4:23 PM, *Relaxant*

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (practice-based Ph.D. Creative Writing with English)

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Abstract

The practical component of this thesis is a collection of poems entitled *4:23 PM, Relaxant*, which consists of an original collection of verse written mainly in the confessional tradition. The collection addresses a number of themes including family and personal relationships, loss, grief, and the combination of everyday objects and experiences with surreal imagery. The critical commentary accompanying the volume focuses on the technical aspects of specific poems from Part One to Part Four of the collection to exemplify how critical reading altered my approach at key junctures in the collection's creation. The crucial aim of the commentary is to detail the development in my poetic voice and incorporate a critical analysis of concepts and motifs in dialogue with key critics including Johnathan Culler, Northrop Frye, Ezra Pound, Sigmund Freud, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Through consideration of their comments about sense and musicality, I gave recognition to a long history of research into the poet's investigation of the relationship between the literal meaning of word-use, and the sound and gestural aspects inherent within reading poetry aloud. Close reading of the work of poets that influenced the collection through the lens of these critics proved essential to this process. In doing so, my thesis demonstrates an awareness of poetry arising from both the avant-garde and mainstream traditions by poets Sarah Howe, Kenneth Goldsmith and Denise Riley. In particular, I scrutinised at the work of poets that explore the confessional modes of writing poetry: Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath. My attention to these poets contributed to the construction of the conceptual framework for my own poetry. Investigating the reflective, critical and technical aspects of these poets helped me to explore the periphery and specificity of my use of musicality in the poems from *4:23 PM, Relaxant* and enabled me to write intimate, close readings of my poetry which further informed awareness of how poetic meaning is developed in the analysis of the poems.

The commentary also contains discussions of confessional and surrealist techniques as they evolve in my creative work, which demonstrates, consequently, the nuanced relationship between these modes of writing. As a result, the subjective experiences and descriptions of the theme of grief re-enacted through imagery, metaphor, form and musicality in the collection were contingent on cross-referencing and perhaps resolving the paradoxes these historically different poetic movements present.

The outcomes of this research are an original collection of poems and in-depth critical commentary that will potentially act as framework to other poets developing their voice through research to contextualise the route their own poetry has taken. Therefore, this research will contribute to the existing knowledge we have in practice-based research in the arts, and act as a case study to any researcher developing an analysis of their writing process while simultaneously writing their poetry collection. It may also be of benefit to researchers critiquing: the arrangement of musicality and meaning in lyric poetry; and, the expression of grief and autobiographical content in poetry and for furthering understandings on the precision of line-breaks and syntactic-control in writing poetry which reveals considerations for the page and in live performance settings.

Biography

In 2012, Lauren was granted an Arts and Humanities Research Scholarship to pursue doctoral study. Lauren is an active poet and musician in Britain's avant-garde music scene and has collaborated and performed poetry with Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth and music iconoclast Weasel Walter amongst a host of musicians from the jazz, electronic and experimental music scenes across the country. Since 2017, Lauren has released six full albums of her poetry woven into improvisational music for the following record labels: *Object/Disco* released by Box Records[1]; *Traine*[2] and *Which Myth Are You Living?*[3] by Tesla Tapes; *Chav Anglais*[4] and the upcoming *Top Ten Zen Meditations*[5] by Artificial Head Records and Tapes, Texas; and *Like a Strange Matador*[6] by Tombed Visions Records, Manchester. In 2019, her album, *Chav Anglais*[7] released simultaneously alongside Lauren's second pamphlet, *No Skyn for Chav Anglais.*[8] Lauren's debut pamphlet, *Lucy's Evening*[9], containing a selection of her Master of Arts degree research in Creative Writing was awarded the Roy Fisher Prize for poetry and published by Keele University. Lauren is currently in the process of adapting *Lucy's Evening* into a poetry film, scored by herself, avant-garde jazz collective Shepherd of Cats, Wrocław and Tombed Visions Records.

Singular poems from *4:23 PM, Relaxant* have been recognised internationally both in print, most recently the poems 'rose, *loss*' and 'Mother's Day at Slade' with *Bare Fiction*

[1] Locean, *Object/Disco?* © 2018 by Box Records, Newcastle Upon Tyne, BoxRec028. Cassette and digital album.
[2] Locean, *Traine* © 2015 by Tesla Tapes, Salford and Ireland, 025. Cassette and digital album.
[3] Locean, *Which Myth Are You Living?* © 2020 by Tesla Tapes, Salford and Ireland, 035. Cassette and digital album.
[4] Locean, *Chav Anglais* © 2019 by Artificial Head Records, Texas, HEAD 031. Vinyl and digital album.
[5] *Top Ten Zen Meditations* by Locean will be released 23 October 2020 by Artificial Head Records, Texas. Cassette and digital album.
[6] *Like a Strange Matador* by Burn into Sleep will be released 09 December 2020 by Tombed Visions Records, Manchester. Cassette and digital album.
[7] Locean, *Chav Anglais* © 2019 by Artificial Head Records, Texas, HEAD 031. Vinyl and digital album.
[8] Lauren Bolger, *No Skyn for Chav Anglais*, (Texas: Artificial Head Records, 2019).
[9] Lauren Bolger, *Lucy's Evening*, (Keele: Keele University, 2012).

Magazine[10] and the poem 'Male Lipstick' with *Swamp*, Australia[11]; and on the stage, including a performance of her poems as part of the Basquiat: Boom for Real exhibition at The Barbican theatre, London[12] and in the Downtown Music Gallery, and Max Fish, and Ceremony, all in New York. Her poem 'In the First Place' was shortlisted for the Bridport prize for poetry and published by Artificial Head Records, Texas. Her poem 'The Race' and 'Untitled' were published both in print[13] and in performance[14] by *Samarbeta* as part of a writing residency working with poet Lydia Lunch of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks. In 2017, her poem 'The Bull' was shortlisted for the Bare Fiction prize. In 2019, she was awarded 1st prize for the Creative Manchester: The University of Manchester poetry prize.

Lauren provided a platform for poets and musicians with her music-poetry fusion events, 'Paradox' and curated three stages at Sounds from The Other City music festival for Islington Mill, and a series of events for the National Trust's Wonder Woman Festival. As well as delivering her practice-based research talks at the Whitworth, Manchester Museum, Winstanley College, and Keele University, she has facilitated workshops as a Poetry Society Stanza representative; and, tutored young people for the Portico Prize for children. Lauren was also an active member of the student committee that planned the AHRC Keele Symposium 2017. She collaborated with the International Antony Burgess Foundation and delivered her practice-based arts research 'Meetings' for the William Burroughs centenary at the International Antony Burgess Foundation supporting the Beat poet Michael Horowitz.

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[10] Lauren Bolger, 'rose, *loss*' and 'Mother's Day at Slade' in *Bare Fiction Magazine*. Published: November 2017. Available: https://www.barefictionmagazine.co.uk/author/lauren-bolger/. Accessed: August 3, 2020.
[11] Lauren Bolger, 'Male Lipstick' in *Swamp: An Online Magazine for Postgraduate Creative Writing* Published: October 2015. Available: http://www.swampwriting.com/?page_id=570. Accessed: August 3, 2020
[12] See *Ransom Note* review. Rosie Quattromini, 'Review: Video Jam X Basquiat At The Barbican' in *Ransom Note*. Published: February 2018. Available: https://www.theransomnote.com/events/reviews/review-video-jam-x-basquiat-at-the-barbican/ Accessed: August 3, 2020.
[13] Lauren Bolger, 'The Race' and 'Untitled' in *Lydia Lunch Presents: From The Page To The Stage*, (Manchester: Samarbeta, 2016)
[14] Lauren Bolger, 'The Race' and 'Untitled' in *Lydia Lunch Presents: From The Page To The Stage*, © 2016 by Samarbeta, Manchester, SBR 005. CD and digital album.

Lauren audited the ‘Writing Poetry’ module for the Creative Writing Masters course at Keele University and contributed to the learning of postgraduates under the guidance of James Sheard in his workshops. She has taught Creative Writing to Guildhall undergraduates for the Guildhall School of Music residency. She has written peer review reports to assist in the publication of Keele postgraduate poetry articles for *Under Construction Journal*. Lauren is currently publishing poetry at Burn into Press and is pursuing a career in teaching.

Acknowledgements

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For my Grandad

Contents

4:23 PM, *Relaxant*

Part One

Doubt sits on the edge of my bed too

I dream inappropriately of ends
the ending of engagements and where

I lay in the house as we drift in
and out of beds I hear the ears beneath
the floorboard and my doubt

I dream inappropriately of ends
the ending of engagements and where

Engaged in the laced back clothes of a party
doubt sits undressing

I dream inappropriately of ends
the ending of engagements and where

They move in my circles how everyone
tends to find a half-love and show it
to their friends

I dream inappropriately of ends
the ending of engagements and where

I'm forgetful of those who see in
how they watch you flex and then exercise
your grief

I dream inappropriately of ends
the ending of engagements and where

Doubt presses two fingers on the receipt
dropping coins without fingers
a tip from the tipper

Family Album

I belong to the girl in the pictures
like them I lie frameless not over touched
I am told this one is my mother young
and they were all taken at the same time

as I leave I drag behind the timings
of a household tied with all my subtle sense
of things

where I pray to be knee-deep with the lows
and following to my wrong every season
the four forms of prayer: stood up, kneeling,
from behind and kneeling

Prayers

I am awake and it's too late for you to be running one finger
over the back crease of my knee

on top of you when you lit the candle for the altar
I was the polo-necked Godparent angled behind the bowl

and as clean as a plan for a day I don't understand

passing the too cold to touch wood, built by the dead
by the well recited few and few of them I know

and even more of them I want to leave behind
even you my naked love

when you ripple the bed, then the curtains, have you seen me?
enjoying the sleep, tired of roles, of talk of children, of books

when I swim I wash my hair in the public pool
I see people I met two years ago in better shape

lightly tanned, wearing mustard with gorgeous crotches
people I met when I was drunk

I take a swim and the water presents me
I make the shape of a cross with my body

in the water I imagine I'm waiting for the guests
and that the view from the car park to the pool

can be reached through each one of these floor-length windows
between the glass are screws where pictures on the wall have been cleaned

by lifeboat hands ready to allocate lockers
to give you their time

in the cubicles I will dry my hands on you for a smile
you may leave at the baths, at the job interview

under my locker are shadows of nicknames then forenames I've guessed
to match the outline of a church guest

to accompany the feet which piled in and left
swinging towels from their shoulders

using toilets, then mirrors, roll on deodorant
I watch you put on your jeans, socks and shoes at once

this is half the argument over in changing
at the back we see the people that look after themselves better

leave the life around us still
in the Roman arena we both left our locks open I heard children
I want to leave behind, my love

when we walked home wet passing chip shops
passing blokes inside them I was not hungry

you said, exercise is good for depression, I said nothing
you said, how do you feel about becoming a Godparent

I said, nothing in my wardrobe is mustard, but your crotch
is gorgeous, I am awake

and it's too late to be startled running one hand
over my eyes, forgiving the black spots on my palm
where mascara has dried

running water to prepare food with passed down pans
clay heavy and in petrol blue floats a lagoon of what we have

you ladle me into your two bowls with lifeboat hands
I'll leave half of mine and give it to the church

the day I feel released from doubt
without responsibility or thoughts

the day the pool's less bleached
because at the altar nothing is constant, everything is taken
my love

Grape Trees

I saw the spotting
but I begged it away

the beast rang
and I answered
with my 26-year-speed

I used cruel, cruel wine
to break my insides

and if only I was different
you would have been

you would have been

Good-night

I can but cannot
clear away
you see

the past is as fresh
as this is
as stuck

to my eyes in this way
and as the
tap goes

I’m warming to you
your face rose-
shocked from where

the air has been
you said my
circulation

must be poor because
I’m freezing
and when

you positioned my
bones onto the
bed into

a smaller
version of
myself

to sleep in
your every
thing now

I am settled

Central Road

I struck horsehair matches in that dark
because in no light sad hands find work
tapping each bone of the spine

you are one hand moved forward in me, in the chorus
and we go away sometimes
to be still in the neighbourhood

how we leave the house clean
and watch looks kill with their friendly admiration

what if I marked my box with their name,
this conversation and said, *come with me*
I have something absent and of ours

and I took you down to reflect how our time
pulled off like number plates named
after women

Filing

I have assisted in your route near where the heat drops
and pours against me like warm golden stones

the path is a blur and maybe once my hair has grown
I will wear it down to assist me I have buried parts

of my possessions by trees one foot there one part
of my stationery set there I have assisted in being brave

and not being brave of rewriting the truth in my room
a state of tossing yourself in your work one I am yet to learn

I buried pictures of you by trees I have undressed
then redressed to suit the sky I have changed you

and unchanged you to suit the bed I don’t know
the perfection of two people

Fox Signatures

I would sleep through the day on a Central Road
brushing crumbs from satin and lace

an energy followed by a five o'clock visitor I wait
for sympathy sex as it’s hard to rest without

I wait for lights switching to warmth it has been
home alone on Central Road locking both doors

and meals of toast from what I remember of
Cardiff on Tuesday when you passed me a towel

like it was a hotel and I putting it back on the rail
slept without your arm I came home last night

to find a fox in my garden I opened the locks
filled with thick fear and the smog of little teeth

in my leg but was it as scared as me aimless
because the night is to myself my own

The Race

I won the bronze medal for the greatest dullness
there is someone in the hall waiting with a box for me

you must have covered my arms up I don't remember
falling asleep in this way you must have taken my jeans off
where I lie in multiplied vision

so sorry I never met you in the place to make corrections
I had a fight with the ribbon, quietly around my head
I fought a shame but one I maintain

so lank in the tongue I've gone to steer a broken horse
with a loose set of callings from doors because
I'm out of most things to say

amongst the young their eyes say I've lost my mother's face
is it waiting in a box for me

Accident

Something scratched me
in the playing field
and left numbers
written on my hand

to get back I pretended
to be blind folded

the great outdoors
condensed to a hallway
nature is just tar

like bedroom music
placing songs not insects
inside a golden locket

I wore the accident
round my neck
till the end of the week
was strung in the sandalwood
a perfume like nothing
I've ever sprayed

years later curiosity led me
to add the contents
of my hand and divide it
by two

I gave you half my body
now one eye is blurry
with Love's hot white
stress

and looking back
the wine on your mouth
looked mysterious
I don't know
if it's even blood

12th-15th April

I want to take it everywhere
in hotels on the back of bikes
I want to look at it blunt in the same way you play
with my confidence how it buries
my sight of you I need glasses
I've heard one day I'll need several pairs:
a pair for the laptop two pairs for reading
one pair for seeing the board or when
I'm at the cinema and I'm tired and the film's
an expired version of life
slim enough to veil my own

I'll spill coke on the seat and note
the change in your singing voice
while tea is laid by the window
what could be more natural
your skin suits April it always has
the way a pack of cards slides into a half circle
is how I steady myself in Paris
if you leave bread unwrapped it becomes
hard inedible feathers surround it
then it goes to another stage
of rain becoming wind-dried in my hair

When we spoke afterwards I'd see
images of meat or eggs getting cracked
in one hand other times on my back
it was a damp toast patted in flour or bound up in string
I always thought it was good of me
as your flag to be kind
to the harnessing and for the morning call
I'd make you look at my day aroused and blunt
the same way you play with my
confidence

Gnarlands

There are multiple superstitions in my head
I mentioned them all on the walk back on our steps
when we returned home to exactly how it was left
there were plates laid for the ghost- the food was
ribboned in Gnarlands a kind of floral banquet
for me and my conscious if I see us still
sitting in chairs when you're out at work
it is because I'm best when I pretend you are here
and you know I would lend you my legs
so you could see how much life meant without money
I'm in evening mode and outside is the colour
of a shirt I wore when I was seventeen
I lost virginity on the lap of class 2005 and years later
we split hands before the lamppost I said, *salt and pepper*
and you said, *man-woman* with grinning impatience

Elbows in the Conserve Basket

My mouth’s cloth-lined when taken for dinner
dressed like a table for one with one napkin
undone and of course we study the order
the request for some water dry oil and legs
we don’t drink instead we place it to our lips
using it to rinse our mouths then I pull down
my cloth so I can speak for when the tray comes
and we share the ices but the cream is held
at arm’s length as we do in arguments when
I go to ruin and see the shower as my treat
because here is the melting of you and me
it drips from memory like the enemy of Sept
sliding into the contents of our home
this time last year when I bent to fold our life
in cardboard to crash on friends’ sofas

Part Two

Music for two women

Flower on flower
your leaner body aging
the way the soft
female form holds on
to another

my favourite colour
is sorry blue
until I am close to craving
water and salt and the sheet

to be inside the cotton-
making rain
long enough to
cover me I can see

more grass
coming through
the cross on the back
of your head

it only took six months
to douse lust
I could not tell you
about mine

since I have been
learning instruments
without your guidance
hear me put down

a sad foxtrot
as roses open outside
your parents'
front door knock

In the First Place

I took your hand in mine and placed a hole around you
underneath cotton briefs and afterwards we slept in

uncertain of the dishes we share, of where to start
when the blot of certain words spread on the knife

on the tip of the diving board we share the edges
before the clean dives arrive and the second place

was better for it, for any remaining tension drained
as would a plug being pressed back in and then

pulled out because it takes a certain strength to return
to make up twice in one day, to stay with your blessing

you took your hand in mine, for the second swim
afterwards we slept till four twenty-three pm, *relaxant*

half-awake we share a shower you went in first and you
left it on so that the water could bring me round

you washed the dishes, I cleaned the sides then we ate
not too much out of each other before putting the clocks

back one hour at bedtime and we haven't got there yet
the first place I go to when I sleep a two-man cradle

encouraging the crease in my face and linen and soap
collection to calm and trust the safety of the wash

in my brains when he's blowing my mind like this
there are points of music in this, smoothed sheet music

read by our hands, by a pattern of sense and no secret-den
now it takes a certain strength to remember the way back here

I think of things like this because I can’t sleep

after coming less than ten nights ago in one of your ill brothers’ rooms
the one with the sinister looking hook on the ceiling smell of crohn's

so cold in there I almost forgot I once lived there parted legs up those stairs
I wonder was your conscience there? Wednesday morn when you said

you stay in bed if you want I have to go to work I knew I had to go
before you returned let me ask you this maybe anything is better

than mood swings on a timer a wispy thread let me question the time
I was watched while I walked upstairs well I’m glad even you failed

at winding my limbs with yours in dirty wooden Catholic boxes
and I remember music daily as a chore in the room that looked out

envisioning America past magpies and *gris* it was so cold in there too
as you held me to stop me falling out of a single bed hardly covered up

and with little blood books beside it I didn’t move all night all week
to be somewhat loved in that time was enough

I said you ought to watch the coffee and whipping scene in that film

I said you ought to watch the coffee and whipping scene in that film
it’s the only engaging part

it was downers like these in the back seat of your parents’ car
where we began to picture the back of each other

or lift the cloche to see baby Jane’s dead parakeet float merciless on the silver

The Cake

at best we rest
but can’t refuse
the pressure
of this peat

like your mother’s
dense cake
of pitted fruit
and oranges

at night we would
wake in the echo
of thick icing

to find our hands
ring-less in the fruit
struggling

But these are complex matters my dear, they take time

Never heard your tread there before not even in song
on your harmony a guitar twelve strings long the one
I dropped from the highest window it drummed
like the legs off a chair either way it was your will outside

or the silhouette of you looking for scratches
or the florist bunch-red glisten down the ankles
of geese chicks, *if you jump guess what happens*
you never repair but for you

life may as well be fondled made not from skin
but wooden tree rings

Lost Property

I hold out her hands and fingers tonight
because I'm no longer co-dependent on
the keys dropped on the floor my purse

when my bag was stolen I found my rail-pass
in a sanitary bin I broke the lid off
I even found the cotton cufflinks and pick

little hints I keep with me including a leaf
from the day we split I lost the rest, £35

my sequin top smells of rubbed aftershave
sore insides and sickness who would have
thought that sleeping with someone else
would hurt this much

Getting rid of the furniture

I never betted on the clang of cymbals
or the roll down of rugs, *would you like to keep*
the red one? I've placed it up to the wall

I finished the day with blue gin and whatever
china was left I had to smash under the stall

Dogs began to sniff at egg sandwiches I think
they were trained to look for *le tabac* only
I wasn't selling that I felt like I was selling us

As you or I at the morgue in plastic bags
may as well place these canines and molars inside

A handkerchief *fifty pence per piece* maybe
it's not so far from what I'm doing now only

We rarely cross paths and when we do
we come back bitten smelling of sex, *did you know*
in small quantities I sense shared smiles in the

Crockeries, the length of two thumbnails apart
bringing in bowls of my gestures and you, in plates
I just saw my limbs moving without me

Hooks

I’ve reached the worst of times
half a sleeping pill and a mosquito in the room
I can’t kill but like this worm at the end
I’d rather be booze-soaked than here

my inner fears coil to a paddling boat
even pals have placed their feet in there
in dirty fleshy shoes
only to meet my protective covers

like Annecy when the picnic became a pulling
of not one but everyone
from my back

less my leotard and so what
I know my eyelids don’t work at night
some mornings I wake dry-mouthed in the good
and as I proceed, I hear the songbirds’ push

my family know I see hooks in the garden
for flowers in that rest and take comfort
in knowing they are just hooks

for hanging-baskets dandelions nude-scenes
the easy smell of honeysuckle: an actress
playing my half-there

New Year's Eve

There is a dumb luck in the meeting
passing me Queens from under
the table I wonder where Jack is?
Jack be strong Jack be Fantastic
never will I feel this engrossed again
Lover *for I always want to be body*
confident and alone making phone
hard-ons with one hand choosing
music with the other feeling seasick
to the memory of one Saturday
drunk in the taxi holding hands with
Drs of Physics from under the blanket
because the radio was some sort
of scuzzy conch to my ear

4x

In the blue of your own bed
you felt my sore fingers
bandage the feet of geishas
four times

You said the same dream
taught you how to dip in
and out

How inside it, *you picture*
my head under a pillow
a leather key ring
in my mouth

Outside the neighbours'
magnolia overlaps the fence
it blends with the bushes
planted by the family here
before us your jaw in my
blood and mucus was much
like that dear and it doesn't
get worse

A Magnet

I spoke butter
and for
my health

had to cut out
the tongue

I can’t be
your stalker
anymore

I can’t eat
bruises from
the fridge
door

because
shop apples
taste like you

The Second Place

The worst is missing you
in an idle way

because walks around
the supermarket

take as long as they take
when in shock

and yes, I may have pushed
our bodies

through the markings
of a saucer before

when I cooked accidentally
for two

then didn't eat at all

somewhere, a bow was
tied then tugged

till it dropped out to a strip
of velvet

I'm better but I could
be better, *please*

hearing my parents' radio
sink through

my wall, the fourth wall
a window

looking out to no audience

now I've lost the sight

of my hand
wearing black rings over
the quilt, shining

your unsaid compliments

at this precise turn, I hear
chimes and

for a split second you're there,
come here

I don't need touch

I don't know what it is
that broke

our bone

maybe it was the talk
of breaking bones

Egerton Crescent

Light has found the garden of Egerton Crescent
where two mounted chairs shine crumpled from a winter
not quite folded away or in decline and on them
are leaves arranged from the fall of man and myself
when we broke it off I would sit on the plastic at loss
holding the arm as if it was ours for minutes
I forgot to dust bits of Nature from my dress
when home stank of office, I should have graced our bets
with all the luck I don't use now on my gaze there
is a line of animals inspecting *Friday's finds*
on collection I wonder what it would be like
if we were alternative beings
preparing for spring
lifting trash to our faces

Part Three

Her name was Bella

When I was saved, I would click off stroking dogs
I felt another kind of loving when she died

I took my chalks to the bushes, my granddad said
he will live on in I wrote, *L&B*, in the bricks

her name was Bella and when none of this
began to matter anymore, I sat here tonight

staring at the vacuum of my un-domestic
touching the desk because here are the bricks

as I remember them before the rain ran pink yellow
as would the life course of a bruise

or an upbringing I could lose but not tonight
with back-a-sweat there's no heat in here the heating

is deadened like all my pets or any secrets
I've ever redefined they live on sulking
wearing a leash of some kind

Northern Hospital

On the car seat I wiped a brave face into the leather
not my own but the skin of someone else

someone I missed and I don't remember how I arrived there
I just slipped North-ways I passed glass and checked myself out

I guess the whole world would know I was sad and sugared
with illusion because love exists in what left

or what was ever there to begin with
and if I cried in towels, *I made a mess of them*

it is because when I am one out of all of you
I'll still pretend your reachable

Lipstick on the Sun Lounger, again

The haziest I've been in a while
I wonder who in the world is sorry now

I wonder which of the male statues
is sitting down, which one leaned

and which one whispered
and was hung from a tree

I can't help, but wait
after all the faces I've drilled through

like the stones in Lyon
the ones I couldn't take on the plane

and had to push through a letterbox

You see I painted each mouth and mine red fleur
I know the chorus is flat in here, too flat

to shy away from the draw

that dies in the mind on a sun lounger
tying the same plimsoll

over and over

Visiting Hour

That is why the house will always be watched
for bottles piling in the bins outside
not all yours but still a loud signal of grief
I prick my hands on them just to see if the
pain is authentic I'm not dead but I am
it's still strange passing the nearest florist
beside the hospital with two relatives
inside and the dull rain curling my strands
when you were sleeping I'd ask a question
and you would answer half awake
I once dreamt a man rubbing my breasts
named my losses once he called them so and so
and when we were together I didn't mean to
let others spit in your beer now wait
I can hear my own steps coming to a halt
the name of a ward the scent not as beautiful

Drips

The moment between walking
the wards and pretending forever, I'm done
and not going inside a hospital
a deciding time where I shake hands-soft with
the accident for too long I've heard, *cry*
it's good for you it cleans, washes your eyes
cry, it's normal, cry, it's in your system
cry it out ~~she can't use one of her hands~~
I'll never forget the way you looked at me
and said why to my mother, why did you bring
her to see me in here, but I was there
and I'm used to you covering the drips
so I can't see them

My Brother

I was told he would bury soldiers in the grass
I put my hands in

they would fight and the loser would lose a child's faith
I was told they could replace any lost

as wealth brought and a poured violence on us
this taste never touched my face like yours
I never lived like you

Introduced to music from outside your bedroom
you covered the clues tied my tie the right way
for school

Old zoom-ins of humour are well remembered
you were quicker than me only slow in recovery

You see when they saw the drops like pearls on your dresser
a man said where is my son and it was twice before
we said nothing

content in your breathing or how you steer a surname
from the shiny sex of a payphone
from the drone of the words you said to me- I love you

I don't see you in life or death but the last rug
will wrap us both up

I was told you buried your soldiers in the dells
I played on as a child and I would give each one
of the ten years between us

Just to see you come down to lift the measures
from the features we share in vain
our similarity

I don’t feel anything

The warmth and the coming is grey
come along as I glue brass saxes
to the wall as I’m throwing boxing gloves
at the wall thinking, *God do you know?*
my hands are full of stalk and cuts
I think I’ve fallen in some dried holly bush
and I think it is okay to live or die
or not live and not die in holly bushes
I just cut my lines of cousin on cousin cloth here
since I heard the music is low too low
for *incestears* like mine for made up
words like mine I mean I think I can
smell God on him because I don’t feel anything

Lapin Glue

I remember how you would point at where
you keep the cigarettes you'd say *the gap*
behind the base and mattress

On your chest I watched your hollow gut rise
round as a blowfish only to undo itself and lie flat

It was like each of the pins dropped out till the bulk of us
thin as bank cards became a hard plastic to melt

Did you ever love me did I ever love you?
Whatever the bid I've sealed it in lapin glue

For you will always be a hand sinking to lining
in my trench pocket and in another breath
the cuffed sleeve to my face

You didn't like going out for cocktails
or even making them inside but spilling them
on my thighs was fine

Holding back the stench of those little broken bones
marbled eyes, bow legs

Your heart no more than freezer goods
for taxidermy

A rabbit attached to a balloon
with a small light bulb in its mouth

Rand’s last morning of judgement

Now in the sixth of my January slow
I’m only washing because you said
every clock in the house says quarter to

and how could I enjoy tipping anyone
or hearing I’m any less than my age

when I hit yours I’ll be enjoying more
than honeyed figs

I know how all the old places seem dead as
the cutting garden, *silk-pants*
Can I call you that? Only it’s the first time

I’ve seen anyone point to a menu
with a knife when ordering wine
when it arrived it was matte in colour

till you caned it heavier than we could
pronounce, *charcuterie*

I was so calm I picked the salt from crisps
and the dregs of a carafe from my teeth

on the way home I saw a boy and his neck
pressed against the garage shutters

they stole his phone so I let him use mine

to make calls as he did I tried to take note
of the dirty-vault this world has to offer

as I speak I’m replacing the eggs in the tray
with slowly eaten figs

the date on them is no longer the sixth

Mother's Day at Slade

With my back to the radio
and spinach in the glass
a wrist-deep mixture
coating the singing voices
the scene is as simple
as the layout of love's jaw
two parts; tongue and chin
the current state of my life

Two nights ago, my mother said
she looks at detail in the same way
she does

We just place different weights
on what we find important

I was sick when my mother
poured me some water,
trying to show me the moon saying,
it is bright for you,
now would you call it whole,
or a rugby ball
can you see it

Opening the curtains
saying, *can you?*

Till you crawl forward

Making the effort to look
and it hits you

Boxer

The place where the lining of my coat feels like the inside of a bra
is a slow moment for me one that brings me out of the day
without moving me away from my femme-made deadlines

how I'm not there in the gut because I've chosen to stay
much longer than I intended in that cage with the lid off
the lid is gold I think I wouldn't really know

the news is best consumed slow and heavy with candy sugars
my womb more like a bomb I won't hold as I'm beating

the weight takes me to a film that touched me once
of a man boxing at the Tate he was hitting himself while
wearing a gimp mask

like birth there was a lot of blood on the floor and as I turned away
I felt ashamed at lunch I wore a napkin wrapped round my fists

where you wanted me to hold you and I couldn't

I

How come thoughts
fill your mind
of that fatality raised
from the soft earth

for the rail line it was one of
the rare mornings

and not wanting
to speak for you

I reckon the longer we wait
the easier it is
to say how we arrived late
for work today

II

How come when something devastating happens
It is all that everyone can think of today?

By this I mean, family and friends
friends not my age-

How I went to fill in the papers with Jeremy
& came away
permanently changed, if only

The self was as bushy as it was
the day it bought the shorts
it feels uncomfortable wearing now
eggs eggs-benedict again eggs-florentine
gin scrambled

I'm talking about the eight lbs gained
just after my best friend died

III

After my body changed
you held my fingers in
the light and tried to love

our celibacy is
the perfect object now
that everything is clean

in the backroom where God
looks on from the window
whatever comfort he

or the internet provides
seems crucial after our
holiday of hot soaks

in the safe weather
no money to go halves
I tried to elucidate

by the pool, and each sound
stands for the strange brain
you're holding now

whereas the words, at a push,
describe that I'm somewhat
letting go of what polluted it before

IV

I'll stay still until you come and our conversation ends
I've always loved you no one else but I don't think
I can sell wine or anything anymore--
I've made sales for too long and I'm not here for this
you know I think I'm lucky then there are days where
I cry thinking 600888898964 I might be taken away

V

I never thought anxiety
would blow for this long
kiss after kiss
my 28-year-old body in the wind
some days it rocks and rocks
like an upset horse

rose, *loss*

one white rose
against the emptiness of my hands
is placed in the handles beside your head

Another page

Can you sense normality in the sound of bells
heard by tranquil people in hotels
a succession of restaurants delicatessens
I'm sorry I didn't mean to protect you to press on
have you finished?
Have you thought any more of that *will*
I was talking to you about? I'll get hold
of a pre-paid package just for you
we are the first in line we are evasive
we are despicable I have instructed crows
with the sale of our estate it will all work out
I loved your father and now he's gone
I feel so alone

Part Four

Parts

They said the part his heart needs takes four weeks to come
And at eighty-seven he’s no longer made for the twelve hour stretch
I hold the news like a bowl tonight one I have combed and combed
They said the part his heart needs takes four weeks to come
Until I drop the orange peel to where I go halves with you on the night
To where I give you water hum songs and cover you with my coat
They said the part his heart needs takes four weeks to come
And at eighty-seven he’s no longer made for the twelve hour stretch

Parts II

and now
someone’s talking
nearby

but it could
just be
in my head

over the
roses left as
donations

please stand
please

Failsworth Crematorium

I sense him on my hand in this field of graves
although, it is a hand I am not used to
that keeps very still

When I sit for his service
I will rest, but not him
because he rejoiced in life more

I know he'd say child,
when did the aroma slip?
and I would reply,

When you became freezing to touch
but not by my own touch, where
did my honesty go?

when I was crawling
the stairs in Amalfi, it trailed into nothingness
I clung to open rock

I took off my shoes
tying them to my wrist, my flesh in wide fishnets
a frenzy for the red-backed ants

On occasion
I snoozed on the dry protruding plants, careless
without love for myself

It took my partner to fall
from a ravine to stop my outer arguing, and now
the storm in my cup has dried

I don't intend on breaking it
or handling my mind
half full with espresso

I slowly warmed when
the neighbour brought in painkillers and bread
I don't think I've ever looked

So pleased to make ice
into a thick compress, the bells told us
it was half past and I was in joy we ate blandly

And I was in joy you met my partner, once
before no crumbs were left
on the board to be brushed away

Never the raw lamb, yet
in this field I feel I am living with your death
as there’s no other address

B.Bolger Senior (1930-2016)

When the family are gathered for their second course
in the hotel behind their parked cars
I will be thinking of the meal we shared & the delicacy
of straight fish pushed round our plates
like white gates against paper plates, I can't stop
only our hands and only your hands and my hands open
these memories where all our possessions lie down together, combined
only what is mine was never mine, but we can say it's yours
and what bodies arrange themselves in the decor this January morning
is not my family, but my life untangling
the very best of lifelong friends, come on
I'm not strong enough to move on to the subject of lost friends

What kind of person am I? What kind of person am I?
to tell them I'd visit you the week before you died
I said, I'd light a candle for you in the morning at the Little Gem
only when the morning came with its aching power, you lost yours
but your weight survived in every see-able detail of that house
that's why I can't be there, for anyone, until I've made amends with grief
shook his hand, the same way I shook hands with my dad's friend
who owned racehorses
I don't want to care about death and what it does to me
I only want to care about you
and it's a shame all the moments you asked if I was okay, can never be renewed
because they helped me fix my past

Sharing ice cream when I was seven
we had spoons, long handled and I was able to learn the importance
of the long handle and the tall sundae glass
as I leaned in, I had to stand on the red seating
for all I know we could have been waiting to see a show
I could see the animals upstairs when you talked about the Sahara
how it's like no other heat
have you ever eaten a pineapple Lauren, in one go?
I'd never tried one before, then this day I found one
I cut the head off with a machete knife and then the sides
like this, one two three four
I didn't know this at the time, but I had made
one large pineapple chunk, I ate some, then I wanted more and all day
the acid contorted my body at the shore

I re-imagined us painting near the garden
watching you drill coconuts and make utility belts for me
when I was stuck like I am still, in the colourful wheel
when I was stuck for work, spraying perfume on card
I nearly cried with a customer, it's funny how many students my age
cry on the shop floor
last week, I asked a key holder why the girl on Dior is crying and she said
her boyfriend is a dancer and he is away, and it is getting too much for her
working and studying and missing him
it's all getting a bit too much for her today

Beginning again, I've been training myself to celebrate this Sorrow
I take it home sometimes
to sleep beside me on the great white patches, these gaps in my understanding
In the morning it hurts the most
And whenever I drink something out my league sprinkled with sugar or cassis
I'll think of your floppy bow ties and your evening ties
And whenever this February evening dies, I will hold my own
near no grasses no love on this road where these people live
alongside these people and that person
And I'll imagine your Catholicism in that parade you described once
you said some of Deansgate's worst villains were seen holding the cross
against bouquets of flowers

And I will remember all the times you said you saw through me
and all you could see was my golden heart
I know yours could never be burnt
in the thing that lives behind those red curtains
in my head that gold beats for us
the same way my gold is half yours
like a white rose and a pinprick of blood
we stained those white curtains, death is:
claret rivers, we sink into it, as we are

And for now, your hand in my life is only ferried away
but the image I have of your hand pushing the plate
is clear and because of that my hands will always drag forward as they age

Shaving

I know this is soft of me to say this, but will you hold me, he said
and you held him, the same way he held you as his first boy
you did not let him go until January, snowing relentless
lay bricks over his body and heart, how it bled longer than they expected
how we both wanted more of him

I believe the shave was your most intimate moment with him
your hand outsizing his jaw which you held and tilted gently, side-after-side
smooth glides into the fragrance-less foam

and afterwards you held my hand tight holding it like it was a code to crack
but his face you held like Fabergé, like blowing glass, stems
I never picked the roses from his flowers as they lay outside the directors,
the cars, the guests, his eyes were the colour of mine, dragging
the last drink forward, I promised not to smoke, I held my own arms
like I do at some weddings

how my head became a bowl of warm water going down the stairs
there's no expression for it, or carbolic soap, only us can keep us in line now
and when I hold your hand dad, it's as if I'm holding my own

handling your fingers like I'm bathing rum in the sponge,
I stayed with him all night until it hit me, the last words I said were, *be strong*

‘Little’ April Cries

It is nearly April now and you would have seen this sun arrive.
You would be eighty-seven and I would be twenty-eight, *nothing less*
How the sun broke through the coldest January

I have ever witnessed, and there was me reading your words.
At the service, I looked beyond the wood, I looked at what was left.
It is nearly April now and you would have seen this sun arrive.

Some guests hadn’t laid eyes on me since the after-school drive
Where you picked me up and carried me home wordless.
How the sun broke through the coldest January

And the strange hold over us all, which came as soon as the curtain rise
When the people kept mounting and I could not face them after the service.
It is nearly April now and you would have seen this sun arrive.

I have the message, I don’t need to see you in objects, and their lives
I know the beginning of the year has directed me without her typical caress.
How the sun broke through the coldest January

And the rest of the year is a journey, every day I wake, and I wipe my eyes
To think I will not see your eyes as soon as the last person leaves the service
It is nearly April now and you would have seen this sun arrive
How the sun broke through the coldest January.

The Sacred

I’ve stopped trying for the sacred
I’ve asked bartenders for strawberries repeatedly
and what I’ve learned from this life is, *don’t give up*
because someone other than yourself
will always give in

Breakfast, again

Friends who saw me in red dresses and complimented
walk past my breakfast table and don't say hello-

I know it's not for long I know I hold you back
I know you could think of your life within all the gaps, where
I make you think about mine

It has taken the length of these eggs, alone
to realise to lose is not losing to lose is material
you wrap it around, and it's a reminder
that you're moving at least

I know, again

I know my irrationality was a bit of a branch broken above the love
and that sometimes I came up to you soaking in olive oil or drugged

Whenever you need a change, again

Remember how many loved
Some placed glasses of wine in your hands
while others told you how wise you are
and you moved away from them

From the glimpse of those nerves in you
I stayed awake hearing
you sleep from within
and even though it made me alive
in the areas of my mind

That felt rushed and slowed my speech
knowing of you filled me so it helped
steady my hands in the queue waiting
for salad and soft soda

The Day Off

we all have fits, the nurse taught
my friend how to inject rain into her legs

when everything is handed to you
you don’t know how to take risks

silence is the wine the guest leaves
in the glass before the night ends

sometimes in the swallowing
of two people the day off wears off tomorrow

when they hear work-bells
jangling thoughtlessly and so...

you put all those clothes in the machine

beat the smell off you
only you don’t bottle it, you just forget

A Rehashing

Again I'm asking you to cover me
so I can focus on the part where
you mention the names of others
I'll be very young and very cold again

Again are you coming?
Just someone said we no longer talk
and now you are here it makes me shake
to hear pain enjoyable pains

I like that picture the best the one
of the greatest person in the world
covered in brown paper cover them

Napkins

I did not want to remove the napkin from myself
let alone my lap, I’m not used to love

presented around cakes, a goody bag, plastic whistles

before I know it, I’m laughing holding two of something
crumbling, one for you and another for you

Maybe, self-assurance and you liked it

what did the ache do next?
but show me the thrill silhouette of a waitress
with adorable brows bending over our old bed
the one I ran back to a few times before
the allure of having you died
I suppose that's why I left the mattress
and the peppermints folded with you
so you can read our hieroglyphics
I know I left an image of a perfect tomb
I always do, always a good dog pissing on the wall
when I want a happy finish

The ‘mouth’ of Rothko, YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qddcgLolAI

No one is worth two million dollars
not even lilies you know
he and I do a lot of business together

Don’t you know a hundred Rothko’s
would sell for millions, no?
Thousands and thousands of dollars

We should be prepared to sell paintings to Marlboro
imagine Jesus I’m shaking

Relax Martin, some paintings we sell
some paintings we consign

Screw you!
At least
conduct this
conversation
in a civilised manner
the year is 1949
if it sells its art

My art is for ordinary people

The people who are looking at my pictures
are the same people
having the *same* religious experience, I had

When I was painting them

Spring 1970

My paintings sell very well
And New York is the right age
For you dear
Britain is the right age for you dear

High quality and full colour
We can stagger if you want
You can pay more tax

Watches

I look at him at that age with distance
what was lifelike before and after
cleaning these floors
the floors I lie on
the walls I stroke the tick is as here as
my hand is here what shall I eat with it
tick what have I got in the fridge

I beat for answers with a tick
I beat tick
beat tick
beat tick
beat tick
beat tick
beat tick
his face is dressed with little black lines
but I imagine breasts and my thumbs
as those lines I lift my hand away
from the wall

Inside I'm both still and a running hare

I'd never rip my nose away
I just keep my hands there as punishment
on my buttons I'll pop I have my flesh in my hand
watery and good my foot catches
the other wall hard and a picture
of my uncle falls from the nail

In my living room where I don't live
I go to pick up the picture he looks great
he is holding me and his teeth tell the time
I start to count them tick tick tick

Wales, the family of mine are dead, but it does not stop me hearing your music

SEA: They fall into their shoes, *light suede light suede*
The current is chopped remembering you
are you wrapped and at war, in brown paper too?
Like those people, the most beautiful, I remember you
GOD: I said something to you, before, didn't you hear?
It was when my ear was close to the floor, breaking
Yes, I give birth and take it away

YOUNG LOVE: I wear heels, they look off, can you see them?
SEA: *Light suede light suede*
Let me tell you about Enoch and the miner from Mold
who was brought out of the mines early
Because his daughter fell from a rocking chair into a fire
Oh you did hear? You see, he threw his hammer at me, and cursed
Have you ever waited for someone to return?
Have you ever waited for a girl?

GOD: *For what reason did they call you, the sea?*
Last week two youths lied facedown, as would a picnic
he held out wine, apple and milk from something grounded
I emptied the bag, but out came crabs, rock, particle,
Oranges on the floor, tumbling white flour
The sea killed them, sadly, it took them
Like the hammer lowering
close to their heads sinks

MINER: 'Before I came to you God, I had one thing right
and I was missing the rest,
now I have it all, except the one thing that felt right'
GOD: Before you were born, the sea suffered an irreversible grief

YOUNG LOVE: I can't think, are you sure it is voiceless, here, have some wine
The glass is cold because I've layered it with ice
and tipped it out
before filling both our cups
and now as I pour
the drink stays cold
(the current creeps to the surface and
wraps around their feet, the barnacles of
green ribbons, swell, their faces swell)

SEA: Last week, two people held out wine, apples and milk
I held them as we rolled into the floor, tumbling
I loved them, until they stopped moving

Three

Like a droplet of hydrangeas caught in the eye
before you close the curtain again before sight

begins to twist to blurs in your hands
it is time to take a longer look at the garden

its verse makes your hands work differently
poppies don’t care if you drop the sugar bowl

or let the milk go off because they know
you can’t tell the difference

my eyes as yours depart are yours any time
it is just bookends keeping you together

smoking with a tissue I know this as I cup the ends
of flyaway grey tips leaving the window

I've closed the curtains for you grandad and told you
exactly what it looks like outside I've even lied

accidentally about colours and the neatness
of the lawn you yawn now

but there is nothing the mind can’t draw

Relaxant

Instead of my daily wrestle with it, I will wait
and it will never be assigned
instead, I will wait for when I am deeply drawn to my funhouse
and as one hand pushes the local pharmacy doors
the other will not carry these things, unless I need them, anymore
these things which bring on rest
there have been moments where my head has been touched
by my own disillusions
on the edge of 4:23pm, *I can see everything I draw*
and I have learned that writing out my half-lies
is a slow thing four years in and that it takes more
to stop the silhouettes, I record from re-entering the mind
They are pushed in my yolk across the bread

Critical Commentary

Introduction

In 2016, I completed the poetry collection counterpart to this thesis, which was a manuscript, entitled *4:23 PM, Relaxant,* that consisted of an original collection of verse written in the confessional tradition. The collection is divided into four chronological parts, with each division allotted to the year of its creation. This structure functions to chart the development in my poetic voice and demonstrate the deepening of my creative and theoretical concerns over the four-year period taken to write these poems. The collection contains poems that negotiate a balance between arranging the literal meaning of word-use and the sound and the gestural aspects inherent in spoken language (aspects measured by the syllabics, syllable weight, space, and breath that each word contains). Measuring the syllabics of every word placement led me to employ different poetic techniques, including internal rhyming couplets, quatrains and triolets. In addition, the collection expands on my previous reworkings and experimentations with the sonnet form found in *Lucy's Evening* (my earlier collection of poems) in order to produce avant-garde sonnets, and the longer free verse poems and sequences that have followed during the writing process.[15]

One of the aims of this critical commentary is to examine how the development of my poetic voice throughout my academic career has led to me uncovering poetic sense in relation to the musicality of my lyric poetry and some of its thematic and formal concerns. The critical commentary is divided into four chapters which reflect these emerging concerns. Chapter 1 explores issues related to the difference between poetry on the page and in performance in relation to my own practice and considers this with respect to the idea of 'play' in poetry. Chapter 2 discusses the importance of musicality in my poetry. The third chapter examines

[15] Lauren Bolger, *Lucy's Evening* (Keele: Keele University, 2012).

the theme of grief in my poetry by way of comparison with examples of poems by Sylvia Plath. Chapter 4 considers the role of the confessional in my poetry with reference to poems by Robert Lowell and Andre Breton. Inevitably, some of these themes and topics overlap and are returned to in various places in the commentary.

Before considering these themes and topics, however, it is important to give a brief overview of *Lucy's Evening's* relevance to the new poetry collection, *4:23 PM, Relaxant*. Reflecting on the use of syllabic control in this pamphlet enabled me to open a dialogue between the past and the present, helping formulate a continuity, whilst also recognising and breaking free of the methods I had previously experimented with. If I compare *Lucy's Evening* with my earlier poems, it is evident that both collections are preoccupied with the sound aspects of language and engage in differing ways with traditional poetic form. However, in *Lucy's Evening* I tightened the poems' relationship with traditional formal patterns and rhythms by adopting a controlled approach to counting syllables and punctuation in order to produce a tension between musicality and reading for sense or narrative understanding that is not often explored in traditional poetry.[16] This is demonstrated in the poem 'A Calmer Want for Rope':

A Calmer Want for Rope

A calmer want for rope
And where to hang her clothes

This tune with the siren

[16] Comparing *Lucy's Evening* and its supporting critical research with my earlier poems brought to the fore the collapse between creative-critical hybrids in my work which is a central element of practice-based arts research. As Hazel Smith states, 'creative-critical hybrids collapse this polarisation of the critical and creative, and meld the two together in the same text. Such hybrid works contest the idea that creative work is only imaginative, and critical work only interpretive and discursive, and point to their symbiosis.' Hazel Smith, 'Creative-Critical Hybrids' in *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, ed. Steven Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 331-340, p. 331.

By a noon black and white

The early newspaper
Spread like a moth love-pinned

For when you kiss my waist
Soreness visits as if

It was a town to see
Hourly inside myself[17]

Here, the controlled use of syllables helps to place emphasis on the words which appear at the end of each line, words which are the result of an action: the 'moth' is 'love-pinned', the 'waist' planted with a 'kiss', the 'siren' departs from the 'tune', the 'noon' changes colour.[18] This syntactic control emphasises the assonance, which is provided at the end of each line in these almost-couplets, and the syllabic count of six full syllables per line clip the flow of rhythm to give the sensation of a full stop and thereby a traditional use of meter (iambic trimeter) found in much lyric poetry.

By designing my own formal restrictions through the careful measuring of syllabics and punctuation, I was able to clarify the narrative content and shape the structure of the poems in *Lucy's Evening* more effectively. I cultivated my own route into applying rhythm and voice to a number of poetic forms by simply focusing on the areas of a poem I could control and restricting the language I used through my experiments with traditional poetic forms. The result was a poetry where traditional poetic forms were recognisable to the reader, but at the same time suggested a departure from those established structures. For example, I did not write sonnets in *Lucy's Evening,* rather I crafted a poem which gave the reader a sense of the sonnet (such as the use of fourteen lines) but eschewed many of the form's traditional characteristics such as the use iambic pentameter or a set rhyme scheme:

[17] Lauren Bolger, *Lucy's Evening* (Keele: Keele University, 2012), p. 4.
[18] Ibid.

The Cake of P. Rabbit

And night like a knowledge one-standing
The other kind of pavement which I
Thought hard of then sat up to say
Like fine cloth the arch of love clothed you
I wore drink in me, the neckerchief
Until I heard the noise-work of love
wake me of this week's lures I called by
The clock tower the church I brought back
Freshly killed flowers a Saturday done
And tomorrow with a decision
I bought us cake with icing glaze it tastes
Tastes like Sunday ought to taste I left
Behind field lanes it is everything
On lip *I forget to remember*[19]

In the writing of 'The Cake of P. Rabbit', I concentrated on the punctuation and number of syllables that constituted each individual line.[20] I removed all marks of punctuation and then replaced those marks with an empty four-bar space. In every poem I would decide if my use of punctuation initiated a break in the sound of a line, or a break in the narrative-sense of the line. I concluded that choosing to craft spaces into the poem instead of punctuation would let the reader make their own choice. They could decide the placement for the rhythm in the poem; if they wanted to pause for the space, not pause for the space, or alternatively the reader could decide what punctuation mark might have existed behind the four-bar space. The decision to remove punctuation makes the idea of enjambment indeterminant – so that it is up to the reader to decide whether to pause at the end of the line or run into the next.

[19] Ibid., p. 10.
[20] I chose to deploy nine syllables per line as the main pattern in this poem, which suggests, and deviates from, the traditional ten syllables in iambic pentameter sonnets.

This freedom enabled the reader to see (at least) two readings of the same poem. For example, in line three, there is a break after 'thought hard of' where readers can either pause as they would after a comma, or alternately rest in the gap provided as if it were a full stop or line break, placing greater emphasis on the narrative sense of thinking 'hard'. Steadily, as this level of control over my poems became more and more integrated into my regular practice, I started to allow myself more flexibility with the use of punctuation and line length to place some punctuation marks back, or to use or lose an extra syllable or two within a line. The poems in *Lucy's Evening* still do not display a traditional use of strict poetic form or convey an instant sense of narrative to the reader, but compared to my earlier poems, by isolating the musicality of language, they demonstrate a greater degree of control over sense and form.

Lucy's Evening furthered the dialogue my previous poetry had opened, one which investigated the gap between the page and the stage, a concern I discuss in greater detail in the following chapter. However, despite the fact that *Lucy's Evening* is a much stronger attempt at writing poetry than my earlier poems, it was important to regard the pamphlet, alongside its predecessors, as a failed attempt to write in traditional poetic forms. Conversely, it was also important to accept that these poems did not lose their connection to tradition by becoming avant-garde or moving towards accentual free verse forms. Indeed, I have relied heavily on the influence of traditional poetic forms in order to rework them, in order to incorporate both musicality and meaning. Having given this overview of my previous work and highlighted some emerging poetic concerns – the dialogue between tradition and the avant-garde, between musicality and narrative sense, between page and performance – we'll now consider the importance of the concept of 'play' in my later poems.

Chapter One: From Page to Performance

One of the central concerns in my poetic practice has always been the relationship between words on the page and the poem in performance. One of the contexts for this is my interest in the concept of 'play' in poetry. My playful attitude towards writing poetry led me to look at how 'play' is explored in Sigmund Freud's 'The Creative Writer and Daydreaming'[21], Roland Barthes's essay 'Toys'[22] and Charles Baudelaire's essay 'The Philosophy of Toys.'[23] The ways in which each of these writers address childhood play in relation to the imagination is illustrative of how I practice 'creative play' in my poetry, bringing me closer to finding my own definition of a writerly form of play.

In *4:23 PM, Relaxant* there exists variations of play. There is definite play in regards to the possibilities of 'sound and sense,' and by this, I mean, the balancing of musicality in a poem with the context of the meaning of the language contained within it. The restriction of wanting the poem to make sense to the reader, or pre-empting a reader's reaction towards a poem's meaning, is a preoccupation of the final editing stages. Indeed, there is a play between chance and constraints in my poems as a result of automatic writing[24], the technique has played a substantial role in the formation of my critical influences that informed in the poetry collection. In my research proposal, my intention was to bring

[21] Sigmund Freud, 'The Creative Writer and Daydreaming' in *The Uncanny* trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), pp. 23-34.
[22] Roland Barthes, 'Toys' in *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, [1957] 1972), pp. 57-60.
[23] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Philosophy of Toys' in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), pp. 198-204.
[24] See Alison James, *Constraining Chance: Georges Perec and Oulipo* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), pp. 111-12. The definition of chance by Alison James, whereby it is divided between seeing chance on one hand and a conjunction of chance and constraints on the other; has revealed what I describe as a more specific definition of how the chance involved in automatic writing also came with restrictions which affected my creative process. Particularly, the chance involved in discussing autobiographical content in my lyric poetry and my approach to the theme of grief in the poetry collection. I discuss how real experiences of grief taken from my life was influential during the writing and editing phases of the elegiac poems in the collection further in Chapter Three.

specific influences together which had directly informed the manuscript. However, during the formation of the manuscript, my research concerns brought to light further influences which, when explored, revealed the hidden side of my production process. For instance, the surrealist and psychoanalytic interest in revelation of the subconscious, revealed the poetic subconscious in my own practice. In the poem, 'The 'mouth' of Rothko, YouTube,' a hidden process was revealed to me through the importance of using very specific times, dates and found material in my work to re-enact real experiences. Having researched the surreal aspects that can be found in some confessional lyric poetry I was led, through writing this poem, to look at the personal and impersonal qualities of found language in conceptual writers such as Kenneth Goldsmith. His use of the found technique in poetry introduces the reader to the gesture of the experience he is collaging through found language intimately. In the collection, *Fidget*, he documents every movement his own body makes from waking to sleeping over a 13-hour period.[25] It is a confessional text because it is recalling his own personal experience, and is closer to a prose poem than a poetic sequence because it is the length of a short novel.[26] My own experiments with found language and automatic writing led me to look at Goldsmith for inspiration, and expand on my approach to chance using restrictions. For example, the couplet in 'The 'mouth' of Rothko, YouTube', 'We should be prepared to sell paintings to Marlboro/ imagine Jesus I'm shaking' tries to deliver the found content like ordinary diction and inserts a spacious sense of breath before and after the word 'Jesus' to get as close to emulating the gestural experience of how those words were delivered aurally in the documentary.[27]

[25] Kenneth Goldsmith, *Fidget*, (Toronto, Ontario: Coach House Books, 1994).
[26] Ibid.
[27] Gardenofeatin, *The Rothko Conspiracy - Suicide & Scams In The Art World (1983).* Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qddcgLolAI [YouTube video], Accessed: March 14, 2016.

To achieve a conversational type of diction I recorded the phrasing of language and counted the breaths used by the speaker in the documentary's delivery. The space left to document this breath is manifested in my use of four-bar space. To achieve the musicality of how that language was delivered, I scored words like musical notes. I also experimented with reading this poem aloud to interpret the best way of achieving the intonation on the page. In *Fidget*'s chronological series of fragmented physical gestures, 'Swallow. Arm drops. Right leg crosses left'[28] – gestures harnessed in language – Goldsmith gets as close to describing the real body as he possibly can, but obviously we are reminded when we read this aloud how difficult it is to place the experience of the reality of the thing we attempt to describe into words.[29] Goldsmith's transcribes every movement made – despite the meticulous documenting and obsessive nature of the process needed to do so.[30] Yet, it is worth remembering that this is initially an automatic process before being edited later. When read aloud, despite the seductive sound quality of the poetry from the severe amount of repetition, what we hear at times is racing and chaotic in pace and thought.[31] The persona's estrangement from the body is enhanced by the knowledge that we as readers are under no illusion that Goldsmith is commenting on the gestures of his own body and therefore his body is recognised through the fictional persona. Reading this conceptual poem aloud is an exhaustive and difficult experience,

[28] Kenneth Goldsmith, *Fidget*, (Toronto, Ontario: Coach House Books, 1994), p. 19.
[29] See Michel Foucault's philosophy on language, it is his contention that we construct reality through discourse rather than capture it objectively. See *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (London and New York: Routledge, [1966] 2001).
[30] Marjorie Perloff's afterword to *Fidget* delivers a very intimate insight into Goldsmith's conceptual writing process, 'Goldsmith admits, after five hours of the experiment in which he monitors his body as it gets out of bed and interacts with objects like coffee cups, he "began to go crazy." The exercise becomes harder and harder, the verbal equivalents to physical motion more and more abbreviated.' Kenneth Goldsmith, *Fidget*, (Toronto, Ontario: Coach House Books, 1994), p. 92.
[31] Perloff explains, the written text is only one of *Fidget's* realisations. It was also a flexible enough to be realised as an installation, a musical performance score and the Java applet (electronic version). Kenneth Goldsmith, *Fidget*, (Toronto, Ontario: Coach House Books, 1994), p. 98.

due to prolonged use of repetition in words, sounds and excessive syntax. The musicality is mechanical and monotonous creating a staccato stop-start effect on your voice. The reader would feel constantly out of breath. This is enhanced by the persona's mental state becoming increasingly exhausted from documenting the reality of the body actions they are describing. This provides a strong sense of separation between the persona's mind and body which re-enacts Goldsmith fraught writing conditions between himself and text.[32] His practice expands on the reader's understanding of what constitutes as avant-garde poetry but it also demonstrates the limitations of conceptual poetic exercises largely due to how difficult it is to read this work aloud. Here, we can see how in some instances the description of the poet's conceptual practice could be considered more arresting than the product/poem.[33]

In relation to this experimentation with the delivery of poems aurally, investigating the philosophic depictions of toys has informed my understanding of the poetic play on words in *4:23PM, Relaxant*. This thinking has revealed that in the initial stages of writing a poem, the idea of the language making referential sense is sometimes secondary to me. In my foundation work, *Lucy's Evening*, sometimes the play of sound came first, and the sense arrived later. This ignorance or expansion of the language in the initial stage of writing a poem gives rise to a time in my production-process to play as it is the only point in the making of the poem where I become free of making direct sense. This is because I am deeply engaged with listening to the sound aspect of the language on the page. In the initial stages of writing my earlier poems, isolating sound was a main priority and making sense would be the secondary concern. However, this would always be reversed during

[32] Goldsmith's conceptual writing exercise physically restricted his body in order to write the text.
[33] In Chapter Four, I further explore the creative possibilities of writing on the self from a degree of distance in reference to the poem 'Dolphin' by Robert Lowell. I look at Lowell's persona's self-detachment from their own body in conjunction with his writing stimulus of use of autobiographical content in the lyric. Robert Lowell, *Selected Poems*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, [1976] 1977), p. 267.

the editing stages as during the editing of the poem the primary concern becomes making sense, thereafter I then allow myself to earn the right to revisit the musicality of the poem in the very final stages.

Baudelaire states in 'The Philosophy of Toys' that the 'toy is the child's earliest initiation to art'.[34] This concept illuminated the creative potential of seeing the words in a poem as toys which enable the poet to play. For Freud, what sets the creative writer apart from other adults is that for them, imaginative play has continued past childhood. In 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', Freud suggest that by leaving toys out on display for all to see, the child gives indication of what is going on inside their head.[35] However, as soon as these toys are removed from one's life, the play becomes internalised and is unable to be communicated, showing the repression of imaginative play in adults.[36]

Roland Barthes has a more suspicious attitude towards toys, especially those that imitate real life objects: 'French toys are usually based on imitation, they are meant to produce children who are users, not creators.'[37] Barthes is in support of play, but not in support of toys which replicate just one function of society. 'The fact that French toys literally prefigure the world of adult functions obviously cannot but prepare the child to accept them all, by constituting for him, even before he can think about it, the alibi of a Nature which has at all times created soldiers, postmen and Vespas'.[38] This difference can be attributed to Barthes' Marxism. Barthes was influenced by Gramsci and mass-produced toys therefore could be seen to represent an aspect of the dominant hegemonic bourgeois

[34] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Philosophy of Toys' in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), p. 200.
[35] Sigmund Freud, 'The Creative Writer and Daydreaming' in *The Uncanny* trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), p. 27.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Roland Barthes, 'Toys' in *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, [1957] 1972), p. 58.
[38] Ibid.

ideology or superstructure.[39] Play alone, on the other hand, implies imagination and the creation of something new which coheres with a revolutionary perspective.

Combining this critique with Baudelaire's concept of seeing toys as the earliest initiation into art,[40] it is plain to see how playing with toys might be considered the beginning of making art, and also how certain toys can be detrimental to a child's progression with independent thought. According to Barthes, if the toy is representative of a real-life object in society, then the child's imagination is restricted to seeing only the pre-defined, limited image they have been presented with.[41] I see the sense aspect and the sound aspect of poetic language in a similar fashion; if I am not able to get past the definition or the context of a word in the early draft of a poem, then I cannot construct a poem, instead I would be constructing prose. Barthes describes the real-life toy as a Jivaro head because it shows all the details of the human face and skull in miniature.[42] He describes how a young child may be presented with a doll that urinates, but the doll is plastic, or a child may be presented with models of the air force which show the exact number of soldiers it takes to make a squadron, however the models cannot kill another soldier.[43] When writing an autobiographical poem, a similar distortion towards life as it is experienced occurs as poetic language is not a true representation of life. The poet is only playing with the idea of constructing and representing life through autobiographical content.

[39] See E.C. Cuff, W.W. Sharrock, D.W. Francis, *Perspectives in Sociology: Classical and Contemporary*, (London and New York: Routledge, [1979] 1990).
[40] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Philosophy of Toys' in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), p. 200.
[41] Roland Barthes, 'Toys' in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, [1957] 1972), p. 58.
[42] Ibid., p. 57.
[43] Ibid., p. 58.

If the toys are a replication of human life then they are also a replication of everyday art. Barthes talks of wood as being the best material for children's toys as it does not fade away like plastic, and will not break as easily, therefore the toy has more chance of staying with the child into their adulthood.[44] The wooden blocks Barthes prefers to plastic toys have no face and cannot be defined easily, making their operation as a tool for imaginative play more malleable. This is a concept I've dealt with explicitly, with the open-ended use of leather as a material in 'Northern Hospital':

> On the car seat I wiped a brave face into the leather
> not my own but the skin of someone else

The use of leather here is associated with a human face who appears in contact with it but is playful because there is also the notion of the leather we may associate with a 'car seat'. However, it is apparent that it is a natural object. I reappropriate it as a child would during imaginative play allowing, through my practice of allowing the reader to make choices, to then play with the imagery imaginatively themselves. Pound would say it is still 'obtrusive' in meaning because it has a multitude of light word-associations due to the imagery, but it doesn't latch onto one image alone.[45] As a result, the reader is free to make a fluid interpretation for the leather with their own meaning. In this regard, the leather is a malleable toy as it does not fix itself to one meaning.

In 'The Philosophy of Toys', when Madame Pantouke asks a young Baudelaire to select a toy from her home to take with him as a souvenir, his mother intervenes, forcing him to choose a more humble toy rather than the one which stimulated him the most.[46] This aptly

[44] Ibid., p. 59.
[45] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, (London: Faber, [1934] 1961), p. 37.
[46] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Philosophy of Toys' in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), p. 199.

reflects the fact that a child's access to, and control of, objects is generally determined by a parent or guardian. This aspect is not considered by Freud in his metaphor where he links a creative writer with a child who leaves their toys out on display.[47] What we should consider is identifying what toys are left out on display and what world has been laid out for the child by others. It is the same with words; every word the poet has to consider delivers a set meaning or a set message, as if we have been handed a specific toy by a guardian. Therefore, it does not matter what words we use, it is perhaps more important to consider the way in which the poet arranges those words. The poet's power to create change in how we perceive the world lies in arrangement. The poet, in turn, becomes the guardian of the reader's 'toys.' Therefore, Barthes concept that the plastic toys promote a set idea of the world to the one who is playing with the toys can be challenged through the idea of arrangement in play; the act of pulling set toys apart and reassembling them. If there is no room to play with the formal idea a word represents, the poet will not have the freedom to redefine the word by how they position, cut-up, supplement or rearrange the placing of a word within a line.

Like rearranging the set toys in order to play with the set conceptions they present, in the process of drafting, revising, and re-drafting poems, I am attempting to make my own meanings through how I arrange the set meanings that live behind each word on the page by paying particular attention to arrangement and syntax. One example of this play of meanings is evident in the line 'I think of things like this because I can't sleep.' Italicised lines are (seemingly) casually slipped into the body of the poem to present a new meaning for the words. The use of italicised lines or words could also be interpreted as another

[47] Sigmund Freud, 'The Creative Writer and Daydreaming' in *The Uncanny* trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), p. 27.

speaker entering the poem. For instance, the use of the French language in the following line feels almost out of place, 'envisioning America past magpies and *gris* it was so cold in there too.' Yet, it is quickly given a relatable context by the refrain of the italicised text used previously, part of a call and response technique presented in the line of two possible speakers, '*you stay in bed if you want I have to go to work* I knew I had to go when you returned.' This use of italics playfully draws these two lines together and alters the musicality. They perform together to introduce another voice that works independently from the voice of the main persona of the poem. The term '*gris*' is also reinvented through the following imagery of the persona feeling cold echoing the action of the persona in one room looking to another that looks cold. The language here heightens the sense of unfamiliarity being felt by the persona in their own domestic space. Furthermore, the use of italics awkwardly juxtaposed helps to reinforce the sense of difference between the persona and their setting, because another voice seems to be entering the poem which contrasts with the speaker's tone.[48]

The focus on Freud, Baudelaire and Barthes arranging of the words (toys) in order to play with the meanings of language can be related to Robert Lowell's use of the 'cooked and raw' meat metaphor for poetry.[49] My process involved in balancing sound and sense are similar to Lowell's difference between 'cooked' and the 'raw' meat that he defines the two types of poetry which he felt pumped through the blood of America at the time.[50] As he argues, cooked poetry is 'a poetry that can only be studied' while raw poetry is 'a poetry that can only be declaimed'.[51] For Lowell, 'raw' poetry allows more play to come

[48] The visual appearance of the italics against plain language potentially increases the sense of difference between the persona and their setting.
[49] This is a metaphor that Lowell made in his acceptance speech at the National Book Awards in 1960. Robert Lowell, 'National Book Award Acceptance Speech 1960.' Available: www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech_rlowell.html#.V6t_nZOANBc. Accessed: 3 August, 2020.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

through in the performance (the 'declaiming').[52] Lowell, here, is inadvertently carving a distinction between the Beat and the Confessional poetic movements of the 1950s and 1960s. We get the impression that 'the cooked' poets are concerned with a different type of musicality and reverence for poetry on the page whereas, 'the raw' poets are working with an innate sense of rhythm that tends to come out in performance.[53] [54]

In making the distinction between the raw and the cooked with respect to poetry in the post-war period, Lowell is referring to a book (and concept) that was influential at the time and became one of the central texts in the development of structuralism as a method for analysing culture, society and literature: Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Raw and the Cooked*.[55] Lowell's comments led me to consider how Lévi-Strauss's concept might also relate my writing, particularly its performance and musicality.[56] I will discuss Lévi-Strauss's work in greater

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Interestingly, Lowell's speech associates the cooked poetry with the day and confines raw poetry to the 'midnight hour', in which the day time could be interpreted as the time where society is typically awake and in work, and the night as a time where society has the freedom to play, sleep and dream. Lowell is also creating a tension in his referral to each of the types of poetry as 'meat', because by defining the poetry in this way he is possibly saying something bigger about the artform itself - perhaps that contemporary poetry is dead and something to be consumed or left on the side to rot. At the beginning of the speech, Lowell quotes a conversation that he shared over the phone with a secretary. He describes an occasion when he was trying to get through to his editor and he let the secretary know his name 'Mr Lowell'. The secretary did not know which firm he belonged to, which left Lowell feeling 'bruised and blocked'. By mentioning this conversation to the audience, a conversation in which his poetry is seemingly being forced to take on a corporate identity, Lowell critiques the conception of poetry as a commodity, something which has been reduced to categories that have been set not by the poetic tradition but by a business logic. It seems to Lowell that poetry is no different to the meat business, in that it was once a living thing that has gone through the mechanical process of being slaughtered and repackaged as an object where it is then taken away to be bought, sold or exchanged. The feeling of being bruised and blocked likens him to a boxer engaged with an opponent. By seeing the cooked poetry as the product of an established poetry industry, this is a sign to Lowell that this is the kind of poetry which can be packaged, digested and made edible for a reader. However, what about the raw poetry, the meat that can be eaten, and is eaten, but just not in a way that is to everyone's taste. It can be eaten, but the audience members know that it comes with a price, with the risk of causing those who consume it an infection. Ibid.

[54] Ultimately, Lowell's sense of 'cooked' and 'raw' poetry resonates with me as it is a useful way of framing the tension between page poetry and performed poetry. Marjorie Perloff illuminated the distinction between poetry on the page and performed poetry. See Marjorie Perloff, *Poetry On & Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions*, (University of Alabama Press, 2004).

[55] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and The Cooked*, trans. Harper & Row and Johnathan Cape (Great Britain: Pimlico, [1964] 1994).

[56] Like Barthes, he is a Marxist and sees society through the lens of oppressor/oppressed and the cultures/societies/forms of knowledge and consciousness that grow from this. I think there is a distinct class/gender reading possible of my poetry and practice that are hinted to through my use of Barthes and Lévi-Strauss and when I discuss Sylvia Plath and gender later in the thesis. By analysing and disrupting structures by

detail with respect to musicality in the following chapter. In *4.23 PM: Relaxant*, I explore how, by incorporating my life experiences into the research poems I could be departing from concerns of musicality to a 'cooked' (to use Lévi-Strauss's concept) sense of poetry. When developing my voice, the musicality changed as a result of my insistence on including my poetry's relation to difficult autobiographical subjects, and relating to whether the poems were performed on the page or on the stage. Lévi-Strauss considers the relationship between the meaning and the sound of poems in regard to the idea of myth (myth being a central concern of his work overall). He wrote:

> If we try to understand the relationship between language, myth, and music, we can only do so by using language as the point of departure, and then it can be shown that music on the one hand and mythology on the other both stem from languages but grow apart in different directions, that music emphasises the sound aspect already embedded in language, while mythology emphasises the sense aspect, the meaning aspect, which is also embedded in language.[57]

Poems and myths are different products of the imagination; however, they are both rooted in the written word and constitute an entanglement of fictional projections and real, lived experiences. The awareness that poems and myths can exist both in the forms of spoken or written words is useful when examining the relationship between musicality and poetic sense in my poetry because, to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, myth and music are both languages which, in distinctive ways, transcend articulate expression.[58] As poetic language transcends

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using structuralist understandings, I'm also revealing poetic, psychological/subconscious and social conflict from my position as a woman from a working-class background.

[57]'Myth and Music' in *Myth and Meaning*, by Claude Lévi-Strauss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 53. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt1gxxr10.9. Accessed: 03 August 2020.

[58]Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and The Cooked*, trans. Harper & Row and Johnathan Cape (Great Britain: Pimlico, [1964] 1994), p. 15.

articulate expression and therefore our reading of a poem shares similarities with Lévi-Strauss's approach to reading myths, I can explore a system which orders the many 'chaotic' dualistic parts, combining fragments together to inform the structure of the poem as a whole.[59] [60] By taking a structuralist lens to the reading of a poem, informed by Lévi-Strauss's theory, the reader can pick out binary oppositions inherent to the concepts conveyed in the poem. These oppositions can equally be found in the sound/musical aspects of the poem for instance (regular/irregular metre; fast pacing/slow pacing; hard/soft sounds). The imagery of a poem can be broken down by identifying opposing 'bundles', 'sets', or 'combinations' of binary oppositions. Recognising these opposites provides another way of understanding the underlying narrative structure of the text. This structuralist approach to interpreting themes within poems can then be applied to the systematic version of events laid out in the traditional narrative that the text presents to the reader.

The benefits of adapting Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach to poetry can be seen in the following analysis of Sarah Howe's poem '(i) Frenzied'. In particular, I identify oppositions in the musicality of Howe's poem:

Maybe holding back
is just another kind

of need. I am a blue
Plum in the half-light.

[59] Ibid., p. 5.
[60] It is important to introduce here that Lévi-Strauss argues, 'music raises a much more difficult problem [than poetry], because we know nothing of the mental conditions in which musical creation takes place. In other words, we do not understand, the difference between the very few minds that secrete music and the vast numbers in which the phenomenon does not take place, although they are usually sensitive to music.' His reason being, 'not everyone is a poet, but the vehicle of poetry is articulate speech, which is common property.' This was influential to my understanding of poetic musicality because Lévi-Strauss's disregards here the poet's innate ability to discover the different types of musicality that exists within words and their arrangement of words, which is not necessarily 'common property,' through the practice of applying structuralist readings to poetry we see how a poet's rhythm is far more problematic than it appears. I explain in more detail the hidden rhythms which exist in poems, which contradicts Lévi-Strauss's idea of poetry as less hermetic than music when I observe Frye and Culler later in this chapter. Ibid., p. 18.

You are a tiger who
eats his own paws. [61]

Initially the break in musicality in the syntax of the second stanza stands out due to the awkward placement of the full stop in the third line. This draws attention to the object of the plum, which makes a delayed entrance into the poem because of this subtle break. It is notable that when this rhythm is read aloud the delay before 'plum'[62] places extra weight on the stress of internal rhyme 'You' and 'who' in first line of stanza three.[63] When the action, 'eat his own paws' is revealed in the last line of stanza three, the seductive quality of the full internal rhyme in the previous line is broken which leaves the image of the tiger in the miserable act of eating itself left to unravel.[64] This effect is achieved because Howe gives it more time and space after the reader is separated from the sense of security created by the lilt of the preceding internal rhyme. As the poem continues, the musicality changes in stanzas four (E/E) and five (F/F) to bold full rhyming couplets, just as the persona has a realisation. The sentiment of the message in 'The day we married /all the trees trembled// as if they were mad-/ be kind to me, you said' is uncomfortable, but the music suggests otherwise because it is uplifting and lyrical.[65] This also highlights the paradoxical quality of a typical idea of a wedding day and how it can be subverted into an event which can engender fear or chaos as something solid quivers: 'the trees trembled.'[66] When the trees tremble in the poem we are broken out of the personal tone of voice into a surrealistic image, but we are also being introduced to a change in the musicality due to the alliteration.

[61] Sarah Howe, '(i) Frenzied' in *Loop of Jade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p. 39.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

Applying Lévi-Strauss's idea of finding opposing symbols, I am drawn to the light and dark duality of the neologism term 'half-light.'[67] This term is applied to the object of the plum which shows the possibility that this fruit is not fully seen, similar to the story we are being presented with by Howe, where details of the relationship have been skipped or left out of the poem. 'Half-light' also stands out because the accentual hidden rhythm is tightened because of the dash; when we read it aloud we don't leave a space or a breath between words 'half' and 'light,' and this creates a forged type of assonance between 'half-light' and 'tiger,' which is not noticeable on the page.[68] The reference to kindness in the last line – 'be kind to me, you said' – is in opposition with the idea of the trees trembling as if they were mad.[69]

We have two opposing sets of emotions here, being in fear and calm. These opposing sets of emotions or categories are used to convey in words a person's understanding of the world and actions in reference to normative standards. Placing these opposing ideas together is significant because the persona is alluding to dialogue with someone who is asking the speaker to be kind. This interjection appears to create an unsettling environment for the persona due to the juxtaposition of this calm rational act against the exhaustive and fearful imagery of trembling trees in the previous stanza. The imagery of the trees dramatically alters our perception of the last line spoken to the speaker and simultaneously draws attention to the lack of response we hear from the recipient of those words. The poem is fairly compact in line-length and in form but the underlying sense of a violence being half-revealed (just like the image of the plum) is powerful. This power is achieved, in part, through Howe's careful handling of the poem's musicality.

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

As we can see from the analysis above, when a structuralist analysis is applied to a poem it involves a process of breaking the totality of a piece of material, in this case, a text, into many dualistic parts and reading those parts either linearly or horizontally in order to access a latent meaning of the text. As Lévi-Strauss argues:

> Were we to tell the myth we would disregard the columns and read the rows from left to right and from top to bottom. But if we want to understand the myth, then we have to disregard one half of the diachronic dimension (top to bottom) and read from left to right, column after column, each one being considered as a unit.[70]

Lévi-Strauss's method of deconstruction applied to poetry inspires the reader to search for elements which may otherwise be hidden because the order in which we approach our reading of the poem tests our conventional approach to language. By focusing on the musicality of language first, the sense is approached from more than one angle. The intensity of this focus is increased when considering the ways in which structure and meaning are affected by the move from page to performance, as previously undiscovered differences and nuances can be brought out when a poem is read aloud. Lévi-Strauss's approach encourages me to play around with different combinations of the properties that stand out. For example, properties such as the syntagmatic structure and the paradigmatic structure. These can reveal latent meanings behind the literal and referential meaning of the words.[71]

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[70] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth' in *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 68, No. 270, Myth: A Symposium (Oct.- Dec. 1955), pp. 428-444, p. 433.

[71] Lévi-Strauss was influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's work on the structures of language. Saussure refers to the syntagmatic structure and the paradigmatic structure of language where the former refers to the syntax of words in a sentence and the latter to the substitution of word groups with similar sounds. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, [1919] 1983).

In referring to music as a language, it is possible to see how musicality determines poetic sense and vice versa because the two are intrinsically linked to the concept of communicating a message to the reader. Sometimes the meaning expressed in these two components is innate, as words and sounds come with their own set of meanings which naturally resonate with the reader. But it is often the case that the message is forged through the poet's arrangement of those words and sounds by shifting them into other situations or settings where the innate meanings may appear strange. This 'making strange' resonates with Victor Shklovsky's concept of 'defamiliarization' as a key aspect of literary language.[72] In 'Art as Device' (also translated as 'Art as Technique'), Shklovsky analyses how shifting the focus of a work ever so slightly – for example, from a human beings to that of a horse– gives indirect humanistic qualities to the horse. In this example, the horse's language becomes very humanistic, and because we cannot see the horse, we are presented with the strange choice of whether to project humanistic qualities onto the character or not. This process also brings to the fore the meaning of everyday objects as they are defamiliarized when perceived through the observing eye of the horse. This process of defamiliarization disorients the reader. The meaning of the text is elevated beyond the literal while remaining inside the everyday.

Both Lévi-Strauss and Skhlovsky were influential in my consideration of the layout and structuring of my poems for *4:23 PM, Relaxant*. A majority of the longer poems that are present in Part One of the collection began as sonnets that were extended during the editing process. These include '12th-15th April', which grew from a traditional fourteen-line sonnet into a poem of three stanzas and 'Prayers', whose form again grew from a sonnet into a composition of six stanzas prominently featuring rhyming couplets. My aim with these

[72] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, [1917] 1965), pp. 3-24.

poems was to retain the essence of the sonnet form in its thematic concerns, but to expand on that content in a more exploratory prose-like narrative form and length. This approach enabled me to give a greater depth of detail to the character's observations and provided the reader space to carefully unravel the experience of each metaphor, climax, character and image they encounter. The collection encompasses a mixture of tones and registers developed through precise syntactic control in which the harnessing of the abstract and the everyday are combined to form a focus for the collection. There are, for example, many instances when the use of punctuation is either deliberately jerky or entirely removed, often to be replaced with an empty four-bar space.

This approach to punctuation reveals the intent behind what Frye terms the 'oracular' or 'associative' hidden lyric rhythm patterns that I have crafted in my poems.[73] My work builds upon a concept explored by both Northrop Frye[74] and Johnathan Culler[75] in their critique of lyric theory.[76] Both critics have concerned themselves with examining the 'hearing' patterns that are not inherent on the page in lyric poetry and the musicality that foregrounding the sound aspect produces.[77] This hidden musicality is expressly acknowledged in *4:23 PM, Relaxant*. The lack of punctuation in my longer lyrical poems, for instance, act as a counter rhythm to the more traditional meters a reader would expect, with the aim to upset the natural flow of reading. As a result, I cause breaks in comprehension and require the reader/audience to re-evaluate their approach to garner a greater understanding of the piece. This approach

[73] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 275.
[74] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[75] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015)
[76] I discuss both Frye's and Culler's theories on lyric poetry in greater detail later in Chapter Two.
[77] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 132-185.

can be seen in the potential stoppage of the rhythmical lyricism as a result of taking a pause for the four-bar space in the third stanza of '12th – 15th April':

> When we spoke afterwards I'd see
> Images of meat or eggs getting cracked
> In one hand other times on my back
> It was a damp toast patted in flour or bound up in string
> I always thought it was good of me
> as your flag to be kind to the harnessing and for the morning call
> I'd make you look at my day aroused and blunt
> The same way you play with my
> confidence

The gaps in the first three lines allows the reader to trace the different aspects of the persona's desire for, or obsession with, love with a greater sense of fluidity. In the longer free verse poems and sequences, I purposefully increased the possibilities for the reader to create their own stoppages, associations and line-breaks within each line, so that the poems become malleable and open to different readings.[78] The gaps in this poem, if adhered to in its reading, are intended to create a lilting rhythm which echoes the experience of wind blowing around the protagonist who is travelling in transit. This can be seen, for example, in the references to the persona embarking on their journey in the first five lines of stanza one with, 'I want to take it everywhere/ in hotels on the back of bikes...'. These lines, and the three lines which follow, are punctual and percussive with great pauses, like a slow drumbeat. They move between staccato and enjambed lyrical phrasings but never in an obvious rhythmical manner as the ride is quite disjointed. There are huge waves of motion not unlike those found in the free improvisation and avant-garde jazz of Ornette Coleman[79] and John Coltrane's

[78] It is important to add that the nature of the relationship between language and meaning as well as the existence of readers within different social/cultural contexts dictate that all poems can be open to different meanings regardless of structure, content and language. Therefore, I'm making it plain that the poem is open to many diverse readings.

[79] See Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz* © 1960 by Atlantic Records, New York. Vinyl.

music.[80] In stanza two the question, 'what could me more natural' is a question without a question mark yet due to the placement of the line-break we are left with a ghostly impression of that mark. The reader has the option of interrupting the flowing rhythm of the previous lines in stanza two that are in accentual meter. In stanza three, I wanted to make a return to the idea of a persona travelling through a variety of spaces and create not only closure for the poem but also a sense of completion to the persona's journey. I use stoppages similar to those seen in stanza one and two—due to the spaces I have used to replace syntax and/or give the illusion of syntax at the start of the last stanza. If the gaps are ignored in the reading, the sensation of recalling this transit still persists, but it just unravels the imagery at a slower pace. Both approaches allow for the hidden rhythms to be detected inside each of the stanzas to convey a feeling of stillness and transit intact.

The accentual words and multiple 'line-breaks' within a line I have highlighted below show where the stress of the hidden hearing pattern would occur during an aural delivery of the first three lines in a reading. This exemplifies a third iteration of the poem offering a potentially different interpretation from the rhythm seen on the page:

When
we
spoke
afterwards
I'd see
Images of
meat
or eggs
getting
cracked
In one
hand
other
times

[80] See John Coltrane, *Ascension* © 1966 by Impulse, New York. Vinyl.

on
my back

As you can see, the sound aspect is foregrounded in an aural delivery, as it is dually accentuated or clipped through the use and duration of silence between words instead of being denoted by punctuation marks. Additionally, these spaces leave time for a breath in which the images can linger in the listener's imagination. This also assists in unpacking dense images which, in turn, helps to produce further understandings of the persona's longing portrayed in the sense of the language. The dual stoppage and line-break after the term 'afterwards', for example, recreates the experience of a tense intimate talk due to the extended pause in-between the language here. The hidden rhythm formed through the several heavy stresses shown in the hidden 'line-breaks' that I have indicated within these three lines, reveals the stresses that are not on the page. it This enables me to convey the placement of the assonance ('when', 'we', 'afterwards'), ('I'd', 'hand') and ('spoke',' see', 'images' and 'eggs;') and how the effect of following these stoppages upsets the cadences in the gratifying end half-rhymes – 'cracked' with 'back.' As a result, the speaker's delivery to the reader changes from engaging in conversation to making curt surrealist statements. There are several poems from the manuscript which have been constructed using the same configuration for the rhythmic details charted above in '12th – 15th April', the essence of which suggest a musical score. On the page, this configuration for this poem's hidden rhythm is a useful critical tool for interpreting the poem's alternative forms of musicality.

The rhythmic details charted above in '12th – 15th April' echoes how meaning is conveyed by visual means in concrete poetry because it expresses the visual shape of how I would read the poem aloud. Conceptually this version of the rhythm is a shape of the poem's speaking voice therefore this configuration could be an experimental poem in its own right. However,

as a poet who often expands on works throughout the editing process by speaking the poems aloud, often alongside improvised music, taking a structuralist approach to the rhythm of my own poems has revealed a plethora of hidden conceptual properties that are usually concealed from the page and the reader's eye. In the above configuration the words appear similar to musical notes, but instead of a single clef corresponding to a specific musical sound, each word here conveys more associations attached to the meaning of the sound because the sonic aspect of these words is always working in combination with the referential aspect of these words. This configuration begs the question, to what extent does the use of syntactic control in the poem change during a performance? Poetry becomes prose when it loses its sense of line but when a lyric poem shows potential for alternative rhythm patterning's, ones that leave the ghostly impression of syntax, accentual stress or line-break in a reading, what we could be hearing is a blueprint for the poem's overall lyric rhythm.[81]

Attentiveness to the 'hidden rhythm' identified in the above configuration is also indicative of how using spacing and breath techniques to form a musical patterning for words affects not only the pace of my poetry, but can also alter a reader's perception of the human experience relayed through the poem's use of metaphor and imagery. The fixed page can be understood as an entry-point to seeing the ways in which musicality functions in the production of poetic meaning. This leads to the conclusion that the vitality of poetry exists as a text to be both seen *and heard*, and each approach should have equal weight.

[81] When I read a poem aloud either alone or alongside improvised music, it will often expand on the page version of that poem, specifically on the beginning and ending of each line-break, which in turn creates an unintentional enjambment. This performed version of the poem can help to formulate new drafts of the poem. Through the use of recording equipment, I am able to return to various aural versions of the poem I have previously experimented with (within live conditions) through relistening to sound recordings; and use my findings to inform further edits of the page version of the poem.

The impersonal surrealist tone of '12th – 15th April' could also be supported further through using musicality to resolve the paradoxes of gestures and word-associations I have suggested in the fragmentary descriptions of food in fusion with the human body. In this imagery, the sense of meat and eggs being cracked on the persona's back could be deployed here, even if the poem is referring to a different context from that of the items being cracked in one hand. The mention of the damp toast 'patted in flour' and/or 'bound up in string' creates ambiguity as it could be making reference to the persona's body or, at the same time implying that the persona is dissolving into these culinary actions. These interpretations that arise from honouring the stoppages in the poem's rhythm help to identify the nuance between the impersonal and the personal tone of the speaker in this confessional poem. This example of subversive ambiguity in meaning is formed by following the stoppages. The combination of the imagery and the stoppages in the poem work together to produce a surrealist re-enactment of the experience felt from the autobiographical experiences depicted in the poem.

Yet, it could also be a subtle use of poetic *Maskenfreiheit* – the freedom conveyed by wearing masks, squeezing the self into seemingly odd configurations of character or object.[82] In both rhythm and sense, this concealment technique places a texture or a gauze over the use of autobiography in the poems, allowing me to embrace the real content of the lyric more freely. Surrounding the speaker in this specific ambiguity when drawing on autobiographical material in the lyric is not a new feature of poetry, but what has emerged through my writing process is a deeper appreciation for the act of close reading my own poetry. This technique opens my approach to the editing process. It has been extremely beneficial to close read my

[82] The use of *Maskenfreiheit* as a poetic technique is explored by Susan Youens in her discussion of Heinrich Heine's poetry, 'Heine knew better. Wanting to write poetry that could serve as a weapon in the war to aid humanity (an unfulfilled, indeed unfulfillable, desire on his part), he understood that the poet must become a smuggler, must use images, parables, contexts, and associations as purveyors of cloaked truth'. Susan Youens, '*Maskenfreiheit* and Schumann's Napoleon-Ballad', *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol.22, No.1 (March, 2005), pp. 5-46, p. 44.

poems to see what allusions to the real/personal experiences I am crafting syntactically, literally and musically. Alongside reworking the traditional use of rhythm over the forms employed, taking a syntactic approach to form has created more opportunities for my use and appreciation of melody. This has also furthered my understandings of the control and use of delay in my execution of the sense related to the meaning of a poem involved in articulating real poetic themes by giving the reader the option to reduce the production of musicality in the poems.

The repetition of 'I', the first-person pronoun, in the stanza from '12th – 15th April' occurs a number of times throughout the poem. When delivered aurally, this reveals a stress on the poem's addressee. 'I' is repeated five times in the first stanza, three times in the second stanza and finally, a further five times in the final stanza. If you place emphasis on the 'I' sound during a performance of the poem this has a seductive sound quality which builds throughout the poem. It also assists with placing emphasis on a candid switch to the use of direct address in the poem's closing lines 'the way you play with my / confidence'. The sense of these lines declares that they are either playfully manipulating or feeling manipulated by the presence of the addressee, which helps explain the deliberately defamiliarizing use of form and language in the lines which come prior to this change in the speaker's register. This is similar to the way that the first two thirds of the poem allude to, and are bound up in sexual desires—a lack of gratification, humiliation and a vague sadomasochistic undercurrent—and a warring relationship in which metaphorical flags of surrender are raised:

> When we spoke afterwards I'd see
> images of meat or eggs getting cracked
> in one hand other times on my back
> it was a damp toast patted in flour or bound up in string
> I always thought it was good of me
> as your flag to be kind
> to the harnessing and for the morning call

I'd make you look at my day aroused and blunt
the same way you play with my
confidence

The placement of the end line-break following the line 'The same way you play with my' breaks on the word 'my.' Of course, this is not a typical place to end a line of poetry. I chose to end the poem here because its recitation invites the reader to dramatically pause, which was intended to create a point of tension, and more specifically, to jolt the reader from the familiar pace of the line. This unnatural line-break puts a heavy stress on the word 'confidence' slowing my delivery of the word down to an unnatural stoppage in the rhythmic pace for this line of language. My intention was to create the illusion of confidence in the poem's persona – they are actively guiding the audience into this strange oracular delivery. There's a sense of playfulness here, one gesturally experienced by both the reader and the persona. This is because the theatricality of this unnatural line-break in its delivery acts as a bait and switch for both the persona and the reader hearing it, where the persona's 'play' returns in a controlling fashion. The way in which the persona and addressee play with one another's emotions is emphasised through the poem's structural by playing with the reader's sense of line ending. For the reader this un-natural line ending could evoke the feeling of a shock and then being soothed from the effect immediately, just before the terse climactic ending is revealed. This gestural opportunity created by the poem's second to last line, breaking on 'my' to create the isolated final word 'confidence,' was designed to subvert the reader's expected aural delivery of this language. The effect is we read 'confidence' in an unravelling and lingering manner. I wanted to create duality here by crafting a confident persona, who is strong enough to play with reader's expectations of the line, despite hinting at the possibility of their own confidence being undercut by another. The imaginary experience executed in this arrangement of the poem's content is made to affect the reader's reality through authoritative unusual phrasing.

In his chapter 'Rhythm and Repetition' from *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler writes, 'In the end, the sound effects that matter most are not merely local to one statement but those that contribute to the seductive charm-like autonomy of the larger poetic sequence'.[83] The foundations of this 'charm-like autonomy'[84] are built upon a series of internal and external rhythms fluctuating in the poem, including sounds which can be seen, heard and associated with the language. This explains the alluring quality of seductive rhythm contributing greatly to the wider meaning through the repetition of the sound and sense technique in a poetic sequence. Applying this concept to my technique of measuring the 'seductive charm-like' quality of the sonics in a poem as a practitioner, and finding ways to anchor the relationship between musicality and sense in *4:23 PM, Relaxant,* it is possible to see the wider purpose of the use of language in this text, which is to build a distinctive poetic 'voicing' and 'voice' throughout in order to fulfil my expectations of the subject. This idea of looking at musicality in order to understand the sense of the lyric subjects in a poem is similar to the way in which James Joyce uses musical notation in the siren sequence of *Ulysses*.[85] The distinctive use of language in this episode contrasts with the rest of the novel.[86] In the siren sequence, the language is scored as if the sound of the language were seen as musical notes.[87] By foregrounding the musicality in Joyce's choice and arrangement of words, the illusion of the siren's song is heightened because of the persuasive and pleasurable qualities this sequence has in its audible qualities. Joyce forms a musicality to attract the reader's attention and provide pleasure not through its application to logic or to advance the narrative but through

[83] Jonathan Culler, 'Rhythm and Repetition' in *The Theory of the Lyric*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp 174-175.
[84] Ibid., p. 175.
[85] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, [1922] 2010).
[86] Important to mention here that every chapter of *Ulysses* uses language differently. Samuel Beckett as Joyce's protégé, could also be seen as bringing this approach to avant-garde writing techniques to fruition. See Samuel Beckett, *Echo's Bones,* (London: Faber & Faber, [1934] 2014).
[87] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2010).

its appeal to the reader's senses. In this respect, the logic of the piece, through the heightened use of sound, becomes tangible in a sequence which operates more like a prose poem than prose. However, although Bloom as a character dissolves into the sound in the siren sequence, when he does re-emerge, we can start to see him as a figure constructed out of language rather than as a physical character. I was influenced by Joyce's approach to the musicality of language in the composition of some of the poems for *4:23 PM, Relaxant* because it helped me to discern the aims of my use of heightened musicality in the past and execute it sensibly and with greater control in my later poems. I was also able to observe how the literal and the musical elements of my voice work together to express wider meanings about the collection's interest in sonic play. This was my aim, for example, in '12th -15th April.' Relearning the literal meaning of poetic language through sonic play creates a voice for the poetic subject that is strongly individual because it is in part addressing the voice of the poem on the page and in part addressing an illusion of the performed voice in the poem.

To return to Culler, in the essay discussed above he refers to Seamus Heaney's 'Death of a Naturalist', a poem for which he defines the vocal apparatus as one which releases 'all sorts of sexual impulses'.[88] Here, Culler is not just referencing the sensuality of the rhythm, he is highlighting the notion that the act of writing poetry is a rewriting of language as we know it. In this context, Culler references Mutlu Blasing's words:

> The birth of a poet is at once a relearning of language, a reliving of what infantile amnesia forgets, and a 'turning' away from it again, now into a poetic language […] this sequential history is remembered in the simultaneous annulment and re-

[88] Jonathan Culler, 'Rhythm and Repetition' in *The Theory of the Lyric*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 175.

> inscription of the subject in poetry, of the dissolution of the subject and its return as an illusion.[89]

For Culler, the 'simultaneous annulment' and 're-inscription' of the self as a subject and the poet's illusion of the self as a subject laid down by Blasing helps Culler to stress that we are sometimes dealing with Seamus Heaney's sonic effect rather than the biographical individual alone.[90] Therefore, the sounds used by Heaney produce meaning through the use of both a series of seductive sounds and a subject that is undergoing this experience. However, Culler argues the subject of the poem is 'a voicing rather than a voice'– this is what we are being presented with.[91] This produces an uncertainty between a written persona and a performed persona that resonates with the longer poems within Part One of *4:23 PM, Relaxant.* In addition, this uncertainty is also found in the use of sonics in Parts One, Two and Three of the collection. The use of sound and sense builds across the collection deepening an exploration of what constitutes poetic meaning and of how poetic voice is constructed. The meaning of the lives presented in these poems is reinforced through the use of a duality between the biographically informed persona and the performed voice of the poem. Therefore, the recalling of specific biographical events in the poems is also a reliving of the paradoxical sound aspects of the voice seen, heard or imagined in the poem.

The act of turning away from both the literal meaning of the poem's word-use and the real, biographical events depicted has assisted me with this concept of 'relearning' my approach to language for every poem in *4.23 PM, Relaxant*. Doing so allowed me to enhance my poetic

[89] Ibid., pp. 175-176.
[90] Ibid., p. 176.
[91] Ibid.

voice's originality through rigorous analyses, reflections upon, and reactions to the creative possibilities of sonic play.

Chapter Two: Musicality and the relationship between meaning and sound in poetry

Considering musicality and the relationship between meaning and sound in the artform of poetry has a long history. It was Aristotle, in *Poetics*, who first sought to isolate the structural features of tragedy into six identifiable areas, which he termed as, 'Mythos' (plot), 'Ethos' (character), 'Dianoia' (thought), 'Melos' (melody/song), 'Opsis' (spectacle) and 'Lexis' (diction).[92] Aristotle approached these functions, either alone or in combination, to identify and define the qualitative characteristics of the art he observed.[93] Aristotle characterised tragedy in terms of genres, and secondly, as a medium with the potential to artistically create 'imitation' or 'mimesis' of life. But as Johnathan Culler explains, it was not until the arrival of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century that 'a more vigorous and highly developed conception of the individual subject made it possible to conceive of lyric as mimetic: an imitation of the experience of the subject.'[94] Culler refers to a mode for reading lyric poetry which, despite its wide influence, moved towards 'a variant, which treats the lyric not as mimesis of the experience of the poet, but as representation of the action of the fictional speaker: in this account, the lyric is spoken by a persona, whose situation and motivation one needs to reconstruct.'[95] Culler understands the limits of this approach when close reading lyric poetry, particularly when it comes to widening the interpretation of the sound aspects of a lyric poem and realising the effects of lyric musicality on the sense aspect of language. This is because we often neglect the 'salient features of many lyrics, which are not to be found in ordinary speech acts – from rhythm and sound patterning to intertextual relations.'[96] These

[92] Aristotle, 'Poetics' in *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. S. H. Butcher (London: Macmillan and Co., [c. 335 BC] 1902), p. 25.
[93] Jonathan Culler, *The Theory of the Lyric*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 7.
[94] Ibid., p. 1.
[95] Ibid., p. 2.
[96] Ibid.

features are neglected because the approach to the voice of the poem as if it was a fictional character in a dramatic monologue designed for stage, and the impact of the popularity of prose, has opened enquiries and expectancies for discovering storyline and plot in poetry. As a result, plot or narrative in poetry has strengthened over time. By expanding on Aristotle and Culler's analyses, this chapter will explore the understanding of the nuanced and flexible state of a lyric speaker (speaking to the audience in a way that is part themselves and part universal). This approach is not addressed when we look at the poetic voice as if it were a persona (rather than the representation of the poet subject themselves). Indeed, it is good practice to remove persona from subject, as it directs the reader away from demands the biographical detail (of the subject/poet) and time of composition (poem/event) creates over our automatic direction of the meaning. This could dramatically alter our approach to an initial reading of the poem, even unconsciously.

I believe exploring the notion of seeing the persona of the poem as a fictional speaker is not necessarily damaging to our reading of the lyric because it still introduces the idea of identifying with the language of the lyric poem as if it was conversational everyday speech. This accessibility helps in better understanding contexts such a grief within a lyric poem. Indeed, reading poetry that discusses grief in an everyday tone helps to formulate a genuine experience of the event of grief being re-enacted by the poet for the reader. It also reminds us a poem is in fact a constructed text, demystifying the artform through foregrounding the fact that it is not an accurate representation of life. By looking at other poets of influence and my own poetry through the lens of Aristotle and Culler, I have been able to broaden the investigation of the sound aspect's effect on the delivery of meaning in interpreting and writing lyric poetry. This chapter frames the discussions of poetic practice by offering close readings of the sound aspects of lyric poems by Denise Riley and Sylvia Plath. Through these

close readings we can explore what can be derived from the musicality in a poem, particularly in regard to its meaning.

In order to carry out this close reading with respect to the way in which the sound aspects effect the mimetic representation of life in lyric poetry, it is interesting to refer to Aristotle's use of 'Melos' (melody/song). His discussion of the category of 'Melos' (melody/song) in tragedy, whereby the 'Melos' (melody/song) is in fusion with the 'Lexis'(diction), and is said to be creating the rhythmic element of the poetry, conveys the sense in which poetry and music are intricately related.[97] During his interpretation of tragedy, he indicates the 'Melos' (melody/song) to be a singular poetic function and separated from the 'Lexis' (diction) of the tragedy.[98] This is where the idea of musicality having a profound effect on our interpretation of poetic sense originates, as melody is disentangled from the set arrangement of the language in order to assess the tonal quality of the rhythm. But there is also an indication of seeing the two parts running together concurrently in the delivery of a tragedy. The 'Melos' (melody/song) and the 'Lexis' (diction) in tragedy morph into Aristotle's notion of a 'language embellished'[99], which means a 'language in which music, ''harmony'' or song enter.'[100] Therefore, Aristotle isolates the reading of the rhythm through observing 'Melos'(melody/song) 'singly or in combination' with 'Lexis' (diction), [101] to identify 'embellishments' such as rhythm and to measure the impact these 'embellishments' of the language have on an audience.[102]

[97] Ibid., pp. 24-25.
[98] Ibid., p. 23.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., p. 7.
[102] Ibid., p. 23.

It is important, however, to note, Aristotle is also recognising this gestural paradox occurring in interplay between the readers' audible and visual conception of the language through an outlet of theatre. This distinction makes it possible to situate this idea of a poetry that is designed for stage but also expressed as a dramatic monologue; it is where the mimetic and imitative qualities of the poetry can be explained in comparison to the real. This is because for Aristotle, poetry is an imitation. Therefore, Aristotle identified a relationship between the musical appearance and the literal appearance of the written word on the audience by acknowledging the action of disentangling the sound aspect from the poem. He noted the specific effects of techniques such as rhythm on the audience's senses. It was not until later when poetry was considered mimetic that a more detailed approach to musicality was conceived. I believe that Aristotle's application of schemas to develop his understanding of the structural characteristics of poetry in *Poetics* allow for division between 'Melos' (melody/song) and 'Lexis'(diction) but disregards the problems that occur for rhythm when disentangling these two features. I think there is a healthy disrespect for the original structure of the poem that the poet intended. However, I can see the creative possibilities for criticism of poetry and how taking this approach laid down the blueprint for a structuralist's approach to poetics with the theory of opposites informing narrative structure theory as per the theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss.[103]

Pioneer of the structuralist analysis of language, Roman Jakobson, in his 'Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning'[104], argues against the position of what he dubs the neogrammarians for whom sound and meaning belong to completely distinct orders[105] In lecture one, he shows how a linguistic approach to poetic analysis through phonology can be freeing compared to

[103] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth' in *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 68, No. 270, Myth: A Symposium (Oct.- Dec. 1955), pp. 428-444.
[104] Roman Jakobson, *Lectures on Sound & Meaning*, (Cambridge: MIT Press), [1937] 1981, pp. 1-23.
[105] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

what he calls the 'naïve form of sensualist empiricism, focusing directly and exclusively on sensations'[106], a method he interestingly termed 'mechanistic' in lecture six.[107] Interrogating Jakobson's rejection of a sensualist empiricism by showing the limitations of solely applying linguistic precision to the interpretation of the musicality of a poem. I agree with Jakobson's nuanced understanding of the relationship between sound and meaning in poetry but dispute the usefulness of his preference for using grammar and linguistics, rather than empiricism, as the basis of interpreting poetry – particularly when it comes to the interpretation of the role of musicality in lyric poetry.

In contrast with Jakobson's structuralist approach, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* argues for the concept of a hidden 'associative rhythm' existent in lyric poetry.[108] In his work he explores three kinds of rhythm which can be used to identify the verbal rhythms in ordinary speech: verse rhythm, prose rhythm and primitive syntax.[109] Of particular interest here is the rhythms Frye identifies which are 'oracular' types of rhythm.[110] These can only be revealed in the act of speaking the poem, to hear the complexities of its rhythm—a key component of my own work. In addition to looking at Aristotle and Jakobson, Frye's theory on sound and sense through hearing sound-patterns, stresses, pauses, line-breaks, punctuation and syllable-counts uncovers and allows the evocation of meanings not detectable on the page. I argue that it is possible to see how the paradox of the sound of a poem's musicality on the page and the sound of a poem's musicality in aural delivery allows for a better understanding of the full complexity of the tension between musicality and sense in poetry.[111]

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[106] Roman Jakobson, *Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1937), p. 4. See Robert G. Meyers, *Understanding Empiricism* (London: Routledge, 2006)
[107] Roman Jakobson, *Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1937), p. 109.
[108] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 275.
[109] Ibid., p. 271.
[110] Ibid.
[111] The isolation of the sound aspect (or 'Melos') of lyric poems is also highlighted by poet Ezra Pound's exploration of the melopoeia of lyric poetry. Pound suggests three ways of appreciating the melos: the 'song' melos, the 'charm' melos; and, the 'speech' melos. This shows how analysis of the fusion of the implicit and

Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* invites the reader to listen attentively to both the conscious and unconscious sound-associations in his two interpretations of a line of verse taken from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, 'Ay, but to die, and go we know not where'.[112] Firstly, he reads the line for the metrical rhythm found in the iambic pentameter of a five-stress line. Secondly, he sees 'the semantic or prose rhythm.' Thirdly, he initiates a reading of the rhythm, which he describes as 'the rhythm of decorum, the verbal representation of a man facing death'. However, for his last reading of the lyric rhythm Frye deconstructs the verse on the page to imitate how he would read the line aloud for its 'oracular' and 'associative' rhythm:

> If we listen to the line very attentively, [we] make out still another rhythm in it, an oracular, meditative, irregular, unpredictable, and essentially discontinuous rhythm, emerging from the coincidences of the sound pattern:
>
> Ay:
>
> But to die . . .
>
> and go
>
> we know
>
> not where. . .[113]

In this final investigation into the construction of lyric rhythm, Frye highlights each and every sound to create an alternative, hidden patterning of the text formed out of its deconstruction. In this version, the sounds appear detached from the page despite

explicit rhythms of lyric poetry creates an impressive experiential and gestural meaning for the reader. See Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, (London: Faber, [1934] 1961), p. 61.

[112] William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. Bate and E. Rasmussen (England: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, [1623] 2010), pp. 21-107.

[113] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 271.

typographically remaining. Frye demonstrates a dual lens with which to view (and subsequently *hear*) lyric language and this lens highlights alternative meters and rhythms to those explicitly audible and visible in a poem.' However, there is, importantly, a third rhythm detected by Frye which shows meaning can be structured through interpreting the indirect associations we assign to language in linguistics.[114] Frye begins to envision another version of the rhythm than that which is presented on the page, one which reworks the original combination of the words through the addition of his own line-breaks placed on the poem. In making this move, Frye suggests an entirely different line to the one crafted by the author, or rather a third rhythm that exists in addition to its metrical and semantic qualities. This raises an issue in determining how poetic rhythm is structured. In Frye's example, the reader is pushed to rewrite the original form of the poem, which in turn reveals how its musicality is generated. The reader, therefore, is invited to re-write the poem as they read it. The creative writer is given more opportunities to explore during the edit of their creative work for musicality, meaning and sound.

Frye's approach to 'babble'[115] and other sound aspects of lyric poems, raises an interesting line of enquiry: does the poem's author invite the reader to discover alternative rhythms, which in turn suggest alternative meanings through their aural sounding when read aloud, and does this invitation lead to a counterpoint to the words on the page? But also, has the poet prepared the reader for a performance of the poem because, for the reader, the lines on the page will physically/textually stay the same? Of course, these questions elicit different answers if the poem is heard as a performance and depends on whether the audience has

[114] Culler develops Frye's point here. Culler writes: 'lyric poetry involves hearing differently, attending to sorts of patterning that might not compel attention in narrative poetry'. Therefore, in order to hear differently, Culler invites the critic to read their poetry differently too. Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 133.
[115] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 275-278.

access to the written text. Frye suggests the lyric poem allows, more so than any other genre, the ability for readers to initiate other versions of the poem's rhythm, giving them the opportunity to isolate the sound aspects due to the intrinsically disguised musicality inherent in the form. If the sound aspect of the language arranged by the poet is prominent and clearly evident during a performance because the page is not present, can the meaning of the musicality of the poem be expanded further, creating possibilities for an audience to discover a new interpretation from the poem's rhythm? Or is the loss of page narrowing the audience's understanding of the rhythm?

When close reading a performance of a poem, these questions give the poet reasons to look for sound and the sense aspects which can be isolated effectively to find latent meanings which we would not necessarily be aware of outside of the performance context. Interestingly, although expanding on our interpretation of the poem's meaning, this is also an area where the reader's relationship with the sense aspect of the poem's rhythm can be problematic. This is because musicality can be detached or disentangled from the meaning during a performance. The sense is dependent on another rhythm concurrent with the set rhythm of the poem that has now been taken away from the page. This can override the literal or intended meaning of the poem, creating a dissonance in the receiver's comprehension, which creates a new third meaning.

It is also possible to see dialogue between the verbal and the non-verbal aspects of a poem's language appear when musicality is foregrounded. If the reader's understanding of the sense aspect relies heavily on interpreting the relationship between the musicality and the narrative of a poem, this relationship becomes further strained when this critique is applied to poetry outside the immediate realms of comprehension and whose narrative is vague. Jonathan Culler notes that lyric poems rich in musicality form an bodily experience for the reader,

which is different to reading for sense or narrative understanding.[116] Referencing 'La Dormeuse' by Paul Valéry[117] to highlight the 'associative rhythm' in a twelve-syllable French alexandrine narrative poem, Culler explores the 'associative rhythm' present in the sound patterning of Valéry's work to reveal the underlying sensuousness of the lyric genre, one which is disguised by the narrative element.[118] Here a crossover occurs between the personal and the impersonal modes of address; 'a sonorous intensity unlikely to be found in narrative poems' which 'pulls the language away from a situation of personal expression into a mode of impersonal sensuousness'.[119] The sensuousness occurs through the repetition of sounds; 'ma, amie, ame, masque, aspirant'[120] – a repetition in sound used to place emphasis on certain areas of the content of the poem. Culler argues that these occurrences in the poem – where an otherwise disguised musicality is heightened – can be identified at points where the girl in the poem appears to be absent: 'The living girl is absent, but the form is awake and watches.'[121] Culler argues that the unusual rhythm of the last line, where the syntax requires stress on the opening syllable and a pause following, gives the line 'a disruptive force: the action of the poem is that the form, abstracted from the human, watches.'[122] For Culler, the sensuous musicality becomes isolated from the literal/linguistic meaning because the sound of the language is prominent at a moment where the girl is disappearing. Culler draws attention to the fact the girl is described by the poet as 'amas, a mass rather than a soul'.[123] By isolating the 'associative rhythm' of the poem from this imagery of the girl transforming into a mass, we look at her description differently. In one sense the musicality has charged

[116] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 169-171.
[117] Paul Valéry, 'La Dormeuse' in *Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Volume 1: Poems*, by Paul Valéry and David Paul, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) pp. 138–139. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x0s16.33. Accessed: 3 August, 2020.
[118] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 134-137.
[119] Ibid., p. 134.
[120] Ibid., p. 135.
[121] Ibid., p. 136.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

her empty appearance with a living energy that has the paradoxical effect of drawing attention to her as a void in the line, but also drawing attention to her as a void being filled in the same instance. The musicality ignites a sense of life and death transpiring at once.

My poetic practice is led by the disjunctions formed between the words on the page and the performative aspect of its reading: how annunciation, pauses, rhythmic delivery, accent and gesture, to name a few, can change the characteristics of a poem's musicality turning it into a distinctly different event than the fixed written version. This disjunction between the textual and aural aspects of a poem (with respect to the production of meaning) resonates with Claude Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myth.[124] Lévi-Strauss's identification of paradoxes within the content of a myth can be likened to the comparison of words on a printed page compared to the delivery of words aloud. Finding such paradoxes and slippages of meaning enable us to read another version of the narrative structure of the myth. Looking at how Lévi-Strauss approaches analysis of a myth helps our understanding of Frye's and Culler's understanding of the concept of 'associative rhythm' in lyric poetry because it encourages readers to investigate the structure of the sound aspect of the poem through comparison of the written lines with the oral delivery of myth. It places extra emphasis on the senses, we explore the paradox of hearing the poem against seeing the poem. If we combine the concept of Lévi-Strauss's narrative structure of myth theory with lyric theory of 'associative rhythm', we can see the possibilities of interpretation beginning to widen – there are increasing ways for the sound and sense to be isolated and interpreted.

[124] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth' in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 270, Myth: A Symposium (Oct.- Dec. 1955), pp. 428-444.

After identifying the ways in which the relationship between sound and sense in poetry has been examined by Aristotle, Jakobson, Frye, Culler and Lévi-Strauss we will now conclude this chapter by exploring how 'associative rhythm' achieves a dialogue on the page between the personal and the impersonal modes of address. We will do so in reference to a specific example: Denise Riley's poem, 'A Misremembered Lyric'. In examining Riley's poem, I draw on and extend the structuralist theories discussed.

> A misremembered lyric: a soft catch of its song
> whirrs in my throat. 'Something's gotta hold of my heart
> tearing my' soul and my conscience apart, long after
> presence is clean gone and leaves unfurnished no
> shadow. Rain lyrics. Yes, then the rain lyrics fall.[125]

In the opening line, Riley's placement of 'misremembered' leads us straight into hearing four syllables pronounced closely together.[126] The first three syllables sound similar: 'mis', 're', 'mem' due to their assonance and length, which sound-link with 'bered'.[127] 'Bered' is a longer syllable, which places a pause before 'lyric', which in turn elevates this second word and draws attention to it.[128] This lexical and syllabic choice explicitly emphasises the sound aspects of the poem, while simultaneously self-referencing the nature of lyric poetry and lyrical devices more broadly. As Riley's title suggests, this lyric is not just any lyric, but a 'misremembered' one,[129] which due to reading the hidden musicality of the opening line, rapidly expands our perception of the literal meaning of the emphasised second word.

[125] Denise Riley, 'A Misremembered Lyric' in *Selected Poems 1976-2016* London: Picador, 2019), p. 75. Taken from her poetry collection, *Mop Mop Georgette*. See, Denise Riley, *Mop Mop Georgette: New and Selected Poems, 1986-1993*, (Cambridge: Reality Street Editions, 1993).
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

Riley's musicality here is dependent on a repetition. Having the title occur again in the opening line establishes a regular meter while ensuring an immediate defamiliarization of the term 'lyric'.[130] The second utterance of the title offers the reader the opportunity to address the sound aspects that are inherent in its pronunciation while not being distracted by needing to comprehend the exact words it contains. This shift in understanding of the literal meaning of the word 'lyric', orchestrated by repetition, appears like an unanswered question. It sets the tone for Riley's explanation for the lyric, which we are led to carefully unravel throughout the rest of the poem. Following this opening, the poem's musicality invites the reader to slip in and out of sense and nonsense, sound and comprehension, the words and references to the songs of musical artists. Riley states, ''A Misremembered Lyric'' uses a phrase from 'Rhythm of the Rain' written by Gummoe, sung by The Cascades, and from 'Something's Gotta Hold Of My Heart' by R. Cook and R. Greenaway, recorded by Gene Pitney; the poem also quotes a line from Graham Greene's version of a 1930s song.[131] 'A Misremembered lyric', then, is clear example of the tensions of incorporating not just found language but found lyrics into a lyric poem.

This technique creates an uncertainty over which sound pattern to look out for: the musicality of the language typically associated with the found lyrics or a fresh sound pattern created by this new iteration, a novel arrangement of the quoted fragments. However, inserting a subconscious musicality into the poem is problematic because it creates uncertainty about which pattern to follow. In addition, there is uncertainty towards which voice we are hearing: does this voice belong to the persona or the singer of the found lyric? By using the found language taken from popular song lyrics, there is an interesting challenge presented by Riley. It invites the reader to closely inspect how these lines have been carefully

[130] Ibid.
[131] Denise Riley, 'Acknowledgements' in *Mop Mop Georgette: New and Selected Poems, 1986-1993,* (Cambridge: Reality Street Editions, 1993), pp. 5-6.

selected, arranged and inserted by the poet into her own work. There is a duality at work. Riley's choices factor in both the subconscious aural quality of the found lyrics and the hidden musicality of her own language, an intersection which creates an alternative rhythm to the rhythm presented on the page. This results in the reader's opportunity to read the poem for different types of musicality, and perhaps, see how easily their subconscious remembers popular song lyrics. The level of attention placed on the uncertainty between the present iteration of the words and the previous sources does not just foreground the purpose of rhythm or repetition in a lyrical poem. It also allows the reader to derive meaning from the poem through the musical associations of the found lyrics.

There is purpose to the fragmentation of found lyrics in this poem. It asks us to re-assess normal settings for a lyric poem and to draw attention to the placing of found lines in the poem almost as if they were different speakers, while not concealing the fact that these lines are not her own. The poem therefore resembles a metapoem because she makes you aware the lyrics are found and invites you to see into her writing process. In addition, the poem draws attention to the role of musicality in popular culture by reframing popular song with a new context for musicality. This technique displaces the roots of the found content, creating something unique. By defamiliarizing the popular lyrics, Riley plays with our subconscious associations of the musicality we would typically associate with these found lyrics – literally and metaphorically.

Northrop Frye helps us further understand the influence that hidden sound patterning has over the poetic sense when writing and interpreting poetry. In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye writes:

> The lyric is the genre in which the poet, like the ironic writer, turns his back on the audience. It is also the genre which most clearly shows the hypothetical core of literature, narrative and meaning in their literal aspects as word-order and word-pattern. It looks as though the lyric genre has some peculiarly close connection with the ironic mode and the literal level of meaning.[132]

The poet's ability to switch emphasis to and from the ironic mode and the literal level of meaning shows the uneasy, tense, playful nature of lyric rhythm and how sound patterning can present problems for a reader during the process of poetic interpretation. To ease our understanding of the problem the relationship between sound and sense presents in lyric poetry, Frye looks to the process of making music to form a basis for his theory on the construction of rhythm in lyric poetry. Frye gives an example of the two tendencies in lyrical music, one of which is to develop 'elaborate contrapuntal structures which, in vocal music almost annihilate the words', the other, 'to reform and simplify musical structures in order to give the words more prominence'.[133] Frye's examples show how the sound aspects of lyrics, conveyed through the music and rhythm, are heightened over the meanings of the words. They also show how the sense and meaning of a poem are affected through the placing of emphasis on the words that have been accentuated through the musicality. He uses the term 'babble' to identify the musical aspect of the sounds in a poem as opposed to the term 'doodle' which refers to the visual arrangement of the poem on the page.[134] He describes babble in the following terms: 'In babble, rhyme, assonance, alliteration and puns develop

[132] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 271.
[133] Ibid., p. 273.
[134] Frye develops his discussion of the 'babble' and 'doodle' opposition and gives them the terms '*melos*' and '*opsis*' respectively. Ibid., p. 275.

out of sound-associations'.[135] The thing that gives shape to the association is what Frye sees as the 'rhythmical initiative' and he notes that even in free verse poetry:

> It would rather be a sense of the oscillations of rhythm within an area which gradually becomes defined as the containing form from the revisions poets make that the rhythm is usually prior, either in inspiration or in importance or both, to the selection of words to fill it up.[136]

Applying Frye's observations about babble and doodle (*melos* and *opsis*) to the practice of writing poetry, it is possible to see how the marriage of form and content is approached through the placing and removal of stress in order to enhance the musicality when ordering words and how poets look to stressing the sound of these words in order to form patterns. When Frye states that these patterns are overseen as well as overheard in his discussion of the visual or 'doodle' aspects of a poem, this theory also presents the limitations of discerning from where the sound and sense derives if we were to not vocalise the printed lyric poem. Frye labels this as the third 'oracular' or 'associative' effect that musicality has on the reader, which is a rhythmic technique which uses 'paronomasia, sound-links, ambiguous sense-links and memory-links' to form meaning.[137] Jonathan Culler expands on this idea further by stating 'the sound patterning gives lyric utterances authority that is neither justified or unjustifiable - always open to question, yet a starting point to lure readers into the poem'.[138] For both Frye and Culler, the poet's approach to the sound aspect of language in the

[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., pp. 271-272.
[138] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 134.

production stages leads to a final draft for the rhythm, rather than the meaning preceding its arrangement into rhymical patterning.

Chapter Three: Why Grief, *Pourquoi Pas*? Approaching Grief in Poetry

One of my key themes in *4:23, Relaxant* is the poetic expression of grief and this chapter explores my experience of thinking about and approaching this topic in the writing of my poetry. It also examines poems by Sylvia Plath[139] where grief plays a significant role. Comparing poems from Parts One, Two and Three of *4:23 PM, Relaxant* to the poems of much longer in length and/or controlled voice found in Part Four, it is possible to see how experimentation with sonnets that extended into longer forms in Part One to three acted as a foundation for the clarity of the poems which emerge in the final part. By this point in the research journey, I was confident in exploring the story telling possibilities of the space longer poems, line-lengths and poetry sequences provides, alongside the use of free verse that moving away from the sonnet form allows. The longer form and the use of free verse, therefore, both allowed for a stronger form for personal discussions of grief. The elegies in Part Four allowed me to control a distinct slowing down of energy which differs to the rest of the collection. The longer elegies execute musicality and imagery slowly with longer lines. It left more space for detail to be included, which allowed me to present the penetrating sense of longing that grief creates. This sense of longing permeates all the poems in Part One, but it is not as raw or as clearly defined as it is in the next three parts. It is, however, in Part Four that the sense of longing becomes climactic.

The themes of the poems in Part One are based on the duality of the placement of sacred mythic qualities upon the profane by exploring human conditions such as fertility, menstruation, anxiety, sexual desire and fear from a younger female perspective. This focus on the mythic allows aspects of grief and longing to emerge through allusion. ‘Grape Trees’,

[139] Sylvia Plath, *Ariel,* (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968).

for example, alludes to an inner beast figure that introduces a thematic darkness into the work, a thread which follows through into consecutive poems in Part One. In ‘Accident’, the sacred takes the form of a malicious unseen presence in the opening line and begins to suggest the impression of delusions taking place in the persona’s conscious view of their surroundings. The opening enjambed lines, ‘Something scratched me/ in the playing field / and left numbers/ written on my hand’ presents a disturbance that has just taken place and lands the reader into a definitive place of fear, where the persona is marked by an unusual force, but uncertain of what it is. As the poem continues, surrealist elements become more prominent in the imagery; ‘the great outdoors / condensed to a hallway / nature is just tar’. Here, the structure of the stanza is intentionally accentual and crisp, to ease the reader’s movement through the unfamiliar juxtapositions of images and objects. In stanza five of ‘Accident’, the sensuality of the music emulates the gestural impact of the experience we feel in the metaphor. For instance, in stanza five the lines ‘was strung in the sandalwood/ a perfume like nothing/ I’ve ever sprayed’ the stress of ‘wood’ ‘noth’- in nothing’ and ‘I’ve’ which are leading up to the ending term of ‘sprayed’, create a lilting rhythm that is subtly interrupted by the placement and emphasis on the word ‘sprayed’. This accentuates the literal quality of the word ‘sprayed’ and the action this word represents.

There is an extended pause happening at the end of this stanza, which suspends the spraying action of the movement inside the metaphor, allowing it to linger in the line and/or imagination of the reader similar to how a scent hangs in the air. At other times in the poem, you can find a hidden awkward patterning of sounds in the musicality, created from breaking the line in an unusual place. This results in a type of phrasing that gestures towards the humanistic racing of breath, for example in ‘I gave you half my body/ now one eye is blurry/ with Love’s white hot/ stress.’ The enjambed line-breaks after ‘blurry’ and ‘hot’ place

emphasis on the literal meaning of these two words thus enhancing the sense of unease. These lines were written automatically but edited later, which helped me balance the anxiety in the voice conjured and the sense informed by the surrealist imagery of the body. The imagery of the body getting reworked like a surrealist beat cut-up is also visible in the line 'I gave you half my body/ now one eye is blurry', which reinforces the sense of division of the mental and physical features of the body for this persona. This brings sense to the preceding stanza's literal aspect where we are told 'years later curiosity led me/ to add the contents/ of my hand and divide it/ by two' and thus creating a dialogue between these two stanzas through the indirect connections in similar imagery and musicality. If you read aloud stanzas six and seven, the sense unravels in a staccato stop-start manner that's intentionally disorientating because of the enjambed lines. Here, the placement of the word 'stress' in the poem is equally playful because the literal experience of physical 'stress' is implied and yet it also enters the poem through a heavy accentual poetic-stress from the word standing alone in the last line of stanza seven. This word is accented further because it remains the only line featuring just one word in the poem. Stress is also anthropomorphised and given the name of 'Love,' which expands on the literal meaning of stress by the challenge it presents to the reader's thematic expectations of love in the lyric form. The reader may also notice that tricks on the eye are occurring and the sight towards these objects and notions of love is becoming blurred.

Following this poem, the tension is sustained throughout the collection and we get the sense the persona has been transformed by the experiences detailed. This is explicitly hinted at in the lines, 'to get back I pretended/ to be blind folded' in 'Accident', where allusions to a

childhood related trauma and a sense of naivety is knowingly expressed, [140] through mention of 'playing fields', 'bedroom music' and 'curiosity', which seem to add innocence and a simplicity to darker complex images. This feels paradoxical because the innocence here is defined in contrast against the darker thematic territory in which the persona is experiencing delusions such as 'the great outdoors' appearing then disappearing 'to a hallway'.[141] We also have the surrealist line, 'placing songs not insects/ inside a golden locket' because we don't often associate song to be a tangible object and neither can you easily compare a song to an insect; however, the wider message is the freedom poetry gives to create images which might not fit in with our conventional view of nature, allows the persona to approach darker subject matter. The nature created in this poem is an example of the city meeting the wild and it evokes a type of urbanised nature which represents the nostalgia for what came before the gentrification of green spaces in Manchester. It offers a possible reworked sense of the traditional sublime. All these elements in the poem where things do not feel quite right or unpleasant can be viewed as either distortions or expansions of real experiences. This creates a contrast between the surreal and the everyday, and a sensory technique of displacement that comes to define the second part of the collection and help achieve a sense of chaos in the persona.

In 'Accident', 'Grape Trees' and other poems in first three parts of the collection, grief is implicit through its displacement on to arresting and surreal images and situations. Part Four represents the moment in the collection when a change of tone arrives both in form and in metaphor. Here the theme of grief is voiced calmly by revisiting the site of the pain, which

[140] In *Axiomatic* by Maria Tumarkin, the grandmother character re-enacts her childhood trauma onto her grandson, combining themes of childhood related trauma in strangely comforting domestic setting (the boy is kidnapped.) Maria Tumarkin, *Axiomatic*, (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2019).

can only come once the autobiographical content of my grandad's death enters the work. The deterioration of senses is another theme explored in Part Four, where there is an emergence and investigation of numbness towards depression and despair. Part Four contains poems that echo the arrival of the confessional voice complicated with subtle surrealist qualities. However, the collection as a whole is unified because we can clearly see a departure from the voice represented in Parts One to Three compared to the voice taking its place in Part Four. This narrative trajectory brings a believability to the sacred presence of the unknown in Part Four because the everyday is portrayed with more realism. This can be linked to surrealistic approach of presenting the everyday from a perspective that brings out the inherent dream-likeness of experience.

One aim of the collection was to produce poems that moved the reader by focussing on a real image or a very specific found word or line that conveyed a combination of immediate potency and distance. This exploration of the relationship between immediacy and distance was achieved by foregrounding the time element of our consciousness, suggesting that clock time is not something we can feel emotionally, but it can be measured rhythmically in our subjective consciousness.[142] This idea of the subjective experience of time as opposed to clock time is explored by the philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson's account of the subjective experience of time in connection to the phenomenology of time can be applied to *4:23 PM, Relaxant* which foregrounds the tension between short spans of time and the long duration of experience; and emphasises that what constitutes as a short and long amount of time in the collection varies greatly. Years are presented as passing quickly and there is a stretching and condensing of the persona's interactions with their relationship with different situations

[142] For an account of the subjective experience of time see Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (London: Dover, [1913] 2001)

presented to them in the world they inhabit, which sit along the same amount of time it takes to read the poem. Rather than suggesting that the use of time in the poems gains meaning by measuring time in hours, minutes and seconds, the poems draw attention to the idea that our experience of time only gains meaning once we know the temporal context of the imagery or sounds we are setting any specific moment against. The use of specific dates and times in the collection assist in creating not quite real settings for my characters. Time is also anthromorphised as a speaker through use of italics, which makes us second guess its presence as an object in the collection. The poems are sometimes directly alluding to biographical experience, and one central theme in subject matter is a realistic portrayal of my own experience of grief. Confessional lyric poetry often presents the tension between the emotional intensity gained in the description of grief and the cathartic effects produced in the very act of conveying that feeling. Paradoxically, then, grief is relieved through its very retelling in the verse.

In addition, to the focus on experiential time, there are several themes occurring concurrently through the writing in *4:23 PM, Relaxant* that connect with the idea of grief. One of these recurring themes is the harnessing of musicality, a method used to affect the rate of control I have over the display of grief in my use of the lyric form. As noted in the Introduction, I have been developing my interest in musicality in my verse forms ever since I began writing poetry in an academic context (specifically in the poetry I produced in my Masters collection, *Lucy's Evening*).[143] This interest in the difference between musicality and sense is expressed in *4:23 PM, Relaxant* through experimentation with different formal modes in the first three parts of the collection, until in Part Four, where the expression of the personal and the control over the musicality reaches balance in a series of long form elegies. This part ends with the

[143] Lauren Bolger, *Lucy's Evening*, (Keele: Keele University, 2012).

majority of poems written in an elegiac tone, including a triptych of poems based on the uninvited grief of my grandad's passing. The desire of expressing the varieties and vicissitudes of grief in the poems also demanded different approaches from me, in order to provide different aspects of my individual temperament towards the truth. I wanted to explore, in re-enacting my singular experience, rhyming couplets, long lines, and experimentations with the use of Volta in the sonnet form, quatrains and stanzas.

In developing my approach to the theme of grief through confessional poetry, I was influenced by Sylvia Plath. Brief examples of the desire to assuage grief through its retelling are conveyed in the uncanny fusion of mythological creatures with unborn or dead human characters throughout Plath's *Ariel*.[144] In several poems in this volume, there is sense of Plath's persona wanting to return to a place where the supernatural is possible and this return is made in order to ease their grief. In 'Lady Lazarus', for example, the persona rises into a phoenix-like vision 'Out of the ash/ I rise with my red hair/ And I eat men like air.'[145] There is a spiritual uplifting of mood taking place here; we know the character is taking some pleasure in their own self-destruction fantasy vicariously by taking on the confident spirit of this supernatural version of themselves. Simultaneously, we are also fully aware of the delusional quality of these imaginings because Plath's persona internalises their relationship with the supernatural, as they enter their presence.

The same can be said of the repetition of unknown objects and remains referring to the Holocaust which are a running theme in *Ariel*.[146] This internalisation of supernatural creatures or the deceased victims of the Holocaust can sometimes change the reader's

[144] Sylvia Plath, *Ariel,* (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968).
[145] Ibid., pp. 16-19.
[146] Ibid., p. 19.

response to what feels real in the poem as the persona intertwines with them physically, making such imaginings appear less of a reference to something external that's unknown and more a personal construct of the persona's own making. Plath is boldly acquainting her persona's trauma with the Holocaust. This is controversial and could be dishonouring the lives of the victims by reclaiming their experience. However, it does preserve the memory of the Holocaust through art, which is one way of keeping the dialogue on the trauma of the Holocaust open and not forgotten.[147] At times in *Ariel*, Plath's persona's cynicism towards the world the poems inhabit is quietly bubbling under the surface of the language: 'Them unwrap me hand and foot- / big strip tease. / Gentleman, ladies'[148]; whereas, at other times, the sickness of these delusions is more visceral and explicit to see, smell, hear or touch: 'Bright as a Nazi lampshade, / My right foot.'[149] In 'Lady Lazarus' the lyrical force brought on by prominent use of punctuation, including many dual stoppages created by combining the full stops with a line-break, suspends that feeling of nausea and fear in the reader. The musicality helps the voice to dip in and out of reality seamlessly through effortless transitions in language, where obsessive thoughts are tamed and released within a highly syntactically controlled lyrical melodic verse.[150]

The confessional lyric poem has been defined as a verse form that aims to tell the truth, yet it is a poetic truth.[151] The triptych of elegies in *4:23 PM, Relaxant* resonates with the voices in

[147] See Björn Krondorfer 'Is Forgetting Reprehensible? Holocaust Remembrance and the Task of Oblivion' in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2008, pp. 233–267. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/40014887. Accessed: 3 April, 2020.
[148] Sylvia Plath, 'Lady Lazarus' in *Ariel,* (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968)., p, 17.
[149] In 'Lady Lazarus', Plath's persona could be alluding to the urban myth of a lampshade made from human skin discovered at one of the concentration camps, which adds far more weight to the otherwise mundane image, the image becomes rooted in myth. See Dr Harry Stein, 'Is it true that the SS had lampshades made of human skin in the Buchenwald concentration camp?' (Available: https://www.buchenwald.de/en/1132. Accessed: 03 August, 2020.
[150] In *4:23PM, Relaxant*, I attempted to convey this paradox of grief, by using multiple registers which are addressed to an 'I' or 'You,' which are addressed both to myself and to the reader.
[151] See Steven K. Hoffman, "Impersonal Personalism: The Making of a Confessional Poetic." *ELH*, vol. 45, no. 4, 1978, pp. 687–709. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/2872583. Accessed: 3 August, 2020.

Plath's poems in how it explores the idea of wish fulfilment (as understood in the Freudian model of dream interpretation) through the wish to resurrect the dead.[152] In opposition to the unconscious fantasy of the return of the lost person or object is the everyday side of the self, which dismisses such thoughts as unhealthy delusion. The elegies in the collection explore this paradox by bringing together these two opposing drives in order to reflect on the submerged aspects of grief. Going into the interior unconsciousness — like playing God over the sad nature of grief — does not feel familiar yet is necessary as there is no truth in the exterior for me to disclose except to accept the elusive quality of the human/poetic side effects of grief as unknown.

There is repetition in references to certain surroundings, smells, objects, nature and human behaviour that provides a continuity of meaning of grief throughout the collection. There are also poems which are intentionally disorientating and even nauseating, the intent being to create a lasting after effect of defamiliarization that replicates uncertainty and the experience of grief. The imagery I use is also equivalent to what I was experiencing in my life, as domestic objects started to figure both for themselves and for their metaphorical possibilities to assist in that narrative of expressing uncertainty towards understanding grief. There are sites of repetition in my poetry derived from 'found' everyday content: specific locations, dates and times describe these environs, which situates the poems, for me, in a real place, yet paradoxically, one that also happens to be removed from reality. My aim was to create a series of phantasmatic spaces within the poetry to examine the sacred potential of a profane space, showing how the real and the imaginary are inextricably linked in the everyday experience. These real locations and objects act as a thread of truth running through the

[152] See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Stratchey (London: Penguin Books, [1900] 1976).

collection, which has improved my understanding of when and where to establish boundaries of the autobiographical content in my work. The collection is also thematically concerned with both childhood and trauma and how a retreat into the innocence of early experiences acts as a protective place of safety to revisit sites of extreme pain. Here there is also a duality, comparable to the innocence of the first experience of the death of a loved one. There is also an acknowledgement in these poems of spiritualty, illicit love, and the desire to create a contrast with the innocence of grief.

In his essay, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', T.S. Eliot identifies three types of speaking voice in poetry: 'The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself – or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse'.[153] For the third of these voices, he goes on to describe the situation whereby, 'a character which succeeds in interesting its author may elicit from the author latent potentialities of his own being. I believe that the author imparts something of himself to his characters, but I also believe that he is influenced by the characters he creates.'[154] This encapsulates for Eliot some of the themes surrounding the third voice of poetry which is 'the voice of poetic drama'. The creation of a poetic voice, even in the sense of a dramatic character, is imbued with real content taken from the poet's own personal life. This can relate the voice of poetic drama to psychoanalytic theory as it suggests the author's intentions and preoccupations lie below the surface meaning of a text.

This is because autobiographical influences often appear embedded in, but can be revealed through, the language of the poem. One explicit example is the elegy 'The Day Lady

[153] T.S. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry' in *the Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 192-200, p. 192.
[154] Ibid., p. 195.

Died' by the New York School of Art poet Frank O'Hara, which details the death of jazz singer Billie Holiday.[155] This is a fast-paced poem inspired by an urban setting that uses found information (the poem's title replicates a newspaper headline about the Holiday's death) alongside O'Hara's own response of grief to a public event.[156] This sense of the public/private combination is also registered in the articulation of time and place within the poem, which can be traced to real places at a particular historical moment, such as in the opening lines: 'It is 12:20 in New York a Friday/ three days after Bastille day, yes / it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine'.[157] The psychological context of O'Hara's biographical life is revealed behind the dramatic voice of this poem through the sense of his life in New York echoing the persona's encounters in the city during the elegy's time of composition.

The fast-paced energy in which the details of the persona's day are presented to us gesturally suggest the fast-paced movement of how *Lunch Poems* was written within the time and chance constraints of O'Hara's lunch hour break at The Museum of Modern Art. 'The Day Lady Died' contains a persona, who like O'Hara, is also a poetic *flaneur* to the city[158] and gallery where O'Hara worked. There are candid moments in the poem which allow the reader to overhear the deliberations of the persona's search for poetic texts in-between grabbing food items which (knowing about O'Hara's life) mirror the artistic conditions O'Hara placed on himself in order to write the poems.

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[155] Frank O'Hara, *Lunch Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1964), p. 25.
[156] The title replicates a newspaper headline. There is also another found magazine title slipped into the poem, which is 'New World Writing and The Poets of Gharna'. See 'A Visual Footnote to O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died": New World Writing and The Poets of Ghana' in *Locus Solus: The New York School of Poets* by Andrew Epstein. Available: https://newyorkschoolpoets.wordpress.com/2013/06/10/a-visual-footnote-to-oharas-the-day-lady-died-new-world-writing-and-the-poets-of-ghana/. Accessed: August 3, 2020.
[157] Frank O'Hara, *Lunch Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1964), p. 25.
[158] Referencing Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Marjorie Perloff said, 'O'Hara "articulated a consciousness that was unique among the poetic sensibilities around the world." At once representative — the voice of a particular community — *and* unique: how does that work?' This shows O'Hara's ability to richly document New York, and muse on the city and the people of New York without losing his voice's strong sense of individuality. See 'Reading Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* After Fifty Years' in *Poetry Foundation* by Marjorie Perloff. Available: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/70187/reading-frank-oharas-lunch-poems-after-fifty-years. Accessed: August 3, 2020.

Picking up lunch while searching for poetic texts and discussing influences with a bookseller or going to see live music, help to blur the line between O' Hara as poet and persona.[159] The pace of 'The Day Lady Died', for example, depicts the pace of an artist in development in the city spaces where O'Hara lived and worked at the time of composition. The poem contains real objects and people from the era: 'Mal Waldron' was Holiday's pianist and the '5 SPOT' was a venue where she played.[160] These moments where life meets art in the poem place a personal impact on the gestural sense of O'Hara's language too, for example when the persona recalls a time where they saw Billie Holiday play music and the performance 'stopped' the persona and the audience's breath:

> and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
> leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
> while she whispered a song along the keyboard
> to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing[161]

These details are delivered in a casual, breathy, racing tone but also an elegiac tone that mirrors the meaning and implies the concept of death. There is no syntax, no capitalisation, no sense of starting and ending in these enjambed line breaks, all the focus is on 'Lady'[162] and the movement of the city that surrounded the persona and O'Hara's grief over their loss.

In spite of not giving an exact date or time, Sylvia Plath's poem 'Daddy'[163] also evokes personal grief through reference to a public context: in this poem, fragments and memories are rhythmically pieced together to re-enact a strong gestural experience of the Holocaust.

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[159] Frank O'Hara, *Lunch Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1964), p. 25.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Sylvia Plath, 'Daddy' in *Ariel,* (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968), pp. 54-56.

This combination of public and private trauma and grief resonates with T.S Eliot's sense of the biographical submerged below the character-voice of a poem.[164] In Plath's case, her own traumatic experiences are displaced onto the description of a real and public traumatic event. This carries an element of taking a poetic risk. In this case, a risk that is in line with the confessional tradition of incorporating personal content into your own poetry, but also a risk which is resonating with Freud's theory of how an element of a dream can be read as a displacement of an anxiety or wish fulfilment; and, the culmination of an imagined state of mind with a conscious state of mind.[165] Freud argues that:

> A dream never tells us whether its elements are to be interpreted literally or in a figurative sense or whether they are to be connected with the material of the dream-thoughts directly or through the intermediary of some interpolated phraseology. [166]

This reveals, how interpreting any dream-element allows for multiple associations attached to the imagery or sound of a poem. However, a dream is not art, therefore it is important to note that although a Freudian approach can help to understand and give more clarity to the presentation of grief in a poem, a certain amount of preformed knowledge is involved when the reader approaches a poem known to contain historical and biographical content. This means the reader arrives at the poem from a fixed position of understanding. It is, therefore, down to the poet's use of displacement and defamiliarization to wrong-foot the reader's expectations and create a more pleasurable reading experience; one which surpasses the normal expectations of a biographical lyric poem. This represents Eliot's second voice of

[164] T.S. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry' in *the Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 192-200.
[165] See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Stratchey (London: Penguin Books, [1900] 1976).
[166] See Freud's footnote. Ibid., p. 456.

poetry – the speaking voice addressing its audience. To paraphrase Eliot, we have to be prepared to dismiss the illusion of the voice of the poet talking to one voice only.[167]

This disruption of the reader's expectations is achieved in 'Daddy'[168] by juxtaposing the serious subject matter with an unsettling playfulness and musicality in the language and imagery. The nuance of rhythm and meter in Plath's poem challenges us to accept the traumatic content by burying it under the poem's music. We understand rhythm best by reading the poem aloud which relates to Eliot's first voice, 'the voice of the poet talking to himself – or to nobody […] Using all of his resources of words, with their history, their connotations, their music.'[169] Syllables are formed at the ends of Plath's line through visible use of comma and full stop. The role of antanaclasis through the repetition of 'do' and 'o' sounds has a profound effect when we read the poem aloud as it creates an alternative rhythm to the visible meter. There is a mix of lines beginning with amphibrachs – 'Daddy, daddy, you' and lines beginning with dactyls – 'There's a stake'.[170] This varying use of meter demonstrates the poem's historical and personal references to grief through rhythm as well as words. These sounds help Plath to construct a conclusive ending where the persona lays down the sensation of screaming at the 'Daddy' character. The key stresses of the screaming come on the first and second repetition of 'Daddy' in the last line to deliver an urgency which is paradoxical due to the juxtaposition of violence against the connotations of childhood and innocence. It is here that a ballad-like nursery rhyme element can be detected in this poem. The impact of 'There's a stake in your fat black heart'[171] gently disguises the knowing

[167] T.S. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry' in *the Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 192-193.
[168] Sylvia Plath, 'Daddy' in *Ariel,* (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968), pp. 54-56.
[169] T.S. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry' in *the Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 192.
[170] Sylvia Plath, 'Daddy' in *Ariel,* (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968), p. 56.
[171] Ibid.

rhymical pattern of the following four lines when the voice of the poem is read aloud or performed. All share the rhyme scheme of (A/A/A/A), ending in repeated use of 'you' three times and finally 'through'.[172] In each, a series of accusations, grievances and physical assault are visited upon the figurative Daddy, each a blow in the assassination of the character, a literal and rhythmic *coup de grâce*. Plath's image of the black heart, occurring just before the chilling familiarity of the everyday, sentimental language of the previous stanza – 'Daddy, you can lie back now' – delivers the concept of the external body of 'Daddy' becoming investigated internally.[173] This duality is then reversed again by the image of the villagers stamping on the body of the character. Here the musical flippancy is mirrored in the flippancy of how we observe the image of this character's body as we are forced to weave in and out of the character's internal and external perspective. This approach to the character of 'Daddy' through the sound and literal aspects of the language creates illusion of penetrative and downright invasive actions being visited upon this body.

However, due to the use of the past tense in the poem, it could be portrayed as if this body has been dead for some time and is being exhumed for humiliation. This is where the impression of nursery-rhyme rhythm leads the reader to connotations of childhood trauma being re-enacted. At the same time, this rhythm is closely associated with jeering folk song or militaristic songs when it is paired with previous World War 2 language in the poem that has

[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.

a ‘hard cut off meaning’[174] like the listing of ‘Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.’[175] Again, this militaristic, popular song side of the pace is also met by the infantilizing rhythm and metaphor of the child command. [176] Throughout the poem, it is easy to get out of the rhythm and slip into reading for meaning like this because Plath creates fixed movements for sound to unravel to create surprise, for example, the ‘Ach du’ disrupts the peaceful watery rhythm of stanza three.[177] Therefore, the reader feels that they are experiencing the ‘Daddy’ character from both physically internal and external angles, including life and death, war and post war, child and adult.

This compares to Freud’s examples of the automatic associations we create for the visual images in dreams.[178] As Plath’s representation of grief is held together by her fragmentation of rich abstract imagery. It is in this putting together of fragments, where Plath’s personal piece becomes a confessional poem that has a wider political purpose. The politics of the grief in this case is displayed not only through wordings but the image of objects and sounds to reinforce the disorder of repressed anger for the ‘Daddy’ figure. However, due to the surreal aspects of how this repression is conveyed, it is possible to find contextual

[174] Pound defined words with a closed fixed association as words with a ‘hard cut off meaning,’ which metaphorically explains the concept of incorporating terms into a poem which have a very tight referential meaning. These terms can be a challenge for the poet to arrange within their narrative because they already hold a tightly fixed narrative of their own. I find using numerals in a poem can have this effect but I value the challenge of working with numerals because they can help to bring a clear simple everyday idea of time (narrative sense) into a poem at a moment where the imagery could be slipping away from the real or rich in multiple meanings (presenting an image which comes with many different associations). See Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, (London: Faber, [1934] 1961).
[175] Sylvia Plath, ‘Daddy’ in *Ariel*, (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968), pp. 54-56. To add, the listing effect of placing these terms together shifts the ‘associative rhythm’ of the line into an everyday prose-like territory which conflicts with the harshness of the literal meaning of these named Nazi concentration camps.
[176] This likens the use of the word ‘brute’ and ‘fascist’ quite easily to family relationship between man and woman or father and daughter in the poems to posit these conventional unions are of a less typical dictator / oppressor dynamic.
[177] Sylvia Plath, ‘Daddy’ in *Ariel*, (London: Faber and Faber, [1965] 1968), pp. 54-56. To add, when you read aloud the words, ‘Ach du’ the words have a sharp stoppage which emulates the effect of possibly a symbol of syntax or taking a breath.
[178] See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Stratchey (London: Penguin Books, [1900] 1976). P. 456-457.

information left unsaid in the expression of Plath's persona's grief which reveal the political gains of her use of the theme of grief. This poem was produced during the 1950s where people were *aware* of mental health issues concerning women but they were much more of a taboo and defined, mostly, by male researchers and doctors often in terms of emotional regulation that have antecedents in Victorian medicine.[179] Therefore, when Plath expresses dissatisfaction towards marriage, her maternal role, and the extremes of a mental health condition being failed by medical treatment, it reveals political positions through the descriptions of personal experience.[180] This shows how personal grief, although a premediated performance for a readership, can be effective in spurring societal change and how the political possibilities of a woman's experience can be harnessed in verse.

Plath is a starting point for showing the political power of her confessional poetry's use of awareness of word meaning and sound meaning associations apparent in her imagery and musicality. Not only does it control the explication of grief in her poems, it also helps carve a brutally personal-political message available to female writers existing in a male dominated canon. In this context it is useful to refer to Andrea Brady's essay on grief, 'Grief Work in a War Economy', which argues for the paradoxical quality of constructing grief for public consumption, with focus on the manipulative tendencies and dangers this emotion provides for the public who visit the 9/11 Memorial Museum in New York. Brady writes:

[179] As a counterpoint to my argument, the policing of gender norms and domesticity was powerful, but it was also a period characterised by increased male involvement in childcare. That is not to say that there wasn't a power imbalance and that women were not generally oppressed or subjected to the patriarchy. See, Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: Personal Relationships in Twentieth-century Britain*, (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2006).

[180] The post-war social changes in Britain concerning gender roles that could be seen as built on in the 1960s by second wave feminism and art of the counterculture. See Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918–1963*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

> Grief has supplanted political discourse, shut down academic debate, legitimated unilateral military aggression, relieved us of historical responsibilities as it also recommenced history. Knowing this, how can we express radicalised emotion in poetry or in politics? How can we recognise the lost individuals and the complex civic agencies they fulfilled, without being drawn into a coercive and conservative sentimentality? Grief is never an unmediated feeling. But neither is it just a plodding through conventions, a rhetorical performance. Grief is impure, and it is useful.[181]

Brady's viewpoint is important for an understanding of the conservative sentimentality that grief can force on the general public, coercing them into different types of societal conditioning. Brady, however, gives a counter argument to the portrayal of grief at the *9/11 Memorial Museum*: this is because it is both serving its purpose as a fit place of mourning, but as Brady argues, it is also an example of how the grief in the general public is prolonged by this memorial site.[182] She considers how the presentation of grief, as well as preserving the memory of the victims in the US, also manipulates its audience into serving the US government's interest of sustaining efforts to continue war with Iraq.[183] This viewpoint is interesting because it relates to the use of direct address in confessional poetry, not only to provoke emotion and move the reader, but to also manipulate the audience's concern for their characters and to even sustain these long after the poem has left the reader. When poets discuss grief in their work, there is always a risk involved in how the audience will react and if they will find the experience of confessional modes of writing uncomfortable. Brady draws

[181] Andrea Brady, 'Grief Work in a War Economy' in *Radical Philosophy*, issue 114, series 1, July-August 2002. Available: https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/grief-work-in-a-war-economy Accessed: 3 August, 2020.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.

on this emotive audience reaction to the careful arrangement of grief through objects and fragments in her discussion on the 9/11 Memorial Museum.

Thinking about Brady's argument informed the ways I view the combination of musicality and confessional subject matter to form a direct address to the audience in my poetry about grief. It also helped me to dig deeper and question both my personal and political motives. This, in turn, led to tracing the repetitions on grief in connection to musicality in the collection. Different phases of the trauma are expressed through the changing registers and tones of voice, which are intended to send out mixed messages. Together, these variations in voice deliver differing active and passive responses to the theme of grief. I have been able to recognise the contrasting human experience of grief, which sometimes acts as a fantasy construct and at other times, as an expression of real trauma. A reading of Brady contributed to my own understanding of the politics that lie behind grief, which helped to place my poetry within the current poetic tradition and examine, with more intricacy, the gains and pitfalls of my use of confessional imagery.

Chapter Four: Considerations on the Confessional Mode of Writing Poetry

As seen in the previous chapter, thinking about grief, as a poetic subject, helped to hone my poetic practice through thinking about a subject that was immediate and personal. Indeed, conveying personal grief through poetry, for me, always has an element of the confessional and in this chapter, I discuss the complexities of confessional poetry with respect to the work of two poets – Robert Lowell and André Breton – before going on to discuss two poems from *4:23 PM, Relaxant*.

In *The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell*, Marjorie Perloff defines two approaches to Lowell's poetry: 'the biographer' and 'the [literary] critic'.[184] Perloff says these two roles have different critical concerns because 'the accuracy of Lowell's confessional poetry is of interest to the biographer, but for the critic, the exciting thing is to discern how thoroughly Lowell mythologizes his private life'.[185] Similar to these two approaches, Lowell's poetry merged two poetic qualities, combining autobiographical detail with self-mythologizing language, a confessional poetic device which leaves the reader always questioning who the 'I' in Lowell's poems is, a persona who seemed to be so deeply intertwined with his personal life.

The critical uncertainty that surrounds the separation of the 'I' in Lowell's poems explored by Perloff raises question of authenticity in the wider confessional movement of poets in America in the post-war period; a loose movement that includes poets such as Lowell, Plath, Anne Sexton, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke and W. D Snodgrass.

[184] Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973) p. 99.
[185] Ibid.

Attempts to render personal experience in poetry can be viewed as contradictory; the confessional modes of writing poetry are more akin to the retelling of a myth than any hard, biographic reporting. Therefore, the 'I' of a confessional poem is a deeply personal but indiscernible entity, and in the areas where imagination has reworked autobiographical content, it is easier to see the persona as an extension of Lowell rather than a true account of the poet himself. This seems particularly prescient in the poem, 'Skunk Hour' from his 1959 volume *Life Studies*.[186] In this poem, Lowell's language in lines such as 'My mind's not right' presents a fragile speaker and shows signs of internal repression becoming unlocked. If the speaker is an extension of the poet, then as readers we are concerned for Lowell. The strange phrasing of the line 'where the graveyard shelves on a town' which describes the possible graveyard location of where the persona/poet is parked, comes before the strikingly open line 'My mind's not right'.[187] However, the veracity of this confession is hard to discern due to the word 'shelves' which clouds the image enough for the reader to feel displaced from the referential meaning of the language in the previous lines. In addition, the following dotted syntax allows the line to drift further away from the reader's grasp. The neologism 'love-cars' shows great intimacy, but at the same time a great distance.[188] A disorientation occurs because the reader believes that the cars are human beings lying together when in fact, Lowell's speaker has only mentioned that the cars are lying together. In this breath, the bulkiness and aural weight of 'hull to hull' shifts the delicacy of the two anthromorphised cars into the unknown, somewhere we can't see because the lights are low. This distance contributes to the weight of the imagery which is layered above the graveyard and above the town. This is because the cars - similar to a

[186] Robert Lowell, *Life Studies* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2001).
[187] Ibid., p. 97-98.
[188] Ibid.

pair of human bodies- are quickly followed by the imagery of a town connected to the connotations of a burial.

Surrealist techniques are used here to disguise Lowell's biography, therefore, his confession. This has resonance with the philosopher Georges Bataille's idea of words being used to mask literal meanings. In his book, *The Absence of God,* Bataille writes:

> If it does speak, in the very process we predict, with each sentence, it finds that the word is harmful to it, and that to the extent that it progresses, it must introduce a disorder / an absence into the word.[189]

This quotation specifically deals with the one of aspect of surrealism, where words lose their function of description and instead become tools of obscuration. In this arena the reinvention of words can produce new worlds for the poet. The objective of reinventing language can actively throw the reader off guard and right out of the bounds of the line. Revisiting the poem, the reader realises that in order to follow the piece again, words must lose their original fixed function and begin to find new associations. It is evident the word 'shelves' is reworking the context of Lowell's stanza, by detaching the town from Lowell's self-subject.[190]

In Lowell's poetry the human subject of the poem, for example a family member, is often described in such a way as to become the object of the poem, distanced and unfamiliar. This dehumanised presentation of the human subject is also present in André Breton's work, for example, in the line from his poem '*Tournesol*': 'a few like that woman seem to

[189] Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writing on Surrealism* trans. by Michael Richardson (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 56.
[190] Robert Lowell, *Life Studies* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2001), p. 98.

be swimming / and in love there enters some of their substance / she interiorizes them' ('Les uns comme cette femme ont l'air de nager/ Et dans l'amour il entre un peu de leur substance / Elle les intériorise')[191] As the substance of the subject's love melts into the block of the word 'interiorizes' ('intériorise')[192], Breton obscures the line between humans and objects. As love becomes an object and the object is humanised, the reader is invited into a world where opposites merge and become redefined. Rearranging words so that they are allowed the space to mean something else expands on the original context of words and refreshes the reader's perception of what is expected from poetic meaning. This is an example of the French concept of *depaysement* – literally meaning 'to be without country' – or perhaps more accurately, having a sense of estrangement or defamiliarization. This is an aspect that Breton shares with Lowell: an example of Lowell writing on estrangement, and stepping out of his element to find his own *depaysement* can be experienced in his lyric poem 'Dolphin':

> not avoiding injury to myself--
> to ask compassion . . . this book, half fiction,
> an eelnet made by man for the eel fighting
>
> my eyes have seen what my hand did.[193]

Reflecting upon the last line, the separation between the writer and the poem and these two body areas creates a sense of self-detachment in the speaker. The hand and eye seem unusually disconnected. The body seems to connect and become tangled in the imagery of

[191] Andre Breton, *Poems of Andre Breton: A Bilingual Anthology* trans. by Jean-Pierre Cauvin and Mary Ann Caws (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2014), pp. 117-118.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Robert Lowell, *Selected Poems*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, [1976] 1977), p. 267.

'eelnets' or 'caught in its hangman's-knot of sinking lines'.[194] I interpret the descriptions of 'scraping' and 'plotting' to be flaps of skin or fins in reference to the title of the poem.[195] Furthermore, Lowell's notion of the speaker **'**not avoiding injury to myself' alludes to self-harm. Lowell is experimenting with the self and the different ways of seeing himself, the different positions and detachments he can create through reimagining his body. The detachment of Lowell's eyes from his hands, here, is an example of him stepping out of the self in order to find the correct distance from himself and write as accurately on his experience as possible. This is evidence of confessional writers distancing from the outside in order to get closer to the void within that life brings, that is similar to Breton's surrealist manifesto of looking out towards a spiritual void that is beyond reality.[196] Like Lowell, Breton forms an 'impersonal authority'[197] through what is left behind for the reader to piece together in '*Tournesol.*' This can be seen specifically in the last stanza:

> A few like that woman seem to be swimming
> And in love there enters some of their substance
> She interiorizes them
> I am the pawn of no sensory power
> And yet the cricket singing in the ashen hair
> One evening near the statue of Etienne Marcel
> Gave me a knowing look
> Andre Breton it said pass on[198]
>
> (Original French version:
>
> Les uns comme cette femme ont l'air de nager
> Et dans l'amour il entre un peu de leur substance
> Elle les intériorise

[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Andre Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism,' in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver and H.R. Lane, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, [1924] 1972).
[197] Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writing on Surrealism* trans. by Michael Richardson (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 56.
[198] Andre Breton, *Poems of Andre Breton: A Bilingual Anthology* trans. by Jean-Pierre Cauvin and Mary Ann Caws (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2014), pp. 117-118.

Je ne suis le jouet d'aucune puissance sensorielle
Et pourtant le grillon qui chantait dans les cheveux de cendres
Un soir près de la statue d'Etienne Marcel
M'a jeté un coup d'oeil d'intelligence
André Breton a-t-il dit passe).[199]

Using autobiographical subject matter, '*Tournesol*' ends with the speaker affirming his presence and authorship of the poem in the line, 'Andre Breton it said pass on' ('André Breton a-t-il dit passe᾽)[200] sustaining a disorientating version of the real, while at the same time personalising the surrealism with his real presence. Earlier in the poem Breton's speaker engages the reader with an apparent, but evanescent image of a young woman through brief descriptive imagery. Emphasis is placed on sensory energy such as the woman's gestures, to help guide the reader's own description of her in the poem, as she is a woman described as being on a journey, jutting, swimming and walking on tiptoe.[201] Breton's sensory evidence of her presence through gestural use of the language creates movement in the poem which contrast with images of stillness or silence, for instance in the lines, 'One evening near the statue of Etienne Marcel/ Gave me a knowing look' ('Un soir près de la statue d'Etienne Marcel/ M'a jeté un coup d'oeil d'intelligence')[202] Here, there is the indirect use of opposite states of subject and object and/or the paradox of human activity set against imagery of desolation and the last stanza overall has the energy of city spaces getting emptied and eerily reworked together to complete our image of the 'invisible' female presence. The line 'I am the pawn of no sensory power' (Je ne suis le jouet d'aucune puissance sensorielle)[203] reflects a speaker that is stripped of all senses, which creates a picture of a hollow body waiting for completion. Interestingly the young woman's internal, heightened senses demonstrated through the lines 'she interiorizes

[199] Ibid
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.

them' ('Elle les intériorise')[204], conjure the image of her completing the speaker's presence who at this stage in the poem has been stripped of the sensory experience she can provide.

Additionally, Breton's implication of a strange but everyday relationship occurring between these two characters within the disorienting imagery of an unknown surrealist world relates to the difficulty which exists in defining confessionalism. M.L. Rosenthal placed Lowell's poetry in the poetic tradition by seeing a 'similar impulse' in *Life Studies* to the Romantics, such as Wordsworth and Whitman.[205] Rosenthal's link between *Life Studies* and the romantic tradition, helps suggest although all these poets use different styles what possibly links them all is an interest in the self as subject for their poetry.

The label confessional implies a truth. But its treatment and veracity in poetry is often manipulated and massaged, and despite autobiographical events being re-enacted within a poem, as soon as the account is placed into the frame of a poem, it becomes a new kind of truth, one that is distinct from the original event. Taking inspiration from Bataille's view of the surrealist 'impersonal authority' formed on creation of poetic language that speaks despite not traditionally making sense, applying his philosophy to confessionalism, we can see how Lowell's poetic devices work to form the reversal of Bataille's concept for surrealism to create a *personal authority* over the reader.[206] Demonstrating an authority to be personal when acting on the impersonal in his poetry, Breton clarifies the uncertainty surrounding the wealth of surrealist images conjured in his poetry by reaching out towards the void that is the everyday which helps to unpack complex imagery and acts as a guide for finding a sense of narrative for example, through the figureless woman which we can

[204] Ibid.
[205] M. L. Rosenthal, *Our Life in Poetry: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Persea Books, 1991), p. 109.
[206] Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writing on Surrealism* trans. Michael Richardson (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 56.

also envision. This ties to how the confessional poetic authority to be personal is constructed in a poem through re-enacting biographical content in the lyric to give the impression of something real even if the setting of a poem is not a true representation of life.

Inspired by Bataille's definition of Surrealism, and influenced by the style of writing by Lowell and Breton, for the writing process of 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)', I explored confessional poetry's authority to be personal through re-enacting a real relationship using found biographical content such as stories and fragments from my relationship with my deceased grandparent, which have been cut up and collaged into this poem. This method allowed me to take risks with the persona inspired by biography to inform a very strange but everyday illusion of the voice alongside the secondary voice of the deceased in this poem. In *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*, Margaret Strobe argues and my confessional poems from *4: 23 PM, Relaxant* demonstrate that conjuring a relationship with the deceased despite having delusional properties is a common reaction to grief.[207] This reinforces another aspect of how 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)' helped me to develop understandings of my use of the authority to be personal in my poetry because the response to re-imagine the deceased is a real-life coping mechanism for grief. I have used both in my own life and as a method for the application of the theme of grief in creative practice.

To relation to how I developed a sense of character in this confessional poem using biographical detail. Margaret Strobe's study suggests that 'Maintaining an inner representation of the deceased is normal rather than abnormal, it also is more central to

[207] Margaret Strobe, *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 34.

survivors' experience than it commonly has been realised.[208] We suggest that these relationships can be described as interactive, even though the person is physically absent'.[209] This concept can be applied to the main speaker who appears in the last stanza of the elegy 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)', where the language is directed towards the deceased in the manner of a one-sided conversation. According to Strobe, the main speaker at this point could be interacting with an inner representation of the deceased presence rather than their physical presence. Jeremy Tambling describes elegies as poems which have a dual purpose because they are both a poem and a poem that is documenting an event.[210] I chose to title the poem with my grandad's name, year of birth and death, which as Tambling explains in his discussion of public and private poetry, makes it 'not something timeless, but a witness - a testimony to something precisely datable, to an event that has changed something'.[211] It also refers to other cultural signifiers of grief, the inscription on a gravestone or the start of an obituary. The moment I produced the elegies in part four marked a dramatic change in my personal life which simultaneously shifted my critical direction.

As soon as the writing process for 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)' ended, this poem led me to produce two more poems to produce a triptych. all three poems merge the concepts behind the elegy form with other traditional poetic forms. The second poem in the triptych merges the elegy with a sestina to create ''Little' April Cries'. The final poem is written in *vers libre* to make 'Shaving'. These three poems lack the lyricism that is found elsewhere in the collection and are rooted in a profound loss that is not to be found to this degree throughout the poetry manuscript. For these reasons they represent a breakthrough for the collection, as

[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Jeremy Tambling, *RE: Verse, Turning Towards Poetry* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), p. 102.
[211] Ibid.

they show another phase in terms of characters, voice and my use of the long open form. This new phase in the collection, initiated through writing 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)', fits alongside the growing theme of grief, that is apparent in many of the poems that were written during Part One and Two of the collection. As discussed earlier in the thesis, the only other example of a poem that comprises of a long series of stanzas before 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)' in the collection is 'Prayers'. These two poems are similar in how they unfold, contrasting fragmentary stories for the reader stanza by stanza. 'Prayers' begins with a Christian ceremony, which moves to a public swimming bath, and ends inside a kitchen. Similarly, 'B. Bolger Senior (1930- 2016)' begins in a living room, moves to a garden, a department store, and ends with a Catholic ceremony inside a crematorium. This journey assists the melding of the sacred and the everyday, as both poems present movement from single rooms, into increasingly larger and more public spaces where there are differing spatial contexts to the speaker's experience. However, the mention of 'the Sahara' in 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)' is intentional, breaking the poem away from the more traditional spaces found in 'Prayers' as an explicit evocation of the unknown afterlife.

Both 'Prayers' and 'B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)' also form a fusion between Christian ritual and domestic household spaces, which connects to the tradition of the eulogy where one of the thematic features is making a connection between the deceased and the sacred site of their faith.[212] The casual diction in the poems, which moves along these settings, removes any distance between images of the sacred and the everyday because the length of these poems allow more time and space for the reader to ride the waves of any lines which contain dense content or repetition. The musicality of these poems is similar, using half rhymes to evoke ebb and flow of conversation. However, the

[212] Mark Strand and Eavan Boland, *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 168.

use of couplets and lack of punctuation in the example below from ‘Prayers’ brings a sense of symmetry to the page and a fluidity to the aural delivery, contrasting sharply to the irregular stanzas found in ‘B. Bolger Senior (1930-2016)’:

> when you ripple the bed, then the curtains have you seen me?
> enjoying the sleep, tired of roles, of talk of children, of books
>
> when I swim I wash my hair in the public pool
> I see people I met two years ago in better shape
>
> lightly tanned, wearing mustard with gorgeous crotches
> people I met when I was drunk
>
> I take a swim and the water presents me
> I make the shape of a cross with my body

The dialogue between the grieving persona and the deceased is the ongoing narrative in the poem which keeps unfolding as we proceed through each stanza. In the closing stanzas the main speaker is alone in the poem, however the language which is continually directed towards the deceased gives the illusion of the deceased being present. The main speaker steps into various roles in the poem which could reflect multiple aspects of a single character or perceived as separate characters: the griever, the child, the adolescent amongst their family, the retail assistant in the store, the student, the poet. The secondary speaker, like the main speaker, also morphs into other roles throughout the poem; moving from the role of guardian to the deceased. The third speaker takes on the roles of a retail assistant and confidant. These characters represent different phases of the self, creating sensations of uncertainty because I arranged images of monotony and a real domestic setting for these characters that are wedged between moments of the uncanny.

Exploring the confessional poetic device of expanding on autobiographical detail, to create uncertainty, and defamiliarization surrounding personas informed by biographical content in confessional poetry. A similar response to character to create the illusion of a

disorientated persona through Lowell's use of defamiliarization over the biographical content can be revealed in the following stanza in Lowell's poem- 'Memories of West Street and Lepke',

> I was so out of things, I'd never heard
> Of the Jehovah's Witnesses.
> 'are you a C.O?' I asked a fellow jailbird.
> 'No' he answered. 'I'm a J.W.'
> He taught me the 'hospital tuck'[213]

According to Ian Hamilton[214], the poem is based biographically on Lowell's time in prison, as he spent a few days in 'New York's tough West Street Jail'[215] before transferring to West Street Correctional Centre, a signpost used in Lowell's title. According to Hamilton, the poem is 'augmented by the recollections of a fellow inmate' named Lepke.[216] Therefore, both the 'I' and the eye of this character can be closely affiliated with Lowell's biographical detail because he shifts between witnessing/speaking for Lepke as well as the additional persona commentating on Lowell's own experience of West Street. It is significant that the two are placed side by side in the title as they appeared in real life next to each other's cells and that this stanza appears in the format of call and answer between the 'I' of the poem and cellmate Lepke. The conversation is persuasive because as a reader with prior knowledge of Lowell's experiences in prison, this odd juxtaposition appears so well-made and seamless inside the poem it does not appear to be a construct. This shows how Lowell's life entered his poetry leading the audience to naivety regarding the confessional truth of the piece, when in fact because there is no certainty the poem is providing gaps in their knowledge.

[213] Robert Lowell, *Life Studies* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2001), p. 93.
[214] Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (Great Britain: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 91.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.

Lowell's blurring of biographical truth and fiction is similar to the moments where Breton's language does not provide referential sense to the reader but in doing so achieves an uncertainty toward character which leaves space that can be filled by the imagination, where meaning is arranged through the reader's organisation of what surrealist objects exist in the poem. Returning to Bataille's view of the surrealist 'impersonal authority'[217] formed on creation of poetic language that speaks to the reader despite not traditionally making sense, and Lowell's confessional use of real content to harness a sense of having personal authority over the reader. Due to the critical uncertainty, surrounding the truth of the narrative sense and 'I' of the poem expressed in Lowell's language we can see how Breton and Lowell both share a paradox in expression, as they share a language both self-contradictory and magical in how it builds an unidentifiable void in their poetry.

As noted at the opening of this chapter, the presentation of confessional content in my poetry was influenced by Robert Lowell's intimate union of the sacred and the profane, as displayed in his seminal collection *Life Studies*.[218] Thinking about Lowell's approach helped to deepen my understanding of the experiential, theoretical and practical experimentations with the confessional lyric form in my collection of work. But most revelatory, I found that use of surrealist techniques is also a concurrent theme in both our poetry. For example, the defamiliarization, displacement and magical realism in Lowell's work bring an element of the surreal to the everyday intimacy between the character and the city space in 'Skunk Hour', which leaves the reader never quite knowing what's real and what's not due to the tension this paradox presents.[219] However, what is real is how the guessing game the reader is presented with affirms a very strong sense of the unknown in his poetry which despite

[217] Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writing on Surrealism* trans. Michael Richardson (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 56.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Robert Lowell, *Life Studies* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2001).

arriving in candid form, is mirroring the purity in instant automatic thought processes found in the surreal writing process and poetic outcomes. Therefore, the role of autobiographical content in the lyric in Lowell and Breton has the potential to connect seemingly divided poetic traditions.

Conclusion

In his supporting analysis 'The Figure a Poem Makes', Robert Frost uses the analogy of a piece of ice melting on a hot stove to describe how meaning is divined from the poem, a process of reduction where the poem's essence 'must ride on its own melting'.[220] This approach has been particularly illuminating in examining the final collection because I have found that employing different theoretical approaches to my poetry often resulted in other opportunities for the creative process to begin again. This understanding combines with a recognition of the poetic instigative qualities I have traced in reading criticism alongside the poetry writing process. Frost's line is not just a brilliant metaphor that captures the paradoxical essence of defining poetic meaning, but it is a critique of his own process. It is also an invitation to take the risks required to write creatively, sometimes with destructive abandon. Frost is knowingly ambiguous here, intentionally making it hard to tell if it this is a line of outright criticism or another poetic metaphor. But it does offer a glimpse into his writing process and his influences and affirms a belief that a poem's meaning can never be easily resolved.

The idea that a poem's meaning is ambiguous provides us with several open-ended possibilities and thus open opportunities for the development of varied interpretations. First, through its imagery, Frost conceives the combined hot and cold effect in this articulation of meaning. Second, we have an object being used to define our senses, an association of the thing used to describe the thing itself. Third, we have the sound and sense aspects, the oral version of the musicality of the line sounds what Frye would describe as 'a chaos of

[220] Robert Frost, 'The Figure a Poem Makes' in *Poetry in Theory*, ed. Jon Cook, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, [1939] 2004), pp. 234-236, p. 236.

paronomasia, sound-links, ambiguous sense-links, and memory links very like that of a dream'[221], almost as if it is taking us away from a statement of factual literary criticism where it was originally placed and towards a sense where the very comprehension of meaning can dissolve. Terry Eagleton supports this tension between sound and sense when he creates a similar distinction between meaning and content in Frost's poetry as, 'it is as though the form has a meaning which is at odds with the content'[222] revealing what could be the reader's battle to comprehend a content that was never meant to be understood. Fourth, the idea of riding, that is perhaps, 'crafting' the poem at the very moment it is melting away from your grip, presents writing as a time-sensitive act, led by a fresh memory or musical experience, which the poet needs to navigate quickly during the production process before it dissipates. It is also possible that this reference to the act of writing poetry is the beginning of a new thought for Frost, a new understanding of his influences, a new poem.

The hope for this thesis is that it gives insight into the embedded musicality that is often concealed in poetry and to shine a light over my own controlled use of subversive creative play on direct and indirect musicality or half-formed lyric meaning. As Frost's reference to writing poetry suggests, when you are switched on to perceive the way the hidden rhythms of poetry operate, it is very hard to go back to gaining the same pleasure that comes from what we might call a naïve reading. The knowledge gained during the research and writing of this thesis has altered how I read poetry. It has also altered how I write creatively and has improved my technical approach. Once you have investigated the processes involved in writing your own poetry, it irrevocably changes the way in which you read other people's poems.

[221] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 271-272.
[222] Terry Eagleton, *How To Read A Poem*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 98.

The gains of reading my own and other poet's work has been enhanced through reading poetic theory. Researching Pound, Culler, and Frye, for example, who each formed their own schemas on how to analyse the importance and production of musicality in verse, has been invaluable in contextualising and articulating the production of my own poetry collection. In addition, exploring Barthes's interpretation of play and toys, Claude Lévi-Strauss's conceptual theories on structuralist understanding myth and Freud's understandings for the interpretation of dreams and creative writing has deepened my approach to practically applying and theorising the hidden rhythms of my poetry and understanding the poetry of others.

Close reading confessional poets such as Plath and Lowell has highlighted the possibility for the reader to construct subjects by piecing together contrasting images of various objects and spaces. Conversely, in confessional poetry there needs to be an awareness of the biographical content of the poem which give the imagined motifs, objects, spaces and characters a certain nuance that extends beyond the words on the page. Breton's poetry has a distinctive approach in this context: his '*Tournesol*', for example, arrives in a fragmented form, challenging the reader to organise and piece together the motifs in order to reach a poetic understanding.[223] Some images in Breton's poetry reveal a reality we are accustomed to, whilst other images take the reader completely out of their comfort zone. It is an approach that can be examined even in the objects themselves; some are more layered and essential than others and some are sparse with less chance of finding the details that determine their relevance. Some motifs

[223] Andre Breton, '*Tournesol*' in *Poems of Andre Breton: A Bilingual Anthology* trans. by Jean-Pierre Cauvin and Mary Ann Caws (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2014), pp. 117-118.

secure an understanding and others need more imagery or dialogue to strengthen the construct.

Finding new ways of seeing poems which have always been a familiar source of inspiration has also been extremely beneficial to my practice. For instance, exploring Plath for musicality alone or looking at Breton's work for its use of surrealist but confessional elements. Finding paradoxical approaches to other writers in a similar manner to how I was taking an investigative approach to crafting my own framework for this thesis in terms of musicality and form, encouraged me to achieve the level of control over the discussion of grief in my own poems (especially in Part Four of the collection). Simultaneously, the flexible state between confessional and surrealist techniques in my poetry was revealed, directly as a result of identifying and interpreting the genre-defying aspects that each of these historically different poets present the reader. Closely reading the work of my influences Lowell, Breton and Plath and each's use of musicality, syntactic control, associative word meanings and associative sound meanings, and their surreal and confessional poetic techniques have helped me to trace the development of techniques such as defamiliarization, displacement, *Maskenfreiheit*, use of disguise, concealment and real content in the lyric in my own poetry. This has helped me to negotiate tensions between the self as subject and object as subject and finally, to reinforce the narrative sense of personas which dissolve in and out of musicality. In addition, exploring the work of more recent poets such as Denis Riley, Howe and Kenneth Goldsmith has improved my understanding of the relationship of my own poetry with respect to a number of poetic styles and traditions.

At times, I have crafted personas with the intention of making them appear real. At other times, I have wanted to pull away the curtain and show the reader the mechanics of the

illusion, to leave an impression of the descriptions of grief in the poems and the delusions these feelings generate. I have always explored the fine line between spoken lyric poetry and reading the poems alongside music in performance. The gains of investigating the problem of hidden musicality in the relationship between lyric poetry in print or on the stage is a line of enquiry I will never quite settle: the relationship between the *heard* and the *visual* presentation of the lyric, as well as between the rhythmic and sense qualities of the poetry collection is endlessly varied and often paradoxical. And this sense of paradox, which has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis and in *4:23 PM, Relaxant*, brings us back to the assertion from Frost which opens this chapter – a poem must 'ride on its own melting'.[224] For me, the inherent ambiguity between this image's critical insight (to take risks, to reinvent), and its poetic quality (where meaning becomes fluid and can never be easily resolved) is indicative of the space I have come to occupy through the writing process of *4:23pm, Relaxant*, as I have outlined here.

This commentary has shared my understanding of the poetic forms, techniques and themes which have brought me the most practical success in *4:23 PM, Relaxant*. In particular, I believe the successes of the collection have come from cultivating musicality and meaning to honour the sound and sense aspects of language from the page to performance.

[224] Robert Frost, 'The Figure a Poem Makes' in *Poetry in Theory*, ed. Jon Cook, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, [1939] 2004), pp. 234-236, p. 236.

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