The Lonely Page

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Introduction

Emily DeDakis, editor (Queen's University Belfast)

The Lonely Page started out as a simple notion: Creative writers working in universities ought to have an academic conference where they could feel utterly at home. No one at *The Lonely Page* would register shock when you revealed that a portion of your Ph.D. thesis was dedicated to writing a novel. There would be no nods of vague comprehension when you explained that, in order to study the difference between stage and screen dialogue, you were writing stage- and screenplay versions of the same original story. *The Lonely Page* would cover all the aspects of studying creative writing theory, with space and time set aside for refining ideas through scholarly debate; for the thoughtful critique of creative work; and for the performance of creative work for an audience.

Over 250 universities in the UK and Ireland offer creative writing MAs (we know – we licked the stamps!), and a good number of those have established Ph.D. programmes as well. The exact requirements for these research degrees vary from place to place, but the common strand within creative writing theses is that literary practice and theory are a marriage of equals: We investigate through both reading (as in traditional literary criticism) and the creation of original writing. Creative writing theory, by and large, focuses on the writing process – its tools, contexts, approaches, and intentions – rather than the writing product. The interdisciplinary tendency is very strong, and topics often link literature with anthropology, education, psychology, politics, history, even computer programming.

The Lonely Page committee started out as five Ph.D. students (Lisa Keogh, Ruth Hartle, Darran McCann, Paul Maddern and

myself) based in the School of English at Queen's University Belfast. Even between the five of us, research topics and approaches differed wildly: speech acts, myth theory, historical fiction, poetry performance and political philosophy. But as we scattered off to different academic conferences (the closest matches we could find to our own academic topics) we came to realise that we had more in common with each other in terms of practice. And we realised that, despite the growing number of students engaged in this kind of study, there were precious few conferences dedicated to it, and none dealing with the full scope of the study. We decided it was time to keep each other company.

So we put our notion into action, and the result was a creative writing conference at Queen's University Belfast on 6th and 7th March 2009. *The Lonely Page* evolved naturally into a collaboration of many different kinds of writers at all levels; delegates were not only students of creative writing, affiliated to a university or not, but also professors and programme directors. Delegates came from all parts of the UK and Ireland, as well as from Greece and the United States. The response was terrific; the essays, poetry and prose included in this eBook are testament to the range and rigour of the writers who attended.

As it was *The Lonely Page* conference's inaugural year, the theme pitched to delegates was 'beginnings and solitude.' Though it ended up being a rich topic that many of the delegates drew on for their writings, content generated for and shared at *The Lonely Page* would be nigh impossible to categorise. Topics touched on during the conference included (list alphabetical but in no way exhaustive):

- the Amazon river
- Jane Austen
- Roland Barthes
- Bruno Bettelheim

- Paul Celan
- collaboration
- confession
- creative writing workshops
- critical reflection
- Bruce Chatwin
- Cinderella
- Choose Your Own Adventure
- colour
- erosion
- "eureka!"
- fact vs. fiction
- faith vs. doubt
- the German Democratic Republic
- Alasdair Gray
- Michael Loyd Gray
- imagery
- limbo
- literary influence
- location
- meditation
- Czeslaw Milosz
- Dennis O'Driscoll
- Oulipo
- painting
- Pascale Petit
- polemic
- postcards
- praxis
- psychoanalysis
- research within creative writing
- short-short fiction
- silence
- the Sony eReader
- Street Fighter
- suicide
- teaching creative writing
- video games
- vocabulary
- Waterstone's
- "what if?"
- Yeats

— and that was just in the academic essays. The essays from the conference included here are by Shauna Busto Gilligan, Ellie Evans, Anne Lauppe-Dunbar, Micaela Maftei, David Manderson, Stephanie Norgate and Jayne Sandys-Renton, Richard Simpson, Laura Tansley, and Cherry Smyth.

In addition to the academic essays, writers were invited to submit separate creative works for critique or performance. The prose and poetry included here was showcased at our Saturday night reading, headlined by Irish novelist and playwright Roddy Doyle, and comes from writers Micaela Maftei, David Manderson, Barbara A. Morton, Cath Nichols, Karen Stevens, Laura Tansley, and Cherry Smyth.

In this written record of the conference, you'll get a sense of the sheer variety of writerly voices heard that weekend in Belfast, but also a sense of these voices' natural connection, and of the importance of this forum for university-based writers, or anyone interested in the craft of writing.

Professional input for *The Lonely Page* was invaluable, and our thanks go to Rodge Glass and Roddy Doyle (our special guest speakers), Jocelyn Ferguson and Carlo Gébler (plenary session chairs), Glenn Patterson (prose panel chair), Matt Kirkham (poetry panel chair), Ian Sansom (prose workshop facilitator), and Miriam Gamble and Eoghan Walls (poetry workshop facilitators). The committee is also grateful to the friends and volunteers who supported the conference, and for the funding we received from Queen's to make *The Lonely Page* happen: Grants came from the School of English (as well as moral support from John Thompson and Gerry Hellawell); the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences' Dragon's Den project; and the Student Initiative Scheme. Many thanks to all the delegates for their hard work on preparing these pieces, and to Dorian Grieve, Rebecca DeWald, Shona Allison and Nessa Johnston at *eSharp*.

This eBook – far from concluding *The Lonely Page* – is meant to keep the dialogue about creative writing theory alive and ticking forward. If you've got any questions, answers or curiosities, keep in touch. For more details about *The Lonely Page* 2009, to contact any

of the writers, or to talk about the potential for future publications and conferences, visit www.thelonelypage.co.uk or write to us at thelonelypage@qub.ac.uk. Thanks for reading.

Suicide, solitude and the persistent scraping

Shauna Busto Gilligan (NUI Maynooth/University of Glamorgan)

Introduction: The scraping

The scraping continued. I sat bolt upright in the small, cozy bed, flinging the ornate bedcover back. I thought of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and wondered whether this was one of those moments. When my mind was starting to slip, when what I was reading echoed what I was going through, when what I was writing reflected what I had been through. Whilst my mind had jumped to self-berating conclusions, the scraping had turned to crunching. The crunching of a very nice oatmeal biscuit that sat beside the cup I had drunk tea from just a few hours earlier.

This, I realized, was the solitude people assigned to writers.

A moment of entrapment – me, a mouse, an oatmeal biscuit in a B&B in Cardiff on a cold December Friday night – was typical of the sacrifices a writer makes. Fear struck me, however, and I could not even transform this moment of solitude into a means to an end, to write a little – hell, even to read a little. Instead, I lay back down again, and in the darkness listened to the persistent scraping and scratching.

This paper, blending academic theory and personal experience, will examine the dilemmas centered around the why and the how of writing, focusing particularly on space and place around trying to beat that persistent scraping – or scratching or itching – of writing – without which, as writers, we would be nowhere. Finally I will take a look at what we write, centering on one of the main

themes in *Presenting Dirk Horne* (my novel, which I am currently editing) – suicide.

The why of writing: On being a writer

Writers are set apart from the mainstream whilst having to function within it. The individual and personal experience of the author writing, somewhat weighted by the public response to the reading of the novel-in-progress and novel-as-published – in other words, the public reaction to private solitude – is the balancing act which writers contend with, surrounded by the ever-changing goalposts of the creative and the commercial. The title of this conference – *The Lonely Page* – echoes both dilemmas that writers have: the need to fill the page to beat the loneliness that the empty page represents, the loneliness that the written-on page can swallow up as it is being read; and who we are as writers – the need to be a part of and yet separate from the busy stream that is life.

It also encapsulates the very essence of what it means to be a writer; writing creates meaning and there is a very real fear when writing that our words may be meaningless, go nowhere, may never be read. It is this risk that we take as writers – that what we create through necessity, through desire, through our art, may not mean anything to anybody – that echoes the vast gulf that suicide tries to fill. It is a void which can be fertile or futile. We write in private for what must be a public audience – by virtue of its publication, performance or reading. It is through the act of writing that we purge ourselves of that need to write – in a way, cancelling ourselves out as we write, the words bringing the meaning to life.

Roland Barthes, in his examination of authors and writers, differentiates between function and activity, assigning the function to the author and the activity to the writer. The author, he says 'gains

the power to disturb the world, to afford it the dizzying spectacle of *praxis* without sanction' (Sontag 1982, p.188-190). As writers, then, we are both authors and writers (as Barthes later says) and, in this role we experience praxis through the act of writing whilst also affording a spectacle of praxis to our readers. Yet whilst words have the power to disturb the world, there is also the other side of the coin, as Franco Moretti says:

> the substantial function of literature is to *secure consent*. To make individuals feel 'at ease' in the world they happen to live in […] to convince oneself that this is really the best of all possible worlds. (1988, p.27, 40)

Writing, then, has the power to both disturb and reassure both writer and reader. Writing is cyclical: It brings the writer and, in turn, the reader through praxis and consent. And it is through the birth of the reader that the writer's existence (and *raison d'être*) is verified; characters bloom, come to life, the message is received. After all, 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (Barthes 1977, p.146-48) – the origin being the private, the solitary; the destination being very public and within a social context (where books are borrowed, bought, exchanged). Yet the act of writing is not that simple. As W.B. Yeats says in 'The Choice', 'the intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life or of the work' (Yeats 1989, p.246).

The how of writing

And so, we very often choose the work. I wholeheartedly agree with John Cleese, who says that you have to create boundaries to write: boundaries of space and boundaries of time (2008). We have to create the *right* time and space boundaries *within* the right

physical space. I certainly wasn't in the right physical space to write in my B&B that night – even though my mind, being in the right psychological space, did process a lot of what I would later write down: the 'wide awake and terrified of a small creature in the corner' equivalent of sleeping on it.

It took me a long time to move from pen and paper to keyboard and screen. By acknowledging how hard I find it to move between the two mediums, I realize how important the notion of the space in which we write is. Where do you write? In a dedicated 'writing' office? At the kitchen table? In coffee shops amid the hubbub? Anywhere at all? I write at the kitchen table, just as I did my homework as a school child at the kitchen table. I recognize this as definitely an attachment associated with positive learning and creative expression. Deborah Lupton in *The Emotional Self* suggests that using a mouse has the effect of:

> suggesting that the computer is responding in an interactive way to the user's thoughts … people … may come to see [computers] as an extension of the self, as human-like with moods and personalities (particularly when they fail to work as expected) and may even give them names (1998, p.146).

Lupton's suggestion is reminiscent of the association many writers have with certain pencils, pens or a particular notepads. Bruce Chatwin wrote on yellow legal pads and said he could always detect when writing had been written directly on a computer; Desmond Hogan writes with the same pen that he draws with and then transfers it to a manual typewriter (Desmond Hogan, personal communication, 22 October 2009). Personally, I have no preference for a particular pen or paper, nor have I named my mouse. I do not have a real attachment to the hardware I associate with writing; it is the place of writing for me that enables the creative process – the

physical and psychological place of writing – which is more often than not a lonely place.

In Paul Auster's *Ghosts* the main protagonist, Blue, who has been turned into a writer by his own double, realizes the terror the writer feels: 'There is no story, no plot, no action – nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book … But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room?' (p. 172) And yet, that man sitting alone in a room and writing a book would not be doing so had he not had an urge or need to discover, to write, and with this urge those dark moments of despair that inevitably accompany praxis. I would suggest that the praxis writers experience – often at an unconscious level – is actually the gift of writing being used. This 'gift' of writing is at once a present, a presence and a curse when it comes to hitting that wall of creativity:

> Before anything, writing demands. […] having given all one's time, in addition to solitude […] one finds only to have no – or not enough – time to write […] having set all one's time from worldly obligations, renounced all hope for ordinary happiness it is not that one can at last sit down and begin to write. (Baross 2000, p.453)

In *Writing Degree Zero* Barthes declares, 'Style […] is the writer's glory and his prison, *it is his solitude'* (Sontag 1982, p.32, my emphasis). What the blank page or screen represents, then, is the solitude of writing – that without the structures of story, plot or action to prop us up and support the aimless words, we are without focus, without aim, without a reason. Solitude is thus a double edged sword – feeling there is no meaning in what you are doing (writing) and realizing that the meaning *is* what you are doing (writing). We are engaging with our own gift, our praxis. To write, we need time.

To write well, we need time and space. To write as writers we need time and space on psychological, emotional and physical levels.

The what of writing: On suicide and solitude

We make time, we create space, we write. But then what? Yeats concludes in 'The Choice',

> When all that story's finished, what's the news?
> In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
> That old perplexity an empty purse,
> Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse. (1989, p.247)

One of the central themes in my novel *Presenting Dirk Horne* is suicide, and in writing about suicide, I find the solitude of writing and the feelings of isolation echo the sentiments of those who attempt suicide. If, as we inferred earlier, writing gives a sense of meaning to life for both writer and reader, suicide declares that there is no meaning to life. Through writing we engage with the Other (reader); in suicide no engagement is possible. We write because we hope to create meaning; in suicide there is no hope because no meaning can be found. The solitude of the writer reflects the solitude of the action of death. That solitude then becomes through its action (suicide; writing) a multitude – the fan effect of the consequence (mourning the death; reading the writing).

I have come, through my research, to realize that in writing about suicide I am trying to capture and mark 'the intensity of immorality in a given society' (Durkheim 1961, p.50). Durkheim's writing, analyzing suicide statistics in nineteenth-century France, is all the more relevant in our society today – despite the doubt around his statistical analyses.

Consider that one of his main premises was that suicide is a product of rapid change in society and in moral structure, happening

in boom and in slump times because of the disruptive changes in patterns of economic social life. Suicide for Durkheim was 'a phenomenon which threatened the existence not only of society but also of the individual' (Tomasi 2000, p.12). Again, we are brought back to the dilemma of the solitary individual within society where we must acknowledge that 'the work of every novelist … is explicitly or implicitly a social commentary on the time in which it is written' (Mendilow 1967, p.256-57).

But how do we write about a topic so complex and sensitive as suicide? People die by suicide because the fear of living seems more painful than the fear of dying. Is it this fear that we are trying to quell when we write? The fear of living and letting?

A desire to commit suicide is a desire to stop a force of such intense and invisible and indescribable pain that words are usually inadequate to express the full intensity of such anguish. (O'Callaghan 2002, p.38)

Reading Gareth O'Callaghan's words, I ask myself: if words are inadequate to express the full intensity of such anguish, how, as a writer, can I write the words to express this very anguish? And is writing itself a contrary condition to suicide in that it acknowledges some sort of meaning?

The key, for me, lies in characterization. Fiction always reflects our reality in some way. It is through the interaction of the central characters and their narratives (in *Presenting Dirk Horne*, the characters of Dirk and his mother Mary) within the real context of Irish society that suicide is explored. It is a showing rather than a telling – and whilst words are used to show, they are not adequate to tell of the anguish of suicide. Tristan Hughes, Welsh novelist, declared that one of his characters, Ricky, 'wrote himself'.

It was only when I finished the first draft of Presenting Dirk Horne that I realized where Hughes was coming from. Whilst

writing the novel, I tended to get stuck inside the meanings of the messages I was trying to convey about Irish society, about suicide, about growing up, about identity. It was only when I had purged myself of these messages that the persistent scraping inside my head disappeared. In *finishing* the novel I was able to take a step back and look at what my words were saying *through* the characterization. The urge that is within us, that itch that needs persistent scratching, is what forms the voice that comes out through the characterization, and the messages through plot formation. In a way, both my main characters had 'written themselves.'

It was only in going through this state of praxis *through* writing the novel that I was able to look at the form, the structure, the plot from the outside in and start the very laborious process of editing. I had stepped out of the private and into the public.

Conclusion: Meaning and survival

In stepping out of the private into the public, what is achieved? Katie Gramich states in her review of the latest collections by Welsh poets Gillian Clarke and Christine Evans that 'In telling us who they are and how they came to be made and shaped by this land, they also show us who we are' (2008). Roland Barthes once referred to Proust as a 'complete world reading system' (1985, p.194), and declared that 'Writing is precisely this compromise between freedom and remembrance' (Sontag 1982, p.37).

Yet writing, I believe, also has a lot to do with faith. On February 1st, 1996, while working on *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* Brian Friel wrote a note in his diary that began with a line from the 17th-century French thinker Blaise Pascal: 'he carried out the gestures and by doing this he found faith'; Friel added, 'Sitting at the desk. Leafing through notes. *Hoping to find faith*' (O'Toole 2009, p.4;

my emphasis). Faith in what? Faith, I believe, in ourselves, in our world, faith that we can become 'at ease' and then challenge that very ease in an effort to better things.

As the *why* of writing is always firmly set in personal experience alongside our place of being whilst writing – reflecting the time of writing – we must conclude that writing (the act itself and the resulting act of reading) creates and recreates meaning in an ever-changing world. Writing secures consent, as Moretti claims, yet it also pushes for change. We need to be secure in our place before we can move on. It is writing itself, not just poetry, that "crystallises people's feelings about themselves and the world, *and if it can show people how to feel in new ways in response to unprecedented changes in the world, it will help us to survive*" (Smith 2008; my emphasis).

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Game: A media for modern writers to learn from?

Richard Simpson (Liverpool John Moores University)

Gaming, like writing, stems from the imagination. This paper will primarily look at whether the modern phenomenon of video games has anything to offer the modern writer. We know that stories and narrative influence gaming, but can this work the other way? It is certainly fair to say that writers have played games with words and narrative over the years: one only has to look at Raymond Queneau and his Oulipo movement to see this. But can the way in which these games are designed be translated to assist authors when approaching more traditional writing forms? For the purposes of this paper I will refer predominantly to the genres of science fiction and fantasy, given that they are common genres in both literature and gaming.

When creating a modern video game the game designer gives the player choices: Should I be good, evil or indifferent? What route should I take through the game (i.e. – do I just want to play through the main plot line, or should I progress in a less linear fashion and explore the world or search for unusual artefacts?)? These are the choices that incite the player to play the game, along with other features like graphics, control interface, and genre.

For the author, inciting the reader to read on is no less complex, as they ask the reader to follow the route that they have already chosen for the narrative to take, confining the reader to infer what they will from what is or isn't written on the page. Bruno Bettelheim explores this concept in his *The Uses of Enchantment*, by comparing the fable to the fairy tale:

> The fairy tale, in contrast, leaves all decisions up to us, including whether we wish to make any at all. It is up to us whether we wish to make any application to our life from a fairy tale, or simply enjoy the fantastic events it tells about. Our enjoyment is what induces us to respond in our own good time to the hidden meanings, as they may relate to our life experience events it tells about. Our enjoyment is what induces us to respond in our own good time to the hidden meanings, as they may relate to our life experience and present state of personal development. (1991, p.43)

Much as the context of the medium may differ slightly, the point translates both in terms of how the reader/player chooses what they take from the text, and what they do within the game, and how this can change depending on the demographic of the reader/player. In the way that games designers have to be aware of the choices they provides for the player, as authors, we need to be aware how the choices we make with regard to plot, characterisation, and genre impact on the reader. We are in essence the game designer *and* player, creating and playing the game to provide an insight into our game, for our readers.

When, as writers, we create a world, we do so in order to give a backdrop to a story that we want to tell. It is there to facilitate the movements of our characters and to add to the immersion of the reader within the scope of a story. This is especially important depending on genre, as individual genres do this in different ways. In this respect, the sci-fi and fantasy genres are of particular interest. In a game, the world is a means in itself as the player will explore it for the sake of seeing everything a game has to offer. This ideal of creating a world that is immersive for the player is explored by Richard A. Bartle in his game design textbook *Designing Virtual Worlds*, in which he refers to the 'holodecks' in *Star Trek* to illustrate his point:

> The holodeck is a programmable environment with which real (in the context of the show) people can interact as if it were (their) reality. For example, a character might create and then enter a simulation of Victorian London, assuming the role of Sherlock Holmes. This works on the screen better than it does on the page because the world and the character's degree of immersion in it are immediately apparent. They require no unveiling. The situation is at once accepted and the episode can progress to examine the issues it suggests. This can't happen in a book unless you're already familiar with the concept of the holodeck from the TV show. (2003, p.69)

In the sci-fi or fantasy genres, the world is key to the reader experience and the writer has to make their world explorable. This task is different for the writer; the writer engages the reader through use of language and character interaction, as well as the world the characters inhabit. Bartle also raises a valid point about the immediate immersion given by the visuals on screen. The point translates to video games as well as TV. In a video game, immersion is much easier to achieve as the player is able to interact with the world through their avatar within the game. Despite this, the game world still has to appeal to the player and reward their effort, otherwise they will not have the desire to continue playing. In the same way, the writer can use his world to incite the reader to continue reading; both the writer and game designer have to consider ways of making the reader/game player continue reading/playing.

By creating a wider world and anthropology, the writer can draw the reader further into their world. Setting and history do not have be a major feature in the narrative but can be hinted at, hopefully capturing the imagination of the reader and inciting them to want to further explore the world of the author. Adding richness to the text can be especially effective during a travel narrative.

Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series does this very well, as each city/location he visits throughout the story has its own very defined culture and customs (similar to the cultures of the various alien races in *Star Trek*). Jordan uses location to define culture and at points uses individual cultures to drive narrative by using them to give characters inciting action thus luring the reader into the idea of a journey of exploration. When used in this manner, the travel narrative becomes comparable to that created by a gamer within a sandbox-style game (a free-roaming game in which the player can choose to explore the world, and is not forced to follow a set narrative arc). Therefore, we can see similar techniques being employed to incite the reader/player to continue following the narrative.

However, there are also differences. As writers we create characters for the reader to live vicariously through, by giving our characters costumes and describing personality and by showing the actions of our characters and their impact on the world around them. In video games this can work differently, as the player can either choose a pre-created avatar or create their own. Generally each avatar will lend itself to a different style of play. For example in the *Street Fighter* series of games (1987-), the player can choose strong or fast characters. E. Honda, a sumo wrestler, is slow but has some of the most powerful attacks in the game; he differs from Chun Li who, whilst lacking power, is fast and can land attacks very quickly. This is represented both visually and through the gameplay. Alternatively, in a game like Bethesda Softworks' recent post-apocalyptic role-playing game (RPG) *Fallout 3* (2008), the player starts the game by customising the attributes of their character. As the game progresses, the player can pick up items of clothing which lead the player to interact and almost create their own version the game world in their mind's eye. For example, if the player chooses to wear a duster and cowboy hat the world takes on a western genre feel. Likewise there

is the option to wear *Mad Max*-style clothing or futuristic armour, creating a totally different character and world feel.

This level of customisation is a large part of what incites the player to start playing a game. They are able to project themselves into the avatar, giving them a link to a character that they are able to create themselves, using the tools the game designer provides. A writer cannot leave characters so open, so they have to attempt to evoke sympathy from the reader in order to incite them to read and follow the character's journey.

When driving narrative/plot forward, the writer has a number of tools at their disposal – character action (or inaction) and dialogue being the primary methods used to achieve this. The game developer also uses these devices but also must be aware of the interactivity required by his genre. As already discussed, the narrative in game can move in different directions depending on the players whims. This effect is achieved through offering the player dialogue choices which can open new narrative paths or quests whilst closing others. For example, in Bethesda Softworks' *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, the player would be approached by different factions within that game world. By allying with one of factions, you are denied the opportunity to work with the other. Furthermore, if the player's subsequent actions are not in keeping with the goals of the allied faction, the player may find they lose that faction's support, thus also closing off that narrative strand. So between player action and dialogue choices we can see the plot arc that the player follows is potentially different with every replaying of the game. This also reveals how the author of the game still controls narrative strands.

Vladmir Propp starts to explore this dual authorship in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), when he sets out the basic components of the fairy tale in order to allow writers to reconstruct these elements as we wish to. This approach permits the writer to

construct formulae around which they can flesh out a story, through their choice of the elements Propp offers, elements which are too numerous to discuss here. Indeed, they provide most of the content within the book, suffice to say that Propp takes each character, and give them a label.[1] For example, the Hero could be labelled 'A', and the Princess 'B'. He then lists many scenarios for each and breaks these down further to individual actions and occurrences within the scenarios giving each action/occurrence a number. So if 'The Hero rescues the Princess from a dungeon' is categorised 'X' and we have a subcategory of 'The Princess kisses the Prince when he enters the dungeon' is categorised 'X1' because it occurs within the context of 'X', we can construct the following 'A X B X1.' This is equivalent to the Prince entering the dungeon, getting to the Princess, and her giving him a kiss. As writers, we can change the formula or the context as we see fit, altering the reader's experience of our work in the same way that two players within a sandbox style game environment will have totally different narrative experiences even if they undertake very similar actions.

To take this a step further we can look at 'game theory', an economic concept regarding the impact of the choice, and opportunity cost – i.e. the reward we might gain from our choices, versus what we could potentially lose. As an example, take the following scenario: I am playing a video game and can choose to play as either a warrior or a wizard. I chose the warrior because he will give me the most pleasure, but this comes at the cost of not being able to employ magic as a style of play. Without magic, there will be quests I can't complete and factions I can't engage with. Therefore, my choice impacts my whole experience and both limits

[1] Please note, I am not using Propp's terminology or abbreviations for ease of clarity. The constructs employed here are entirely my own and are designed merely to provide an example of how Propp's charts and formulae work.

and expands simultaneously the choices available as I play through the game. If each subsequent choice could have a similar impact (although I hasten to add video game hasn't quite reached this level of sophistication), the potential in game is for many different storylines to be played out.

Whilst it is fair to say that within the scope of a book, this type of experience is limited, it has been experimented with before. The *Choose Your Own Adventure* and *Fighting Fantasy* books of the 1970s and 1980s offered the reader a limited version of this type of role-playing experience within sci-fi/fantasy worlds. They were limited predominantly because of their media – a book only has so many pages. However, the advent of digital media such as Sony's eReader could mark a return to this style of book and offer readers the opportunity to explore different plotlines based on character choice or a slight change of events. Page and word count are no longer at the mercy of publishers' cost concerns and profit margins, given the comparative cost of e-storage to paper and ink.

Has this approach already started to filter through? Certainly in fiction, a game tie-in can work very well. Is this because the reader is familiar with the game, drawing on an established culture and anthropology, and can therefore fill in the gaps – meaning the writer can get away with being 'lazy'? Or could the popularity of this sub-genre of sci-fi/fantasy be helped along by the fact that the authors of these stories are gamers themselves and approaching their work accordingly?

During a recent workshop, a fellow student submitted a short story for the group to look at. It was a piece of 'slasher' fiction. However, instead of paying homage to films like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) or *Friday the 13th* (1980), the piece was based around *Silent Hill* (1999), a videogame in the survival horror genre. This genre is characterised by long periods where relatively little happens

but suspense is built in that time. This did not work on the page, as the short story struggled to keep the attention of the reader. Bear in mind that a feature film usually lasts for 90 to 120 minutes, whereas a video game can last 20 hours or longer, giving the game developer much longer to build suspense and play on the player's expectations and fears. However, this author did capture the 'feel' of the game visually by emulating in her description of the setting the grey and dull colours that the player would typically see on screen. It is also important to note the piece was not set within the world of *Silent Hill*, but in the real world. I refer to this because it is an interesting example of the video game gradually becoming part of the writer's canon, and also because it reinforces that those of us who refer to video games need to experiment with what works when translating the game onto the page.

As writers, is it possible for us to approach the stories we wish to tell as though we were gamers? Could we explore a plot and effectively micro-manage the choices that we make as writers, and also those that our characters make, through a greater awareness of the impact upon the future of both the character and their surrounding world, as well as the impact this will have upon the reader? By doing this, will our work be any fresher or more original in terms of narrative? Or will it dilute work in a literary form as the writer tries to do too much and strays from traditional rules for narrative development and structure?

In any case, the video game is a medium barely fifty years old; we have yet to see the true impact that it could have upon us as writers, and it may be some time yet before we can appreciate this. New technology like the Sony eReader could open up new possibilities, not just for the reader, but for the writer.

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Imaginary ledgers of spectral selves: A blueprint of existence

Christiana Lambrinidis (Centre for Creative Writing & Theatre for Conflict Resolution, Greece)

Last year in an art gallery in Glasgow I saw *Figures in a Landscape* (2004-2006), the work of Tim Davies, a Welsh artist. Davies had cut out human shapes from old - sent and received - postcards. The vacuous subjects narrated stories trespassing borders between the visible and the invisible with the speed of perception. Some of the postcards were left almost untouched. Only at the edge of the epistolary genre small figures were cut out as their shadows loomed over the torn parts. In the catalogue of the exhibit, Davies explained that 'underneath each costume is the individual. The loss of the individual is at the root of my work' (2006, p.36-7). He went on, saying that the shapes he cut out wore costumes of the 18th and 19th centuries, 'when subjugated nations sought cultural renaissance and self determination' (Davies 2006, p. 36-7). I had never been in Wales, when I saw that exhibit, and I was moved and intrigued by such a power of the invisible: invisibility as self-determination.

In Book Two of *The Republic*, Plato tells a story already told:

> There was a shepherd in the service of [a] ruler; after a great deluge of rain and an earthquake the ground opened and a chasm appeared in the place where the shepherd was pasturing, they say that he saw and wondered and went down into the chasm. He beheld other marvels there and a hallow bronze horse with little doors, and he peeped in and saw a corpse within, as it seemed, of more than mortal stature, and there was nothing else but a gold ring on its hand, which he took off, and so went forth. And when the shepherds held their customary assembly to make their monthly report

> to the king about the flocks, he also attended, wearing the ring. So as he sat there it chanced that he turned the collect of the ring toward himself, toward the inner part of his hand, and when this took place they say he became invisible to those who sat by him and they spoke of him as absent, and that he was amazed, and again fumbling with the ring turned the collect outward and so he became visible. On noting this he experimented with the ring to see if it possessed this virtue, and he found the result to be that when he turned the collect inward he became invisible, and when outward visible, and becoming aware of this he immediately managed things so that he became one of the messengers who went up to the king, and on coming there he seduced the king's wife and with her set upon the king and slew him and possessed his kingdom. (1961, p.359b-360b; my emphasis)

Depending on where each of us comes from – what practice, what conceptual and imaginary ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑ (the Greek word for 'republic') – the shepherd himself could be a practitioner of creative writing, toiling for the power of the printed word in the treacherous pastures of language; the ring, creativity; the hallow bronze horse with the little doors, meaning; the corpse of more than mortal nature, en-ghosted selves; the usurping of the kingdom, the act of writing itself, between material and textuality, memory and experience, narrativity and self-determination, visibility and invisibility.

During a workshop on violence and sexuality with illiterate Roma boys living on the street, Kadal, fourteen years old, wrote: 'Invisible. I entered a super market and bought things for my family to eat. I saw a small basket with a book in it. The book contained diabolic stuff. I read them and became invisible. I want to be human.'

Like the shepherd in Plato's told story, an object-target (the book, found not in a chasm but on the supermarket shelves) made

the body skillfully invisible and invisibility promised the Roma adolescent boy training to increases his forces - humanness. Like the shepherd, he was invisible to others, not to himself. Unlike the shepherd, visibility kept no rights for him. No means of articulation, no possibility for acquiring – violently or peacefully – a visible space for himself and his family to exercise their rights as citizens of a state. As in Cadet's cut-out forms, invisibility became a quest for self-determination – an oxymoron, since visibility is the basis for identity building.

What is visibility?

> The respect and protection of the value of the human being consist the primary obligation of the state. (Greek Constitution: Part I, Section A, Article 2)

If we are to accept Foucault's analysis of power – 'power is exercised rather than processed, power is productive as well as repressive, power arises from the bottom' – then we also accept that power constitutes subjectivities (Olsen 2006, p.19-20). If we are to position ourselves geopolitically, then the constitution of a state forms the ledger of power in the conceptualization of institutions that construct, permeate, and sustain subjectivities. Since the ledger is a manuscript that involves writing, we can believe that writing is first and foremost the recording of one's self in a mental, spiritual, psychosocial and imaginary ledger used, in essence, to understand the constructs of existence. The understanding of existence encapsulates both the value of the human being and the protection of that value. So, writing can be the means to undertake the first article of the Constitution as a right for creativity.

Kadal, the Roma street boy, finds his own ring (creativity) and uses it to articulate letters that construct possibilities of en-ghosted selves to render him invisible, yet enable him to understand

the constructs of his existence. We could say that the Constitution through creativity can also be invisible, yet very much present like the cut out shapes of the Welsh artist. The state ledger could be used like the old postcards were used: a surface upon which loss can become evident, visible, clear.

> 'Ifighenia'
> I am making myself a dress. I have designed it in my head. It is for that day.
> The seamstresses – the good ones – originate my design.
> They clothe me with tears, a plethora of women. I pull back not to spoil the garment.
> I want everything on me to be superb. I want to be superb today.
> They show me the way.
> They escort me. Men escort me.
>
> Lit candles encircle the dress.
> The flame occupies itself with the fabric, engulfs it and the dress is consumed.

Ifighenia – not the textual daughter of Agamemnon, but a member of a creative writing group at the Center for Creative Writing & Theatre for Conflict Resolution – writes in response to the origins of her name. She disperses herself within invisibilities she constructs – an absent body and a dress made visible by 'skillful seamstresses' as she, the creative writer, de-contextualizes Euripides' Iphigenia in Aulis – the 'corpse perhaps with more than mortal stature'. In this case, the I becomes the ring, creativity. She 'usurps' the kingdom by usurping the fate of the original story. How much of the tragedy is traced within narratives of state and promise? Perhaps Agamemnon or Clytemnestra – even Iphigenia herself – wrote the Constitution in the hopes of producing subjugated citizens, obedient selves in the pathos of pain.

The difference between the commonwealth (for the good of the community, Iphigenia must be sacrificed) and ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑ ('republic') is the enforcement of an imaginary investment of ritualistic 'de-scapegoating', as it would be called in family therapy; where gender undertakes the responsibility to exercise conceptual articles of a constitution that exists to produce and sustain the subjectivities of pain viewed as engendered paradigms of self.

> I am called Spindizic Magbula. I am 43 years old. Mother Vasvia, father Halil. Province, Bratunac. Village, Potcaus. I lived in my house, before the war. My husband was a driver. My children were going to school. There were four. Animals, I had a cow and some sheep. I had two acres of fertile land. When war started, the children and the husband left for Sremprenjica on May 10, 1992. I was a housewife, I stayed home to keep the animals and the house. On May 13, 1992, they began cleaning Bratunac. That day I was banished for Tuzla. I had to leave the house and the animals. I came to Tuzla like the worst beggar to live in this school Tzemal Mantzic. I have been here for 2 and half years. I have nobody, I am alone and I live through these bitter and difficult days. My husband was in Sremprenjica in the front. On April 1993, I heard a tragedy I cannot forget. My children are alone in Sremprenjica, without either of their parents. When they took us to the trucks they were asking from us money and gold. Whoever had it should give otherwise they would destroy him. I left it all. Money, gold, the animals there. When they took us away I couldn't take anything with me. Everything stayed behind. My only hope in life is to return home and my greatest hope is to see my children.

So writes Spindizic Magbula, a Bosnian refugee, during a creative writing workshop in a refugee camp in Tuzla. The original text was in Serbo-Croatian. Since then, Serbo-Croatian has become an invisible language; it was forbidden to exist after the civil war, as if imposed and surveilled lexicon(s) could perform acts of assumed equalities, as if constitutions could be re-written eradicating the

history of words, of concepts, of meaning. Traumatizing maps meant traumatizing mental, spiritual, psychosocial and imaginary ledgers used, in essence, to understand the constructs of existence.

Spindizic Magbula, a vacuous subject not to herself but to others, wishes to see her children and return home. For Spindizic Magbula, wishing is self-determination and seeing is the 'respect and protection of the value of the human being'. She herself becomes a site for the fulfillment of an invisible, imaginary constitution. And here the right to creativity turns into a mirage. The adhesion to the self is the first grip of madness born like a mirage, says Foucault. When human rights are violated, blown to pieces, subjectivities, however wounded, take it upon themselves to turn invisibility into rights – even if madness looms over them like the shadows over the cut-out figures in Tim Davies' postcards. The act of writing is an act of survival and survival is visible. In survival, meaning is real and tragedy summons itself to be of use, as it is fluent in constructing meaning of the real out of the unreal. Creativity turns pain into the tool of writing and writing becomes a visible condition of self-protection of the value of human beings; madness learns to perform itself as ring in the hands of the survivor-writer.

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Actual testimony from Spindizic Magbula, a woman who participated at a writing and empowerment workshop in Tuzla, Bosnia, in November 1994. I went to Tuzla, to conduct writing workshops at the refugee camps and participate at the international conference "Is Europe Possible Without Multiculturalism?", November 3-5, 1994. The conference was organized by the Forum of Tuzla Citizens (FTC), the Verona Forum from Brussels and the Association of Independent Intellectuals Circle 99 from Sarajevo.

The Centre for Creative Writing & Theatre for Conflict Resolution, first of its kind in Greece, was founded by Christiana Lambrinidis in Athens. An autonomous, flexible, cultural refuge, dedicated to creative writing and theater intervention as acts of contemplation, literature, theory and community. Committed to social change, the Center organizes and implements seminars, workshops, writing projects and performances with the voiceless and the voiced from the invisible to the visible borders.

Performances in international organizations, universities, theaters, refugee camps: "Rifts in Silence: How Courage Is Taught" (1995-1996), "A Mythography of Courage: Bosnian Women Speak" (1996-1997), "Lesbian Blues" (1998), "When Whisper Becomes a Voice" (2002), "A Breast Beyond" (2003), "Logarithms of Secretion: Medeas and Masculinities" (2005), "Rehearsing Sex..." (2006).

Feminist in its conception and methodology, the Center fosters the first collections of women's writing in Greece: (Landscapes of Empowerment, Alternative Press, 1995), (Rifts in Silence: How Daring Is Taught, Fournos Editions, 1995), (Lesbian Blues, Women's Editions, 1998). The Center nurtures a consistent flow of new writers in a Publishing Project (2002 - 2011): Athina Masoula, "On a Jagged Knife", "Lions of Affliction" (Garvrilidis Editions), Aggeliki Stratigopoulou,"I Will Ask Daddy No More" (Melani Editions), "Annunciation" (Kastaniotis Editions), Aphrodite Kapnoutzi, "The Matter was the Elephant" (Dodoni Editions), Eugenia Fragoulidou, "When Antigone does not cough, she listens" (Dodoni Editions), Danai Soulis, "The Rip" (Iridanos Editions), Stephanos Papadimitriou, "The dyslexic mouth of bilingual monsters" (Iridanos Editions), Maria Tsaroucha, " The Lucid Empty Head" (Iridanos Editions), Akis Sidiropoulos, "The Vagabond of Jerusalem", Elena Alessandratou, " Le Train Sucree", Mersini Samara, "A Couch In The Jungle", Kyriaki Frantzi, "Beograd's Voices", Alexandros Aidonopoulos, "Lacquered Tongues".

‘The writing is the thing’: Reflections on teaching creative writing

Micaela Maftei (University of Glasgow)

In the late autumn of 2008, I began running weekly creative writing workshops for undergraduate students at the University of Glasgow. Workshops ran for five weeks in the first academic term and for five weeks in the second term; they terminated in the final week of February 2009. The workshops culminated in a printed anthology of student work from my own and two other such workshops. This class was not for credit and entirely voluntary, but a brief application process aimed to ensure a level of commitment and preparedness on the part of the student. These classes have run for the past three years through Student Services in response to student demand. I received no special training before running these workshops, beyond my own academic experiences and work as a postgraduate creative writing student.

I discovered unexpected diversity in the academic backgrounds of my students; most were not literature students. Many came from scientific backgrounds and some had no previous experience with a similar class or workshop. Several were returning to writing after years of not practicing. This presented me with a number of exciting challenges. The workshops had to be rewarding not only in the long term, but also on an immediate level, to ensure students returned every week. I felt they should present a manageable degree of difficulty for every student, regardless of their level of experience or what stage they were at in their own writing. Finally, the workshops had to appeal to all students, including many who were evidently used to a very different teaching style and class structure. The workshops, I felt, also should be beneficial to students in terms of

taking something back to their own disciplines, or using these workshops to approach their own fields of study in a new way, or at the very least simply exposing them to a very different way of learning.

This paper explores effective practices for running creative writing classes for students from diverse academic backgrounds, especially with relation to the traditional workshop format. Student feedback and responses are used to illustrate the viability of suggested practices and to reflect on actual results. Similar reactions occurring across academic fields will be observed and considered.

In preparation for this paper I put together and distributed a brief questionnaire to all students. The questionnaire consisted of twelve questions about students' expected vs. actual outcomes of the classes. The questions were very open-ended in order to encourage as much elaboration as possible. My intention was to discover patterns of response common to a particular discipline and search for responses that might be common across multiple disciplines.

Before delving into a discussion of the results, I would like to point out that seven students returned questionnaires. This represents a rough majority, since workshops were never greater than fifteen in number and usually much closer to ten. However, these results cannot be indicative of anything beyond these students' opinions. Further research of greater scope would need to be undertaken before more comprehensive claims can be made, therefore this experiment represents qualitative rather than quantitative research. I do not wish to present any overarching claims; I simply wish to examine the responses I received in the light of a few existing opinions on what it means to teach creative writing and what effect a traditional workshop (or lack thereof) can have on a creative writing class.

I will say a few words about the general class format before discussing my results. As mentioned, this class was not-for-credit and attendance was voluntary. The advantages to this set-up included a relaxed and informal setting; an absence of standardized academic or attendance requirements made for a mutually relaxing experience. I was close in age to many students and very forthcoming about being a student myself. This led (I hope) to a comfortable feeling of mutuality in the classes. We were free to create our own boundaries and 'syllabus'.

There were some notable disadvantages to the class format. A register was circulated at the start of each workshop but this was purely for informational purposes (and, in fact, only forwarded to the university at the close of each term). This meant attendance fluctuated as students handled other engagements or dealt with particularly busy academic periods. The lack of an established class list also meant that new students could arrive week by week; there was a relatively big influx of new students at the start of the second term. The not-for-credit structure of the course, as well as the inability to expect consistent attendance, meant that it was difficult – if not impossible – to implement a workshop format where work was circulated before class with sufficient time for members to read and annotate it, and class time devoted to group analysis and discussion. There was no assurance that students would produce work in time, even if they had verbalized intent to do so. There was indeed no assurance that the same students would appear from week to week. And I felt, given the voluntary nature of the class itself, it would be somewhat unreasonable to establish a requirement of circulating, printing off, and annotating manuscripts week by week. A website for the course was made available but used irregularly.

During group discussion at the start of the course, students politely asserted that they were unable and unwilling to commit to a

schedule of posting or bringing in writing – their academic schedules left them unable to take on an additional class's worth of work. There was a definite sensation, both spoken and unspoken, that students did not want this course to bring with it requirements similar to their other classes. Therefore, in accordance with these wishes and in order to avoid situations in which work was expected and did not arrive, we decided to forgo a traditional workshop set-up.

I do not want to give the impression that these students behaved in any way irresponsibly. I believe this course was intended to be a relaxed venue for students to explore and practice an activity they are interested in, regardless of ability or experience. As such, I believe the best way to organize such a course was to open up the space for students to determine their own levels of participation and commitment to the course, which these students, after careful thought, did. The majority of students was taking a full course load and did not want this course to be another source of pressure or stress. I thought this was not only wise, but only to be expected. I believe there was a very real advantage to making each class self-contained and I think the students maturely, honestly and responsibly gauged their own abilities to commit.

In the spirit of freedom, relaxation, informality, and open-endedness, I refrained from establishing any ground rules (beyond, of course, an atmosphere of respect and consideration), suggesting through actions or language that a certain method or result was correct or more appropriate than any other, and kept all comments purely constructive. This created a less rigid and critical structure than I myself have grown used to in classes and workshops. "It was easy to read out work as the sessions had a very relaxed atmosphere," one student reported.

It is interesting to note that in their questionnaires students indicated they were looking for, or had imagined this course would involve, group discussion of pre-written student work, despite the fact that very few students found themselves able to post work prior to class and many of the students who were looking for workshop results did not have consistent attendance from which to benefit from this activity. It should be mentioned that much later in the year students became more amenable to posting work in advance and in the last few sessions we were able to begin devoting around half a class, or one hour, to examining student writing in a more traditional workshop atmosphere. In spite of this, it was evident that not all students had read the pieces being workshopped in any given week.

A consistent response from all students was that they appreciated having time set aside for writing. Verbal response as well as written feedback indicated that one of the most important reasons for attending such a class was having a specific time each week to devote entirely and only to writing, even if sporadic attendance indicates this may not have been strictly true. "It's something I wouldn't do now if I didn't set aside the time,' reported a student in her final year of a psychology degree. "[This class] gets me writing," echoed an art history student. Time deliberately set aside for writing, then, seemed to be the primary goal of attending these workshops.

Another response consistent amongst all respondents was the opinion that, while creativity is innate, the purpose or advantage of creative writing courses is to provide a venue for and instruction in practicing writing, for honing and trying new techniques. This experimentation with technique ended up being the focus of the workshops: classes were based on a variety of exercises and experiments, writing from visual stimuli, writing from an open-ended verbal prompt, and timed writing exercises. This is closely aligned with Rob McFarland's views, quoted in a 1999 article by

Tim Mayers: "I once ascertained five essentials of a serious writer: desire, drive, talent, vision, and craft …Whether the list is held at five, cut to three, or expanded to twenty: of the essential, only craft can be taught" (Mayers 1999, p.34). As early as the 1890s, a Columbia University writing instructor noted that "technique" was "the only aspect of art which could be discussed properly"; as such, a devoted writer "cherishes" it and "is forever thinking about it" (Brander Matthews, quoted in Myers 1993, p.285).

McFarland's original 1993 article remains insightful and useful today. His view is a popular one, and one that was unanimously held by my students. While they felt creativity is to a certain extent inborn – either you have it or you don't – creative writing classes are essential both as a means of encouraging naturally-occurring talent and a way of trying new approaches and methods, providing "a seed from which to start," as one student put it. They were in agreement: you *can* teach creative writing. "Absolutely," answered one respondent to that question. If, as McFarland states, writing classes and workshops primarily serve to teach craft (defined by Mayers as "that faint grey area of overlap between genius and rhetoric" [1999, p.84]), then whether one has read and annotated a peer's manuscript (or several peers' manuscripts) before class is largely irrelevant, and could even be seen as standing in the way of exercises designed to teach and hone craft. Anyone who has attended a more traditional writing workshop is aware of the benefits (which is not to say there are only benefits) of interacting with other writers and their work, but this somewhat circuitous route leads me to my assertion that it is in no way a weakness to run a writing workshop bereft of actual workshopping; such a class could be even more useful, or at least as useful, for writers as purely analytical discussion held over a rota of student work. If one can *only* teach craft, then classes focused entirely on practicing and learning craft seem sensible.

I find support in this idea from D. G. Myers, whose 1993 article "The Rise of Creative Writing" sought to provide an explanation for the meteoric rise of university creative writing programs. These programs and classes, he asserts, came about as part of an effort to reform the study of literature, which had become too focused on disciplined dissection of texts without a context of exploring how these works might have been created in the first place, and experience in doing the same. The main aim was to unite the practice of writing with the study of existing writing. In other words, "treating literature as if it was a continuous experience rather than a corpus of knowledge – as if it were a living thing, as if people intended to write more of it" (Myers 1993, p.279). More specifically, Myers refers to Hugh Mearns (an early teacher of creative writing – though perhaps it should be noted, also an unsuccessful novelist) and his suggestion that the role of the creative writing teacher is to provide students "with immediate experience with something better than they have hitherto known" (1993, p. 290), and this responsibility must be combined with students' own work and creative growth. The word "better" is woefully vague, but the "something better" is clearly not limited to adhering to a now-standard workshop model.

Michael Loyd Gray's article "Speaking My Mind" (written in the same year as Mayers's and coming six years after Myers's) concisely presents his own criticisms of traditional workshops. He quite accurately states that this model results in "the dazed writer […] holding a pile of annotated copies of his or her manuscript, and the advice isn't always helpful" (Gray 1999, p.17). While the writer in question is not always dazed and in fact is often rather resigned, I agree with a fundamental truth in what Gray is saying – standard workshops necessarily result in an author's receipt of a variety of different viewpoints, which are not and cannot be all be useful all the

time and must be sifted through to discover some connection between constructive criticism and an author's openness and genuine desire to understand the way the workshop members view the writing. In other words, standard workshops may be a great way to find out what other people think, but a writer should consider to what end he is receiving these opinions, and should tread carefully before applying them to his work. I do not believe Gray's further claim – that "the workshop goal then becomes a quest to ferret out the flaws" (1999, p.17) – is necessarily always true, but it is certainly a valid and worthwhile point of debate.

Work was produced on the spot, in response to verbal and/or visual stimuli. For instance, unclear or incomplete photos of humans were used to focus on character writing; busy/crowded scenes were presented and students asked to write what occurred in the minutes immediately before or following the scene; an ambiguous spoken phrase was the starting point for a free-writing exercise. These exercises, particularly the more cryptic ones, often presented a visible challenge, but all students reported appreciating these challenges. One (psychology) student felt the variety of exercises "stretched us and made us do different things each week". Another advantage to these open-ended exercises was that students could respond in prose, poetry, or whatever form they most wanted to work in at that time. One workshop was devoted to dialogue and work produced was expected to be primarily in that form but other than that there was no restriction or requirement in terms of formatting or style. It is interesting to note that, in a way similar to the request for more workshopping but a demonstrated reluctance towards actually pre-reading or marking student work, the group expressed a desire to explore poetry and script-writing but only one student produced any poetry and no student produced a script until the second-last week.

The class format made spontaneity the overriding force in the room, which nearly all respondents saw as a positive factor. One student, who is pursuing an English literature degree, recounted his reaction to the exercises:

> Initially my general response was negative. I don't consider myself to be particularly talented at making up things on the spot and I tend to do a lot of thinking before I write. So initially I was unhappy because I felt that was not my strength. But this has also turned out to be the positive side – I wasn't challenging myself to write in different ways and about different things and these exercises were encouraging me to do just that, to reach outside my comfort zone.

These feelings are echoed in the feedback of another student who is pursuing an English language degree after years spent studying and working in the electronics industry. He found the exercises useful as they "made [him] realize how easy it is to come up with ideas" – I believe the unspoken end to the comment is "once you sit down and just start." He stated that the exercises and course in general taught him to be less "fickle about what to write about – the writing is the thing." The desirability of sitting down and writing, regardless of how much (or little) time or preparation one has had was stressed by all respondents. This comment links the two primary responses – participants desired and appreciated time set aside only for writing, and that they were happy to use that time in activities which *exercised* various ways and topics of writing. The writing is the thing.

I'll briefly return to Ron McFarland's article by way of closing. His paper addresses some popular (mis)conceptions regarding the nature of creative writing courses and those who teach them. This article is useful in understanding the aims and purposes of a course such as this one, as well as reactions to it. More so than a course required as part of a degree path, this class was available for students

to practice something that they love or find interesting, divorced from official assessment or regulations and led by someone who is also committed to practicing the same thing that they too love and find interesting. It is beyond the scope of the course – not to mention impossible – to make someone into an artist, as every student agreed. What is not impossible, and what I believe is in fact the duty of these courses, is "teaching students how to write [with a very clear emphasis that this is in terms of technique, experimentation, and practice – craft – and *not* referring to more amorphous, intangible instruction in 'how to be a writer'] and creating an environment where writing is possible" (cited in Mayers 1999, p.82).

Creating an environment where writing is possible seems as though it would be quite easy. But the overwhelming appreciation these students had for a regularly-occurring period of time devoted to nothing but writing indicates that it is useful (I cannot say necessary) for these classes to exist. This is the fundamental purpose of these classes; other benefits are over and above providing an environment in which to write and guidance in different ways of doing so.

One student, who is presently studying veterinary medicine and has a background in biology and history, reported that what she took back from this class to her other coursework was nothing less than "better writing overall." If this is true, the course was undoubtedly worth it, and I feel lucky to have been a part of it. Another student claimed that, despite feeling that she brought "a loss of vocabulary and creativity" as well as a "less interesting style of writing" from her (scientific) field to this course, the class had impacted positively on her other academic activities "in every way." I do not doubt the potential of regular artistic practice to change

one's life "in every way"; if this happened to this student, I am very grateful.

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The solitude room

Cherry Smyth (University of Greenwich)

American poet Lorine Niedecker once asked, 'Would somebody start Meditation Rooms, places of silence, so silent you couldn't help but hear the sound of your page without opening your mouth… ' (1973). It made me think about the various relationships between writing and solitude and also about where poetry and meditation intersect. Both require silence, practice and faith. Krishnamurti once said that 'meditation is the action of silence.' The same could be said of poetry. Both develop a sense of process, of beginning in emptiness, and of commitment, individually and collectively. Both are forms of concentration, attentiveness and illumination.

Using a selection of poems from both secular and spiritual traditions, I'd like to explore the depths and breadths of the silence beyond the mind where the unutterable begins and is brought forth into language.

Firstly, I would ask that everyone participate in a short visualisation exercise. Notice the quality of the silence in the room. What colour does it have, what levels of sound and non-sound? Is it the silence of concrete or of wood? Or both? Now, please sit upright, alert but relaxed, your legs uncrossed and your palms on your knees. Close your eyes. Listen to your breath and slow your breathing. Tune into the simple act of the breath coming in and out of your nostrils. Let your shoulders relax. Soften around your eyes, the bones of your jaw. Let any thoughts that arise float away. Notice your breath again. Imagine you're on a beach, watching the waves come and go; hear the sound of the surf, the call of seabirds, the moments of stillness which occur between the wavebreaks and the

backwash. Now, keeping your eyes closed, come back to the room and focus on the silence here.

Now open your eyes. Was the silence different after the brief meditation? If so, how? If not, why not?

Some say that to meditate is simply to extend the gap between one thought and the next. Is that where poems start? Entering solitude does not necessarily mean entering silence. It can be noisy, full of what's known as the monkey mind, chattering away about everything and nothing, what to have for dinner, will it rain later. First there has to be an absence of noise, then a growing physical silence, followed by a quieting of the mind, then the indescribable silence beyond the mind that we try to access as writers and report back from.

If many poems start in doubt and end in some kind of faith, this paper will address the quiet, still space that is both within a poem and comes after it. As Jorie Graham puts it: 'If poems are records of true risks (attempts at change) taken by the soul of the speaker, then as much as possible, my steps are towards silence' (Graham 2000). How does the silence in which words fail relate to the teeming silence of the creative flow? Can the solitude that inspired the poem be transmuted to the reader as a restorative act?

There is a story told about an old nunnery in Maine that had been run under strict monastic silence. In the '60s, the Pope directed that the nuns begin to speak. Many found that they didn't know how to talk, and when they did, they were surprised to experience conflict and judgements, built-up resentments and pettiness that had been contained by the rituals of prayer and silence. It took some years for the community to find the same grace in words. Yet spiritual life, like creative life, needs both – inner knowing and outer expression; rituals of separation and integration; learning how to simultaneously interconnect and yet disconnect from other things in

the world; how to negotiate proximity and the unbridgeable gap or zone of indeterminacy it often leaves us with.

I thought it useful to look further at solitude in four main ways: chosen solitude, enforced solitude, magical solitude and frozen solitude.

Firstly, chosen solitude is to commit to the act of being alone, to enter into an enriching contract with silence. To get to that silence, where German-language poet Paul Celan says so much happens, can be a hard-won fight: 'I cut my way through the objects and objections of reality and stood before the sea's mirror surface. I had to wait until it burst open and allowed me to enter the huge crystal of the inner world' (Celan 1999, p.3). His sparse language bears the taut intensity of words balanced on a high-wire in a poem called "Alchemical":

> Silence cooked like gold in
> charred hands.
> Great grey
> sisterly shape
> near like all that is lost:
> All the names, all those
> names
> burnt with the rest… Great grey one. Wake-
> less.
> Re-
> gal one.
>
> (Celan 1988, p. 179)

With its holocaust haunting, this silence goes on burning after the poem's close. 'Wakeless, regal' are words trying desperately to transform and penetrate those incomprehensible mass murders.

How different from the flourishing, fecund solitude of Taoist poet Li Po, whose 8th-century lifestyle as a wandering exile taught him to practice non-attachment. I'd like to read "Night Thoughts at

Tung-Lin Monastery on Lu Mountain". The word 'kalpa' means a vast world-cycle of time – over four million years long.

> Alone, searching for the blue-lotus roofs,
> I set out from city gates. Soon, frost
>
> clear, Tung-lin temple bells call out,
> Hu's creek's moon bright in pale water.
>
> Heaven's fragrance everywhere pure
> emptiness, heaven's music endless,
>
> I sit silent. It's still, the entire Buddha-
> realm in a hair's breadth, mind depths
>
> all bottomless clarity, in which vast
> kalpas begin and end out of nowhere.
>
> (Po 1996, p. 9)

The 'vast vacant clarity' Li Po conveys allows watching each thing to unfold according to its own nature, which is known in Chinese as 'tzu-jan', 'self-so' or 'being such of itself'.

This mindful attentiveness influences many contemporary Western poets, such as American Jane Hirshfield. While Li Po's canvas is usually a wondrous, dramatic mountainscape, Hirshfield's worlds are often interiors that open up delicately to other levels of thinking about the self and non-self. In her poem "Only When I Am Quiet and Do Not Speak", for example, she describes the process of the objects around her drawing near as if in contemplation of her entrancing strangeness. She thinks she can hear

> the sigh of happiness
> each object gives off
> if I glimpse for even an instant the actual instant –
>
> As if they believed it possible
> I might join
> their circle of simple, passionate thusness,

> their hidden rituals of luck and solitude,
> the joyous gap in them where appears in us the pronoun
> I.
>
> (Hirshfield 2001)

To glimpse yourself glimpsing the I is part of the practice of becoming the air in the vase and the air around it at the same time – the thusness where the world and the self exist in interdependent harmony for that noticed instant. American Poet Charles Wright calls it trying 'for the get-away by the light of yourself' (1991, p. 90)

However, to be exiled, imprisoned, powerless in childhood, abandoned in love – a break-up or breakdown – brings me to the second category: enforced solitude. In "Thoughts of You Unending", Li Po loses his spiritual buoyancy and writes in a quoted fragment: 'My lone lamp dark, thoughts thickening, I raise the blinds / and gaze at the moon. It renders the deepest lament / empty…' (Po 1996, p. 48).

Resilience and aesthetic discipline helped Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet to thole more than fourteen years in prison and the last thirteen years of his life in exile. In "Advice to Someone Going into Prison", he suggests:

> Inside one part of you may live completely alone,
> like a stone at the bottom of a well.
> But the other part of you
> must so involve yourself
> in the whirl of the world,
> that inside you will shudder
> when outside a leaf trembles on the ground forty days
> away.
>
> (Hikmet 2002, p.171)

I love what Hikmet does to time and space in this poem, conjuring the freedom to move outside the confines of 'doing time'.

To me, my third category, magical solitude, is the ability to be utterly alone in a crowded tube, a bustling café – to enter, as

Austrian novelist Thomas Bernhard put it 'one's ownself within ourselves' (Bernhard 1990, p. 203). That the zone in a head in need of space can be created unbidden is a rare and exquisite gift. Even Paul Celan invokes 'this wandering empty / hospitable mist' in a poem called "On Either Hand" (Celan 1988, p. 163). To be lost in writing in the midst of others is also what some writers prefer and seek out. For me, it's always accidental, magical.

The final category that enables us to think about ways of being solitary is frozen solitude, a malign state where, even when solitude is granted, it remains dull, where good anger or bad sadness cannot be expressed and alienation pins us between the black void above and the unmarked white below. Celan put it thus: 'No word has come to an end and no phrase, it is nothing but a pause, a blank – you can see all the syllables stand around, waiting' (Celan 1999, p. 19). Many poets write about this struggle against the impossibility of inscription. In "Stone Canyon Nocturne", Charles Wright carries the disillusion and desolation through the body of the poem like a corpse:

> …No one believes in his own life anymore.
>
> The moon, like a dead heart, cold and unstartable, hangs
> by a thread at the earth's edge…
>
> Like a bead of clear oil the Healer revolves through the
> night wind,
> Part eye, part tear, unwilling to recognise us.
>
> (Wright 1991, 139)

Poet and theorist Gaston Bachelard calls this bereavement of healing solitude, 'the source of our first suffering. It lies in the fact that we hesitated to speak… it was born in the moment when we accumulated silent things within us' (cited in O'Driscoll 2008, p. 418).

But can we also see frozen solitude as necessary shadow? To inhabit the barren silence is to be in some sense enclosed, to be made

aware of imposing structures of will and helplessness and watch how you watch them. A poet once told me that the block is there for a reason. Find out what the reason is and it will be gone. For Czeslaw Milosz it is a question of faith, as in his poem by that name: 'We and the flowers throw shadows on the earth. / What has no shadow has no strength to live' (Milosz 1996, p. 57). For me, this means to doubt the doubt.

One of the challenges of being human, an individual that can also belong to a collective, is learning the balance between the desire for isolation and the dangers of too much of it. Writing can stand as a witness between this continuing quandary of resisting and longing for solitude. Why is it that we often write the most prolifically at the end or the beginning of a relationship or when in grief? The entering into a new painful solitude demands a redefinition of the self in relation to time and space, as does leaving that solitude for a new configuration, accommodating the life and demands of another human being. These liminal solitudes or solitudes of the threshold are places of intense creativity – disbelieving, fearful, frantic and/or rescuing, welcome, celebrated and ecstatic. Solitude is serene time or time's cruel slow gift, with death as the biggest and most unknown solitude and grief its intermediary.

And finally when contemplation becomes creativity, where repose enables reinvigoration and clarity, we can achieve the simple directed strength of Romanian poet Nina Cassian in a striking poem called "Intimacy", of which I'll quote only a fragment: 'I can be alone, / I know how to be alone. / By tea-light / I write' (Cassian 1990, p. 52)

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How critical reflection affects the work of the writer

Ellie Evans (Bath Spa University)

This paper addresses the ways that critical reflection affects the work of the writer and, in particular, the rewards gained by the requirements of a Creative Writing Ph.D. Let me outline these: for my Ph.D. at Bath Spa University, I have to produce a collection of poems on a specific theme; I also have to write a thesis of 40,000 words on a poet. The crucial requirement is that my writing should inform and influence my research, and my research should influence my writing. This developing inter-relationship of mutual informing and reinforcement should also be examined and commented upon. For the purpose of this paper, I shall concentrate on the second half of the requirement: the influence of the critical research upon my own writing and its value.

I was attracted to these formal requirements precisely because they gave me both sticks and carrots for what is my main focus: a poetry collection. I am not an academic and do not intend to practise in the field so the research was, to begin with, a necessary adjunct. However, it has become a pleasure and, occasionally, even a passion or obsession. I started, therefore, not from primarily wanting to do research, but to write a collection and to find ways of developing my writing. I already knew exactly what I wanted my poetry collection to be about: the construction of a self-image and a knowledge of the world – both of which were distorted by having delusional parents who had false opinions about objective things and who shaped their children's view of reality. I also wanted to explore the disjuncture that arose as the children moved into the outside world.

For the subject of my Critical Component, I was looking for a contemporary poet who addresses some of these issues: I chose Pascale Petit, as in some areas our experiences overlap. She has written two collections based on her relationships with her parents: *The Zoo Father* (2001) was mainly about her sexually abusive father; *The Huntress* (2005) deals with her relationship with her psychologically abusive and mentally ill mother. Our material was similar, however, her technique is totally different – very original and highly energetic – and I felt that this would be an especial attraction of studying Petit within the interactive constraints of the Creative Ph.D. which I have outlined. I felt that her violent, exotic and uninhibited method would be an excellent boost to my writing; hitherto it been a rather genteel, repressed, and cerebral approach. (At this point I must note that when I made these decisions before registering for the Ph.D. four years ago, I had been writing poetry for only three years.)

I shall now trace the development of my poetry and how it has been inspired and informed by my study of Petit. My initial process was 'to achieve porosity with Petit' as my Director of Studies Tim Liardet put it. So I began to read Petit's work very closely and write poems of my own in which I attempted to address her influence. This had two functions: both as a way of understanding her and of gingering up my own writing. To do this, I attempted pastiche. I am using the word *pastiche* not in a derogatory way, but in the sense of the eighteenth-century genre of imitation where, for example, a translator (such as Pope) strove to catch not only the form and spirit of the original text, but also to add to it a flavour of his own outlook and language as well. I employed this technique because it forces you to look very closely at the surface of the language – the diction, the tone, the movement of thought and so on – but also to catch the spirit of the original and to emulate it.

Even at this early stage, I became aware of the value of a sustained and imaginary context; how to establish metaphor throughout a poem and how to move between the two sides, the vehicle and the tenor; how to make the abstract concrete through physical details; and to create a sense of defamiliarization by the use of exotic material, which is underpinned by evidence of careful research and factual detail (e.g. use of indigenous vocabulary). I then examined these features in a series of papers on Petit and also addressed them in my own writing.

First, the creation of parallel worlds. In all her work, even her earliest published poems, Petit moves into a fantastic world which she then explores. In her earliest poems, this is the world of Anderson's 'Snow Queen'; in her first pamphlet it is the glaciers of Tibet; in her first collection she uses the Amazon, which she elaborates upon in much greater detail in her subsequent work. Various things struck me about this: how she moved from cold and barren landscapes to hot and vibrant ones (and seems more effective in doing so) and how, by staying within this context, she creates a feeling of entrapment which is entirely suitable for her subject matter – and, indeed, for my own.

Petit's use of the parallel worlds, especially the Amazon, was the first element of Petit's work I tried to address in my own writing. I wanted something equally suggestive of distance, violence and exoticism and, not to be too slavish in my imitation, thought of time as the distancing dimension. Piranesi's etchings of prisons, very aptly titled *Imaginary Prisons*, were my inspiration, and I wrote a series of poems (about forty) using this world.

Although this sounds like a calculated process, it was in fact very liberating. It allowed me to say things indirectly but often quite savagely – for example my poem 'Ant in Vaseline' which was published in *The Rialto* last summer. However, looking at Petit's

work and also my own, I found this relentless imagizing was almost too claustrophobic and also restricting in material (too many hawsers, cables, lions' heads etc.). Another problem was that I had chosen a rather obscure parallel – I don't know how many people are acquainted with the etchings.

So, I then transposed some of the ideas of the Piranesi poems into the world of film noir which seemed more demotic, but still again too contained and affording too little variation – also, still without colour. Nevertheless, it did give me the confidence to write a poem about Westminster tube station as an image of an abusive relationship. It does use these elements quite effectively, but in a much subtler way, I think.

In this poem, I found that I was able to move between the two sides of the metaphor in a filmic way, based upon another feature I had noticed in Petit. When using a metaphor, it is common practice to start in what, for convenience, I shall call the 'real world' and then move into the parallel metaphoric one. Thus, in an early poem, Petit had described the real life with her insane mother in her suburban house (the technical term for this is 'the tenor') and then moved into a metaphoric world of a desert (the vehicle) to portray the barren violence of life with the mother. But in a later poem, Petit reverses this process: the 'real world' of the tenor she describes is a glacier she is climbing in Tibet; inside it, she finds her mother living in rooms of ice (the vehicle). I thought this was a very exciting way of handling, and distancing, difficult and highly personal material.

A further spin that Petit puts upon this method is to make these apparently bizarre experiences entirely convincing precisely because of their context: in Tibet one might hallucinate because of oxygen starvation, in the Amazon one's visions might be induced by shamanic practices and so on. This has made me realise that these

metaphoric jumps and shifts must be prepared for, and be plausible within their context.

In counterbalance to this almost outlandish material (for example in *The Zoo Father*, Petit performs an Amazonian ritual of shrinking her father's body in revenge for his abuse), there is a great deal of supporting and convincing factual detail. Petit does a great deal of research and incorporates indigenous language, customs, place names and even found material. I have also found this a most productive field, especially in conjunction with the fantastic, yielding the most unexpected and exciting outcomes: for example, my monologue 'Damien Hirst designs a Wet Room'. I have also adopted, on occasions, her habit of basing a poem on a line from a myth as a starting point (for example 'Thirteen Gourds').

Petit also uses the devices of masks and self-portraiture, especially in her pamphlet based upon the paintings of Frida Kahlo, *The Wounded Deer*. I have been encouraged to reflect upon this process and as a result have written not self-portraits but an equivalent: monologues. These again address my main theme of the disjuncture of appearances; some are from fairy tales (e.g. the pumpkin in *Cinderella*). I've again found this a very useful way of addressing highly charged and challenging material in an apparently light-hearted way; for example, 'Lady Sackville-West expects her daughter Vita to luncheon'.

This last point is important because looking at the reception of Petit's work has made me aware of how difficult it is to write about mental abuse and how it can seem too raw or self-indulgent. So I have found that these approaches, which I would not have considered if I had not studied Petit in such detail, extremely fruitful. In conclusion, what have I gained? First, a much wider body of reading and a greater ability to read in depth and detail. Second, a variety of ways of writing: creating a parallel world, reversing the

metaphor, achieving filmic but plausible shifts, the use of research and fable, plus the importance of tenacity in developing a poem upon a certain trajectory. Third, the value of making confessional material oblique, not only through another setting, but through a different voice. Finally, it has made me aware of the danger of too much relentless imagizing, as well as the importance of variety. This is why, along with the poems written for my Ph.D. remit, I've written others too and attended outside courses, particularly on form (for example, the prose poem). The critical reflection process has given me focus, discipline, inspiration and confidence. Not least, having to get up here and explain it all to you has been very beneficial as well in clarifying my thoughts and getting the creative juices flowing!

Poems

The following five poems are by Ellie Evans, and appear in her forthcoming collection The Ivy Hides the Fig-ripe Duchess (Seren 2011).

I. Ant in Vaseline

Film noir favours underground scenes
like this still from *The Third Man* where arches
frame a sewer and light splinters on black water,
while men in trench-coats grasp their guns and wait.

My memories are subterranean too, grey light
and a white enamel table with black edges,
so sharp you could cut yourself.
That's where my father stoops over his machine,

a brass harpy. It has my mother's face,
her cold hard breasts; her wings and claws

are sticky. Her name is Celeno,
darkness My father's fingers stroke her hair

as he bends her neck, tips the mirror
at her feet, with a twang slips
a wafer-sandwich made of glass
between the clips held in her lap.

He pulls my face down to the eyepiece –
the halo round her head. I watch. Those twitching
segments are my body, my legs no bigger
than an eyelash, scrabbling and slithering.

That's how I hurl myself, my jaws agape, against
my see-through ceiling, see-through jelly walls, my see-through floor.

(first published in *The Rialto* 66, Spring 2009)

II. Westminster Tube

I thought of you this morning
when I caught the tube at Westminster: the station's
lined with stainless steel, an overcast sky
that cannot rain. The hall was huge as nightmares:

had pipes like sewers that twisted and coiled
around me, like the sinews of a giant
waiting to throttle, just as you try to squeeze
me into nothing. The barrier bared its teeth

and clamped them shut behind me so now
I'm in your head. I recognise
those transparent doors of glib politeness
which no-one sees but me, how they slide

and lock; how we can't heed the red light
as we're thrust along the black
fixed tunnels of your arguments
which always stop at the same stations.

I face the wall of grey steel where
my reflection's just a smudge, while

your rage bangs in rivets big as egg-cups.
The escalator isn't working.

III. Damien Hirst designs a Wet Room

So he awaits his patrons
at the heliport, while his P.A. scans the screen for flights
from *Osaka, Nassau, Chamonix*. One client has brought
her Dutch masseur, another a new wife from Kirkhizstan,
already pregnant, blonde. The third, a Japanese banker,
travels solo. The hired chopper whirrs and hops
above the motorway, dips into a dark valley,
wooded, raining. They'd all expected London –
Clerkenwell or Hoxton, not to walk across a football pitch
and then along a towpath, where they don't
recognise the weeds.

The site is designated Grade Two Star,
says the P.A. brightly. *I am contracted*
to deal with contaminated water and/or
ground gas, adds Damien, as he shows them
to their rooms, when they've admired
the new glass flooring of the mezzanine.
We have applied a sensitive approach
in regard to the unique historic fabric
of this building, says the Welcome Brochure
(its folder of faux voleskin, tucked into the hamper
with shortbread tails and vintage pink champagne).

After dinner they will go next door,
through a sliding wall of steel into
The Factory. (They noticed, at the entrance,
big lumpy things like dinosaurs,
shrouded in bubble-wrap, with jutting
bits of bone). But first, they'll have a shower.
The Wet Room is communal.
And obligatory. Its design, they are informed,
is apposite for them alone. They shuffle in, stripped down,
blinking in the gloom, peering
at the grey stone walls whose scratches
they can't read. Damien watches
from his control box, turns the water on
and then ceiling spotlights so they see:

The first, a plain slate slab:
Private W.G. Boucher
Lancashire Fusiliers
30 August 1916
age 23

The second is black granite:
Thomas Carrington
Killed in the Sapperton Short Tunnel
3 September 1917
age 66

The third is slate again:
Pilot Officer O.A. Noah
Royal Airforce
10 May 1942

The fourth is pinkish marble, and the lettering is gold:
This Tomb was erected
by the Members and Friends.
of the Adjoining Chapel
in Affectionate Tribute

but condensation hides the rest. The last one, the fifth, is black basalt, seemingly:
In this Vault lie the remains of…..

And then Damien turns out the lights.

IV. Thirteen Gourds, a Lunar Year (from the Aztec Lacondon poem 'Purification of Grains of Copal Incense')

The first was that space between us
and a pause in the heat: white marble, green sea.

In the second, we stirred up memories;
like blind worms they lay, nudging, recoiling.

Third, fourth and fifth were full of laughter –
how we set them glinking in the sun!

Sixth was a jeroboam of expectation.
Seventh was the goblet of our kisses
but the eighth was full of tears.

Ninth, tenth, eleventh, were bitter cups to swallow
when we gulped down lies dissolved in fire.

The twelfth lay smashed in smithereens.
It's still there, on the cold marble.

I'm setting the lunar table for you:
I offer you thirteen gourds, chill as words.

V. Lady Sackville-West expects her daughter Vita to luncheon (Streatham, 1932)

If only, if only, she'd been a boy. Then
everything would have been fine, inheritance intact,
the longest drawing-room in England ready for his majority.
Instead we've got this, this striding girl with her curls
and nose, always sniffing, always poking into flowers;
her fingers squirming into the earth. Oh, she is married,
but oddly – they live separately at Sissinghurst;
little boys in one cottage, husband
next door, and she, across the lawn in her tower
with books, stained glass, a desk dotted with posies.
They meet up in the Library for meals.
She's become quite famous as a plantswoman -
husband does the layout, favouring pleached limes.
Now she's acquired a mad girlfriend novelist
who's put Vita into her latest book,
and has her change sex in the middle -
it's called *Orlando*. I hope V won't turn up dressed half-
and-half, as she did last time. Boots and breeches,
twinset and pearls. *Lady Chatterley* above the waist,
Gamekeeper below, said Osbert. And she'll sneer
(with that long dripping nose) – my garden's bare,
the beds just mud and cinders-----yes! Brenda, my dear,
I know that it's your afternoon off, but could you go
to Dickens and Jones, and buy up all the velvet flowers
in their millinery department? We could stick them
in the borders. They'll make a good show!

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Beyond solitude: A poet's and painter's collaborative approach to the creative process

Stephanie Norgate (University of Chichester)
& Jayne Sandys-Renton (University of Sussex)

Stephanie

In a sense, no poets are writing in solitude. We are aware of a conversation between our work and our reading. That conversation often extends to other forms of art, for instance the visual arts. For many poets, the gaze of the painter has served to crystallize thought, or to create a new exploration, a stimulus. The most famous example of this is probably "La Musée des Beaux Arts" by W.H. Auden (1976, p.146-7), with its reflection on Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus*. Another more recent example is Pascale Petit's excellent collection *The Wounded Deer: Fourteen poems after Frida Kahlo* (Smith Doorstop, 2005). In a sense, Petit is working in collaboration with Kahlo, though Kahlo's oeuvre was completed independently in another time and place. We would all accept that Petit's or Auden's poetry is not merely illustrative, that the poems themselves form complete and satisfying works, enriched further by a knowledge of the visual source but not dependent on it. As a poet, I am interested in painting, and read about painters' ways of working. In the past, I have written a play about Artemisia Gentileschi and poems about Monet and Jackson Pollock – perhaps more about their lives than the actual work.

Whereas poetry's rough drafts (particularly word-processed rather than hand-written) can seem lacking in actuality, the physicality of artists' sketch books and the pleasing visibility of the

creative journey has always attracted me. The chance to work with a painter therefore felt right, and also exciting, as our aim in this collaboration is to respond to mutual sources and to the stages of each other's creations from inception, rather than to the finished pieces.

Jayne

I agree with Stephanie in that when you are working, be it writing or painting, you are never truly alone. However, it is a lonely business. Other artists who collaborate, like Gilbert & George and the Chapman Brothers, are in close relationships (lovers or brothers) so probably have an honesty that might take many years to reach. Their collaborations are also in the same artistic fields, but it would be exciting to make a piece of work that became neither mine nor Stephanie's.

When Stephanie asked me to collaborate with her, I was working on another painting project using images by the photographer Francesca Woodman. In a sense I was collaborating already; Francesca Woodman is dead and she became my fictitious friend. I read what I could about her, including bits of her diary, and eventually wrote my thesis about her work, but the relationship could never go beyond my own imagination.

There was a strange coincidence in that when Stephanie came to my studio to talk about the possibility of a collaboration, my walls were covered in huge drawings and paintings based on Woodman. Stephanie had no idea I was working with Woodman's work, so when she offered me *Hidden River* (Norgate, 2008), a book of her poetry with a photo by Francesca Woodman on the cover, it seemed prophetic that we should work together. And I immediately used some of her words from a poem called "Ponte Sant'Angelo, Rome" (Norgate 2008, p.52) in a painting of the Woodman series.

Fig. 1: The River Remembers (Jayne Sandys-Renton)

Stephanie and I met in a café to begin work in November 2008. Stephanie spoke to me of her interest in buildings and erosion, and described an image she had of a house in mid-air, in reference to Birling Gap where houses had once stood but were now in the ocean. We decided we'd try to find buildings, new or old, and look at the concept of erosion, and at some point visit Birling Gap. This was the starting point for the collaboration.

Stephanie

This is an early draft of the poem stemming from the Birling Gap visit. The poem has now become three sonnets in the completed sequence "The Fallen House and Other Voices", which is also the title of our collaborative exhibition to be held in the Otter Gallery in Spring 2010. The poem has gone through several forms since this early presentation at the Lonely Page conference.

"You need me"

though I'm all to pieces, though you don't know me
in the brick ball shifting under your feet.

When you moved, I was already old,
had listened for returning soles on my floors,
had heard, in my walls, the boom of wars.

I'm with you in the undertow, in that washed splinter
of blue paint that drifts in the shallows,
in the thin wisp of nylon, its mesh of air,
or in that strand of hair caught on a rock,
or in that tongue of leather drowned on the day
she cast her shoes over the cliff. I watched
them go, boats sailing a choppy surface.

Later, other lovers ducked the tape
the warden tied around the gate.
Travellers leant against the plaster.
Some left their mark, an acid stain, a date,
a graffito spider spinning on in scratches.

Remember her skin stung and reddened?
Remember the wasp nest I kept in the rafters,
its great head layered with paper,
a home that you speared with a pole
and lobbed into the sea, its lantern globe
blotting up the tide, then drowning.

I had thought I was married to the cliff.
I had thought the horizon was drawn
to my line of vision. I had thought

the petrels were calling me, the gulls
were my friends. I had thought the bluebells
creeping through grass wanted to be near me,
that the clean mint by the door, the hot nasturtiums
she'd planted, grew for me. You think I can't taste,
but I pulled indoors the blossoming currant
and felt the comfrey flower in my mouth.

I have rolled and unrolled in your head,
as glass on a French beach, rubbed to shingle.

To see her now, you'll need to dredge for battens,
compass points of woodworm, shattered tiles.
You'll need my rusty bolts, the iron latch
on the bedroom door that stuck over time.

Shake off the beach and gather me up.
Throw me back up the cliff. Rebuild my fragments,
floor, hearth, lintels, stairs. Fix the sill where she stood,
the sash rattling in the wind. Hang the nets
at the windows. Strike the match for the kindling.
Burn the driftwood in the bedroom grate. Let
my salt walls flicker the light back to you:

and there she'll be, on a thundery afternoon,
the lines of her body uneroded, clear.
And there you'll be, yourself again.

Jayne

This was the first poem that I saw from Stephanie, and it was written in the voice of a building. In my reading of the poem, each memory became a person trapped within the walls of the building. In the paintings, I began to give body to implied presences. I could feel the words creeping under my skin; I felt an immediate gut reaction to the echoes of time that jumped out of the page. The building and the people became one and the same, embedded with memory. I didn't know if Stephanie had intended this outcome, and I knew it didn't matter. I started to form images which didn't illustrate the

poems but responded to the importance of the building and the human element.

I asked a model, Juliet, to pose for photographs as reference material for the work; I asked her to listen to the house, to find its memories. I liked the simplicity of the lines of her body whereas the graffiti tower, which we'll be mentioning later, is busy and full of colour. In the photos and poses of Juliet, I wanted to recreate a sensitivity that was in the poem. So I stripped the room, took out paintings, rolled up the carpet, so that there were just bare floorboards and walls. Juliet was almost naked because I wanted her whole being to become part of the space. We were lucky with the light on that day and the big shadow that fell across the room. I felt I was almost recreating moments of the poem to stage something I could work with. I talked to Juliet about listening to the building, and because she's a dancer, she wasn't inhibited in moving around the space. I started drawing from those photos.

I haven't developed this into paint yet as I'm grabbing material before going in any set direction. I wanted the images on the paper, and I drew in ink and started to work with the poetry written across the page. I started with a linear, simple piece, and I can imagine this painting will evolve very differently from the graffiti pieces we're going to talk about.

Fig. 2: From Stephanie (J. Sandys-Renton)

Stephanie

Walking the landscape together has been a major part of the process, as both of us work from observation and the 'flash upon the inward eye' that happens later. Sometimes our work has developed from elements which had previously been bedded down in the memory, e.g. my fascination with coastal erosion, and a landscape which is also a voice and a state of mind, and Jayne's interest in the body's relationship to space, in landscape and figure. While I introduced Jayne to an eroding cliff-face, she introduced me to a strange ruined tower, which has sown the seed for a sequence of poems and has made connections for me between graffiti, the flints written into the cliff in lines, and murals and cave paintings – elements I hadn't previously considered writing about and certainly wouldn't have linked together without the collaboration.

Jayne

The tower is an interesting space because of the aging of the building and the association of graffiti with youth, and the debris made the space look almost like a war zone. There was a combination of beauty and destruction which had been inherent in the work of

Francesca Woodman. In Woodman's case, knowledge of her suicide made you anticipate her ultimate destruction when you looked at her work and saw the quite brutal way she used her body in relationship to the space. There was also an honesty and freedom and celebration in her work. In the case of this new body of work I'm making, I don't have a sense of any prefigured outcome in the same way.

Going back to the graffiti tower, I found that by placing younger and older people in the space, the building changed its nature. The people affected the way I saw the building; I tried a creative experiment of using models of different ages, though using Lizzie, the younger model, initially posed a few problems: a 'fashion shoot' effect. But, as with my directions to Juliet, I had also filled her in on the idea of an abandoned rave situation, with a young person in black. I wanted a contrast with the colour, as it's so strong in the graffiti tower. To avoid the 'fashion shoot' look, I tried out the ambiguous, sinister form of Tim, the older model, in the tower; I hadn't really worked with the figure of a man before but always with the female form, and was surprised by the work that came out of this experiment. Stephanie says that she found it strangely apposite, as if I'd given flesh to the man addressed by the house in the first poem. The big piece of Tim now seems too gentle, as if I've softened his figure, whereas the earlier sketch shows someone who, perhaps, has absorbed some of the spirit of the anarchy of the place. In this later sketch, some younger more innocent quality, perhaps from my youth and age ideas, has seeped into the figure, and I'm not sure yet whether the figure loses something for that or whether I will build on this.

The later photos I took show two people. This seems to develop more of a narrative which may or may not be developed. Interestingly, I would never normally show anyone these photos and

sketches at this early stage. In the next tower picture, a strange unexpected figure appeared behind Lizzie. I kept photographing and Lizzie turned round spontaneously. It's interesting that I prefer this picture with its chance moment rather than the staged moment. Yet the staged moments led to the finding of this image, which I prefer.

Fig. 3: Tim Tower (J. Sandys-Renton)

Fig. 4: Lizzie Tower (J. Sandys-Renton)

Stephanie

Here's an example of some of a new poem draft coming out of Jayne's new work on the graffiti tower. These are some lines from a rough draft I'm pleased with and which will be developed somewhat:

> You are slicing a palimpsest
> from a tower. Specialist
> in scrawled words and carved
> letters, you can lift the sprayed
> shape of a graffito
> the record of couplings
> which only the moon watched.
> You have your anthology
> of defacings, crowded
> with boys, those night-time
> drinkers, lighters of fire-pits.
> If they leave only shapes
> scratched in ash, the wind

will deliver them to you:
this blue painted R I P,
the spray stained hand,
on him, in him.
Each line of knife in soft lime
draws you to the place
where someone ached
to be known or owned,
recorded as the earth records -
even cave painters
left the images of their eyes,
these bulls and calves,
a swimmer like a sperm
muscling through rock …

There's no doubt that the subject of troubled identities, the erosion of self, memories and land, the recordings of presences are emerging in this collaboration and that being with a painter is also introducing acts of writing and painting as part of the subject-matter itself. The reconstruction of a human passion from the trash left at the scene is always interesting. The singular of 'graffiti', 'graffito', makes a connection between older forms of art – the scratches and drawings made in Rome and Pompeii – and there's something about the singular noun which is defamiliarizing, seems to take me back to the single person who made their mark on some forbidden area. And so I am finding that the new poems respond not only to the same material in terms of place and detail, but also new poems are occurring from Jayne's drafts and sketches.

For instance, Jayne's wash of diluted ink to create a wall from which a figure emerges near a door made me think of a tempered, almost uncanny existence; there is something Ovidian in the way the figure emerges, some element of transformation between figure and place, and this fed back into my obsession with the fallen house speaking to the man trying to recreate a memory from a place. Where I let the objects speak, Jayne has created independently the

addressees, the human characters who inhabit or visit or search. What was invisible in my first poem has become visible in Jayne's new work. And this in its turn has stimulated me to deepen elements of buried memory in the presences that appear in new poems. If I were simply illustrating Jayne's work through a poem or Jayne were illustrating my poems, there would not be this sense of dynamic development.

An interesting offshoot is that while we both are interested in graffiti, graffiti itself has become an issue for me. Jayne would like me to write on her paintings so that the work fuses and relates in an integrated way. I love the idea, but find a huge inhibition in actually writing on her art work. While fascinated by other people's graffiti, I cannot seem to break through a boundary to write on a picture. At the time of writing, I haven't yet managed to write on her pieces with the lovely sharpened bamboo stick and ink that she's leant me. Strangely, I have written about these objects themselves taking the bamboo right back to its roots in the ground and envisaging the diluting of the ink, but I can't seem to use the materials yet. Maybe when I do, some other element of the buried drama of my poems, some understanding of the invisible graffito writers and the voices of the house and tower will become clearer to me.

Jayne

There's a respect for the other person's space and boundaries. I had the idea of Stephanie writing on my work and for me to work on top of her writing. For Stephanie, writing on my work is crossing a boundary. She relates this to graffiti, but she can't do it herself. I want her to see it as a positive thing, not destructive, or for the destructive element to be positive and not to feel inhibited.

Paint quite quickly moves into its own way of being and you don't always know where it ends up. Dialogue with someone else

reaches beyond your own imagination and ability, whilst thinking on one path you can be quickly moved into a new direction.

Stephanie

As the theme of this conference is The Lonely Page, it's worth adding that scheduled meetings and visits, to locations or to the studio, create a healthy pressure on time and energy that avoids to some extent the loneliness of the page.

Jayne

It's like being able to give up your isolated, selfish absorption with your blank canvas or blank paper and look at someone else's work and try to develop a relationship between your working practice and yet create an entirely new body of work which cannot be planned in a completely rational way.

Stephanie

The fascinating part of the experience is how a decision to let each other's work evolve in a mutual relationship of two very different media creates unexpected developments, where we try not to have a pre-set agenda but to go with the flow as the work develops. And that's exciting.

⋆

Update

It is now October, six months since giving the paper above at *The Lonely Page* conference. Jayne has had three exhibitions since then, all featuring paintings arising out of our collaboration. She is about to share another exhibition, *5 x 5*, at West Dean College.

The poems from our collaboration have evolved now into a sonnet sequence called "The Fallen House and Other Voices" and

are fairly unrecognizable from the drafts included here. Stephanie felt the need to impose more shape and connection on the work, and it has turned into a multi-voiced piece that connects themes and images that she sees in Jayne's developing work.

Our continued walks, visits and attention on each other's work are still sparking ideas. We are working towards a shared exhibition, *The Fallen House and Other Voices*, at the Otter Gallery, University of Chichester, 19th February – 26th March 2010; Jayne's paintings will be accompanied by recordings of Stephanie's "Fallen House and Other Voices" sequence. The exhibition will also feature sound, as we are compiling wild track from the places we visited. The final exhibition is quite different from what we were expecting: we both feel we have stayed true to our individual visions while producing work that is complementary, in a strange relationship like the voices and addressees in the poems, like the figures and their world in the paintings.

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Petit, Pascale. 2005. The Wounded Deer: Fourteen Poems after Frida Kahlo. Huddersfield: Smith Doorstop.

Townsend, Chris. 2006. Francesca Woodman. London: Phaidon.

Exhibitions

2009 Sussex Barn Gallery, West Dean, Chichester
Joy Gallery, Chichester.
Artel Art Trail, Chichester,
Presentation on Collaboration at Lonely Page Conference, Belfast
Open Doors Studio Trail, Chichester
Waterside, Chichester

2008	Islington Contemporary Art & Design Fair
	Gallery One, (Grayshott,Surrey) Summer Exhibition.
	West Dean Post-graduate Diploma Exhibition.
	Work exhibited in West Dean House. West Sussex
	Transept-Traverse – ARTEL group show in Chichester Cathedral.
	Pallant House Gallery, staff exhibition, Chichester.
2007	'Tactile Art', Otter Gallery, Chichester
	Open Doors studio trail, Chichester
	Oceanographic Project, Bargate Gallery, Southampton – collaboration with scientists from the National Oceanographic Centre, Southampton
	Langstone Gate, 'big-purple-dot', Havant.

Jayne Sandys-Renton's webpage: http://www.jstudio.co.uk/

Stephanie Norgate's webpages:
http://www.poetrypf.co.uk/stephanienorgatepage.html and
http://www.poetryarchive.org

Making the Statue Move: Balancing research within creative writing

Anne Lauppe-Dunbar (Swansea University, Wales)

Fig. 1: Berlin 2007

This paper examines the process of choice versus creativity when writing the 'make believe,' within the 'real landscape'.

The novel I am writing is set in Berlin, November 1990. The narrative follows a former German Democratic Republic medal swimmer (now a policewoman) retracing her past through a land-mine of carefully wrapped secrets and lies. The landscape is one of both political import and infamous landmarks; creating a unique (demanding) set of questions. For example: when has a writer permission to move such landmarks? When should those landmarks remain in their correct space? In their correct time?

I started writing my novel with a clear picture of where my principal character Sophia lived. I described her living in the top apartment of an old (pre-war) warehouse. This warehouse would have been rebuilt (storage rooms sliced to create manageable flats) in

the 1960s, accommodating the emerging rental market. The image was delightfully complete, fitting with the character I was attempting to create.

I flew to Berlin for the first time in 2007, following a lucky break to meet director Marcus Welch and watch his documentary *And I Thought I Was the Greatest*, a film profiling the life of a former German Democratic Republic (GDR) volleyball star named Katharina Bullin.[2] The meeting was a mixed success. I had the distinct impression (his eyes dulled rather than lit up when we met) that Marcus Welch was expecting a younger and more 'with it' student. Happily, the film was fascinating, giving me a deeper insight into the mentality behind the training and systematic doping of the GDR athletes. In the pub after the viewing Katharina Bullin refused my request to meet her the next day, only acknowledging me after I told her that my mother came from Greiz: a small town in the former GDR. After an hour or so of trying, rather haphazardly, to hold any kind of conversation, I gave up - leaving the group to drink to the director's success – glad I hadn't disgraced myself and had remained, throughout this bad grace, polite and friendly.

The next day I walked from my hotel towards the Brandenburg Gate, skirting Tiergarten Park and Tiergarten Strasse, to where I had imagined Sophia lived.

[2] Marcus Welch documentary film: Katharina Bullin - Und ich dachte ich Wär' die Grösste

Fig. 2: Tiergarten Strasse

After two hours of walking, I had to admit to the inevitable. Sophia's apartment was not there. I was looking at diplomatic housing: flags waving, gates locked guarded houses. All were the right size but, by sheer stature and beauty, each one was totally unsuitable for Sophia. To make matters worse, further along the street new glass structures advertised shopping, cinema, theatre and a casino. Not *one* apartment fitted my seedy mental idyll. For the first time, in the face of this adversity, I considered the idea of mixing fiction with history - creating faction.

Up till now my characters and plot were fictitious, but the landscape remained historically correct. But here I was considering the appropriateness of creating an *imaginary* warehouse, moving *real* to make way for my own version. In other words: making the statue move; creating a world within a historically correct framework, but allowing detail, some detail, to be fictionalised.

So, what went in and what stayed out? And who decided?

I had always been clear that my own moral choice stressed I change as little as possible. Whenever I could I worked around the landscape, keeping time-lines in order with natural history. But I could not change *location* for Sophia. I wanted two things for her.

One: she had to see the victory column through her sitting room window. Two: she had to be able to run through Tiergarten Park, with an ease that suggested she lived next to it.

For example, in this exert, Sophia has arrived home and is preparing to go for a run:

> Crossing the road to the park, she let the ridiculously tense day fall away, took the time to breathe, to notice that the evening light was amazing. Dark and soft, she thought, stretching her arms up and looking at the sky, dreamt chances at something new and wonderful, like stepping into a new skin, or a new place where no one knew you and you could really, truly, become someone else. The 'could be' becoming real, maybe even meeting people, people who would understand, would just get who this newly made her was. Sophia laughed once, and stretched her legs, breath rasping in the cold air, to an easy run. She could list the kinds of things they would talk about – interesting things, things she longed to explore; like the ideas behind painting blue on white, the black unseen deepness of the sea, and the possibility of mermaids, the strangeness of time; when it stood still and when it rushed past the back door and was gone. They would understand the smell of longing mixed with turpentine.
>
> The evening light was dense and cloudy, thick enough to hide the golden angel perched on top of the Victory Column. Each time she ran past she thought of Diertha, a star athlete from a life before. She remembered her without reason or sadness. Knowing she'd sunk to a watery grave, while Sophia had lived. She raised her hand to the statue, a greeting, a way of warding those particular demons away.
>
> She knew only too well that angels were simply mermaids out of water, and this angel was sad, frozen and easy prey to the boom of aeroplanes and bird crap?

The world I wanted to create was one in which you or I could trace through history, the locations detailed and correct.

In order to get things right, I spent hours trying to determine detail. Did site workers in Berlin wear yellow or white hard hats?

What colour were the 1970 East Berlin phone boxes? Sophia was a policewoman, so naturally I researched the history of the police uniform before and during the amalgamation of East and West, and read anything I could find about athletes that were given steroids to maximise performance.

The most concise archive turned out to be Steven Ungerleider's collection, housed in The University of Texas, Austin. This archive holds the result of many years work; resulting in the book *Faust's Gold*.[3] The story details the journey from the 1940s to the 1990s, beginning with Hitler's prescription steroids for his armed forces, to the history of the GDR sports machine and its eventual demise.

I was, by now, drowning in paperwork, the seriousness of issue after issue weighing heavy. I felt (and still feel) a huge obligation to be true to these men and woman, who continue to suffer from the after-effects of years of steroid abuse. Medical issues range from sex changes – you may have read of 'Hormone Heidi'. Children were born with clubbed feet, liver damage, tendon damage and of course the mental fallout from knowing their precious medals were won through foul means.

None of these women were willing to come out of the shadows and meet, and in reaction to this, Sophia became a pale shadow hiding behind a mound of research.

I became obsessed with detail: how many steroids were given out on a daily basis, what colour were they, how were they presented (in a box, tube, casing)? Where did athletes train? How far did they swim … as if this would lead me back into the novel? Months passed in which I completely lost sight of my story.

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[3] Ungerleider, Steven. 2001. *Faust's Gold:* Inside the East German Doping Machine. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.

In amongst this daily fiasco (little of which very would be shown in my writing), I wrote to the Kienbaum Training Centre[4] and was surprised to receive an invitation.

Fig. 3: Kienbaum 2007

Kienbaum is near Berlin, in Hangelsberg. It was Eric Hoenecker's holiday retreat when he was rising to power, then in 1953 the grounds were adapted to facilitate the training of athletes from the GDR and other countries. On many occasions the Cuban team were resident.

Kienbaum has a (now unused) hidden underground facility for testing and training athletes. There were rooms for doctors, a canoeing pool, cycling and treadmill room, and a Baro-chamber. This Baro-chamber is a simulated high-altitude space that increased blood flow, allowing the athlete to train harder and faster.

[4] http://www.kienbaum-sport.de/

Fig. 4: Steps into the Baro-chamber

Fig. 5: One of the underground rooms

As I walked down the ramp, scarcely able to believe where I was, into a series of underground rooms camouflaged by a strange cone-like hill, I had a *eureka* moment. This was the perfect setting. This was where Sophia would end her story – where she would face her past and nearly die in doing so.

Fig. 6: The Baro-chamber

Fig. 7: A resting area

The black fake leather seats in the recovery or waiting room were perfectly seedy. The small doctor's room; just left from the lines of small monitor screens, gave a near perfect pitch of paranoia. The only problem lay in the fact that no Olympic-size training pool existed. The nearest pool was in the city at the SC Dynamo Berlin. Again I was faced with the dilemma of needing to create an unreal description in a real world.

I decided to write the nearby shot-put training arena as a swimming pool, not Olympic sized, but a specialised training pool, based on the former top secret 3 x 5-meters tank in Leipzig. This tank had an apparatus attached to the swimmer's face, allowing for breath flow to be measured in a current that would be adjusted for maximum affect. In making the decision, I 'created' a pool *inside* the underground labyrinth, thus providing the perfect setting for the denouement of the final chapters.

I found more detail from each visit to Berlin and Kienbaum than from any book, paper or document. For example, in Kienbaum I learnt that all paperwork had been burnt in 1989, just before the reunification. The staff had been dismissed. Not knowing what to do, they returned in drips and drabs to clean the houses and to garden. Eventually the West German state realised the facility for what it could be, and began to rebuild the resource into what it is today. The secretary (then librarian) kept one small box of

paperwork that she secretly showed me, as we chatted about our children and life in general.

I stayed for two nights; during each pairs of nightingale sang – something I had never before experienced. My room was still part of the original single-story shared dormitories. Each dormitory had one entrance; mine facing the lake. I wrote about nightingales and about the training camp orgies that resulted in Sophia's friend's suicide in the lake. I began to see Sophia walking to breakfast, tidying the room, her exasperation with Diertha her messy roommate. The all-important list of drugs and research faded into the distance as I began to see my story.

I returned home to begin selecting detail from a mound of accumulated research that included 'Saltzbrötchen', a white butter roll covered in salt crystals (my own favourite) and Sophia's police uniform colours, as shown in this extract:

> It was getting late, past six thirty, and if she wasn't out the door by quarter to seven she'd be late. She shrugged on the green jacket, hugging its shape close just for one moment, she loved the feel of it, the safety the uniform afforded, *one of many*, not alone. Her beige trousers were not flattering, lumpy and too thick they still (although she would never see it) did not hide a slim and quite lovely female shape. Then, as she did every morning, Sophia touched medals that hung by the door, they clinked together once. She grabbed the bag with her washing and her hat - the insignia of Police protection squad looking the same as it had been for most of her twelve years of service.
>
> She jogged across to the shop and bought two Saltzbrötchen, biting into the salty topping, trying to reason with the fluttering in her stomach that told her she was now, categorically, officially late *again*.

It was during this time that I finally managed to get the answer on which my entire plot rested: When did the police begin investigating the athletes' case? I had written this 'conveniently' as

1990, thinking: The wall is down, stories must have gotten out. The answer was not good. In 1991, information was received about a lost archive hidden in Bad Saarow, a suburb of East Berlin; from this the police began investigations in 1992 in a more stable Germany.

The two dates did not mix. The *story* time, 1990, had to remain as chaotic and haphazard – the messy start to a unified Germany. This was vital, not only in the danger Sophia faced, looking into her past; but also Pettra, her father, and her estranged mother, Dagmar, had to be living within a divided and still dangerous land.

I felt I was back where I started, struggling with the dilemma of whether the *story* moved, or whether I moved *history*. In the end I felt I could not alter the timeline. I could not make the statue move so far as to write the police investigations beginning in 1990, rather than 1992, so I made Sophia a recipient of letters. Letters that forced her to remember, pushing her into the still dangerous territory of a Stasi-like rebuttal.

I had always been clear that it was *my* choice to be authentic, setting the serious issues raised in the book against a genuine historical backdrop. I felt that in my story, the statue could move only so far, to include changes that were additional, rather than integral – in other words my story wove itself around the statue, not the other way around.

The balancing of research with creative writing was quite another matter. The author Gillian Slovo suggested (during a class at the 2008 Cheltenham Literary Festival) that research should never obscure, or stand out from story, but that it should be presented as a *see-through* curtain through which the narrative runs.

I would agree, though the task is harder than I imagined. My research is becoming less intrusive; in this novel at least, the Victory Column remains firmly in Berlin's Tiergarten Park.

Two inches of ivory: Short-short prose and gender

Laura Tansley (University of Glasgow)

The title of my paper refers to a much-referenced quote by Jane Austen taken from a letter to her nephew, Edward. She writes:

> What should I do with your strong, manly, spirited Sketches, full of Variety and Glow? - How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour? (Austen 2004, p. 198)

This comment from Austen seems a fitting point to begin a discussion of gender and genre, as through this self-deprecating aside, Austen points to a theory of there being an established space for female writers. What I am concerned with, in regards to this 'two inches of ivory', is the productivity of this space for contemporary women writers: whether it creates a stifling boundary that forces female voices into a realm of limitations, or whether this sort of space provides a creative freedom, as meditated limits often do. To do this, I'd like to briefly discuss some of the aspects of the history of women's writing, particularly the novel and the short story, which will bring to light some of the cases in point for women writers and the short-short. I hope to draw conclusions from this on the nature of women writing in contemporary forms – the possibilities and the limits. Secondly I want to establish what it is I mean by short-short forms of prose, although not definitively. The short-short is slippery but I hope to make its position in literature clearer by examining what its history is and where it stands today.

Mary Eagleton, in the 1989 essay *Gender and Genre*, using Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* as direction, suggests that women's writing proliferated in the eighteenth century through the novel (p.58). Woolf's ideas on the social history of women surmise that the development of capitalization and the move towards industrialization 'denied middle-class women their traditional occupations' such as 'brewing, baking, spinning [and] weaving' (p. 59). Eagleton continues that, due to the low literary status of the novel, its availability to women offered opportunities for the female author. The novel was considered populist and of little worth to literature, domestically produced and consumed (as opposed to drama) and therefore became popular with women because the domestic was considered a female realm. Eagleton notes that Virginia Woolf considered older, well-established, understood and respected forms of literature to be 'hardened and set' (p.60). A 'low status' therefore implies that a genre is not concrete in its designations but 'open and malleable' (p.60). By remaining unestablished, women were able to appropriate the form to express themselves. Citing certain criticism, Eagleton discusses the idea that the 'feminisation of culture' was responsible for the rise in female novelists; that 'the growing emphasis in literature on feminine subject matter – the domestic, the interpersonal, feeling – and a feminine point of view – conciliatory, socially minded rather than ego-centred, healing division and difference,' (which could be a description of the two inches of ivory Austen makes reference to) also encouraged female novelists (p.61). Eagleton is unsure about this argument, but what she seems interested in is the idea of a link between women writers and literary forms of low status. She applies the same logic to the short story writing that, given its low literary standings and how ideal the short form is for domestic production and consumption for a contemporary woman, the short story holds potential for female

voices. Eagleton reinforces this idea by referring to various quotes by authors suggesting that the short story deals with 'submerged population groups', portraying characters who are 'aliens' (p.62). She suggests that the short story creates an image of both character and writer being 'non-hegemonic, peripheral, contradictory – a reflection of the position of women in a patriarchal society' (p.62). This seems to create a double bind for women. Eagleton writes,

> the intimacy of the form, the one-to-one relationship between author and reader, or because of the short-story's focus on a manageable, single incident, is, on the one hand, to recognise women's social experience in our culture […] on the other hand, it is to confine women once again in the personal, the closely detailed, the miniature,

in Austen's two-inches again (p.64). What Eagleton and Austen seem to be identifying is a cycle of women appropriating forms of the disavowed, suggesting that short-short prose, with its current status as fleeting, produced and digested quickly, would be the next logical form for female writers wishing to manipulate norms in literature to investigate. But by following this pattern, are women placing themselves perpetually as an outsider? As literary writers, would we want to be insiders, accepted by the canon that has excluded so many of us? Now that Mary Eagleton has set a path for us, I want to move on to the short-short and consider these questions and issues for a new and different genre.

Firstly, and not just for those that are unfamiliar with it, I want to try and define the short-short as I think this approach begins to demonstrate the potential appeal for female writers. The 'short-short story' is an umbrella term for the many existing forms of very short prose. Such titles include micro-fiction, flash fiction, smoke long (which refers to the idea that a story could be consumed within the time it takes to smoke a cigarette), miniature prose, the drabble

(100 words exactly), sudden fiction and postcard fiction – the notion of which has recently been translated by the bookseller Waterstone's 2008 'What's your Story' campaign where members of the public were encouraged to write a story that would fit on a postcard. The winners were published in a postcard book, presumably so that the postcards could be torn out and sent. Each of the terms I have mentioned has different, and in some cases unstipulated, word-length designations but each form shares ideas of sparseness, implicitness, minimalism, precision, lightness and energy. This forms the handy acronym SIMPLE, which the microfictionist Richard Gwyn once shared in an undergraduate creative writing course at the University of Cardiff. An interesting example of a short-short written by Gwyn is 'Bees':

> Returning from the olive fields with nets, axe and saw, I was told that Iannis the honeymaker had been stung to death by his bees. He was a man in his early forties, with three children. He had entered the hive, in the Greek way, without protection. That evening, in the kafeneion, the shepherds sat in silence with their crooks and worry beads. In the background was a perpetual wailing that came from the direction of Iannis the honeymaker's home. Occasionally the wailing would be interrupted by screams and shouting. I imagined the beating of the widow's fists on walls, the beating of the widow's fists on unyielding hives, the beating of the widow's fists on her husband's departing back. Then, as night fell on the mountains, a mysterious humming sound began to seep into the air. I went and stood on the veranda, overlooking the village square. People appeared in doorways, shutters were opened. The deep buzzing grew louder, a counterpoint to the shrill wailing from the dead man's house, and then, very gradually, it subsided. Nobody talked about this afterwards, but I knew from their faces the next day that everyone had heard it. (2000, p.33)

'Bees' evokes a mystery and defies normal expectations of prose. Taken from *Walking on Bones*, which the back cover describes as '42 poems', 'Bees' becomes a moot example. The prose within it is lyrical but not rhythmical, it lacks poetic formatting and it asks the reader to concentrate on plot rather than the sonorous or rhythmic tendencies of the words. I would therefore contend that without the back cover giving the reader a genre-bearing, if the piece was taken out of its context, as it appears in this paper, then it could also certainly fall into the designation of the short-short. This, very briefly, demonstrates that naming and context plays a large part in establishing a place for a piece of short-short prose. Gwyn's gender is, of course, an issue as I began this paper with thoughts of a place for women writers. I am using his piece firstly because it begins to demonstrate the short-short's tendencies towards moving between genres and secondly to demonstrate that, as Hélène Cixous notes, 'the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity' (cited in Cavallaro 2003, p.122). Julia Kristeva furthers this idea: 'Our attention ... should shift from the *gender of the author* to the *gender of the text*' (cited in Cavallaro, 2003 p. 82, Kristeva's emphasis). So Gwyn's example moves the discussion away from gender and what it is to be a man or a woman, to the gender of writing and how authors liberate themselves from established norms by questioning boundaries.

I would like to discuss another short-short characteristic through Gwyn's piece which is quite apt in regards to 'Bees': the sting in the tail. The sting or twist is a kind of punch-line which is often recurrent in short-short forms. Pamelyn Casto describes this as 'surprising twists that take place; twists throughout the story or stories that have a twist at the end which turns what came before on its head' (online, 2002). In the introduction to the microfiction collection *Dinner Time*, Holly Howitt describes this twist as:

> a stab in the back that dislocates the reader and shows her that, actually, the story has been somewhere else all along. This can be like poetry, but equally relates to the short story (2008, p.4).

Howitt succinctly summarises one of the aspects of the short-short that links it to both poetry and short stories, an aspect which leaves the short-short in a kind of self-imposed limbo, able to dip its toe into one genre or another.

In terms of being an unestablished genre, the comparisons with other, more established genres in order to categorise it and the many alternative names and forms it appears in demonstrate that the short-short currently has no strict definition. As for its literary standings, the short-short is often considered as merely a writing exercise or an editing technique rather than a legitimate literary art form. It appears in creative writing classes as a way to sketch a novel, or as a happy distraction from work that has a more serious purpose. Its popularity can be attributed to the ease of its consumption due to its length which can be specified by an arbitrary word count without fear of constricting writers. This is because the short-short is considered a kind of game, a way of showing off a writer's abilities (as Ernest Hemingway demonstrated with his six-word story: 'For Sale: Baby shoes, never worn' which allegedly won him a $10 bet), or as a way of testing the limits of fiction and the audience that reads them. Judging panels, online writers' magazines and literary journals have proliferated the genre simply because reading, accepting or dispensing with a 250-word submission can, at times, be favourable to a 5,000-word short story submission.

The history of the short-short depends on what you would define as a short-short, which we have already discovered is subjective and context-based. Nevertheless the modern short-short has roots in parables, proverbs, fables and aphorisms which Michel

Delville discusses in 'The Prose Poem and the Short (Short) Story' (1998 pp.97-149). All of these historic forms share the concept of transmitting a moral, a principle or a truth. However, the short-short has the potential to be different from its historical reference points. The short-short can have a literary end rather than a moral end by having the kind of mystery Gwyn employs in 'Bees'.

Mary Eagleton is uncomfortable designating certain topics as feminine, in the two inches of *experiential* ivory that Austen knows so well. I am equally uncomfortable designating genre or form as feminine – in this case, two inches of ivory *page space* – because inevitably it means essentialising women and female experience. The nature of the short-short means it would lend itself well to domestic production, to a woman with ever-changing roles throughout the day, and there is power in domesticity. Ann Romines in *The Home Plot: Women, Writing and Domestic Ritual* suggests that 'ritualized housekeeping may be a sacramental activity that provides essential cultural continuity' (1992, p.6). If writing and reading have been part of the housekeeping schedule since the 1700s, then the literary production within this domestic sphere has vocalised, perpetuated and allowed for the survival of female voices in literature. My concern is that suggesting the short-short is ideal for female writers creates a space, but a space that is limiting, a space with yet another set of boundaries to contend with. Although being committed to a space is a way of creating ownership and control, this also creates a kind of reverse-exclusion for other writers. What I am suggesting involves a more liberating approach to the short-short.

As a genre to investigate, the short-short is ideal. It infuriates me as much as it intrigues me and its malleability (which comes from its current lack of definition) means there is space to transform its exterior and interior; time to play with it and manipulate it to address a whole spectrum, to constantly morph its boundaries. The

short-short's status provides a chance to create a series of voices expressing compound visions, a multitude of angles – like a fly's eye, kaleidoscopic – before the floodgates close and it becomes formally established. For writers, the short-short offers a place of experimentation in an almost wholly unsubstantiated form, where voices that contend with established modes of writing and logic can flourish in a distinctive genre, picking up parts of other genres on the way. It is difficult to do justice to this argument without giving an example, so at this point I will refer to my own work by way of conclusion:

Polaroid

At the end of his bed, between the frame and the sloping attic roof, is a box. He shows me the cards and letters inside, standard remnants of ex's and the ticket stubs of things he thinks he should keep so he could pause, when the mood took him, to look at himself and his past and consider himself. I want to see them so that I can know a different part of him. At the bottom there are Polaroid's of Nicola. She looks disgruntled but flattered, a green jumper, black, smooth tights, a flickered TV next to her; then excited; then with her auburn hair pulled over one shoulder sitting turned from a cluttered desk, looking right at the camera and not at him.

Then she is naked. The room around her has disappeared. There is only a bed and her shape. Her legs are splayed, knees bent, red dots of shaving rash visible at the edges of her pubis. Her head has been cut out by the frame, as have her hands. Her neck and arms extended, palms facing upwards I assume, her bare limbs are completed by the white frame of the photograph.

When he leaves later, I go back to his bedroom without pretence; I am there for that photograph. I sit on the bed, on the same creaseless sheets as in the photo. I consider her body amputated by the lens, like Lavinia, red-ribbon streamers flowing from her wrists and mouth, showing she could never tell. But he'd told me she'd wanted it this way, so that no one could ever tell it was her.

> I stare at the frame for a long time, until my vision blurs and the edges sink inwardly, down to the bed she is lying on. The white disappears. I reach my hand into the depth of the dark photo, to the navy sheets around her; to pull them over her, cover her. She relents for a moment, and then with her handless arms she stops me, wanting to explain with her body. She motions with her whole self to an LP cover where a Hispanic woman poses topless. I can tell that she doesn't like him looking at her.
>
> So I return to the room. To the same sheets. And I find the album cover. I colour in her face and chest mercilessly with a black marker pen, inhaling the scent, feeling the satisfying smoothness of the pen against the glossy sleeve.

My endeavour here is to question the frame, to ask questions of ownership, to ask the reader to consider what is outside of the text and to question the authority of the 'author', to set my own limits rather than to adhere to any hardened rules. In the way that Gwyn's piece does, 'Polaroid' evokes a mystery but the mystery continues outside of the text. It doesn't exist within itself, the story is not simply circulating within itself; it is not trapped within the two inches of ivory frame. The short-short has the potential to allow an escape from this and other boundaries, other frames, by being non-essentializing and questioning traditional methods of narration.

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The beginnings of solitude

David Manderson (University of West Scotland)

I'm going to offer you a case study. His name is David Manderson. He's 53 years old and he's spent much of his life teaching low-level qualifications in colleges of Further Education or doing other jobs of the same sort. He's always written too – short stories published in magazines and anthologies. For a while he edited and ran his own magazine, *Nerve*, a Scottish Arts Council-supported project that bit the dust after five issues. He's now an academic at a post-1992 university, getting used to his new job, trying to figure his way between quality standards and regulations, teaching creative writing and screenwriting, writing research papers, going to conferences and, above all, trying to continue his own practice as a writer. The reason for his move to HE? His Ph.D., completed in 2006 – a novel – the end of ten years of postgraduate study, beginning with the M.Litt at Glasgow University. His book won a couple of prizes and excited the interest of several agents. But what's in question now is not that, but what its author does next. Will he go on? Will he give up? Like every novelist, he's had to invent his own way of tackling his chosen form. But he can still run into barriers that can stop anyone. Will he be pulled from his route by institutional politics and the drudgery of marking? Has he gone as far as he can or will he achieve his ambition of writing good fiction? Will teaching other people creative writing stifle his own? Will the infamous second novel prove the challenge too far? Will he ever write (well) again?

I want to start with these questions because I think the title of this paper, 'The beginnings of solitude', contains the answers. Beginnings and the way they come together: the half longed-for, half-feared start: ideas, impulses, half-formed instincts: the setting off

into the unknown. The period of critical reflection between finishing one piece and starting another – surely a process, like writing itself. 'I feel like writing a poem,' McCaig says, 'the way you feel hungry or thirsty' (2004, p.2). Time has passed, the writer has slept or digested, he's ready to start again. The process may be different for every writer though. Different ones seem to need different amounts of time. John Braine matter-of-factly advises one week off between books, then a three-week planning period before starting the next: 'There are always excuses for the […] writer not to write,' he urges (Braine 2000, p.36). Lanark in Alasdair Gray's book stares through a grimy window at a nightmarish city he's just discovered or come back to. He has no memory of how long he has existed, or what he did before. But he's come to a moment of frustration: 'He became restless and started walking up and down the room. […] "What does it matter who I am?" he asked aloud,' and quickly he tears brown paper from the bottom of an empty drawer into neat squares and starts scribbling (Gray 1982, p.15).

The moment arrives to write again and the writer recognises it. He casts about for a beginning, for beginnings. Where are they found? Probably to an extent they depend on what's being written. Flannery O'Connor in her essay 'Writing Short Stories' talks of writing as a sense of discovery: her short story 'Good Country People' begins with a description of two women O'Connor knows. Before she's had time to think about it she's put a wooden leg in it, then a Bible salesman, and ten lines before the salesman steals the leg she realises it was inevitable from the start (Anderson 2006, p.529). Myers in Carver's 'Put Yourself in My Shoes' is between stories, and he feels despicable. He visits the home of the angry Morgan, a man with a grudge against writers in general, and Myers in particular. 'If you were a real writer, sir, you would put that story into words and not pussyfoot around with it, either,' he flings after the writer, and

Myers in the car on the way home is silent. He keeps his hands on the wheel. He's at the very end of the story (Carver 1985, p.114)

Some begin with people and objects and no conscious story, others think it through all the way to the end. It's likely that, as the bigger but not necessarily more complex form, the beginnings of novels will be bigger too. Sometimes, like Stephen King, the novelist goes into his quiet room and shuts the door with just an idea. What if some children came across a body? What if a prisoner took thirty years to escape? But this simple proposal is just the entry into a multitude of other starts: an American town, a prison, friendships, memory, time, all starts we can see in many other books by the same writer. Sometimes personal disaster interrupts. The process changes, or is sometimes destroyed, or is delayed and another must be gone through — as if the writer has to start all over again, search for new beginnings. Christopher Rush wrote a book a year until 1993 when his wife died, and it took a further decade and the personal odyssey of *To Travel Hopefully* for him to write again. Alice Sebold struggled for twenty years to write about the experiences she describes in *Lucky*. Like the process, beginnings seem unique to each writer, and delicate, difficult moments.

The first novel is the breakthrough, where the process is seen through for the first time. The experience of having written one before helps; you have a model for the future. If from the first it's been discovered that creativity springs from impulse, from spontaneous unbidden interest, the deep-seated need to find something out without knowing why should be followed, and always critiqued: the photograph of the previously unknown great-uncle in kilt and tunic, rifle at his side; the story of *Blackwood's* and its brilliant, treacherous group, James Hogg's expulsion from it and his lampooning in the pages of the journal he helped established; Maga itself, Wilson and Lockhart and De Quincey and Maginn;

Ambrosian nights of talk and feasts; Patrick McGill and his journey through Ayrshire, Glasgow, and the Scottish Highlands to the killing fields of Northern France, and then to Hollywood; the patterns of migrations to and from and between Northern Ireland and Scotland and America; the trails of steel and coal, of Catholic and Protestant, of tolerance and sectarianism, of employment law and subversion. 1970s feminism, Sheridan Lefanu and 19th-century Irish and Scottish gothic, mid-20th century pulp. All beginnings. All studied alongside the writing of the fiction without worrying about or attempting to explain their relationship to it. But thought about, considered, studied in relation to theory and angle, post-colonial and feminist thought. What did they have to do with the psychological thriller being written? Nothing. Everything. Surface and river-bed. Topsoil and roots.

As a writer one struggles to make sense, to make an order of things. But what about daily life, work routines? How much energy do they leave for the writing, how to make sense of them? Preparing, teaching, marking, validation documents, validation meetings, marking, subject panels, scrutiny boards, external and internal examinerships, students' needs and complaints, marking, marking. Useless to hope that this paper storm will ever slacken. There is no respite. But equally, a book in progress is the way to give order to this. Without one a centre (a unifying pattern, maybe a vortex) is missing. Its absence provokes the loss of control, the feeling of being swept away. Of course the difficulties of working alongside writing are real and both affect each other. But so do things like a lack of work, or too much time, a feeling of pointlessness or marginalisation, or not enough distraction. When one works in an institution one belongs, an existence and a point are confirmed. Maybe writing, like a satisfying job, should be busy and

active. Maybe it's at its best when it sits alongside many other things — when, in fact, you don't have too much time to think about it.

What about the dangers of teaching creative writing? Will personal creativity be lost by encouraging able students, or worse, submerged beneath mediocrity? While the role of creative writing in the university grows and is explored in so many different needs, is it possible now to survive with personal creativity intact? And what about the need to press forward with theory and critical work — conferences, papers, critical articles? And what about the thousand other pressures mounting in the less-than-simple business of surviving in the contemporary university?

Perhaps writing flourishes when it brings a sense of proportion to the day-to-day stuff, when it makes the day-to-day playful, interesting, light relief from the real work. It's wrong to take a livelihood too seriously. Treating it as a game makes it tick. The idea of playfulness seems also crucial to the approach to the teaching, encouraging students back to their imaginations. The creation of new creative writing materials and the putting forward of them to students seems a way of learning for both students and lecturer, provided it doesn't impinge too greatly, or not enough. Writing systems can be interesting ways of reviewing and renewing approaches. Vogler's Shapeshifters, Heralds and Threshold Guardians, McKee's Inciting Incident, Field's Act structure and Parker's taxonomy. Working with story. The constant examination of structure, character, tone and visual style — and the professional experience of colleagues in acting, producing, directing and musical composition worlds sharpens, one's own perceptions of story, brings insights, and hones craft. Writing short films to practice the new skills will contribute something. Film work picked up — script editing Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* — is a step forward. Despite all the pressures, or even sometimes because of them, there

are moments of reflection, of quietness, of what Charles Sanders Peirce called 'abduction' — the form of thought different from induction or deduction — the dreamlike state, the place of the inspired guess — where, unlike all other work where things must be separated, connections are made, things pulled together. A novel in progress absorbs it all, remakes it, finds a different order and a new sense, and makes a new relationship between the components.

Research is an activity that ought never to seem out of place in a university. The battle to give credibility to creative writing research might therefore seem frustrating, but it is the same battle fought by all academics for their fields. Debates over genre fiction can help sharpen an understanding of form. Also, research for a novel can lead in a thousand directions; it may not be completed with the end of the book, although it may feel like it for a time. Critical reflection can bring the understanding that themes, perhaps felt for a while dealt with in the original book, continue, that other books will go further with them and that supposed cul-de-sacs can become passages to other books. Ray Robinson's *Electricity* with its male-writing-in-a-female voice — 'transsexposition', Robinson calls it in *Making Electricity*— such a contrast to the solemn, deliberate male voice of the first book (Robinson, p.63). Berthold Shoene's essays in *Writing Men*, so influential in its thoughts on 'The Successful Zombie' (about John Braine's *Room at the Top*) — almost a guideline to the start of the first book. But what about its shadow, what Shoene leaves unsaid?

Research trails need not just lead to fiction. The pressure to publish as an academic can be met: reviews, articles, biographical entries, critical books. Creative non-fiction developed from an aspect of research, taken further to where it needs to go? Research deepening, changing, opening new areas within itself, constantly reviewing and critiquing itself, giving as much back as it's given,

showing a different ways forward than ever seemed the way at the start. Why not?

But in terms of the fiction, what is seen now? What is the new story coming together, coming out? To predict a story before it starts to tell itself might be to destroy it. How to allow images, half-imagined longings, thoughts and dream-like guesses to come, without doing that? A novel of course is organic. Better to let it grow. But with two years gone since the end of the last book, that period of critical reflection over, one day some notes were jotted down in an old-notebook:

> Make it light
> Make it entertaining
> Make it different.

Precepts, principles. A step away from what's known. The second novel: the only one worth writing, the only one that can be written. A structure-less building without walls or a ceiling. But images: a young girl falling from a tower, a female voice, a father, a town by the sea with a ruined castle and cathedral, tank tops and loon pants and afros, and a group of paunchy men now, today, men in suits, teachers, lawyers, journalists, gathered for a reunion. Things never tried before, and not easily pigeon-holed. Not like the first book but springing from it, even if the way it does can't be perceived or understood at the moment. The writer doesn't know if he can do it. But he hopes for the future and sees its shape ahead.

So will David Manderson be reborn? Will he be who he can be? He feels the whiff of it again, like a fresh breeze in the face, a good blast of oxygen. Another journey stretching ahead, thank god. He's waiting for the moment, the right place and the right stretch of time when he might not be interrupted. He hopes he can. He believes he can. He knows he can. Directly ahead, that thing he's

been missing, what he really needs: quietness and solitude. Solitariness, not outwardly but inwardly. It's all coming together again. And all he needs do is wait.

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An extract from the novel *The Bridge*

Karen Stevens (University of Chichester)

His name is Kenny. Kenny Miller. Nick-name Killer Miller, or Killer, for short, he tells us, fag in mouth, shoulders hunched, hands bulging like apples in the pockets of his drainpipes. His Dad's a wank-uh. His Mum's alright. His cat thinks it's a dog. There's a court battle with the neighbours. *All* the neighbours hate them. They hate *all* the neighbours. He hates Hush Puppies, pop music, people who aren't realistic, girls with flicks, David Bowie, embroidery, uniforms of any description, church-goers, Pink Floyd, the Royal Family, woodwork teachers, thirty-plus wrinklestiltskins, middle-class sitcoms – 'Oooh, yawww!'

He hasn't looked back at us once. We have to almost run to keep up with his uneven grasshopper strides, and keep slipping on the hailstones that still haven't melted, it's that cold.

'You hate a lot of things!' I yell at his back.

'She speaks!' Killer shouts over his shoulder. 'I thought there was something wrong with you. I thought you was a mute, or something. That's why I invited you back.' He turns round and waggles his hands like a spastic. 'Thought it might be *interesting!*' he says in a dinny voice, and me and Charlie *really* laugh.

Killer stops walking and taps me on the shoulder. 'You're it!' he slobbers in the same dinny voice, and runs off waving his arms.

'You're it,' I say thumping Charlie and squealing after Killer.

We go down so many roads - left, right, left - that I've given up trying to memorise our way back to our bikes. Killer's assumed front position again, with no looking back. I watch his orange jelly shoes, his soaked grey socks, the way his left foot twists out to the side with every stride, like it's been mangled in between his bike

spokes at some point. I'll ask him to draw me a map before we go home, but then he probably *hates* maps because they're *sooo* middle class. My heart sinks.

'You know what Superman's special powers are?' Killer asks.

'He can fly, *and* he's got x-ray vision,' Charlie says quickly, despite the fact that he's sulking. He didn't like being 'it'. Whenever he caught up with me and Killer, he'd say, 'You're it,' and take a swipe at us, but we'd jump back, so he'd swipe again, and we'd jump back again, and he'd swipe at nothing.

'Superman's also got heat vision, telescopic vision and microscopic vision,' Killer shouts, '*and* he has sensory powers that have the ability to see, hear and feel the entire electromagnetic spectrum!'

Charlie looks crushed by so much vital information. 'Heat vision…' he mumbles worriedly. I feel almost sorry for him.
'You want to go home?' I ask him quietly.

'No.' Charlie glares at me. He is gripping onto Killer's every word, virtually clutching at his jacket to keep up, to make sure he doesn't miss out on the pile of Superman mags piled-up in the corner of Killer's bedroom.

We turn into a neat, wide road lined with trees and tall Victorian-looking houses that are all red brick with huge bay windows. We trot right to the end, to a house on the left with half-opened curtains and a dismantled motorbike on the oily, black grass. Killer tilts his head back and gobs into the neighbour's garden as we wander up the front path.

He opens the flaky door. Loud reggae music bumps from somewhere at the back of the house. We walk past loads of greasy bike parts lined up on newspaper along the right wall. Black fingerprints cover the bottom half of the faded, flowery wallpaper. We follow Killer past the wide stairs, where a massive bundle of

coats are thrown one on top of the other over the banister, and into a room just after the stairs.

The half-closed curtains have turned the room to shadows, and the air is blue and thick and wavy with fag smoke. It takes a while to adjust to the heat and the unreal shapes of furniture and people slumped in the weird orange glow from the electric bars of a fire. It's like diving underwater and discovering a different world. Charlie's cold hand slips into mine.

'Hello - it's the Pied Piper,' someone says, and a few of them laugh lazily.

Killer about-turns, disappears down the hallway and, as usual, I'm unsure whether we're meant to follow because he doesn't look back at us.

Someone with a mohican makes the sound of a flute playing and someone else says, 'Aw, don't take the piss.'

'Go on. Run along, children,' Mohican-man says.

I drag Charlie out of the room and we hurry down the hall and round a corner and into a kitchen which is big and dingy and the source of the really loud reggae music. It's so loud the cassette player buzzes annoyingly against the top of the yellow Formica unit. Charlie puts his hands over his ears.

Killer's thrown his jacket off and onto the floor in a corner along with his twelve-inch special edition Ian Dury single which he's obviously stopped fussing over, seeing as the corners are bent and it's now worthless, according to him. He's wearing a moth-eaten jumper that looks like it'd fit Charlie. One of the side-seams is completely ripped right up to the armpit.

'See Dad's not in, then!' Killer says, turning the volume down to stop the fuzzy buzzing.

'I play my reggae when he's about, thank you very much,' says a woman with peroxide hair and a mouth full of pins. She's sewing

the hem of a rock-and-roll style skirt at a wooden table that's in the middle of the kitchen.

'You never play your music when he's about!'

'Yes I bloody do!' Half the pins drop out of her thick, red lipstick mouth. 'Now see what you've made me do!' She tuts furiously, starts searching for the pins amongst the layers of skirt that froth across her lap.

'So where is he?' Killer sneers.

'Who?'

'Dad.'

'In the shed, shagging one of his half-assembled bikes, probably.'

Killer picks up an open cereal packet and stares into it. 'Never anything to eat round here!'

The woman, who must be Killer's mum, flashes him an evil look, and her eyes catch on me and Charlie in the doorway. 'Hello,' she says, completely unsurprised. 'You just arrived with the post, or are you a new friend of Kenny's?'

Me and Charlie look at each other, unsure.

'Going to introduce me to your new friends, Kenny?'

'Found 'em in the park,' Killer says, stuffing something in his mouth.

'What d'ya mean – *Found them in the park?*'

'Dunno who they are, do I?'

'So hadn't you better find out?'

Killer turns to us. 'Sorry. Who *exactly* are you?' he asks, then he lets his mouth hang open, and a load of half-eaten mush tumbles out.

Killer's mum rolls her eyes, but doesn't tell him to clean it up.

'You wouldn't think this obnoxious turd was my son – or would you?' She winks at us. 'You want a seat?' She nods to the table and we walk into the kitchen and sit down.

Killer steps over the half-chewn food and Charlie flashes an anxious look at him. He doesn't want to sit politely around a table with me and Myra Hindley. He's here for the Superman comics.

'Biscuit?' she asks, nodding to a red tin on the table. Me and Charlie just look at each other.

'I'm Liz.' Liz smiles, revealing a mouthful of dodgy, crossed-over teeth.

'I'm Jen, and this is Charlie.'

'Pleased to meet you.' Liz watches us curiously with her darkly made-up eyes, and we watch her back.

'Kenny's always brought things home,' she says, still watching us. 'Ever since he was little. At first it was shells from the beach, sticks from the woods, wounded bugs and birds, and now it's people.' She arches a thick, black eyebrow. 'So, are you wounded?' she asks.

'WANT SUPERMAN COMICS!' Charlie says in his stupid baby voice.

'Oh. Yeah.' Killer leaves the kitchen and Charlie jumps up and stumbles after him.

'He's five,' I say, embarrassed.

'Well, I was just making small talk, really. Something kids don't have an awful lot of time for.' She tuts. 'I dunno. Kids of today, eh?' She looks pleased when I smile.

'You like this skirt?' She flattens it out so I can get a good look at the maroon fabric shot through with fine gold threads.

'It's taffeta. I love taffeta, don't you? It changes colour.' She puts her hand underneath the fabric and moves it about so the skirt

ripples from maroon to a sort-of purple. The net skirts underneath make a lovely shooshing sound.

'Sounds like the sea,' I say.

'I know. I love these old rock-n-roll skirts. You could be in the worst place ever, then you close your eyes and ruffle your skirt, and you're at the beach.' She snaps off the thread of cotton with her big teeth. 'I have at least thirty of these skirts. There, all done.' She stabs her needle into a dirty pin cushion.

A huge ginger cat slinks into the kitchen, stops at Killer's mush and starts eating.

'Satan!' Liz snaps. 'That's been in Kenny's bloody mouth!'

'Satan?'

'Kenny named him. You should hear me calling him in: *Satan! Satan! Come on, boy*!' Satan strolls over and rubs his long tabby side against Liz's leg.

'The neighbours are all gossiping about us being devil worshippers.' Liz laughs. 'I mean, really! All the houses are owned now on this street, except ours, and they want us out. I don't know why they look down their noses at us, when they're such a bunch of ridiculous, stuck-up wankers.'

Poems from the sequence *Distance*

Cath Nichols (Lancaster University)

Steel

Once I was neat and useful; sharp,
round-headed as a pin. Now

I am hard, headless. Your death
has split something. What is

this hole in my side? The sea-wind
blows through me.

I have become a needle,
without cloth, without thread.

(Second-prize winner in the Poetry on the Lake competition; and first published in the journal *Poetry on the Lake*, Vol. 1, 2008)

Otter

His fur shows small bubbles when
placed in water. Silvery spots, minute
ball-bearing flecks. Michael kept this clipping
from the paper. He's written in the margin:

'Four-legged yet water-gifted, to out-fish fish' –
Ted Hughes. I read the article, stare
at the photograph. Torrent is an otter cub
afraid of water. He was rescued from

the recent flood. His hairs should lie smooth,
be sleek like a seal's waxy pelt. Torrent
has a phobia in water. His raised skin
pimples up and seems to gasp for breath.

Waking Up

My shoes are neatly placed beside my towel. My teeth
stick together and my stomach pulses. I focus
on the feeling of shingle beneath my feet. *Nothing
is so bad as 'before';* the waiting. The water's not so cold
once you're in. Nothing is so bad as the waiting,
not knowing. When it's over, there are arrangements
to be made. You have people to tell, things to do.
But the second waiting will not end. Waiting for

the birthday card, his call, the old argument
about where to spend Thanksgiving. I used to nag
he didn't stay in touch. He said I should be pleased:
The lack of calls meant he was happy. The times
we squabbled least were in the ocean; he loved it,
even as a child. New Brighton was best, his Uncle John's.
Once, as adults we'd swum in the River Hudson,
but it's England he came back to. Look, Michael –

I'm up to my knees, I'm leaning over, my head's
gone under. Crap! It's cold. My teeth unstick.
It's solid and wet; I'm coming up. I slap wet hair
off my face, tread water and spit. I'd forgotten
the taste; and that salt lifts you. I turn on my back,
paddle, do the starfish. Drift. He'd want to be
remembered here. Why has it taken so long?
I turn and stretch out, do a lop-sided crawl, head

towards the horizon – catch myself, pull in.
I swim parallel to the strand, keep an eye
on my towel, trying not to go too far.
Fatigue is setting in and a warm ache. I lunge towards
the shore, heave myself out, a heavy monster
slopping up the beach. Dry clothes are welcome;
coffee will be good too. Back at the house I fix
the jug, scoop grains from a tin with a shaky hand.

The kettle boils; I pour hot water, let
the coffee stand, then push down the plunger.
The smell, the steam hits the back of my throat. I nearly
choke. Cream goes into my mug, then coffee.
My legs are weak – too long a swim – I pull out
the stool at the counter, sit down. Out of practice, I think,
I should have done some exercise when I gave up

the swimming. Something aerobic, maybe cycling?

I add the sugar and stir. 'Mom, just the one?'
Clever dick, I say. *I'll have two just to show you.*
I'm crying now, stirring recklessly, the noise
clanging like a train. I add another spoonful. I must be
crazy: this idea of 'sugar for the shock' so many months
after has got me laughing so I can hardly sit up straight,
hardly get the coffee to my lips. *Well, son,*
you might have hoped I'd give it up, but one is too few.

Damn you. This is my drink
and I'm going have it the way I like it.

Birkenhead Park

Dresses – wedding dresses – are hanging in
the trees. They remind me of shed skin, or
chrysalises, girls hung out to dry. To start with,

I guess one lady left her dress here. Perhaps
she'd never worn that dress. Perhaps she'd been
left standing at an altar and willed herself

to shrink away, leaving just the rigid dress behind.
Whatever her reason, the strangest thing, as soon
as she'd hung it in the tree her dress had company.

Other wedding dresses flew from closets, swam
through tides of dreams like swans or geese. Silently,
at night, navigating by scent like giant moths

or ghosts. We are entranced. People walk
through the park staring upwards. A wordless thing,
a natural wonder, the tree had borne spontaneous

fruit – chiffon plums, brocade pears, in white
or cream or gold. *I had a little nut-tree, nothing*
would it bear, but a silver nutmeg, and a golden pear.

I think in nursery rhymes, see the *fine lady*
upon a white horse, rings on her fingers, bells
on her toes. Lantern-like they swing, pale hollow

pumpkin globes, some pregnant; others
flat-stomached, gauzy and transparent. Yet the dresses
seemed happy: letting the Best Day of Your Life go,

letting the past swim free. Today the sun shines.
The chestnut tree is hung with sodden droops, clutches
of tiny leaves, lime green and luminescent.

An extract from the novel *Lost Bodies*

David Manderson (University of West Scotland)

Two of them.

In short-sleeved white shirts with sharp creases and black shoulder-tabs, their figures blocking the valley, their peaked caps the sky. One of them heavy with a wide face, the other dark and slight.

The smaller one saying his name, swaying forward as he spoke, as if he'd rehearsed it.

—Yes?

He was blinking over their shoulders at the valley, not able to look at their faces.

Shock rolled in a second later. A wave crashing over him, roaring past.

—Just a few questions, sir, if you don't mind. Can we come in?

Going ahead of them into the living room. The tread of their shoes, the floorboards creaking. They were too big for the place, seemed to bulge in it. Everything unreal, the brightness outside, the silence in here, the air clear and dim.

The big one stayed standing, over by the window. He looked the younger of the two. The small one dapper with a bright white collar, a gold watch with a rolled bracelet, a hatchet face. He sat on the settee without being asked, pulled off his hat, laid it on the table, looked up at him. Quick, sharp eyes.

—Lovely day, sir.

—Yes ... He forced his tongue to move.

—You could fry an egg on the bonnet out there.

The dark one smiled, took out a notebook. The big one didn't move. Standing with his hands hanging, not sure what to do with

them, not knowing whether to sit or stand. He could smell himself, sweat and earth. He went to the armchair, half-perched on its arm.

—Are you okay, sir?

—Yes ... fine ...

—You look a bit white. Too much sun?

—I've been working...

He moved a hand at the window, his arm heavy as lead. His mouth felt stuck. The small one ran a hand through the damp black tufts sticking up on his head.

—Is that your car parked outside, sir? Directly in front here?

—Yes ...

—It's your property - not borrowed or hired?

—No, it's mine ...

Numbers on their shirts, white plastic buttons with black figures. **6858677** hunched over his note-book, writing with his silver biro, **5768882** perfectly still. The big one had boots on, pimpled black leather with black toecaps. The dark one had neat, polished black shoes.

He managed to clear his throat.

—What's – what's this about?

—Just a routine enquiry, sir. We're visiting a few addresses.

The big one had moved over to the window, out of his vision; he could just see his feet. He couldn't move his head, couldn't turn his neck to look. He could feel eyes on the side of his face.

The small dark-haired one had sweat-sparkle high up his forehead, a film of it on his upper lip, a way of frowning as he wrote.

If it was bad they wouldn't've rung the bell, wouldn't be here now asking these –

The shock wave had helped – made him go stiff. Even his face had frozen. Answering their questions like a robot. But wearing off now. He could feel his knees, his elbows shaking.

Their car parked outside – he'd glimpsed it when he'd let them in. Parked right outside his driveway, blocking it off, its nose almost touching the rear end of his Rover. All along the street, the curtains twitching.

—What do you use it for, sir, your car?

—Well, I – He glanced round at the tall one. He was looking out the window ... To go to work. Or at night, weekends, just ...

He moved his hands, lifted his shoulders.

—Domestic use? In and out of town every day? To your place of employment?

—Not every day, some days. There's a train station near here. … I use it sometimes.

—And you work at...?

—Lesley and Cowan, Consultant Engineers, 8 Crown Terrace.

—Crown Terrace on this side of the city?

—That's right.

His heart tightened, like someone had given it a squeeze. The air singing in silence. His wrists trembling now, quivering like Anne's used to. His eyes burning and jumping, his lips quivering. Forcing his voice out through a breath he couldn't let go of.

Surely they saw it? They *must*, they couldn't –

The big one still staring out the window, his jaw latched over to one side. Difficult to watch him and keep an eye on this one too, listen to the sing-song voice, watch the quick eyes coming up to his face, going down to the notebook, back up again.

—Where were you last week on the twenty-fifth of June, sir?

—The twenty-fifth? He frowned ...Was that the Tuesday?

The slight one consulted his pad.

—Monday.

—I was at work ... He was nodding his head slowly ... I must've been. Unless I was off sick.

His stomach gave a dip, he was shaking like a leaf. But this was playing it the right way, acting stupid. He could tell from the way they weren't interested, the way the bloke made just a brief note.

—Actually we checked, and you *were* there, sir, according to their records ...

The small one smiled like he'd passed a test.

—I'm off sick today, he said, his voice painful in his throat.

Why had he said that?

—We know, sir, they told us ... That's quite a distinctive car you have there.

Cold now, slippery with sweat, a band tightening round his stomach. A trickle running down to his eyebrow. Impossible, beyond anything he could endure not to lift a hand, wipe it away.

He didn't move.

—I like it.

—They're quite old, aren't they? ... The dark one rapidly clicked his pen, not moving his eyes away ... The S-series, is that what they were called? Before they stopped making them?

—I think so.

—A car very like it was seen near the location of a serious crime on that day, sir. At around two-thirty in the south part of the city. White exterior with red leather seats, the same make and series. You weren't out and about at that time, were you?

—No.

—You didn't go anywhere near Shawlands?

—Shawlands? No.

—You couldn't have gone out and driven over there, for any reason? Maybe something that's slipped your memory?

—No. I was at work.

—You're sure about that?

—I'm positive.

The slight one stared up at him. Then smiled, flipped his notebook shut. Started to rise, lifting his hat. The big one seemed to come awake, started to move towards the door.

The way they didn't quite follow things up, bored underneath the courtesy. Probably a hundred other similar registered cars on their list. His name ninety-eighth on it.

—Well sir, thanks for your help. We'll be in touch if we need you again.

—You're nearly finished then?

A mistake. He knew it the instant it was out. Not the words, the way he'd said them. Too quick, almost eager. They stopped in the doorway.

—Sorry, sir?

—You'll ... be looking forward to getting through it?

They looked at each other, then at him.

—Getting through what, sir?

—The – the list. Of car owners.

It was like he couldn't stop doing it.

The small one turned his head, looked round the hall.

—Live here alone do you, sir? Not married or anything?

—No. I mean yes I am, I am married ... But my wife's away. With her mother.

The wee one turned his head back, not saying anything, waiting. The big one's eyes moving over him.

—She's not well, he said, after a moment.

—Sorry to hear it, sir ...Well, thanks again.

—Not at all.

—As I say, we'll be in touch.

—Yes, well ... I hope you find it. Him. Whoever you're after.

Their eyes looking back at him from under the peaks of their hats as they went down the steps. He shut the door and leaned against it, his heart bumping through wood.

From the poem *Now you're a woman*

Cherry Smyth (University of Greenwich)

Questions for the Womb

—What shape are you?
—Peanut-shaped. A bidet of felt.

—Where do you sit?
—On the throne of the cervix,
hands folded over my fundus.

—Are you happy?
—400 times or more I've prepared myself,
laid down the red carpet. What do you think?
No one comes to my wicker gate.

—What do you know?
—A little poetry and a lot of complaining.
I'm packing up. This place is getting me nowhere.
I'm going to wing it.

Parts One, Two and Three

Laura Tansley (University of Glasgow)

Part One

'You're Second Generation So You Can Only Blame Your Parents For Your Temperament and Not Their Country' (working title), taken from 'Mimic'.

My voice is on the turn. Withered and shrunk like skin sucked of youth. Makes my early morning supplications sound 'whiny' you say. Too many cigarettes last night. I needed something to do with my hands. You say I sound like a schoolboy. Is it the cracks and grooves in my voice or my pleading? 'Change the record' you say, as if you are a needle playing me.

I notice after you've gone to work that the sheet underneath me feels recently damp, my clothes cold as if fresh out the washing machine. But my sweat hasn't dampened the smell of bonfire. Insipid, I smell its pungency on my bra strap. Black bitter powder pine forest.

I weigh my lungs by breathing deeply. They're heavy with laboured air.

The fireworks burst like a lunging squid, a colourful ink blast from an octopus, limbs exploding out so suddenly that I winced and kept stepping backwards. They fell out of the sky like the melting movement of a jellyfish. You let me stand behind you.

The back garden fire that followed felt safer. Not sure who started the game but the trick was to count to ten without two people saying the same number at the same time. We weren't

drinking though. We were beyond that. My eyes shook with fatigue and the flames.

'One'

'Two-three'

You're Cypriot, so I'm not sure how you managed to get such blue eyes with such black lashes. We sat on planks of wood rescued from a skip in the alley behind your house.

'Four'

'Five-six-seven'

A pause.

Two people said 'Eight', everyone groaned.

The sky never turned the colour of your eyes, just different shades of grey and then to rain. I wanted to keep the light out. My brain ran through thoughts; then, like a shoal of fish, darted and flitted, and wouldn't slow down.

When I see you later you stride over and I can't stand up. The back of my chair is against a wall, its front legs are knotted with the table somehow. I am hunched from the knees and you've already excused yourself. My voice is stuck under the table like a miaow from underneath a car.

Part Two

Extract: 'Seeing the Woods for the Trees: A Biography of Kevin Woods' by E. F. White.

When Kevin Woods returned to Worcester to learn of his parents' divorce, he met with his poet friend, Karen Alice Thomas. They waited to be seated in a Chinese buffet restaurant, asking about each other's work, discussing progress, Woods mocking Thomas for her messy hair and striped ties. At this time Woods was finishing his now famous short fictions (famous for their controversy and not, perhaps, their literary worth), entitled *Mimic*. After they had filled their plates and sat down at a sticky table, he pushed across to Thomas part of one of his stories, which was probably 'Weight'. The piece begins:

> This weight, this prickle, this empty heaviness feels uncontrolled. Sits in an unseen place that I know only with my fingers. It feels attached to my stomach as if a piece of string hangs from my naval to my clitoris…the memory of him twists the string, weighted like a pendulum.[5]

Thomas had been writing feminist criticism for nearly ten years at this point and she was working on a poetry collection of women's voices silenced throughout history. Woods' attempt at voicing the feminine, females, was, therefore, disturbing for her. An argument broke out about how the restrictive nature of one's own gender should not be transferred to creative processes, about the morality of taking on a marginalized voice. The kinds of hurtful words that can

[5] It is unclear if it was, in fact, this piece he showed to Thomas because many stories in *Mimic* addressed similar issues with a similar tone. It is not made clear in Thomas's diary entry from that day (which is included in her memoir) either: "Does he think he can truly write about female sexuality? I am quite sure he doesn't empathise." (*Field Work*, 238) But we shall assume that it was this particular piece, as it is the most explicit and the writing of which coincides with Woods homecoming.

only be exchanged between friends during arguments were spoken. Woods, who had always felt inferior to Thomas, left the restaurant and, quoting from Thomas's memoir, *Field Work*, said that she "could sell her OBE to pay for dinner".[6]

Woods walked through Worcester for a while, along the high street, through lanes where men and women were already stumbling on the cobbles. He stopped in a quiet pub, sat at the bar and drank. At this time he was also concerned about his girlfriend's burgeoning success, a woman who he had been dating for some months and whose appearances at various literary events were being met with a greater and greater sense of excitement. She was a lot younger than him, quicker than him, "wittier".[7] The bar was dingy and the beer was weak and expensive. He drank it like water and only moved to use the bathroom. He watched the muted television hanging on the wall and listened to the conversations of the bartenders who had no punters to serve, apart from him.

The event that followed proved to be crucial in Woods' career, the episode itself fictionalised and immortalised in one of the most memorable passages in his novel, *Graciousness*. The incident seems to have occurred as Woods was leaving the bar. Perhaps he fell in to the bouncer; no doubt he was quite inebriated; perhaps he was looking for an argument, agitated from the past days' events. But a disagreement ensued. According to the bouncer, whose interview appeared in the *Worcester Evening News*, Woods was entirely to blame and was quoted as saying, "he gave me a shove, so I told him to calm down and keep walking. He said something about me bouncing to overcompensate for having a little d*ck, I told him my girlfriend would disagree and that he could go f**k himself before I f****d

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[6] Thomas, *Field Work*, 239.

[7] Woods, *An Autobiography of Worcester*, 211.

him over".[8] It is unclear after this who swung first, but Woods fared worse.

[8] *Worcester Evening News*, 30th November 2005, p.3, report by Daniel Parker.

Part Three

Recorded 1st December 2005, 19.30 – 19.46. Transcribed by E. F. White.

Hi. Hi. Thanks for that introduction, it's been such a long time since I was last in Worcester, it's nice to be back. I saw the floods on the telly; glad I wasn't around for that. So. I thought I'd start off reading something new for you; it's a very short piece that'll be part of my new collection, which is loosely based on the ideas of memory and language. It's called You're Second Generation So You Can Only Blame Your Parents For Your Temperament and Not Their Country. So, You're Second Generation: My voice is on the turn. Withered and shrunk like youth sucked out of skin. Makes my early morning supplications sound 'whiny' you say. Too many cigarettes last night. I needed something to do with my hands…[pause] Sorry. Can I smoke? Yes? Hold on then. Ok. Let me have a sip of water. Sorry. You're Second Generation: My voice is on the turn. Withered and shrunk like youth sucked out of skin…[long pause] Sorry, this isn't working. Where can I put this out? Are you sure? That china looks expensive. You don't mind getting ash in your teacup? Ok. Can I keep it? Thanks. Sorry. This just isn't going to work tonight. I'm preoccupied. Maybe let's have some questions… anyone…? I'm sure you're all dying to know how I got this black eye. Well we all know bouncers, don't we. Overzealous, inferiority complexes, bullied at school, needing to express their masculinity in an overbearingly threatening and violent way. I believe I may have bumped in to him, I know I was very apologetic. He didn't want to know and instead of letting me go on my way, he threw a string of insults at me. Very mature I thought. I responded by apologising again, but suggested that swearing at me was not very well mannered. He then proceeded to hit me. I struggled free without retaliating and let the bar staff deal with him, not wanting to course

any…um…fuss. Did – I'm sorry, what? They're here for me? In uniform? [aside] George, go and talk to them for God's sake. So anyway, that's how I got my black eye. It wasn't a racially motivated hate crime, or a provoked attack as the newspapers suggested. But it is interesting how the words have altered in my memory already. His voice has changed, and the newspaper has altered my feelings and made me more defensive. The language of memory is fluid, it moves with us, moves without us realising it. The words I choose to say now will probably have more of an effect on you than if you read it, it is the immediacy of my voice, the words I choose, that you will then interpret and alter and will change over time. The space it inhabits, the literal space I inhabit and…what? Do they know I'm giving a reading? I'm the one with the black eye, I don't see how this affects…another incident? At the same place? Well if it's got anything to do with that bouncer I won't be surprised. I'm sorry folks, looks like we'll have to stop early but maybe…George? Could you arrange another time perhaps? Ok officer, no need to come in, I'm leaving now.

Marthé

Barbara A. Morton (Queen's University Belfast)

Marthé Looks Upwards in the Theological Hall

These neatly stacked shelves exchange a whisper and every so often a visiting author
arrives, in secret, to fold down a page of a volume or two from the two hundred
thousand or so that rest here, and the seven free-standing globes, placed equidistant
the length of the hall, are waiting for attention; positioned to revolve, they are willing to do so,
still, for now they stand motionless, abeyant worlds suspended, waiting their direction

and at the eastern wall, a circular reading table stands square before the east-facing
window as light falls delicately and adequately upon the pages of the illuminated book,
the chosen one, and Marthé permits herself turn a page, one turn of the page
leading to another establishing a familiar rhythm until she hesitates, lingering at one
image in particular then reading a sibylline paragraph which confirms everything

she thought she knew, though mostly Marthé is dreaming and thinking of the one image
she is hoping to discover and at the same time trying to remember the reference
she came to recover – as she turns the final page, a turning page echoes –
I thought I was alone, she sighs, and finds him standing at the far end of the hall
adjacent the scriptorium, wearing robes the colour bearing witness to the colour

of the cloth-bound volume she is reading and he holds an open volume also,

one hand steadying the page, the other reaching forward to touch a word, and Marthé
watches as he folds the book to a close and begins his ascent upon the flight of library steps,
his intention distinctly heavenward towards the higher topmost shelves,
the dream of any scholar, or anyone who reads –

don't look, Marthé, she warns herself, as she tiptoes past the cabinet of curiosities,
recalling the last time she was here and the time she wasted staring at the glass-
framed scriptures, the green-beaked dodo, the colours of the inks of the beautiful
illegible handwriting, and not even allowing herself to think about the original core
of the library, its incunabula, its early editions, its major thinkers

until, breaking the silence of the hall, he whispers, *Marthé, look* -
supposing some Byzantine mosaic or intricate woven text does nothing to prepare
her for the imaginary almost invisible narrative at play, the profession transformed
as an image when Marthé, leaving the comfort of her memory for an instant,
only for a second, obeys as he insists and tilts her head backwards looking upwards.

Marthé Looks Upon the Master of Flemalle

An olive cloak of autumn weight.
Her back to the open fire.
The velvet cushions on the bench
Are red, dark-orange red.
The contrast, against the olive
Of her cloak, is well defined.

In her hand the book of many pages.
Some of the words distinguished
In amaranthine ink
Draw her attention
To the wisdom of the speaker.

Her hair has become loose
From its plaiting.
Her eyes are almost closed.

Marthé Visits Roteshaus

A pouch of colour delivers the landscape.
This house, built from local soil and stone
Is set between two wood-fields, protected
Also shaded. Its walls are orange-red
And weather turned. The vines flourish.
Strong and crown-heavy with fruit,
Supported by the east-facing trellis
Easily they reach heavenwards.

The stream-washed pebbles are pink and cool.
Small boats with paddle oars are moored and ready.
Every so often, they adjust themselves
Though mostly they are patient, waiting
Treading low water at the water's edge.
Within such easy walking distance from the house
Her feet need not even get wet.

They cross the bridge, go back and forth,
Watch fishers stand before a clear river
And in the distance, layer upon layer,
Hear low music and church bells.
A summer breeze blows a silver flute,
The world is on the outside.

Are these storm colours, asks Marthé.
He replies, I hope not, and draws her attention
To the walled garden, the gated pathway,
The cordon of fruit trees in between.
Hand in hand, they tread the treasury
Of local stone, a journey they remember
And notice other stones, some touching
Some idle from the herding instinct.

He brings her to the cedar bench.
You could read and sew here.
Pointing to the sky, explains a scene of golden
Specks and ribboned lines fluid as ink.

His voice reminds her of the emotion of prayer
As, pausing at the open doorway, the steps recently swept,
She puts her hand to her brooch and he asks her
Marthé, tell me, would you like it here?

Shift work

Micaela Maftei (University of Glasgow)

The best shift I worked with Barry was only my fifth. So soon after I started: a depressing thought. But I didn't know it was the best until it all ended, I always thought it would get better and better. I was a natural, he said, which may or may not have been true. All I know is that it came normally, as though I was not learning but remembering. It is an easy job, you might say, filling glasses. Anything with opposable thumbs could. Not quite the truth. But it fit over me nicely, and I loved it, the banging of fists and money on the counter, the endless loops of bottles going end over end over end, the bar so loud you learn to tell the names of drinks from the shapes of opened mouths, the game of guessing who wants what, the scoop of ice in the glass, digging and digging and digging. 'Watch my hands,' was the only advice Barry ever gave me. It may not have even been advice. It may have only been a command. His hands moved independently of the rest of him. Barry's hands had eyes and brains in them. His hands did not need each other. They may not have even liked each other. Barry fondled his till and ran his dishwasher and served his bar and still had time in his hands to pat me on the shoulder to tell me he had already made the order I was looking to start. Barry had saved his hands in the many first years of his life, folded them and crossed them and put them in his pockets, softened them and rested them up. He had let them be complacent and lazy so that when he needed them they had the spastic energy of fire trucks.

'Watch my hands,' he said. Like a typist. Movement until blurring. A task for each finger. It was ridiculous. But I watched his hands, and I tried to learn. I tried to imitate, and that's where the

learning came from. I felt like I was running a marathon in place every time I worked, and my body thought so too and it would tell me so every morning after. There were a thousand sounds running beneath the surface roar that I loved. The beginning of the river of beer from the tap, the deep-throated rip of a beer case's flaps coming open, the muted sharp noise of a glass breaking along the lip, the full-scale shatter of it hitting the others in their bin of angles and blades. My elbow on the cash register, always in the same spot, a hitting like your head on the pillow, silent but felt. The knee to close the fridge, the hip to carry bags of ice like infants, the wrist to control the weight while the shot pours, the fingertips to scrabble through the stacks of coins, the palm for two pints at once. The languages they all spoke, drunk and pretentious and hopeful and despondent and joyful, all of them thinking I spoke it too. The work of a translator. *We are polyglots*, I remember murmuring to myself on a night when I heard Barry change his personality a hundred times to match a hundred customers. Three drinks made in the time it takes the fourth to order. The man's beer poured while the woman deliberates. At the end of the night I would go to the bathroom to take my shoes off and walk in place on the glorious tiles, just to feel the hardness of them against the ragged lumps of my feet, something like the most sensual massage.

'Watch my hands,' he would say when I felt overwhelmed, when I asked him if it was time to close yet, when I asked him to make a drink for me so I could catch up. 'Watch my fucking hands,' when I was being too slow, when he was let down. 'Check this out,' when he delighted in running circles around me, when it was funny that I could not understand what the person in front of me was ordering and he was already behind my shoulder reaching for the bottles to make it. Always telling me to watch the hands, so much, so often that I started doing it all the time, outside of work. In the

park my eyes were trained on him and his delicacy in unzipping the Ziploc, his flicking of the lighter, his nimbleness in counting the bills, the lack of superfluous movement in his treatment of the button at the waist of my pants.

The fifth day started so slowly that Barry had time to become entranced in a TV show. He asked me to go get coffees without taking his eyes from the screen. I took a long time deciding what I wanted and by the time I got back there was a line-up. I don't know where they all came from. Time passed in a way unlike normal. That night, I was doing more than watching Barry's hands. I was being Barry's hands. So many times that night, dumping glasses, slamming bottles, opening a beer a second, shaking with one hand and making change with the other, I wanted to sing with glee. We were never more together than we were that night. Like a machine. The obvious image. I don't think we spoke to each other once but we were perpetually aware of the other's body, the space taken up. I knew what he was doing behind my back and I could reach behind me for the limes and avoid his arm coming past my face for a straw. I was flying all night. At three when he was sweeping and I was re-capping, I wanted to cry for going home. A shower of money made me want to buy another shift. There was never speed like this at home, there was never the opportunity to please anyone so quickly and easily and then have them get out of my face at the end of it.