body which demands attention and care contrasted with the memory/news of the dead is a periodic topic. The body is unruly and carries on demanding attention even though I am stuck in thoughts of the dead. Life is in a sense being inconvenienced by vital flesh; this is evident in the poem *24th April 2018*. The clothing and washing of my body are pestiferous tasks that must be accomplished to attend to the living. My menstrual cycle is referenced, the

¹⁷⁷ p.50 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

acknowledgement my body itself carries a potential for further life is juxtaposed with the news of a death:

24th April 2018

Another young man I know has died [] likely by his own hand or misadventure [] that he did not mean it [] a mistake made in haste he could not come back from [] it is still the raining [] the window streaked blur [] I am still bleeding [] a vivid reminder my body is very much alive [] performing its functions [] I am about to go to the terrace house where his body was found [] if I believed in such things I would feel vestiges of a soul in the walls [] if a woman friend had given me the news I would have asked what to wear [] black is sometimes inappropriate [] I am bleeding and would be wearing black today in case of accidents [] I have called T. [] who was told by B. [] tried to use my unfortunate knowledge of these situations [] the terrible things I have known and felt have a use here [] a library of awfulness you check out on such occasions [] pass on the pertinent passages [] the body must be attended to [] a tampon sought [] the rest washed [] clothes whatever colour [] T. is coming up [] the realisation that many more reunions for this reason will happen¹⁷⁸

Here the inconvenient body, which demands actions to be carried out despite grief, is gendered by both its own bodily functions and social conventions. We are most often made aware of gender being enacted on the body by social obligations.

D. Wordsworth expresses dismay at the limitations of her abilities to carry out her domestic duties, in self-admonishment of unwellness she seeks to make herself appear better for

William Wordsworth 'I will look well & be well when he comes back to me. O the Darling!

Here is one of his bitten apples! I can hardly find it in my heart to throw it in the fire'¹⁷⁹ this

quote also brings me onto another principal element to be found within the journals, that D,

Wordsworth took immense pleasure in all aspects of her domestic life. During the time of

The Grasmere Journals and was a joyful helpmeet to Wordsworth, friends, and visitors to

her door. It was not seen by her as a barrier to her writing and was frequently the subject of

¹⁷⁸ p.62 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

¹⁷⁹ p. 74 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

it. There are passages where the domestic tasks are in fact a consolation during unwellness 'I was not well mended stockings'¹⁸⁰ as previously mentioned D. Wordsworth found pleasure in the accomplishing of domestic tasks for herself and others in the house. A sense of pleasure in domesticity and care as an achievement in and of itself is palpable throughout.

This is in stark contrast to my own experience of the domestic. I take very little joy in any form of household task, beyond the washing machine, which having lived without one for periods of time remains miraculous, proffers an opportunity to clear a large amount of untidiness/mess in one fell swoop. The feminist nature of the invention of the washing machine is readily apparent to anyone who has had to wash a double bed sheet in a bath. A task that historically (although in the memory of many people still living) used to usually take women, an entire day, often taking girls away from schooling as well, is reduced to mere hours by a machine allowing other tasks to be carried out while it spins. The washing machine also has creative possibilities as it allows you to dye clothing/material with relative ease.

I not only do not readily notice domestic disorder but often lack the executive function to carry out domestic tasks other people accomplish with relative ease or even pleasure. In lines from *18th July 2016*, I stated the sentiment *'I want to throw out everything in my flat and live out of a bag [] have no past I know wanting to cut all ties is unsafe [] I would rather set fire to the kitchen than clean'*¹⁸¹ the sense that all the objects and mess within the flat are too much and wanting to simply purge the place is, for me, a common irrational

¹⁸⁰ p. 76 Wordsworth, D. and Woof, P. (1993) *The Grasmere journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁸¹ p.31 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

intrusive thought, experienced during my manic/dysphoric manic episodes. Be that as it may there is one area in which I share D. Wordsworth's enthusiasm in domestic tasks, the act of repairing/cleaning items which were previously not in working order creates an antidote to existential dread in the poem *17th of May 2016* I connect the act of cleaning dried up pens to my friend's stay in a psychiatric unit, that he can in time repair himself, as the pens are not irredeemable neither is, he:

...last summers canvas shoes lose their mould on the spin cycle [] I forget I put them in [] suspect intruders [] the windows are open and I am dancing [] SINGS: tonight we make love only in words [] I run the dried up fountain pens under the tap [] the ink splotches turn to dove feathers on the porcelain [] almost nothing stained and used up looking is beyond purpose [] I want you to remember and pick up your guitar¹⁸²

Although the washing machine here is being used making the shoes wearable, the sound creates discord, the unusual sound of the rubber soles in the machine creates a misperception and fear. Due to the way in which I perceive and hallucinate, washing machines can be a noise that I either hallucinate, just fear I am hallucinating or in this case misinterpret as someone breaking into the flat.

There are times when mania drives me to clean, it is a seemingly safe activity to carry out when I have an excess of energy and my perception is altered in *6th June 2017* I describe being 'driven' to the act of cleaning, the ensuing spiral into the description of the flat is indicative of an altered mood:

¹⁸² p.25 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

6th June 2017

I could have done with another blanket on my bed [] it has rained steadily [] unrelenting harsh rain you need protecting from [] for two days the wind makes the branches rattle the window [] alarmingly it feels dark as October [] I feel as if I have used up the bright days with worry [] I went out in my Pyjamas and velour jacket (I am wearing a jacket indoors) to tip out the recycling and it was cold [] I was supposed to go to the shop hours ago [] I have been driven indoors by the weather [] over the weekend I was driven to clean the bathroom [] scrub the lino behind the toilet [] face to it I can see how poorly it was cut [] someone rushing for a lunch break [] an addition to the litany of poorly fitted features [] it is hard to motivate yourself to clean something so flawed [] I have never considered moving because of the cost and the need to live alone [] avoid confrontation there is another [] I do not deserve a place that works [] is functional [] I can allow the stacks of books to sway [] slide [] hide my notebooks [] a place where everything falls off shelves and out of cupboards [] I need to buy more poison [] I still hear mice behind the bookcase¹⁸³

Another example of an unwanted intrusion of the natural world on the domestic sphere in the shape of mice behind the bookcase, the mice are as intrusive as my intrusive thoughts, of the flat falling down and taking me with it. I am not sentimentalising their intrusion. It appears that the material objects and the flat itself seem to fall. As described earlier this confusion of the boundaries between the building structure and my body is a form of dissociation not hyperbole. Further on the topic of the connection between mental state and domestic tasks in my poetry and that of Anne Sexton can be found in chapter three.

In addition to Wordsworth's journals, research is being done into *The Common Place Chapbooks* and how in her handmade books, D Wordsworth created a form of experimental writing. In the opening of the Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth essay Feder refers to D. Wordsworth's journals as daily writing a key term for the work I have produced in this

¹⁸³p.58 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

project; the term is more inclusive than diary as it does not indicate a strict record but rather writing for/of the day.

It is suggested by Feder that 'investigating the history of homemade and handwritten books provides an alternative origin for modern experimental poetry that dramatizes the overlapping public and private spheres represented by its literal and theoretical materiality'¹⁸⁴ This insight suggests a clear historical context for the dailiness and experimental features of the poetry I have produced. Arising from a fusing of journaling and poetry composition. This engagement with both the public and private spheres is congruent, I have written a large amount from my bedroom or other window, I have written a private (journal) sphere into the public (poetry) one using a hybrid form of both.

This blurring of boundaries, of intended and unintended audiences of the writing D.

Wordsworth produced echoes the ambiguity of the poetics of my writing. Addressing my own experiences of mental health, the weather and environment, often observed from a domestic viewpoint. This blurring of boundaries was initially unintentional, as the original plan for the work included separate journals, (this inkling does owe something to Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*) divided further into separate divisions such as weather and mood. It quickly became apparent when the new form arose, which organically mingled all these attributes that this was the mode the poetics should be embracing.

Revelatory to a fault and intensely focused on physical sensation, this too is an act of making the private public, of making the invisible (illness) visible. This form of hybrid writing functioning as both a form of daily writing and as poetry, has a clear precedent in *The*

¹⁸⁴ Feder, R. (2014) *The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth, Studies in Romanticism*, 53(4), pp. 541–559. [Online][Accessed 16th January 16th 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2014.0014>

Common Chapbook, written and made by Wordsworth. This act of making too has relevance, the physical object that must be seen and held to be experienced this physicality relates to the textperiments I created (see appendix) which cannot be accurately reproduced in a scanned image having layers to be moved and change readings of the text.

Feder uses the term hybrid texts to discuss the experimental nature of D. Wordsworth's work 'to sift through Dorothy Wordsworth's literary output is to encounter writings that transcend, ironize, and imitate print culture in order to create hybrid texts and experience of reading'¹⁸⁵ it is this hybrid approach and the idea that the text she handmade must be experienced only in the original form she created, which places her work as both an early form of experimental writing and provides a historical precedent for my work. Feder's essay refers to D. Wordsworth as 'literally and figuratively marginalised this is to say Dorothy Wordsworth has been treated as a marginal figure of Romanticism, and indeed her writing often occurs in the margins of the Wordsworth family archives'¹⁸⁶. The long held academic focus on William Wordsworth might explain why D. Wordsworth is not already considered an early experimental writer. It is also the process of removing and recording the marginalia which removes the very qualities which make the writing experimental and hybridized.

Dividing the writing from the physical object out into genres adulterates the work, as Feder states 'Wordsworth's writings present a problem for recover effort because her works become denatured and dematerialised when removed from the textual corpus'¹⁸⁷ in relation to my own processes, I attach in the appendix pages from my journals and

¹⁸⁵Feder, R. (2014) *The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth, Studies in Romanticism*, 53(4), pp. 541–559. [Online][Accessed 16th January 16th 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2014.0014>.

¹⁸⁶ Feder, R. (2014) *The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth, Studies in Romanticism*, 53(4), pp. 541–559. [Online][Accessed 16th January 16th 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2014.0014>

¹⁸⁷ Feder, R. (2014) *The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth, Studies in Romanticism*, 53(4), pp. 541–559. [Online][Accessed 16th January 16th 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2014.0014>

textperiments despite their difficult position in terms of legibility. It is where the creation of my own hybridised writing occurs for the project. This consists of blending the initial intended poetry, mood, and weather journals. It showcases the way in I write in my notebooks in haphazard fashion turning them upside down, front, and back as mood and attention dictates.

The physicality of D. Wordsworth's book is further explained 'reading the chapbook involves moving from poem to poem, sometimes lift an insert or tilting the commonplace book at a different angle, handling the material, deciding what to read and how'¹⁸⁸ this physical experience of reading and the multiplicity of possible readings of the text conjugates to my acetate textperiments. Layers of text created by tiers of printed acetate that provide the reader a physical experience that could not be replicated if they were lifted and printed as one page of text within a standard book. It is the reader's choice to manipulate the layers to find multiple readings, witness obscured text to experience the muddled and joyous alterations of brain fog and mania. The nature of the experiments within the book are marginalised, private, and not necessarily intended to be lifted from the whole. Creating possibilities for experimentation and the way in which this experimentation has not previously been acknowledged:

I do not mean to crown Dorothy Wordsworth the fairy godmother of experimental verse; rather, to suggest by attending to the literal margins of the poetic canon can illuminate a history of poetic experiments that manipulate their marginal status, that activate generic innovation and invention grounded in questions of materiality. Attending to Dorothy Wordsworth's Common Place Chapbook – a handmade book within a handwritten book, a site of generic and intertextual innovation – represents a first step in reconstructing an alternative literary history. That first step is to read daily and private women's writing as experimental¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Feder, R. (2014) *The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth, Studies in Romanticism*, 53(4), pp. 541–559. [Online][Accessed 16th January 16th 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2014.0014>

¹⁸⁹ Feder, R. (2014) *The Experimental Dorothy Wordsworth, Studies in Romanticism*, 53(4), pp. 541–559. [Online][Accessed 16th January 16th 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1353/srm.2014.0014>

This posits a hidden alternative canon of domestic and marginalised experimental writing by women throughout history, through its private nature, domestic focus and in some cases physically covered by men's writing. It may in fact be the private, writing without the intent to publish, that may have provided the impetus for experimentation. Within the private seclusion of domestic spheres, women writers including D. Wordsworth, Perkins-Gilman and Dickinson felt the freedom to experiment. We proceed to our penultimate chapter, in which we peruse D. Wordsworth's linkage to RLP in terms of her experimentation, preoccupation with the natural world, her body and composition by walking. Other literary critics have already forged a historical literary coupling, between the practice of D. Wordsworth and the walking/writing practice of the women of RLP. This affiliation goes some way towards modelling an experimental women's canon. In this chapter, I take you on a tour of the nest of poetics I have built. Including upholding the concordance between the practise of the walking women of RLP and D. Wordsworth.

Scaping: Gender, Language, Landscape

I will elucidate upon the key features of RLP and how these features can be yoked to the poetry I have written. The radical element of RLP refers to features of the poetry itself and its treatment of, and possibilities for, redefining landscape. The types of landscape which are represented in RLP are dilatant. RLP is not limited to the traditional, pastoral, rural definition of what is, or has been previously considered to be covered, by the word landscape. As Harriet Tarlo states, regarding open-field poetics, which she and other RLP authors employ as a spatial technique: 'I would argue that the more dynamic, open form style of writing, which makes use of the entirety page-space to create is, particularly suited to reflecting on engaging with the spatial.'¹⁹⁰ It is through the experimental form on the page that what is considered landscape is experimented with and scaped. Scaped here, initially, refers to the way in which open field poetics carves white space. By considering the entire page as a landscape the possibilities for a plurality of meanings in language and therefore a scaping, a remaking of language itself occurs.

Open field poetics is a form of experimental poetry which employs the use of the entire page, unlike traditional poetry forms, including free verse, which are largely confined to left-aligned text, and regular stanza structure. Open field poetics allows for the poetry to take over the page entirely, for new meanings of words to be found by locating them in unusual ways. It changes the way the poem is viewed and read, imbuing complexity into single words. It is this engagement with open field poetics that sets RLP apart from other forms of eco-poetry, its key feature is this experimentation with the appearance and sound of the

¹⁹⁰ Jacket 32 - April 2007 - Harriet Tarlo: Radical Landscapes: Experiment and Environment in Contemporary Poetry (April 2007) [jacketmagazine.com](http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml). [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml>

poetry beyond traditional forms associated with current eco-poetry. In *shelter radio* (sic) included by Tarlo in *The Ground Aslant*, there is a poem which not only showcases this scaping of the page, but also has qualities congruent with R.D Laing's poetry as essay form (discourse on this can be found in the introduction) whereby the shaping of the text communicates deeper meaning. I quote here the final stanza which typifies this connection to Laing, the horseshoe shape splaying out the lines creating distance in words that are usually bound together:

we're not all doing

every thing

we said

we would

*so what?*¹⁹¹

The application of the horseshoe shape may arise from the mention in the previous stanza of 'horse eating'¹⁹² I propose that like Laing, the shape here is aiding and enhancing meaning. Laing utilised circles to imply vicious cycles of behaviour. The horseshoe or broken circle implies a broken promise, or rather a duty, to the environment. Unlike concrete poetry which brings to bear shape in a more literal way, Tarlo and wider, RLP's, use of scaping the page is somewhat more abstract. In the manner of a melting glacier carving mountains, this looser application of scaping the page with open field poetics does enhance meaning with physical form, what this process reveals, is far more open to diversiform

¹⁹¹Tarlo, H. (2011) *The Ground Aslant: an Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*. Exeter: Shearsman Books. p. 139

¹⁹²Tarlo, H. (2011) *The Ground Aslant: an Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*. Exeter: Shearsman Books. p. 139

interpretations. It is no great surprise that Tarlo has carried out collaborative interdisciplinary work involving painting and poetry, the precise treatment of the white space and sparseness of language has something painterly to it. In a co-authored journal article *Poetry, Painting and Change on the Edge of England* Tarlo's use of open field poetics is characterised by this abstraction:

*Tarlo's landscape poetry is written in the Anglo-American open form style of poetry in which sparse use of language draws attention to particulars – words are arranged across the page organically rather than in traditional versification and lineation. Her poems explore the connections between poetic form and landscape but they also attempt to embody human movement through place and space*¹⁹³

This abstraction, as mentioned above is not solely experimentation, the sense of the words finding their form organically is part of RLP's attempt to bridge the gap between the human and the non-human, the forms the words make upon the page are never merely aesthetic. The placing of words attempts to scape the landscape itself, by traversing the human body across it in text. I will apply visual and textual analysis to another segment of one of Tarlo's poems *Nab* that show this travel of body before delving into my own experimentation with open field poetics:

Late-flowering single bells

bellflower and ling

white in the green

(grasses)

boy (about ten)

passes singing

stops himself

¹⁹³ Tarlo, H. and Tucker, J.E. (2019) *Poetry, Painting and Change on the Edge of England*, 59(4), pp. 636–660. [Online] [Accessed: 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12232>

carries on

sky moving too fast

to stay hot

clouds overtake it

whelm

kestrels hold hot

for rabbits

higher up¹⁹⁴

The whole of the section *from Nab* included in *The Ground Aslant* follows this swaying pattern of stanza, it is not regular, more of a loose zig zag, as that of a desire path down a hill, this swaying back and forth connotes the movement of the grasses, of the boy's voice up and down as he notices he is not alone, of the clouds across the sky. The movement of the organic life present to the poet in the moment. The second poem written for this project experimented with this spatial linguistic scaping:

October 2015

October and only just the first fogs and fireworks air permanently smoked search the sky for a cigarette stub sun.

and already being told to fear the snow

there hasn't been an all covering snow boot deep for years

the roads around my 2nd floor flat unsalted it hung around for weeks

the guilty stain of red wine vomit after exiting a cab and all my footsteps

¹⁹⁴ Tarlo, H. (2011) *The Ground Aslant: an Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*. Exeter: Shearsman Books. p. 142

*each of my shoe treads preserved memory of having managed to leave the house
every time it got more difficult my feet had made it out the door and back again*

*the faith the greengrocer has that all his produce will still be there when they return from
afternoon prayer warms me as the sun*

*it is the time of year I clothe myself in velvet a soft shell as I rock my feelings shut drink too
much wine and skin my knee.¹⁹⁵*

In the poem of mine above, an early foray into open field poetics, each block of text is a separate thought, and they pile up like the snow remembered in the poem. The lines advance and retreat replicating the footsteps in the snow curtailed by SAD. Here the experimental text techniques of open field poetics allow me to notate my disorder in text placement, it is only experimental poetry and precisely open field poetics, which allows for this layer of meaning to be inlaid into the white space of the page. Much as I do not ascribe to myself the title of RLP poet, I also do not expect the vestiges of my experimentation with open field poetics to be readily apparent. It is never my intention to show where I have borrowed my influences (like the magpie's loot) remain hidden in my high hideaway.

Allow me here to apply heat to the lemon juice invisible ink that lurks underpinning the form of my journal/prose poems. To view this entire sequence of events in terms of the research I undertook, see the *Textperiments* in full and some of the excised poems in the appendix. To evince, I draw your attention to the first poem of the project, proscribe the experimentation with form that underpins the prevailing style which appears to be merely that of prose poem:

¹⁹⁵ p.9 A.Percy Poetry Manuscript

October 2015

Today there are blue skies in Paris sky
there are children who have never seen
a sky so clear thought it a screen based illusion
smog that grew reached us and the news gone the
In Manchester a rare clear sky
that has become so unfamiliar
thought time had and my mind had created
such clarity of atmosphere out
I searched for a scrap of cumulus
found only an aeroplane trail vertical
The sun was starting to set
threw a rosy glow on crowd
white tower blocks in Hulme,
I cycled and all the traffic receded up
underneath that blue
Crossed the junction
spinning out to each quarter of the city
and Salford where the trucks rise
roaring join the cars

this is where the snarl up
begins each turn faced
with more bodies vehicles
the centre has been torn
internal buzzing starts heart pounding as
legs are slowed by obstacles
each street finds new tram works or roadworks
broken concrete and steel railings

*get larger in my mind*¹⁹⁶

There is much to find fault with, in this poem, it is the first pot that would be crumpled into a new form, a clumsy attempt at embodying anxiety and open field poetics. It fails to externalise the internal distress through a lack of embodiment. In terms of form the spatial working is that of three different poems bolted together, a cut and shut job that should be scrapped as unroadworthy. I progressed from this striving to scape the white space, to experimenting with taking open field poetics into a realm that could only be experienced physically, by printing on acetate and layering the text over one another. Another form of the scaping of language to obscure and divine meaning which RLP poets undertake. The ultimate result of these textperiments is this:

¹⁹⁶ See Appendix



This is a version of the poem *17th May 2016*. I cut up the printed acetate into single lines, placed it in a clear plastic folder and added the following: a green tea bag (mentioned in the poem), a small item I knitted in variegated wool, a key (I have no idea what it unlocks), square letter beads in various colours and faux pearl beads from a broken necklace and hand sewed it shut. There was in my mind the child's kaleidoscope, the tumbling of beads and sequins in angled mirrored surfaces altering what is seen. This takes open field poetics in a different inclination than Olson or RLP poets. This was an attempt to make a physical representation of the distortion bipolar disorder wreaks on perception and language, using found objects and domestic, traditionally feminised, crafts as part of my eco-ethical practice. I had taken open field poetics to the outermost regions of manic inspiration, there was no more road left for me to take it down. These textperiments are unprintable by traditional means and not entirely effective, meaning is clouded rather than illuminated, while this is an apt depiction of brain fog, mania, and hallucinations, it does not communicate clearly.

To complete the thesis experimentation was halted. I am hopeful that following this submission, there will be time and space to experiment and collaborate further using the body of work I have created. The issue with this rabbit hole was that I was falling into my old habits of excessive editing by remaking these poems potentially over, and over, in ever more bizarre artforms. This would stop the flow of writing, lose the emerging dailiness and noticing in the moment that the journal form was vivifying. It is at this point that a return to prose poem form was essential, with the work that led to the blown apart and obscured final textperiments, influence at play. After this restoration of the invisible processes of my practice we return to explore further features of RLP.

The word radical declares RLP's experimental concerns of forging new ground, RLP achieves this by combining several features which set it apart from other forms of eco-poetry namely: the use of open field poetics/experimentation and how this is used to scape the page, how RLP attempts to redefine what landscape within poetry is, and the recognition of the impossible struggle to avoid human intervention. RLP attempts disruption of the Anthropocene while being all too aware it is the only position possible in eco-poetry by virtue of being created by humans. These features are a result of linguistic-, stylistic- and content- based attempts to avoid imposing an anthropocentric view of the land/landscape. All poetry scapes landscape and language: we are humans, our language is human and by using language we alter or scape the landscape in our own image. Tarlo, the originator of RLP as a term declares it to be experimental in form and in linguistics '(T)he subtleties of experimental poetics provide an ideal linguistic arena in which to engage in this shifting and sifting of assessing and reassessing our relationship with the places and spaces we inhabit'¹⁹⁷ The use of experimental poetry techniques and open field poetics has RLP poets winnowing language to interrogate meaning, and human's relationship to the language of the natural world. It is this seeking and questioning within language which feeds into my attempts throughout this project to avoid anthropomorphism of flora and fauna. It in turn provides a realm in which to broadcast my parsing of what is my/others' reality and what is my perception/altered perception of the world/landscape as my body (mind) is an unreliable narrator.

¹⁹⁷ Jacket 32 - April 2007 - Harriet Tarlo: Radical Landscapes: Experiment and Environment in Contemporary Poetry (April 2007) [jacketmagazine.com](http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml). [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml>

RLP questions notions of what landscape or nature poetry is: 'I quickly realised how much less likely such poetry was to be imbued with nostalgia for 'pure nature' or indeed with the sentimentality so strongly associated with 'nature' in more traditional poetry of the pastoral tradition'¹⁹⁸ this sentiment of Tarlo's which allineates with my poetry exploring the liminal green spaces of suburban areas. This line from one of my poems helps to illustrate: *I notice the moss repointing the brick work [] the weeds growing out of the concrete [] they are beautiful and I breathe*¹⁹⁹. The moss here is a micro-environment existing between the brickwork – a close focus – and the mention of being aware of the mechanics of the breath of the body, or the almost rural, the woods in hearing distance of cars offers another intense focus. RLP provides a space for non-traditional place/nature/environmental poetry and to question the meaning of those terms within poetry.

RLP allows for the exploration of our failure to capture experience in language, the experience of the non-human and aids the development of the eco-ethical lyric for my ambitions. The eco-ethical lyric ties into my desire to construct a poetics that attempts to show respect for the non-human by avoiding anthropomorphism. In a poem entitled

Anthropomorphism Poem Edit I wrote:

*foxes live and sometimes shriek their terrible shriek
cats too park gates squeal with rust
none of these things are words they are gifted no language
the crow on the eaves near my bed only caws*²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Jacket 32 - April 2007 - Harriet Tarlo: Radical Landscapes: Experiment and Environment in Contemporary Poetry (April 2007) [jacketmagazine.com](http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml). [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml>

¹⁹⁹ p.46 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²⁰⁰ See Appendix

This poem was composed in a workshop where I was supposed to be writing anthropomorphically, instead, I ended up writing a form of a poetics manifesto decrying the practice. The term eco-ethical lyric in feminist eco-poetry, describes my attempts at writing from a feminist, atheist perspective which seeks to avoid anthropomorphism; respect for the non-human, accepting limited agency over the non-human. In the introduction to *The Ground Aslant* the first anthology of RLP poetry, Harriet Tarlo argues that the radical landscape poetry being written in the UK today is characterized by a 'double bind': on the one hand, the poets aspire to inhabit the land on the land's own terms; on the other, each attempt to do so entails a scaping that 'acknowledges interventionist human engagement'.²⁰¹ RLP acknowledges the impossibility of avoiding human intervention in landscape and provides a discourse upon this double bind with the use of open field poetics the use of spatial placing on a page subverting meaning. The RLP poet is a hare in a snare of manmade language attempting to dance within it.

Tarlo herself and others in this area are inspired by American experimental poets 'for me such poets as Niedecker and Charles Olson were significant figures in the development of my own attempt to write an eco-ethical poetics'²⁰²and radical in terms of approach. Tarlo refers to in the introduction to *The Ground Aslant* 'the spatial and the sonic'²⁰³ these are poems that look and sound radically different to other previous forms of landscape poetry. Tarlo discusses the way in which experimental poetry can examine our use of language and the ways in which the experimental canon as is, restricts our understanding of ourselves and

²⁰¹ Smith, D.N. (2013) 'Scaping the Land', Chicago Review. Edited by H. Tarlo and M. Haslam, 57(3/4), pp. 182–193. [Online] [Accessed: 2 October 2023] <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24770552>

²⁰² Jacket 32 - April 2007 - Harriet Tarlo: Radical Landscapes: Experiment and Environment in Contemporary Poetry (April 2007) jacketmagazine.com. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <http://jacketmagazine.com/32/p-tarlo.shtml>

²⁰³ Tarlo, H. (2011) *The Ground Aslant: an Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*. Exeter: Shearsman Books

landscape. It is possible this blurring of the boundaries between body and mind can give rise to the formation of a poetics which does not separate the two.

The poetics of the gendered mentally ill body undertakes to proscribe a body that is affected by the mind, and in turn a poetics which is embodied, always rooted in what that body is experiencing, or able to experience. RLP often features landscape experienced and occupied by the human body or bodily experience of the natural world. I reroute us back to one of my research questions: what does eco-poetry look like when you can't get out of bed? There are many poems written in periods of time when my communion with the natural world has been limited to my bedroom window. The notion of redefining what is considered landscape and nature poetry, allowed myself to consider my writing, from the narrowed perspective of a window, as a valid form of eco-poetry. In terms of what this means for writers with mental illness that limits their physical bodies' activity is radical. RLP's enlargement of the breadth of eco-poetry concocts an all-embracing debordering of the demarcations of what eco-poetry is for women (and other marginalised genders), people with mental illness and disabilities. The following three poems converge upon what can be experienced from a window, intermittent agoraphobia or being unable to leave the house due to extreme fatigue are symptoms I have lived with since my teens, the second two poems written during a period of time when many people with chronic illness were frightened to leave the house amplifies the importance of windows:

24th June 2016

It is grey [] the rain is starting its subtle metallic noise on the windowpane [] my cheek still smarts from when I thwacked it on the pavement [] taking the curb wrong after too many pints [] I had hoped would swallow my anxiety [] that gnaws at my throat and stomach [] makes my skull buzz [] I do not want my mother to call me today [] she said she wanted to vote leave [] I just cannot bear it [] her misinformed vote [] just one of hundreds her age [] no security left for any of us [] this is June and there have been hardly any sticky tarmac days [

] I cannot see why they voted leave [] when the seasons have slid into one another [] there will
 be no EU flood funding the next time the river's banks burst [] I don't even have the money
 to stockpile French wine [] like the older generation who own their own homes and voted
 leave [] my grazed face feels itchy and tingles [] my face is the focus of these minor
 hallucinations [] it chooses spots of anxiety [] the eczema round my mouth [] this scab makes
 it livid and distorted [] in my mind [] I am regretting not having travelled more [] not going
 to see my aunt near Lyon more often [] I am regretting how small and island bound my life
 has been [] I have been governed by fear and access to quetiapine [] the fear of losing my
 mind and not knowing the language [] I know the words but they are all being used
 differently [] I have already weathered a recession and do not know how to survive
 another [] when I have already sold all the gold I had passed down [] the cracked opal ring
 and the crumpled brooch [] went on rent and a Eurostar ticket [] I am worried [] that they
 will now be able to use any pesticide they choose [] based off efficacy and price [] that we will
 finally wipe out the bees [] I am worried I will never travel [] I am worried I will have to find the
 money for my medication [] when they privatise the NHS [] I wish I had taken a back pack []
 folded up my fear [] bought a rail ticket when I was younger [] I should have drunk more
 champagne [] my father like his sister who lives there loved France [] how my mother
 has got so confused by the rhetoric [] that it will somehow mean more money will come into
 our economy [] rather than flow out [] as it has now [] is beyond me [] the sky is grey
 and I do not know what to do²⁰⁴

Write About an Action you or Someone Else Performs at a Window Every Day After Daisy
 Aldan's poem Women at Windows

Due to being the cornice of a terrace block [] when I look out my bedroom window I
 sometimes see a woman showering in the distance [] through pebbled glass [] faintly [] I know
 that she is white and there is lather [] any other detail is obscured by the deliberate modesty []
 of the patterned glass and distance [] I do not know how opaque this bedroom window looks
 from behind that surface [] if this woman has also seen me dressing or undressing [] a blurry
 nude in the pane [] or if only the crow that besieges my dreaming state by cawing on the sill []
 is the only creature who has seen my vulnerable state [] I had to relearn about windows and
 the way others can see you in the glass [] after years of being sheltered by pines as a youth []
 when the tree that blocked my living room window almost entirely with its branches [] was cut
 down I had a sense of having a layer of protection removed [] the way they tapped had
 become a meditative sound to me [] now there is a bright light from far away [] or several
 streets [] that burns brighter than any other window [] like Gatsbys green light [] it has grown
 in all possible significance [] beyond the ordinary people who must live there ²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ p.29 A. Percy Manuscript

²⁰⁵ p.99 A. Percy Manuscript

24th Feb 2021

Write a Poem that has a Grand Declaration with the Word Window/s in it and Not in the Body of the Poem After *I Love You More Than all the Windows in New York City* by Jessica Greenbaum

The police go by on horses [] past my living room window [] I hear the hooves and do not need to look for their fluorescent jackets [] there is a certain heaviness of hoof [] to a police equine [] searching no doubt for illicit parties [] I have in the past partied in many a basement disco round Whalley Range [] watching for flakes of white wash to drop in a plastic cup [] of whatever booze is left [] in a house party at three am [] the ceiling shaking with the beats [] I would not have chosen [] communal music reverberating in the breast bone has become a luxury now [] like the first gig I went to after I left the hospital [] I was so high on returning to a stage filled with the thrum of Interpol's guitars [] the heaving [] of bodies [] the mingling of sweat [] of possibilities of pleasure returning to my body [] to dancing with a plastic pint of Tuborg lager spilling on my red converse [] we will return to dancing with strangers²⁰⁶

In the second two poems composed on the same day there is the sense of the window shrunk to Norman castle's arrow slit. The outside is legitimately treacherous increasing seclusion. From what can be experienced via the windowpane as portal we transition on to the subject of the body. *Bodies* is a chapter heading in the introduction to *The Ground Aslant* indicating that it is pivotal for RLP poets. Tarlo concurs regarding the long-held tradition in feminist circles of a preoccupation with the body; 'writing about the body is a particular strength of women poets, who have only recently thrown off an objectified position as part of an idealised landscape in favour of a speaking one'²⁰⁷ as women writers we were traditionally part of the observed landscape in either human or anthropomorphised terms.

²⁰⁶ p. 101 A. Percy Manuscript

²⁰⁷ Tarlo, H. (2011) *The Ground Aslant: an Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*. Exeter: Shearsman Books.

For feminist eco-poets writing the body is not only about the physicality of the body and its functions while moving through landscape. It is also about the experience of being a woman and having a woman's body, a body that is gendered by external viewers as we move through the world. The body being imposed upon by society and the attendant fear that comes with it that is an isochronal motif of my work. I further submit that I am exacting RLP as an espalier, to graft my poetics onto, to grow a different fruit along a branch that has already fruited, by putting forth my poetics of the gendered mentally ill body. After this cursory magpie's eye overview of RLP we traverse to the journal article *Walking Women: Embodied Perception in Romantic and Contemporary Radical Landscape Poetry* is a discussion of D. Wordsworth linking her walking and eco-ethical stance with that of contemporary RLP women writers: Tarlo, Presley and Macdonald. The landscape experienced by walking and as a gendered experience, influencing the way in which these writers approach nature and the non-human. Crucially the importance of D. Wordsworth here is that her form of poetics differed from the other Romantic poetics who she was influenced by, and formed relationships with, at the time, in that she moved towards a localised and domestic understanding of her environment. Walking as an act of engaging with environment itself, Widger suggests this is a difference in part created by gender, that other romantic poets of the time were engaged in acts of walking with a purpose or goal, scaling mountains etc and that this form of goalless walking is taken up by women poets in RLP. In the extract for the article Widger states:

It then considers Dorothy Wordsworth's influence over her brother and the possibility that a Romantic 'eco-poetic' emerges from the 'feminine' perspective below the mountain, and within the domestic landscape. I argue that this gesture away from walking and mountaineering as the demonstration of physical prowess, or as the pursuit of a real or ideal goal, is taken up by three contemporary women poets of landscape. Harriet Tarlo, Frances

*Presley, and Helen Macdonald offer different ways of walking, which dispense with goal-orientation*²⁰⁸.

The proposition here is that women are uniquely placed in their poetics to focus on the local and the domestic landscape. D. Wordsworth's poetics moved away from the epic lyrical style and conquering of the landscape. Towards a practice of noticing and understanding the local and domestic landscape, revering these locales as worthy of being exalted in poetry as any other. D. Wordsworth's poem *Floating Island* is a meditative act of retroactive noticing on a floating islet:

*Once did I see a slip of earth,
By throbbing waves long undermined,
Loosed from its hold*²⁰⁹

as this poem is an act of the inner eye of memory, it is no great stretch to propose that this may have been composed from her sick bed. This poem takes a jeweller's loupe to this untethered scrap of landscape, D. Wordsworth's approach to the natural world is so imbued with the domestic and unafraid of her perspective that she compares this miniature oddity that she compares it to part of a dwelling:

*Food, shelter, safety there they find
There berries ripen, flowerets bloom;
There insects live their lives — and die:
A peopled world it is; in size a tiny room.*²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Widger, E. (2017) *Walking Women: Embodied Perception in Romantic and Contemporary Radical Landscape Poetry*, Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry, 9(1). [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.16995/biip.12>

²⁰⁹ Foundation, P. (2022) *Floating Island* by Dorothy Wordsworth, Poetry Foundation. [Online] [Accessed: 16th January 2025] <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51925/floating-island>.

²¹⁰ Foundation, P. (2022) *Floating Island* by Dorothy Wordsworth, Poetry Foundation. [Online] [Accessed: 16th January 2025] <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51925/floating-island>

It is not just this layering of the domestic sphere onto the natural world through imagery but the scale, the hyperfocus on the lilliputian, the concern for the creatures' wellbeing, which sets her apart. I would class this as one of D. Wordsworth's non walking poems, as so much has been made of her practice as a walking poet I wished to provide a tip to the scale and a nod to my own categories of walking/not walking poems.

It is principally the focus on the feminine body moving through landscape, the noticing of step and breath for example, that creates an eco-ethical dialogue. This noticing of the body and breath also refers to Olson's ideas of composition by breath as expanded on later in this chapter. This practice of noticing of the body allows for examining the ways in which we attempt to understand our relationship to our environment, and the non-human. Widger expands on this embodied meandering approach to landscape poetry thusly:

the walking represented in the works of Tarlo, Presley and Macdonald instead explore ways of relating to the external world, or to be more precise, moves towards reconciliation of the interior-external dichotomy through an enactive understanding of the body in its environment. Presley's 'Stone Settings' sequence converts the Romantic affirmation of physical prowess and goal-oriented mountaineering into an embodied and goal-less experience of breath and pace. In particular, 'White ladder' enacts the physical movement it describes, offering itself to a kind of embodied reading, and revealing a phenomenology based on what Lucy Lippard calls 'perceptual and physiological sensations'. Tarlo's 'steady yourself on a grass' evolves as the movement of the head and eyes on a walk reveals the possibility of intentional and ethical exercises in perception. In 'Walking', Helen Macdonald acknowledges danger and harm as potentialities particular to women's participation in outdoor walking, but also reinvigorates pathetic fallacy so that it denotes the interactivity of emotional and perceptual experience.²¹¹

The knowledge that we should be fearful of harm to our body, a fear attendant to being a woman, in the environment, that creates diligent focus on the body. We are never more

²¹¹ Widger, E. (2017) *Walking Women: Embodied Perception in Romantic and Contemporary Radical Landscape Poetry*, Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry, 9(1). [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://doi.org/10.16995/biip.12>

aware that our bodies are feminine than when we are walking, outside of the domestic sphere. In turn this awareness of the body and its actions creates a special attention to the details of what is being walked through, a specialised noticing specific to women writers and our relationship to both our bodies and the environment we move through. As my poetry has made no distinction between nature of the urban/suburban/edgelands and that of rural areas I choose to include Skoulding's and others writing on walking the city experimentally.

Flaneur/Flaneuse Women Walking Experimentally

Metropoetica is a collaborative collection of poetry and essays produced by women writers walking through cities along real and digital desire-paths. The essays discuss the habitude of women walking and writing through their environments. Zoe Skoulding refers to the gendered nature of women writing and walking in the city:

places in which women's ability to inhabit public space has historically been compromised. In the literature of the flaneur, epitomised by Baudelaire, the poet-observer of the city has been until recently almost invariably masculine. The feminine street walker, if she is noticed at all, has been characterised as a prostitute, someone who falls outside of legitimising social structures. The poet in the city moves simultaneously through space and language. Poetic language, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle has argued, is disobedient to structure, formed by the constitutive remainder of sound and accident, and defined by a crossing of linguistic frontiers. Such frontiers are, in his view (drawn from the work of Judith Milner), 'linked to the speakers experienced of his own body', defined against what he is not. He goes on to suggest:

*This is how man experiences his body as a sexual body, as the body of a man and not of a woman perhaps this relation between the experience of language and that of ascription of sexual roles is at the bottom of the parallelism...*²¹²

The experience of walking and writing is gendered by how we move through space and the language we use to describe our experience. It is unfortunate that the term 'feminine street walker' is used here to describe a woman walking through the city, as this is in fact a term for sex worker in some areas. I clarify here that Skoulding intended to discuss the feminised body walking the streets. As above, in the Widger article, the differences in the ways in which men and women write are ascribed to the experience of the gendered body walking through environments. Previously the mountaineer conqueror is contrasted with the meandering woman walker and here the nonchalant *flaneur* is contrasted with the woman walking the streets in an uneasy fashion. Skoulding goes onto discuss the uneasiness of

²¹² Skoulding, Z. (2013) *Metropoetica*. Brigend : Seren Books.

walking the streets as a woman and how it creates an awareness of our gender, referring to Denise Riley on the fluidity of our noticing of gender, our body and awareness of our gender, is gendered by other people in the urban environment:

Gender identity fluctuates; one moves in and out of awareness of gender as a category, so that 'to speak about the individual temporality of being a woman is really to speak about movements between the many temporalities of designation', whether these emerge in awareness of the body or other's perceptions of it. Riley offers an example drawn from urban space:

'You walk down the street...hell-bent on getting to the shops before they close: a car slows down, a shout comments on your expression, your movement; or a derisively hissed remark from the pavement. You have indeed been seen "as a woman" and violently reminded... that you can be a spectacle when the last thing on your mind is your own embodiedness'²¹³

The contrast here is how street harassment alters our own experience of our body/mind/environment, the experience of a stranger commenting on your body in a negative and gendered way can serve to move you from the thoughts of your inner mind. This causes a mental focus drawn to the body, or from a focus on the purpose of the body, moving fast to carry out some task, to being a gendered spectacle for someone else's amusement. The phrase 'violently reminded'²¹⁴ is very pertinent as street harassment even when it does not invoke a physical threat always carries an undercurrent of the threat of violence to the feminised body. Harassment, affects my movement through my local environment, the frequency with which it occurs is not reflected by the scant number of poems which mention it. It is a very frequent, terrifying experience to the point of being banal and therefore not worthy of note. In 2nd June 2017 I am cycling and thinking about the weather and the contrast between that day and the day before when an incident occurs:

²¹³ Skoulding, Z. (2013) *Metropoetica*. Brigend : Seren Books.

²¹⁴ Skoulding, Z. (2013) *Metropoetica*. Brigend : Seren Books.

2nd June 2017

It is raining as I leave the house [] it is June and I drank too much last night [] it is refreshing and does not sting [] I lumber up Seymour Grove potholes make this arduous [] I am angry the roads are such a state [] think of Norwiche's smooth city centre [] it was hard to leave the house [] I am regretting leaving it so late [] parents are struggling with reluctant children everywhere [] I do not feel like I have reinhabited my home [] I struggle to speak [] my accent clangs here [] the journey back is worse [] the rain has not stopped [] rain seems the wrong word [] it is too light [] somewhere between drizzle and rain [] it is a dark day and I fail to connect it with yesterday [] the sun at 7pm [] the corner near Lynwood Avenue is full of teenage boys playfighting[] several walk backwards into the road [] I shout I get called a silly bitch [] by all of them [] they see me turn into Lynwood Avenue [] I shake locking up my bike and try to calculate if they will see me unlock my door [] this is the way women's territories shrink [] leaving the house tomorrow will be harder²¹⁵

The effects of street harassment impact deeply on how women feel able to inhabit public space, outside the domestic sphere, it is a universal experience to one extent or another.

When I am gendered by an external intrusion on my solitude there is a further humiliation; I am gendered not only as a woman, but a mad woman. Reminded my reactions are extreme, disproportionate, and deserving of mockery. Street harassment is a necessary subject to cover when discussing women's movement through urban environments.

To return to Skoulding's critical discussion of the feminised body walking through the city, discussed at length in *Contemporary Women's Poetry and Urban Space Experimental Cities*.

In the introduction she discusses further the shifting and politicised nature of the concepts and relationship between the city/urban space and the feminised body:

A view of the body and subjectivity as intrinsically political is a key factor in the feminisms of the feminisms that have influenced these poets; this in turn inflects approaches to spatial practice...Elizabeth Grosz has argued that bodies and cities are not, as Lefebvre's view of spatial production might suggest, related through cause, since this would imply the body exists before the city and is independent of its social construction; neither are they related as analogues that reflect one another, as in the model of the 'body politic' which perpetuates naturalised hierarchies (Grosz, 2002, p.300). In her view the relation is, rather one of 'interface', comprising fragmented linkages, or temporary kinds of 'co-building'; she rejects

²¹⁵ p.57 A. Percy Manuscript

the notion of body and city as unchanging monolithic entities (Grosz, 2003, p. 301). Donna Harraways' exploration of the borders of the body reveal an understanding of the body as a spatial construction (Harraway 1991), while Julia Kristeva's analysis of body, language and space foregrounds the disruptive potential of poetic language (Kristeva, 1984). Joan Retallack echoes this interest in her exploration of the 'experimental feminine' a grammar or dynamic within language characterised by multiplicity, fractal geometries and swerves (Retallack, 2003, pp. 110-44)²¹⁶

Not only are the concepts of city and body, politicised in a feminist sense, and constantly in flux, so are our personal and poetic relationship to the two concepts, capable of constant shifting. It is suggested here that through experimental poetry, through a poetics which offers fractal possibilities, we can begin to find alternate systems of negotiating and expressing these shifting relationships to the concepts of body and city/urban environment. Through experimental, disruptive, or radical poetics. Whereas the term *flaneuse* has been mentioned as an alternative to the *flaneur* by Skoulding in *Metropoetica* here she returns to the use of the concept of *flaneur* using it for all poets who write about the experience of the body moving through a city:

An awareness of the body in space is central to my discussion. The figure of the walker in the city may recall the nineteenth-century Baudelairean Flaneur, or the twentieth century psycho geography who derive through the urban unconscious... The embodied experience of urban space has most frequently been articulated from a masculine perspective, but equally, it has been extensively critiqued by male writers. Always temporary, unpredictable, and partial, the body's relationships with the city disrupt and destabilize the different kinds of unity presented by the map and by the notions of wholeness it implies.²¹⁷

It is through our complicated, gendered, temporary and ephemeral relationship with our body that writers are best able to discuss the experience of inhabiting a place in both space and time. The act of walking/cycling is an important part of my writing, as a method of input

²¹⁶ Z. Skoulding (2013) *Contemporary Women's Poetry and Urban Space*. Springer.

²¹⁷ Z. Skoulding (2013) *Contemporary Women's Poetry and Urban Space*. Springer.

and composition. It is in the pieces that were written during the Manchester Place Writing Festival in workshops with both Jean Sprackland and Paul Evans that would most neatly align with the tradition of the flaneur/flaneuse. These pieces were composed during or after walking in the centre of Manchester in the process of writing most akin to free or automatic writing. The initial sensory, emotional reactions to the act of walking and existing as a feminine body in the urban space are detailed. It is also one of these poems which gave rise in part to the title of the collection of poetry and one of the research questions. This makes this wandering of body, mind, and pen of central importance to the thought processes that lead to writing this thesis. In Jean Sprackland's workshop we were instructed to write about a place in childhood and then take a short walk and write about what we experienced in a multi-sensory way, not overlooking small details. The composing context is worth pointing out these were prompted and timed pieces that were written with other people present mostly during the act of writing.

Here it is of interest that one is a recreation of a place that was being visualised and not currently experienced. Recreation of a place that now cannot exist in the same way as in memory and will obviously be idealised by distance, years, and recollection. The second I deliberately chose a spot I had never actually walked down to despite having walk past it many times at night I would not have done so which felt significant. The choice was also made not to seek out something that will be readily considered aesthetically beautiful or desirable to view by a visitor to the city. In the first poem *No. 8 Farrow Road Garden Norwich* I used the exact address of the house I lived in. It starts immediately with sensory description of walking:

I was always barefoot [] I knew all the surfaces [] including the crazy paving path [] badly planned concrete [] every piece felt different under the ball of my feet [] I eschewed shoes [] even after the splinter [] that required a Drs visit [] I chased the dog and laughed [] we were close [] then her short fur never far from my fingers [] I slept in her basket [] she was calm and did not bite [] I was allowed to wander anywhere [] except the far end with the decaying greenhouse [] crushed in the grip of ancient vines [] it created many dark tales in my head [] of what could happen among the broken glass and thick twisted branches [] there were yellow roses [] that I remember [] we cut some once [] made them take up blue dye [] above the fireplace [] the old gas fire [] I would pick rhubarb and sit on the step with a glass dish of granulated sugar [] the snap of the stem [] the sharp hardness of the plant and the textured sweetness in the sun [] when the garden was calm and the sun still reached me [] the garden was a space I was left alone [] even my anxious mother could not find her way to worry about me there [] despite my near permanent double plastered knees [] I was left to play the games small children play in the grass [] make my clothes smell of green [] an elaborate imagination could make worlds of daises and dandelions then ²¹⁸

even in in a protected space, fear creeps in among the rhubarb. In contrast the second piece

focuses in on the bodies of are those who inhabit the city before moving on to my own

sensory perception:

*Write in a Space Nearby Multisensory Do Not Overlook Small Details or the Strange
By the Canal Just Past Sainsburys off Oxford Road*

There are Jehovahs Witnesses on either side of the street outside no. 70 Oxford Road [] the sign speaks of the four horsemen of the apocalypse [] 'how their ride affects you' [] and on the other side they hide their purpose [] on a JW and 'what is the meaning of life?' [] I avoided sitting outside the station [] too many fretting memories there [] where I dubiously locked my bike [] had to put my sunglasses on immediately [] it is bright for me even in the shade [] as I walked down to the canalside [] the concrete steps reek of piss from inefficient kidneys [] I can smell the canal [] a faint rubbish wet smell [] an orange balloon and peach Styrofoam kebab tray [] a yellow kinder egg toy case and an empty funsize bottle of echo falls float by [] three joggers passed me on the canal path dressed in shades of pink and black [] all had headphones on so I could not tell if this was happenstance [] I can hear the buses and the

²¹⁸ p.53 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

*zebra crossings and calls of children [] but muffled slightly [] here close enough to fall into the canal [] this is a place I would not dare walk alone at night [] I have not in fact ever walked down this path [] I am still afraid despite looking at this spot since 2008*²¹⁹

The poem ends by stating my fear of standing where I am and the year I moved to Manchester. While I have lived here, or more accurately, mostly in Whalley Range for nearly a decade, there are places and times which make me acutely aware of being an interloper; not knowing, or properly inhabiting this city, the centre in particular. It is the way in which these two pieces were composed having nestled my mind in a quiet garden decades ago to be jolted into traffic, rubbish, noise, stench the latter piece is the epitome of the worst of urban living focused on decay and effluvia.

A longer piece written during Paul Evans workshop, was written after a longer walk being instructed 'wander in a beatnik sort of way' we were also instructed to gather flora and fauna during the walk which created a mindset focused on finding the natural world within the very built-up urban centre of the city composing while I was walking. In a sense the composition started with the first step and on the walk back. In the workshop room timed writing went on for half an hour. I chose to write continuously the poem opens with the recollection of the walk and then returns to the room in 70 Oxford Road where the writing took place. Specialist knowledge of the city that comes from having lived in a place in which significant construction work/infrastructure where change often occurs is evident from the start. The city centre is not fixed structurally and cannot be in my personal map making:

June 1st 2017 Paul Evans Workshop After Being told: Go and Wander in a Beatnik Way and Find Flora/Fauna

I have a vague notion of going towards the library and realise I have resurrected the peace gardens in my mind [] nothing but manicured grass and stone war memorial there now []

²¹⁹ p.54 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

there are many crossings [] it is cacophonous makes me aware of the sweat under my arms [] from being late and cycling [] I cross over the bridge and am aware of the stench of the canal and effluvia [] there homeless men asleep on the benches curved round the base of the library [] it is safer to sleep when it is light [] I pass the friends (quaker) meeting house and first want to pick one of the large white daisies outside [] decide against it [] residual quaker guilt [] there is a sign there saying something like 'everything is too unequal which is bad for everyone' [] towards the back of the city hall there is more noise and yellow rosettes tied on trees and lampposts [] setting up for MIF I suspect [] I had wanted to get at the plants there [] I start telling myself I picked a bad route [] I round the library with the trees that look unremarkable except in April [] when they support fantastical purple candles of flowers I keep asking people the name and forgetting [] all the trees on this route have been expertly tree surgeoned [] so that no one could climb them and I cannot get at a single leaf [] there is drilling and a lot of noise [] Manchester feels like an ever changing city [] any large building or green space can disappear at any time [] less dense with historical buildings than Norwich [] and poor town planning [] I have my mp3 player in my bag [] but today I am making myself listen to the din [] a girl is setting up to play her electric guitar [] with a small amp under the tree []s I have no watch and cannot see the big clock from here [] I cross the tram tracks and try and piece together St Peters Square in 2006 back together [] 1st St Peters Place was not there [] but an uninspiring Italian restaurant has box hedges [] that I have to check are real [] I grasp a top branch and put it in my pocket [] young people are wearing things we wore as teenagers [] it is the first time this has happened to me and it is unsettling [] even McDonalds has an I heart MCR sign outside [] and it makes me feel bilious [] I walk back on the other side of the road [] it is all stone and concrete and too well tended [] this corridor seen by all the tourists [] for plants to wreak their slow transformation [] back at no. 70 Oxford Road someone whispers that the bird singing is a blackbird [] my bird knowledge is limited [] I can identify a few by sight but not by sound [] I do not know what plant I picked is box hedge? [] you can hear the zebra crossing from here [] it keeps rattling my thoughts [] I am still not sure if it will rain [] the clouds were mixed and do not move as quickly as they do in Norwich [] where the sky blown about by gales [] changes in seconds [] the city smells of people and what they leave behind [] it could do with a rain [] there is wind and it is shaking branches outside the window and leaves [] makes the sound small rainsticks make when you tip them [] when I come back here [] I find everything too much and struggle to see and hear the green [] there are trees everywhere and they will always play that soothing song unasked [] the wind will always make it happen [] I cannot work out if the building opposite is occupied [] or which one it is [] it is very dirty and window sills are peeling [] many layers of paint [] dead plants in window boxes throng the broken window and mismatched curtains in terms of length and pattern hang in the other [] cycling today felt difficult [] no one would let me turn out of the junction of Upper Chorlton road for minutes [] cars and trucks did not notice me [] the city felt enormous and uncaring [] well the drivers of the vehicles anyway [] I cannot see the sky anymore [] I am itching to look at it and determine if it will rain [] Norfolk gave me back the desire to sky gaze [] I think the trees making such beautiful sound are oak [] someone in the room collects leaves from the balcony [] faintly I can hear trains coming out of Oxford Road Station [] the traffic is louder and the zebra crossing above that [] I am still looking for the beauty here [] not everyone can manage the wilderness [] fear dictates where I go []

*Fallowfield Loop got added to the list [] tales of bikes grabbed from owners [] motivation too [] how do you get to the wilderness when you can't get out of bed? [] one of the bars tips out empties very close [] I would have found more plant life in Whalley Range [] the moss on the wall in the yard is luscious we leave our weeds be*²²⁰

It was during this festival, this writing session, that the thinking on the question of most significance began to crystallise. Despite the efforts of inclusion at the festival the impression of poetry of place as a white, able bodied, male monolith that women and disabled people have only started to chip away at became clear:

*...that I am still looking for the beauty here not everyone can manage the wilderness fear dictates where I go Fallowfield loop got added to the list tales of bikes grabbed from owner's motivation too how do you get to the wilderness when you can't get out of bed? One of the bars tips out empties very close I would have found more plant life in Whalley Range the moss on the wall in the yard is luscious we leave our weeds be.*²²¹

This section sets forth that writing of the suburban and urban, its attendant landscape, flora and fauna, has a role to play within place writing/nature writing. Not everyone can in fact access the wilderness. The mythic concept of true wilderness often featured in these kinds of writings on place became clear. The notion is explored elsewhere that anxiety shrinks and contorts a mental map of where I feel safe to move through is discussed. A place that offers respite from traffic, in the last lines move to trying to see the plant life that exists in the suburban Whalley range as a refuge. Here it is not just the body which contorts the map but the mind as well. Geraldine Monk writes what Skoulding refers to within *Experimental Cities* as 'her declared interest in what she describes as 'the emotional geography of place'²²² this

²²⁰ p.55/56 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

²²¹ p.55/56 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

²²² p.87 Z. Skoulding (2013) *Contemporary Women's Poetry and Urban Space*. Springer.

refers to mapping within her work not only geography as it can be observed now, but the past, future, emotional and physical responses to a place within her work.

An attentiveness to place and its histories pervades Monk's work as in a piece presented in 2000 as an alternative bus tour of Manchester 'Hidden Cities' (Monk, 2001, pp.63-70). The final section, '(Unlocated)', begins:

So all this past is come to pass and a body aches / in one place and then another / body aches in another / place and a face / cracks and creaks in time to / some emotion or another time / and the space is vacated / and another is filled with / a past and a body that ached in / one place and another body ached in another place and a face cracks and / creaks in time to emotion / or another time is faced and the space is vacated and another is / filled with a past is / come to pass and a body aches / in one place and then / another (Monk, 2001, p. 70)

...In the pattern of repetition and difference that builds up in the poem there is a series of echoes and or after-images, the distance between a phrase and its repletion complicating the question of here and now, or the deictic aspect that one might expect of a guided tour. The relationship between a body and the place it inhabits shifts continuously through these repeated verbal gestures...different locations around Manchester are explored in a palimpsestic sequence that moves between sensory apprehensions and appreciation of a past in conversation with the present and future.²²³

It is through description of bodily experience in a space that a sense of moving through an everchanging landscape, in both space and time is achieved, alongside the linguistic effects achieved by repetition and juxtaposition. In this section of this chapter I continue with supplementary treatise on Charle's Olson's *Projective Verse*.

²²³ Z p.88. Skoulding (2013) *Contemporary Women's Poetry and Urban Space*. Springer.

Charles Olson's Projective Verse and Women Beat Poets

Olson's manifesto was first distributed in 1950 in the form of a pamphlet on his term projective verse discussing the process of poetry composition by field or open field poetics. In the beginning of this chapter, I set out how Olson's idea of using the entirety of the page in composition of poetry has been imbued with new resonance for the UK based proponents of RLP. As RLP is decidedly influenced by Olson's American experimental poetics, it is relevant to discuss the impact that some forms of American poetry have had upon my own poetics, and the history of experimentation in America. Arguably the biggest divergence from the ways in which American poetry in literary history altered from our own traditions is the Beat poets, in the earliest drafts of my plan for this project I drew heavily on the work of both Diane Di Prima and Ann Waldman, who were respectively part of the beat generation and someone who met and was influenced by them later. Diane Di Prima had from her earliest writing, a strong social and environmental conscience combined with some features of feminist poetry. *Her Revolutionary Letters* which she added to throughout her life could be considered a hybrid text much like my journal poems. These poets it could be said have a closer geographical and chronological direct connection to Olson. Primarily they have used his techniques to compose bodily, of the breath. It is in the sense of bodily composition, writing rooted in the bodily experience, that Olson sets out his poetics:

I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, this lesson, that verse will only do that a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear and the pressure of his breath' in essence a connection of both body and mind, 'it is from the union of the mind and the ear that the syllable is born' the idea that the poet's voice, their breath is as important a tool in composing poetry as anything else, of the utmost importance, a sense of capturing the rhythms of how a poet speaks into the work 'together these two, the syllable and the line, they make the poem, they make that thing, the-what shall we call it, the Boss of all, the "single intelligence". And the lines comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes, and this is, it is here that, the daily work,

*the WORK, gets in, for only he, the man who writes, can declare, every moment, the line, its metric and its ending- where its breathing shall come to termination*²²⁴

I discuss the women beat poets here not only as they have greatly contributed to the fruition of my feminist eco-poetics, I present them as a case of how poets can take inspiration from the same source in wildly different directions. The discrepancy of poetics of RLP and Beat poetry has a number of contributing factors; geographical location (the UK and USA), time period (20120- vs 1950s-). I make this point to illumine what I have stated throughout this thesis, I am not an RLP poet I have made use of studying the techniques used by the poets of RLP, adventured these techniques with my own poetics. It is within open field poetics, whereby the moment, the poet's connection to both their inner and outer voice, the very functions of the body, the breath itself dictate the length of line, of the poem. Rather than employing forms of poetry composition within established form or metrics from literary history. To apply the breath to lyrical composition is a self-created, self-defined form borne of a connection to the whole of the self, located in the rhythms of the breath, the noticing of the body. It is in this mode, whereby the noticing of the body and what the body *notices* in the moment, that twain the content and the mode of composition of the eco-poetics of the gendered mentally ill body.

All the poetry for this project was first handwritten in a notebook and in cases where a notebook was not immediately available was composed by breath and speech while walking and cycling. I speak my words aloud while composing where possible, setting voice and breath into the moment of composition. Composition by writing by hand, is an attempt to remain connected to bodily experience through ink, through the motion of a fountain pen on paper, the ink splots on my skin, the scratching sound the nib makes.

²²⁴p.2 Olson, C. (1959) Projective Verse.

The selection of my poems I come to next, exhibit open field poetics notion of composition through breath and body. They were all written by breath and pedal, the composition process occurring whilst cycling, the poem then written down as I reached my destination. There are similarities across all these poems, the length is shorter due to having to hold the lines in my head/repeat them aloud while cycling on roads, they have a strong rhythmic and onomatopoeic factor. It is these poems that most typify the qualities of poetry composed by breath/pedal/body motion:

(circa January/February 2016)

The snow comes all at once [] I don't expect any to settle [] around the Arndale and up Deansgate it evaporates on contact [] too many humming buildings and humans [] reach the junction and the roads are filling with it [] I have sunglasses on to keep it out of my eyes [] my mouth is filling with snow [] I have been hungry for snow for months [] for years [] I am trying not to think about how dirty the snow is [] acid snow [] city snow [] I had forgotten how it feels when your sinuses freeze [] I am thrilling [] I am scared [] my basket is full of cider [] I am going to topple over in the snow [] caught in the spokes [] I am trying to breathe through my mouth [] when I breathe through my nose it mists the glasses [] it keeps coming [] flurry on flurry and the traffic lights are kaleidoscope [] I can hardly see and my breath is loud and visible [] I am slow and ponderous with each pedal stroke [] all this snow lasts a day [] how many till my last?²²⁵

12th April 2016

The chill is off the air [] despite my bicycle being blown sideways [] leather jacket become bat wings [] my trachea closes [] my breath is raw and ragged [] my wheel dips the whole tyre [] more into a pothole at speed [] as I rise up out of it wavering [] without falling my breath stops [] my heart badums [] badumbdadumdadums [] blood in my ears [] I am grateful for the navy leather gloves [] returned to me by a friend [] my bones have been chilled for weeks [] thrusting fists in pockets at traffic lights [] near my door the blossom is out [] uneven on the trees [] they have not recovered from the early false start [] spring made in December [] I can tell the temperature has risen because I can smell the stench of the wheely bins [] kindness outshines the cold today [] my heart is warming up²²⁶

²²⁵ p.16 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²²⁶ p.22 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

9th December 2016

My head is dull and heavy [] I am struggling to wake from dreams in which I upset everyone I love [] the roads are wet and strewn with leaf mulch [] my tiny amount of wakefulness is concentrated on the road [] ahead a large blue people carrier barrels across the road [] does not honk their horn [] my left hand wont move fast enough [] the old injury plays up in the cold [] I slide on the road and hit the side of the car [] it pauses and drives off [] leaving me shocked and shouting [] on the way back home I force myself to get supplies [] leave the library book in the pannier [] trudge back to get it [] decision making is hard [] ethics and considerations grow large [] as I lock the bike in the yard [] I notice the moss repointing the brick work [] the weeds growing out of the concrete [] they are beautiful and I breathe²²⁷

22/23rd July 2016

I have reduced my quetiapine to 75mg at night 3 X 25 mg [] none in the morning [] I am wearing my sunglasses to cycle at night [] to protect myself from the traffic lights [] I am not sure if this is myself coming to surface [] or dangerous²²⁸

The other uniting factor of these poems is the sense of writing in the moment as it is experienced which I am terming writing through experience which I will return to right at the end of this chapter. There is much of the breath in these poems as an asthmatic in motion, in winter my breath, my heart become unfathomably loud. These poems all exhibit a strong sense of rhythmic lyricism the poem is driven by footsteps, by pedal, by exertion of breath and heart, they thump along with my inner and outer percussion. Over the years developing both my writing and performing voice became knitted in my practice, it encouraged me to read newer work without editing it obsessively, to understand my poetic voice in short. Performing since 2004 has constantly exposed me to other forms of poetry and developed how I write and perform. When I started my MA, I was unable to tune my writing for sound, some sound patterns were appearing, which was noted and praised by

²²⁷ p.46 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²²⁸ p.32 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

tutors, but I was unable to replicate it or do it on purpose. I credit the more natural lyrical nature of my current writing to working on my performance, which forces you to focus on the body and breath expressing poetry and listening to others. I rarely rhyme, it is a restriction, rather to follow the way in which sound patterns can be created in a longer line or prose poem.

It was Di Prima's ongoing sustained habitude with political and eco-poetry, the blending of the personal and the political within her writing that led to my delving into her poetry. Di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters* were written as a form of ongoing conversation with herself/previous selves are a hybrid form, as the poet is in conversation with herself over her entire career; opening up a private sphere/dialogue/thought into the public and subverting the form of the epistolary poem I include an excerpt from one of that series of works below:

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #4

*Left to themselves people/
grow their hair. /
Left to themselves they/
take off their shoes. /
Left to themselves they make love/
sleep easily/
share blankets, dope & children/
they are not lazy or afraid/
they plant seeds, they smile, they/
speak to one another. The word/
coming into its own: touch of love/
on the brain, the ear. /*

*We return with the sea, the tides/
 we return as often as leaves, as numerous/
 as grass, gentle, insistent, we remember/
 the way, /
 our babes toddle barefoot thru the cities of the/
 universe ²²⁹*

The body and writing about thereof is a part of politicised poetry, eco-poetry by its engagement with an environment under constant threat is a politicised form of writing. The collection *The Poetry Deal* opens with Di Prima discussing the earlier *Revolutionary Letters* from 1968, the personal and political circumstances of their composition, the rest of the works are new. This collection being the first new collection of her work in decades. In *POSTCARD FROM MARSHALL, CA* she continues her practice of hybridising the text of making the poem function as both correspondence and poem she discusses floodtides:

*floodtides/
 creep right up to/
 these houses on the Bay/
 tide covers the road & leaves thin layer of mud/

 green-slippery-moulding-thick-crazy-wetness bursting
 into/
 narcissus, ferns, pale grass like green velvet elf-cloth/
 this North Coast a huge compost pile, alive w/one
 million mushrooms/
 (all one mushroom)
 whales go by at the Point, leaping & spouting for*

²²⁹ Babcock, J. (2010) Revolutionary Letter #4 by Diane di Prima, Arthur Magazine.[Online] [Accessed: 4 October 2023]<https://arthurmag.com/2010/08/29/revolutionary-letter-4-by-diane-di-prima/>

‘the body’ as a main character in a series of poems has the lines ‘MUCH LESS THE BODY IN PANTIES, the thinnest issue of piss seeping through, staining the sad panties a touch more’²³¹ she is unafraid of depicting intimacy with her own body and that of others in an unflinching, anatomical light. The poem which is most like a journal, or the recollection of a diary or planner is *Living it*, via the instrument of the anaphora ‘if this is Wednesday’²³² the poem takes us through her domestic tasks and errands, some statements factual ‘return library books’²³³ other lines expand into further imagery and sensory detail:

Mother said she read in the paper that Pete was granted a divorce.

His third. My highschool boyfriend. Meanest thing I could have done, I did to him, returning a long-saved-for engagement ring in a Band-Aid box, while he was stationed in Da Nang.

Meant to tell F this morning about dream of eating

Grasshoppers, fried but happy. Our love a difficult instrument

*we are learning to play, Practise, practice*²³⁴

I will note here that I did not borrow the use of using first initials in poems from Wright, this is a long-held convention in my poems which sprung from my teenage diaries. I was drawn to the way this poem blends the deepest anguish of the worst thing Wright has ever done to a man and the domesticity of telling your partner about your strange dream, the hum-drum errands that must be run. This poem captures the aesthetic that I have attempted in my poetry; of everything being of value to be included in a poem, that the texture of women’s lives is made up of these moments of immensity and tedium. The poem succeeds in wrongfooting you by meandering through her day and her realisations by ending on:

²³¹P.105 Wright, C.D. (2007) *Like Something Flying Backwards*. Bloodaxe: Hexham, Northumberland

²³² P.81 Wright, C.D. (2007) *Like Something Flying Backwards*. Bloodaxe: Hexham, Northumberland

²³³P.81 Wright, C.D. (2007) *Like Something Flying Backwards*. Bloodaxe: Hexham, Northumberland

²³⁴ P.82 Wright, C.D. (2007) *Like Something Flying Backwards*. Bloodaxe: Hexham, Northumberland

'If this is Wednesday, meet F at Health Department 10.45

For AIDS test.

*If this is Wednesday, its trash night'*²³⁵

We have the sense at the end that the litany of 'if this is Wednesday' is a phrase to pull her back to familiar comforting routine for the sake of her own peace of mind, to hold onto the calendar, as it usually plays out for the sake of her daughter, her mother, her students, whatever happens, if it is Wednesday she knows where she needs to be and how her life and home are to be managed, a white knuckle grip on a to do list keeping her together. Another apposite aspect is the way in which the everyday becomes poignant in context, in the litany, in the juxtaposition between the high-minded wonderings and the tasks to be ticked off. The second poem composed for the PhD described vomiting in the snow;

*...the roads around my 2nd floor flat unsalted it hung around for weeks
the guilty stain of red wine vomit after exiting a cab and all my footsteps
each of my shoe treads preserved memory of having managed to leave the house
every time it got more difficult my feet had made it out the door and back again...*²³⁶

The first fumbling poem written for the project (as analysed in terms of physical structure at the start of this chapter) focused on a newspaper article about air pollution. This lack of connection to my bodily experience, the lack of hyperlocal detail doomed it to fail. The second poem focuses on bodily sensation. There was a noticeably clear breakthrough and progression in a matter of weeks. it was inspired by a Forrest Gander reading I attended in

²³⁵ P.82 Wright, C.D. (2007) *Like Something Flying Backwards*. Bloodaxe: Hexham, Northumberland

²³⁶p. 9 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

Liverpool where a stench in an alleyway was featured in a poem, I was lucky enough to discuss this concept with him. Spontaneous vomiting is a symptom of my mania.

The tedious lines written particularly during a low mood are something that previously I would have edited out in the past, the value of these banalities is that they are a strong indicator of mood patterns, in conjunction with the chronological and cumulative effect of the poetry it is such that within the aggregation, significance is then wrought from these lines and depressive episodes can be tracked by the difference in the poetics. Depression is drab in the extreme, it is the defining feature, I talk frequently of boring myself. Depressive mood states are ruminative, repetitive. These are tools of creativity, contrariwise, it can result in bromidic lines.

While searching for lines to illustrate this point, I found a run of poems with similar lines that in the past I would have edited out, they also refer to a theme throughout the project where I am engaged in the act of writing about how I am writing in the given moment and how my mood is impacted by this. The run here of three poems in one month clearly depict part of a depressive mood period that went on for some months:

*...[] every word I write today seems pointless [] I cannot grasp the flurry of poems I wrote in August [] I am forcing this pen across the pages as I cannot remember writing this month [] I know enough now [] I know I must []...*²³⁷

2nd November 2016

*...I am bored of every single one of these words as I am writing them [] I can see no value in any of the poems I am writing [] they are all clichés and poorly constructed [] or like this a maudlin diversion [] just to push the pen across the paper and pick up the thread of thought...*²³⁸

²³⁷ p.41 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²³⁸ p.42 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

9th November 2016

*...I am fed up of all my words and am writing this under sufferance [] that I had to write something today...*²³⁹

13th November 2016

*...I have got strange [] where my old poems are written by someone else [] who knows how to write poetry and not this scribbling whinge*²⁴⁰

That most of these lines, occur at the end of a poem is an expression of an exceptionally low mood as this is typically the point where I turn the thought, to talk myself out of a destructive thought pattern. Depression has curtailed the poem, left me in that state even after writing which typically has some positive effect on my state of mind. It was essential for this project, with its focus on the body, not to censor the more grotesque symptoms that occur, such as the unsightly eczema rashes among other bodily afflictions that are affected by my mood. Not trying to poeticise aesthetically my existence, rather make poetry from the fullness of my experience.

As women we are conditioned to make ourselves appealing, to prepare our bodies for consumption, to reveal the hidden grotesqueries that lurk within, or on our skin still feels like rebellion, like a radical act. To reclaim our bodies from the male gaze, to combat that othering of the gendered mentally ill body, it is essential to embrace the fullness of our bodily experience. This poetics of the mentally ill body, focuses on noticing sensation, connecting with the ways in which the mentally ill body is inhabited and the ways in which the body is gendered by external forces rather than appearance. As the poetry sought to alter feminine aesthetics traditionally expounded in poetry, so too the content was driven

²³⁹ p. 43 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²⁴⁰ p. 44 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

by an attempt not to valorise mania, to write of the whole spectrum of mood states and apply this to my experience of the wider environment. Writing through experience is a poetic aesthetic that I define as taking its warp from open field poetics and RLP, its weft from leaning into the grotesque and the banal. This aesthetic is defined compositionally by circumscribing Olson, the beats and the walking women of RLP's attempts to compose using the entire page. To embody the writing process, incorporate the movement of the hand, the foot, the body, the breath into the (in my case eco-ethical) lyric. The gendered mentally ill body acts a prosopopoeia for mad poetry, hazards undertaking the inclusion of the feminine grotesque.

Conclusion: The Bipolar Magpie Beaking into Academia with an Unusual Squawk

One of the key ethical concerns raised when I started this project was the notion that the very act of writing about my mental health may in fact cause it to worsen. In my ambition, I had not factored in the extremes of the PhD research process into this. I have had to at my behest and the behest of my tutors suspend my studies beyond what is generally offered as standard. Any study at this level is extremely difficult, requiring of herculean effort and stamina. When you are someone whose energy levels dip to the point where you are unable to get out of bed or conversely fall out of touch with reality to the point where you are unable to open your laptop, the challenges have been more complex. It is impossible to focus on academic rigour when you are hallucinating. I include scraps of abandoned drafts in the appendix, which should illustrate the variations of my cognitive abilities. Most recently I was due to hand in this last June, my tutors rightly saw that my attempting to pull all-nighters was a risk for my ongoing sanity. At the point when I rested, I had to admit that I had several of my warning signs for an impending mood episode: tinnitus, waking up at six am convinced the doorbell is being rung and feeling someone is touching the back of my head to try and get my attention etc. There are common practices and requirements that are part of modern academia which are going to be harmful to any researcher or student. My reaction to extreme fatigue is more immediate and dangerous. Pushing myself beyond the limits of enervation, not getting enough sleep and even a moderate amount of caffeine use can induce a manic episode with psychotic features, which left untreated would lead to full psychosis.

This project has been passionately propagated on the idea that the personal is the political. As someone unable to protest in the streets, poetry is the most useful form I have of

resistance. The eco-ethical lyric I have engaged is fundamentally political while having a deep respect for craft over the didactic. As a line in one of my poems goes *'the futile gestures an individual can [] make in the face of multiple apocalypses'*²⁴¹ poets document their experience, set down what is noticed and how it is noticed. My noticing comes from the perspective of someone with a bipolar affected brain and eco-feminist values. Eco-anxiety has driven the poetry, it is my fervent intention that it exists as a form of documentation, of noticing of the hyperlocal, over years, it is a love letter to the suburb of Whalley Range, its attendant flora and fauna.

This could have been the never-ending poetry manuscript, the cut-off date for the poetry was only determined so that I could focus on completing the critical writing. During the editing process of the poetry for my final submission. I was astounded by the emotional reaction I had. I was unprepared for the effect close reading of so many poems written with such acuteness about my own mind would have. In consummation I was left (and I hope the reader is left) with the abiding knowledge that while I have endured mood states and madness of great ferocity; *'my capacity for pleasure remains undiminished'*²⁴²

I was certain in wanting to provide uncertainty, there is no end as such as my life and writing continues off the page. There are other reasons for providing a post-modern lack of narrative resolution. I am not recovered. I live with my condition. I have not written this poetry to provide a comforting trajectory of my miraculous recovery from bipolar type 1. This is not the story of a poet who no longer lives with daily distortions of their reality due to the healing power of poetry. This raising up of the liminal, the lack of an ending is embedded

²⁴¹P.73 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

²⁴² p.104 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

in the mad poetics and what it owes to open field poetics and RLP. Two forms of poetry which resist the arbitrary borders of landscape, the page, and the tidy narrative arc, to favour the embodied experience of moving through landscape and how it is liv/ed/ing. They are poetics of the living, ever-changing, landscape and body.

Bipolar disorder remains one of the most stigmatised and mystified mental illnesses. It is only since I started this project that I dared to write about my condition truly opaquely due to the fear of the stigma. Much as feminist literature has sought to ostend that the particulars of women's lives are of the same importance as the lives of men, mad literature maps out an unknown topography of the mind's interior. The poetics have sought on a mental health level to avoid trauma narratives, the genre of misery memoir, that serves as salacious details for the neurotypical. A narrative of recovery that posits that recovery is linear and fully achievable. Many of us with chronic conditions will have near constant episodes. The trauma narrative also exists as a what not to do, provides an ableist idea that disability is avoidable. I wanted to write poetry of mental illness without retraumatising myself or others. Mad studies is in a sapling stage, I defend those whose contributions to this critical area are rooted in autobiography, my aspirations for my poetics and critical writing were multifarious, to evince my mad poetry and the concept of the bipolar magpie as critical modality. It is the plaiting of central concerns of feminism, eco-poetry and my recondite knowledge of the vicissitudes of bipolar that are the unique contribution this document makes.

There are numerous acts of reframing and redefining occurring in this text. The headline being that this is an atypical thesis. I am not seeking to expunge the residue that bipolar has left on this text, it has been edited to be better understood, my hope is that it continues to

exist as a dialectic of the machinations of my bipolar thought patterns. The second act of reframing aligns with the second research question: how can the tradition of the body in (eco-feminist) radical landscape poetry be built upon to include the gendered mentally ill body?

RLP has acted as a redefinition of landscape itself and when that window has been left ajar by other poets it allows for my eco-poetics to ask why isn't the domestic also a landscape where nature is experienced? An opportunity for those of us who experience agoraphobia, extreme fatigue, psychotic symptoms, to allow ourselves to consider that we may also be landscape poets. It is the eco-poetics of the gendered mentally ill body that has attempted to communicate the very internal, invisible, presentation of my illness, that is unlike anyone else's. Much as I would not say that I am an RLP poet, my poetry does not seek to define anyone's mental illness but my own. Feminist theorists from the previous wave spent a good deal of time refuting gender essentialism, in upholding the belief that every woman's experience is different and is socially constructed²⁴³. Judith Butler's vitally important works on performativity were a bulwark against essentialism of gender, as a feminist informed mad poet, I resist the idea of an essential bipolar experience.

The description of the body as a functioning entity, as one that walks the landscape is a feminist feature of RLP. My poetry has added onto this the concept of the body both capable and incapable of walking. The poetics utilises the bodily effects of mental illness to communicate something many would consider ineffable. Evidencing momentary sensation in the moment. There will be much that is waiting to be written on the poetry of the covid

²⁴³ Olla, N., (2011) *Building for difference: Essentialism in the work of Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak. The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Journal* 2011, p.78.

lockdowns, for those of us with chronic health conditions we were already familiar with the domestic as landscape, of the sensation of watching the world from the window as D. Wordsworth did on her sick bed. I will make brief mention here that there will be new relevance in the poetics and research I started before this occurrence when reframed (another reframing) after this global phenomenon. The poetry takes into account the pre and post Brexit landscape. This document has relevance politically beyond the two main concerns of environment and mental health.

The breadth of literature that has inspired the poetics, positions myself as the bipolar magpie, the unconventional researcher with multiple viewpoints, to join up my disparate points of knowledge, the journal hybrid poetics bequests to me, my entire joined up self. It is necessary to consider the poets of the mid-20th century labelled by critics as confessional, R.D Laing's writing on madness remains some of the most radical and compassionate that exists and open field poetics as mentioned in the previous chapter was a source of inspiration for both the beats and RLP. This thesis has been on several areas that are so untrodden that there is little critical writing on them, the magpie approach has desired to make clear that which I have thought was self-evident, the interconnectedness of all these viewpoints and poets.

I call to attention in these final paragraphs the language used in the poetry. The thought throughout the poetics that arose was: how do I articulate myself in a language that is inherently patriarchal and ableist? As mentioned in the introduction aligning myself with experimental poetry allowed for a greater range of expression within both form and language. Permission to not make sense makes sense of my experience. I had been trialling free writing and a prose poem form before, (brief examples exist in all my published books)

the form that I returned to was that of very short lined free verse which I edited obsessively, excessively. I was purging all possible evidence of my disordered brain, or editing those that remained into abstraction, when I did write my symptoms into my poems they were identified as clever imagery not my reality. The journal/prose poem hybrid with its minimal editing -the mad and breath informed brackets as sole punctuation- embraces it.

To expand further on the language used in this project; it could be defined as much by what I have deliberately excluded writing about, as what has been included in the poetry, I have avoided detailed depictions of my stay in a psychiatric unit and traumatic events. There is more to writing about living with mental illness than packaging trauma for the consumption of those that do not experience it. In terms of the body there are depictions of any number of bodily functions, sensations, and hallucinations, and truly little of my physical appearance or that of others. This is a feminist choice to take control of the narrative of my marginalised body, the gendered mentally ill body, that is gendered by being observed. The aim is to avoid the incipient judgment, objectification, pigeonholing of the aesthetic of the sad woman 'poetess' (this continues even when said body has decomposed²⁴⁴ ²⁴⁵) which leads me to the feminine grotesque. The depiction of my body as something that can be grotesque in its functions, in its delirium, in the same way any body of any gender can be. A body that experiences and functions is at the core of the poetics of the gendered mentally ill body. The body and mind are revolting in the poems' mechanisms; psychologically, ecologically, aesthetically and politically.

²⁴⁴ (2017) *Sylvia Plath Looked Good in a Bikini—Deal With It*, *Electric Literature*. [Online] [Accessed: 23 November 2023]<https://electricliterature.com/sylvia-plath-looked-good-in-a-bikini-deal-with-it/>

²⁴⁵ Conway, C.A. (2017) 'Sylvia Plath's bikini shot: it's Time to Stop Sexualising a Serious Author to Sell Books', *The Guardian*, 28 September. [Online] [Accessed: 23 November 2023]
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2017/sep/28/sylvia-plath-bikini-shot-its-time-to-stop-sexualising-a-serious-author-to-sell-books>

As for whither my poetics goes next; following an intense period of noticing my reality, I have made forays into a number of poetic directions. In times of fighting the blank page I have returned to my ekphrastic practice of free writing in front of an artwork in Manchester Art Gallery. I have found myself flirting once more with poems that favour the surreal. These are modes I have operated in before the well is not dry, I do wish to cast the net wider for something utterly new. There is of course potential to expand my feminist eco-poetics combined with my other practices, I have glancingly mentioned repairing, remaking, and constructing from vintage materials, clothing there is potential for interdisciplinary exploration. I might seek invigoration from more complex experimental techniques. I also have several manuscripts that await publication. A small press that promised a run of a pamphlet has shuttered its doors freeing it up for submission elsewhere for example.

Mental health funding is at an all-time low, much of my poetry that touches on my experience of hospitalisation is one of fear of a lack of autonomy and the traumatic nature of inpatient care. It is now the issue that people with severe mental illness are unable to be admitted when they require it, such is the deprivation of mental health care in this country. I have never known so many people take their own life as during this period. I have not created a litany of these deaths in the poems as my poetics are fundamentally about the act of living with mental illness. The mental health act is forty years old and attempts at reform have been delayed^{246 247}. Vital medications are frequently unavailable due to Brexit

²⁴⁶ *Mental health legislation needs urgent reforms* (no date) www.lawsociety.org.uk. [Online] [Accessed: 24 November 2023] <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/mental-health-legislation-needs-urgent-reforms>

²⁴⁷ Mind (2019) *Mental Health Act Review* | *Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems*, Mind.org.uk. [Online] [Accessed 16th January 2025] <https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-work/mental-health-act-review/>.

shortages. The ongoing destruction of our environment and climate change has continued apace with little real actions being taken by global powers²⁴⁸.

When a manuscript containing poems from this project was recently rejected by Carcanet they advised that they saw clearly how the poetic form functioned: that the journal form spiralled out from the personal to wider concerns. I wish to leave the reader with the understanding that this is a deeply personal, hybrid, hyperlocal, hyper specific, embodied eco-feminist poetics with an ambition to inform and bear witness to my mental health and the destruction of our natural world. The micro-climate of 'moss repointing the brickwork'²⁴⁹ is as beautiful and worthy of saving as the rainforest. We are all interconnected as is all life on earth.

²⁴⁸ Boehm, S. *et al.* (2023) *State of Climate Action 2023*, www.wri.org [Preprint]. [Online] [Accessed: 16th January 2025] <https://www.wri.org/research/state-climate-action-2023>.

²⁴⁹ p.46 A. Percy Poetry Manuscript

Appendix

(Circa Oct 15) Hitchcock Blonde View 1.

I am dressed in a dress and firework
to indicate some of the things that
this herringbone not out of place on celluloid
think he has beaked his way through the glass
how dressed in a dress and firework
each of my shoe heads preserved
evidence of having left the house

(Circa Oct 15) Hitchcock Blonde View 2.

elvet I am dressed in greysoak
only just the first fogs and fireworks
as Hitchcock dressed his child's sunflower
already being told to leave the show
to indicate something off-kiltered
hasn't show been dead for years
ff this herringbone not out of place on celluloid
glass

I dreamed of picking blackberries
how unsold the bricks seem
today's deluge and wind
want around the unsaid it being around
an unexpected plunge into winter
feels the heat and while I'm not eating a cat
my skin looks scalded
each of my shoe treads preserved
evidence of having left the house

14th February 2016

14th February 2016

yawn cracked my lip : I pained exhausted bled onto the pillow
the market traders with their shopping trolley stalls added plastic flowers
it is now after six and there are desperate people on every street
my emotions are too close to the surface my eye brim
it snows minute flakes for thirty seconds or more a ^{haloed by cigarettes} time stretch
the pavement glitter is too bright a bad sign perception wavers
tinnitus is back warning klaxon as long as I can't see shapes in the floor
I can pull back from this loosening of my tongue, the drinking
I have been cycling and not remembering
not taking enough of my medication I am not yet beyond sleep
I have been wracked with mother nightmares and waking at 5am

17th May 2016 View 1.



17th May 2016 View 2.



17th May 2016 View 3.



17th May 2016 View 4.



17th May 2016 View 5.



17th May 2016 View 6.



Impaired Drafts:

The issues that I have had cognitively impacting my ability to write academically or at all have been construed in the main body of the thesis. I include below for your edification some examples. To start with I include the text from a file on C. D Wright which I opened in March of 2023 returning from my last period of suspension due to injury and illness with no memory of what I had written and found only one line of text:

C. D Wright

The poems on the body/nature/feminism/unruly/inconvenient body/feminism/body as functioning rather than object/long lines/mundanity of dailiness having poignance in accumulation/hybrid text/journal poetry.

The following fragments are either impaired drafts, or abandoned avenues of research, each unearthed from a different file.

20th March 2017

Poetry of Noticing.

Poetry in itself cannot necessarily alter laws, advance scientific discoveries or change political opinions. It can however inform, and bear witness to the environment and its changes. As Neil Astley comments 'This is the perspective we need in considering the so-called "role" of poetry in the ecological debate: a "way of being in the world'.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/feb/26/poetry>

In my work this will be referred to as a 'poetry of noticing'. In this instance poetry of noticing refers to poetry which "notices" or documents the environment as it is, or was, often specific to the author's/voice of the poems personal experience.

While diverse traditions of eco poetry can be recognised going back to the works of Wordsworth and John Clare and beyond the difference is the rapidity with which the environment and climate is changing. Recent research states how urgent the situation is "the changes of the last 60 years are unprecedented in the previous 10,000 years, a period in which the world has had a relatively stable climate and human civilisation has advanced significantly."²⁵¹

Due to the urgency of the situation, poetic responses to climate and environmental change often tend towards being polemical and emotionally charged. *Earth Shattering*, Bloodaxe's collection of eco poems describes in its back cover blurb "our headlong rush towards eco-armedgeddon". One attempt at immediacy anthropomorphises the earth and environment this collection includes Jean Binta Breeze's *earth cries* (sic) with the repeated refrain "she doesn't cry for..."²⁵² this is an attempt to elicit a sympathetic response from the reader.

This is not poetry that notices but rather poetry that makes the earth or environment into a person or body which emotes and feels. Performance poetry by its nature is often given to the polemical and political. There are accepted styles negotiated in part by it being a visual/audio medium via youtube and podcasts creating a common aesthetic often featuring a prose-like structure with extraneous phrases and less of a focus on editing, line breaks and other structures and a concern with end rhyme as this aids memorising. Its importance here

²⁵¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/15/rate-of-environmental-degradation-puts-life-on-earth-at-risk-say-scientists>

²⁵² p.203 Astley, Neil ed. *Earth Shattering Eco Poems*. Edited by Bloodaxe, 2007

is the value this form of poetry places on the lived experience of the poet and this instance that what the poet notices is what is worth noticing.

However in my own practice I have found it is possible to write poetry which attempts to avoid these problematic elements using both performance and experimental techniques to avoid the polemic and anthropomorphisation.

Experimental poetry techniques are innovative, movement of text can allow for sparseness of language producing poetry which attempts to avoid the issues associated with poetry which uses anthropomorphic and polemic techniques. I write experimental poetry which is written to be performed combining techniques from these two areas of poetry.

In the wake of the paris attacks many on social media have been sharing Warshan Shire's poem anthropomorphising an atlas "where does it hurt?/ it answered/everywhere"²⁵³

In a moment of extreme emotion many turn to this kind of poetry. The lasting impact of this style of poetry and its usefulness in adding to knowledge and understanding of climate and environmental change and damage is limited. This type of poetic response may fail to have a lasting impact once the initial trauma of the event or environmental destruction of kind has passed.

Abstract emotional anthropomorphising reactions in poetry will not have lasting resonance poetry of noticing by grounding itself in what can be/has been observed in reality documents and bears witness to current situations weather and past experiences and changes of environment.

²⁵³ <http://amberjkeyser.com/2015/11/warsan-shire/>

The difference lies in merely setting down the emotional reaction largely out of context in a broad way produces reactive poetry which has a cathartic effect for both the writer and the reader but in terms of environmental poetry which will have a lasting impact and add to the pool of knowledge which will have a lasting impact of our changing environment poetry of noticing is better placed to achieve this aim.

Poetry of noticing seeks to root itself in personal experience of weather, in sensory data to provide detailed specific idiosyncratic experience of climate and environment change. It is poetry which seeks not be message driven but image sound pattern and innovation focused. Seeking to create poetry which documents and bears witness will achieve lasting impact and add to knowledge documenting observable change in environment and climate and communicating this knowledge through poetry.

These kinds of eco poetry provide a contrast to eco poetry which uses hyperbolic and polemic language often featuring anthropomorphism of the earth and environment. In Denise Levertov's *It Should be Visible* the poem ends "this blue green globe/ suffers a canker which is devouring it".²⁵⁴ This anthropomorphism is often accompanied by imagery of disease and violence.

Aside from the histrionic tone there is the problem that the earth when anthropomorphised is often female.

Poetry of noticing by repeatedly engaging in acts of noticing of place is also concerned with documenting the bodily experience of the observer within the environment how the body and mind feels as noticing of environment is achieved by recording sensory data the

²⁵⁴ p. 194 Astley, Neil ed. *Earth Shattering Eco Poems*. Edited by Bloodaxe, 2007

condition and experience of the body of the observer plays its part in poetry of noticing.

Which is the role of the position of the observer within poetry of noticing.

Hauntology

The concept of hauntology is that even those of us who cleave to the rational (an essential practice for myself as I have dealt with delusions) is that we all carry and conjure ghosts, of the industrial past, the ever changing urban environment, our own loved ones and lost lovers and ultimately our past selves.

21st March 2017

I refute the survivor narrative currently provided by some areas of Mad studies I am not recovered, no recovery not a survivor experiencing episodes consistently, my experience of Bipolar disorder is despite medication a life-long, chronic condition which even during periods of relative stability affects me daily with symptoms from both medication and the condition itself.

21st March 2017

My experience as a neuro-divergent individual with a diagnosis of Bipolar Affective Disorder impacts on my writing, including but not limited to my hallucinatory and unusual sensory experiences, extremes of emotion and mental states in particular producing surreal imagery.

28th March 2019

Structural Sexism

Other poets who are openly Bipolar take a contrasting approach they prefer to write poetry in form and strictly edit away the disorder in order feel in control. SOURCE!!!! It for this

reason, and the power of stigma that we cannot know how many other poets edit out the elements of their condition that are apparent in their writing. For myself the process of being open and not trying to hide the symptoms in either description or in the very writing and syntax itself has allowed me to be the most prolific I have ever been in my writing career. The project consists of around 100 poems, other poems for other projects were composed during this project I have never written in this volume aside from what I was previously designated as merely scribbling in my journals.

The sense of anxiety of being outside is present too, the hyperawareness associated with anxiety leads to a deeper level of noticing of both my body and my surroundings present. Walking and Cycling studies are current forms of research into the ways in which these ways of moving through the world can impact the ways in which we write. REFERENCE

Many artists also discuss the importance of dream journaling or keeping a notebook by the bed as in this half waking/half sleeping state another form of creativity can be accessed by being in an altered state no matter what your usual experience is. SOURCE

LINK BELOW TO Place, Space and Gender by Doreen Massey and Metropoetica

The sense of the world gendering women's bodies, which leads in turn to a greater focus on the body because it constantly politicised ties into the concept of structural sexism, the world is simply not built for women, to our detriment. There are many recent examples of this, the first all-woman space-walk was cancelled at the last minute due to the realisation that they did not in fact have space suits suitable for the women's astronauts bodies
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/mar/25/nasa-all-female-spacewalk-canceled-women-spacesuits>

Among the troubling situations discussed linked to the notion of structural sexism, that the bicycle seats currently available are not suitable for professional women cyclist are most notably that the anecdotal evidence suggests this is a widespread and unacknowledged issue, and that the partners of some of the women discussed noted their partners were not aware of the damage caused due in part perhaps due to a widespread issue that women's anatomy is not as well known as men's. This was evidenced recently by the fact that a photograph of the muscle structure of woman's bodies went viral recently because of the depiction of women's milk ducts simply because a lot of people were unaware of what a woman's anatomy looks like, including the author of this article quoted below on the phenomenon

"It has taken a viral tweet for thousands of people to realize that all human bodies are not male bodies – and that women's muscular systems look different from men's. To be fair, the image, which displays milk ducts in all their raw, floral detail, is indeed a new one for many of our eyes (my own included). That isn't out of personal ignorance, or at least not entirely. It's also because American scientific and medical education – and, troublingly, research, treatment and standards – presume the male body is the default."²⁵⁵

this revelation for many who have previously seen the male body as default in any form of anatomy education has revealed the ways in which the female body is othered in society.

²⁵⁵ *How a viral image of breasts exposes science's obsession with the male body* | Jill Filipovic (2019) *the Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/26/women-anatomy-body-default-female-male>.

All these examples come from articles published in the last few months, while I have been looking for examples of the ways in which women's bodies are impacted by the gendered world being set on a male default which does point to a growing awareness of the issue.

in another instance of ways in which women's bodies are at risk due to structural sexism not taking our variation in bodies to account.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/feb/23/truth-world-built-for-men-car-crashes>

16th December 2016 ²⁵⁶

"...I am shaken by the car bump still and today as several vehicles rolled onto the cycle path I flinched and shook I will not let fear take me off my bike I refuse to have my freedom curtailed even in the face of the news of the minister who cardoored a cyclist and said there are too many cycle lanes in London a woman was kicked down the stairs in Berlin and another attacked in Whalley range on Mayfield Road at 10 am something hasty and uncaring has been uncorked the masks are not worn anymore and all it says that as a woman and a cyclist I am supposed to be scared by drivers with no care for my safety the liberty of my body the men who holler for me to give them a ride they know we are frightened and fright amuses them"²⁵⁷ P.64

²⁵⁶256 P.64 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

²⁵⁷ P.64 Anna Percy Poetry Manuscript

Images of Notebooks from the Project:

As many of the notebooks used as I could find.



outside de code against it

residual makes quilt

then is a sign saying

something like "everything

is integrated too unequal which

is bad for everyone" today

the back of city hall front

more noise and yellow noise

ted on trees and lamp

setting up for MIF

Not walking - the walking and
coping studies show.
The assumption that everyone
can walk all the time

- Gendered body - p. 10
Structural sexism - the
world not being built
for women

- The mentally ill body
is building upon the
more recent work of
women writing about
the opened gendered
body you are

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women writing about
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body you are

Aim for
 meetings
 every two
 weeks with
 tutors on their own
 as it will help the
 progress

common
 place

10,000 of a whole
 whole that part
 by December (or
 early) saw in what way
 two needs WHAT EVER
 YOU HAVE

what of
 people with
 mental health
 illness
 to be
 hyper-aware
 hyper-attentive

gendered
 what of which
 what of which
 what of which

Process Poems

October 2015

Today there are blue skies in Paris sky
there are children who have never seen
a sky so clear thought it a screen based illusion
smog that grew reached us and the news gone the
In Manchester a rare clear sky
that has become so unfamiliar
thought time had and my mind had created
such clarity of atmosphere out
I searched for a scrap of cumulus
found only an aeroplane trail vertical
The sun was starting to set
threw a rosy glow on crowd
white tower blocks in Hulme,
I cycled and all the traffic receded up
underneath that blue
Crossed the junction
spinning out to each quarter of the city
and Salford where the trucks rise
roaring join the cars
this is where the snarl up
begins each turn faced
with more bodies vehicles
the centre has been torn
internal buzzing starts heart pounding as
legs are slowed by obstacles
each street finds new tram works or roadworks
broken concrete and steel railings
get larger in my mind

I lock the door fret over the bashed in
part of the frame rammed with a recycling bin
think of the secretive door of Hill House
facing woods barbed wire and bluebells
the front door never opened the black side door
weathered and stiff the knack to open it
once surprised by an angry man who
journeyed up the drive to shout about ragwort
the shed where the key was kept next to pheasants
pine semi circle enclosing and absorbing sound

there is a man in a tshirt with a red vacuum cleaner
bent over in the passenger seat arse crack over his jeans
he won't want to do this in a month's time
among the dented nitrous capsules
flattened carling cans and the leaves
which have started falling finally
there is a clutch of hair wavy dark blonde
like my mother's a length not a whole heads
worth remind myself they sell it
though that is often cut unwilling

My parents bungalow the thock of the cat flap this house does not shake how unsolid my flat
seems wavering on the second floor many nights I have laid in the bath/bed with fear the
bed/bath without warning will fall through the floor

Anthropomorphism poem edit.

The streets have houses which look like faces
only in the style of Picasso
foxes live and sometimes shriek their terrible shriek
cats too park gates squeal with rust
none of those things are words
they are gifted no language
the crow on the eaves near my bed only caws
there are no mynah birds in Whalley Range
people speak in languages remote from my own
Punjabi, Gujarati, countless others
but the cobbled streets say nothing.

21st October 2020

My notebooks have been closed more than open using two to prop up the laptop on the 70s zebra footstool an attempt at a flattering angle on zoom a book was edited yes one lockdown poem snuck in a book drains you like the obvious I was shagged out of poems for months how much of my scrawl I have written before how did I fill endless notebooks? A flurry of words kissing the pages lustily urgent poetry is lost to me for whole chunks of time like my other appetites it induces fear of the page of my thoughts the week and half late period that shook me I could not write that down till I cramped I came back to the white expanse
