

# Listening Lyrics:

An exploration of poetry by Geraldine Monk, Bhanu Kapil,  
Denise Riley and W.S. Graham

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# PART ONE: THESIS

# Abstract

The aim of this creative–critical thesis is to attend to listening in lyric poetry. By developing close readings of poems by Geraldine Monk, Bhanu Kapil, Denise Riley and W.S. Graham I argue that lyric is a listening device.

In Chapter One the lyric is read in relation to trauma in Geraldine Monk’s poetry, drawing on Ann Cvetkovich (2003) to read Monk as a poet whose work speaks of the affects and effects of abuse and trauma.

Chapter Two focuses on difficulties between language and healing in Bhanu Kapil’s *Schizophrene*, arguing that a fragmentary poetics carries out reparative work, ‘touching’ the harms of trauma without reifying experience through representation or narration. Barthes’ *Mourning Diary* is used to read the fragment in relation to loss and grief.

Chapter Three reads Denise Riley’s ‘Listening for lost people’ in relation to listening and loss. Drawing on Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text* to contend that reading is a process of listening to loss, Michelle Boulous Walker’s (2017) advocacy for attentive listening provides a way to consider the meaning-making of language and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Listening* (2007) provides a way to think about sound, loss and subjectivity.

Chapter Four reads W.S. Graham’s ‘The Dark Dialogues’ drawing on Barthes’ essay ‘Listening’ to parse ways the poem stages a series of listening acts to render the processes of lyric composition and belonging.

The thesis concludes that Geraldine Monk, Bhanu Kapil, Denise Riley and W.S. Graham stage distinct acts of listening within their poetics. Lyric is associated with articulation, expression and subjectivity, associations which have led to a tendency of critical attention to focus on the speaking voice of the lyric. In emphasising the role of

listening this thesis advocates investing critical attention to the lyric as listening device, thereby contributing to the rebalance of the emphasis on speaking.

The critical component of the thesis is followed by a portfolio of creative work. The portfolio comprises three pieces: *Lease Prise Redux*, *speaking towards* and excerpts from *Stitch*. *Lease Prise Redux* is a sequence of sixty-four sonnets, *speaking towards* is a collection of sound fragments, and the excerpts from *Stitch* are taken from a long sequence poem. The works in the creative portfolio embody, enact and critically engage with the themes of listening in relation to violence and harm, utilising the sequence form as the principle heuristic and framing device for listening.

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# Introduction: 'I Leave This At Your Ear'

*The poet works with mental ears. Via this specialized audition the real-time sounds of speech and vocalized utterance are disintegrated into sub-lexical acoustic noise by analogy with the striking clatter of real work in the material world.*

- J.H. Prynne

In 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work' the poet J.H. Prynne professes to 'present experimentally a scheme for the description and analysis of poetic language mounted in the domain of poetic discourse' (Prynne 2010, p.126). Prynne's 'scheme' presents as an essay attending to the work of sound and the act of listening to the sounds of language in poetry. The epigraph above, taken from Prynne's essay, discusses the materiality of sound as one of the ways in which poetry performs 'real work in the material world.' The distinction of 'real work' and 'material world' depends on their opposites, the contention that poetry is not 'real work' and is not part of 'the real world'. This is the idea of poetry as 'other worldly' and 'inspired' as if it is possible to exist outside 'the real world.' In the essay 'Let it Be: An essay on poetry and language' the poet Peter Manson posits that, '[a]rtifacts of language are the most human objects in the world, other than those objects which are human beings' (Manson 2003, p.33), situating language itself as an 'artefact', a material object. Manson goes on to say that, 'The practice of accepting texts for what they are, in the fullness of their potential for branching off into realms of meaning unforeseen by any author, is analogous to the practice of human tolerance, and might be considered a useful rehearsal for it' (Manson 2003, p.33). It is the materiality of texts, and the poetry of language which makes them 'the most human objects'. Prynne and Manson's assertions that poetic language is



material is a claim that the lyric is composed of all the forces - social, cultural, political, subjective - which shape language. This is a challenge to the usual claim for the lyric as speaking voice separate from the material world and conflated with concepts of 'truth' and 'self'. Situating the material into the lyric makes lyric listen to the material world. The lyric is made of the materiality of language rather than an originality inherent in poet.

The origins of this thesis lie in my long-held preoccupation with W.S. Graham's poem 'I Leave This At Your Ear' (Graham 2004, p.166). Subtending this preoccupation is my interest in the agency of articulation and its dependency on listening. In Graham's poem the ear is the entry point for sound crossing from the external environment to the internal world of the listener. The prone ear, which is open even as its owner sleeps, may receive the articulation of the speaker but the agency of speaker and listener is only afforded to both agents in the act of listening. This is language doing real work in the material world. The dormant ear of 'I Leave This At Your Ear' is indicative of a poetics which reinstalls the agency of sound in poetry. Graham uses his ear to marshal language into a poetics for his readers' ears. It is this foregrounding of acts of listening in poetry which underpins the exploratory work of this thesis.

### **Listening and the Lyric**

The thesis addresses listening as a relatively neglected area of attention in the study of lyric poetry. In attending to the role of listening I argue that listening is an essential component of the agency the utterance of the lyric achieves. In emphasising listening the thesis challenges the attention given to voice and speaking in lyric. In attending to listening the thesis changes the emphasis on the lyric as an assumed singular speaking voice and argues that lyrics listen as well as speak. The work of four contemporary

poets, Geraldine Monk, Bhanu Kapil, Denise Riley and W.S. Graham, will be read to identify what their work yields when approached using the concept of listening. Before proceeding to read the work of these poets it is useful to consider different conceptualisations of the 'lyric' and how I have come to focus specifically on listening in the context of lyric poetry. According to *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, 'In Western poetics, almost all poetry is now characterised as *lyric*, but this has not always been the case' (Greene and Cushman 2012, p.826). Over the course of nine pages this encyclopaedia entry on the term 'lyric' proceeds to document the historical development of the term, concluding that, 'When that history becomes visible behind or beneath critical and poetic fictions, it testifies to the tremendous malleability of the term, to the ways in which the lyric persists as an idea of poetry fixed at points by literary history, often frozen by literary criticism, but as subject to change as the definition of poetry itself' (Greene and Cushman 2012, p.834). An overview of this 'malleability' can be found in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Jackson and Prins 2014) which tracks the lyric through a range of approaches drawn from Twentieth and Twenty-first century literary criticism. In their Introduction Jackson and Prins argue that, 'It seems more accurate to describe the lyric as a project modern literary criticism took from the nineteenth century and made its own' (Jackson and Prins 2014, p.2). Specific nodes of this project are particularly pertinent to the investigation undertaken in this thesis. Northrop Frye draws on John Stuart Mill's 'eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*' (Jackson and Prins 2014, p.3) when he writes, 'The lyric is [...] pre-eminently the utterance that is overheard' (Frye 1957 in Jackson and Prins 2014, p.32). Frye develops this to argue that, 'The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners' (Frye 1957 in Jackson and Prins 2014, p.32).

Whilst literary scholarship and criticism has evolved since Frye's declaration that the poet 'turns his back on his listeners', the concepts of utterance and listening remain key to thinking about the lyric as a literary form. Much of this thinking circulates around the role of the lyric in relation to subjectivity and focusing on what came to be referred to as 'the lyric I' and 'the speaker' (Jackson and Prins 2014, p.3). In his essay 'On Lyric Poetry and Society' Theodor Adorno challenges the centrality of subjectivity arguing, 'For the substance of a poem is not merely an expression of individual impulses and experiences' (Adorno 1991, p.38). Adorno foregrounds the centrality of language in shaping the lyric; 'But the medium of this is language. The paradox specific to the lyric work, a subjectivity that turns into objectivity, is tied to the priority of linguistic form in the lyric; it is that priority from which the primacy of language in literature in general (even in prose forms) is derived' (Adorno 1991, p.43). Recent commentary on contemporary poetry and poetics follows Adorno's discussion of the lyric form. In *The Lyric Touch* John Wilkinson suggests, 'If it is the fate of lyric poetry to feign the intimacy of the trustworthy speech act and invariably to break trust, at every point exploiting the potential of language for at-least duplicity, does not poetry actively bring about the erosion of the intimacy on which it presumes?' (Wilkinson 2007, p.8). In Wilkinson's analysis of the lyric any possibility of the 'I' is superseded by the ambiguity and plurality inherent in the materiality of language, an interpretation which situates agency in the language itself rather than in its representative function. The psychoanalytic model of interpretation underpins much of Wilkinson's work which emphasises the contested nature of subjectivity and the impossibility of a final self-knowledge. Ian Patterson develops a similar argument, drawing on W.S. Graham's poem 'What is the language using us for?' to emphasise that 'An understanding of the performativity of language itself, and the way in which we use it, and it uses us, to

perform our social and intellectual functions, has necessarily altered the location of lyric authority' (Patterson 2016, p.221).

In *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler's major theorisation of the lyric, Culler argues 'This conception of the lyric, as representation of subjective experience, while widely disseminated and influential, no longer has great currency in the academic world. It has been replaced by a variant which treats the lyric not as mimesis of the experience of the poet but as a representation of the action of a fictional speaker' (Culler 2015, p.2). *Theory of the Lyric* offers a transhistorical account of the Western lyric and the methods informing Culler's reappraisal of approaches to lyric inform the turn towards listening which informs this thesis. Specifically, Culler's concern with poetics, in devices such as apostrophe and address, over hermeneutics, 'although difficult to separate in practice' is sympathetic to engaging with poems without subordinating them to interpretation (Culler 2015, p.5). Engaging with poems in this way allows for a focus on how the poems achieve their affects and effects.

The emphasis in each of these engagements with lyric foreground the role of 'utterance' or speaking, a focus which diminishes the role of the listener and listening. Conversely, Lisa Sewell argues that, 'Twenty-first century feminist scholars and critics have begun moving away from paradigms that assume lyric poetry expresses an unproblematic version of selfhood through solitary emotive speech' (Sewell 2016, p.379). In this move away from a lyric of solitary speech Sewell identifies a 'new' lyric including 'a lyric mode that emphasizes the sonic over the emotive, calling attention to its complex materiality instead of its semantic meanings' (Sewell 2016, p.379). By developing close readings of poems by four poets this thesis will show that attending to the sonic properties of the lyric is a fundamental, rather than 'new', feature of the lyric. By readdressing the role of listening in its relation to the lyric this thesis argues for

listening as an essential component of the agency the utterance of the lyric seeks to achieve.

Rather than seek to define the lyric, the exploration of poetics in this thesis is situated in a context which understands the lyric following Thain's assertion that 'messiness is a part of what makes the concept of lyric so interesting an object of study' (Thain 2016, p.3). The collection of essays gathered in Thain's *The Lyric Poem* (2016) enable a generous approach to the lyric as form, mode and genre. It is in this spirit of generosity that the lyric is offered as the context within which the readings presented in the following chapters unfold.

This thesis contends that the attention to voice in lyric poetry has led to a relative neglect of attention to listening in relation to the lyric. Attending to listening problematises assumptions about the singularity of the lyric voice and adds to scholarship that focuses on the materiality of language and its functions within lyric poetry as discussed by Adorno (1991), Wilkinson (2007) and Patterson (2016). Focusing on acts of listening in lyric shifts attention from the articulation and agency of the lyric in relation to what it says to what it does. Attending to listening reveals multiple processes of listening within the lyric: the lyric reads us as we read the lyric.

### **Methodology and structure**

The methodology of this thesis combines close reading of poems by four contemporary poets, worked through theoretical and philosophical thought. The close readings draw on both hermeneutics and poetics to encompass interpretive perspectives and the techniques that contribute to the meaning-making of these poems. Developing close readings of only four poets and a small number of poems necessarily limits this study, however, the poems have been selected through a process of iterative reading in which

the work of these poets emerged as significant in relation to listening. The theoretical and philosophical texts have been selected according to their ability to assist in developing meaningful readings of the poems.

The thesis comprises four chapters and a portfolio of creative work. Each chapter focuses on the work of one poet, developing readings which focus on practices and achievements of listening in these lyrics.

Chapter One, “‘I Was Not HEARD’”: Trauma and Articulation in the Poetry of Geraldine Monk’, develops a close reading of Geraldine Monk’s poetry, focusing on the theme of trauma. Trauma blocks knowing and understanding because it is hard to know, difficult to articulate and hard to hear. The ambiguity, intense listening and articulation, openness to internal voices and affect of lyric allow for a particular relation to trauma. I draw on Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings* for a theoretically informed ‘exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions’ (Cvetkovich 2003, p.7) as a starting point for investigating Monk’s poetics. Cvetkovich’s emphasis on ‘cultural approaches to trauma’ to ‘counter the assumption that clinical approaches are the only model for responding to trauma’ (Cvetkovich 2003, p.10) situates a social rather than a medical model of trauma. I use this approach to develop a new reading of Monk’s poetry to argue that Monk’s poetics are the affects and effects of trauma. Monk’s lyric is a poetics listening to trauma and meeting the limits of articulation of trauma. Cvetkovich’s cultural approach politicises trauma, turning it from an individual pathology to a societal problem. Sandra Bloom’s (2003; 2010) writing also situates trauma politically and provides a bridge between the investigation into Monk’s poetics and the work this poetics might achieve.

A close reading of individual lyric poems in Monk's major poetry collections, *Interregnum* (1994), *Escapfeld Hangings* (2005) and *Ghost & Other Sonnets* (2008) develops an interpretation of the poetics in these collections. The reading focuses on the representation of victimhood and trauma, identifying the articulation of abuse and the communal and communicative function of repetition in these poems which speak of the affects and effects of abuse and trauma. Identifying thematic and compositional repetition assists in locating a poetics of trauma that scrutinizes the relationship between articulation and agency, baffling a conservative poetics rooted in individual identity by bridging individual articulations of suffering with the agency afforded by connecting with a wider body politic. Monk's poetics is a poetics of trauma demanding to be heard.

Chapter Two, "Touching something lightly many times": Bhanu Kapil's *Schizophrenie*', reads Bhanu Kapil's *Schizophrenie* (2011) focusing on difficulties between language and healing to identify how language carries out reparative work. The chapter situates *Schizophrenie* in the context of its critical reception within the experimental poetry communities in which the book emerged. Reviewing the critical reception of *Schizophrenie* foregrounds the themes of mental health and the effects of Colonialism. A form of literary listening takes place between *Schizophrenie*, the critical reception of the book, and the wider socio-cultural context in which these dialogues take place. The themes of economy, psychiatry, family and the fragment as a literary form provide a four-part structure for the close reading. In the first part I read economy as a site of ideological pressure. In the second part I draw on Sandra Bloom's understanding of trauma and Verity Spott's *Click Away Close Door Say* (2017) to consider psychiatry and communicative schism. The theme of 'family' provides the locus for a third exploration of communicative schism, utilising Simone Weil's *The Iliad or The Poem of Force* (Weil 2005) to assist in locating the violence of force.

Finally, the fragment as a form of writing is considered, drawing on Camelia Elias (2004) to locate an agency that eschews the violence of a fixed narrative. The chapter closes with Roland Barthes' *Mourning Diary* (Barthes 2012) to consider the reparative work Kapil's fragmentary *Schizophrene* achieves.

In Chapter Three, 'Listening and Loss: Denise Riley's "Listening for lost people"', draws on Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* to read 'Listening for lost people' as a lyric handling the complexities of loss and language. Barthes' text provides the contention for this chapter that reading is a process of listening to loss. The chapter draws on Michelle Boulous Walker's reading of Luce Irigaray (Walker 2017, p.75-125) and Jean Luc Nancy's *Listening* (2007) to develop a close reading of 'Listening for lost people.' Walker's conceptualisation of attentive listening is informed by the psychoanalytically orientated philosophical methods of Luce Irigaray. Nancy's thesis on listening draws on phenomenology and deconstruction. Each of these approaches touches on traditions which can be detected in 'Listening for lost people' and throughout Riley's critical and poetic oeuvre. Walker discusses listening as to 'stage an encounter' which 'pays attention to the other'. These positions are set in the wider context of 'what it means to think of reading as a kind of listening' (Walker 2017, p.104). William Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy' and Philip Sidney's 'A Farewell' are identified as predecessors of Riley's poem which provide insights into a poetics of lyric listening and loss. Nancy's phenomenological account of listening provides a lens for thinking about sound in Riley's poem. The process of listening for sound is discussed as spatialising and temporal, relating these to loss and the reconstruction of subjectivity after the experience of loss. Walter de la Mare's poem 'The Listeners' (de la Mare 1973, p.32-3) provides a poetic precedent for the lyric simultaneously summoning and



becoming its subject. ‘Listening for lost people’ is the listening lyric which both speaks of and listens to the continual processes of loss to which the poem attends.

The fourth chapter reads W.S. Graham’s ‘The Dark Dialogues’ drawing on the different listening practices of ‘alert’, ‘deciphering’ and ‘inter-subjective space’ in Barthes’ essay ‘Listening’. These distinctions between types of listening provide tools for identifying acts of listening in Graham’s poem. ‘The Dark Dialogues’ utilises themes of landscape, home, the ocular, and the temporal, exploring these by modelling different types of listening. ‘The Dark Dialogues’ is a model of lyric listening; the poet listens for the lyric, the lyric listens to the poet, the reader listens to the lyric, and the lyric listens to the reader.

An understanding of listening as encompassing a range of distinct practices problematises an emphasis on speaking and the voice in lyric poetry and, furthermore, questions the prominence of the notion of a singular lyric speaking voice. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop formulations to address this problematisation of the speaking voice, however, the thesis proposes that multiple and distinct acts of listening indicate possibilities for the development of alternative creative and critical practices and theorisations of the lyric.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis argues throughout for a poetics of listening. It argues that attending to listening both addresses listening as a relatively neglected area of attention in the study of lyric poetry and advances scholarship on the agency of the lyric.

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of the lyric speaking voice and its problematisation see, for example, Adorno (1991), Culler (2015), Jackson and Prins (eds.) (2014), Kinnahan (1996), Ladkin (2007), Parmar and Kapil (2017), Patterson (2016) and Thain (ed.) (2016).

# Chapter 1 'I Was Not HEARD': Trauma and Articulation in the Poetry of Geraldine Monk

Trauma, according to Ann Cvetkovich, 'can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all' (Cvetkovich 2003, p.7). One of the notable characteristics of trauma is its inability to integrate into the usual functions of memory (Bloom 2003, p. 9-10; Van der Kolk 1994). Unassimilated trauma is continually re-experienced through flashbacks, re-enactments and other physical and emotional symptoms, akin to an experience of being haunted. According to psychoanalytic and psychiatric discourse, it is only through assimilation of the trauma that these symptoms can be relieved (Ringel 2011, p.3). In psychoanalytic discourse the assimilation of trauma is situated in listening taking place between self and other. The symptoms of trauma are at once personal and a social necessity. They are part of an evolutionary process designed to signal to the social group that the suffering individual requires help and the repetitive behaviour is an encoded message disclosing something of the original trauma, a symbolic form of history returning (Bloom 2010). It follows that the social group would recognize these signals and intervene to heal the traumatic wound (Bloom 2010, p.207). The fragmentation of societies coexistent with the rise of individualism saw the mechanisms for signalling distress break down; behaviours that evolved to elicit social support have become behaviours that are interpreted as deviant and distressing, and as a consequence resulting in the individual becoming further isolated (Bloom 2010, p.208-209). This schism in the flow of communication can be understood as symptomatic of mental health in the contemporary moment; communicative failure gradually detaches the

individual from the healthful belonging to society, and a fragmented society is less able to function without the full engagement of its citizens.

The communication gap between the individual and society can be bridged, according to Bloom, by the arts. In this chapter I draw on this contention, taking aspects of Cvetkovich's theoretically informed 'exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions' (Cvetkovich 2003, p.7) as a base from which to investigate the poetics of Geraldine Monk, specifically the representation of victimhood and trauma, focusing on the articulation of abuse and the communicative function of repetition. Repetition is identified through close readings of poems drawn from three of Monk's major collections, *Interregnum* (1994), *Escafeld Hangings* (2005) and *Ghost & Other Sonnets* (2008). These poems speak of the affects and effects of abuse and trauma. Identifying thematic and compositional repetition assists in locating a poetics of trauma that scrutinizes the relationship between articulation and agency, baffling a conservative poetics rooted in individual identity by bridging individual articulations of suffering with the agency afforded by connecting with a wider body politic. In these poems, repetition operates simultaneously as a device for generating agency and a barrier to assimilation of trauma.

Geraldine Monk is a British poet whose work primarily focuses on the human predicament as expressed through lyric poetry (Kinnahan 1996, p.625). Monk often baffles this form through incorporation of compositional methods more often associated with experimental or avant-garde writing. Writing of her 'enduring or preferred theme of wrongful or circumstantial imprisonment' (Monk 2007, p.181), Monk situates a reoccurring theme of her work as a concern with being outside of and wronged by other, dominant, structures. This poetics attempts to speak out against perceived and actual abuses experienced by the often incarcerated voices in these poems.

Geographical sites of perceived abuses are invoked and Monk's poetics speaks through, into and around abuse. The poetics develops a representation of incarceration within which it seeks an expression of the abuses experienced. In speaking of the abuse, the scenes of victimisation are fixed and become a representation that, in turn, resists the possibility of transformation. By repeatedly re-visiting these sites of abuse and speaking the words of the abused, the poetry enacts what Freud identifies as the compulsion to repeat (Freud 1958; 1991), where a trauma is compulsively re-lived until it can be resolved through a deliberate intervention and the subconscious need to re-visit it is closed. Monk's poetry talks around trauma by adopting the voices of the abused as a representation of trauma. The traumatic compulsion to repeat is enacted thematically and sonically in Monk's poetry.

The theme of imprisonment unites *Interregnum* (1994), *Escafeld Hangings* (2005) and *Ghost & Other Sonnets* (2008), three of Monk's major collections of poetry. Each of these uses the theme to develop a poetics of trauma through use of sequences. Nate Dorward (2004) identifies the sequence as a key structuring principle in Monk's earliest work, and later collections indicate that the sequence remains Monk's preferred form. In *Interregnum*, *Escafeld Hangings*, and *Ghost & Other Sonnets* the structure afforded by the sequence as a form simultaneously offers potential imprisonment - the voices of the poems incarcerated in the structures and strictures of form - and provides the framework for the creation of these voices. In *Interregnum* Monk engages with the 1612 trials of the Pendle witches of Lancashire (Kennedy and Kennedy 2013, p.71; Tarlo 2007, p.31). This book-length poem progresses through three sections, beginning with depictions of the external world and travelling downwards, the recognizable world receding into the fragments of voices and texts of part two. These recede further, revealing a hell in the third and final sequence of poems (Kennedy and Kennedy 2013,

p.77). *Escafeld Hangings* features the historical figure of Mary Queen of Scots during her fourteen-year imprisonment in Sheffield. Again, the collection is divided into three sections, each part focusing on a specific approach to voicing incarceration. Finally, *Ghost & Other Sonnets* takes the form of a sonnet sequence. The sonnet becomes a frame or cage in which the various ‘ghosts’ and voices of the poems jostle. The containment of the cage is a form of imprisonment; to be caged is to be treated as a prisoner, to be framed or caged is to be trapped. Conversely, the same framework provides a holding space that creates the security required to explore, evoke and indeed invoke less tangible concerns. These take the form of ghost stories and the familiar trope of the haunted house. The sonnet sequence itself becomes a house haunted by the stories and voices that emerge, in turn echoing the history of the sonnet as a form speaking to and being haunted by its historical predecessors. The inclusion of ‘& Other’ invites a consideration of an ‘otherness’ beyond ghosts to suggest the sequence is a kaleidoscopic process of endlessly haunting acts of thematic and sonic repetition.

A sense that the external world is imbued with indefinable threats pervades all three collections. In Monk’s poetics, language is made to create and capture this intangible terror. Different modes of articulation and levels of agency are modelled, developing a poetics of striving amidst the terror of the environments in which the voices in the poems find themselves. These voices, whether presented as the Pendle witches, Mary Queen of Scots, the disembodied voices in *Ghost* or those that probe the gaps in these environments, speak of, to and in their circumstances. Such articulations speak about, towards and outwards from their various imprisonments, simultaneously placing and displacing the certainties of space and time, geography and history, which baffle chronology, comparable with the repetitive and dissociative effects of trauma. Through partially severing language from its representational functions, Monk’s poetry

challenges the commonplace appeal to repetition and inexpressibility within trauma studies, offering instead a move towards a poetics that probes trauma from within. Rather than externalizing abuse and its associated trauma through the development of representational or confessional narratives, Monk's poetry builds on the sound of language to express the effects of trauma from the inside out. Remaining on the inside, as each of these collections does, refuses and refutes the possibility of these poems as catharsis. Instead they offer language as articulation, which in turn affords various iterations of agency.

### ***Interregnum***

Attending to specific examples of voices attempting articulation of their circumstances provides insight into Monk's explorations of intersections between articulation and agency. A particularly pertinent example appears in the final part of *Interregnum* where the short poem 'James Device Replies' encapsulates the formal and thematic preoccupations of *Interregnum*. Formally 'James Device Replies' continues the poetics developed throughout the poem and is structured through the repetition of words and sounds. The individual words 'was' and 'here'/'hear' form the basis of the poem and within these the sounds of 'w' and 'as' and the shift of here (e-r) to hear (a-r) form the basic units of sounds travelling through the poem. Despite the simplicity of the word palette, attempting to read the poem aloud reveals the extreme difficulty of articulating James' words. The poem begins with the speaker (James) articulating his position:

I wasn't here	I was here	I won't
here I wasn't	here I was	here I
wasn't' was		

(Monk 2003, p.161)

James must articulate the fact of his presence for his presence to be recognized. Stating 'I wasn't here' indicates a presence insofar as James exists and is therefore able to deny that he was 'here' but was in fact 'here' instead. The 'here' remains mysterious; articulating his presence may refer to the present, the 'here and now' of 'here' or the historical record in and from which this account arises. Equally, the process of reading James' articulation enacts the simultaneous existence of both possibilities. 'I won't' suggests the resolute refusal of a child who will not conform to demands imposed upon him. The first two lines echo a phrase in common parlance, the origins of which seem obscure; 'I was here. Here I was. Was I here? Yes I was'. 'I was here' is also a phrase that often appears in graffiti, itself a practice that stakes a claim to temporal and spatial territories by leaving a mark to signal the artist's presence and altering that place through the act of tagging. Tagging, as the word suggests, signals the importance of having a name and the significance of the relationship between naming and identity (Gottlieb 2008, p.34-40). James' statement 'I was here' exercises a psychological need to claim time and space-bound existence in order to assert the specific presence of an individual life. Echoing a phrase recognisably drawn from common parlance also situates James' reply as emerging from spoken rather than written English, indicative of the illiteracy ascribed to him by the emphasis on articulation and the context of *Interregnum*. In lacking eloquence and literacy, James' attempts to articulate himself reveal tensions and limitations on language as a medium for expression. This struggle is manifest in James' attempts at articulation that particularly emphasize language in the process of attempting to work itself out as the poem moves through the different operations of articulation required to reach an endpoint with the word 'HEARD'. The inadequacies of language in the context of extreme circumstances are apparent below the surface of the literal meaning of the words themselves, registering most acutely in

the cumulative affective experience of engaging with the poem. The physical process of reading (speaking) and hearing these words and sounds invokes both James and the poem. The oral and aural coalesce into a felt and thus recognized existence. The figure of James becomes a device not only in name but literally a device through which this iteration of articulation proceeds, while the poem is a device that creates James.

The threat of not existing, being forgotten or disappearing is enacted in James' struggle to find and articulate words that sufficiently render him audible and present. Achieving a level of comprehensible verbal articulation facilitates a degree of agency, enabling James to exert greater influence over what happens in his own life. This is not an easy task, as James stumbles over ordinary words and alternates between dialect ('I won't', 'I wasn't') and non-standard articulation of standard words. This process examines the differences between standard and non-standard language use. Meredith Quartermain identifies a 'socio-poetic soundscape' in Monk's poems, writing that '[t]o insist on speaking in a manner labelled accented in the privileged arena of literature [...] is immediately to establish a cultural space that acknowledges social realities, including the reality of gender-based or class-based marginalization and whitewashing by normative, schooled modes such as BBC or CBC or Oxbridge English' (Quartermain 2007, p.74). James Device's struggle to convey himself through language is also an accumulative point within *Interregnum*; Device's inarticulacy stands in for the cumulative class-based marginalisation which is iterated throughout the poem. James' articulation is just about sufficient to register James' presence; he can be recognised. Presence is embodied as well as linguistic. Appearing twice in the poem, the word 'tongue' emphasises the physical aspect of sounds articulated through the human mouth. It appears first in the context of biting where James says 'bit part / my tongue off on', a reference to the expression 'bite one's tongue' meaning to hold



something back despite the urge to speak out (Room 2002, p.133). Biting the tongue is also a form of self-wounding. In both instances damage to the tongue impedes the movement of words from the internal to the external world, inhibiting the transgression of the boundary of the bodily self into the wider, social, environment. The second reference to tongues in the poem is ‘tongue lollery’, summoning images of the tongue ‘lolling’ outside of the mouth, a position of uselessness and inability to form words. ‘Lollery’ alludes to the Lollards, followers of the fourteenth-century theologian, reformer and dissenter John Wycliffe, a reference that points towards the historical material informing the poem and situates the work in the tradition of English poetry that dissents from orthodoxy.

The wider historical context with which *Interregnum* converses lies beyond the scope of the present discussion and has already been treated by Sean Bonney, Christine and David Kennedy and Harriet Tarlo (Thurston 2007); however, the intersection with dissent from Catholicism and intimations of the Protestant Reformation invokes historical schism as a potentially traumatic wounding fought out across and traceable within historical arguments about language use, focusing particularly on the language of the Bible. Such an intimation gestures beyond trauma as experienced by the individual and towards social history rather than solely psychological history as a site of trauma. In the context of ‘James Device Replies’, ultimately, despite being ‘here’ and pleading to be listened to, the poem ends with James stating that ‘[...] I was not / HEARD’. The poem moves through the ‘I was’, ‘wasn’t’ and request to ‘hear me’, to the figurative action of the tongue being snipped off, the lips stitched together, rendered silent. When James’ voice is silenced the limited agency arising with his ability to articulate himself is stifled. Ending with James’ direct statement, ‘I was not / HEARD’, the reader returns from the emphasis of HEARD to the start of the poem to question their encounter with

the poem. The simplicity of the words used to execute this mechanism contributes to its force and pathos. In *Interregnum* the abuse suffered by James is also the abuse suffered by the underclasses evident in the content of the poem who, being unable to sufficiently articulate their traumatic experiences, remain unheard: their collective trauma remains trapped as an affect that the reader experiences in Monk's poetics. Trapped in repetition and echo, the stuttering of a language unheard, a tongue snipped off, there is no release. Trauma is trapped in the poem and repeats throughout *Interregnum*.

### ***Escafeld Hangings***

Monk's *Escafeld Hangings* was published in 2005, a decade after the appearance of *Interregnum*, which can be considered its predecessor and model. *Escafeld* is an imaginative engagement with voice and like *Interregnum* uses a historical approach to frame its investigation. Where the geographical basis of *Interregnum* is Pendle Hill, Lancashire, *Escafeld Hangings* focuses on Sheffield (Monk 2005). It is through this geographical connection that Mary Queen of Scots emerges as a key figure in the work; Mary was held captive in Sheffield for fourteen years until her beheading in 1587. Throughout *Escafeld Hangings* Monk's voice often seems to be speaking through Mary, a strategy that marks a decisive shift from the articulation of *Interregnum* where the movement of the language itself is a voiceprint. The language in *Escafeld* reflects a shift from the earth-and-body-bound preoccupations of *Interregnum* to the mind and ocular-based considerations pondered throughout *Escafeld*. This follows the movement of social positioning in the poems, shifting from the outsider status of the underclasses of *Interregnum* to the regal position of Mary Queen of Scots. This shift marks a transition from voices outside the structures of power that shape society (the voices in *Interregnum*) to a voice that vies for the ultimate position of power in society, the

monarch (Mary Queen of Scots). The attempt to ‘voice’, to be heard, is ratcheted up; the abused, victimised and persecuted voices of *Interregnum* mutate into the outraged and outrageous railings of Mary Queen of Scots. Voices in *Interregnum* are concerned with the practicalities of articulation, the difficulties of translating sounds from ‘common’ spoken English to the English of official culture, whereas the voice of *Escafeld* speaks largely as an observer of society, as a voice removed and providing commentary. Voices in *Interregnum* speak of experiencing exclusion, whereas the voice of *Escafeld* generates a narration of the world as it is seen during incarceration, and in this world everything is terrible. The two lines, ‘This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN’ and ‘Madness is all the rage’ (Monk 2005, p.64), carry a particularly pronounced charge of Mary/Monk’s vision of this world. These lines appear at the mid-point of *Escafeld Hangings*, in the fifth poem within the ‘Mary Through the Looking Glass’ sequence. Appearing in a prominent position within the sequence and the physical book, these striking statements are pivotal to revealing the shape and sense of the collection.

A CD audio recording of the ‘Mary Through the Looking Glass’ sequence accompanies *Escafeld*, indicating that the sound of voices in this section is particularly significant. In a discussion of the recording Zoë Skoulding reflects on ‘Monk’s own speech, steeped in Lancastrian’, noting that ‘there seems to be a degree of fusion between the performance of these two identities – Mary Stuart’s and Monk’s’ (Skoulding 2011, p.190). Listening to the inflection of dialect and its modulation between Lancastrian and Yorkshire, Skoulding argues that ‘[a] sharp attention to the specificity of languages spoken in different social, geographical and historical contexts is combined with a dialogic approach that refuses to locate language in the individual subject as point of origin’ (Skoulding 2011, p.190). The audio-recording of this lyric invites reflection based on listening to voices whilst the printed text of the same lyric

invites an ocular rather than aural reception. Ostensibly the focus of this sequence is Mary Queen of Scots taking stock of herself as she looks into her mirror, an ocular focused activity which results in a doubling. In the recording, Monk vocalises her poem and an additional voice is provided by the Portuguese actress and singer Ligia Roque. This dual voicing foregrounds the relationship between Mary and the ‘other’ self she addresses in the mirror. Mirrors are a familiar trope in literature, specifically in fairy tales where they appear in stories about aristocracy, warning of narcissism and its ensuing dangers. Whether Monk is speaking through Mary or Mary speaking through Monk, ‘Mary Through the Looking Glass’ presents the reader with an extremely angry voice. This anger peaks with ‘This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN’ and ‘Madness is all the rage’. In speaking to her mirror image, this anger is reflected back at Mary/Monk, it is trapped, its energy fails to find release, exposing the tragedy of seeking solutions in a mirror. In addressing a mirror the listening ‘other’ is absent; the speaker addresses only herself. The circularity of this speech act stands in for the singularity of the lyric voice admiring itself.

The title ‘Mary Through the Looking Glass’ clearly references Lewis Carroll’s novel *Through the Looking Glass*, the sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. By presenting Mary through allusion to Alice, Monk gestures that this text is a sequel to a prior text. Monk herself states that *Escafeld* reworks the form of *Interregnum* (Monk 2007, p.181). The three-part form of each text suggests that the two might be read in relation to each other as a mirrored pair where *Interregnum* and *Escafeld Hangings* can perform a kind of listening to the other text.

Seeking answers from a mirror also alludes to the Brothers Grimm fairy tale *Snow White*. Here the Queen asks her mirror, ‘Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?’ Each day the mirror replies that the Queen is the fairest until an

occasion when the mirror identifies a princess to rival the Queen. This unleashes the Queen's jealousy and resolve to destroy her rival, Snow White. Justice and beauty are juxtaposed. In Monk's poem Mary is trapped in dialogue with her mirror, raging at the world:

Bed heirs  
ya sad fries  
of carnal feast –  
ya looms of misery  
to un-wombed  
posterity.

Do we not lobotomise worrisome fruit?  
Furious life fest  
countercultured  
life forced to kill.

(Monk 2005, p.64)

There is an allusion to possible incestuous acts; the act of 'bedding heirs' in the context of Mary's voicing would indicate the act of taking to bed other heirs to the throne, in other words, family members. 'Ya' indicates a colloquial and a disregard of those she addresses, 'ya' replacing the more formal 'you'. This scene of a 'carnal feast' is reminiscent of Hamlet's disgust at his mother's incestuous relationship with his uncle:

Nay, but to live  
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,  
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love  
Over the nasty sty –

(Shakespeare 1998, p.676, 3.4: 81-84)

Incestuous relations connect intimately with ‘misery’, being ‘un-wombed’ by having sexual desires distorted. ‘Posterity’ speaks to the sense of hopelessness prompted by incest but also the posterity of the speakers’ place in history and by implication also Monk’s poem. A lobotomy is known, in lay terms, as a psychosurgical technique involving the removal of a portion of a person’s brain. This understanding arises from a crude procedure that emerged in the 1940s when ‘lobotomy was used to reduce agitation and aggressive behaviours and to make patients easier to handle’ (Fischbach and Mindes 2011, p.358). Rather than removing parts of the brain, connections in the front area of the brain were severed and the process used to treat forms of mental illness that were otherwise considered untreatable. ‘Worrisome’ refers to the tendency to worry and of one who causes concern in others. As ‘fruit’ cannot be lobotomized or worry, the ‘fruit’ must refer to a person, probably the speaker, who may be a ‘low hanging fruit’, a phrase referring to ‘easy pickings’, which may also describe victims of incest. Someone referred to as a ‘fruitcake’ in common English parlance is being referred to as ‘mad’ to some degree, to be ‘fruity’ is also an informal reference to the sexually suggestive. Presenting the speaker as ‘fruit’ also dehumanises her, making it simpler to consider acts of violence (lobotomy, incest) towards it / her. ‘Furious life fest / countercultured / life forced to kill’ is typical of Monk’s method throughout her work, of selecting contronyms, a strategy that multiplies possible interpretations. This generosity shifts the attempts at agency enacted within the poem across to the reader, inviting her to locate her own interpretation of the text.

The word ‘furious’ is given a particularly Monkian treatment. The Oxford English Dictionary reveals an etymology from Old French and Latin, with the earliest given English usage appearing in Chaucer c.1374. Four definitions are provided, the first giving the most common associations in English: in reference to a person or animal

‘full of fury or fierce passion [...]’; raging, frantic’; of the elements ‘Moving with or as if moved by fury’; and also ‘fast and furious’ a commonplace term, referring to ‘eager, uproarious, noisy’. ‘Furious’ also carries earlier references to being mad or insane, foolish and absurd. These associations inform a determination within the poem to refute the negativity the speaker witnesses in the world. This horror is addressed with a raging objection, combined with the ‘fast and furious’ pace of this raging, the sense of movement that typically travels across Monk’s *oeuvre* and finally the allusion to madness that speaks directly into the insane of ‘IN **sane** IN’ and ‘Madness is all the rage’. Incorporating these readings of ‘furious’ into ‘Furious life fest’ facilitates a reading of ‘fest’ as ‘festival’ where ‘life’ exhibits a type of Bakhtinian carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984).

Rather than delimiting a temporal space during which ideological authority is suspended temporarily, Monk’s poem suggests that life itself is the time for celebration. Insanity or madness are re-inscribed as experiences that are simply part of the human experience rather than experiences that mark people as outsiders. As an undercurrent, ‘fest’ also carries the possibility of ‘festering’, where the various interpretations of ‘furious’ may be bubbling beneath the surface of life’s festival. This inverted reading of ‘fest’ is encouraged by ‘countercultured’, which requires a dominant culture in order to posit the possibility of an alternative culture to ‘counter’ the mainstream. ‘Countercultured’ feeds into the holistic approach to ‘life’ in ‘Furious life fest’, rather than existing solely on the cultural plane. ‘Life forced to kill’ offers life that is celebrated through a fast and furious, possibly seemingly ‘mad’ modus operandi, finding itself in a position that it must take an extreme course of action and ‘kill’, although the target of this action remains uncertain. The double appearance of the word ‘life’ combined with ‘kill’ suggests some form of ‘life’ is killed, perhaps the way of life

perceived as the dominant mode or the death of the particular counterculture. Abutted to the earlier ‘Do we not lobotomise worrisome fruit?’ and the concern this expresses of being perceived as a potential candidate for lobotomy as well as the association between lobotomy and the mind suggest that the ‘worrisome fruit’ is part of the counterculture. There is an ongoing tension between the counterculture and the dominant culture, with the possibility that one seeks to kill off the other. The ‘worrisome fruit’ is a product of the counterculture but resides in the tension between the two cultures that the doubled use of the word ‘life’ gestures towards. If the ‘worrisome fruit’ is Mary, and her existence the possibility of a counterculture, an alternative to dominant culture, then a form of ‘lobotomy’ may neutralize the threat posed by this royal intruder. The trajectory through these few lines locates a cause of trauma in incest and details consequences of trauma in the words ‘sad’, ‘misery’ and ‘un-wombed’, followed by the threat of a mental health intervention dating from the 1940s in the form of ‘lobotomise’. Following Bloom’s (2010, p.207) assertion that the social group is key to healing traumatic wounds through assimilation, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque of ‘[f]urious life fest’ can be read as an attempt at signalling the trauma to the social group. Despite this, the voice speaks of ‘life forced to kill’, indicating a deathliness at the heart of life, a rigidity symptomatic of unassimilated trauma. These ten short lines lead to: ‘This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN’. This typography, unique within *Escafeld Hangings* for combining standard, capitalized and bold font within one line, acts as a substitute for the ear and voice, denoting emphasis in how the line is heard and read. With different options it is impossible for the reader/listener to decide where the emphasis within the sentence lies. In reference to Monk’s deployment of visual forms within *Interregnum* Lacy Rumsey argues that ‘[e]ach of the graphic gestures in this text is recuperable in semantic terms’ and that ‘[s]uch visual techniques



constitute a supplementary rhetorical cue to conventional reading practices' (Rumsey 2007, p.333-4). The use of visual techniques in *Escafeld Hangings* multiplies interpretive options for the reader/listener. The line is riddled with repetition in the form of alliterative vowels and alternative typographical patterns. The multiplication of repetitive patterns points both towards an interpretative assumption that this line is laden with meaning and the sense that it is a sort of riddle for which an answer remains elusive. Its emphasis may ultimately be found in its sonic sense, which undulates with the movement of voice. Given the reference to insanity, the line may represent a notionally 'insane' mind inhabited by multiple voices, the effects and affects of trauma. The words also function as a pictorial illustration of a troubled mind, where meaning-making is detached from words. The earlier reference to counterculture allows a reading where the emphasis on the 'no' 'be' 'sane' operates as an unhidden hidden message pointing towards the insanity of mainstream culture and the possibility that counterculture can contain a degree of what passes as insanity in mainstream culture. Hidden messages are a reoccurring motif throughout *Escafeld*: the letters Monk devises between Mary and her sister Queen Elizabeth I, the alternative names for birds in the sequence 'She Kept Birds', the messages encoded within tapestries in the 'Marian Hangings' sequence, the handwritten typeface in the poem 'The Scottish Queen's Cypher Alphabet', and the notion of synaesthesia as a code that emerges throughout *Escafeld* and receives direct treatment in 'Dressed to Die For'. In repeatedly returning to sites of hidden messages, *Escafeld* signals an urgency in the need to communicate that which cannot be explicitly spoken and for those messages to be heard. Smuggling messages through apparently innocuous sources is a form of attempting agency, through communication, in restricted circumstances. The revelation of trauma itself is also an unhidden hidden message; the repetitive behaviours of the distressed require

interpretation before they can be understood and the agency of the individual restored. Poetry too is a type of code that hides its messages while simultaneously signalling a desire to be understood.

A literal reading of 'This is no age to be in sane in' interprets as a statement that 'this age', meaning the time frame of the poem that is simultaneously Elizabethan England, the duration of composing the poem or the contemporary environment of the speaker, does not accommodate the 'insane'. Conversely, given the splitting of 'in' and 'sane' it also reads as this time not being accommodating to a person or persons existing 'in' the 'sane', in other words congruent with mainstream culture. 'Insane' speaks back to the threat of lobotomy mentioned previously, the hints at incest, the wildness beneath the 'furious', the hyperbole of 'kill', and points towards the 'Madness' in the following line, the 'soft-brained', 'Prison' and 'harangues'. If 'insane' indicates trauma, the suspension of time becomes the timelessness of the traumatic acts which haunt the traumatised.

'This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN' is followed by the similarly striking line 'Madness is all the rage', which is a statement in its own right and an extension to the previous line, with repercussions throughout this poem and the rest of *Escafeld Hangings*. It is the 'age', the era that Monk/Mary lives in, that is blamed for the 'voice' appearing to be 'mad' rather than the apparent 'madness' (which is, in fact, victimhood) being problematic. In effect this argues that society rather than the individual is sick. 'Rage' reaches into a reading of 'rage' as fashionable, for something to be 'all the rage' in common parlance refers to something being a fleeting trend. In considering assumed 'madness' in this way, the conflation of 'madness' with poor health is replaced by a madness that can be chosen. This choice may be a lifestyle choice, which drains madness of its power to disrupt, or a mask, which permits the speaker to 'rage' about

the madness of the terrible world she sees around her. This type of madness presents as a form of exposing deception and lies, where these deceptions are the causes of the anger expressed in 'rage'.

'This IS **no** AGE to **be** IN **sane** IN' and 'Madness is all the rage' are linked through 'age' and 'rage', which hark back to the image of the speaker addressing the mirror in *Snow White*, a scenario where old age is usurped by youth and causes rage. The age/rage connection and the texture of Monk's language suggest affiliations to Dylan Thomas' 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night', which features both (Thomas 2000, p.148). 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night' is a villanelle where repetition and the accompanying effect of stasis is key to its affect. The poem's refrain, 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light' posits rage as a force of energy that challenges death. Rage and death are two possible outcomes to the stasis of the earlier address to the mirror. This stasis is crucial to an understanding of *Escafeld Hangings*. Articulation, addressed to the mirror, fails to achieve agency; the trauma arising from incarceration is maintained rather than resolved, relating to the socio-political context where through Mary's beheading the status quo is preserved. Unresolved trauma appears as affect in repetition of sound throughout the poem, whilst the effects of trauma are described in words. In the first two stanzas 'fries', 'feast', 'fruit' and 'fest' work together forming a celebratory scene, despite the 'sad', 'carnal', 'misery', 'un', 'worrisome', 'furious', 'counter-' and 'kill' that accompany them. There is the previously mentioned carnivalesque amidst the horror, where victimhood becomes a cause for celebration because it gives the speaker an identity and a role to play. Her prisoner status enables her incandescent regal railings against the injustices she has suffered; to forgo these through release from her trauma would require surrendering her status as victim to one of privilege. Conversely, it is her comparatively privileged status

that has caused her incarceration. *Escafeld Hangings* flaunts the affects of trauma by privileging unassimilated trauma through the speaking voice of Mary. Attempts at assimilation of trauma fail when the effects of incarceration are interpreted as cause for celebration by the voice of Mary. In attempting to speak ‘through’ Mary, the materiality of the language is subordinated to a poetics ordered around this imaginary character as a mouthpiece. In the mirror scene the listening ‘other’ is absent and the singularity of the lyric voice is seen admiring itself. The listening function of the lyric is marginal, submerged in the sounds of repetition across *Escafeld*.

The repetition of sound forms the primary poetics of Monk’s *Ghost & Other Sonnets*, a sequence which links the effects and affects of trauma to haunting. *Ghost & Other Sonnets* utilises the sonnet form to marshal the affects and effects of trauma into a sequence that interrogates the ability of the form to hold and express trauma whilst leaving the trauma unassimilated.

### ***Ghost & Other Sonnets***

*Ghost & Other Sonnets* is a sequence of sixty-two sonnets which contain the effects and affects of trauma. In these poems trauma is manifest in the sounds and patterns of language across the sequence and in the theme of haunting. *Ghost* breaks from traditional sonnet forms by refusing regular meter, yet each individual sonnet retains the fourteen-line format of a traditional sonnet and closes with a couplet set apart from the preceding twelve lines. These features set Monk’s sonnets in-between traditional and experimental forms of sonnet, indicating that this poetics forges an address which speaks and listens across the binary of these two traditions. Indeed, writing about sonnets in *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets* Jeff Hilson states that, ‘With the example of women writing necessarily inside and against the form, it is perhaps better to talk of

different ‘traditions’, plural, of the linguistically innovative sonnet’ (Hilson 2008, p.13). This chimes with the affects of Monk’s sonnet sequence where the regularity of the form provides a structure which becomes a vessel for performances of unassimilated cultural, social and personal trauma. The sonnets are cut through with a developing sense of the uncanny which fails to be resolved as the sequence unfolds. As two sides of the same coin the frisson between the accumulative familiarity of the sounds and rhythms of each sonnet and the unhomeliness of the uncanny haunting, which similarly appears through the sounds and symbols in the poem, refuse resolution into a final revelation of the trauma that underpins the haunting. In its ability to simultaneously enact and withhold, the sequence strips away the narrative function of traditionally recognisable ghost stories to reveal the effects and affects of haunting through emphasising glimpses and fragments of sounds and images. These teasing glimpses become disorientating as the violent imagery underpinning many of the sonnets repeatedly emerges only to quickly be subsumed once again into the tumult of the play of language across the sequence, as though revelation of the trauma or traumas themselves would be too much for the sonnet sequence to contain. In reading sonnet number 39, Sheppard (2011) finds rape, sexual violence and secrecy but stops short of naming trauma:

A barely human (ape) rape has occurred amidst this ordinary scene against ‘stunning’ ‘beauty’ and ‘loveliness’ (together the words suggest a woman is violated by ‘rape-ghosts’), though it might only be sexual stimulation, ‘tossing’. ‘Mindless kicks’ suggests gratuitous sexual play as well as violence, or both. Lamentation is obscured by the intimate but threatening ‘shush-love’ that both extinguishes love and could also signify the love of an unhealthy secrecy.

Such revealing is typical of the collapsing of the sonority of these sonnets, with the action played out just below the level of direct representation. Sonic repetition

combines with thematic repetition in the sequence to develop a sonic-environment that elicits a sensory and emotional response and prioritises this over the semantic sense of the sequence. As in *Interregnum* and *Escafeld Hangings*, sites of victimisation are repeatedly re-visited, contained and expressed; ‘Inexplicable encounters / Traduce unknowns with wary / Other’ (Monk 2008, p.43). The poetics of haunting develops through an engagement with Victorian ghost stories that provide material for the sequence and the various guises in which terror appears, repetitiously but always recognisably. In this sequence voices are not embodied as they are in *Interregnum* and *Escafeld Hangings*, suggesting that the voices manifested through sound across the sequence are those of ghosts. Ghosts are associated with the historical past returning to haunt the present, an action analogous to the compulsion to repeat found in sufferers of trauma. In Monk’s poem the ghosts are incarcerated in a haunted house that is also the cage of individual sonnets and the sequence. Incarceration in the cage of the sonnet and the haunted house of traditional ghost stories generates an echo chamber, reminiscent of the mirror in *Escafeld*. The agency afforded through articulation is stymied by the haunting repetitive sound of the language contained by the framework of the sonnet sequence as a form. In literary tradition the ghost story and the haunted house emerge as consequences of past misdemeanours: crimes or repressed desire re-visiting the present until they can be resolved. This mirrors the idea, discussed at the start of this chapter, that the resolution of trauma lies in the process of assimilation (Ringel 2011, p.3). In *Ghost & Other Sonnets* the house is haunted with memories of past harms and trauma, performing a double of the sonnet as a form being haunted by its antecedents. The house and sonnet is a cage, providing containment, entrapment, even entertainment but not the release of trauma through realising agency. The theme of haunting in *Ghost & Other Sonnets* distils the theme of incarceration which shadows *Interregnum* and

appears explicitly in *Escafeld Hangings*. In the sonnet sequence the experience of being trapped, incarceration, appears in the uncanny sonic affects and brief glimpses of violent or frightening scenes. The form of the sonnet incarcerates the trauma in its cage, enabling a performance of its affects whilst withholding the possibility of release from its effects.

In this chapter I have drawn on Cvetkovich (2003) for a theoretically informed ‘exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions’ (Cvetkovich 2003, p.7) to read Geraldine Monk’s lyric as a poetics of trauma. In close readings of Monk’s *Interregnum*, *Escafeld Hangings* and *Ghost & Other Sonnets* repetition is found to act as a form of articulation and mirrored, echoic, listening. Trauma is submerged in Monk’s poetics, generating a body of work that expresses the affects of trauma and enacts the persistence of the compulsion to repeat. It presents through the motif of the abused in the form of the Pendle witches, the incarcerated Mary Queen of Scots and the ghosts of past abuses that haunt *Ghost & Other Sonnets*. Attempting to speak of these abuses forms the basis of the articulation in this poetics. Speaking through, into and around abuse generates the affect of trauma and reinstalls the experience of victimhood. Monk’s poetics are dependent on the suspension of the assimilation of trauma; the poems hold open a traumatised space since its recuperation could only be effected outside the poems. The possibilities for assimilating trauma, which Cvetkovich and Bloom (2003; 2010) argue can be found in social and cultural forms of engagement, are blocked in a poetics which depends on unassimilated trauma for its effects and affects. Cvetkovich and Bloom’s approaches explicitly politicise trauma, articulating trauma as a societal problem rather than an individual pathology. The lyric voices of Monk’s poetry celebrate the deviant and distressing, moving increasingly away from the collective of voices of *Interregnum*, to the regal and unique position of Mary in

*Escaped Hangings* to the disembodied ghostly voicings of *Ghost & Other Sonnets*. In progressively individualising the effects of trauma, the voices of the poems become increasingly isolated, moving further away from what Bloom (2003; 2010) describes as the possibilities of assimilating the trauma through (re)integration into cultural and social norms.

When James Device in *Interregnum* announces ‘I was not / HEARD’ that accusation stretches across this poetics and into the surrounding culture. Furthermore, ‘I was not / HEARD’ echoes across this poetics which speaks of seeking its own resolution through repeatedly returning to the sites of trauma yet frustrating the possibility of its assimilation.

This chapter listens to Monk’s poems and identifies a poetics of unresolved trauma. The act of listening in these poems is restricted to a repetitive, echoic listening which is unable to hear the trauma submerged in its poetics. Trauma is a break in the communicative function.



## Chapter 2 ‘Touching something lightly many times’: Bhanu Kapil’s *Schizophrene*

In focusing on difficulties between language and healing Bhanu Kapil’s *Schizophrene* (2011) models how language can perform reparative work. This chapter draws on the fragment as form to argue that *Schizophrene* attends to the reparative function of language. Firstly, the critical reception of *Schizophrene* is reviewed to provide the context in which Kapil’s text has been received and interpreted. Secondly, *Schizophrene*’s epigraphs are read to identify the locus of the harms this text addresses, drawing assistance from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘Schizoanalysis’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Thirdly, the themes of economy, psychiatry, family and the fragment are explored as sites of communicative schism within *Schizophrene*. Finally, Barthes’ *Mourning Diary* assists with reading the fragment in relation to loss and grief. The chapter argues that the fragmentary form of poetics in *Schizophrene* carries out reparative work by ‘touching’ the harms of trauma through the practice of reading as a form of listening without reifying experience through attempts at representation or narration.

### ***Schizophrene***

Critical reception of Bhanu Kapil’s writing tends towards describing the themes of her work. Rainsford writes of Kapil’s concerns with ‘migration, transformation, loss, and the hybrid text’ (Rainsford 2017), Donovan identifies that ‘[t]o read all five of Kapil’s books so far [...] is to recognize the ongoing working-through of a series of traumas which have touched Kapil’s life deeply’ (Donovan, no date p.57), and in a review of Kapil’s *Ban en Banlieue* Maye writes, ‘*Ban en Banlieue* touches on the social history of

domestic violence in diasporic Indian and Pakistani communities. Scenes and figures repeat within and between these works as a kind of social trauma' (Maye 2016, p.175). Beer describes *Schizophrene* as 'testing the boundaries of an aporetic, sometimes clinical and sometimes scaldingly emotive prose' (Beer no date, p.114). In 'Lyric Violence, the Nomadic Subject and the Fourth Space', co-authored with Kapil herself, Sandeep Parmar notes that '[a]ll of Kapil's books differently and yet with tremendous repetition of traumatic detail give voice to the horrors of Partition, the effects of migration, intergenerational trauma and the loss (in this case too small a word) of family' (Parmar and Kapil 2017, p.31). This latter essay explicitly discusses lyric in relation to violence and it is from this direct signalling of lyric that I locate *Schizophrene* as a lyric poetics. Trauma, violence and the specific histories of the diasporic experience of Partition reoccur as motifs throughout the reception of Kapil's work, both in reviews and the sparse critical writing currently extant. Assumptions about these themes and their relation to the biographical subject of 'Bhanu Kapil' subtend these reviews and critical summaries of her writing.

Counter to locating an interpretation of Kapil's writing in relation to the (auto)biographical subject, Amy De'Ath develops a reading of Kapil's writing through 'dialectical negation' to approach Kapil's writing as a 'mobilization of a *counter-(re)productive negativity* that is able to aesthetically trace the negative dialectics of the value-form itself' (De'Ath 2016; De'Ath 2017, p.iii). By drawing on Marxist and feminist theoretical frameworks De'Ath's critical work begins to locate Kapil's writing within an understanding of power and value, both vital themes which are eschewed in readings which turn interpretation of the text back onto the writer.

It is in this context of the critical reception of Kapil's writing that I read *Schizophrene*. Early reviews of *Schizophrene* by Jai Arun Ravine (2012) and Lauren

Russell (2013) turn to definitions of the word ‘schizophrenia’ to locate the book in the context of mental illness. These glosses of ‘schizophrenia’ carry with them an accompanying backdrop of medicalised psychiatric discourse, which forms one of the themes *Schizophrene* interrogates through its continual returning to experiential accounts of traumatic encounters. *Schizophrene* listens to language and utilises the resources of the materiality of language, and in particular the fragmentary form, to heal historic harms. The agency of *Schizophrene*’s reparative action lies in its use of the textual fragment as form.

***Schizophrene*: ‘I tried to write an epic’**

*Schizophrene* is composed entirely of text presented in fragmentary form. The fissure of the book’s title manifests as an account of migration and immigration as trauma. The two different experiences of migration and immigration, leaving one’s own country and going to live in another, create a fissure of unbelonging which problematises the concept of ‘home’. The historical context of the specific experiences of migration and immigration underpinning the book is the Partition of India in 1947, which created the independent countries of India and Pakistan (Jorgenson no date; Quaid 2012; Russell 2013; Parmar and Kapil 2017). The social and cultural context of the book, held together through references and allusions to the history of the Partition of India, is written about directly in the opening of *Schizophrene* under the heading ‘Passive Notes:’

For some years, I tried to write an epic on Partition and its *trans-generational* effects: the high incidence of *schizophrenia* in diasporic Indian and Pakistani communities; the parallel social history of *domestic violence*, relational disorders, and so on

(Kapil 2011, p.i).

In a single sentence, the social, cultural and historical origins of Kapil's *Schizophrene* are pinpointed. The writing of and in *Schizophrene* is historically situated. The process of writing the book is presented as arising from the materiality of Kapil's notebook; Kapil throws the notebook into the garden when she perceives that she has failed to write the epic she aimed to write. Leaving the notebook in the garden during the cold winter of 2007, the effects of the cold weather alter the materiality of the notebook and the legibility of the writing inside it. The italicisation of words in the 'Passive Notes' section pull against the assertion that these notes are 'passive'. The italicisation activates specific verbs and nouns, connecting a series of actions which combine to produce *Schizophrene*. The words 'passive' and 'notes' serves to remove the authorial agency from the writing process by suggesting that the action of writing is passive and the writing comprises 'notes' rather than narrative. The paragraph, a fragment of text, beneath this heading describes the writing process of the book, showing it to be a process of accumulative actions including the practice of working with chance. 'Passive Notes' is followed by three epigraphs. The significance of the epigraph appearing after the introductory material of 'Passive Notes' incorporates the epigraphs as active components of the fragmentary texts marshalled into *Schizophrene*'s force-field. In placing these epigraphs together *Schizophrene* invites a reading which is an act of *listening* to what these fragments of text become when placed adjacent to one another. Together these epigraphs identify home, mental illness and gender as the focus for *Schizophrene*'s reparative work.

The first epigraph, 'It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' is taken from Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Mutilated Life* and even without an informed knowledge of Adorno's writing in relation to late twentieth and early twenty-first century poetry, the reader can locate this epigraph as

foregrounding a concern with ‘home’ in the context of Adorno’s subtitle, ‘a Mutilated life’. The themes which preoccupy *Schizophrene* emerge at the intersection between the implications of the belonging with associated with ‘home’, and the migrant and immigrant experiences of not belonging, which the subtitle ‘mutilated life’ gestures towards. Use of this quote as an epigraph invites the reader to question assumptions about the meaning of home and establishes the theme of home as a central preoccupation in *Schizophrene*.

The second epigraph is taken from a scholarly paper by Dinesh Bhugra and Peter Jones, published in *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* (Bhugra and Jones 2001).

The epigraph in full reads:

The key question here is whether migration itself acts as a stressor and produces elevated rates of schizophrenia or, whether the stressors occur later...However, the stress and chronic difficulties of living in societies where racism is present both at individual and institutional levels may well contribute to ongoing distress. These factors may also interact with social class, poverty, poor social capital, unemployment and poor housing.

Drawing on text from a scholarly journal for an epigraph pulls the ‘scientific’ discourses of the journal article and its concern with mental illness and migration into the language force-field of *Schizophrene*. By incorporating the Bhugra and Jones extract into her text, Kapil invites a transaction between the supposedly ‘factual’ language of scholarship and the imaginative use of language familiar to poetry and other forms of writing more readily associated with the creative. Setting these discourses alongside each other serves to destabilise the authority of one form of writing over the other, which is not to assume that the imaginative should be privileged over the scientific and scholarly or vice versa but signals the different agencies each writing affords. The explicit link between migration and mental illness is a primary

focus of *Schizophrene* and the Bhugra and Jones epigraph provides queries which Kapil's text interrogates. The contexts of 'social class, poverty, poor social capital, unemployment and poor housing' locate experience in a specific social and historical context in both Bhugra and Jones' research and in *Schizophrene*. The ethnographic studies of Corin (2007) explore experiences of psychosis in India and resonate with themes in Kapil's *Schizophrenia*. Corin's studies in India 'explore how culture helps shape psychotic experience' and that 'Indian society proposes and culturally elaborates stances of retreat and withdrawal that may act as "myth models" for articulating limit-experiences' (Corin 2007, p.277). Here 'limit-experiences' refer to what are labelled as 'psychotic' experiences in psychiatric discourse. Corin finds 'an interest in elements that escape "narrativity"' (Corin 2007, p.278), 'building a position at the margins of the normal world and retaining an aura of strangeness' (Corin 2007, p.298), 'experiences that go beyond words, representations, and symbols' (Corin 2007, p.300) and 'accounts of their experience speak to an excess of signifiers, sensations, and meanings that escape order and coherence, and to a blurring of boundaries that creates a deep sense of confusion and uncertainty' (Corin 2007, p.302-3). These experiential accounts of the 'psychotic' point towards experiences which challenge the fixity of 'psychosis' or 'schizophrenia' as diagnostic categories. Diagnoses label the individual, making a social problem a private and stigmatising concern. The phrase 'limit-experiences' situates these extreme experiences within the bounds of being human yet situated at the limit of the human ability to adequately articulate what it is to live through and alongside such experiences.

The mental illnesses which arise in relation to migration and immigration are consequences of history and social action. *Schizophrene* locates individual experience within its wider contexts of history and the social sphere, and in doing this signals that

the present day contains possibilities for transformation into an improved society in the future. Adjusting the discourses surrounding mental illnesses are one way of contributing towards this change and the agency generated between the fragments of *Schizophrene* form a small contribution towards a less damaging future.

The third epigraph draws from Elfriede Jelinek's novel *Lust* and reads in full:

The director clings to the woman who shares the bed. She's been worn out and knocked about for so long, perhaps he's intending to finish her off. Let's take a look.

*Lust* is a novel written in poetic prose and Kapil's inclusion of this epigraph signals a thematic concern with gender and the aesthetic possibilities of hybrid forms of writing. The Jelinek quote highlights the theme of gender through a scene of violence and by intimating that depicting scenes of violence is a form of voyeurism. References to 'the bed' 'knocked about' and 'let's take a look' anticipate the potential of the exhibitionism of the writer and the voyeurism of the reader in relation to the sensationalism of writing on and around trauma and the effects of personal experiences tangential to trauma. The Jelinek epigraph forestalls the sensationalism inherent in the focus on mental illness signalled in the previous epigraph by indicating an aesthetic lineage into which *Schizophrene* can be situated.

Presented together these epigraphs form the circuitry of home (Adorno), migration and mental illness (Bhugra and Jones) and gender (Jelinek) which are the locus of the harms *Schizophrene* addresses. In placing these texts at the start of *Schizophrene* Kapil invites a reading of her text as an act of listening and responding to these prior texts. The schizophrenia which echoes in *Schizophrene*'s title, and the affective processes of its fragmentary text, can be productively read with assistance from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'Schizoanalysis'. 'Schizoanalysis' 'aim[s] to

develop a materialistically and experientially based analysis of the “breakdowns” and the “breakthroughs” that characterize some of those labelled schizophrenic by psychiatry’ (Seem in Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p.xvii), which suggests a theoretical approach for analysing the experiential. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept and the political context of their writing provides a framework into which *Schizophrenie* might be read generatively. *Schizophrenie* can be approached as an engagement with ‘schizoanalysis’ as a strategy, the fragmentary form of the text suggesting ‘breakdowns’ and ‘breakthroughs’ of the experiences presented in the book. However, reading *Schizophrenie* solely through schizoanalysis as a theoretical or conceptual lens limits the agency of the text, imposing a fixity its fragmentary form resists. Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of ‘schizoanalysis’ transforms the messy reality of mental illness into theory, which distances the effects and affects inherent in experience. Conversely, the conceptualisation of ‘schizoanalysis’ provides a route into thinking about the processes which develop into the affects and effects of mental illness in *Schizophrenie*. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept provides a kind of handle with which to think about mental illness as a social and cultural construction. *Schizophrenie* is not *about* schizophrenia, it is a circuitry of fragments which when listened to together articulate the social and cultural harms of trauma. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari’s text, *Schizophrenie* resists assimilation into the category of what Camelia Elias (2004) identifies as ‘critical discourse’ (Elias 2004, p.353). Rather than a discourse, Kapil’s text animates fragmentary texts to build a lyric poetics of belonging, utilising ‘home’, migration, mental illness and gender to think about belonging and its opposites.

In the next sections I draw on the themes of economy, psychiatry, family, and the fragment to locate sites of communicative schism within *Schizophrenie*.



## **An Economy**

In a section of fragments gathered under the subtitle 'Partition' Kapil writes:

An economy is a system of apparently willing but actually involuntary exchanges. A family, for example, is really a shopfront, a glass plate open to the street. Passers-by might mistake it for a *boucherie*, splashed as the customers/butcher are with blood. Transactions frozen in place beneath a chandelier of the good knives

(Kapil 2011, p.42).

An economy is defined as 'a system of apparently willing but actually involuntary exchanges', a depiction which separates 'economy' from an explicitly financial domain and situates it instead as a form of communicative schism. The fragment goes on to locate these 'involuntary exchanges' within the family, a move which destabilises the usual assumptions of belonging associated with the idea of the family. Identifying economic exchanges as 'involuntary' evokes structural forces which shape social, cultural and emotional territories. In *Schizophrene* these forces are the family, the dispossession of people during the Partition, and the disruption of the concept of home which arises in the interplay between the immediate environment of family and national politics. Using the term 'economy' to interrogate micro and macro manifestations of home and belonging situates *Schizophrene* in the wider context of economic exchange as a primary structuring force of society. By focusing on the economy as an organising structure in the context of the effects of Partition *Schizophrene* sets individual experience into the framework of the violence underpinning this specific political act.

The etymological root of the word 'economy' draws on Greek concepts of 'household management' (Parker 1987, p.36-53) which is one of the violent forces *Schizophrene* exposes both in its origin story where the notebook of the original text is thrown 'into the garden of my *house*' (Kapil 2011, p.i) and in its presentation of the

household through images of family as a defined space of violence. In drawing a parallel between the Pindaric ode as poetic form and Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of economic 'fields' Sam Ladkin writes, 'An extended idea of the household is a particularly significant point of juncture for these different economies, as the location for the inculcation of habits in childhood, and as a site of ideological pressure' (Ladkin 2007, p.320). *Schizophrene's* attention to the household performs a similar function in that it enables Kapil to present family life as a pressure point where household management, the intersection of 'home' and 'family', is exposed as a violent economy of exchange. The affects and effects of trauma which *Schizophrene* registers arises as a consequence of this violence.

'An economy is a system of apparently willing but actually involuntary exchanges' depicts the dysfunction of familial relationships distorted by an economy of violence. 'Involuntary exchanges' also characterises interpersonal exchanges, gesturing towards psychology and *Schizophrene's* interrogation of psychiatry. Kapil describes these familial relationships as *dysfunctional* because they are 'involuntary.' In this context 'a family' becomes a set of enforced emotional and mental entanglements. Furthermore, these exchanges are merely a (shop) 'front' in which the allusion to shopping speaks back to the transactions of economic exchange, situating the family as a network of economic exchanges vulnerable to the destruction implied by the breakability of the 'glass plate', its location in a public place inviting any passer-by to observe and perhaps shatter the glass window. The reference to '*boucherie*' (butchers) towards the end of this fragment alludes to slaughter; the socially-sanctioned family life enforced through economic ties is an involuntary performance demanded by the consumer-driven society looking in through the shop window. The conjoining of 'customers/butcher' allows no one to escape; the book is a shop window, the reader is

complicit in this economy of distorted desires. The ‘apparently willing but actually involuntary exchanges’ normalises the violence of family life as a reification of relationships through economic exchange. The normalisation of violence submerges the trauma arising from violent action, hiding the causes of trauma and making its effects difficult to detect.

## **Psychiatry**

In ‘Bridging the Black Hole of Trauma’ Sandra Bloom writes of the effects and affects of trauma, depicting the experience of trauma as a ‘black hole’ into which the individual experiencing trauma is drawn. Rather than pathologizing trauma as the responsibility of the troubled individual, Bloom locates reparation within the domain of social experience. Furthermore Bloom ‘make[s] the case that artistic performance, in all its variations, is a primary integrating mechanism in an organism highly susceptible to the protective, but ultimately destructive mechanism we call *dissociation*’ (Bloom 2010, p.199). Bloom describes dissociation as ‘a primary response to traumatic experience’ (Bloom 2010, p.201) through which ‘we can deny important aspects of reality that are too disorganizing, too threatening to our own internal stability either individually or as a group’ (Bloom 2010, p.202). It is linked to fragmentation and loss of integration, specifically in relation to recollecting memories of traumatic experiences. Bloom posits evolutionary purposes for the development of artistic practices, arguing artistic creativity performs a communicative function enabling integration of the individual (back) into their society. Belonging to the wider society is core to the integration of the individual who depends upon a healthful belonging (communicative function within) to the social group, symptomatic of the essentially social nature of being human. Bloom’s attention to the loss of language function which accompanies trauma points towards the

communicative schism and the reparative work art can perform (Bloom 2010, p.204). Bloom's model is one of integration and reintegration where the isolated individual is able to reintegrate within the cultural terms of that society. *Schizophrene* is an attempt at marshalling language into a reparative action, to reintegrate the affects and effects of trauma into some form of healthful belonging. Attempts at assimilation of trauma are found in *Schizophrene*'s attention to encounters with psychiatry and as a structuring force of migrant/immigrant family life. In both instances the schism of a communicative gap provides the locus for *Schizophrene* to model difficulties between language and concepts of healing.

The depiction of an encounter with psychiatry is presented through the image of a door as barrier, a form of institutional gatekeeping. An institutional door is pivotal to Verity Spott's *Click Away Close Door Say* (Spott 2017) and I draw on Spott's encounter to parse Kapil's image of the door. Mental illness is also located in the 'involuntary exchanges' of economic circuitry as they bubble up through communicative schism witnessed in the image of family life as a performance of violence. Attempts to seek understanding or healing for the affective damage arising from these acts of violence result in encounters of absence:

What digs into the head?

(Kapil 2011, p.7)

I went to the Institute of Community Health Sciences in London, to interview Kamaldeep Bhui. Getting as far as his door.

I pressed my forehead to the door, which was cross-hatched. I could see his radio, his books, his clutter

(Kapil 2011, p.17).

Digging into the head is the role of the psychiatrist. The Institute of Community Health Sciences and Kamaldeep Bhui reference a real institute and a real clinical academic psychiatrist, signalling that this account is based on the factual: there is a historical, cultural and social context to this text. An online search for Kamaldeep Bhui reveals his expertise in ‘cultural psychiatry’ (Queen Mary University of London, no date). which indicates the type of information sought in Kapil’s account of an abandoned attempt to interview Bhui. Conducting an interview requires an interviewer, an interviewee, and a transaction of language. The depiction of the room, minus the interview, shows a space without the anticipated exchange of language. The cross-hatching on the door evokes a type of door familiar to users of public health services in the UK; this is an institutional door, with reinforced glass held together by a grid of wire intended to prevent the glass being shattered. The cross-hatching resembles the gridlines on maps and contributes towards the accumulation of references to maps and nets which are a reoccurring image throughout *Schizophrenie*. The cross-hatching on the psychiatrist’s door emphasizes the door as a barrier, distancing the speaker from the institutional and professional discourses to which she seeks access. Whilst Bhui’s absence means that dialogue is not possible, the presence of a ‘radio’ and ‘his books’ signal the presence of a silenced language. The radio and the books require a human presence to bring their language to life through acts of attention in the form of listening and reading. ‘Clutter’ signals the uselessness of these forms without the animating presence of the human ear and eye. In pressing her ‘forehead to the door’ the speaker is simultaneously leaning towards the window to find out whether the office is occupied and emphasising a gap between her search for understanding and the barrier presented by the institutional door.

The significance of doors is given extraordinary treatment in Spott's *Click Away Close Door Say* (Spott 2017). Here the image of the door takes on menacing proportions, appearing early in the book as:

The second door, the second  
one before me is managed by two codes:  
one on the outside of the door if you  
are coming in, and one on the inside  
if you are going out. One door, a shrinking  
through-space hatching to the room,  
to make some sense of what you see the door is undisclosed.

Once the person on the in-  
side taps the code they open up the  
second door to me or the first door to  
them, so as to go through but not around.

(Spott 2017, p.10)

The door later reappears as 'It is not a thing but a place, a central fucking door, / object of completion, of taking' (Spott 2017, p.58), and later still, 'I do not want to walk through this door to stay inside that door to remain out here between them' (Spott 2017, p.83). In a commentary on *Click Away Close Door Say* Danny Hayward identifies the door as 'the poem's master metaphor' (Hayward 2017, p.27) and the poem itself an 'attempt to rip the poem's master metaphor out of its frame' (Hayward 2017, p.27). Spott's door, like Kapil's, appears in the context of institutionalised mental health care provision. Reading Spott's and Kapil's renderings of doors in parallel emphasises the power of the door as an image of exclusion and entry, barrier and boundary between different epistemologies, and how these become manifest in the economies of institutional settings through access and withdrawal of language. The door might be a

mouth. It is the violence of institutionalised causes of trauma which amplifies the significance of the door in *Click Away Close Door Say*; the door, if it is a metaphor, is a metaphor which remains detached from a singular interpretation. Kapil's door acts as a barrier; unable to enter the psychiatrist's office, Kapil is unable to access what she has sought. Alternatively, if the door is a boundary rather than a barrier, the map-like 'cross-hatching' may indicate that the professionalised discourses of cultural psychiatry are not the discourses the seeker, Kapil, needs. If *Schizophrene* is concerned with boundaries rather than barriers its poetics become an attending to language as a process with a potential for healing rather than language as a barrier to healing. *Schizophrene* offers language itself as a strategy for interpreting the trauma and grief arising from Partition and its associated experiences.

The 'cross-hatched' door bears resemblance to the imagery of gridlines on maps, imagery which summons allusion to the territorial remapping of Partition. Maps appear in the third section of *Schizophrene*, 'A Healing Narrative', which comprises eight fragments of text across two pages. Four of these fragments are single lines. One fragment reads, 'I cannot make the map of healing and so this is the map of what happened in a particular country on a particular day' (Kapil, 2011, p.48). Here 'the map' refers to the literal remapping of territories and the internal map of the speaker. 'Cannot' speaks of the loss of language inherent in trauma as well as a refusal to reify personal experience. Healing as a reparative act is rooted in a shared understanding of historical specificity. The pathology which subtends the title of the book is repositioned through the work the book carries out by bearing witness to the specific harms and violence which carry trans-generationally through the diaspora of which Kapil writes. The economy of trauma in *Schizophrene* is measured in the absence of language, an absence which locates the affect and effects of trauma.

## Family

The role of the family provides the third locus for *Schizophrene's* examination of communicative schism and trauma. In the 'Partition' section of *Schizophrene* 'the family' is presented as: 'A family, for example, is really a shopfront, a glass plate open to the street. Passers-by might mistake it for a boucherie, splashed as the customer / butcher are with blood' (Kapil 2011, p.42). The family scene reappears in the same section twelve pages later:

The schizophrenic's work is to make the house schizophrenic: an illuminated yet blackened construction at the centre of the field. All of the lights are on and the curtains are not drawn, exposing the occupants in the rituals of their illnesses. There is the butcher with his hatchet, compulsively chopping the meat. There is the butcher's wife, washing the table then setting the meat down upon it. There are the butcher's children sitting down to eat. When the meal is done, they remove their clothing as a family and put it in a bucket to soak. Even this far from the centre of the regional metropolis, their nudity comes as a shock  
(Kapil 2011, p.54).

Presenting this insight through the lens of 'the schizophrenic' situates the origins of this insight within the broader framework of *Schizophrene* and its concern with psychosis as an embodied affect of the Partition of India. It also serves as an entryway to the fragmentary and heightened aesthetic of this paragraph, which gestures towards the scene as a 'visionary' insight. In 'exposing the occupants in the rituals of their illness' conformity to prescribed social roles is presented as a form of illness. The 'work' of the schizophrenic is to reveal, through the schism of detaching from the 'shared reality' described by Bloom (2010, p.202), a visionary encounter with family as a compulsively enacted set of harmful rituals. This vision is 'illuminated' with the societal privileging of familial bonds over other forms of relationship. Following 'illuminated' with 'yet



blackened' emphasises the enforcement of this construction of family ties, placing it 'at the centre of the field' to imply the de-centring and devaluing of alternative forms of social ties. In this visionary scene interpersonal exchanges of family members are presented as brutal, analogous to butchery. An animal aspect of human behaviour is rendered in the killing involved in butchery, where the consumer and the consumed become indistinguishable. A parity between 'family' and 'murder' is intimated, alluding to the severe losses accumulating through enacting the social and economic practices which underpin and perpetuate the family as a primary structure around which social life is based. Closing with an image of 'their nudity' summons the vulnerability of the human body and the proximity to the human form to the animal bodies butchered in this visionary insight.

Throughout this fragment the device of 'the schizophrenic' serves as a lens through which to distance the reader from this presentation of a scene which brutally critiques the normative social structures. The vision can be dismissed as 'psychotic' by the reader unwilling to consider the possibility of the nuclear family as a form of violence and, furthermore, that violence forms the basis of prevailing social structures.

Drawing on the philosopher Simone Weil's *The Iliad or The Poem of Force* assists with thinking about the effects of violence at an individual and collective level. In writing on force Weil says, 'To define force – it is that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a *thing*. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all' (Weil 2005, p.183). 'That *x*' is a violence which dehumanises. Weil continues, revealing the harm violence causes to the individual:

An extraordinary entity this – a thing that has a soul. And as for the soul, what an extraordinary house it finds itself in! Who can say what it costs it, moment by moment, to accommodate itself to this residence, how much writhing and bending, folding and pleating are required of it? It was not made to live inside a thing; if it does so, under pressure of necessity, there is not a single element of its nature to which violence is not done

(Weil 2005, p.185).

Private harm is configured by Weil as the contortion of the soul. In the excerpts from Kapil's text which focus on the family, private harms are revealed in the destructiveness of the family as an institution. The private and individualised harms arising from conformity to enforced social roles, in the form of the nuclear family, intimate the public concerns of the family as a foundation for the social and economic basis of society. Weil shows the violence of force to be a cause of trauma. The imposition of force results in further trauma in that the recipient of violence – in the moment of being subject to that violence – becomes an object of violence, which is to say their subjectivity is erased. Force within relationships instrumentalises relationships, reifying those relationships. The imagery of butchery is Kapil's depiction of reified family relationships and the destructive interpersonal dynamics which are a result of force. Weil's *The Iliad* was written at the start of the Second World War and the focus on force is the concern of the instrumentalization of human life as it unfolded under Hitlerism and the Nazi regime. Weil links public concerns with the private troubles witnessed in her description of the contortions of the soul attempting to survive in the contorted body. The individual is reified in a society which seeks to instrumentalise social activity. Kapil's *Schizophrenie* is a document which takes the form of a fragmented account of how private experiences are shaped by public concerns in the form of the trans-generational effects of Partition. *Schizophrenie* suggests that these effects may include the trans-generational transmission of trauma.

*Schizophrenie* engages with a range of aesthetic strategies which create a text able to resist reification. By resisting narrative *Schizophrenie* resists the force and violence of imposed meaning-making, offering instead a form of language that withstands the fragmentary impact traumatic memory has on language. As a strategy the withholding of narrative enables Kapil to depict violence and force without recreating those scenes and in doing so perpetuating a narrative of violence. Kapil's strategy for writing violence includes the use of occasional images, such as the family scenes and the door, as insertions of the end-results of violence rather than depicting violence-in-action. Kapil's motif of 'touch' speaks to the visceral quality of her images, her language, and the fragmentation of the text. In resisting narrative, as her section title 'A Healing Narrative' indicates, Kapil's text does the work of 'touching something lightly many times' (Kapil 2011, p.61). Light touch is the opposite of force, it is a form of care, a somatic register of a desire to ensure that the language of this text, in resisting force, offers an alternative to violence. The communicative function of touch is significant in *Schizophrenie*. In the 'Quick Notes' which close the book Kapil writes, 'In making a book that barely said anything, I hoped to offer: this quality of touch' (Kapil 2011, p.71). The touch of *Schizophrenie* is the touch of language which, to use Kapil's own words 'barely said anything'. This lightness of touch is the opposite of the coercive force of replaying scenes of active violence and the imposition of narrative on a series of fragmentary memories.

### **The Fragment**

The fragments which comprise *Schizophrenie* form the basis of the communicative transactions the book conducts. The language of these fragments provides the material for the reparative action, the healing, *Schizophrenie* attempts. The hybrid form of the

book resists categorisation: it is neither a book of poems nor a novel. Kapil's description of the text as 'a book that barely said anything' (Kapil 2011, p.71) and the fragmentary form of the text indicates *Schizophrene*'s emphasis on the work of language and grammar rather than narrative, the texture of language rather than meaning-making. In emphasising these aspects *Schizophrene* shares qualities with the lyric. Kapil's blog 'The Vortex of Formidable Sparkles' (Kapil, no date) documents this emphasis on materiality as a process of writing emerging from physical experiences as a form of embodied poetics. In the Introduction to their *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness* the poet CA Conrad writes of their creation of 'ritualized structures where being anything but present was next to impossible' (Conrad 2014, p.xi) as a prompt to writing poetry. Kapil's blog documents a comparable process which seeks to generate writing that speaks of and listens to present experience. In the context of traumatic experience and its associated tendency towards enacting the compulsion to repeat, this focus on the present becomes a significant tool for resisting the 'black hole' of trauma (Bloom 2010). Kapil's oeuvre connects the physical and writing processes of an embodied poetics to experiences of trauma (Kapil 2006, 2009, 2011, 2015; van der Kolk 1994). Kapil's adoption of somatic processes to generate writing leads to a fragmentary lyric poetics which mirrors the fragmentary qualities of traumatic memory. By moving outwards from the body into language the process of writing mediates between trauma and the listener/reader.

The fragmentary form of Kapil's texts witnesses the trauma of historic harms which re-emerge through these somatic processes of writing. Bearing witness to violence rather than attempting to represent it is one strategy Kapil uses to construct a text that performs acts of reparation. In the areas of blank space on individual pages and between fragments of text, *Schizophrene* provides space for the fragments to coexist

without being stitched together into a linear narrative. This reflects the loss of language which Bloom (2010) attributes to a function of trauma and the eschewing of ‘narrativity’ that Corin (2007) identifies as a trait of ‘limit experiences’ such as trauma, psychosis or schizophrenia. Kapil’s fragmentary poetics invites the reader to participate in the meaning-making process of the text, a gesture which approximates the writer’s experiences of making meaning. This participative process is another strategy for generating writing which is collaborative and attempts to eschew an authorial imposition (violence) upon the reader. The fragmentary text invites an elision of the author/reader dichotomy, positioning the reader’s experience of interpreting the text in relation to the author’s experience of writing through and of experiences of trauma as an effect of the force of violence.

In parsing the fragment as a form of writing it is helpful to draw on two differing accounts of the fragment as a form. Marjorie Levinson develops a critique of the fragment in *The Romantic Fragment Poem*, emphasising ‘irresolution’ as intrinsic to the form; ‘Irresolution - a feature dialectically dependent on an idea of completion – naturally varies in accordance with the *particular* idea of resolution felt to be relevant’ (Levinson 1986, p.25). Here Levinson interprets the fragment within the framework of the specific properties of its literary and historical context; it is understood within a narrative. Despite the properties of linearity offered by context, the fragment achieves ‘irresolution’ through being situated in relation to the narrative trajectory yet not realising those trajectories through resolution of its supposed partial form into a ‘whole’. Levinson later continues:

The differential which the poem presents as its appointed limit – the condition of its formal achievement – will be seen to express the work’s internal

divisiveness and contradiction, and to mark the site where its self-thwarting (which is its self-realization) takes place

(Levinson 1986, p.25).

The 'self' in the terms 'self-thwarting' and 'self-realization' speak of the Romantic fragment's identity; these fragments are part of a *being*, which is to say they are understood within a specific literary context. The opening 'Passive Notes' which introduce *Schizophrene* indicate that the fragmentary text is generated through as a series of failed processes, actions which can be described as 'self-thwarting', and the text is 'realised' as *Schizophrene* coheres into a book. Levinson's descriptions of the 'irresolution' and 'divisiveness' fit with *Schizophrene*'s ambiguity which plays on these qualities to generate its reparative agency.

Camelia Elias' account of fragments in poetry and in critical texts finds:

In the end the fragment forges two positions: it *is* and it *becomes*. Whereas the fragment's manifestation as text throughout history is a question of constitution (*being*), in critical discourse the fragment's manifestations are most often related to the question of function (*becoming*), which is to say that as a text in its own right the fragment is conceptualized in terms of content, whereas in critical discourse the fragment is conceptualized in terms of form. However, form and content are inextricably linked insofar as their interrelation and position vis-à-vis the manifestations of the fragment represented in the dichotomy *being / becoming* also constitutes the poetics of the fragment as a poetics of intersection *par excellence*

(Elias 2004, p.353).

Here Elias identifies contingency and agency within form which is dependent on context. Where the fragment appears in the context of the poetic Elias defines the fragment as *being*, its existence is contingent on its (historical) context, as Levinson's

account of the fragment also demonstrates. In the context of critical discourse, which in Elias' account refers to those texts considered within the broad framework of critical theory, Elias identifies an agency associated with the fragment; it is related to 'becoming.' A difficulty arises here in the split between 'being' and 'becoming' which Elias resolves through the trope of 'intersection'. Kapil's fragmentary text resists easy categorisation and answers neither to Elias' fragment in the context of poetry nor the fragment within critical discourse. Kapil's textual fragments intersect with recognisable bodies of critical discourse, as the epigraph from Adorno's *Minima Moralia* signals and the focus on post-colonial experience of estrangement suggests (Browne 2017, p.73). However, Kapil's foregrounding of the experiential, manifest in the presence of memories, the somatic, the space on the page, even the authorial acknowledgement of the procedural underpinnings which contributed to *Schizophrene*'s final form, enables the text to resist reification into theory. *Schizophrene* draws on a literary tradition of the fragment as poetic form; the text can be situated in the wider literary and historical context of Kapil's oeuvre and the milieu of experimental poetic writing in which her books are reviewed and received. Situating *Schizophrene* in this way makes the case for *Schizophrene* as a lyric fragment. Utilising Elias' framework, Kapil's text is neither poetry nor critical discourse; it is both being and becoming. The generous approach to the lyric as form, mode and genre asserted in Thain's 'messiness is a part of what makes the concept of lyric so interesting' (Thain 2016, p.3) enables an enfolding of critical discourse into a poetics, a manoeuvre which Kapil's fragmentary text achieves. As a fragmentary lyric drawing on different lineages of the fragment as a form, *Schizophrene* utilises the resources of poetry and theoretical critical discourse to model the reparative action language can pursue.

The 'Passive Notes' at the start of *Schizophrene* present the book as a failure to 'write an epic' (Kapil 2011, p.i); a failure to achieve narrative coherence and failure to produce a text which belongs to a recognisable, and historically situated, poetic tradition. The section of the book with the title 'A Healing Narrative' does not provide a narrative; *Schizophrene* eschews linear narrative through its presentation as an assemblage of fragmentary text. The notion of a 'healing narrative' reflects a cultural association of linear coherence which is in turn equated with health. The fragmentary form of *Schizophrene* challenges the equation of linear coherence with health, demonstrating an alternative model of agency which emerges from working with (writing with) what is available (Kapil's processes for generating writing). The notion of a healing narrative is the cliché underpinning *Schizophrene*; Kapil's text posits that imposing narrative is to dispense a predetermined healing intervention (the violence of force) which denies the traumatised individual their agency. Denying an individual their agency is to deprive them of their *being* (historically situated) which necessarily incorporates the inclusion of all structural components of their environment. The activity of healing is reparative and demands the recovery of agency. Kapil's *Schizophrene* locates an agency between the poles Elias identifies as poetry and critical discourse. In locating a combination of being and becoming, Elias' 'intersection' (Elias 2004, p.353), the poetics of *Schizophrene*'s accumulative fragments performs an intersection with the violence of imposed social and cultural constructs. Eschewing the violence of imposition, Kapil's writing performs the action of 'touching something lightly many times' (Kapil 2011, p.61) as a reparative act. Given *Schizophrene*'s concern with the effects of the Partition of India the reparative action of the book also encompasses reclamation of agency taking the form of writing by black writers and writers of colour. Kapil's contribution to the poetics *Threads* explicitly discusses racial



acts of violence and reparative actions in poetry and its adjacent communities (Parmar, Ramayya and Kapil 2018) and a collaboration with Sandeep Parmar interrogates lyric violence in relation to colonialism (Parmar and Kapil 2017). Both collaborative texts address themes which appear in *Schizophrene* and help to situate a reading of *Schizophrene* as a reparative reclamation of the effects and affects of colonialism.

In *Schizophrene* Kapil shows how language might resist becoming a ‘thing’, where a ‘thing’ – following Weil – might be ‘healing’ as a destination or ‘narrative’ which requires a cogent trajectory. *Schizophrene* shows that these destinations are socially and culturally constructed, determinants of a fixed language. Instead, language itself offers a form of continual becoming, a process not a destination; being as fragmentary rather than a temporally linear movement. Each of these possibilities signals that the rupture trauma creates might be considered as something which offers alternative perspectives on dominant social and cultural practices. Rather than pursuing a ‘healing narrative’ to assimilate the trauma into the dominant social and cultural discourses and assuaging the differences of those who have experience of trauma, the fragmentary language of *Schizophrene* provides a process of reparation. If, as Bloom argues, loss of the language function is a result of trauma (Bloom 2010, p.204), Kapil’s text attempts a reparative retrieval of language where language is a process located in the material world rather than the imposition of a predetermined trajectory. A close reading of Kapil’s book as fragments of texts arranged under the title of *Schizophrene* performs a close listening to an agency that emerges between these fragments. The act of listening to the fragments performs a somatic poetics of ‘touch’ which animate the agency of the language.

## **Articulation and Agency**

The writing of Roland Barthes provides an exemplary exposition of the fragment as form and its agency in relationship to articulation of trauma and its attendant losses. The work of retrieving language from the silence of loss is documented in Barthes' *Mourning Diary* (Barthes 2012). *Mourning Diary* traces Barthes' experiences of grief and mourning following the death of his mother. These diary entries appear as fragmentary notes. In his afterword to *Mourning Diary* Richard Howard writes, 'Mourning Diary is in fact a diary only in a rather desperate sense: the writer kept a stack of quartered typing paper on his desk, and from the day of his mother's death until nearly his own [...] he would scribble one or another or sometimes several of these aphoristic losses' (Barthes 2012, p.259). In a reading of *Mourning Diary* Wernmei Yong Ade locates Barthes' preference for writing in fragments in his concern with writing being 'discontinuous, not subject to the passing of time' (Ade 2016, p.365). The fragmented form speaks of a breaking away from the social order of a shared experience of the temporal, a distancing which gestures towards the solitary, and in the instance of the composition process of *Mourning Diary* also speaks of the private experiences of grief separating Barthes from the social sphere. It is in this context that Barthes writes of 'get[ting] in touch' as a necessity:

Exploration of my (apparently vital) need of solitude: and yet I have a (no less vital) need of my friends. I must therefore: 1) force myself to 'call' them from time to time, find the energy to do so, combat my – telephonic (among other kinds) - apathy; 2) ask them to understand that above all they must let me call them. If they less often, less systematically, got in touch with me, that would mean for me that I must get in touch with them

(Barthes 2012, p.181).

The fragmentary as it is manifested in Barthes' *Mourning Diary* points towards a resistance which is inherent in loss. Barthes' 'touch' maintains contact with others and offers a sympathetic counterpoint to the role of touch in *Schizophrene* (Kapil 2011, p.61). The fragmentary form of *Mourning Diary* assists with reading *Schizophrene* as performing some of the tasks of grieving. In this reading of *Schizophrene*, language holds a reparative function directed towards loss. The processes of grieving the losses arising from trauma provide the agency to recover language in the form of articulation. The losses in *Schizophrene* are located in the personal, through the depictions of specifically gendered experience and the scenes of family life, and the historical political background to *Schizophrene* which locates trauma as a consequence of the Partition of India. Kapil's text situates grief and mourning as a continual process accompanying the rupture of trauma with a refusal to end at the point of rupture. Instead of the traumatised subject becoming an 'object' because of the violence of trauma, subjectivity may be recuperated through the experiential processes of grief and mourning.

In utilising the fragment as the primary form of composition in *Schizophrene* Kapil foregrounds the resistances to be found through interrogating the difficulties between language and healing. In making use of the fragment as the organising principle for the text, Kapil rejects the process of narrative trajectory as a 'map' through the series of traumas and their associated losses which punctuate the book. As Kapil writes, 'I cannot make the map of healing and so this is the map of what happened in a particular country on a particular day' (2011, p.48). Instead of narration Kapil deploys reoccurring images and processes of writing practices to create a text that, in Kapil's own words, 'barely said anything' (2011, p.71). The refusal of narrative is the rejection of chronology. Utilising the fragment as both process and form creates a text that

witnesses the resistance which accompanies attempts to articulate loss. Articulation of loss is a continual process which *Schizophrene* resists fixing into the chronology of explanation that narrative offers.

*Schizophrene* models difficulties between language and healing. The themes of economy, family, psychiatry and the fragment have been explored as sites of communicative schism locating trauma in the microcosm of family and the historical context of the Partition of India. Bloom's (2003; 2010) theorisations of the assimilation of trauma are used to consider the reparative actions of *Schizophrene*. Simone Weil's conceptualisation of violence in *The Iliad or the Poem of Force* has assisted thinking about the reifying effects of force including the force of narrative trajectories. Finally, Barthes' *Mourning Diary* has helped to situate the fragment in relation to loss and grief. This chapter argues that the language of the fragmentary form in *Schizophrene* carries out reparative work by 'touching' the harms of trauma through the practice of reading as a form of listening whilst resisting the reifying of experience through representation or direct discussion.

## Chapter 3 Listening and Loss: Denise Riley's 'Listening for lost people'

In the introduction to her contribution in *Infinite Difference*, an anthology of 'U.K. Women Poets' (Etter 2010), Denise Riley writes, 'My attempts at writing stay strongly attached to lyric, and to continuing modern lyric, its cadence and musicality, and its meditative powers' (Riley 2010, p.47). The following chapter develops a close reading of a single instance of Riley's modern lyric, the poem 'Listening for lost people'. The focus on listening as a social and poetic practice connects the poem to loss and grief, a theme which unites many of the poems in *Say Something Back* (Riley 2016), the collection in which 'Listening for lost people' appears. Loss and grief are the twin preoccupations of Riley's short prose chapbook *Time Lived, Without its Flow* (Riley 2012), the publication which precedes *Say Something Back* and shares with the collection a concern with the experience of the temporal disruption of grief. The temporal disorientation which grief frequently prompts can also be found in Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* when he writes 'Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language' (Barthes 1975, p.14). This 'state of loss', which Barthes describes as a loss of all points of subjective orientation, resonates with the affective experience of grief. The texts Barthes identifies as texts of bliss are the texts which he associates with loss and to which grief is inevitably attendant. Andrea Brady writes of Barthes' 'deeply psychoanalytic account' (Brady 2017, p.287) of the pleasure of the text and through such an account Barthes' connection between writing and grief might be explicated through biographical detail.

The following chapter draws on Barthes' text to help with reading Riley's poem through an eschewing of the biographical in favour of thinking about reading as a process of listening. To read Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* as a text of bliss is to encounter a text which locates a proximity between loss and reading. If the process of reading is to move through language, the process of reading incorporates an encounter which cannot be re-experienced; it is lost once those words have been read. Reading is a process of listening to loss. This processing of language is to listen to the passage of language through the mind's ear. It is in thinking about language as a process in relation to loss that Barthes assists with reading 'Listening for lost people'.

The following chapter draws assistance from Michelle Bouldous Walker's reading of Luce Irigaray (Walker 2017, p.75-125) and Jean-Luc Nancy's *Listening* (2007) to develop a close reading of 'Listening for lost people.' Walker's conceptualisation of attentive listening is informed by the psychoanalytically orientated philosophical methods of Irigaray, whilst Nancy's thesis on listening draws on the phenomenological tradition. In combining these different approaches to listening I read 'Listening for lost people' as a listening act attending to the grief of loss. In this reading the lyric functions as both a speaking and listening device, a process which Riley describes as a 'talkative ear'.

### **'Listening for lost people'**

The recent critical reception of Denise Riley's poetry focuses on the lyric (Kinnahan 1996; Butler 2005; Brady 2013; Piette 2016; Solomon 2013; Hardy 2014, p.122; Riley 2016a). Reviewing Riley's *Say Something Back* the poet Peter Riley writes, 'The word lyric has hovered round Denise Riley's poetry for as long as I can remember, mainly at her own instigation in her theoretical writings and teaching, and it still haunts

commentary on her poetry' (Riley 2016a). Writing on repetition in Riley's poetry Andrea Brady 'reads her poetry against the claims of her theory, to argue that Riley's thesis that language is "impersonal" is challenged by the lyric dialogues she stages' (Brady 2013, p.138). Both Peter Riley and Brady frame Riley's poetry in the context of her philosophical and theoretical feminist writing on issues of language. In *The Words of Selves* (2000a) Riley dedicates a chapter to 'Lyric Selves' drawing on her own poems, 'The Castalian Spring' and 'Affections of the Ear'. In *The Words of Selves* Riley argues that language is impersonal, a contention Brady (2013) resists through a reading of Riley's poetry. Sam Solomon (2013) finds a shared political project across Riley's philosophical and theoretical work and her poetry: 'The poetry and prose seem to stem from the same set of questions and concerns, even as they each take different kinds of responsibilities and linguistic approaches to them' (Solomon 2013, p.167). In each of these commentaries Riley's lyric is the focus of scrutiny.

The poem 'Listening for lost people' first appeared in the *London Review of Books* in May 2014 and was later published in Riley's *Say Something Back* (2016). The initial publication of the poem followed Riley's long hiatus from publishing poetry. The subject matter of Riley's twenty-first century poetry and her chapbook *Time Lived, Without its Flow* (2012) centers on the death of her son. Riley herself links this loss with the re-emergence of her poetry (Baraitser and Riley 2016). 'Listening for lost people' appears on the page as a square of text and adopts the form of an English sonnet. It contains a straightforward lexicon without specialist vocabularies. It is a lyric poem following conventional syntax to convey a sense of the speaker's internal dialogue. Its imagery draws predominantly on the sea, whilst thematically it considers death. The poem in full:

### **Listening for lost people**

Still looking for lost people - look unrelentingly.  
'They died' is not an utterance in the syntax of life  
where they belonged, no *belong* - reanimate them  
not minding if the still living turn away, casually.  
Winds ruck up its skin so the sea tilts from red-blue  
to blue-red: into the puckering water go his ashes  
who was steadier than these elements. Thickness  
of some surviving thing that sits there, bland. Its  
owner's gone nor does the idiot howl - while I'm  
unquiet as a talkative ear. Spring heat, a cherry  
tree's fresh bronze leaves fan out and gleam - to  
converse with shades, yourself become a shadow.  
The souls of the dead are the spirit of language:  
you hear them alight inside that spoken thought.

(Riley 2016, p.32)

In the reading of the poem which follows I take my cue from the title of the poem to utilise the concept of 'listening' to read the poem in its relation to loss.

### **Reading as Listening**

In her book *Slow Philosophy*, Michelle Boulous Walker reads the philosopher Irigaray to consider 'what it means to think of reading as a kind of listening' (Walker 2017, p.104). Walker discusses reading as a kind of attentive listening, seeking an ethical form of reading that emphasises instituting a love of wisdom rather than a pursuit of knowledge (Walker 2017, p.xvi). Walker's propositions that 'listening is to stage an encounter' and listening 'pays attention to the other' (Walker 2017, p.104) provide useful positions from which to read Riley's 'Listening for lost people.' The title of Riley's poem acts to explicitly position the poem as an encounter of 'Listening for lost people.' There are three parts to this encounter: through the action of the poem's



speaker performing an act of listening, through readerly attention to the poem, and through the poet's act of listening during the composition of the poem. Each of these three approaches also encompasses an act of 'attention to the other', where the 'other' is the 'lost' which the processes of the poem seek to rediscover. As well as staging encounters of listening, the poem also stages encounters with 'people.' The most apparent of these takes place between the speaker and a deceased addressee. However, the poem is populated with allusions to other 'lost people' which – as I show later – serve to position the act of listening as a dialogue which transcends the limitations of corporeal temporality.

The poem begins with a title which announces a commitment to listening. The lower case 'l' and 'p' in the words 'lost people' underscores that these are not proper names; these are not The Lost People. The opening line of the poem undercuts the proposed emphasis on listening by switching to the act of looking; 'Still looking for lost people – look unrelentingly.' The noun 'Still' sets the poem into motion with the deep silence associated with stillness, the silence into which the 'listening for lost people' will take place through the act of clearing space for the poem. The verb 'still' slows the poem through quietening the movement of rhythm and progression of the poem as movement. Whether this stillness is one of non-movement or continual movement remains unclear. One may be stationary in the act of listening, or one may be actively physically searching. Ending the line with the word 'unrelentingly' punctuated by a full stop links the word 'still' with a timeless quality; this search does not reach an endpoint. The full stop paradoxically emphasises that the past tense of 'lost' in this sentence remains in the present. The opening line emphasising 'looking' and 'look', through its jarring appearance after a title announcing a focus on 'listening', serves to disorientate the reader who through the process of the first line is required to consider differences

between 'looking' and 'listening.' During the act of reading this poem the act of 'looking', which is the process of reading the poem on the page, is an act of listening to the words as they are articulated either silently or aloud. As a process this fits with Walker's proposition of reading as a kind of listening, which facilitates a reading of the poem as staging the encounter of searching for lost people. In order to develop this further one may read the poem as a mechanism for retrieving the deceased, which is what the poem goes on to attempt to perform.

The quality of perpetuity which underpins 'unrelentingly' in the first line is continued into the second line, "'They died'" is not an utterance in the syntax of life'. Reading this as '[...] unrelentingly. / "'They died"' speaks of the continual experience of loss that accompanies death. The word 'utterance' signals the status of the poem as a lyric by echoing Northrop Frye's 'The lyric is [...] pre-eminently the utterance that is overheard' (Frye 1957 in Jackson and Prins 2014, p.32). It is pertinent to the emphasis on listening in Riley's poem that Frye goes on to insist that 'The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners' (Frye 1957 in Jackson and Prins 2014, p.32). Reading 'Listening for lost people' alongside Frye's contribution to the theorisation of the lyric form, Riley's poem can be interpreted as an intervention which insists on the centrality of listening as a component of the lyric. 'Utterance' brings the concept of 'speaking' into the matrix of communication verbs within the poem – 'listening' and 'looking' – which propel the poem into motion. Utterance is a form of speaking which demands the use of language and is tied here to 'the syntax of life', a phrase which resolutely ties 'life' to language and furthermore ties language to the living of life. Conversely, the death referred to in the quoted phrase 'They died', is followed by 'is not an utterance', signalling that death has no language because the dead cannot speak and lyric is the

speech of the living. The poem proceeds to find the ‘lost people’ or bring the dead to life, through language:

‘They died’ is not an utterance in the syntax of life  
where they belonged, no *belong* - reanimate them  
not minding if the still living turn away, casually.

The shift from past tense ‘belonged’ to the present tense ‘*belong*’ serves to bring the deceased back to life through the mechanism of language. In choosing the action of ‘not minding’ the speaker’s linguistic manoeuvre causes other people to ‘turn away’ and isolate the speaker as she continues her dialogue with the deceased. The pause preceding ‘casually’ indicates that this linguistic manoeuvre is not shocking to others; it is perhaps such a familiar manoeuvre for those experiencing grief that it can be ‘casually’ ignored. The second appearance of ‘still’ adds emphases to the ‘still’ which opens the poem. ‘Still living’ distinguishes life and death, separating the living from the dead, and signals the silence accompanying the act of turning away. This doubling of silence and the action of turning away indicate a process of turning aside from others in order to deepen the experience of listening for and to a sense of the deceased. This turning away facilitates the unfolding dialogue with the dead in the second and third quatrains of the sonnet. The first quatrain establishes the process of listening to language as a form of encounter between the living and the dead. The second and third quatrains enact Walker’s ‘pay[ing] attention to the other’ (Walker 2017, p.104). The progression into attentive listening registers in the switch from the discursive lexicon of the first quatrain to the heightened aesthetic combining imagery and allusion in the second and third quatrains. The movement from an everyday form of listening to the

attentive listening poetry demands establishes a shift from the ‘utterance’ of spoken language to the attention to stress, rhythm and meter in the literary register of lyric. The heightened register of the lyric demands attentive listening from the reader and underscores the process of reading as a form of listening. Insisting on the listening function of the lyric addresses the concerns with the singularity of the lyric voice stated in the introductory discussion of this thesis. ‘Listening for lost people’ presents as ostensibly a singular voice yet enacts the work of attentive listening to its own language, revealing a plurality of ‘voices’ or activities of meaning-making within the framework of the sonnet. If the first quatrain establishes what the reader is listening to, the second and third quatrains move deeper into an engagement with the complexities of the lyric’s capacities for listening.

Beginning ‘Winds ruck up its skin [...]’ the second quatrain continues the concern with the processes of language and the temporal through delaying reference to what it is the winds ‘ruck up’ and whose ‘skin’ is the object of attention. ‘Winds’ disturb the silence of the previous quatrain whilst ruck, an unusual word, begins the development of the imagery which informs this quatrain. Amongst the definitions for ‘ruck’ offered in the Oxford English Dictionary is the transitive verb ‘ruck’ meaning ‘To crease or wrinkle (fabric, clothing, etc.); to cause to form untidy folds or ridges. Frequently with up’ informs the imagery, and the inclusion of ‘up’ fits with Riley’s use of ‘ruck up’. ‘[R]uck up its skin’ suggests wrinkles in skin and whilst the ‘skin’ is not attributed to a specific body at this point, it echoes back to the ‘lost people’ of the title and opening line. Line five continues, ‘so the sea tilts from red-blue’ continuing through line six, ‘to blue-red: into the puckering water go his ashes’, linking the imagery of ‘ruck up’ to the waves of the sea. ‘Tilts’ emphasises the liting movement of the sonnet and the sea, which merge in the rhythm of the poem particularly in the mid-

section of the sonnet. 'Red-blue / to blue-red' reinforces the transitory aspect of the living body (symbolised by the red) and its merging with the sea (symbolised by the blue) with the switching from 'red-blue / to blue-red' mapping in symbolic form the past to present tense movement from the earlier 'belonged' to '*belong*'. Reference to 'skin' animates the 'puckering' into the shape and action a mouth might make in preparation to kiss, as in to 'pucker up', whilst also echoing the imagery and sound of 'ruck.' Alluding to the mouth through 'puckering' foregrounds the relationship between death and language, the central subject of the sonnet, referencing back to the 'utterance' of line two, and the 'talkative' and 'spoken' of lines ten and fourteen respectively. References to the mouth also allude to the 'speaking' function of the lyric and ask that the reading of the sonnet listens to its 'speaking'.

The physical death within the poem is confirmed in the word 'ashes' yet the enjambement with the following line, 'who was steadier than these elements. Thickness' immediately revives the 'ashes' into the living by starting the new line with 'who' and continuing the line which goes on to parse as a question although not presented as one. Closing with 'of some surviving thing that sits there, bland. Its', the second quatrain moves from 'surviving' to 'bland' and in so doing repeats the 'living' to 'casually' transition of line four. Repetition here reinforces the motif of modulating from life to death, with 'casually' and 'bland' emphasising the ordinariness of death. The constraint of the sonnet provides a process for thinking about death within the formalised structure of the form and the form structures the thought processes. The open ending to line eight, which closes the modulation between life and death of the second quatrain, moves into the beginning of the third quatrain which opens with another reviving of the deceased by starting with the word 'owner's' which attaches the life of the deceased to an individual person. Walker's parsing of attentive listening as

‘listening is to stage an encounter’, ‘pays attention to the other’ and ‘reading as a kind of listening’ (Walker 2017, p.104) provide useful lenses through which to approach the unfolding action of the third quatrain. Following on from the ‘Its’ at the end of the second quatrain, the third quatrain reads:

owner’s gone nor does the idiot howl - while I’m  
unquiet as a talkative ear. Spring heat, a cherry  
tree’s fresh bronze leaves fan out and gleam - to  
converse with shades, yourself become a shadow.

Here the encounter between the speaker and the deceased is doubled through ‘the idiot howl’. In the context of the ‘lost’ in the title ‘Listening for lost people’, the ‘idiot howl’ prompts allusion to William Wordsworth’s poem ‘The Idiot Boy’ (Wordsworth and Coleridge 2006 [1798], p.81-96). In this poem from *Lyrical Ballads* the narrative depicts a relationship between a mother and her son, including an episode in which the mother fears her son is lost and dead, only to be reunited with him later in the poem. Reading ‘The Idiot Boy’ connects the loss in Riley’s poem to a maternal loss, a specificity which is otherwise not apparent in the poem. The focus on maternal loss is confirmed in the reviews which followed publication of the collection in which ‘Listening for lost people’ appears, with reviewers discussing the collection in the context of Riley’s writing about the death of her son (Burt 2016; Coates 2016; Kellaway 2016; Piette 2016; Mlinko 2016; Sampson 2016; Troy-Donovan 2016). Riley’s allusion to ‘The Idiot Boy’ might also gesture towards the oeuvre of her contemporary, Douglas Oliver. A consistent theme in Oliver’s poetry and prose is the death of his baby son, Tom (Oliver 1990; Oliver 1996). In a reading of Oliver’s work,

Luna suggests that Tom is depicted ‘as a figure of beatific, redemptive ignorance and innocence’ (Luna 2016, p.3), a description which would also fit the son in ‘The Idiot Boy’. The encounter between Wordsworth’s ‘The Idiot Boy’ and Riley’s poem adds pathos to the loss depicted in the latter and sets up a dialogue between Wordsworth’s depiction of a maternal bond and the same relationship as portrayed in Riley’s poem. Riley’s allusion to ‘The Idiot Boy’ ‘pays attention to the other’, where ‘the other’ here is the earlier poem. The poem performs ‘reading as a kind of listening’ (Walker 2017, p.104) where Riley’s poem creates a way to re-listen to Wordsworth’s poem through the new interpretation her poem brings to the earlier poem. Riley’s poem revises the portrayal of the maternal bond in Wordsworth’s poem whilst the allusion to ‘The Idiot Boy’ adds to the understanding of ‘Listening for lost people’. These acts of listening cut through temporal time and offer intertextual commentary, enabling the reader to revise the spatial present of the poem in relation to poetic history.

The preoccupation with language in relation to loss continues through ‘howl’, ‘talkative’ and ‘converse’ in the third quatrain, to be resolved in the final two lines of the sonnet, as is traditional for the sonnet as a form. ‘I’m’ appears at the end of the ninth line and is the only appearance of the speaker as a first person. This appearance distinguishes the speaker from the ‘idiot howl’, claiming a separate identity for the speaker and the deceased. The ‘I’m’ runs into ‘unquiet as a talkative ear’, where *unquiet* seems to dissolve the ‘still’ of the first quatrain. ‘Talkative ear’ is a distinctive image and one which is recognisably belongs to Riley’s poetic oeuvre. Riley discusses the functions and image of the ear in her poem ‘Affections of the Ear’ (Riley 2000, p.94-6), *The Words of Selves* (Riley 2000a, p.106-112) and ‘Three Awkward Ears’ in *The Caught Habits of Language*, an anthology of poems published as ‘An Entertainment for W.S. Graham for Him Having Reached One Hundred’ (Boast, Ching and Hamilton

2018, p.24-25). The ‘talkative ear’ signals another doubling, this time through denoting the ‘talkative ear’ as a technical impossibility, but one which is manifest in the dual functioning of the lyric as both a speaking and a listening device. This dual functioning is also an enactment of ‘pay[ing] attention to the other’ and ‘reading as a kind of listening’, this time through Riley’s poetic conversation with the poet W.S. Graham.

The epigraph to *Say Something Back* is taken from W.S. Graham’s poem ‘Implements in their Places’:

Do not think you have to say  
Anything back. But you do  
Say something back which I  
Hear by the way I speak to you

This poem also provides the title for Riley’s collection. Riley’s contribution to the W.S. Graham tribute anthology also signals Graham’s influence on her poetry. Graham’s poetry is an exemplary form of listening; acts of listening in his work have received close critical attention from Angela Leighton (Leighton 2007; Leighton 2018). In this respect, ‘Listening for Lost People’ may also be in dialogue with W.S. Graham’s poetry, with Graham taking on the role of poetic predecessor as a poet attending to the functions of listening. Reading Riley’s poem becomes a way of engaging with a deeper poetic history of listening across temporal and spatial boundaries. In the context of this lineage of lyric listening the pluralisation of ‘people’ in the title of ‘Listening for lost people’ encompasses the plurality of losses of which the lyric speaks and to which the lyric listens. The suspension of linear time prefigured in this ‘talkative ear’ of the lyric appears as the compression of the four seasons into one sentence within ‘Listening for



lost people': 'Spring heat, a cherry / tree's fresh bronze leaves fan out and gleam - to / converse with shades'. Here 'cherry' denotes the abundance of summer, 'bronze leaves' symbolise autumn and 'shades' denote the darkening of winter. In the twelfth line the speaker makes a direct address, '[...] yourself become a shadow', where 'yourself' provides a 'you' which the 'I'm' addresses. The same line also allows for a reading where 'yourself' may be either the speaker or the addressee or even the reader. The full line, 'to / converse with shades, yourself become a shadow' suggests that to be in dialogue with the deceased is to live a shadow life, to remove oneself from the living. Reading the poem as a dialogue with the poetic record suggests an interpretation which cautions against conversing with the 'shades' of poetry instead of the living. The 'shadow' of these conversations is the text of the lyric on the page and not in the ear.

The final two lines of 'Listening for lost people' resolve the sonnet by drawing together the predominant themes of the relationship between death and language, and the imagery and words connecting with speech. 'The souls of the dead are the spirit of language: / you hear them alight inside that spoken thought' follows the traditional sonnet form in resolving the sonnet through two lines following the previous three quatrains. The linking of 'souls', 'dead', 'spirit' and 'language' in the penultimate line thread together the motifs of death and language put into relation with each other through 'souls' and 'spirit' which reach both backwards across time and ahead into the future. The final line resolves the poem by bringing that historical past into the present, incorporating the specificity of the death on which this poem dwells and foregrounding the capacity of language to bring the past into the present. The concluding 'spoken thought' traces the movement of language from inside the mind, through the mechanism of the mouth which has appeared in the imagery throughout the sonnet, to

the externalising action of ‘spoken’. The poem is a ‘spoken thought’ manifest as lyric performing its dual action of speaking and listening.

Returning to Walker’s account of the practice of attentive listening where the act of ‘listening is to stage an encounter’ and listening ‘pays attention to the other’ (Walker 2017, p.104), the closure of the poem recognises language as an encounter with the past. Such an encounter stages listening to language as a form of paying attention to the historical ‘other’ ‘listening for lost people’. The ‘lost’ of the sonnet’s title implies these people can be found and the closing lines of the sonnet resolve the dilemma of how the lost can be retrieved through the dual speaking and listening functions of the lyric.

### *A Farewell*

‘Listening for lost people’ stages a dialogue with poems which can be understood as its predecessors. Walker’s propositions that ‘listening is to stage an encounter’ and listening ‘pays attention to the other’ (Walker 2017, p.104) provide helpful ways to consider these transhistorical poetic dialogues. Reading the poem through this lens attends to what the poem *does* rather than what it might *mean*. Riley’s ‘Listening for lost people’ can be read as an act of attentive listening which cuts through the temporal, enabling the reader to revise the present poem and poems in the historic record in light of the present: ‘you hear them alight inside that spoken thought’. The role of Wordsworth’s ‘The Idiot Boy’ in relation to ‘Listening for lost people’ has already been discussed in terms of its contribution to the themes of Riley’s poem and ways that the earlier poem is revised by Riley’s contribution to the poetic conversation about maternal relationships to sons. The attentive listening to the poetic record as signalled in the title ‘Listening for lost people’ and enacted in the lyric indicates that Riley’s sonnet is likely to have a predecessor. This earlier ‘shadow poem’ appears to be Sir Philip

Sidney's 'A Farewell' (Sidney 2008, p.27). 'A Farewell' takes the form of a sonnet and shares with Riley's sonnet a preoccupation with how language demarcates loss.

Reading the poems in parallel is, drawing on Walker, to stage an encounter between the two poems with the purposes of uncovering how each poem speaks and listens to the other. Where Riley's sonnet hinges on the shift from past to present tense in 'belonged, no *belong*', Sidney's sonnet circulates around the word 'depart'. The departure in Sidney's sonnet is that of a lover leaving his beloved, an act of parting which is presented as analogous to death. In Riley's poem the act of parting happens because of an actual death.

In order to discuss Sidney's sonnet it is helpful to consider the sonnet in its entirety:

#### **A Farewell**

Oft I have mused, but now at length I find  
Why those that die, men say they do depart;  
'Depart', a word so gentle to my mind,  
Weakly did seem to paint death's ugly dart.  
But now the stars with their strange course do bind  
Me one to leave, with whom I leave my heart,  
I hear a cry of spirits faint and blind,  
That, parting thus, my chiefest part I part.  
Part of my life, the loathed part to me,  
Lives to impart my weary clay some breath;  
But that good part, wherein all comforts be,  
Now dead, doth show departure is a death,  
          Yea worse than death; death parts both woe and joy;  
          From joy I part, still living in annoy.

'Part' appears ten times, enacting the process of departing and its accompanying loss as a continual movement. Where Riley's 'lost' implies a possibility of 'found', so Sidney's

‘depart’ encompasses the possibility of return. Reading the two poems in proximity there is a shift from a locus of loss which seeks to possess in Sidney’s poem, to Riley’s sonnet which proposes the act of listening as the route towards reclaiming the lost. Sidney’s ‘A Farewell’ combines a rhetorical mode of address with the formal rhyming structure of the English sonnet to heighten the drama of the relationship between the lover and beloved. The temporary loss of parting from a lover is compared unfavourably with death, where death is found to be preferable because ‘death parts both woe and joy.’ ‘Listening for lost people’ performs an acceptance of loss through its location of loss in language. If Sidney’s poem is the shadow text to ‘Listening for lost people’, the latter poem performs an act of listening to its predecessor and stages a dialogue between the former and the latter. Riley’s act of listening to Sidney’s poem is a form of listening for lost people, finding the lost in the parting in Sidney’s sonnet and drawing on this tradition of loss as a framework to rework the loss at the centre of her poem. This act of poetic listening ‘enables a meeting in the present’ (Walker 2017, p.112) through the act of reading as an active and engaged listening as a prelude to writing.

### ***Listening and The Listeners***

Staging the encounter between Walker’s account of attentive listening and Riley’s ‘Listening for lost people’ assists with parsing the meaning-making of the sonnet. However, the emphasis on listening in the poem’s title suggests that reading for meaning is not the primary focus of this poem. Riley has written and discussed her poetry in relation to song and particularly popular song, linking this to the origins of lyric poetry (Riley 2010; Corcoran 2014). Whilst the song lyric is formed in language, song necessarily comprises a musical component. The emphasis on ‘listening’ in the

title of 'Listening for lost people' signals a significance in the sonorous aspects of the poem. It is helpful to turn to Jean-Luc Nancy's essay 'Listening' (Nancy 2007) to parse the work of sound and the work of listening in Riley's poem. Nancy is a philosopher whose 'Listening' adopts a phenomenological approach to distinguishing between different acts of listening. In situating his examination of sound in its relation to the (human) body Nancy develops a sustained inquiry into hearing and listening. Approaching hearing and listening as embodied acts, Nancy questions how positionalities of the aural construct sense and signification. Nancy's thinking about what it means to locate sense-making in the aural assists in reading Riley's poem for its sound-making and sound-sense. Locating meaning-making in the aural rather than the ocular shifts meaning from the empirically evidenced (through the visual) to that which is speculative, unobservable and felt in the body.

In an essay on close reading Adam Piette writes, 'Rereading is rehearing, going over the sounds again, becoming newly alert to the darker patterns of subversive significance cruising through the lines' (Piette 2013, p.239). Piette goes on to provide a close reading of Denise Riley's poem 'Song', identifying how:

the ordinary voice and its ordinary sounds seem to dominate, and, accordingly, readers might be tempted to rush through the sound textures as though merely listening to neighbourly chat. Riley shocks us into something different by revealing the poem's violence, and relates this revelation to alertness to internal sounds, as in sounds internal to the house of the poem, not only with 'Listen', but also with the title which asks us to sing this, to sound the words, and with the figure for sound there in the disturbing wind

(Piette 2013, p.239).

The 'Listen' Piette refers to here is the use of the word 'Listen' at a pivotal point in the poem he discusses. The word 'Listening' in 'Listening for lost people' performs a

similar function, pointing up the significance of the act of listening in this poem, directing the reader to attend to the act of listening both to and within the poem. The sound pattern of the poem's title as the liquid 'l' moves from 'li' to 'lo' to 'le', which continues into the opening line, 'Still looking for lost people — look unrelentingly' creates the 'list' of listening as a movement within the poem, as though setting into motion the listing of the ship on the sea which is the focus of the second quatrain. The ebb and flow of the 'l' sound also functions as mimetic representation of the sea, anticipating its later appearance. The emphasis on the 'O' sound in the first line results from the unusual appearance of 'looking' and 'look' in a poem which begins with a request for 'listening'. The 'O' sounds the grief arising from the loss of the 'lost' which is otherwise muted in the restraint of the sonnet's form and is gestured towards with the appearance of 'howl' in the third quatrain. The use of sound to convey the listlessness of the sea and the 'O' howl of grief move the poem beyond the surface meaning of the text which, in hinging on the shift from 'belonged, no *belong*' foregrounds how language can seem to bend time from the past to the present.

In considering sound Nancy writes, 'sonorous time takes place immediately according to a completely different dimension' (Nancy 2007, p.13) and 'the sonorous is omnipresent, and its presence is never a simple being-there or how things stand, but is always at once an advance, penetration, insistence, obsession, or possession, as well as presence "on the rebound", in a return' (Nancy 2007, p.15). Here 'the sonorous' locates sound, as distinct from the act of listening, as a-temporal, always immediate and 'omnipresent.' The sonorous presence is permanent and by implication is present even when there is no listener to detect it. In this way he links sound to the temporal and moves towards an ontology of sound. The act of listening brings other qualities to sound:

When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject, something (itself) that identifies *itself* by resonating from self to self, in itself and of itself, hence outside of itself, at once the same as and other than itself, one in the echo of the other, and this echo is like the very sound of its sense

(Nancy 2007, p.9).

Here the act of listening is spatialised and becomes temporal. According to Kane (2012) this lies at the heart of Nancy's thesis on sound, sense and subjectivity. Nancy's phrase 'outside of itself' resonates with the title of another of Riley's poems, 'Outside from the Start'. The title of this poem always appears within inverted commas, indicating that the title itself is a quotation. Brady (2013, p.146) notes that this title is 'a quotation from Merleau-Ponty: "Nothing determines me from outside, not because nothing acts upon me, but on the contrary because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world."' Given that Nancy and Riley share a phenomenological approach to the act of listening, how might Nancy's text help elucidate Riley's poem? The excerpt from Nancy cited above, 'When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject' almost replicates the title and opening line of Riley's poem 'Listening for lost people', which positions listening as the principal focus of the poem then immediately opens the poem with a line about 'looking.' This is not to say that Riley's poem draws on Nancy's text but rather that the acts of searching in Riley's poem are situated in the aural rather than the ocular, shifting the search from the empirical evidence of the visual to the speculative encounters of the aural.

Riley's poem and Nancy's thesis demonstrate that searching is more suitably situated in the domain of the aural, augmenting this argument with the presentation of the two levels the aural is able to detect: a surface meaning, such as that denoted by the meanings ascribed to words, and the atemporal work of sound, 'the very sound of its sense.' The sound-world of 'Listening for lost people' (re)creates the 'lost people' of

the title; the sonnet transitions from the general of quatrain one, through to the specific 'his' of quatrain two, through to the subjectivity of 'I'm' which makes its only appearance in the third quatrain. The poem closes with a return to its beginning, situating apparently subjective experiences into the framework of how language shapes that which appears unique. Subjectivity in Riley's poem lies not in the surface meaning of the language but rather, following Nancy's argument, is created in the process of listening, being 'on the lookout for a subject.' It follows that Riley's poem itself is created through an act of listening which summons the loss preceding the poem. The language of the poem enables the loss to manifest in the perpetual present of the sonnet which in turn facilitates a reconstruction of subjectivity after the experience of loss.

Attendance to lyric listening as a way to reassemble the subjective can be found in Walter de la Mare's 'The Listeners' which provides a precedent for Riley's poem. The title of de la Mare's poem emphasises the role of listening, whilst withholding the identity of who is doing the listening. The title suggests that the subject of the poem will be these 'listeners', and the narrative form indicates that these 'listeners' will be revealed within the storyline of the poem. The narrative of the poem features a Traveller who knocks on a door and receives no response (de la Mare 1973, p.32-3). Seeking a response to his visit the Traveller calls out in the opening line, 'Is there anybody there?' When this question is repeated in line eight, the Traveller effectively becomes his own echo. Through description of, '[...] a host of phantom listeners / That dwelt in the lone house then', the act of listening is troubled by the word 'phantom' which carries multiple meanings including a supernatural or ghost-like presence. 'Phantom' also refers to illusion and delusion, forms of falsity. When the act of listening is attributed to 'phantom listeners' it becomes a supernatural eavesdropping, an allegory for the act of writing poetry where writing prefigures an attentive form of



listening to language, the dual functioning of the lyric as speaking and listening device. De la Mare's 'The Listeners' holds open a space for listening, the poet asking, 'Is there anybody there?' The act of listening in the poem is presented as preceding sound but the reader's experience of reading the poem necessitates the sound of the poem already existing, therefore for the reader there is always already somebody there: the poet. The title 'Listening for lost people' is another way of asking 'Is there anybody there?' and eliciting the response which forms through the crucible of the sound of the poem as it manifests in the form of the poem: language. Listening, for de la Mare, Nancy and Riley is communication with those who are seemingly absent. Listening, not the empirically evident sense of the ocular ('look unrelentingly'), facilitates creation of the poem. Nancy writes that, 'the subject of listening is always still yet to come, spaced, traversed, and called by itself, *sounded* by itself' (Nancy 2007, p.21). Riley's sonnet simultaneously summons and becomes its subject, the lost is retrieved in 'that spoken thought' which is the poem.

Considering the emphasis on the lyric as speaking and listening device in this chapter it is useful to return to Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* to reassess the states of loss and grief with which this chapter begins. Barthes writes of 'Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language' (Barthes 1975, p.14). I argue that Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* is a text of bliss, a text which locates a proximity between loss and reading, and that reading is a process of listening to loss. The temporal and spatial disorientation of reading as a process of listening to loss is analogous to the disorientations of grief. 'Listening for lost people' is a lyric utterance of a 'state of loss' and might be productively read as a 'text of bliss'

for its transmutation of loss into an expression of grief through language. The lyric as the ‘talkative ear’ of ‘Listening for lost people’ holds the paradoxes of loss through its ability to both speak of and listen to grief.

In this chapter I have read Riley’s poem ‘Listening for lost people’ as a lyric handling the complexities of loss and language. I draw assistance from Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text* to argue for reading as a process of listening to loss. Michelle Bouldous Walker’s thinking on attentive listening is utilised to identify the processes of language and poetics which speak and listen to losses in Riley’s poem. Wordsworth’s ‘The Idiot Boy’, Sidney’s ‘A Farewell’ and de la Mare’s ‘The Listeners’ are identified as predecessors of Riley’s poem which provide insights into a poetics of lyric listening and loss. Jean-Luc Nancy’s account of sound, listening and hearing in relation to sense and subjectivity helps to parse the sonic and sound-sense making aspects of ‘Listening for lost people’, locating subjectivity in an aural recuperation of sense-making. The ‘talkative ear’ of ‘Listening for lost people’ is the listening lyric which both speaks of and listens to the continual processes of loss to which the poem attends.

## Chapter 4 Listening and Sound: W.S. Graham's 'The Dark Dialogues'

In *Memoir of W.S. Graham* Sebastian Barker writes of Graham, 'His whole life was keyed towards listening to poetry' (Barker 1986, p.90). The adjacency of Barker's 'towards' to the word 'listening' emphasises the 'list' in 'listening', which defines leaning towards. In his essay 'Listening' Roland Barthes identifies 'three types of listening': 'alert', 'deciphering' and an 'inter-subjective space' (Barthes 1985, p.245-6). The parallels Barthes draws between listening and reading, and voice and writing, in his 'Listening' essay provide a way to think about written language in relation to listening. The following chapter takes its cue from Barthes' essay to develop a reading of W.S. Graham's 'The Dark Dialogues', centring the role of listening.

Firstly, I begin by recounting critical perspectives on Graham's poetry, identifying an emphasis on listening and the function of sound. Secondly, I read Barthes to identify the listening practices of 'alert', 'deciphering' and 'inter-subjective space'. Thirdly, I utilise Barthes to read Graham's 'The Dark Dialogues'. The first part of this reading draws on Barthes' 'deciphering' to excavate the relationship between listening and landscape. The second part uses Barthes' 'alert' and 'inter-subjective space' and Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1994) to consider listening in relation to memory, with a specific focus on the home. The third part considers listening in relation to the ocular, and the final part focuses on the relationship between the temporal and listening. In modelling multiple practices of listening 'The Dark Dialogues' differentiates listening into multiple and distinguishable acts which in turn problematises assumptions about the singularity of the lyric voice.

The critical reception of Graham's work is partially informed by Graham's commentary on poetry, in particular 'Notes on a Poetry of Release', initially published in 1946, and his correspondence, which was published in 1999 as *The Nightfisherman: Selected Letters of W.S. Graham* (Snow and Snow 1999). The 'Notes' and the letters provide insight into Graham's development of his poetics. Reading Graham's letters, for example, Leighton finds 'poems in the making' (Leighton 2011, p.56).

In 'Notes on a Poetry of Release' Graham states, 'a poem is made of words and not of the expanding heart, the overflowing soul or the sensitive observer' (Snow and Snow 1999, p.380). The 'Notes' develop a critical reflection on how the materiality of poetry is shaped by history, politics and experiential facets of the world, and how those facets are shaped by the materiality of language. The assertion of the materiality of language and poetry pushes against claims for the lyric as the singular speaking voice of the poet. Graham's claim matches the assertions of J.H. Prynne and Peter Manson, which I discuss in the introduction to this thesis, situating a listening lyric constructed by the materiality of language rather than arising from the originality of the poet. Graham's 'Notes' also prefigure the preoccupation with sound in Prynne's 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work' (Prynne 2010). Graham locates the sounds of the poem in the sounds of the world: 'those swift metaphors of the moment break into sound in the ear' (Snow and Snow 1999, p.382). This is echoed in Prynne: 'The poet works with mental ears. Via this specialized audition the real-time sounds of speech and vocalized utterance are disintegrated into sub-lexical acoustic noise by analogy with the striking clatter of real work in the material world' (Prynne 2010, p.126).

Returning to the critical commentary on Graham's poetry, the first in-depth study of Graham's oeuvre is Tony Lopez's *The Poetry of W.S. Graham* (Lopez 1989). Lopez provides an overview of Graham's life, critical readings of his early poems and

his collections *The White Threshold*, *The Nightfishing*, *Malcolm Mooney's Land* and *Implements in their Places*. Lopez reads Graham as a Modernist poet whose 'work carries forward the insights and achievements of Eliot, Joyce and Pound and develops them in a new way' (Lopez 1989, p.132). In his study Lopez finds reoccurring preoccupations in Graham's poetry, including the theme of the voyage, poetry as an abstract space, the resources of language, and the concept of a coherent self which Graham's poetry interrogates (Lopez 1989, p.126-7). In concluding his study Lopez identifies the two qualities which distinguish Graham's poetry as, firstly, 'the will to engage with large metaphysical questions' and secondly, 'to see this exploration of the resources and restrictions of identity and communication in strongly physical terms, in terms that is of the drives that operate in us beyond the control of the intellect' (Lopez 1989, p.131). Lopez makes the case for the power and originality of Graham's poetry, yet there remains a relative paucity of critical study of his work.

The publication of Graham's *New Selected Poems* in 2004 was accompanied by the publication of Matthew Francis' monograph *Where the People Are: Language and Community in the Poetry of W.S. Graham* (Francis 2004) and the collection of essays *W.S. Graham: Speaking Towards You* (Pite and Jones 2004). Francis presents Graham's poetry in relation to community; Francis opens his study with the line, 'W.S. Graham is a poet of language' and argues that Graham sees 'language as a problem' (Francis 2004, p.1-2). Francis develops a close reading of the poetry and eschews a convincing argument for the methods Graham uses to develop his poetry and poetics. This gap may arise from Francis' attention to methods linked to what he describes as 'the linguistic turn' (Francis 2004, p.2); however, Francis' study does offer glimpses of alternative paths for exploration, opening up possible new ways for approaching Graham's poetry. Amongst these is the potential of reading Roland Barthes' work alongside Graham.

Francis only fleetingly draws on Barthes, referencing ‘the death of the author’, ‘The *Nautilus* and the Drunken Boat’, and ‘the impersonal space of text’ (Francis 2004, pp.18, 104, and 114). The connection between Barthes and Graham remains unexplored in the literature. In the following chapter I develop one such connection in depth to focus on acts of listening.

The collection *W.S. Graham: Speaking Towards You* presents Graham’s poetry as both experimental and traditional (Pite and Jones 2004, p.4), a binary which the ten essays in this collection attempt to dissolve. Ian Sansom’s contribution, ‘“Listen”: W.S. Graham’, suggests that the act of listening will be the focus of his reading of Graham, yet instead offers an overview of the social context and milieu of Graham’s writing (Sansom 2004, p.11-23). The practice of listening is given sustained attention in Nathalie Pollard’s ‘“The pages are bugged”: The Politics of Listening in the Poetry of W.S. Graham’ (Pollard 2010). Pollard argues that ‘even (or especially) at its most personal, Graham’s poetry insists upon art’s opening onto, and involvement in, the politics of the civil sphere’ (Pollard 2010, p.3). Writing that ‘For Graham then, lyric language is not – nor should the poet let it appear – simply reflective, representational, or personal. Rather, one’s language *makes* a world of ideas enriching to enter’ (Pollard 2010, p.5). Pollard focuses on language at the level of its political and therefore public agency, rather than the language of the lyric as something which separates the lyric and by implication also the poet, from the social sphere.

Angela Leighton’s writing on sound in poetry includes ‘Poetry and the Imagining Ear’ (Leighton 2009), and chapters on W.S. Graham and sound in *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of the Word* (2007) and *Hearing Things: The work of sound in literature* (2018a). Crucially, despite Leighton’s intended emphasis on sound her reading of his poetics tends towards a hermeneutics which reaches for a

narrative interpretation. Leighton writes of ‘a kind of sound-story’, ‘an allegory’ and ‘a narrative of homecoming’ (Leighton 2007, p.208-9) which usher the role of sound into a form of naturalisation.

Drawing on the emphasis on sound in these critical perspectives on Graham’s poetry, I now turn to Barthes’ essay ‘Listening’ to assist with reading ‘The Dark Dialogues’ as a specific instance of Graham’s attentive preoccupation with the workings of sound and acts of listening.

In ‘Listening’ Barthes draws on the ocular to discuss the auditory: ‘I listen the way I read’ (Barthes 1985, p.245) and ‘[t]he voice, in relation to silence, is like writing (in the graphic sense) on blank paper’ (Barthes 1985, p.254). The auditory forms through intentional incursions into spatial and temporal terrains. Barthes’ sensorial coalescence arises in the quietude of reading. For Barthes listening is as deliberate an act as reading, and the act of writing is an intentional disruption of the silence implicit in the blank page. Focusing on the intention and precision of the auditory is a challenge to the passive assumption which subtends the act of listening. As the musicologist David Toop points out, ‘There is shuteye, but no shutear’ (Toop 2010, p.xi). Although ears cannot be physically closed, the type of listening, the range of any given act of listening, is variable. Barthes’ ‘Listening’ asks that his readers become *listeners* and in doing so enhance their pleasure, sensitivity and insightfulness. Barthes’ essay persuades the reader that listening is a visionary act, where the visionary found in the aural leads to insight and intimacy.

Barthes identifies ‘three different types of listening’ which in his essay present under numbered subheadings one, two and three, followed by a fourth section discussing the implications of these different listening activities. The complexity of each type of listening is described in dense paragraphs which marshal together social,

cultural and psychoanalytic scenarios, resisting a definition of each type by showing how each style of listening is materially situated. In resisting the presentation of these ‘types of listening’ as categories, the multiplicity of acts of listening retains the agency Barthes’ essay is in part provoking. I use Barthes’ descriptions to locate the labels of ‘alert’, ‘deciphering’ and ‘inter-subjective space’ (Barthes 1985, p.245-6) to gesture towards the sets of activities detailed in each of the three sections of ‘Listening’. The ‘alert’ broadly indicates ‘the spatio-temporal situation’ (Barthes 1985, p.246) which Barthes connects to the concept of ‘territory’ as ‘the space of security’ (Barthes 1985, p.247). This first type of listening ‘transforms noise into an index’ (Barthes 1985, p.252). The second type of listening is linked to ‘creation’, ‘the secret’ and ‘religion’ and operates around the action of ‘deciphering’ (Barthes 1985, p.249-50). In summarising the second section Barthes writes, ‘this second listening metamorphoses man into a dual subject: interpellation leads to an interlocution in which the listener’s silence will be as active as the locutor’s speech: *listening speaks*’ (Barthes 1985, p.252). The third type of listening develops from a psychoanalytic account of the processes of listening as understood from an approach to the psychanalytic as also embodied. This set of listening practices creates an ‘inter-subjective space’ where ‘[I]listening to the voice inaugurates the relation to the Other’ (Barthes 1985, p.254).

Drawing assistance from Barthes’ distinguishing and modelling between types of listening I read Graham’s ‘The Dark Dialogues’ to explore how these differentiations contribute to understanding the workings of sound and listening in the poem. ‘The Dark Dialogues’ is a single poem comprising four parts. In the first part of the poem I focus on listening and landscape, the second part emphasises listening in relation to memory and home. The third part considers listening and the ocular, and the fourth part draws together temporality and silence. Each section of ‘The Dark Dialogues’ is seen to model



different aspects of Barthes' discussion of listening although these models are not as straightforward as one type of listening being represented in each of the distinct sections of the poem. The complexity and multi-layering of listening in 'The Dark Dialogues' resists simple meaning-making and encourages a reading emphasising the sound-sense of the poem.

## **The Dark Dialogues**

### **1: 'I always meant to only'**

The following section uses Barthes' 'deciphering' to excavate the relationship between listening and landscape in 'The Dark Dialogues', to argue that for Graham this act of listening is tied to the processes of the lyric.

Barthes writes, 'Listening is henceforth linked [...] to a hermeneutics: to listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred, or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the "underside" of meaning' (Barthes 1985, p.249). This forms part of Barthes' description of the 'deciphering' form of listening, which he also characterises as 'religious'. 'The Dark Dialogues' perform multiple acts of listening as forms of 'decoding'; Graham depicts listening as preceding the lyric and forming the lyric. Listening, language and the future, which for Graham is the lyric, are interlinked. The opening three lines of 'The Dark Dialogues' establish the importance of the temporal and spatial for listening:

I always meant to only

Language swings away

Further before me

These lines are set apart from the nine lines of the next stanza and the other, longer, stanzas of the poem. These lines are a device for setting the poem into motion and their function resembles the opening lines of Graham's long poem 'The Nightfishing': 'Very gently struck / The quay night bell'. Leighton suggests that the opening lines of 'The Nightfishing' 'resonate like metaphorical signposts throughout the work' (Leighton 2007, p.204). Leighton, however, goes on to talk about 'the sound of a sound' (Leighton 2007, p.204) as the sonic poetics which propel the poem into motion. In the opening lines of 'The Dark Dialogues' 'further before' denotes that language precedes and appears in front of the poet, an action which positions the poem itself as appearing ahead of the poet, with the poet following behind. The opening lines of 'The Dark Dialogues' set the poem into motion in a way analogous to Barthes' notion of the 'alert'; 'like a funnel leading to the interior' (Barthes 1985, p.248). The sounds of the opening lines clear the way for the poet to listen to the silence from which the lines emerge, seeking to decipher the poem as it forms in the poet's ear and into the future through writing. These lines introduce 'The Dark Dialogues' as a poem of fracture and language where both continually drop away into silence. Fracture is the result of stress and in poetry stress forms the foundation of the rhythm maintaining the structure of the poem. Beginning with 'I' and ending with 'me', these opening lines journey between these two poles which are held together by the action of the line 'Language swings away'. The propelling movement of language is the 'stress' of the poetic line which is perceptible to the ear as the poem develops. The capitalisation of the 'L' in 'Language' makes 'language' function as a proper name, a second presence between the 'I' and 'me', holding together and separating these markers of identification through the movement of swinging away ahead. The opening line, 'I always meant to only' ends abruptly, the reader never knowing what the speaker intends 'to only' achieve. The

swinging away of language attempts to explain this fractured statement, the words of the poem themselves enacting the swinging away by swinging away from the reader, refusing resolution.

In the second stanza an allusion to the sea as ‘that other fond / Metaphor, the sea’ brings into the poem a visual metaphor and a sonic background against which the various ‘dialogues’ of the poem are set. The sound of the sea provides a continual sonic backdrop to the poem. Again, writing about Graham’s ‘The Nightfishing’, Leighton discusses the sea as ‘a kind of sound-story’ and claims that ‘The sea, for Graham, is less a place or time than it is the formal condition of losing place, time, even self, for the sake of sea-shapes and ““sea-worked measures”” (Leighton 2007, p.208). Whilst this may account for Graham’s own acknowledgement of his ‘fond / Metaphor, the sea’ it eschews the *materiality* of the sea as a presence in a poem whose title denotes an interest in ‘Dialogues’ and particularly in ‘Dark’ dialogues. In a poem emphasising dialogues characterised as ‘dark’, the sea becomes one of the many contributors to the ‘dialogues’ enfolded into the lyric. The listening in the poem encompasses acts of listening not only to the sonics of the language but also to the sounds evoked through other presences, such as the sea, within the poem.

Graham’s use of mythology towards the beginning of ‘The Dark Dialogues’ and its reappearance at the close of the poem points towards Graham’s poetics incorporating a distinction between mythologised place and ‘real’ place. Such a distinction serves a function within the poem. The mythical scene in stanza three contrasts with the ‘real’ landscape the poem depicts:

Wanton with riding lights

And staring eyes, Europa

And her high meadow bull [...].

The mythical is compared negatively with the real, falling ‘slowly their way / Behind the blindfold and / Across this more or less / Uncommon place.’ The ‘blindfold’ covers the eyes as the ‘real’ world is replaced with the mythical world summoned through the myth of Europa being seduced by Zeus in the form of a bull and carried over the sea to Crete. In this myth the bull Zeus is transformed into the constellation Taurus (Graham 2004, p.361). This ‘blindfold’ is a double-blind, a *fold* between the external landscape and the mythical world. The ‘fold’ is the dialectic where the day-to-day is a blindfold preventing visionary insight and also the insights of mythology which can blind one from the action of the real world. In providing a creation story for the existence of the constellation of Taurus, the myth of Europa provides Graham with an example of language bridging the mythical and the ‘real’, demonstrating that the ‘reality’ of both is constructed with language.

The direct address of, ‘And who are you and by / What right do I waylay / You’ invites dialogue which is not forthcoming. However, the imagined dialogue between the speaker and the person with whom their internal dialogue is conducted indicates that the speaker is addressing an ‘other’ whose conceptualisation of the human world is mediated through mythology. Where the poet has his ‘fond / Metaphor, the sea’, this other with whom the (imaginary) dialogue takes place, has a fondness for mythology. These ruminations are punctuated by a sound in the environment; ‘striking / Your hobnail in the dark?’ The striking hobnail refers to hobnail boots. The sound of feet in the dark are analogous with the poetic feet of poetry. The mirroring of the ‘k’ sound in ‘striking’ and ‘dark’ illuminate the darkness with a poetic ‘chime’, the sound of poetry

behaving like a match being struck and lighting up the surrounding darkness, enabling the poet to see (hear) the poetry. The sound of the match strike enables the listener to gauge the spatial environment in which they find themselves. The sound of poetry enables the poet to gauge their environment. In the absence of a speaking 'other' in this dialogue the speaker addresses the 'silence' of the environment which becomes the 'other' to whom he listens. In 'Believe me I would ask / Forgiveness but who / Would I ask forgiveness from?' the act of 'asking' requires speech, an incursion of language into the dark environment. The sound of words light up the darkness in their activity of seeking.

The 'vast Dialogues' are 'A place I can think in / And think anything in, / An aside from the monstrous'. In these lines 'Dialogues' create a place to think; the 'monstrous' opposite of 'Dialogues' would be silence accompanied by being unable to 'think'. A stanza break after 'monstrous' allows the thought of non-dialogue to linger, followed by 'And this is no other / Place than where I am,' with the enjambment after 'other' speaking back to the 'other' addressed as 'who are you' earlier in the poem. 'Here turning between / This word and the next' uses 'turning' to transform the reading of 'word' into world; where the world turns on its axis, the poet's world turns on the word, existing from word to word. This depiction of silently turning from one word to the next is broken by, 'Yet somewhere the stones / Are wagging in the dark', where the 'wagging' refers to the colloquialism of 'wagging tongues'. According to *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* the phrase 'Tongues are wagging' means 'There is talk; there are rumours; people are gossiping' (Room 2001, p.1190). The tongues being 'stones' suggests these stones are the Neolithic circular henges or dolmen-like constructions found in the British Isles and particularly in Celtic areas such as Cornwall, where Graham lived for much of his life (Whittaker 2015; Smith 2016, p.63).

Their inclusion alongside ‘sparstone’, which appears towards the end of the first part of the poem, and which the Oxford English Dictionary traces back to the Old English ‘spærstan’ meaning ‘a pale or translucent mineral’ (Graham 2004, p.373), speaks of a lengthy temporal and spatial reach. The presence of Neolithic standing stones indicates ritual as an older form of speaking and listening, and a connected human continuity across time. The Neolithic monuments are simultaneously speaking (‘wagging’) and, in their silence, also listening. Barthes’ description of ‘deciphering’ as a form of listening includes ‘at once the sacred and the secret’ (Barthes 1985, p.250). The act of listening to the ‘wagging’ of the stones in ‘The Dark Dialogues’ is a form of listening to the ‘sacred and secret’ in the landscape, a process which mirrors the poet’s listening for the ‘sacred and secret’ in language which yields the lyric.

The first section of ‘The Dark Dialogues’ establishes a circuitry of communication between the landscape, historical memory as witnessed by the standing stones, and the language of poetry. Encompassing the landscape into the poetry is achieved through the poet’s attentive listening. Barthes’ description of ‘deciphering’ is that this type of listening ‘intentionalizes at once the sacred and the secret (to listen in order to decipher history, society, the body, is *still*, under various lay alibis, a religious attitude)’ (Barthes 1985, p.250). Attentive listening to the landscape is to decipher history, society and the body, as situated in the landscape. The presence of the standing stones symbolise attempts in earliest human history to decipher the landscape. In Graham’s poem language registers the acts of deciphering the landscape, suggesting that language performs functions which the stones historically were intended to perform. The ‘sacred and the secret’ which Barthes ascribes to ‘deciphering’ speaks of a disposition which, in attentively attending to the sounds of the landscape, endows the landscape with qualities worthy of attention and which yield secrets in response to

Careful listening. In 'The Dark Dialogues' listening to the landscape and listening to language are comparable. In listening to language, as though language is its own landscape, the poet attends to the secrets of language. By attentively listening to language the poet shapes the lyric, which in turn listens to the poet.

## **2: 'Almost I, yes, I hear'**

Where the first part of 'The Dark Dialogues' listens to the external environment, the second part focuses on the interior. Barthes' 'alert', 'inter-subjective space' and Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1994) help to elucidate the themes of listening and memory in relation to home.

The second part of 'The Dark Dialogues' unfolds within the space of a domestic household. In this section the speaker in the poem is listening to the movements of the house, which shifts the activity of listening from the external environment of the first section of the poem to an internal environment. The acts of listening in this section attend to a physical house and the poem itself as a house built of language. The opening lines, 'Almost I, yes, I hear' foreground the act of listening as key to the unfolding of this section of the poem. The domestic space which is the focus of this section combines the intimacy commonly associated with a home environment, with an estrangement arising through the attentive listening attuned to the sounds of this space. The poem depicts the recollection of sounds which in turn summon memories and speak of the psychological investment in the particularity of home. Barthes' 'alert' listening is an attentiveness attuned towards sounds which alert the listener to intrusions into a familiar environment. Whilst there is comfort to be taken in the intimacy of the familiar, it can be disrupted by intrusion including the encroachment of unfamiliar sounds. The attuned listening to the domestic space in the second section of 'The Dark

Dialogues' simultaneously summons the intimacy of domestic space and signals its fragility. The human presence in these opening lines is traced in the act of listening to the sounds in relation to the house. The intimacy of the domestic space and its fragilities are mapped in the sounds the poem documents.

The opening 'Almost' contrasts with the 'always' which opens the first section of 'The Dark Dialogues', adding a hesitancy which is reinforced by the grammar couching the speaker's 'yes'. Here listening is an act of uncertainty. In 'Almost I, yes, I hear' the 'I' is made possible through the act of listening; the uncertainty of being 'almost I' actualises as a definite 'I' through the process of listening. The poem is full of sounds mediated through a listening presence in the house; 'I hear [...] / A man's step on the stair', 'The broken mantle roars', 'green murmur', 'the door / With the loud grain', 'Knock, but a small knock', 'time knocking', 'Hissing in the grate', 'Only to speak and say', 'to hear / That someone has heard me', 'I hear them breathe and turn', 'cry come out / Come out whoever you are', 'I called / And called across the wide', and 'Dialogues drew their breath.' The speaker, who is the primary listener in this section, is depicted as a woman: 'I am, / Their mother through his mother'. 'This is the house I married / Into' suggests restricted agency in that her 'home' has become hers through marriage, an social institution which in the poem defines her in relationship to a man. 'This is the house I married' links the house to the notion of home, and home to the notion of sexual fidelity. The speaker's attentive listening to the house forms part of her claim to the house as her home. The particularity of the sounds in the house singularise the experiences of the speaker, enabling her to experience the house as her own. This act of listening creates a dialogue between the speaker as listener, and the house as it 'speaks' through the various sounds emitted through its environment. It is through acts of listening that the 'others' in the poem, a man, children, the house, and the objects in



the house, are created in relation to the 'I' of this section of 'The Dark Dialogues'. This circuitry is another of the 'dark dialogues' of the lyric; the 'house' of the poem is created by listening to its sounds.

Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological account of intimate spaces, *The Poetics of Space* (1994), assists with considering Graham's poetics and how the listening practices in 'The Dark Dialogues' are keyed-in to domestic space. Bachelard claims that, 'The house, even more than the landscape, is a 'psychic state', and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy' (Bachelard 1994, p.72). Bachelard connects sounds with memory through the resonance of domestic rooms:

Still farther it is possible to recover not merely the timbre of the voices, 'the inflections of beloved voices now silent,' but also the resonance of each room in the sound house. In this extreme tenuousness of memory, only poets may be expected to furnish us with the documents of a subtly psychological nature  
(Bachelard 1994, p.60-1).

By identifying these memories as the 'sound house', that is, the house as it is reconstructed through memories of different sounds, including voices on the stairs and the differences between voices in a large room and a smaller room, the construction becomes real through the process of auditory recognition. Utilising Bachelard's phenomenological approach to read 'The Dark Dialogues' Graham's (re)construction of the sounds of the house become an active state of recalling memories using memories of sound as the trigger to summon memories of the house into the present moment. In this way sound and the act of listening provides a way to suspend the temporal. The past and the present are simultaneous in the spatial construct of the poem. The excessive attention to the act of listening in the poem engenders a spatialization of the temporal. In this space, drawing on Barthes' third type of listening, 'an intersubjective

space where 'I am listening' also means "listen to me" (Barthes 1985, p.246), the poem constructs an intersubjective space where the reader attends to the listening in the poem and the poem attends to the listening reader. In connecting memory with sound, the immediacies of temporal experience are located simultaneously in their present context (the space of the house) and in the memories which connect those sounds with the particularities of time and space. The account of listening from within the house in 'The Dark Dialogues' accords with Bachelard's 'only poets may be expected to furnish us with the documents of a subtly psychological nature'; attempting to parse the meaning-making of 'The Dark Dialogues', is, to an extent, to decline to engage with the processes of the poem which enact the phenomena of 'dark dialogues'. The second section of 'The Dark Dialogues' documents the 'subtly psychological nature' of sound, memory and home. The 'dialogue' in this section of 'The Dark Dialogues' is cradled in the recognition between poem and reader. The two-way process of dialogue is reinforced in:

Only to speak and say  
Something, little enough,  
Not out of want  
Nor out of love, to say  
Something and to hear  
That someone has heard me.

These lines echo the sound and response of the spatial and temporal, focusing on speaking and being heard as essential components of dialogue. The unspecific

‘Something’ indicates that it is the act of speaking, rather than the specificities of the words themselves, which create the ‘other’, confirming the speaker’s existence.

The title ‘The Dark Dialogues’, appears towards the end of this section:

But the place moved away

Beyond the reach of any

Word. Only the dark

Dialogues drew their breath.

The title-drop signals the significance of this section within the poem and these lines as pivotal to the unfolding of the poem. Depicting the dialogues as dark augments their depiction as ‘vast’ in the previous section. Darkness and vastness tie back to ‘the stones / Are wagging in the dark’ which expands the temporal range of the poem as dialogue. ‘Vast’ and ‘dark’ speaks to a phenomenological account of Graham’s spatialisation of the temporal, an encompassing which prioritises the immersive nature of the auditory over the linearity of the visual.

### **3: ‘Now in the third voice’**

The previous section considered listening in relation to memory and home as it appears in the second part of ‘The Dark Dialogues’, drawing on Barthes and Bachelard to elucidate temporal and spatialised readings of the poem. The following reading of the third section of ‘The Dark Dialogues’ considers listening in relation to the ocular and how this relocates the visionary.

The third section prioritises the voice of the father:

Now in the third voice  
I am their father through  
Nothing more than where  
I am made by this word  
And this word to occur.

The specificity of 'their father' indicates this is the 'man' referred to in the previous section. In his critical account of the poem Lopez claims the father in 'The Dark Dialogues' is the poet's father and the mother in the poem is the poet's mother (Lopez 1989, p.95). However, the poem insists that 'I am made by this word / And this word to occur', indicating that in the house of the poem 'mother', 'father' and the world of the poem itself is a construct of language. 'Occur' is close to 'ocular' and pre-empts, 'But I can't see. I can't / See in the bad light', which appears four lines below, with 'bad light' pointing back to the 'dark' of 'The Dark Dialogues'. Early in this section, 'I thought I heard somewhere / Someone else walking' re-establishes the sound of feet in the previous sections and allude to the feet which drive poetry. The many visual references towards the start of this section - 'But I can't see. I can't / See in the bad light', 'Between your eye and mine', 'To learn to use their eyes' and 'I hear the blind horn' - are problematic: being unable to see due to bad light, movement happening *between* the eyesight of two people, eyes which need to learn to see, and the use of a visual reference ('blind') to describe a sound making instrument (horn). 'Horn' disrupts the ocular references by bringing sound into the landscape, triggering the speaker's memories and collapsing the preceding temporal sense into the present moment. Here the 'visionary' properties of the aural lie in their immediacy, where the ocular presents barriers ('I can't see') to the present. Barthes' 'alert' type of listening, 'that preliminary

attention which permits intercepting whatever might disturb the territorial system [...] it either reveals danger or promises the satisfaction of need' (Barthes 1985, p.247), provides a way into parsing the prioritising of the aural over the ocular. The linearity of the ocular prevents a state of alertness, unable as it is to detect anything other than that which is immediately before the eye and the 'I' of the voice (the father) in the poem. The aural properties of the poem on the other hand are 'alert'; the act of listening intercepts the sound properties of the language which 'speak' (write) the poem.

The emergence of sound and specifically language appears in the following:

I try to pay for my keep.

I speak as well as I can

Trying to teach my ears

To learn to use their eyes

Even only maybe

In the end to observe

The behaviour of silence.

'Keep' and 'speak' are linked by the 'k' sound which projects the ownership of 'keep' into the agency of 'speak'. The strangeness of the lines 'Trying to teach my ears' 'The behaviour of silence' quietly reveals that the lyric 'The Dark Dialogues' arises through the acts of listening to silence as an entry point to the temporal and spatial. These lines are followed by 'Who is it and why / Do you walk here so late', returning to Graham's use of the word feet and the act of walking as a way to discuss poetry, indicating that the purpose of 'Trying to teach my ears' 'The behaviour of silence' is to do the listening required to write poetry. The speech of 'speak' is associated with the 'ears' which

Graham depicts as instruments for seeing. The Oxford English Dictionary includes definitions for the words 'seer' as; 'A person believed to see divinely inspired visions; a prophet. Later occasionally also: a person regarded as having profound spiritual insight' and 'A person claiming to have, or regarded as having, supernatural insight into future or distant events'. 'The Dark Dialogues' locates insight in the ear and the act of listening, retrieving insight from an ocular concern emphasising linearity and the exterior, to the 'dark' invisible concerns of the aural which disrupts temporal and spatial linearity. The silence of this 'dark' space is necessary for dialogue with an 'other'.

The prosody of 'Even only maybe', where each word consists of two syllables, is trochaic, suggestive of the hesitancy of walking, one foot after another, the hesitancy of the poet writing the poem as he listens to 'The behaviour of silence.' Cautious and careful listening leads to:

Listening while a branch

Squeaked in the resinous dark

And swaying silences.

The 'dark' here is 'resinous' which speaks to the context of 'the flailing / Boughs of the roaring wood?' and the 'branch' insofar as resin is secreted by trees, particularly coniferous trees, suggests that the 'dark' is a quiet wood and marks another incursion of the wider sound environment into Graham's poetics. Considering woodland as an environment in which sound is present indicates the complexity of Graham's poetics. Even a cursory reading of the literature on woodlands and forests reveals that the densities of forests and woods vary (Tudge 2006). The density of conifers in woodland or forest comprising mainly or entirely of evergreen trees dampens environmental noise

(Bucur 2006, p.7-8). A knowledge of the variability of woodlands encompasses an understanding that different varieties enclose different qualities of silence. Silence is not a singular quality, and neither is the act of listening. The darkness in this section of the poem is part of the natural environment and is suggestive of the properties of silence, where both 'dark' and 'silence' are not equivalent yet sit in proximity. The word 'resinous' rather than 'resin' suggests a liquidity, a golden colour, and properties which preserve the past. If the darkness has properties of resin this suggests that it oozes from its surrounds, much as a tree yields resin. In the poem, the 'squeaked' sound of the branch emerges from the dark, the darkness being the transmitter of the sound. The proximity of the word 'resinous' to the word 'resonates' in terms of the sound of each word speaks of the activity this 'resinous dark' undertakes, confirmed by its link to 'swaying silences'. Darkness and silence are shown to be connected states of emptiness into which sound enters, analogous to the emergence of poetry through the process of listening to language. The acuity of the prosody anchors the darkness and silence into the poem as an entity, gesturing towards the poem as a dialogue with the real, material, world rather than the elevation of the poem into the mystification of symbolism.

The closing section of the poem moves through memories of childhood accompanying imagery of listening, the wind, and an outdoors landscape. The movement of the wind, the act of listening and the puzzlement of words and language crystallise in the final stanza:

I am the shell held  
To Time's ear and you  
May hear the lonely leagues  
Of the kittiwake and the fulmar.

Previous expressions of indeterminacy coalesce as though shaped by the mirroring image of the 'shell' and 'ear' into the ear-shell, becoming the 'I am' as an echo of the 'I am' which appears three times at the start of this section of 'The Dark Dialogues'. In 'Listening' Barthes speaks of the physical ear as 'the folds and detours of its shell seem eager to multiply the individual's contact with the world' capturing its shell-like and magnifying properties (Barthes 1985, p.248). Transmuted, the poet-as-ear becomes the shell, the abandoned habitat of another creature. The poet-as-ear is an act of listening but rather than listening to the sea as is traditionally associated with holding a shell to one's ear, the poet-ear summons seabirds ('the kittiwake and the fulmar'). Encompassing the chatter of birds into the sounds of the poem is indicative of Graham's poetics of inclusiveness whereby the sounds of the environment are incorporated into the soundscape of the poem. Acts of listening in this poetics are not exclusively orientated to language but encompass and belong to the materiality of the world.

#### **4: 'Or I am always only'**

The final section of Graham's poem considers the temporal in relation to listening and formation of lyric. Time appears as a proper noun towards the close of the third section of 'The Dark Dialogues', pointing towards its significance in the final section in which 'time' makes eight appearances. The opening lines of the final part set aside the ocular; 'Or I am always only / Thinking is this the time / To look elsewhere to turn'. '[L]ook elsewhere to turn' signals a turn inwards; the speaker is considering his relationship to time, language and poetry. Where the ocular is set aside in the first stanza, time is put aside in the second stanza, clearing the way for speech, listening and suspension of the present:



And there are other times.  
But the times are always  
Other and now what I meant  
To say or hear or be  
Lies hidden where exile  
Too easily beckons.

The intentionality underscoring ‘meant’ is erased by the deferral of time, a process reminiscent of the activity of writing and familiarity with procrastination and deferral. The ‘exile’ arises in the deferral of the present to a future time which, never arriving, becomes a form of exile from poetry. It is necessary to attend to the present moment in order to listen for the sounds of poetry:

So to begin to return  
At last neither early  
Nor late and go my way  
Somehow home across  
This gesture become  
Inhabited out of hand.

‘Somehow’ indicates that the speaking voice in the poem does not know how this ‘returning’ to poetry takes place. In connecting with the ‘turn’ in line three the word ‘returning’ suggests that it revolves around a choice to ‘turn again’, turning back towards poetry having turned away from it previously in deferring it for an another (‘Other’) time. Use of ‘turn’ and ‘returning’ echoes T.S. Eliot’s ‘Because I do not hope

to turn again / Because I do not hope / Because I do not hope to turn' from 'Ash Wednesday' (Eliot 1974, p.95). Tony Lopez finds Eliot's poetry echoed in Graham's poem 'Dear Who I Mean' where 'quick brown pouncing god' recalls Eliot's 'strong brown god' in 'The Dry Salvages' (Lopez 1989, p.82). Lopez also suggests that Eliot's use of Shackleton's account of the Antarctic expeditions pointed Graham towards the exploration theme in *Malcolm Mooney's Land* (Lopez 1989, p.85). The influence of Eliot on Graham's poetry presents here as an influence of language and theme, however, the deeper significance of the influence lies in the preoccupation with the temporal which surfaces in the poetics of both poets. In the context of Graham's 'The Dark Dialogues' the temporal manifests in multiple orientations towards listening. The multiplicity of listening acts destabilises notions of linearity, situating a poetics which is atemporal and, as 'The Dark Dialogues' depicts, encompasses the ability to enclose the past, present and future into the present moment of the poem. Barthes' 'inter-subjective-space' assists in considering Graham's atemporality from a psychoanalytic perspective where 'listening is a posture orientated towards origins' (Barthes 1985, p.256). Certainly, given the presence of a mother, a father and a home environment in the poem, 'The Dark Dialogues' orientates listening towards origins. Yet 'The Dark Dialogues' is not a confessional poem; the possibility of a singular 'I' as the primary speaking voice in the poem is eschewed through the multiplicity of listening orientations animated in this poetics. In 'The Dark Dialogues' acts of listening are directed towards objects as well as towards people. Attuning to the plurality of sounds makes it possible for Graham's poetry to encompass the material, in all its forms, into his poetry. Objects, the physical environment and people all inhabit 'The Dark Dialogues', listening and speaking to and across each other, forming the soundscape, the 'dialogues' of the poem.

Returning to the fourth section of 'The Dark Dialogues', the act of writing poetry appears throughout the poem in imagery of footfall, the 'feet' of prosody:

I stop and listen over  
My shoulder and listen back  
On language for that step  
That seems to fall after  
My own step in the dark.

The repetition of 'listen' emphasises the processes of listening and the lyric; as well as listening to lyrics, lyrics are acts of listening. '[T]hat step / That seems to fall after / My own step in the dark' is poetry (the sound of the footfall) forming *after* the poet has taken a step forward, through the act of listening, into the unknown silence of 'in the dark'. Barthes' description of listening as 'inter-subjective space' where 'we ask listening to *release*' (Barthes 1985, p.258) provides a way to think about the lyric as an inter-subjective space, where the lyric enacts both the speaking and the listening, and which listens to the reader. The space between lyric and reader is an 'inter-subjective space' in which the multiple acts of listening 'release' the meaning-making of the lyric. The specific temporal and spatial experiences which appear throughout the poem are mediated through the sound of language 'spoken' in the lyric; 'And this place is taking / Its time from us though these / Two people or voices / Are not us' and later, 'Yet somewhere a stone / Speaks and maybe a leaf / In the dark turns over.' The poem closes by recalling imagery from the first section; the speaking stone recalls the 'stones / Are wagging' and the imagery drawn from the Greek mythology of Europa and the bull reappears. The mythology and the sky bring together both 'realities'; the allegorical

'reality' of the mythical where the temporal and spatial constraints of the day-to-day are lifted, and the 'reality' of 'a sky, real and / particular'. The interplay between these two 'truths', the 'reality' of myth and the 'reality' of the physical world, play out in the inter-subjective space of the poem:

The bull and the girl turn  
From what they seemed to say,  
And turn there above me  
With that star-plotted head  
Snorting on silence.

Describing the speech-act as 'seemed' presents uncertainty, whereas 'silence' is as certain as the darkness of the sky in which this constellation appears. In affirming the present, the speaker also affirms the artifice of the poem:

There is no other place  
Than where I am, between  
This word and the next.  
Maybe I should expect  
To find myself only  
Saying that again  
Here now at the end.

The poet exists in the movement which takes place in the shift from one word to the next word, which is the activity of sound. The line 'Here now at the end' is not the end of the poem, it is followed by lines which meld the mythical and the physical:

Yet over the great  
Gantries and cantilevers  
Of love, a sky, real and  
Particular is slowly  
Startled into light.

In the closing lines of the poem, 'particular' anchors 'The Dark Dialogues' to the materiality of the world and the language-world of the poem. The dialogues in 'The Dark Dialogues' emerge from the 'particular' of attentive listening, the different voices, and the processes of dialogue which underpin the lyric as form.

'The Dark Dialogues' performs an attentive listening attuned towards silence. In this chapter a review of critical commentary has identified an emphasis on listening and the function of sound in Graham's poetry. Barthes' 'Listening' has provided assistance in distinguishing different orientations of listening in Graham's 'The Dark Dialogues'. In this poem listening is attuned towards the landscape, home, memory, time, many objects, and the lyric. Listening is an act of plurality, taking in sound, noise, voice and ambiguity. In modelling multiple practices of listening 'The Dark Dialogues' problematise assumptions about the singularity of the speaking lyric voice. In its opening lines, 'The Dark Dialogues' states, 'I always meant to only / Language swings away / Further before me'. In attuning to listening, the lyric attends to historical resonances and the future, situating itself in a poetic temporality of communicative

belonging. 'The Dark Dialogues' stages a series of listening acts to render the processes of lyric composition and belonging.

# Conclusion: Listening Lyrics, a Talkative Ear

This thesis has attended to listening in lyric poetry. By developing close readings of poems by Geraldine Monk, Bhanu Kapil, Denise Riley and W.S. Graham alongside theoretical and philosophical texts I have argued that lyrics stage distinct acts of listening. Lyric is associated with articulation, expression and subjectivity, associations which have led to critical attention focusing on the speaking voice of the lyric. In emphasising the role of listening this thesis contributes towards a rebalancing of this emphasis on speaking, advocating critical attention towards the lyric as listening device.

In the first chapter the lyric is read in relation to trauma in Geraldine Monk's poetry. The claim in these poems is for a poetics which addresses the harms of violence and abuse. A close reading of the poems reveals a poetics that restages these harms, reinstalling the effects and affects of trauma. Monk's lyric is a poetics listening to trauma and meeting the limits of articulation of trauma.

Where Monk's lyric reinstalls trauma, Kapil's *Schizophrene* utilises the lyric fragment as reparation of trauma. Kapil's poetics deliberately eschews restaging scenes of violence, drawing instead on the resources of the fragment as a form of lyric composition. In its staging of the difficulties between language and healing *Schizophrene* models the difficulties of speaking and listening to trauma. In this poetics the fragment functions as process rather than solution to repairing the harms of trauma. Force, including the force of imposing narrative trajectories, is rejected in favour of 'touching' the harms of trauma through the practice of reading as a form of listening.

The poetics of Monk and Kapil listen to trauma in very different ways, resulting in diverging engagements with the affects and effects of trauma. Monk's poetics

depends on the suspension of an assimilation of trauma. Kapil's poetics attends to the affects and effects of trauma by drawing on compositional processes which seek to avoid reinstalling trauma through the reification of trauma in the form of utilising representational or narrative depictions of violence. Where Monk's poetics enacts the communicative break characteristic of trauma, Kapil's poetics attempts reparation of the communicative schism. These distinctions suggest Monk's poetics signal a conservative aesthetic and politics, choosing either consciously or otherwise to refrain from assimilating trauma for the purposes of an ongoing poetics. In signalling awareness of the harms of trauma, Kapil's poetics is a search for assimilation: the fragment as a form of composition is inherently social insofar as the agency of the lyric staged therein is achieved through the proximity of fragments to one another. In refusing narrative, *Schizophrene* solicits the agency of the reader to continue the dialogues staged in the fragments; *Schizophrene's* sense-making is led by the reading process rather than by the poet's imposition of narrative. Perhaps this socialising dimension of the text enacts the assimilation of trauma Sandra Bloom (2003; 2010) posits is essential to overcoming trauma and a process which art can perform. The suspension of the assimilation of trauma witnessed in Monk's poetics, conversely, might be considered to 'bite back' at Bloom's assertion of the healing function of art. Monk's poetics seem to indicate that art, poetry in this instance, does not necessarily assimilate trauma. There is a gap here between the theory of trauma on which Bloom draws and the practices of Monk's poetics.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to speculate on the implications of this gap; the close readings of Monk and Kapil's poetics, however, resist the narrative of art as pathway to recovery from trauma. Monk's poetics demonstrates that poetry can discuss trauma. Kapil's poetics explore the possibilities of poetic language as reparative action.



The lyrics of Monk and Kapil listen to trauma that is difficult to hear or cannot be heard; or these lyrics listen to trauma that insists on being heard and cannot be forgotten or silenced. The lyric enacts processes of listening to these traumas and in the process of reading the reader listens to the trauma. Each instance of listening provides an opportunity for the affects and effects of trauma to be assimilated through their reintegration into the wider environments of the cultural and social contexts.

The loss and grief which accompany trauma are the focus of Chapter Three. In a close reading of Denise Riley's 'Looking for lost people' the lyric stages a circuitry between loss, listening and language. This chapter intrinsically links listening with loss through the contention that reading is a process of listening to loss. Riley's lyric stages multiple practices of listening: the poem describes a process of a mother listening for her deceased son, the lyric listens to itself to enable its composition, the lyric listens to its poetic predecessors, the reader listens to the lyric during reading, and lyric listens to us as readers. The critical reception of the poem focuses on the first of these acts of listening; however, the recuperation of loss and the reassembling of subjectivity following loss depend on each of the other types of listening for realisation of grief. Riley's recognition of the dual properties of speaking and listening within the poem are realised within the poem in the phrase 'talkative ear' which encapsulates the multi-faceted speaking and listening which lyric performs.

Emphasising the listening qualities of the 'talkative ear' provides the focus for Chapter Four which distinguishes different types of listening in W.S. Graham's 'The Dark Dialogues'. The titular dark dialogues appear through the different voices in each section of the poem, and in the dialogues staged in the processes underpinning the lyric. While there are no overt scenes of trauma or loss, my assertion that reading is a process of listening to loss carries through Chapter Four as well. 'The Dark Dialogues'

performs an attentive listening attuned towards silence. The ‘dialogues’ that comprise this lyric are presented as emerging from the poet’s listening into this silence. The poem is drenched in pathos and nostalgia, particularly in the second and third sections which are spoken in voices of a mother and father respectively. These sections speak of memory, which is inseparable from loss. A listening attuned to both historical resonances and the future creates, in Graham’s poem, a poetics which seeks continuity through attending to its predecessors and imagining its future. Graham locates poetics in the materiality of the world, which includes language. Listening to silence tells of a solitude. Listening to silence for a response tells of a loneliness. Situating itself in a poetic temporality performs a communicative belonging, and the act of listening in ‘The Dark Dialogues’ enacts the search for this belonging. Whilst Graham’s lyric does not witness the communicative schisms of the poetics in Monk and Kapil’s lyric, the grief undergirding Riley’s lyric appears in an understated form in ‘The Dark Dialogues’ in the attendance to memories of a childhood home and in the poem’s closing reflections about love.

As I conclude my analysis of the lyric and listening in relation to the work of these four poets, my continual return to Barthes for my thinking about listening seems significant and worthy of reflection. The continual presence of Barthes’ writing suggests a sympathy between his texts and the lyric. In reading *Schizophrene* Barthes’ *Mourning Diary* helped to parse the form of the literary fragment in relation to loss and grief. Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text* provided a way to think about reading as a process of listening to loss and grief. Barthes’ ‘Listening’ essay assisted with distinguishing different acts of listening in ‘The Dark Dialogues’. Each of these texts by Barthes’ reflects on the processes and practices of reading and writing, locating each practice as a form of attentiveness. Indeed, in his essay ‘Listening’ Barthes states ‘I

listen the way I read' (Barthes 1985, p.245). There is a sensual coalescence in Barthes' *Mourning Diary, The Pleasure of the Text* and 'Listening' which situates reading and writing as processes on a continuum rather than as discrete functions. Considering reading and writing as a continuum has specific implications for the process of reading, giving it agency that is less apparent in comparison to the agency of writing as a process. The agency of reading as a process is fundamental to the agency of the lyric which is activated through the reader's active engagement with the sounds of the poem. It is in the reader's processes of listening to the lyric that the sense-making processes of the lyric are animated into agency. Barthes' attentive listening to texts and the documentation of those processes in his own texts has provided a key to thinking about reading as a form of attentive listening and particularly in helping to parse the distinctions of listening practices modelling in the poetics under study in this thesis.

In focusing on listening the chapters of this thesis map a trajectory through trauma, fragment and reparation, loss and silence. In the Introduction I state that this thesis addresses listening as a relatively neglected area of attention in the study of lyric poetry. In addressing listening in poetry by Geraldine Monk, Bhanu Kapil, Denise Riley and W.S. Graham the processes of listening are shown to model multiple and distinct acts. Listening is an act of plurality, taking in sound, noise, music, background, voice and ambiguity. The lyric can render this plurality in language and indeed 'The Dark Dialogues' models this in its encompassing listening attuned towards landscape, the materiality of home, memory, the sea, seabirds and the many other objects in the poem. Attending to listening in the work of these poets focuses on what this poetry *does* as well as what it says. Making this distinction facilitates readings of Monk, Kapil, Riley and W.S. Graham which emphasise their poetics as processes and therefore with agency. In reading these lyrics in this way we find Monk's representations of

victimisation as a poetics which depends upon the suspension of assimilating trauma; Kapil's poetics which 'barely said anything' (Kapil 2011, p.71) addresses difficulties between reparation and trauma; the processes of listening in Riley's 'Listening for lost people' grieve, and 'The Dark Dialogues' stages an attentive series of listening acts to render the processes of lyric composition and belonging.

Emphasising listening actuates the reader as a listener. The process of reading, including the close reading that informs this thesis, is also a process of close listening. The poet and the reader listen to the lyric across time: we read the lyric and the lyric reads us. In close listening the materiality of language is heightened; the achievements of sound in the poem are emphasised and 'meaning' beyond the surface level of meaning-making in the poem is foregrounded. To listen to a poem is to render the poem audible, to recognise its aural materiality and reality as well as the sense we make through the ocular and largely linear process of close reading. In situating the audible poem in the material world, I return to the introduction to this thesis and the discussion of J.H. Prynne's 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work' which emphasises sound to locate poetry amongst the 'clatter of real work in the material world' (Prynne 2010, p.128). In emphasising listening, this thesis has shown how lyric poetry transmits agency in the material world. The recent publication of Angela Leighton's *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Leighton 2018a) and Peter Robinson's *The Sound Sense of Poetry* (Robinson 2018) indicate a turn towards an emerging contemporary interest in the role of sound and listening in poetry. This thesis advances this turn towards listening.

A note on the bibliography: All references in this thesis use the Harvard referencing style. References to the Oxford English Dictionary in the main text of this thesis refer to the *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed at:

<http://www.oed.com/sheffield.idm.oclc.org/> .

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## PART TWO: CREATIVE PORTFOLIO

## [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]: Critical-Creative Bridge

The work gathered in this creative portfolio establishes a bridge between the interpretive work undertaken in the critical component of the thesis and my poetic practice. The critical component of the thesis undertakes creative work in the form of interpretation and the creative component of the thesis undertakes critical work. The critical component interprets poetry by Geraldine Monk, Bhanu Kapil, Denise Riley and W.S. Graham, drawing on a range of theoretical texts to advance an argument for a closer attentiveness to listening in relation to the lyric, and in this sense does creative work. The range of work in the creative portfolio is a poetic engagement with the ideas, forms and themes discussed in the critical component. This poetic engagement does critical work. The poetry and audio work embodies and enacts critical thought rather than demonstrating how the theoretical and critical work in the preceding part of the thesis might be synthesised or even simply differently discussed. The creative work pursues its own open-ended enquiries: it researches its own questions.

### **Violence and Harm**

The critical section repeatedly identifies themes of violence and harm. In Monk's work the affects and effects of trauma are shown arising through experiences of historic abuses towards women in *Interregnum*'s engagement with the Pendle Witches and the story of Mary Queen of Scots in *Escafeld Hangings*. The domestic sphere of the house as a site of violence is embodied in the repetitive and cyclical images and sounds of Monk's *Ghost & Other Sonnets*. Bhanu Kapil's *Schizophrene* explores the harms of abuse at the level of the individual and the socio-political harms of colonial violence caused by the Partition of India. Through a close reading of Denise Riley's 'Listening

for lost people' the violence found in the spatial and temporal rupture of death is encountered in the address to the harms of loss and grief in the eulogising and reparative functions of the lyric sonnet. Finally, W.S. Graham's poem 'The Dark Dialogues' models multiple acts of listening, distinguishing differentiated listening acts to probe the themes within the poem and the sounds of the poem's language. The combination of the themes and sounds within and across the language gesture towards unspoken violence and its harms, most prominently in the suppressions of violence which accompany depictions of the domestic sphere.

In these poetries language does the work of listening to harm by registering it, and goes some way towards reparative address through the processes of listening.

### **The Sequence as Form**

Whilst there are unifying themes across the poetry explored in this thesis, each chapter examines lyric through a different poetic frame. The close readings of Monk's poems draw on individual poems from longer sequences. Kapil's *Schizophrenie* comprises a series of fragmented texts rather than identifiably distinct poems. Riley's 'Listening for lost people' is a sonnet, and W.S. Graham's 'The Dark Dialogues' unfolds as a long poem of four parts. Although the method of close reading as it informs the discussion in each chapter emphasises individual poems the oeuvre of each poet tends towards the sequence as their primary form. The sequence is explicit in Monk's *Interregnum*, *Escafeld Hangings* and *Ghost & Other Sonnets*. Kapil's *Schizophrenie* utilises the form of the fragment to develop a book from a sequence of fragments. Riley's 'Listening for lost people' is a single sonnet within *Say Something Back*, a poetry collection which gathers together lyrics of loss and grief. The thematic unity of *Say Something Back* is indicative of way the lyric can function within a sequence. Likewise, W.S. Graham's

‘The Dark Dialogues’ can be interpreted as a short sequence itself and as part of the wider project of Graham’s poetry which develops and tracks themes and processes across his entire body of work. Whilst the latter may be commonplace in the work of poets, including the poets discussed in this thesis, consideration of what individual poems do within part of a sequence helps to emphasise ways listening can function across the temporal and spatial distances sequence poems create.

### **Creative Portfolio**

The works in the creative portfolio embody, enact and critically engage with the themes of violence and harm, and utilise the sequence form as the principle heuristic and framing device for listening. *Lease Prise Redux* is a long poem comprising sixty-four parts of fourteen lines, a form recognisable as a sonnet sequence. The irregularity of the lines and metre of each line and sonnet situates the sonnet in the experimental sonnet tradition (Hilson 2008). Thematically *Lease Prise Redux* examines socio-political violence through the lenses and lexicon of economics and how the harms of capitalist economics reverberate through the widest social sphere and distort individual lives. These harms manifest in language referencing housing inequalities and its relationship to social injustices including poverty, and its domestic manifestation as the deleterious effects inadequate housing has on social relations and the individual. *Lease Prise Redux* constructs a rickety house with and through the sonnet as a single unit and as a sequence. The ‘experimental’ interpretation of what a sonnet can be pushes at the traditional sonnet form and in doing so registers the roles and functions of housing as capital in which people live temporarily. In his Introduction to *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets* Hilton remarks on the poet Bill Griffiths’ suspicion of the sonnet as a form, quoting Griffiths’ poem ‘Rousseau and the Wicked’: “‘What better disguise for evil /

than sonnets?’” (Hilson 2008: 13). Griffiths’ question might usefully be applied to the relationship between the experimental sonnet form of *Lease Prise Redux* and housing, the places we live, as capital

The audio-recording *speaking towards* gathers nine audio fragments which speak towards, with and into Roland Barthes’ essay ‘Listening’ (Barthes 1985). This audio collection marks one point in a process of engaging with Barthes’ writing on listening and the voice in relation to the poetics explored in this thesis. The instrumentation in the audio-recording relies solely on my own voice, which is variously treated through loops and use of delay effects. The narrative development that Barthes establishes in ‘Listening’ moves from ‘alert’, to ‘deciphering’ to ‘an inter-subjective space’, a transition which progresses from the listening an individual needs to enact to survive, to listening as an interpretive process, to listening as a component of dialogue. The fragmentary excerpts of *speaking towards* problematise this narrative trajectory. Rather than accumulating a narrative ‘meaning’ the audio offers excerpts and disintegration of sound and voice. The title ‘*speaking towards*’ insists on listening as a critical act; through indeterminacy the audio demands attentive listening. Through engaging with Barthes’ ‘Listening’ *speaking towards* questions the theoretical exploration and creative interpretation in the critical component of the thesis and raises new questions: is *speaking towards* a theoretical work in an audio form? Is *speaking towards* a poetry sequence, is it sound poetry, or is this audio work distinct from the concerns of poetry? A parallel might be drawn with the questioning in W.S. Graham’s body of work which repeatedly queries what the poetic voice/s are speaking towards and who might be listening.

The third part of the creative portfolio comprises two sections from a poem sequence gathered under the title *Stitch*. The opening line of the excerpt titled as ‘[3]’

reads ‘the intentional destruction of the body’, a line which locates the harms of violence on and in the individual body and in the body politic. *Stitch* develops the brevity of the individual sonnet form in *Lease Prise Redux* into an extended form to expand themes from the latter and to reach into its own, new, enquiry.

Manuscript of *Lease Prise Redux*



# LEASE PRISE REDUX

**i**

Divested of evidence ensures high insurance &  
business rates. S·he looks so hollow in  
generation. Rates are so high  
taking out massive  
recently vacated. If s·he tells  
pay the borrowed  
in the longing of appearance  
originality  
quietly agreed. The equanimity of  
expansion in the private rental sector  
goodness  
regulating what s·he sees  
leaning on the never  
supply guarantee

**ii**

leap the mandatory quota  
& a statement resulted  
torn to titles &  
reporting blueprints blue as  
check boxes & shirts. S·he the supposed  
dark of independence fades into  
guarantee. Down on  
independence, waiving the  
sup of what s·he actually  
not officially accepted  
shapes recommendations  
statements that one &  
fringe appear to forget  
original headlines.

### iii

Short term exits scheme & forgot  
cold feet  
cost much more to  
rent the risk. Factor in  
& see the staggering  
currently building  
retrospect brilliantly. The original  
benefit payment puts &  
more in debt.

Slide the suggestion into  
tick box jurisprudence. Banks &  
other lenders do lean  
close to themselves & levels of debt  
the state of too many

**iv**

expansion is imminent risk when choice  
over the lakey  
know this  
greater precariousness  
end-stops ever  
in recent years it will  
unable to space itself  
risk to the proportion  
unaffected rejects what is  
reset, lock.  
Services improve clout  
profit.                   Complain  
a joke in which to  
allow risk to health.

v

Unlikely to be especially fulfilled  
in the interests  
not necessary to be  
results & the possible commute  
driven to usually left  
over on the shoulder.

Sever is safer.

The mainland is hiking &  
the extraordinary coping  
strategies out  
to maximise nothing.

She droops the familiar  
& most tenants drop it.

Any life lived with such an obsession.

vi

Conversely the young link  
especially  
undergoing the most level  
only prison  
adversely  
overcrowds the rising  
spending on the broadcast  
aid & near.

In the moment attention changes  
s·he guts the ready.

It is enough in the gratitude of strangers  
to resist  
it rising too fast.

At least coalescence is avoided.

**vii**

She peppers steaks with lies.  
Stay in that part of the building  
least by-passed.  
If force finds reassurance  
in the cave of lottery  
the flicking of friends who are  
somewhat different  
differentiates our worry  
becoming dysfunctional. If  
anxiety is order  
the day drifts &  
value is bricks & mortar.

If to carry on is not to



**viii**

overwhelmingly what occurs is  
living through  
the widely described.  
Tin-pot riches &  
gloriously reliant on buoyancy  
only if the set of nations  
fundamentally links.  
Sister sits on her own &  
thinks beyond first  
cares. A lap  
honours its own place.  
Notice occurs in particular  
presenting the new  
on sheets.

**ix**

S·he issues tissues profligately  
to the point  
better envisage all s·he wants  
on tiptoes when only just  
made into the percent  
s·he wants, probably,  
children but more ostentatious.  
A modesty myth  
rankles in the dream. Rich boy  
s·he say if flaunting ain't good  
enough may as well  
not succeed without an ability  
version to almost nothing  
so few do

**x**

blanket parts on the driveway &  
out steps  
Pops. If an example  
illustrated its own way now  
this plank fails to see shelter  
enough in the rain  
before bedtime tucks it  
right until morning. Kneeling  
right there with it  
right heard it  
at the back creaking out into  
every epic. S·he switches back  
knowing it was bad  
didn't know what to do

**xi**

you can sympathize with such fear  
history &  
empathy soon the simple  
equation of marching & the streets  
continue regardless.

She end-stopped hierarchy. It  
rippled out  
otherwise poorer.

Force rents lives &  
the most tip over the edge to  
more. Simple pretext  
carries weight

i simple to feel.

**xii**

Segregation rankles on the rung.  
Individuality impairs the unchecked  
until almost  
no one can live there. Twinkle toes &  
volatility fingers fool enough  
to sleep on a balloon  
offer a little disgust  
might decide  
decision-makers roll  
aisles happy  
bargain precariously  
if forced to afford harm  
cheekily it gives itself away  
it has one room too many.

**xiii**

Single rooms let to entire families  
subsidy is the growing  
directly to landlords. Little known  
rooms run to extremes,  
cages &  
growing desperation  
ill prepared to register  
sick relations. As if  
you could afford to  
but it is harm  
to  
tenants & cages.  
The route out  
routes in.

**xiv**

Vacant campaigns realise empty cages  
leave a precarious future  
overexposed lenders &  
normal evictions  
none of this  
enjoyable leniency  
wakes her. Homelessness  
spiders out  
the majority of participants  
O curb! O vultures!  
freedom is mad inside  
& pleasure a tiny boat  
the mad are privileged  
enough

xv

lights up. Perhaps the collective  
popularity of investments  
divest her of  
mystique &  
a place extremely well-paid  
in aggregate  
overall empty for just part of the week.  
Shy at the inefficiency, why  
change fecklessness just  
anxiety &  
subdivided owner-occupiers  
some have so many  
bed don't occupy  
enough sleeps



**xvi**

so inhibited by the volatility  
will sell worth  
holding  
rising prices raise.  
Nighty-night &  
lots of living space takes longer  
to upload, increasingly,  
when there isn't enough  
to hear a lone parent  
currently do about the market  
crash as deep as depression.  
Currently not vacant  
whatever as long even if  
increasingly putting up with

**xvii**

boom! In just growing  
it happened before; becoming more  
equitable at the end, rise over  
the sun of the stop &  
lift arms up. Fall into the half  
& too far back  
not necessarily sustainable this  
feint half is worse  
shouldering occurrence  
with intention. Calls for inequitable  
sacrifice &  
simplicity. In her eyes intention  
appears to call similarity  
what narrows

**xviii**

waiting for winter because they were coupled  
to know how large the gap  
equivalents did  
simply build the unreduced  
trounced through the curtailing  
cats tail disappears. What exec  
balances determination  
s-he sits on  
doorstep & gaslights  
double your unfairly shared  
the original family  
starts with the census  
fairly allocated. Over  
becoming ever

**xix**

data successfully addresses  
system-built flat-packed  
situations  
taking space on average the middle  
sign of slowing  
steeps the pomposity of knowing  
down  
to steamy uncertainty.  
Difference mistakes the chronic  
despite spending. Hic &  
cough through dinner. S·he  
didn't promise the night  
slums donate  
clear.

**xx**

Some deposits as low as 5%  
similar to schemes  
hitched to landscape  
too familiar to consult  
as terrain untrammelled &  
other frowns.  
Don the modest demand  
walk in too  
the current shank is &  
a fertility dream. Doze  
out the conservatory  
suggests again  
undergrowing the boom.  
Born per net

xxi

agitation subsidizes private sector  
encouragement. She faces  
depression industrial regions &  
smokes a last  
milestone be  
that last nearly impossible generation  
that  
income gap  
achievement of each was fallow  
compassion minor  
it roots in response to the latter.  
Hang on. Public disquiet  
so lowers the lurch to a stand  
stronger than the best-off

**xxii**

squeeze on the provision  
in name. Create  
the bill plummet with  
plume & bust  
including possibility. S·he shapes  
beautifully, it's difficult  
to go. Sucking on the last  
drops of that last  
step out into the stepping up.  
S·he is Rococo  
through a series of lurching &  
standing. Being  
well bent over  
it goes quiet &

**xxiii**

it's best to benefit the better-off.

Bonds come down

forcing to work a few low paid hours

unstable &

unsuitable

walking vicious circles

at night with experts

finite & long drawn faces

looming out after shining excess

forms a bubble.

What soap extracts this bubble

a result of policies &

in an era better understood

shared?



**xxiv**

Reverts to what should be  
shelter &  
ok s-he top halves it to the rising  
percent. Unable to also  
their own rising  
at least one living  
who cannot  
move. More  
built up than go round to  
deficit. S-he struggles in the queue  
credits a graph to  
multiply averages  
back then it was less expansive  
the sails more knowing.

**xxv**

Reductions in interest offset  
tighter fiscal policy. The shore  
most lowly settlement  
& society directors sink  
their heads. Pulpits &  
parapets again  
attract. The Punch &  
Punch of stop-it &  
tidy-up, tidying up their flotsam.  
Who waits to kiss what.  
High differences  
backfire into the ginnel.  
Two up two down  
outside loo

**xxvi**

about to vote  
they cannot afford the rent  
piggy backs  
eke security &  
stability devolve into worsening  
props &  
the long story no one can afford  
dips into back then.  
Her proportions are such  
great financial inequality  
s·he lifts  
& falls out  
for want of assets. Her  
part-time qualifies

**xxvii**

do not match the larger part  
reliance on  
owned &  
distance  
don't make sexy-times a state of affairs.  
Cannot relax the investor  
proprietor privately  
gambols  
& the response of lending lusts  
deep into unchartered  
university-sponsored  
exclude outright ownership &  
records of families &  
acute deprivation rents

**xxviii**

none of this.

Shelter is the most

instinct. Extra influential force.

Circumstantial lies & cheap

policy. Crux of the gap.

S·he lies hard below deck.

Doubt & the expenditure of total

horn lock

tips into forward. The grasp of

shake down

possible to stockpile disgust

flies

point

view

**xxix**

few people are becoming  
speculum  
happens to the time  
as well by the right wing  
economic credited  
last housing &  
precarious dances do  
so to lend  
less creditably wishes to live  
will protect them.  
Selfishness is not living  
as one wishes to live  
letting other lives alone  
in debt.

**xxx**

Charitable to  
increase volatility.  
Less access to the decent  
freedoms, curtailed philosophy  
sits in class  
& sucks  
an indication. Fingers  
& thumbs rub  
apparently less with concern  
personal free &  
hard to basic  
the affluent & other minorities  
treat those who find luck  
usurped

**xxxi**

do harm the current  
organising population.  
Shifts in popularity  
realign sovereignty with  
pretty cretins. Overall  
the longer & more polluting  
commutes to work  
collude with  
burst  
& badly. Ultimately  
recognise & turn  
cognisant purposefulness  
to footsteps  
wide of the width.



**xxxii**

Controversy & concern

couple policy

with beauty.

Who can no longer pay

her imagination built

more

to allow a few

inadequate for the long

new green

& the inequality

cramps concern.

Struggle to secure one obvious answer

affluent countries carry on housing themselves

**xxxiii**

very affluent transfers rise  
& lino creaks  
'look after yourself, no one else will'  
the new group  
skin  
down to volatile children  
tax dodging &  
in lay-bys           disagree with yourself.  
Hold more  
& paths cross  
rare investments. S·he divests  
dildos into the gutter  
just for looking.  
& for many there is always fear

**xxxiv**

refined. Median  
off the mark is a fine definition  
grace to win  
era of  
groupies &  
chucking up rent. Children  
hardly need to sleep  
in slums. Even  
clear  
modest means in the West  
wake mass to try.  
Privilege sleep penalty free  
redeem to vouch  
environmental fractals

**XXXV**

successive influences

lopsi

the value of reliance. She sits

on sanctity remaining

fall a tiny fraction.

Arguments follow lines

& cute lines. Upside

cuts now reliant

swig &

walk an affable line.

Winter interventions &

all arguments

post out. Combinations

cannot be learned.

**xxxvi**

Compare these buyers  
furnishing  
their counties. Fixtures &  
fittings shod so  
beautifully with basic  
bath &  
stunning 'quality', what  
bits part company & the striptease  
of 'and'  
parks just because.  
Not too long ago  
undermined difference  
wildly high  
four star.

**xxxvii**

Buying frenzies blame

cash

illustrating full & end-stopped reason. O

shanks too cosy

banks by contrast

blame accumulated government debt.

She rides a pony

term of praise

indeed. Bluntly

illustrate how fast &

far a housing

greed. Fix attributes

coalesce. Equally

apportion land.

**xxxviii**

Reel to national  
two lives. The life of  
& wish of  
private communism.  
Try not to talk  
elsewhere. Comparison with  
the backed-up drains  
shoulders near neighbours  
rife with  
current problems. Slither  
a tongue  
who is now interred  
responsible for reluctance  
to press cover

**xxxix**

each bails out          bubble  
high heels districts  
cheap sadly accustomed to  
bayonet trying not to  
butterflies so  
cry a shoddy service  
charge into dark landlords  
state indirectly  
profiteering delight  
charm &  
validation of  
culture & mentality.  
Exploit debt  
& the present day



**XXXX**

offers where rent controls remain  
assured &  
bleak into  
backing  
asking the problem to square  
throughout the develop  
solve the apparent  
rife pegs  
demand &  
strip already. Said 'not in that chair'  
they have worked  
prevent authorities to force  
law into lists  
avoid becoming

**xxxxi**

rife through regulation. Alphabetise

comedy for effect.

Travails so shit-hot

it delves

out of demand into utterness.

Keep on. Off already

exists page left

defining shock as families trade up

investments. A little one

numbers

portfolios gain speed.

Type it

so recent years own

squatters receive so little attention



**xxxiii**

ruptures perpetuate new forests  
given to adopt  
better crises. Lift  
foreclosure to neighbourhood  
towns. Who  
lends in a crisis?  
Issues abandoned death certificates  
over even-handedness receiving interest  
to press on. Even  
papery &  
fine smoking leaves  
nothing less than harm  
trailing over  
other types of soon.

**xxxxiv**

Circumstantial blackouts. Evenly distributed  
rates secure essential  
pocket linen. On the basis of value.  
Stumbling through right s·he lights  
a last wish  
people choose to  
certain but to stay as a tenant  
completely defaulted  
vine often  
polarised &  
shitty. High density living  
views itself  
let in enough safety &  
swallow

**XXXXV**

neat masts

trap sore

world apologise

'if only my mother'

every

last chance cities regarded

towerless & late

can play happy. Breathe

in pretend

masks sear. Cities polarise

if could seize

now blocks

replace the sore with heart &

gerbera

**xxxxvi**

whose obvious answer is unpalatable  
same the ratings  
among foreigners  
follow if to receive  
bail out  
the IMF walks the streets at night  
if to suck on children  
reports events  
representatives flow uphill  
never to  
fuck that guy  
tuning officials referring inside  
see 'important-looking'  
black out.

**xxxxvii**

If you could be more certain  
avoiding the worst  
blanket conviction  
poise & the post-capitalist imagination  
then need  
casino subvert  
responsible landscape  
Guggenheim guilt  
pond large intervention  
recent tales run to the market  
squeals & stop  
a bubble disquiet through unemployment  
O hoist over the wags  
earn on fault



**xxxviii**

definition is seismic promises &  
birds the old model.

Relative stability is crazy, the old goose

heart of Europe

rubs. Roll

material gain control & blanky

tucky-up time.

XX

Quickly through property think the remain

so greatly incremental

stepping simultaneous availability.

Flip

doorstep friends & family

loan no longer

**xxxxix**

'I love you, will you marry me?'

quickens fearful contagion

buoyant & still a girl

constructing even less

joint assert

ripple change.

Even if only

average salaries

gesture a stiff letter

there's a starry starry night

pretend

familiarity is difficult

both behave

after confidence.

**XXXXX**

Endocrine pathways ache. O  
keep a number of such highly paid  
short-term  
similarities cheat their way  
hold back. O vultures  
how to behave is just a simple handbook.  
Average enticements butter in  
good news.  
Opal gone into administration.  
Such excessive formats  
formally advise  
London is so expensive these days  
don't  
exchange

**xxxxxi**

Every time 'goodbye'  
cynical help-to-buy a little every time  
wonder ladder when  
    hear a lark attachments  
there's an air somewhere  
to sleep no finer reason  
how strange not devoid  
change is reason  
every time precariously  
renovate            income  
streams through similarity  
now almost wonder  
others fear  
confession

**xxxxxii**

completely reliant on a steady stream  
to gamble  
one lasting end-stopped bus lane  
meant early morning  
spring about the greatest drops  
concentrated on  
listing endless nights listing  
loans to tune  
routine. What can't be written  
out during a lifetime  
end-stops unfettered                      town-planning  
demand does not  
gesture  
scaffolding invests in the rich world

**xxxxxiii**

bailing chawks the furthest drop  
structural problems wrap both arms &  
waiting for Winter nods  
prices into portfolios. S·he knows  
weeping that way  
washes out  
estate agents. Plummeting into  
bang on the face  
into state-planned & state-funded  
interrogations in the therapist's chair.  
Hops  
out constitutions of foolhardy  
scribblers. Not one  
unfettered walk

**xxxxxiv**

revolutionaries basic supply & command  
peep-toes scattershot speculations  
even orthodox hovers  
wishful. O s-he skirts  
long-distance daydreams  
generously. A twenty-five year mortgage might  
not pay land rise little or nothing  
prevention weighs  
rather fold  
sheets over blue options  
pension funds & utility companies  
pretend  
good at giving  
enough to come

**XXXXXV**

the previous year building faster

possess the empty

cage hospital

shortages back-to-back the block

& call in

fee to blame any policy.

Related slowly. Potentially fictitious

left spare single elderly people

left spare single elderly people

whatever property

nibbles the knees

kiss to

let that likely

‘it is not possible for many people to live alone’



**xxxxxvi**

cry in circumstance & pretend  
tenderness. Wild horses  
drive  
ex-colonial resolutions. Map & hearts  
shift into overdrive  
whatever property they can get  
results in reduced overcrowding  
s·he tackles that  
cost per person  
iambic pens hover  
in a row of dustbins  
under-occupation is a resolute dream.  
Water  
scattered journeys

**xxxxxvii**

tenure suggests release suggests

wrong to raise the ladder

the baa

baa politics of

on board flotilla            kind substandard

contracts outright owners

gate the wrong

implies substitutes but what substitutes for

prophets

obnoxious advocates of raising cash

entrenching

admonishments of waxing employment

a quick built moon

gerrymandering

**xxxxxviii**

to replace what has been replaced

semantics

shuffle knowingly ashamed deterioration

cold yet reducing environmental damage

mortgages

a feasible life to trip-wires

& ballet.

Crosshatch significance

vista

taste iron.

Squat. Action replies on the get-go

go-getting refrain

through the apparition of Sunday

reparation impossible

**xxxxix**

should there be cages  
enough to live  
& swimmingly through the laws of balance &  
quotation  
quality end-stops courage & the only  
economically possible property  
wavers. Experts build  
maintenance costs into standard  
opposition faces  
boarded up provisions  
recovery & prices of fairly average two-bed  
nod night  
frightened in there of retreating  
cervix

**XXXXXX**

systems facilitate the so  
conversely requires more space  
new families  
crisis                      also do  
between cities either  
a reconstituted really  
facilitates unremitting stress  
hawking anxiety as if  
just about building replacement properties  
mandated  
reflux of just another  
help people to learn not to hoard  
exist in limited form  
fail applause

**xxxxxxi**

state many individual houses  
large-scale demolition coverts  
little acknowledgement  
wilder arguments defend defenestration  
adapted by knocking on doors. Cagey enough  
cocktails write-off  
syllabi. No one knows less especially  
sensitivity stroking sensitive leaves.  
Wilder arguments defend  
to be seen  
clears decadence of  
a sniff  
intend i  
so social swerving

**xxxxxxii**

silly nights

destined in several parts

protestors & planners aspire

special concentration of disadvantage

disavow policy

currently paid into

transfer offshore to purchase

residential treatment

destitute at the market rate

s/he wanders surprising struggling

misapprehension triggers

lay

gentrification & liberal increase

sand

**xxxxxxiii**

tenants are not balance  
famously corrupt  
borough reports shifting boundaries &  
without police  
s·he drowns marginal  
carry on at school in a neighbourhood  
earmarked to be sold  
famously  
in a way they might be worried  
in the way of worrying  
'if the North becomes a place to stow  
extradited people'  
impossible to complex  
shimmying fantastic



**xxxxxxiv**

stronger than certainty  
iconic gestures leave empty cages roaring  
about  
wonder why it is there  
who has been moved forcibly  
ident financial  
a new segregation under  
uprooted friends  
uprooted friends your home is tragedy  
in an identical financial situation  
loans companionship  
shoot  
repercussions percussive  
conscious

# speaking towards

<https://enjoyyourhomes.bandcamp.com/album/speaking-towards>

## speaking towards

by linda kemp



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- ▶ 1. oscillation of the mark 02:33
- ▶ 2. prey-threat-object 02:27
- ▶ 3. auricular confession 00:09
- ▶ 4. the oaks of dodona 08:35
- ▶ 5. sensu stricto 03:51
- ▶ 6. auricular confession II 00:31
- ▶ 7. deciphe 00:39
- ▶ 8. oscillation of the non-mark 05:05
- ▶ 9. [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] 00:29

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# Excerpts from *Stitch*

[ 3 ]

the intentional destruction of body

violet proportion

particularly in women

disparity is evident in data form

access to concern provide valuable emotional support

instances of style & coats with-

out despair wandering clinical corridors

these aesthetes with lovely smiles

available more widely than ever before

particularly in terms of reducing frequency

limited users being drawn

focusing on the

tick-box survey of

intimates &

assorted genders with

in each instance passion was sought

duplicate complications allow one question

all cruelty is in tact

do not answer every question

transposes participants into categories these

borders &

patience scuttling into overburdened administrative officers

accounts of  
dysregulation follows  
despite the questionnaire  
frequency infers a degree of sensitivity  
a personal definition of biting &  
looking deliberately  
active starting the  
further clarification of personal dignity  
it startles no definition  
selecting other  
over every  
tiny burning names  
using the largest group to indicate an  
average remains a  
closet guess  
the taut wire &  
*we must find time to talk about this*  
frames & other longer  
lenses in hospital beds the berth  
using the daily indicator of  
malevolence & seekers of prestige in a job  
market so distorted pay to read  
no definition was provided  
defamation is viewing threads in the forum  
the ecstatic sex of harm

moderating the search for images yes  
in an average day the image reproduction  
motivates to either find  
therefore they're also  
to connect  
often the same support is comparative  
harm was not bad enough to need  
particular the increase  
competition popularises the pay-grade  
need for assistance the  
feeling of petty independence  
look &  
own because better care &  
small numbers isolate in particular  
causes the negative effects of sleep &  
perceptions of psychological impact  
over duress face  
down in  
trig [cn]  
*it made self-harming worse*  
*that surrounding with ecstasy &*  
*music &*  
*poetry that*  
*\_\_\_\_\_ is a figure of*  
*glory in a burning thorny crown*

*guess how much i want to fuck you*

perception of negative effects surrounds humour

aiding beneficiaries

belonging in the social interaction

desperate for &

to talk about it

but large support is

written in Visa/Maestro & present

in healthier ways of coping

unannounced flight departures

these professional lifestyle blogs they

clog society up with

so much as a method

not a teenage community but a

envelope of solitude a

clumsily defining answers with further evidence the

cut &

stitch of speaking that

claustrophobic mouth

that moth

not every conversation is talk

[ 4 ]

because desire is not an instrument

these private messages operate as support &

random chatbots

introducing topics facilitated by constant streams of

rooms &

disciplines allocated to three-dimensional promises knowingly

catalogued as dreams

these researchers chivvy along the readers

with their complex operations of

retracting from memory the sideswipe

formerly known as turn

debate is a random pattern

free to introduce consistently swerving materials into

an immaterial encounter

these allocations are sweet as provocation

dreamtime is the baseline lacking language the

discipline of care presenting abuse as a sole solution to

discussion between compromise &

the passive involvement of lounging in this

consensus of illustrative quotes

these gardens are a string agreement the

journey into outer hemispheres a mere tongue

touch the gentle cheek of  
internet use & the anxiety of age  
a distortion is someone online crying  
non-responders in the mean  
when telephone felt less  
the invitations to complete  
did not correspond with qualifying examples  
being lost in the  
firing felt bigger the loss of  
less random responders the sharp-tongued talk  
of biting  
sections of the survey reveal illusory agreement  
the boost of self-esteem gone wild  
the knowing others did not share  
the feelings of something ill-judged

*sit on that chair &*

*measure the world in cigarettes &*

*illusory bottles of wine*

*the same as*

not now a stranger may be true but  
seeing several pros mean maintaining face-to-  
face contact overnight  
there is always going wrong & learning more



the never spoken entry into  
gutters with the remnants of readers languishing  
hungrily in doorways those self-made voices  
widening & thoughts & emotions  
younger now than  
asking for help on a particular issue ostracises  
not often but mostly  
the wrong question on the wrong lips displeases  
ranking in order of consensus  
it's not a major shift or anything but  
the prepaid ride is not the same feeling  
the guts of it gone into  
semicircular decline  
the race out of London to push up houses  
the book dealer says this is a music city  
there is not a lot of rest here  
the rest is easily explained  
a card-catalogue of disasters  
waiting in emergency rooms for a surgeon who fails  
arrival every time the door closes  
there is no problem here  
the harm is heartache with a cure  
tinctures on one knee

sometimes distraction works for  
before talking kind of pro  
moderation is not useful  
a beak only to intervene if  
increasing familiarity discloses disaffection  
these clothes are not the clothes of a poet  
settling with disorder  
to talk openly gathers in aggregate