On the Threshold:
The Polyphonic Poetry Sequence

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Liz Bahs, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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***

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On the Threshold: The Polyphonic Poetry Sequence

Although the polyphonic poetry sequence has become a popular form of poetry, it has been widely neglected in contemporary critical discussion. The last major work to focus on the poetry sequence was Rosenthal and Gall's *The Modern Poetic Sequence* (1983), which makes little reference to the approach that polyphony brings to the genre. This thesis traces polyphony from its origins in music, to Bakhtin's use of the term as a literary metaphor, before moving to a primary focus on the poetry sequence. The chapters examine specific techniques and characteristics of the polyphonic poetry sequence: the layering of two or more distinct voices, the juxtaposition of poetic parts and speakers to conjure simultaneity, and the creation of a unified whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

In parallel with the research, three sections of poetry are included. The first, 'Polyphonic Sketches', is comprised of poems that experiment with polyphony through juxtaposition, refrain, and the number and placement of speakers in poems that appear to use only one obvious voice. The second, 'Composition', is a sequence of sixteen portraits of family members that explores polyphony through voices residing inside and outside of the scenes. The third section, 'The Calling', is the re-imagining of a Hebridean mermaid myth, a sequence that employs signposting and countermeasure in the progression of its four voices.

My practice-based approach to polyphony has informed the research of this thesis; as such, the arguments are illustrated by a close analysis of three sequences with polyphony at the core of their constructions: Jackie Kay's 'The Adoption Papers', Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves', and Gabrielle Calvocoressi's 'Circus Fire, 1944'. As a unique contribution to knowledge, my poetry and critical arguments therefore address the following key question: What are the distinguishing features of the polyphonic poetry sequence?

Table of Contents

Polyphonic Sketches ____ 5
Composition ____ 17
The Calling ____ 37
Introduction to the Thesis ____ 70
    Methodology & Foundations ____ 73
    Thesis Chapters & The Practice of Polyphonic Poetry ____ 78
Chapter 1: A Polyphonic Spectrum ____ 81
    Polyphony as Literary Metaphor ____ 82
    Extending the Terminology ____ 89
    A Polyphonic Reading: 'The Adoption Papers' ____ 95
    Juxtaposition & Polyphonic Simultaneity ____ 101
    A Spectrum of Polyphonic Poetry Sequence ____ 110
Chapter 2: A Polyphonic Threshold ____ 114
    The Tendencies of Poetic 'I's ____ 115
    Gradations of Discourse ____ 124
    Speakers on the Threshold: 'Room of Leaves' ____ 128
    Speaker as Consciousness ____ 135
    Dialogic Connections & Challenges ____ 143
Chapter 3: A Polyphonic Progression ____ 150
    Narrative Trajectory & Countermeasure ____ 158
    Polyphonic Layers: 'Circus Fire, 1944' ____ 164
    Sequence Signposting ____ 171
    Dynamic Interaction ____ 177
    A Sum of Parts ____ 184
Conclusion: The Polyphonic Poetry Sequence ____ 190
    Layers of Poetic Polyphony: 'The Calling' ____ 190
    A Genre in Process: The Polyphonic Poetry Sequence ____ 196
    Beyond A Sum of Parts ____ 202
Bibliography ____ 204
A Selection of Additional Sequences from the Polyphonic Spectrum ____ 213
Appendix ____ 215

Polyphonic Sketches

38 to Islington

I

Inside a cherry-red bus
my face reflects night: slack
lips, halo of frizz, unfocused eyes.
Outside, a blur of faces, shopping bags. I link
people in crowds, make pairs. No one looks back
through my window or they would see a quick pinprick
of scarlet bloom near my lapel,
petals almost
blood-coloured.

II

Cherry bus. The window frames
a blur of winter hats, couples in odd
pairs waiting at stops. No
one looks in. Night's face
reflects slack lips, electric frizz (imagine

lacework and petals). Quick
procession of scarlet, heart pinned
on my brown wool coat. Bullet-hole
bloom, almost blood-red.

III

Bus speeds up. Couples
blur in the frame,
cherry smiles. Accurate
faces. Pinpricks
of night, spreading. Almost
red, as garishly dark as. Hold
lacework and petals.
Odd pairings to heart. Stop
in the crowd, imagine slack.
No one
to look. So long.

The Dacre Mill Photographs

Light echoes in empty corridors,
a shatter of glass and boards.
Hazard   *Danger*   Notice the signs.

In the hallways he plays dead, body
broken among a shatter of glass and boards,
graffiti in corridors, an echo of winter sky.

I shoot his play: feet kicking jagged
boards and splintered glass, graffiti spray
on hazard signs, no caution for danger.

He plays dead, plays broken, while I
climb chimney ruins, study sky,
blue graffiti, light in empty corridors.

He tests broken boards, dangles his legs
through the jagged floor, a blend of salt
and danger in the signs: *Hazard.*

He dangles through broken floor,
disappears with a shatter of boards.
Snapped in an echo: an empty corridor,
hazard signs, his play with danger.

Song Kol Camp, Kyrgyzstan

for M.W.

Parched earth disappears in the dying light
but our feet find ground. My eyes focus on blank sky,
black like felt, the air heavy with horse dung. Boys corral
their herds, call and whistle across plains of dust.

Your voice at my ear pauses and starts, pauses and sings—
homesound. Here among the ache of altitude, my head
is a hum of blood as we make a path through darkness.
Walking into nightfall with you, into the dark

without sight, we could walk and walk for hours,
my arm in yours to anchor us. I am further from home
than I have ever been. Our eyes on sky, we squint
into an arc of blackness, miles nearer, still out of reach.

One star arrives, the atmosphere sliding aside, then
a hundred more. There, the little dipper, or is it the Plough?
Orion's Belt, you say, *or wait*, *maybe it's there*. We look
and look, heads back as far as they can go, the night lit

with tiny suns. And in our looking—as we try to make them
close—a fog like frozen breath stretches above us. *That's it*,
you say, *the Milky Way*. That white cleft, that haze? *Yes*.
We're in it, just here, but so far away.

Stay Bones

She's ribboned into her stays, secured near her hip,
bone edge snagging each rib. *Breathe in or it could snap.*

Strips like thick paper, bone paper, knife-edge
sharp, curved to shape flesh. *The finest bones*

if you stay, if you wait. Feel the bite of bone, carved
with thorn and rose, carved with ships, pearly bone

of the palest pink. She keeps herself upright,
slipped into stays: sliced whalebones, his engravings

entirely concealed. *I will send you the finest bones*
if you keep yourself. This stay bone’s a triptych in ink:

indigo boats cut shimmered sea, forget-me-nots in delicate
blues each side. Her dress keeps secrets, scalloped ends

lifting breasts, a fit that’s just so. *The finest bones if you*
keep yourself for me. Watch as the flowers appear, see

the sea rise: ships slide into view as we free
the binds, the spine’s curve, bone by bone.

Greyhound Night Service: Atlanta to Miami

We're through Macon without a stop, to Cordele's *Flying J.* 2am. LeRoy shouts—
Quick break. No booze. No funny stuff. Yu'll be searched on reboardin'.

He cuts his eyes to the gaggle of drag queens preening in the aisle and the man with a stitched-up face. Stepping into the fug of mosquito and heat, I hear the locals before I see them—hip hop blaring, a jangle of voices shouting over the noise to greet us, their rusted cars without hubcaps. Our seven-minute pit stop is the only party in town.

We queue up to get back on. LeRoy, bulldogging the door, plunges elbow-deep into bags and pockets, frisking everyone before he lets them pass. Silver greyhound leaping off his lapel— *Dare'll be no readin' on mah night bus. No chit chat.*
Cell phones need ta be good as dead.

He slams the bullet proof wall closed in front of aisle one, separating his driver's throne from our rows of silent seats. He grips the wheel, staring in the rear view at intervals, chugs a two litre of diet Sprite. I nod off to the engine's hum, the rhythm of car lights passing us.

A thumping wakes me and he's there, pounding on the smudged glass. Our bus stopped on the road side. He glares at the girl beside me as she tries to stash her phone, a tinny voice on the other end still talking. He jabs his finger at her, moist lips spitting words—
Eyes an ears dees walls have. I'll kill yo communicatin' fore it spreads.

Okapi

i

He turned up Wednesday
on top of the tall bookshelf, his eyes
surveying the whole room. Somehow

he made it to my desk, his curved
hooves leaving little
indents in the cherry wood.

ii

Rust-red, like the last
day's blood each month. Here in a rush,
then gone. Where no one has been
for so long.

iii

More zebra than giraffe, though science
says otherwise. A miniature clay model

becoming the real thing. Old-man eyes
in a burnished face. His flank glistens

after our evening together; he lies
on the blue Turkish rug, laps cool water

from my palm. Eyelashes fan
open and closed, hypnotic.

iv

Today we take the Bluebell Railway
after eggs Benedict and black tea.
Your long neck through the narrow
window, sooty smear
on your brow when you lean
back in to kiss me. Honeysuckle
everywhere on the breeze.

v

He takes quick photographs—
ticket stubs, stop signs, wind
haunting trees—*click click click.*
His glance doesn't linger. No focus,
just impulse.

vi

Behind moss-green blinds,
shadows lift, light from outside glows the room
to a meadow of green. Other green things:

my desk
your velvet armchair
some thin books on the shelf
pens for marking papers

Like Christmas with you here, your auburn
silhouette a fixed point in a forest of evergreen.

vii

Animal stink. White
stripes on an earth-red rump—*white*
red white red—flick of his tail

sending Morse code with stripes;
line and colour blurs, musk and warmth.
His slick fur against my chest
as I floor him

tangle of laughter and groan,
the downy trumpet of his ear, a taste
of fresh grass.

viii

At 5am on a Saturday, the M25 is clear,
open road. How you arrange such long
legs, all knee and fur-ringed ankle
into this sports car, I'll never know.
The zoo, you say, *to visit old friends.*

We trust sat-nav, get lost along the way.
Later, you mingle and sniff, circle and circle
your brother's new wife. The young ones

gallop and graze, your mother
peers at me through the low trees.

ix

Only rare sightings of you in the weeks
since you moved in: velvet throne, baskets

of shoes, collection of tiny jungle creatures,
bed for a king. If I throw myself onto its wide expanse,

if I open my arms out like Christ, if I close
my eyes, will you leap on me like you

used to? Will you nuzzle your tender nose
behind my knees, lick a salty trail

up my thigh, will you make me
forget the others?

x

A note beside
the bed in miniature
writing—*who am I*
to disturb an angel?
I search for you, call out your
name into the silent
air of our house. Your things
disappear one by one. Faintly,
through the garden
gate, a clatter
of hooves.

Natural History Museum, Carapace 13523 (extinct)

Where her head and neck would be   where her front legs
would sit astride the bone that protrudes like a trowel into empty air.
Where the soft moss-brown folds, the dip and pucker of skin—
as clavicled as our own—would be, there.

Sure   the vivarium must've been big enough
to mimic forest, stream and beach. Sure   she was kept
with others of her closest kind. Sunlight shines over

the wooden barrier while we gawk and say   *Only one*
While we say, loud enough   *She's the last*   We say, loud
enough that she—*her eggs sterile*—loud enough that she hears
No more   in the certainty of our goodbye.

New York: Flight 1549

I

Go to the wings, she screams—
window seams pouring the river in.

We shuffle farther, farther out, the white metal
slick with fuel. On the other wing everyone's

shouting. This side's quiet until a man
plunges down, tries swimming

to shore. A girl clutches my wrist.
In the distance, ferries move towards us.

My feet are wet now, toes burn with cold.
A man behind me clears his throat, *Let's dance*

he says, and I turn to him. *All of us*,
he means, all of us should dance

to stop the frost in our limbs. And the whole
wing begins to heave, ice-grey river shifting

closer as we sway, pressed together
each on our square foot of paint.

II

They kept shouting   *Throw the baby*   *Throw us*
the baby   after about 30 seconds, I did   and when I
let him go he swung high over the Hudson, towards the arms
of a man in black uniform and I thought—*when*
the bough breaks—but he didn't fall, was caught like
a loaf then started wailing. In the minute it took for me
to follow him from wing to life raft, I felt it. Something
that keeps me awake now after I put him to bed.
The urge to jump the other way, swim down
the long cold river, not looking back, my boy safe
in the arms of a stranger, safer than with me.

III

Silence as I fly over the wreckage: passenger ferries,
half-inflated life rafts, baggage, the river clotting
with dark shapes. Divers jump from helicopters,

men crawl like insects over the parts not yet submerged—
the tailfin's blue and white striped flag, ice crystals
on the rudder like stars. I want to circle my aircraft back

around, retrace the path that was their descent. Keep my wings
horizon-level, ready to ditch on target. I want one chance
to skim the water with the cold white belly of this plane.

On January 15, 2009, US Airways Flight 1549 was forced to land in the Hudson River, New York City. Everyone on board survived.

Composition

‘Poetry puts starch in your backbone so you can stand, so you can compose your life.’

Maya Angelou

Chicken Pox Nude [*motion blur*]

Through green shag-pile fields, she gallops on
tip toe, brown plastic horse in hand.

Her blonde ringlets are looped with beads
and red feathers,

her big-chief headdress.
Her day begins in bare-skinned battle, limbs

daubed with pink splodges, her only cover
to keep the crawling itch at bay.

It's a no-holds-barred, cowboy and Indian war,
a prairie ambush with nakedness on display,

herself the squaw-hero, milk teeth snarling,
surviving a plague.

[

Composition—I

Crumpled with a flame-eaten edge
The others all shredded then burned to ash
This last, saved when Mamma caught her in the act

]

Aaron, 2 ½ [*polaroid*]

Everything's outside the frame—
Grandmother's legs in dark cotton pants,
curved stomach and chest, the slope of her back,

Aaron's stroller, his plump knees and hushpuppies.
[Even the horse isn't all here, amputated
from the jaw line down.]

And Papa's truck–
everything’s gone except the grill.
In the sun's glare

rough-hewn planks corner then disappear,
no sky or ground,
only shadows stripe the fence.

*

Aaron’s in the center, shy
as he sees her, live and up close—

her velvety face, nostrils
swivelling, ears tracing their talk.

His chest rises, holds breath,
hands clutched as she scents him.

Grandma moves in
with a pincer grip, prises his hands up

to touch the horse—hot breath,
silken grasping lips.

*

No hat on him and the sun ablaze, she's talking talking
at him. Grabs his little wrist, pulls him near to pet the horsey.
But he's fine as he is—sitting back, looking from her to me.
Like when I buy him ice cream and he almost
can't bear it—so cold and pink, crisp cone in his fist, dripping
as it melts in the heat and he doesn't know where to start.

Kali [*slow shutter*]

Impossibly black, necklace
of ginger on her chest. All day she chitters
on the sill, at night she crawls into the dark

curve between my knees and chin, the two
of us falling into shared breath. She's a sleepy
Bastet, queen of cats. She's heat, alive, the twitch

of ear and claw. Amber stare from a midnight
face. [*Kali: created before light itself.*] Each dawn
she wakes me and I remember this.

Engaged, 1973 [*shutter lag*]

She is decorating the balsam fir, conjuring a home
from cream modular walls. Her box of tinsel and lights
unpacked, she weaves strung cranberries through the boughs,
glances back at me with every round. Amid the tinny bells
and far-off radio noise, I marry her name
with mine. And she turns—
                                        but my shutter's
too slow, loses half of her in the frame [one ear and an auburn
swirl of her hair missing]. But it's quick enough to catch
her cheeks [grown rose], the swish of her hips, a corner
of an eye. Behind her our tree's a jumble of garland, bare
branch at the top [where the glass snowman will be].
I see in her blush our new sleepless nights, the gifts
we'll unwrap by degrees.

[

Composition—II

Doubles, in their paper sleeve—
me me   you you   us us

We split them like dealing cards
one by one.

And after twenty years apart
your copies return to me by post:

fingerprinted and dog-eared
not a single photo lost.

]

In Papa’s Barn [*wide-angle*]

Ya know I usedta cut silage with this tractorand see
here where the headlight’s got a crack in ‘er.
But I kin fixerup real good by just gettin’ me a new
one from Hazen’s shop, half the pricen the others.
Lemme backker upta the wall heren youse
kin have a lookit ‘er. Whatta beut, eh?

*

He says, *Take a photo uv me on ole’ Bessie, commere.*
No, line ‘er up straight. I wanna getta good one uv ‘er.
Back up, back up an make sure you getta good one.
I wanna send a copy to Vernie, show ’im I’ve still
gotter runnin’.

Behind him, the walls are washed out, a map
of cracks tracking through concrete, blue as ash.

She says, *Shut up, shut up. I’m tryin’ ta take uh good one*
an you keep flappin’ yer jaw.

He sits on his tractor like a king, grips the wheel
with white-knuckled fists, exhaust choking us.

He says, *Did ya getter?*

She says, *Lemme take another onen case that didn do it.*
How do ya put on the flash?

He says, *Give it here woman.*

She says, *I got it, shut up now.*

He strikes his pose, the usual face: set lips,
glasses low on his bridge, that look.

Lemme getta good one.

[

Composition—III

Sometimes she's written the date or place or both
Sometimes the ink's smudged, the names underlined twice
Sometimes it's faintly on the back
Sometimes, across our laps, or with an arrow pointing to her baby bump
Sometimes blue letters on the sky or her left-hand slant beneath his feet
Sometimes dark marker on snow
Sometimes no words at all

]

Patience, 16 [*fisheye*]

She surveys the field, a rifle slung
over one shoulder, its stock jutting behind her.
Her spaniel darts in circles, hovers at speed, paws
stretched then curved: his flight and touchdown.
She watches the treeline, skeletons embracing
the dusk and, with the rabbit's dash, she's a blur—
two shots and the grass goes quiet.

Her face is nearly all in shadow as she bends
to lift her kill, except her eyes, a moony glint
above slender cheeks, and the last things you'll notice—
tiny horns, one at each temple like a young cow's,
the pair tied with ribbon beneath her jaw. And the red
flame of her forelock, a tuft to run your fingers
through, a tuft to fondle.

Perfect Symmetry [*tilt*]

Half a face: eyebrow a blackbird's wing,
ear angled out, red mouth sprouting
stones for teeth. Tape it to a blank page,
fill in the other half, capture what's not:
the wishbone of her throat, paper-white
skin, the pool's surface broken
beneath her.
At the surface
she splits red lips to speak, to gasp
for air, to shout. Fill in her other half:
black hair a cascade, the silence
as her eyes find you. No
perfect symmetry here.

Perfect symmetry here
as her eyes find you out. No
black hair or cascade of silence
for air to shout. Fill in her other half:
she splits red lips to speak, to gasp
at the surface.
Beneath her skin
the surface pools, breaks
the wishbone of her throat, paper-white.
Fill in her other half, what's not. Capture
stones for teeth, tape them to a blank page.
Ear angled out, red mouth sprouts
half a face: eyebrow, a blackbird's wing.

Crescent Beach, 1999 [*triptych*]

I

I see more of you this way, through my lens:
your long curls escaping the green hat,
your strong legs, twin limbs

rising from the sea. You don't smile
or look at me. I catch this distance
and keep clicking, want every angle captured

until I can almost touch you;
weeks of sand and something
undone between us.

II

The breeze is cold, holds winter already.
I have come here to cross miles of seabed,
to swim until my limbs ache.

I hear her shutter catch the light, feel her
gaze on my bare shoulders stronger
than this blinding sun, but I don't turn,

don't wade further out, just stay, anchoring
my favourite green hat as the tide between us
tries to pull it away.

III

Arms up, hands on head steady a green hat.
In this moment's still frame: gooseflesh, orange
bikini bright against a hurricane sky.

On shore, slung between pennywort
and cordgrass, a wooden skeleton of foot bridge
begins and ends at nothing.

All that matters is here:
young woman knee-deep in Atlantic water,
November sky gathering in behind.

Uncle [*technicolor*]

He pulls plastic cups from the cupboard—
yellow green
orange pink
one white bowl,

arranges them on the table,
all upside down,
some near her,
some far away.

He tells her to hold the yellow one still,
in the centre.

These are the planets, he says, *you
hold the sun.*

*

In the falling dusk there are no stars,
so colours take on the shape of spheres,
this white bowl the moon.

It is hard for her to hold the sun,
wanting to draw figure-eights
around earth and moon.

She doesn't know
that someone has walked there already,
doesn't know about light years
or the milky way.

*

It's dark now
[outside the picture]—

leave him at the table
where he keeps spinning colours—
rotating worlds in sequences,

until all the patterns make sense,
until the universe comes alive.

[

Composition—IV

In truth, the kitchen is blown white
a glare of formica and chrome.

At the table, he's bled out—neon
hair and moustache framing a near
invisible face.

In truth, his hands are empty and night
through the window, a faded blank.

]

Her Skirt [*image transfer*]

The other girls called her wild, the skirt a scandal, like leaving lit candles unattended or camping on a school night. It was the green of finger paint, with pink and orange flowers, the hue of boiled sweets. I wore her skirt through college, wore it with purple suede shoes, strappy tops, feather earrings tangled into my curls. The moment I can last locate it: senior year, on my way downstairs after class, its mid-calf whisper as I rushed. It wasn't my only skirt, wasn't the only gift from my grandmother. But it was the only thing, among all the clothes she sewed, the handmade rugs and throws and afghans, the only thing she made just for herself, made at fifteen, before she knew she'd have to marry the Smith boy she'd camped out with. The one whose soft voice and tight rage wouldn't allow her to wear a skirt that bright, that thick with flowers, a skirt she'd stayed up all night stitching with fine green thread. The skirt he'd noticed her in, caught by a flame of pink as she swished past. What reason could I have had for giving it away, for not packing it carefully in the cardboard box when I moved? I don't know. I don't know how. I don't know how in the world I let it go.

Looking for Charles [*fall off*]

You can tell it's him
by the teeth, his smile
so pointy.

[His senior portrait] yellowing
from the center: red blazer
turned rust, hair combed
in corrugated rows.

And that quiver
at the point of his chin.

*

At twenty-nine, lifting his son,
playing airplane. The floor strewn

with sippy cups, mashed food, socks.
In the faded bottom corner, a jack-in-the-box—

sprung—its greens and blues a greyish
tone, jack's smile brown, glued on.

*

Legs stretched under starched
hospital sheets, he leans forward.

I know it makes Popeye strong
but it's worse than eating slime.

Pale face and his hair
out of control.

*

I keep almost finding it:
dark wood walls, him
leaning forward, toes
sticking out of a plaster cast,
a small girl smiling.

*

Her fingers spider
into his sides, her head
thrown back.

The kitchen's yellow tiles
broken with the photograph's tear, tack holes
punctured at top.

He's working a Thanksgiving
bird, bone-handled fork sunk in.

His son at the edge, pink
[and hyped up], threatens more play.
Charles looks dead-pan

through the frame, curved
knife out in front, his lips caught, forming
that word *stop.*

*

He holds his gift like a trophy:
thermometer, huge as a school-room clock,
dial steady at 70 degrees [Fahrenheit].

Snowmen leap through a forest
behind his head. The flash casts shapes
on dark wood walls, brightens the tree.

His shirt sleeves are rolled up, the room
piled with torn paper, toys stacked on chairs.

She's written in blue ink
across the top: *Xmas 89, with Dad*.

*

It's not here [but I keep
almost seeing it]: dark wood, him leaning forward,
leg propped on the sofa,

toes sticking out of a fresh white cast, a girl
smiling up at him.

*

The extension's pulled
from kitchen into den and still there's more cord
twisted round itself, white coil in thick rug.

He's leaning back, left leg up in plaster, thigh
to toe. Ear and shoulder cradle the phone, arms
crossed, upper body twisted to smile for the camera.

*

Small concrete basketball court,
hoops at different heights each end.
Charles mid-leap—palms an orange globe—
his two feet off the ground, the ball
just missing the basket.

*

He's out front on the long driveway
in his army-green canvas chair, one leg propped
on Uncle Bob's pickling barrel, crutches
askew on the lawn. *Yard Sale '96.*

Racks of dance costumes glitter in the sun: violet
taffeta, blood velvet, blue and gold sequinned hats.
Tables heaped with Barbie clothes and Playmobil sets.

Money-box on his lap, he's stacked coins along
the length of his new cast, silver towers teetering
beneath his steady hand.

*

It's almost [but not quite] like this:
he's leaning forward, leg propped up,
his white cast with toes sticking out,

a baby girl smiles back at him,
lifting her hands.

*

Her face looks over a blue shoulder,
the jacket, a blue of spring skies with nothing but birdsong.
Her face looks over the shoulder-length curls,
looks over a shoulder that's his and not mine.

Over his shoulder, she winks,
her veil blowing out to one side.
Her arms curve around his back,
small chin and green eye looking over his shoulder.
Only one eye looks, the other is winked closed.

Behind them, a dark room, staged.
A room staged for the photograph,
there's no one else around to see this.
[And somewhere the clink of glasses, a hum of chat.
Somewhere else their party, without them.]

The fizz and pop of an old flash,
for a moment
the blinding glare around a black hole of glamour.
His shoulders beneath her hands.

*

It's [almost] this:
he's leaning forward,
one of his legs in cast.

His girl's smile as wide as his
as she reaches out
for him
[steps].

First Portrait [*monochrome*]

Six hands to bring him to the room, to the texture
of air, to the speech of voices he doesn't know. In black and white
his skin is the colour of machines, of gloves and surgical gowns. Two hands
blur with the scalpel's pass, one clamps his cord in a white so brilliant it blends
with the body, blends with the blood and aperture.

Two hands grasp his neck, steady in their horizontal dance,
another waits with syringe. His are the only fists, clenched but uncurling
as he conducts latex and steel, clamps and beeps and suction. An orchestration
of light, his eyes closed inside a circle of hands. He begins: breath room
voice fingers spread wide.

The Calling

In the Outer Hebrides, on three full moons of the year,
the Mer may assume human form…

These poems are meant to be read in sequence and contain four speakers who are differentiated by form—

Irmina: field notes

islander: prose

Sarah: poetry

Mwelvah: italicized poetry

Field Notes: Orasaigh Croft
2nd Feb. 2004

Some seasons the earth quietens down / Other voices speak louder /
Make themselves heard

They are part of this story—My Sarah. Her bairn. The years between.

thymus seryllum : wild thyme : tall creeping stems, nectar source,
evergreen

Part I

1976-1977

Let yerself arrive. Heather neath yer boots, each step sinking doon.
Marsh an rock unsteady underfoot, ay, naething quite as it seems: each
ditch deeper, each fence longer, a gate hidden tae the road's view.

Coast Fall, 1976

Gannets plunge, churn sea to froth,
slam wings
        to waves, waves
        on rocks.

At the cliff edge
before I've seen how sheer
        the drop,

one bird comes
closer to me.
So close

I can almost
        touch it
if I just stretch,
        reach out—

          but the earth
        slips
back,
no grip—
            birds

                everywhere
        in the pale sky.

Birds
swarming
        the air.

        Birds

        and cliffs
                falling
                        upwards

[Sarah]

Sea-change

Memory, a dry earth.
Bruised chest, limbs, bones.
And something here, a shadow
in the water
watching me sleep.

*

He feeds me salt, feeds me
purple and green, mouthfuls
of turtle flesh. *Drink each breath*
he says, s*o lungs make strong.*

*

Overhead a far surface glimmers,
changes as light through trees can change.
His echo soft and low.

*

Now he's close, close as caught breath
a murmur in my head,
his voice everywhere.

A deepsong,
tremor-fine, calling,
calling me,
his hands
bidding me stay.

*

In endless dark, my blood turns
to what wasn't in me before.
Moons wane—
what's mine is his.
Moons grow—
what's his is mine,
a new heart keeping time.

[Sarah]

Field Notes: On the Machair
18th May 77

Hounds chasing each other to shore / Night too clear / Keep away

Our men drown, bairns drown, way home from school. Làn-mara
not safe. Sea too close, too deep.

There'll be slung stone / Just wait / We'll catch what washes up

geranium sanguineum : bloody crane's bill : stem spreading, petals
irregular, rocky outcrops, dunes, margins

Be here at mune tyde—Atlantic moanin, beatin yer windaes an doors. Lambs lie doon in the fields. Storm’s break brings the starlins swoopin doon. They pick mites oot o wool, litter sheep in mirk till, wi a shake, they’re up.

Second Chance

Time’s up. Tides gather, pull
us back through blue—
midnight to dusk then sea-green
dawn till I burst
into white and foam, salt
to sand. We surge

from deep
into a shriek
of moonlight, air
harpooning lungs as I breathe—
the slither of sea from blood.

Time’s up. Time I’ve held
my breath for, dark *linea* stretched
down the curve of skin, each month
closer to this end.

Birth Moon, 1977

Tide edge,
I cradle her
with first milk. Watch him
prepare her silk-thin caul.

He breathes
our child's name into it—
oh beautiful voice.
Na Qordah Mwelvah, he says
eyes flittering over me.
Her name is Mwelvah.
Floottail korra luud :
tailskin red as heart blood.

His fingers fold the caul, tapping
each turn. He licks
the skin shut, moves close—
Sarrra Sarrra Sarrra
song-smooth blur

as he reaches for her.
And I stumble
to my feet.
Refuse
Once Twice Three times.

Drag us to the path but her
narrow chest heaves for breath,
pulls me back.

He swims out with her
and I churn the sea
with screams, with blood.
No sign.
Only the cocoon of her caul, a gift
at the tide line.

Field Notes: Traigh Mhor
29th Sept. 77

Boiling concrete, far enough out / Cockles for tea & tomorrow

Way back—Donny barking to warn a ghost.
Grown lass smeared in blood.
Scratched my arms up pulling her from whins.
Made her sit awhile till she could walk wi me home.

Mumbles to herself / Fever skin / Put her to bed

Tonics—comfrey leaf, Knitbone. Case she's worse'n she looks.
Beesmilk, fatten her up. Watches me but quiet

cakile edentula : sea rocket : tumbleweed, slightly succulent, leaves
lobed or undulate

Field Notes: Housekeeping
6th Dec. 77

Fingerprint ridges / Gills smoothed over rock

Watching me months now, no talk. Threw out her clothes. Blood
stained, bare threads.

Made stew, over-did garlic, no harm. We two in the house for winter. Bedding down.

Tonight—*Sarah* she says I says *Who*
she says *That's me*

Pressed her lips on mine.

coronilla varia : crown vetch : bud open, pink to pale, dark violet keel

Waves shine glowen roond us, peer an vanishr like a dream, like flo'oer on croft, kye on the dunes. Ye widnae ken her like we dae, wir ain fowk. No' wrack and waith cowdlin the stream, but morrough, on so many munes.

Part II

2002-2003

The Calling, 2002

In the cold hour
before dawn, I'm on the path,

bare feet to grass, where gorse
and cliff drop away.

At the cove, a slip
behind rock, hands smooth
on stone until I remember where.

sshahssi sshahssi neertunn soor

Safe. My girl's birth skin, caul
so fine I am afraid to hold it, to sing
his words sown there
like a spell.

Sshahssi Sshahssi Neertunn Soor

To look again
into her quicksilver eyes, I spill
each sound like blood.

Sshah Ssi
Sshah Ssi
Neer Tunn Soor

Return, through full moon's
open door.

Go doon tae the bay, ay ye'll see seals, but stay till the day's done. Wait there ye must hae patience or ye'll no see her. She'll be there an ye'll think she's jist anither seal, they all dae, cannae believe their een, ye'll ken her, ye'll see.

slak water

beach on smuuth rock
till floottail loosens
divides in leggs

furst night
high cliff on moonelite
sheep with sweetgrass

sing soothesound frum Ooishah
song frum na veins

let toes bathe in no salt
let leggs balance to errth
lern wahking
feet too stone

[Mwelvah]

Field Notes: Orasaigh Croft
17th Feb. 03

Flat before the wind starts up / Moon reddin the fire / Fix shutters

Tonight—scratching at door, a girl. Mighty naked!
On way to scolding except Sarah in my head—*Who's to see,* so left it.

Trouble she could cause / Eyes odd / Fish skins / Shifty

Spare room—in there for now. Screeching like cat fiadhaich, like the devil's on her back. Wrestles radio on off, on off. Up too loud!

When Sarah gets home, we'll sort her.

cirsium vulgare : spear thistle : prickly wings, solitary ends, spines directed outward

Upstairs Watch

I shouldn't go in too soon—
silent latch, cool and heavy, lifts
in my hand before I stop myself.

She's a huddle of bedding, blankets
pulled round her head. Up close
a smell of wet fleece and filth, short hair

so dark and tangled it's hard to tell.
Probably just some runaway, nothing
to do with me. Her deep, deep

breathing rattles the room and she turns
in her sleep, to dead-man float
in a sea of sheets. There. Nose

freckled, like me. Fingers grip covers,
wide thumbs. Mine. The sea drums
the walls, clocks tick and chime.

Hear the sputterin engines cranked up, putterin oot o the bay. Horizon’s a halo o sand, ben an brae tae see afore the fog settles doon. They says a sealkin gone up tae the girls’ hoose. Mina’ll toss er oot, nivver was one fir messin wi the fowk.

Field Notes: Sunday Out
4th Apr. 03

Bowl of blue / Haze burned off / Midge clouds

With S. Dragged along the girl, needs sun. Face peelie-wallie.
Collecting—silverweed & liquorice. Kippers.

Wait wait wait for the dour craitur / Legs shakin / Fair puckled /
Hissed at us! / Keek like Sarah's when she's mad!

Try—sundew : *drosera.* Drops wi lemon. Won't thank me I'm sure.

potentilla anserine : silverweed : rooting at nodes, often toothed,
mostly undivided

neap

too much loud
house sound
in small room stay
till stop

plate crash   metall clangs
wrrrrrr wrrrrrrr clothy spins
tall won calls   calls
Wuur goin oot gurrl
ware yee bee

Father sed   You caulled errth at moonetide
Follow aanish
Floodtide to show way

in bed night soothe
hand at korra
fast beat   flutterbreath

night sounds soft in na room
whoooll whoooll whoooll
song of air fish

Field Notes: Ditchside & Flowerbeds
15th May 03

Liquid flint / Quartz-tipped / Rust mountains cutting sky

They don't go out. Don't eat. Don't talk.
Sarah—follows girl round house. Stares. Sighs. Ignores me.
Girl—paces at windows, always looking out.

<u>In common</u> : Testing ground, foot to foot / Sea-obsessed
Toothy grin / Hair a wire of red
(*crocosmia venus :* montbretia)

Keep the head! Let me get on wi my simples!

Today:
neslia paniculata : ball mustard (3 drops) : rare casual
malva sylvestris : mallow (2 drops x 4) : stem trails, leaves stalked

ebb tide

wind rain night
Ooishah wild
bedcover cling hot
chestlung   breath heave
skin peel off me

stay not long
only till moone door

Sarrra plays downstair
play strings on wood   plays
till na breath soothe awile

when stop
hum hersong all night

hum Sarrra sshahssi song
to bring us sleep

Full Moon Duet

Unmoored she dreams, my girl
asleep, lost in a storm of hours.

Her song, the wind as shutters creak,
the sea her unending beat.

By moonlight, alone, I lift my bow,
let shadows coax the strings, a murmur

of tides to play her home, a duet
to let her breathe.

[Sarah]

Part III

2003-2004

Field Notes: Crow Rock
14th June 03

A mudslide sweeping in / S says this morning—*Tide's on the turn*

They're gone somewhere—Girl in the night. Sarah chasing after.
Creag Feannaig a good place to wait. Sure I'll see them before long.

For lambing last month. Not good to look but couldn't help.
Slick like silk. White as winter sun slipping outta his ma.
His back to me. The first stood up wi his back to me.

Bad luck this year / Knew it coming

euphrasia : eyebright : yellow throat, purple lines to lips, terminal flowers

flood tide

moone reddy this night
crawl cove for tide
saltskin salt air
quickflood rush

pain scriiii in   airlung
scriiii   thruu me

Sarrra on cliff   search
echosound her voice
Mmwwellllvaaa

her voice to me
Sarrra shout
na yahneesh name
shout till find me
Mwelvah

my name
in Sarrra mouth

Watch the ship's reek disappearin ahint her. Like oor past, like wee memories. Path o blue we cut ower the Sound, keepin close eye on it, till it's gone.

spring tide

all night by moone
Sarrra arms wrap me
waves over under are us

skin scriii itchiiig   Sarrra say
rubb en sand   let skin scrayp off

in saltsting   peel
skin stretch
knees feet smuuth
grown to gone

dark curve floottail
thick skin safe on me
na korra luud

Ooishah pulls
dahter home
na Sarrra strong arms
let me go

The Note

Sea shifts like skin,
white to blue
to grey.

All night
all day
I sing her my grandmother's songs,
    songs into waves.

Let the birds lift
words from my tongue.
    All I can tell you is this—

when she rises
to meet me
I go.
    Swim out until I
        until we
are only light,
light slipping between waves.

Her voice in me
    calls,
the roar in my ears
    everywhere,
Her voice in me.

Field Notes: Traigh Mhor
1st Jan. 2004

Islands appear from nowhere / From làn-mara like ghosts / Mirror
of molten light / Smoke screens

Found—back of Sarah’s drawer. Thing like skin. Didn't wanna touch.

No way to change this / Twenty-six years of us / Gone / Green
island all my own

scyliorhinus canicula : mermaid's purse : twisted tendril, usually
hatched, difficult to identify unless examined closely

~

Introduction to the Thesis

The foundations of this thesis were laid in 2009, when I encountered a literary call-to-arms by theorist Brian McHale in his article, 'Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry.'[1] McHale noted that there was a need for a new examination of poetry in contemporary narrative theory: 'In many classic contemporary monographs on narrative theory, in specialist journals [...] at scholarly meetings [...] poetry is conspicuous by its near-absence' (1). His statement proved to be the impetus for my doctoral research on the polyphonic poetry sequence, a type of poly-vocal poetry sequence that was similarly 'conspicuous' to me due to the lack of any critical discussion of it. Although McHale's suggestion for a deeper understanding of 'what makes poetry poetry' originates, for him, from a gap in narrative theory, it encouraged me to also question the gap in the critical writing on poetry with regards to the examination of the poetry sequence (14).

McHale's article spurred on the development of questions surrounding a group of poetry sequences that I had been teaching in undergraduate creative writing classes since 2006. These questions included the following: How do individual poems from a sequence with multiple speakers behave lyrically, narratively, dramatically? In what way does the structure of a poetry sequence reflect the structure of music? At the same time I had begun to write a series of linked segments, in the voices of several poetic speakers, to explore such ideas and to put these questions into practice for the purpose of gaining new knowledge about the use of several individual speakers in one long and narratively-segmented sequence. I also wondered whether an examination of these sequences through the lens of narratology would offer answers to these questions and to the others that arose in my classroom and in my own critical reading and writing practice. The aim for this thesis, then, is to explore the following question: What are the distinguishing features of the polyphonic poetry sequence?

[1] Brian McHale, 2009. 'Beginning to Think about Narrative in Poetry', *Narrative*, 17.1, 11-27.

Although there have been many studies on a number of particular poetry sequences, to date, the only full text to focus on the methods of the poetry sequence as a whole is M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall's *The Modern Poetic Sequence.*[2] Published in 1983, this monograph defines the poetry sequence as a form that is decidedly lyric, by which they mean, poems 'of passionate preoccupation' constructed 'on a progression of specific qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness' (9; 6). The authors state that a poetry sequence is 'a grouping of mainly lyric poems […] which tend to interact as an organic whole. It usually includes narrative and dramatic elements, […] but its structure is finally lyrical' (9). Rosenthal and Gall's examination of sequences imposes a single model of the form, and as such, while this text offers some key ideas on the connection between the poetry sequence and music, it does not develop an argument that takes the variety of contemporary poetry sequences into consideration, nor does it open up an examination of sequences that have so-called dramatic or narrative tendencies. *The Modern Poetic Sequence*'s lyrical bias not only treats narrative as 'useful poetically only as [it] provides [...] dynamic structuring of the centers of intensity', it also fails to view narrative or dramatic qualities within the sequence as anything but helpful in highlighting the lyrical aspects of the poems (7). As Rosenthal and Gall's text also deals solely with single-voiced sequences, it provides little illumination on sequences that contain multiple poetic speakers.

As my enquiries developed, the focus of my research became three poetry sequences that contain multiple speakers: Jackie Kay's 'The Adoption Papers' (1991), Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves' (1998), and Gabrielle Calvocoressi's 'Circus Fire,

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[2] M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall, *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). An example of a monograph that focuses specifically on the operation of the sequence in relation to one specific poet is Randolph Paul Runyon's *Ghostly Parallels* (2006). Runyon argues that the poetry sequences of Robert Penn Warren 'oscillate back and forth' in their 'tightly woven' structures, and as such they constitute lyrically 'interpenetrating sequences'. *Ghostly Parallels: Robert Penn Warren And The Lyric Poetic Sequence* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2006), pp. 3, 193, 207.

1944' (2005).[3] These sequences have many things in common including a fictional, poetic approach to a real, historical event or situation, multiple first-person speakers who engage with each other in the text and with the reader in dialogic exchange and, importantly, elements of dramatic and narrative discourse as well as lyric tendencies. Here are three sequences that do not fit into Rosenthal and Gall's definition and the more research I undertook, the greater the quantity of similar sequences I began to discover. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I chose to maintain a close focus on these particular sequences by Kay, Dalton, and Calvocoressi, because even in their commonalities, they represent three points in a range of polyphonic technique in contemporary poetry sequence.

Throughout my PhD, I found few contemporary critical discussions of the operation of multiple, distinct, poetic speakers in one text, and even fewer on multiple speakers within a poetry sequence.[4] In 2014, however, the May special issue of the American journal *Narrative* focused on responses to McHale's statement of omission five years previously, that is, 'a focus on narrative in poetic form'.[5] This issue as well as a book of collected essays on Bakhtinian theory in poetry scholarship, *Poetry and Dialogism*, published at the end of 2014, brought specific attention to narrative discourse in poetry and the concept of dialogism in poetry.[6]

Articles in this *Narrative* issue by critics such as Jason M. Coats and Lasse Gammelgaard present research on sequencing in poetry and reader-response to verse

[3] Jackie Kay, 1991. 'The Adoption Papers,' in *The Adoption Papers* (Tarset: Bloodaxe), pp. 7-34; Amanda Dalton, 1999. 'Room of Leaves', in *How to Disappear* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe), pp. 27-46; Gabrielle Calvocoressi, 'Circus Fire, 1944', in *The Last Time I Saw Amelia Earhart* (New York: Persea Books, 2005), pp. 29-51.
[4] Mara Scanlon's 2007 essay 'Ethics and the Lyric: Form, Dialogue, Answerability', *College Literature*, 34.1, 1-22, provided one of my early examples of critical writing on polyphony in poetry.
[5] Brian J. McAllister, 'Preface', *Narrative*, 22.2 (2014), 151-153.
[6] *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over*, ed. by Mara Scanlon and Chad Engbers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

narratives.[7] Their arguments confirm the direction of my own research as they touch on key aspects of sequencing and poetic segmentivity, yet without reference to the methods of employing multiple voices in a sequence. So too, Mara Scanlon's argument that Bakhtin's theory of dialogism can be convincingly applied to poetry, as well as Andrea Witzke Slot's tussle with the link between dialogic and polyvocal poetry, helped me to fine-tune my definitions for polyphony and dialogism.[8] Although this thesis has been written into the gap that exists in the discussion of the poetry sequence and multiple speakers, the littoral zone between it and other contemporary research on poetry is changing shape now that theorists are also beginning to examine techniques such as the sequencing of poetry, the progression of poetic narrative, and dialogism in poetry.

Methodology & Foundations

The methodology for this thesis takes an inductive approach: the questions that I explore in my three chapters arise from an engagement with the primary poetic texts. I constructed the arguments in my chapters around the patterns that emerged from these, as well as a wide range of other multi-voiced sequences. My primary interest while conducting this research has been to investigate, in particular, the layering of distinct poetic speakers within the structure of a poetry sequence. As such, I do not seek to impose a single, alternative, model of the poetry sequence in this examination, nor even a single model of polyphony in poetry. In identifying this frequently-overlooked and often mislabelled type of poetry sequence, I argue that the form and structure of

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[7] Jason M. Coats, 'Sequence and Lyric Narrative in Auden and Isherwood's *Journey to a War*', *Narrative*, 22.2 (2014), 169-184.; Lasse Gammelgaard, 'Two Trajectories of Reader Response in Narrative Poetry: Roses and Risings in Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes"', *Narrative*, 22.2 (2014), 203-218.
[8] Mara Scanlon, 2014. 'Introduction: Hearing Over' in *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over,* ed. by Mara Scanlon and Chad Engbers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 1-19.; Andrea Witzke Slot, 'Dialogic Poetry as Emancipatory Technology: Ventriloquy and Voiceovers in the Rhythmic Junctures of Harryette Mullen's *Muse & Drudge*', in *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over*, ed. by Mara Scanlon and Chad Engbers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 160-179. For a thorough examination of the usefulness and validity of applying Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to poetry see Scanlon, 2007. Slot argues that polyvocal poetry is different from dialogic poetry, however, her theory sits within an examination of a single, shifting voice in Harryette Mullen's long poem 'Muse & Drudge', and it is a position with which I contend.

polyphonic poetry sequences distinguishes them from their single-voiced counterparts, and that poetry sequences with polyphony at the core of their constructions move beyond the 'finally lyrical' monophonic sequences under the scope of Rosenthal and Gall's poetic examination.

This thesis does not take a strictly narratological approach to the poetry sequence, yet it employs aspects of narrative theory as a compass. Underlying my argument is Mikhail Bakhtin's metaphor of literary polyphony and his focus on dialogism within this polyphony. Although he is best known for his writings on the prose novel, I extend his musical metaphor and adapt it to my theories on the poetry sequence. My methods of research are also informed by critic Robyn Sarah's question (2007), 'in what sense or senses can poetry in its *printed* form be polyphonic?'[9] Indeed, this question is so multi-faceted, most of it stands outside the scope of this thesis, yet in determining which aspects of polyphony were most key to an investigation of the poetry sequence, I focused my research on the juxtaposition and simultaneity of sequence parts, on the techniques of lyric and dramatic voices, and finally on the countermeasure in the sum of parts that offer a reader an *experience* of polyphony. Bakhtinian scholar Stephen Benson (2003) posits that there are 'three facets of polyphony—singularity, constitutive simultaneity in spatial combination, and plural wholeness'.[10] When examining poetry sequences with two or more first-person speakers, it is these facets of polyphony to which my attention turns.

Although the terms *polyvocal* and *polyphonic* are often used synonymously in the discussion of literature, polyvocality refers to the use of multiple voices in a text, an umbrella term that covers a multitude of such occurrences and types of voices in poetry. And while the poetry sequences under discussion in this thesis are polyvocal, I have

[9] Robyn Sarah, 'A Dangling Conversation (for multiple voices)', in *Little Eurekas: A Decade's Thoughts On Poetry* (Emeryville, Ontario: Biblioasis, 2007), pp. 205-226, (209).
[10] Stephen Benson, 'For Want of a Better Term?: Polyphony and the Value of Music in Bakhtin and Kundera', *Narrative*, 11.3 (2003), 292-311, (300).

chosen not to rely on this terminology because, as such a broad term, its use does not specifically refer to the deeply-layered dialogic texture of much polyphonic literature. In this thesis, then, I use *polyphonic* to refer to literary texts with two or more first-person speakers where the patterns formed by this vocal multiplicity are integral to the structure of the work as a dialogic entity. In its original musical definition, polyphony's texture is one formed of individual parts that must stand alone while also moving through patterns of simultaneity. This simultaneity then allows for temporal and relational dialogic relationships within all of the sequence parts, forming a greater whole through their exchange.

In order to formulate hypotheses about polyphony in the poetry sequence, my arguments allow for a spectrum of polyphonic approaches, and it does not, as previously mentioned, seek to exclude any particular type of poetic polyphony in the poetry sequence. Yet the sequences under spotlight here share similar characteristics with each other as well as with such a significant quantity of other polyphonic sequences that they require a close, first-hand exploration of their techniques. For this reason, the focus of the thesis falls on the specific elements of polyphony in poetry sequences that contain a high level of narrative within its poetic segmentation, where the shifts between poetic speakers are clearly indicated by textual signposting, rather than an emphasis on poetic voices whose individual identities are blurred, or where a change of speaker may be difficult to determine. I have chosen this slant for my argument because of the necessary singularity of voices used in musical polyphony, as noted by Benson, voices which are experienced as individual entities and as parts of a whole. Similarly, my research has necessitated a focus on sequences that position their multiple voices in dialogic contact with the other individual voices in the poems. This has led my poetic exploration away from the direction of the work of postmodern poets such as Susan Howe and John

Ashbery, as well as T.S. Eliot's multi-faceted poetry where the mixture of first-person 'I' voices often play with a diversity of fragmentation and identity.[11]

There is a proliferation of labels for the sequences under examination herewith. While undertaking research into the various techniques and strategies of polyphonic poetry sequences, I discovered that sequences with two or more speakers are often confusingly defined by critics and reviewers. There is little or no mention of polyphony in these descriptions, and the list of labels includes the following: a series of dramatic monologues, a 'long story-poem', 'a novel in verse', 'juxtaposing dramatic monologues', 'lyric sequence', 'many masks and dramatic personae in […] definitive lyric framework', 'super-monologues', 'large, strange works […] between the needs of poetry and the standards and values of prose', and 'prosaic lyric poetry.'[12] Due to this confusion of terms and the lack of a singular way to name this type of poetry sequence to which many poets are trying their hands in the past two decades, I propose the new classification, the *polyphonic poetry sequence.* As part of my investigation into the distinguishing features of the polyphonic poetry sequence then, the chapters of this thesis shall examine the potential of making a claim for this new, unified terminology.

Much of the foundation of my research begins with the work of critics whose key theories emerged in the critical time period of the 1970's and 1980's, including arguments from Bakhtin's early work, only published widely in English in the 1980's. This same era saw the birth of the modern wave of reader-response criticism, in

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[11] So too, my specific focus on polyphony in the poetry sequence has led me to exclude some contemporary poets such as Derek Walcott and Anne Carson from close examination here. Both play with polyvocality in their own ways: from the hybridity of voice and language, in Walcott's case, to the multiple, prose and poetic fragments situated within the whole of a text, in Carson's many works.

[12] Donald Wesling, *Bakhtin and the Social Moorings of Poetry* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), p. 134; Julian Barnes, 'Preface' in *Amours de Voyage*, (London, Persephone Books, 2009) <http://www.persephonebooks.co.uk/amours-de-voyage.html> [accessed March 2015] (para. 1 of 3); Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1957), p. 158; Lynn Keller, *Forms of Expansion: Recent Long Poems by Women* (London: University of Chicago, 1997), p. 22; Slot, 165; Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen & Co, 1977), p. 35; Dorothy Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 11; Michael Eskin, 'Bakhtin On Poetry', *Poetics Today*, 21, Vol. 2 (2000), 379-391, (383).

particular Wolfgang Iser's theories on the relationship between textual gaps and the reader. Contemporary critics of narratology and poetry still regularly return to these early works, and many of Bakhtin's arguments are still hotly debated today. I also follow the construction of Wayne C. Booth's model of author / reader relationships as approached from both the author's perspective (Booth 1961) and the reader's perspective (Phelan 2007), because they provide a scaffolding for the discussion of active engagement with a text.[13] Booth argues that the 'flesh-and-blood' person (FBP) who writes a text is the real author and different from who he calls the 'implied author' (IA), or the author's official version of herself that the reader encounters either as narrator or as a nearly-invisible background presence.[14] Opposite and in equal counterpart to the FBP and the IA reside the 'flesh-and-blood' reader or actual reader and the text's 'implied reader'. This implied reader is an imaginary presence to whom the author writes, a reader who the author imagines to be in a sympathetic position to her, which may or may not suit the actual reader when engaging with the FBP's work.[15] In Chapter 3, I will explore the various arrangements of author and reader with regard to the multiple 'I's' of a polyphonic sequence, and for the purpose of the entire thesis, I use James Phelan's suggestion that Booth's model 'assumes that the flesh-and-blood (or actual) reader seeks to enter the authorial audience' and that, like Phelan, when I refer to 'what "we" readers do in response to a narrative text', I am describing what the imagined, implied reader would do (Phelan 2007: 4).

[13] Wayne C. Booth, 1961. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (London: University of Chicago); James Phelan, 2007. *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University)

[14] Wayne C. Booth, 2005. 'Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?', in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), pp. 75-88; Susan S. Lanser, 2011. 'The Implied Author: An Agnostic Manifesto', *Style*, 45.1 (The Implied Author: Back from the Grave or Simply Dead Again), 153-160.

[15] Booth uses the term 'ideal reader' for this position but Iser has re-labelled it as the 'implied reader'. Wolfgang Iser, 1974. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (London: John Hopkins University)

Thesis Chapters & The Practice of Polyphonic Poetry

The main research portion of this thesis is comprised of three chapters. In *Chapter 1: A Polyphonic Spectrum*, I analyse Bakhtin's metaphor of polyphony in literature from his examination of Dostoevsky's prose to the musical structure of polyphony. I discuss the exclusion of poetry from Bakhtin's definition of polyphony, and provide two contrasting, contemporary views of the use of polyphony in printed poetry: from Robert Bringhurst's insistence on the visual layering of words within individual poems, to Dennis Lee's consecutive rendering of voices in sequence. This chapter will also trace the connections between Bakhtin's polyphony and his theory of dialogism. The 'coexistence and interaction' at the heart of polyphony's mode in literature are also what form the basis of dialogic exchange in the poetry sequence (Bakhtin 1984: 28). As I will demonstrate through the close reading of Jackie Kay's triple-voiced sequence, 'The Adoption Papers', the juxtaposition of separate parts constructs a 'sensation that captures simultaneity' for the reader, a key technique of polyphony and a thoroughly dialogic framework within which Kay's voices can sing.[16] This chapter will also trace the links between poetry and polyphonic music, while constructing a case for the development of a spectrum of poetic polyphony.

In *Chapter 2: A Polyphonic Threshold*, I highlight the qualities and discourse types of the multiple speakers in a polyphonic sequence. Through a reading of Susan S. Lanser's theory on the levels of attachment between reader and text, I explore first-person, present-tense narration by providing a comprehensive look at the lyric and dramatic modes of a polyphonic sequence. This chapter will observe the connections between series of dramatic monologues and the poetry sequence as well as questioning the lyrical techniques of such sequences. Through the close reading of Amanda Dalton's

[16] Paulo C. Chagas, 'Polyphony and Embodiment: a Critical Approach to the Theory of Autopoiesis' (2005) trans. by Revista Transcultural de Musica <http://www.paulocchagas.com/2005_ Polyphony_and_ Embodiment.pdf> [accessed July 2014], p. 6.

'Room of Leaves', I extend a theory of dialogic exchange among multiple poems with dramatic and lyric tendencies, yet within a narrative framework, while positioning the individual poetic speakers as consciousness-centres in the dialogic pattern of the sequence.

In *Chapter 3: A Polyphonic Progression*, I use Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1996) and John Shoptaw's (1995) theories of segmentivity and countermeasure in poetry to explore the way gaps operate in poetry sequences with multiple speakers. Through a close reading of Gabrielle Calvocoressi's 'Circus Fire, 1944', I trace methods of narrative progression in poetry sequences and construct a new spatial metaphor for the polyphonic poetry sequence. This chapter highlights the application of textual signposting in the sequences to aid the transition between voices in the text as well as to act as anchors on either side of a section gap. I also apply Iser's reception theory and his concept of the wandering viewpoint to query the transaction between a reader and a polyphonic text, positing that the reader is offered an opportunity to engage dialogically with the poetic speakers through the negotiation of gap and text in the sum of a sequence's parts. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by arguing for a triple reading of the polyphonic poetry sequence, one that recognises its poetic segmentivity, its sequential structure of parts, and the layering of its multiple voices. From this reading I construct my concept of a 'chronotope' of the polyphonic poetry sequence, or to borrow doubly from Bakhtin, a '*chronotope' of threshold*.[17]

Throughout the research for this thesis, I continued to write and experiment with polyphonic voices in individual poems and within poetry sequences. The conclusion to this thesis will highlight how my creative practice informed the direction of my critical practice by asking me to focus my questions and, later, my arguments on the techniques I was grappling with in my poetry. As I attempted to construct a polyphonic sequence,

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[17] Mikhail Bakhtin, 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (London: University of Texas), p. 84.

my critical reading of the primary texts examined elements that were proving difficult to manage structurally in my poetry such as the signposting of titles, the sectioning of parts, and the pattern and quantity of voices. As my creative practice began to shift in response to the research, I continued to return to the theoretical underpinnings for the chapters and to develop new questions as both a reader and writer of polyphonic sequences. The primary texts have influenced the writing of my own sequences as well as the approach I have taken to the theory; the theory has, in turn, influenced my poetry and the cycle will continue to be linked in this way in my future practice as a researcher and poet. Moreover, the original outcome of the arguments in this thesis reflect the creative approach I have undertaken in my doctoral studies and the critical direction of the theories I extend, especially in regards to the focus on literary polyphony in poetry sequences, the use of signposting, segmentivity, and narrative progression, and finally, the dialogic relationship offered to the reader of a polyphonic poetry sequence. My contribution to knowledge sits within a developing field of critical examination of narrative in poetry as well as of poetry sequence within the study of poetry and its sub-genres.

Chapter 1: A Polyphonic Spectrum

In this chapter I will explore the distinguishing features of the polyphonic poetry sequence through an investigation of Mikhail Bakhtin's literary metaphor of polyphony, from its musical origins to its development in prose fiction. By undertaking a close reading of Jackie Kay's sequence 'The Adoption Papers', I will extend an argument for the examination of the texture of polyphony and its operation in a poetry sequence where two or more distinct poetic speakers reside in the text. Bakhtin's use of the term 'polyphony' in his collection of essays, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), forms the basis of decades of scholarly debate on the possibilities for, and the validity of, this metaphor in reference to poetry.[18] The origins of the term 'polyphonic' in Bakhtin's writing focus on a key feature of Dostoevsky's prose, namely, its 'plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices' (6). Dostoevsky's prose prioritises the utterance of characters over any authorial speech. Bakhtin notes, 'a character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word […] it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and […] combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters' (7). The combination and arrangement of voices in such a way allows for dialogism in the text, a technique that Bakhtin links with polyphony.

Because Bakhtin is, at best, unresolved on the issue of poetry's potential for dialogism except in isolated instances, this chapter necessarily begins with Bakhtin's formation of his theories in prose. However, from this foundation I highlight the polyphonic textural elements in 'The Adoption Papers', especially Kay's use of juxtaposition, to construct a sense of simultaneity in the text and to posit that such polyphonic texture allows a sequence to operate as a dialogic exchange between poetic

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[18] Mikhail Bakhtin, 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. by Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, Vol 8, trans. by Caryl Emerson (London: University of Minnesota Press). All italics within his quotations are Bakhtin's. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the text.

voices. This chapter will also trace the links between poetry and polyphonic music, while constructing a case for the development of a spectrum of poetic polyphony.

In Rosenthal and Gall's monograph *The Modern Poetic Sequence*, the authors suggest that the poetry sequence 'exist[s] within a continuum' of different styles and structures, and it is their concept of a continuum that informs the development of my polyphonic spectrum for the poetry sequence (26). By placing the three sequences explored in this thesis along a spectrum of polyphony, I offer a theory on the relationship between this literary metaphor and the contemporary poetry sequences published from the end of the twentieth century to the present, sequences that have at the core of their constructions the *equally valid voices* of two or more poetic speakers. Through the connections between Bakhtin's metaphor and the poetry sequence, this chapter will propose a new way of considering dialogism in poetry by examining juxtaposition and simultaneity in individual sequence parts, and within the sum of these parts, positioning the sequences along a spectrum of polyphony.

Polyphony as Literary Metaphor

When the term *polyphony* is used as a metaphor in literature, this concept highlights the deep link with a musical tradition that places the primary tendencies of musical polyphony, that is, 'singularity, constitutive simultaneity in spatial combination, and plural wholeness', at the core of its construction (Benson 2003: 300). In this thesis, I argue that to make such a link, between the musical texture of polyphony and the poetry sequence, acknowledges the underlying structure of these sequences where multiple voices are arranged in dialogic exchange with each other and with the reader. The origins of Bakhtin's claims for literary polyphony start with his examination of Dostoevsky's prose, prose in which the author 'surrenders to his characters and allows

them to speak in ways other than his own'.[19] Such individuality, of multiple prose voices residing as singular subjects, highlights the importance of two aspects at the foundations of musical polyphony. Benson notes, that 'it is in order to elaborate basic ideas of part and whole, of independence and mutuality, that Bakhtin employs musical terms as organizing concepts' (296). Bakhtin credits Dostoevsky with the creation of the polyphonic novel while at the same time recognizing that it is not without its literary predecessors and influences, including Shakespeare and Dante. An understanding of the construction and effect of polyphony in music was something of which Dostoevsky, undoubtedly, was aware. In Bakhtin's reading of L.P. Grossman's extensive work, 'Dostoevsky the Artist', he notes that Grossman's observations were of utmost importance to building his own theories on polyphony precisely because Grossman approached Dostoevsky's work 'from the standpoint of composition': 'Dostoevsky himself pointed out this compositional vehicle [...] and once drew an analogy between his structural system and the musical theory of [...] counter-positions [...] *These are different voices singing variously on a single theme*'.[20] The layers of connection between music and literary technique—from Dostoevsky's own experiments to Grossman's examination of them and then Bakhtin's in turn—led to the development of a metaphor that carries the weight of tradition from both music and the prose novel.

Novelist Milan Kundera's essay, 'Dialogue on the Art of Composition' (1988), also supports the use of this metaphor in the prose novel by suggesting that polyphony indicates the way in which voices 'are perfectly bound together but still keep their relative independence'.[21] Bakhtin posits that it is Dostoevsky's particular ability, 'for hearing and understanding all voices immediately and simultaneously [...that] permitted

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[19]Wayne C. Booth, 1984. 'Introduction' in Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, pp. xxii-xiii.
[20] Leonid Grossman, 'Dostoevskii-khudozhnik', in *Tvorchestvo F.M. Dostoevskogo*, quoted in Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. by Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, Vol 8, trans. by Caryl Emerson (London: University of Minnesota, 1984), pp. 41-42. Original italics. No English translation available of original source.
[21] Milan Kundera, 'Dialogue on the Art of Composition', in *The Art of the Novel*, trans. by Linda Asher (London: Faber, 1988), pp. 71-96, (74).

him to create the polyphonic novel' (30). The texture of this polyphony contains characters who reside within the text as their own speaking subjects, voices 'that are not fundamentally under the "monological" control of the novelist's own ideology' (Booth 1984: xx). Although Kundera never mentions Bakhtin in his essay, their ideas arguably overlap, and it is he who elaborates where Bakhtin's theories stop short, that is, specifically on the point of a polyphonic composition's structural wholeness or what he terms, the 'indivisible entity' of the novel itself.[22] Kundera argues that the 'architectural balance' of an entire work is the key to its structure (77). For example, in his 'comparison between the novel and music', he states the following: 'The division of the novel into parts, parts into chapters, chapters into paragraphs—the book's *articulation*—I want to be utterly clear. [...] A part is a movement. The chapters are measures' (87-88). Kundera suggests that by sectioning a novel into parts, one can 'set different emotional spaces side by side', a significant point of connection in the complete whole of a polyphonic text (90).

Dostoevsky moved away from the tradition of using a single omniscient narrator in the text of his novels, one who asserted a subjective and unifying view on the other characters and, instead, orientated his characters on equal footing with one another and within the dialogue of the novel as a whole. This technique effectively broke down the novelistic structure of his era, where an author traditionally kept his or her characters in self-enclosed worlds, and where the implied author-as-narrator generally spoke about his characters instead of speaking with them. Bakhtin found his metaphor of polyphony so useful that it informed all of his theories on Dostoevsky but it also inextricably linked the two writers: Dostoevsky as 'inventor' of the polyphonic novel and Bakhtin as the theorist who first named this metaphor at work in prose.[23] Bakhtin also specifically

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[22] Kundera, 74; Benson, 293; 301.
[23] Critic Lynne Pearce also notes: 'What is clear to all of us now, of course, is that it was Bakhtin (if anyone) who 'invented' the polyphonic novel by bringing its form to theoretical consciousness.' Pearce,

notes that this metaphor must be used 'as a graphic analogy, nothing more': 'We are transforming this metaphor into the term "polyphonic novel" since we have not found a more appropriate label. It should not be forgotten, however, that the term has its origin in metaphor' (22). Written during the second half of the nineteenth century, novels such as *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) contain characters that develop alongside one another, characters whose thoughts and feelings the reader is party to through the development of different vocal registers within one cohesive text.

The key difference between Dostoevsky's approach and what had come before in the novel tradition lies in the way he worked with 'the great dialogue' among his characters and positioned his implied authorial presence in relation to them (Booth 1984: xxiii). Bakhtin notes that Dostoevsky 'would have forced his characters to see and know all those essential things that he himself—the author—sees and knows' (72). In other words, Dostoevsky's approach to a polyphonic rendering of voices in his novels means that the characters exist within the world of the novel without 'any *essential* authorial "surplus"' or mediation by the implied author into the affairs of the characters, whether this would be through lengthy monologues or decisive opinions on their actions (72). Instead, he positioned his characters in a way that created 'dialogic contact', and as implied author, 'he would himself have assumed, in relation to them, a dialogic position with equal rights' (72). The relationship between Dostoevsky's characters is demonstrated by the depth of such 'dialogic contact' in his novels.

Everything of importance in Dostoevsky's novels is introduced to and known by the characters as well as the reader. For example, we get to know the main character of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, entirely through his ideas and thoughts: 'all his chance encounters and trivial happenings—everything is drawn into dialogue' (75). In

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Reading Dialogics: Interrogating Texts Series, ed. by Patricia Waugh and Lynne Pearce (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 44.

the novel, the implied author does not give a direct opinion on the behaviours and actions of Raskolnikov, instead, the reader comes to see him through the same lens as other characters, even though at times the reader knows him as well as he knows himself. The way such a character exists, alongside of other characters in the novel, is the foundation for the first principle of literary polyphony: equal status between the textual voices, with each voice an individual amongst other individuals.

In *Crime and Punishment*, the voices first appear separately, yet the juxtaposition of voices takes place solely in Raskolnikov's mind. Polyphonic novels contain characters who are individuals with their own, often imperfect but always deeply-felt, ideas. Of key importance to Bakhtin is the embodiment of *idea* in the personality of a character. Through their realisation in Dostoevsky's work, ideas become inseparable from the characters themselves. The critic Donald Wesling reinforces this focus of Bakhtin's: 'At the heart of his work […] is a firm belief in utterance as emanating from an embodied moral person: the person-idea, not one without the other.'[24] Within the polyphonic novel, ideas are continuously in an 'uninterrupted dialogic interaction with other fully valid ideas', those embodied in other characters, which then, when read alongside one another, supply a diverse range of opinion (86). The act of idea exchange, through the personalities of Dostoevsky's various characters, brings *idea* beyond internal thought into an external exchange. Bakhtin sums up this process: 'In this sense the idea is similar to the *word'* (88). In a polyphonic novel, words as ideas are built on a dialogic exchange of more than one position or view: uttered, heard and understood.[25]

All language, and indeed all thought, is dialogic for Bakhtin: existing within the

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[24] Donald Wesling, *Bakhtin and the Social Moorings of Poetry* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), p. 164.

[25] For more on this topic, see the following: Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, ed. and trans. by Eugenia Hanfman and Gertrude Vakar (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962); A.N. Sokolov, *Inner Speech and Thought*, trans. by George T. Onischenko (New York: Plenum Press, 1972); Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990); Caryl Emerson, 'The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language' in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on his Work*, ed. by Gary Saul Morson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 21-40.

context of other language. Dialogism reminds us that, as human beings, we speak and write in response to and in relationship with other speech, writing, and thought; we are always in dialogue with each other and ourselves. At their dialogic best, Dostoevsky's characters grapple with words and ideas combined while the voices of others are juxtaposed, often in heated conversation. In *Crime and Punishment*, for example, just after Raskolnikov has had a letter from his mother informing him of his sister's intention to marry a man she barely knows, Dostoevsky juxtaposes several voices, setting them into a warring polyphonic conversation in Raskolnikov's head. This interior monologue becomes dialogic as Raskolnikov attempts to reason his way through the situation, calling forth the voices of several characters in the process: his mother, his sister Dunya and the proposed bridegroom Mr Luzhin. What follows is a brief passage from Raskolnikov's six-and-a-half-page rant:

> It's finally been decided: you're going to marry a man of business and reason […] one who has capital of his own (who *already* has capital of his own—that's more solid and impressive-sounding), who has two positions and who, '*it would appear*, is kind', as Dunechka herself observes. That *it would appear* is the most wonderful bit of all! […] Dunechka, *it would appear*, is going to get married! […] And what's this she writes to me? 'Rodya, love Dunya, she loves you more than she does herself'; […] but Mr Luzhin doesn't take much figuring out. The main thing is that 'he's a man of business, and, *it would appear*, kind.'[26]

Raskolnikov's thoughts flow in circles around the words from his mother, the situation of his sister, and the little that is known about Mr Luzhin. Dostoevsky creates a polyphonic sparring in the texture of voices, juxtaposed in dialogic connection.

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[26] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 50-51. Bakhtin notes that there are multiple instances of 'interior dialogues' in *Crime and Punishment*.

The sections that present ‘dialogic contact’, such as the one above, are the culmination of an arrangement of voices in the novel. In *Crime and Punishment*, voices first appear individually. In this instance it is through the letter from Raskolnikov’s mother. This letter contains a strong sense of the mother’s voice and personality, along with direct references to what his sister says, as well as the exchanges with Mr Luzhin. Once Dostoevsky has presented the voices separately, he then juxtaposes them within Raskolnikov’s mind, creating a ‘dialogized interior monologue’ (74). Bakhtin notes, ‘a conflict of voices takes place. In the beginning of the passage Raskolnikov actually re-creates Dounia’s words […] and over her intonations he layers his own—ironic, indignant, precautionary’ (74-75). The novel is made up of just such vocal pattering, in the juxtaposition of voices after instances of characters speaking individually; a particular type of interior / exterior build-up of voices that culminates in what Bakhtin calls a ‘*microdialogue*’: ‘all words in it are double-voiced, and in each of them a conflict of voices takes place’ (74).

As I will discuss later in this chapter, all literature encounters difficulty in capturing a sense of polyphony yet Dostoevsky’s texts demonstrate that it is possible to work with juxtaposition to fashion prose which does just that. Ken Hirschkop notes in his essay, ‘The Domestication of M.M. Bakhtin’ (1986), ‘dialogism and monologism are not different kinds of texts, but different kinds of intertextual configuration.’[27] It is important to keep this in mind as we move into a discussion of poetry, as poetry too will bring its own challenges to the concept of dialogism. Yet the poetry sequence offers a different use of juxtaposition to render polyphony, one which arguably moves the polyphonic poetry sequence firmly into the realm of the dialogic, refuting Bakhtin’s claim that poetry is, ‘monologic, single-voiced, suppressing half of a dialogue’ (Wesling 2003: 21).

[27] Ken Hirschkop, ‘The Domestication of M.M. Bakhtin’, in *Essays in Poetics,* 11.1 (1986), 81.

Extending the Terminology

Bakhtin's observations on the polyphonic novel can most usefully be applied to the polyphonic poetry sequence through his theory of dialogism, however, it is well known that Bakhtin himself was hesitant to consider poetry's polyphonic or dialogic potentials. Bakhtin argues that the only way for poetry to attain dialogism would be if it underwent 'prosification', and as he finally concedes, 'in the nineteenth century such instances were rare [...] not until the twentieth century is there a drastic "prosification" of the lyric' (200). The so-called prosaic transformation of poetry that Bakhtin envisions as an exception to his theory suggests that, on the one hand, he allows for the possibility of dialogism in poetry, but on the other hand, he is suggesting that poetry, as a genre, is largely excluded from this possibility due to what he sees as poetry's unifying features such as rhythm and stanzaic structure.[28] Overall, Bakhtin's tentative acceptance that poetry may, on some occasions, attain dialogism, is founded in his belief that poetry is at its dialogic best when it emulates prose. I suggest, however, that Bakhtin's model is more conducive for an appreciation of a poetics of polyphony than he acknowledges.

Some contemporary critics such as Wesling argue that, 'if we are careful to define our terms and our relation to what Bakhtin said, we can apply his most powerful ideas to poetic texts, to find them differently dialogic from the novel, but nonetheless dialogic' (10). Dialogism as a concept considers the interlinked nature of our communications within thought, the written word, and spoken language. A key aspect of Bakhtin's dialogism specifies that 'the utterance always only occurs *between* people.'[29] This view suggests an inherent plurality involved in discourse, and it is a plurality that mirrors the tenets of polyphony with its emphasis on the connections between individual voices and parts. One of the key techniques of the polyphonic poetry

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[28] For a further examination of Bakhtin's discussion of poetry see, Michael Eskin, 'Bakhtin On Poetry', *Poetics Today*, 21, Vol. 2 (2000), 379-391.
[29] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 43-44.

sequence is the juxtaposition of different voices. The layering of voices is essential to the creation of polyphony in the text, and as I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, the way this juxtaposition operates can shed light on the workings of dialogism within a polyphonic poetry sequence.

Other contemporary critics, in particular some of those from the Canadian circle of literary polyphony, Robert Bringhurst, Dennis Lee, and Robyn Sarah, explore the idea of what literary polyphony means directly in relation to poetry. Sarah's essay, 'A Dangling Conversation' (2007), broaches questions left unasked by Bakhtin in his examination of literary polyphony: 'In what way or under what circumstances can the term "polyphonic" be applied to poetry?'; 'In what sense or senses can poetry in its *printed* form be polyphonic?'.[30] Sarah points out the key issues with the consideration of poetic polyphony in a printed form, especially that, 'it is not really possible to read and grasp two lines simultaneously: one is aware that one is only approximating the act–reading them consecutively and trying to imagine them superimposed' (209). This structural conundrum is one that has been approached in a variety of ways by different poets and critics. David Lodge, in his text *Consciousness and the Novel* (2002), discusses the problem of attempting such simultaneity in language. He argues that the 'primary limitation is this: that verbal language is essentially linear. One word or word-group comes after another, and we apprehend their syntactically cumulative meaning lineally, in time.'[31] So too, poetry sequences are apprehended in a linear fashion, highlighted by the additional 'sequencing' in which the poems appear.

Dennis Lee's approach to poetic polyphony takes this hurdle into account, and he positions himself as a purveyor of the tactic that 'grafting polyphony from the medium of music to literature involves scoring different voices consecutively, and not

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[30] Robyn Sarah, 'A Dangling Conversation (for multiple voices)', in *Little Eurekas: A Decade's Thoughts On Poetry* (Emeryville, Ontario: Biblioasis, 2007), pp. 205-226, (207-209).
[31] David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 62.

simultaneously, across a work'.[32] The consecutive scoring of voices, one after the next, through the progression of the sequence is the most common approach to rendering polyphony in poetry, perhaps due to the accessibility of the voices and the clarity with which the poet can present these different, individual parts. This method of polyphony is, however, in direct contrast to the experiments of the poet Robert Bringhurst, who believes that literary polyphony can only be achieved through the visual layering of voices on a page. Critic Mark Dickinson notes the following of Bringhurst:

> For more than twenty years, Bringhurst has been attempting to reach across exactly this discontinuity by composing poems for two or more voices that literally speak at the same time […] In order to succeed at the task that Bringhurst has set for his polyphonic poems, the page must be capable of accommodating an overlay of different voices, melodies or sounds, as we may hear in a crowded café, in a string quartet, or in the forest at dawn (116-117).

This ambitious approach to poetic polyphony is demonstrated best in Bringhurst's sequence, 'The Blue Roofs of Japan'(1986), a poem that takes the visual simultaneity of voices one step further than any other sequence I have encountered to date. 'Blue Roofs' overlaps the text of two speakers on the same page, with voices alternating in status as the sequence progresses.[33] Though Bringhurst overlaps the text of two voices on each page, using blue and black lettering to denote different speakers, each page must be read twice to comprehend the individual utterances or else, the text exists as a visual jumble of partially decipherable words and phrases. Bringhurst's work with literary polyphony continues, and although 'Blue Roofs' is indeed a visually striking and ambitious

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[32] Mark Dickinson, 'An Ever-Enlarging Circle: Polyphony, Ecology and Nation in John Ralston Saul's *A Fair Country* and Robert Bringhurst's *Ursa Major',* in *Asian Journal of Canadian Studies,* 17 (2011), 107-126, (115).

[33] Robert Bringhurst, 1986. 'The Blue Roofs of Japan: A Score For Interpenetrating Voices', in *Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart), pp. 79-95.

approach to the simultaneity and individuality within polyphony, I am not convinced that his method is the most useful way of creating polyphony in poetry. As I will explore in Chapter 3, the poetry sequence's use of segmentivity and countermeasure also allow for a strong sense of polyphony, but without such deep visual layering as to make the poems nearly unreadable. Although the primary method of the polyphonic poetry sequence appears to lean toward Lee's concept of consecutively scoring voices, the use of structural elements such as textual signposts and the pattern of voices conjure polyphony in a sum of sequence parts.

In his essay, 'Singing with the Frogs' (1997), Bringhurst refutes Bakhtin's stance on poetry outright, stating that 'he stakes out his position and argues it in fervent and combative and exclusionary terms'.[34] While I agree that Bakhtin's discussion of poetry unhelpfully relegates poetic polyphony to a 'prosaic' category, I also posit that Bakhtin's analysis, in naming and clarifying polyphony and dialogism in prose, offer a structure through which polyphony in poetry can be usefully explored. In Bringhurst's essay, he constructs what he refers to as 'a simple test for polyphony in literature, analogous to the test for its musical counterpart' (129). This 'test' is a list of four conditions that, as Bringhurst suggests, need to be present for a piece to be considered truly polyphonic. The first requires, 'two or more voices, which are *or are made to seem* simultaneous' (130). Critic Stephen Benson reminds us, it is such 'simultaneity in spatial combination' that is the second key principle of polyphony (300). Bringhurst's other conditions require that the voices be able to stand alone, that all voices be of equal importance in the text and finally, that 'a space is created by these voices', a space which 'does not exist in any of the voices by itself, but it emerges from their conjunction' (130). Though useful in determining literary polyphony, I also argue that Bringhurst's list of conditions undoubtedly owes a nod to Bakhtin's analysis, the first to

[34] Robert Bringhurst, 1997. 'Singing with the Frogs', *Canadian Literature,* 155, 114 – 134, (122). Any use of italics in these quotations is the original emphasis of the author.

open up discussion of literary polyphony in a critical context.

Consider Bakhtin's insistence that the voices in a polyphonic novel 'combine in a higher unity', or that they are always 'two equally weighted discourses' (1984: 16; 188). What I draw from Bakhtin is an appreciation of the mind set of polyphony, one which holds that '*coexistence* and *interaction*' are key to the method an author employs when constructing a dialogic exchange (28). Bringhurst's essay does, however, make an important leap from Bakhtin's argument that literary polyphony can only be found in the realm of prose. Yet if we are to go back and examine the metaphor of polyphony, we must also return to the roots of this comparison by revisiting the musical concept itself.

From early myths that place Orpheus as lyre-master and composer of words and song, to the chanting and recitation of epic poetry and the singing and narrating of choruses in Greek drama, poetry and music have been intimately connected. Polyphony in Western music is a complex system involving multiple sounds as well as the process of listening and perceiving these sounds. Composer and theoretician Paulo C. Chagas notes the following in his essay 'Polyphony and Embodiment' (2005): 'a single sequence of events is associated with the notion of "voice" or "part", and the sequence of simultaneous sequences of events – voices and parts – is associated with the notion of polyphony.'[35] This 'plural wholeness' in musical polyphony resonates in terminology with Benson's third aspect of polyphony in literature and takes into account the individual, the parts in combination, and the combination as a whole arrangement (300). But when looking at the history of polyphony in music one enormous paradox can be seen. In *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations Between Poetry and Music* (1981), James Anderson Winn provides the reader with his argument concerning the emergence of polyphony: 'I believe that polyphony, arguably the most important invention in Western musical history, was initially a metaphor, an attempt to create a

[35] Paulo C. Chagas, 'Polyphony and Embodiment: a Critical Approach to the Theory of Autopoiesis' (2005) trans. by Revista Transcultural de Musica < http://www.paulocchagas.com/2005_Polyphony_and_Embodiment.pdf> [accessed 2014], p. 26.

musical equivalent for the literary and theological technique of allegory.'[36] According to Winn, the simultaneity found in the allegory of Old and New Testaments provided an inspiration for musicians. These texts allowed for an early experience of 'mystical simultaneity' in language, one that musicians realised they could try and replicate, thus taking the technique that language used one step further by combining melodies through the duration of a piece to create sounds which could be heard simultaneously in time, an effect that literature lacked.

Although connections between poetry and music are still actively explored in the twenty-first century, the connection between the musical sequence and the poetic sequence is little examined. Winn's text is one of the only full examinations of this link and it falls primarily in the field of music history. This polyphonic connection, and the way musicians harnessed and refined a technique they first found in literature, adds a paradoxical slant to a thesis which must reach back to the musical origins of polyphony to make connections with poetry. As Winn suggests, 'To locate the origin [...] is simply to assert that medieval men began at some point to make music by processes of combination they had long employed in making literature' (88-89). The polyphonic poetry sequence is a contemporary product of such combinations.

One crucial touchstone between polyphonic music and its literary metaphor is the way that polyphony's simultaneity can be experienced in two such very different contexts. Chagas highlights the idea that 'we can define polyphony as the sensation that captures simultaneity in the world', and here I place the emphasis on the phrase *sensation that captures simultaneity* (6). It is this simultaneous *quality* of the voices in a literary polyphony that Bringhurst and Lee particularly disagree upon, with Bringhurst's insistence that textual representation of voice in printed form must also be displayed in a way that is visually simultaneous. But Chagas conceives of a fuller notion of

[36] James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations Between Poetry and Music* (London: Yale University, 1981), pp. 87-88.

polyphony with his suggestion that, ‘in the way that painting renders non-visible forces visible [...] polyphony renders non-simultaneous forces simultaneous’ (6). To this, I would add that if a piece of literature does produce a ‘sensation that captures simultaneity’ it should surely also be examined for the other qualities of polyphony, rather than being ruled out if there is no visual, textual simultaneity as well.

Polyphonic music is developed using a specific way of organizing voices; in Chagas’s analysis of the structure of polyphonic music, he notes that there are ‘two compositional space domains: the domain of horizontality – the linear or temporal succession of sounds – and the domain of verticality – the simultaneity of sounds’ (1). A polyphonic musical composition resulting from this three-dimensional approach usually contains the progression of several, simultaneous, independent melodies along a linear plane through the duration of a piece. The polyphonic texture created is the result of the way voices are layered and set against one another as a piece progresses. The voices appear rhythmically linked and yet they are separate entities within the greater whole, each sounding alongside of and simultaneous with the others.

A Polyphonic Reading: ‘The Adoption Papers’

Although voices often join in and fade out individually in a polyphonic poetry sequence, the patterns that the voices form link separate utterances into a densely textured and dialogic sound scape. This sound scape changes and shifts as different speakers enter the poems. The poets of the sequences I am exploring in this thesis use methods to differentiate their voices from, for example, Jackie Kay’s different typographical elements to distinguish her three main voices, to Amanda Dalton and Gabrielle Calvocoressi’s use of textual signposting such as titles and dates to indicate poetic speakers. As my research is focused specifically on poetry sequences whose speakers are distinct, separate entities in the text, the polyphony of this network of

sequences usually employs clear textual methods of allowing speakers to enter the arena of the sequence. The juxtaposition of the voices as they begin to speak brings poetic depth to the layered textual construction of parts to whole.

Not only does ‘The Adoption Papers’ capture a sense of simultaneity through the overlapping of its three poetic speakers, the sequence also uses motif and refrain to connect individual poems and to create links among the voices over the duration of the sequence. The refrains in Kay’s sequence are all drawn from the information found in the opening section, the most significant of which starts on page ten and acts as a prologue to the sequence though it is not labelled as such and does not show up on the ‘Contents’ page either. This prologue contains the voices of all three speakers, laid out as follows: first, ‘Adoptive Mother’ in one, twelve-line stanza; then ‘Daughter’ in one, eight-line stanza; finally, ‘Birth Mother’ in three sets of couplets. (10). Kay transitions between the poetic speakers without using punctuation at the end of their sections, and she places only a set of double blank lines between these to signal change of voice. These first, brief utterances serve as introduction to each speaker’s voice but also act as back story for the events in the sequence. Chagas reminds us that in musical polyphony, ‘one can listen […] by distinguishing both the various sequences of events which are developed simultaneously and the multiple relationships existing between them’, and in this opening page of her sequence, Kay establishes the relationships among her speakers by placing their thoughts and memories alongside one another (9). With this juxtaposition, Kay splices three very different experiences of one event, allowing the three versions of it to stand together, so that the experience of each woman sits in direct relationship to that of the others and to the events of the entire sequence.

From this first experience of three voices, Kay sets up a type of repetition in ‘The Adoption Papers’, where an entire stanza repeats at intervals, much like a chorus does after a verse of music. From Daughter’s opening stanza, the repetitions begin as

single images, building up until finally her original prologue stanza repeats in poem eight, eighteen pages after its first appearance. Daughter's 'prologue' stanza (10):

> I was pulled out with forceps
> left a gash down my left cheek
> four months inside a glass cot
> but she came faithful
> from Glasgow to Edinburgh
> and peered through the glass
> I must have felt somebody willing me to survive;
> she would not pick another baby

The images drawn from Daughter's opening stanza repeat, at first, individually, through Birth Mother's voice: 'So much the better than her body | encased in glass' (13); 'I lie | willing life into her | breathing air all the way down the corridor | to the glass cot' (13); 'it was as if he was there | in that glass cot looking back through her' (26). Then in poem eight, 'Chapter 8: Generations', Daughter's prologue stanza appears again as an entire refrain, this time with a different set of line breaks and a full stop at the end (28):

> I was pulled out with forceps
> left a gash down my left cheek
> four months inside a glass cot
> but
> she came faithful from Glasgow to Edinburgh
> and peered through the glass
> she would not pick another baby.

The line breaks of this refrain emphasize the repetition of the journey that Adoptive Mother took in claiming her baby, regardless of distance. But one line of the original stanza has also been omitted here: 'I must have felt somebody willing me to survive'.

The removal of this line and only this line from the refrain, places emphasis on two aspects of what the speaker conveys with this repetition. Firstly, it suggests that Daughter has accepted the relationship with her adoptive mother. Kay indicates this by

omitting the reference to Daughter's survival in the refrain, thereby placing more importance on the final line of the stanza (and the full stop to reinforce it), and allowing Daughter to claim her chosen place, not just as baby, but fully as a daughter of the mother who chose her. Secondly, with the removal of 'willing me to survive', Kay has ensured that this image appears elsewhere instead (p.13 as above). In its other appearance, in the voice of Birth Mother, 'willing life into her', the idea comes as a shock, situated as it is within her thoughts of suffocating or drowning her baby to free herself from the ties of motherhood and the shame involved in being an unwed woman with a new-born. Kay's use of this entire stanza as a refrain demonstrates Daughter's awareness that both mothers, in some way, willed her to survive, and as such, it acknowledges the connections among the voices in the sequence. Kay's use of refrain brings a circular quality to the journey Daughter must endure during the sequence in the discovery of where she belongs and how to articulate this belonging.

Similarly, imagery and entire lines from Birth Mother's opening couplets appear individually throughout the sequence as well as in a refrain. Her lines in prologue (10):

I still have the baby photograph
I keep it in my bottom drawer

She is twenty-six today
my hair is grey

The skin around my neck is wrinkling
does she imagine me this way

The most obvious use of refrain from Birth Mother's opening lines is the continuous reference to age in other sequence poems. In her opening, Birth Mother notes that her daughter is twenty-six, but it is also revealed in the second poem that she herself was nineteen when she gave birth. These two numbers, twenty-six and nineteen, appear ten times and there are as many more additional references to age as birthdays pass and time moves forward in the sequence. Birth Mother's opening couplets appear later in the

sequence as well, in two halves of a refrain. Also in 'Chapter 8', the final two couplets appear woven together with Daughter's voice shortly after the reader encounters Daughter's own refrain lines (30):

> **She is twenty-six today**
> She was a waitress
> **My hair is grey**
> She wears no particular dress
> **The skin around my neck is wrinkling**
> **does she imagine me this way?**
> Lately I make pictures of her

This long stanza continues with the juxtaposition of voices, as earlier in the sequence, and the textual layering of speakers articulates a relationship between them that is both visually polyphonic as well as dialogic, as the pronouns shift and refer to different speakers at different times.

In his analysis of 'The Adoption Papers', Ian Gregson notes that 'it is by fully measuring the extent of the otherness […] – the gaps between the women – that it [the sequence] finally evokes sympathy for each of them, and a sense of genuine, if precarious, identification.'[37] The emotional gaps between the speakers show up precisely when the voices are closest together on the page. With the use of refrain, Kay creates links to imagery from earlier in the sequence but aligns it differently, shedding new light on the way the speakers connect as well as on their disconnection. The first two lines from Birth Mother's prologue are not repeated as they first appear but rather are referred to in the final page of the sequence. This page, like the prologue, is unlabelled, set apart from the previous poems and placed on a new page; it does not show up in the 'Contents' section other than as a gap between the end of 'The Adoption Papers' and the beginning of the rest of Kay's collection. In this form, the final page acts as an epilogue and it is here that Birth Mother's opening lines of the sequence haunt the

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[37] Ian Gregson, *Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 244.

end as she takes the only photograph she has of her daughter and throws it down an old well, mirroring the opening image with a closing one: 'I still have the baby photograph | I keep it in my bottom drawer' and, 'years—she's been in my drawer | Faded now, she's not a baby any more' (10; 34). The use of rhyme in these, her final lines, as well as refrain, allows Kay to bring the sequence full circle for this speaker and to give her a sense of closure structurally in the text.

The early musical sequence used similar repetitions among parts to connect individual vocals. Winn notes that each of the parts were considered 'parallel versions of the same truth', separate vocals within a bigger vocal texture (64). In 'The Adoption Papers', Kay constructs her sequence so that each speaker's part relates as a complete and stand-alone voice, but a voice that exists within the whole of a unified text comprised of other individual voices woven together. These voices behave, very much, as individual 'versions of the same truth', in this instance the events surrounding an adoption. The layering of poetic speakers in connection to one another within one tapestry of a sequence is what links a polyphonic poetry sequence more directly to polyphonic music than to polyphony in prose. As Bringhurst suggests, in a true polyphony, 'a space is created by these voices [...that] does not exist in any of the voices by itself but it emerges from their conjunction' (130). The space that he conceives of is perhaps best visualised as an overlapping sound texture, much as it would be if musical voices were linked in this way. The configuration in Kay's sequence is layered similarly to music: voice / voice / voice, a simultaneity of all of the voices together on the page to visually mimic a sound texture for the eye.[38]

As I have demonstrated with the excerpt from *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky's prose layers multiple voices within the thoughts and speech of an individual fictional mind, thereby creating polyphony with an internalised juxtaposition

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[38] See Appendix for a visual representation of the spatial arrangement of 'The Adoption Papers', especially the use of refrain and the patterning of voices. For further information on musical sequences, see Richard Crocker, *The Early Medieval Sequence* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977).

of voices. The polyphonic texture and the dialogic exchange in a poetry sequence with multiple voices at the core of its construction, does not, however, use juxtaposition in the same fashion. Instead, poetic speakers most often reside in separate visual and physical spaces within the sequence as a whole. This takes the form of either different stanzaic units within a poem of mixed vocals, such as Kay's or, more frequently, as separate poems-as-sections within a pattern of vocal utterance in the sequence. The individual poetic segments, representing each speaker, exist alongside one another, in the same type of 'coexistence' that Bakhtin envisions for Dostoevsky's dialogic and polyphonic prose: 'For him, to get one's bearings on the world meant […] to see everything as coexisting, to perceive and show all things as side by side and simultaneous' (28). In a poetry sequence where multiple voices are juxtaposed in the text, a unique type of poetic dialogism is born. This dialogism operates differently than it does in prose, due to the specific poetic structures such as line and stanza break, and the gaps between sections or change of speaker. By continuing with a close reading of 'The Adoption Papers', I will now explore the dialogic exchange offered by the polyphonic poetry sequence, especially through its use of juxtaposition to conjure a polyphonic 'sensation' of simultaneity.

Juxtaposition & Polyphonic Simultaneity

Whether they speak to one another, to the reader or to themselves, whether they speak about one another or not, when a poet juxtaposes voices in a poetry sequence, the reader is offered the opportunity of making dialogic connections. To clarify the operation of dialogism in a polyphonic sequence, I return to 'The Adoption Papers', and Kay's juxtapositioning of her three speakers. Throughout the sequence, Kay alternates the voices of Birth Mother, Daughter, and Adoptive Mother by weaving the thoughts of one into the thoughts of another, building a momentum of exchange as the utterances of the

women become longer. This texture is the culmination of two earlier renditions of the poems: a re-ordering and re-structuring of Kay's original layout, as found in her pamphlet, *That Distance Apart* (1991), and the broadcast of 'The Adoption Papers' as a radio play the previous year.[39]

Kay's typographical labelling of the voices takes place before the sequence's prologue page and is set out to mirror the cast list from the radio play, with a different font for each speaker. In the poem, 'Chapter 1: The Seed', Kay lays out the two voices of Adoptive Mother and Birth Mother by alternating lines to suggest that the two women speak in a simultaneous moment. The layout of their speech appears as two parts of a spliced-together conversation, visually implying that the women speak with one another, or alongside of one another. This combined text also signals two halves of one whole, each woman telling her individual side of one, combined story, though in the world of the sequence, these two women never meet (11). Where Kay has situated the voices separately in her original pamphlet, they appear to speak in monologues, much as the voices of *Crime and Punishment* do before Dostoevsky combines them in the main character's mind. In 'The Adoption Papers', however, the voices lie together, intertwined on the page. The little punctuation that exists only comes at the end of a long, joint thought. [Speakers are typographically: Adoptive Mother; **Birth Mother**]

I crave discomfort like some women
crave chocolate or earth or liver

Now these slow weeks on
I can't stop going over and over

I can't believe I've tried for five years

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[39] Jackie Kay, 1991b. *That Distance Apart* (London: Turret Books); Jackie Kay, 1990. *Drama Now: The Adoption Papers*, dir. by Dominique Legendre, Trevor Francis, and Frances-Anne Solomon (BBC Radio 3, 28 August 1990). Although the radio play took place in 1990, Kay notes that the poems were already set for her pamphlet *That Distance Apart*. Kay then further edited the sequence after the radio broadcast and this new arrangement appeared in *The Adoption Papers* collection, which, by a chance of timing, was published before the original pamphlet's material. Kay, 2017. (jackie.kay@btinternet.com). (July 10)—The Adoption Papers, PhD Query. Email to Liz Bahs (poetsbriefcase@gmail.com).

for something that could take five minutes

It only took a split second
not a minute or more.

In his analysis of Kay's sequence, Gregson argues that the lack of punctuation in the sequence poems, 'suggests that the speech of each opens towards the others in a mutual interrogation' (244). I suggest, however, that the speakers are linked in a mutual struggle with motherhood, but from opposite ends of the spectrum, and rather than interrogate each other, the format of interwoven voices allows for interaction between the two different experiences.

Interaction is crucial to the exchange; Bakhtin notes, in 'the great dialogue of the novel as a whole, separate voices and their worlds are juxtaposed to one another as inseparable wholes' (96). Time becomes a preoccupation in their speech and the struggle that ensues is a symptom: pregnancy for one and infertility for the other. The juxtaposition of voices in Kay's poem demonstrates a temporal and successive layering of voices, and in the words of Ian Gregson, this technique is 'profoundly dialogic' (243). In sections such as this, juxtaposition operates to cultivate a dialogic exchange within the poem by allowing the words of each speaker to directly interact with another. The reader, in turn, is also presented with a unified poem in two visually distinct voices. In Kay's sequence, unlike in most polyphonic novels, the voices are laid out on the page without the use of speech tags to denote a change of speaker. This allows the voices to merge without authorial intervention to signal the change of voice to the reader, while font differences for speakers are distinct enough to keep the reader from confusion.

The interweaving of voices in 'The Adoption Papers' creates an emotional intensity that is doubled by the doubling of voices in the text. The method of juxtaposing these speakers without punctuation or labels mirrors the turn-taking of conversation. On its own, for example, Birth Mother's speech would become a

monologue on the slowness of time and the quickness of one moment. The theme of this is unremarkable on its own, yet Birth Mother's speech, set above and below the text of Adoptive Mother's speech, allows the voices to be interlinked to highlight their similarities and differences. Kay uses this weaving, along with the repetition of imagery and diction to create a contrast between the speakers. The effect of the juxtaposition is the amplification of tension in the dialogue that arises between voices as they are situated together on a page (11):

> **The time, the exact time**
> **for that particular seed to be singled out**
>
> I want to lie on my back at night
> I want to pee all the time
>
> **amongst all others**
> **like choosing a dancing partner**

A conversation begins in this poem through the 'dialogic contact' made by the speakers: both women are waiting for something and the intensity of the moment they wait for doubles when the two voices speaking are visually aligned.

Though I am not suggesting a simple parallel between dialogism and conversation, the textual contact made between speakers demonstrates and reinforces Bakhtin's dialogic concept that, 'utterances cross between persons [...] That territory is the moving border between persons no matter how near or far they may be one to another in space / time' (Wesling 2003: 164). Here in this poetic context are speakers who make contact across chasms of space and time, across the so-called boundaries of utterance in a specifically poetic context. The shared theme of the sequence is taken up by one voice, then another, and another, with connections moving back and forth over the textual, segmented gaps of poetry's line, stanza, and page breaks. This type of boundary crossing is not one which I believe Bakhtin could have fully envisioned for

poetry in his time. Though he hints at the potential for poetic dialogism, his prejudice against poetry attaining this level of connection was strong. Wesling notes:

> Nearly always, when Bakhtin wrote of poetry he compared it to narrative prose and found it lacking. He was unable to see behind this opposition […] Russian poetics […] had drawn a sharp line between poetic language in its controlled and formal cosmos, and prose language in its aleatory or chaotic abandon […This] prejudice was a notably Russian one […] because it is rooted in the Russian Orthodox trust in the Word: […] the incarnate god in language (21).

So in Bakhtin's insistence that, poetic 'dialogization doesn't happen because the language of poetry is different', one must work around the narrowness of his definition and look instead to the contemporary poetry sequences that contain such layering of voices; and one must look even more deeply and, therefore, beyond Bakhtin in order to apply his theories to the type of writing he was unable to apply them to himself.[40]

As a poetry sequence, 'The Adoption Papers' employs a distinctive method of combining its multiple speakers.[41] The voices reside like complete micro-units within a nesting doll: each speaker textually intertwined with one or more others, each of these combinations within a poetic section, each section a numbered and titled part within the sequence, and the sequence situated as part of a whole collection of poetry. The quality of the voices in a polyphony, that is, their 'independence' as well as their 'interaction', are what set apart sequences such as Kay's from other polyvocal work where the voices do not employ both of these traits (Benson 2003: 299). The structure of 'The Adoption Papers' is both polyphonic and dialogic as here, the 'irreducible plurality' of the voices is 'constituted out of multiplicity', a multiplicity that builds and develops as the

[40] Bakhtin, 1981, 284. Wesling also takes a similar approach in his text, suggesting we should look beyond Bakhtin and ask questions such as: 'How can his writings be taken against his expressed opinions, as contributions to poetics and the reading of poetry?' (19).

[41] Although Kay developed this intertwined texture of her voices after the sequence was broadcast on radio, the original layout of the poems, in *That Distance Apart,* indicates that she was already attempting the consecutive polyphony found in other sequences such as Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves'.

sequence progresses and the three speakers become more fully intertwined.[42] The alternation of voices within individual stanzas and sections of the sequence allows Kay to capture the inner turmoil of her speakers at their most dramatic points.

> **Does she imagine me this way?**
> Lately I make pictures of her
> But I can see the smallness
> **She is tall and slim**
> of her hands, Yes
> **Her hair is loose curls**
> an opal stone on her middle finger
> I reach out to catch her (30)

In the stanza above Kay splices the thoughts of Birth Mother and Daughter by allowing line break to disrupt the syntax of the sentences and the enjambment that would ordinarily carry the image of one line, in a singular voice, over to the next. By layering the voices in this way, Kay brings through the effect of interruption and yet simultaneity of the speakers as each of the women day dreams about the other. This close arrangement creates a sensation of contact between the speakers, and conjures a potentially endless multiplicity of vocal exchange.

Bakhtin's envisioning of the dialogic contact in prose also speaks to the heart of the structure of the polyphonic poetry sequence: 'Two discourses equally and directly oriented […] cannot exist side by side without intersecting dialogically […] Two embodied meanings cannot lie side by side like two objects—they must come into inner contact' (188). In Kay's sequence, each speaker performs a combination of relating directly and indirectly to the others at every point where the voices appear side by side, for example, Daughter imagines Birth Mother, writes to her, dreams of her, yet she is nurtured and raised by Adoptive Mother; Birth Mother remembers and wonders about Daughter and yet only their thoughts have direct contact in the text, with separation an

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[42] In his exploration of polyphony, Benson suggests that the 'coexistence and interaction' that Bakhtin envisions is based on the 'plurality […] constituted out of multiplicity' of voices in a text (299).

underlying theme in the sequence. The heightened emotional and physical separation between speakers is highlighted by the close textual juxtaposition of their voices which sets up an endless series of echoes on a variety of themes including secrets, mirrors and doubling, and official certificates and papers. Bakhtin's awareness of the interactive contact of a dialogic text is undoubtedly astute, and I argue that when the same lens is applied to the polyphonic poetry sequence, this claim feels all the more accurate.

Perhaps it is the simultaneity of musical polyphony that is the most difficult aspect to render in literary polyphony. To establish individual yet dialogically connected voices and to imbue these voices with a polyphonic model, that of the 'sensation of simultaneity', is a substantial poetic undertaking. Much lyric poetry is concerned with a distillation of time into a single, significant moment, yet a poetry sequence's segmented nature often deals with the progression of time and the development of a theme or experience. When a sequence also contains multiple speakers interacting dialogically, the complication of how to situate the voices in time arises, especially where the poet wishes to explore, thematically and structurally, how the speakers represent individual yet linked 'versions of the same truth' (Winn 1981: 64).

As I have demonstrated by highlighting the methods of juxtaposition in 'The Adoption Papers', one of the ways that the polyphonic poetry sequence signals simultaneity is through an interweaving of speakers within individual poetic parts. Kay's approach to textual layout comes close to Bringhurst's method of visual overlay of words and phrases, but by layering the voices in alternation within stanzas, sections and within the whole of the sequence, the simultaneity of the speakers' experience comes through without the need for a deciphering of voices on the page. Other polyphonic poetry sequences use a layout and structure that is looser than Kay's but still prioritises an alternation of speakers and a pattern of imagery as subtext to the voices.

Chagas reminds us that polyphony is ‘the manifestation of simultaneity – a system of multiple and individual events’ (3). In Kay’s section ‘Chapter 4: Baby Lazarus’, both mothers speak about their experiences as they move forward in time and onward as they travel through the Scottish landscape between November and March (16-18). At each temporal point in the poem, Kay arranges the voices of the women so that, although they are physically separate in the world of the sequence, their thoughts mirror one another’s moment by moment. This excerpt is from ‘November’ (16):

> I felt all hot. Don’t get overwrought.
> What does she expect? I’m not a mother
> Until I’ve signed that piece of paper.
>
> **The rhythm of the train carries me**
> **Over the frigid earth**
> **The constant chug a comforter**
> **A rocking cradle.**

The imagery from each speaker is at two extremes, overheated or icy, and one of the women is waiting to call herself a mother while the other has given her baby up; both are completely consumed by thoughts of this child. These details, as well as the back-to-back stanza layout situate the journeys of the women as two halves of one moment. They are contrasting yet complimentary mothers, twin aspects for the baby who resides in limbo between them at this point in the narrative of the sequence.

Bakhtin tells us that, for Dostoevsky, simultaneity was a way to ‘get one’s bearings on the world’; it was a way to look at ‘*interrelationships in the cross-section of a single moment*’ (28). Kay presents the stanzas of this section as a cluster of single moments, and in each resides the experience of two different, yet vitally linked women. From ‘March’ (17-18):

> We can pick her up in two days.
> Two days for Christ’s sake,
> could they not have given us a bit more notice?

> **[…] I went out into the garden—**
> **The frost bit my old brown boots—**
> **and dug a hole the size of my baby**
> **and buried the clothes I'd bought anyway.**

The stories of the speakers in 'The Adoptions Papers' unfold in the juxtaposition of parts. Kay's approach to structure ensures that each speaker's perspective is heard alongside of the others within the same textual, spatial domain. The relationship between the stanza segments act as links among the small details of the poems; these are then formed into a larger tapestry of voices within the whole sequence. The poems-as-sections also operate within the overall pattern of the complete sequence.

In Bringhurst's examination of literary polyphony he retains strong links to the musical roots of the metaphor. I offer a short excerpt of his definition of polyphony here by way of highlighting the key elements of the texture at work in Kay's sequence:

> Polyphonic music is music in which two or more interrelated but independent statements are made at the same time, creating a statement that none of these statements makes on its own. […] Their relation is that of coequals […] That coequality is why what they say can exceed the sum of the parts. Polyphony, in short, is singing more than one song, playing more than one tune, telling more than one story, at once (1997: 114).

In attempting to tell the stories of three interlinked women, Kay has structured her sequence so that the voices interact and co-exist, both key features of Bakhtin's dialogic and polyphonic literary texture. She positions these voices, two or three at a time, within the micro-units of stanzas and poems so that, when read collectively, a pattern of distinctly separate voices emerges.[43] Kay leaves her reader with the tying together of these separate strands in an epilogue where each voice is situated on the same page, and

[43] See Appendix to this thesis for a visual representation of this texture.

the final section, ‘Chapter 10: The Meeting Dream’, brings the dialogic connections to a close. Here the mothers each meditate on the daughter that is claimed by one and given up by the other, a sensation of a final simultaneity in the rhyme and imagery of their closing lines: [Adoptive Mother] ‘Closer than blood. | Thicker than water. Me and my daughter.’; [Birth Mother] ‘I’ve no more terror. | Going home, the light spilled like water.’ (34). Through the process of allowing her reader to witness the mutual coming to terms with their roles, Kay places the voices together one last time to demonstrate the transformation that has occurred—Adoptive Mother is now linked in a fashion thicker and closer than blood to Daughter, and Birth Mother has shed her connection to, and fear of, her lost daughter. Through the alternation and close interweaving of her three speakers, Kay’s sequence exceeds any one of the stories, any singular point of view or experience of just one of the speakers. The polyphony of this poetic text offers an emotive and densely-textured account of an adoption and the three main participants in this event. As such, ‘The Adoption Papers’ resides firmly in the polyphonic spectrum of poetry sequences that I shall now turn my attention to in the conclusion of this chapter.

A Spectrum of Polyphonic Poetry Sequence

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the juxtaposition of multiple first-person speakers within a poetry sequence has the ability to render polyphony, what Chagas refers to as, the ‘sensation that captures simultaneity’ (6). The simultaneity of a polyphonic poetry sequence is undoubtedly different to that of polyphonic music, yet like polyphony in music, a polyphonic poetry sequence contains individual voices that reside alongside of other voices each of which, when read together, become more than the sum of their parts in the sequence as a whole. The polyphonic poetry sequence, like polyphony in prose, contains a dialogic exchange in the connections among its speakers, and in ‘The Adoption Papers’, this set of interacting voices comes close to Bringhurst’s

model of visually simultaneous polyphony on the page, while still retaining its ability to be read easily. In his essay, 'Dostoevsky's Poetics of Spirit'(1987), David Patterson notes that, in polyphonic prose, 'the dialogical relation between characters', is one which 'engages the novel in an implied dialogue with itself; turning back on itself, it participates in its own polyphony'.[44] The polyphonic poetry sequence also 'participates in its own polyphony' through the text's focus on the juxtaposition of its speakers in a dialogic interchange, where the voices often echo each other and extend the preoccupation with one textual event through the use of refrain, repetition of themes, the pattern of voices, and the conjuring of what is also left unsaid.

To refer to a poetry sequence as *polyphonic* names the multiplicity of speakers in a unified poem presented in parts, but it also captures the unique structural elements and poetic styles of poets attempting to work with simultaneity on the printed page. In Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis I will explore two further sequences with polyphonic structures, Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves', and Gabrielle Calvocoressi's 'Circus Fire, 1944'. Although Dalton and Calvocoressi use many of the same techniques as Kay to render simultaneity amongst their multiple speakers, their approaches to this also vary in the layout and signposting of poetic parts, and the poems in their sequences follow patterns uniquely their own. In a consideration of such differences and unique styles, I suggest that the three sequences under examination in this thesis be considered as three points along a spectrum of polyphonic poetry sequence in print today.

In *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (1995), Simon Dentith arrives at a similar point with regard to polyphonic prose; he states the following: 'Perhaps novels can be placed upon a scale, with polyphony at one extreme and monologism at the other' (45). This scale would take into account the variety of novelistic structures and approaches to multiple voices. In their defining of the modern poetic sequence,

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[44] David Patterson, 'Dostoevsky's Poetics of Spirit: Bakhtin and Berdyaev', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 8 (1987) < http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/DS/08/219.shtml>[accessed August 2014], p. 221.

Rosenthal and Gall also allow for a type of 'continuum', one that spans a range of possible forms of sequence structure. Their range extends from one end, where sequence is comprised of 'highly fragmented structures […] at different intensities and levels of consciousness', to the other, where poems fall into clear sections, 'to cohere as a system of tensions, modulations, and reciprocal tonal forces' (26). Yet as varied as this continuum appears, Rosenthal and Gall only include within it sequences that have a 'lyrical organization' and relegate all others to 'just beyond the tip, as it were, of each extreme' or outside of their continuum altogether (26). Nevertheless, both Dentith's scale and Rosenthal and Gall's continuum highlight the need for the consideration of a range when making an argument for polyphony in the poetry sequence.

Within the sub-genre of the poetry sequence, sequences that are constructed with a polyphonic texture make up their own distinct type. So different are they in structure and effect from monophonic sequences, that I suggest they could easily form their own new category. At one extreme of a polyphonic spectrum of poetry sequence would reside Bringhurst's visually simultaneous double-voice sequence, 'The Blue Roofs of Japan'. Situated close to 'Blue Roofs' we would find 'The Adoption Papers' with its simultaneity of voices and dialogic interaction. There are other sequences that would also reside near this heavily-polyphonic end of the spectrum with the textual simultaneity rendered as closely as possible on the printed page as to that of the vocal expression of musical polyphony. Some of these would include *Dart* and *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* by Alice Oswald, where voices appear sequentially within long poetic sections and where changes of speakers are noted only in the margins; also, poems from Catherine Greenwood's *The Lost Letters*, especially those from 'Dear Peter' where voices appear in juxtaposed columns on the same page.

In the middle of the polyphonic spectrum, sequences such as those in Gabrielle Calvocoressi's collection *The Last Time I Saw Amelia Earhart*, would appear. So too,

Patricia McCarthy's *Rodin's Shadow*, Deryn Rees-Jones's *Quiver*, two sequences by Liz Cashdan, 'The Same Country' and 'The Tyre-Cairo Letters', and Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves', to name just a few. The sequences in the middle of the spectrum all contain multiple first-person speakers and their layouts and styles appear variously, but often with voices layered consecutively, as per Lee's suggestion for capturing poetic polyphony. At the other end of the spectrum then would fall those sequences where the speakers appear in a mixture of points of view, but include work with a third-person perspective.[45] This end of the polyphonic range would include Amanda Dalton's 'Lost in Space', Gillian Allnutt's 'Nantucket and the Angel', *Fragments From the Fire* by Chris Llewellyn, and Jennifer Copley's *Beans in Snow*, amongst many others.[46]

The spectrum of polyphony in poetry sequences covers an array of themes and structures. The juxtaposition of voices within a polyphonic sequence arguably creates a unique type of dialogic exchange, one which can offer new ways of considering the links with polyphonic music and prose, though, as Bringhurst reminds us, polyphony is not simply a technique found in music or literature, 'it is a complex property of reality which any work of art can emphasize or minimize, or notice or ignore' (1997: 130). In the next chapter I will examine how poetic speakers operate within a polyphonic sequence by using T.S. Eliot's essay, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', to explore lyric and dramatic tendencies of poetic voice. Through a close reading of Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves', I will continue to explore the polyphonic poetry sequence as a site of dialogic exchange.

[45] In a wider examination of polyphony in poetry collections, one would also include many of Anne Carson's books, often categorized as novels in verse, with a hybrid approach to polyvocality.

[46] Full details of these and other sequences in the spectrum can be found in the Bibliography section at the end of this thesis. Allnutt, 'Nantucket and the Angel: Sketches', in *Nantucket and the Angel* (1997); Cashdan, 'The Same Country' and 'The Tyre-Cairo Letters' in *Things of Substance: New and Selected Poems* (2013); Copley, *Beans in Snow* (2009); Dalton, 'Lost in Space', in *Stray* (2012); Greenwood, *The Lost Letters* (2013); Llewellyn, *Fragments From the Fire: The Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire of March 25, 1911* (1986); McCarthy, *Rodin's Shadow* (2012); Oswald, *Dart* (2002); Oswald, *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* (2009); Rees-Jones, *Quiver* (2004).

Chapter 2: A Polyphonic Threshold

In the previous chapter I offered a close reading of Jackie Kay's sequence 'The Adoption Papers', through exploring the methods of juxtaposition and simultaneity in the polyphonic poetry sequence. I also discussed poetic dialogism, a concept that Bakhtin largely dismissed. In this chapter I will investigate the construct of the speaker in the polyphonic poetry sequence by undertaking a close reading of Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves' to illustrate my argument. I begin with an exploration of the types of poetic speakers because, as I will argue, the inclusion of multiple first-person speakers in a sequence disrupts the tendency for the reader to relate to either a lyric 'I' or to the 'I' of the dramatic monologue. This chapter will also examine the variety of labels used for sequences with such multiple I's, by addressing the question of whether the speakers are lyric or dramatic renderings of poetic voice. Historically, the few critical analyses written on aspects of polyvocality in a poetry sequence have most often characterized these poems as 'juxtaposing dramatic monologues', as found in, for example, Robert Browning's well-known sequence, *The Ring and the Book* (1869).[47] From Browning's text through to present day, there has been a proliferation of confusing labels for poetry sequences that contain complex multi-vocality at the core of their structures.

Through an analysis of the poetic speakers of a polyphonic sequence, I will extend critic Alan Sinfield's concept of the 'divided consciousness': the reader's double awareness of both the speaker's fictional existence and, at the same time, the allure of this fiction.[48] Dramatic monologue sets up what Sinfield refers to as 'an impossible reading experience', due to the way the reader is asked to believe in the real-life qualities of the first-person speaker (30). However, such a speaker, T.S. Eliot argues, cannot be considered fully dramatic and must therefore be evaluated as a mask worn by

[47] Langbaum, 158; Robert Browning, *Robert Browning's Poems and Plays: The Ring and the Book, 1868-9,* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1962), III.
[48] Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen & Co, 1977), p. 32.

the poet for his own means.[49] I will address Eliot's concept of the dramatic voice to highlight how these sequences operate differently than the dramatic monologue, yet do not fit into the category of lyric that Rosenthal and Gall defined in *The Modern Poetic Sequence*. The starting point for this chapter is thus an argument that the speakers of the polyphonic poetry sequence contain both lyric and dramatic tendencies, yet operate differently to the speaker of a dramatic monologue and to the speaker of the lyric poem. This difference can be characterized by a twist on the dramatic technique of the *feint*, an artifice that resides between speaker and reader in the first-person poetic utterance. The polyphonic poetry sequence exceeds this artifice through its dialogic relationship between its multiple speakers. In a return to Bakhtin's dialogism, what he defines as 'a dialogicality of the ultimate whole', I will argue for a movement beyond his limited focus on poetry, to encompass the challenges presented by the polyphonic and dialogic constructions in the poetry sequence (1984: 18).

The Tendencies of Poetic 'I's

Within poetic criticism, there is a large quantity of scholarship that focuses on how a poetic speaker resides within the text, and specifically on what distinguishes the speaking 'I' of a dramatic monologue from that of the lyric. This distinction was particularly important for literary critics in the middle decades of the twentieth century, when debate surrounded the ideas about the relationship between poet and speaker. In her overview of the form, *Dramatic Monologue* (2003), Glennis Byron notes that the distinction between the 'I' of a dramatic monologue and the lyric 'I' was a source of 'subsequent debate centered on distinguishing the dramatic monologue from the lyric, in particular determining the different natures of the respective speaking 'I's, and the

[49] T.S. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1943; repr. 1957), pp. 96-112, (104).

relationship of those speaking 'I's to the actual poets'.[50] In contemporary studies of poetry, Byron suggests that, 'while both lyric and dramatic monologue present a first-person speaker, there are some significantly different tendencies in the two forms, and they have different effects, even if, in some texts, they begin to merge' (11-12). In the case of the polyphonic poetry sequence where the speakers of poems take on varying degrees of both lyric and dramatic tendencies, it is therefore important to explore how the multiple 'I's of these sequences function.

In this discussion, I employ an approach to lyric, narrative, and drama similar to that of Stefan Kjerkegaard in his essay 'In the Waiting Room: Narrative in the Autobiographical Lyric Poem' (2014). Kjerkegaard makes the case that lyric, narrative, and dramatic are 'discourse types' found within the genre of poetry.[51] Indeed, to use these terms is to highlight similarities and differences within the same genre, rather than to discuss the lyric, narrative, or dramatic as separate genres under the umbrella term of 'poetry'. Within a polyphonic poetry sequence, these types often work in an amalgamation and it is this mixture that gives the reader a unique experience of its multiple voices.

Sequences with multiple first-person speakers have frequently been labelled as a *series of dramatic monologues,* however, other equally unclear labels include a 'long story-poem', 'a novel in verse', 'juxtaposing dramatic monologues', 'lyric sequence', 'many masks and dramatic personae in […] definitive lyric framework', 'super-monologues', 'large, strange works […] between the needs of poetry and the standards and values of prose', and 'prosaic lyric poetry.'[52] The confusion with critics in how to label a sequence of poems in multiple voices, as well as how to most usefully discuss them critically, can be seen from decade to decade in the texts as footnoted here.

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[50] Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.11.
[51] Stefan Kjerkegaard, 'In the Waiting Room: Narrative in the Autobiographical Lyric Poem, Or Beginning to Think About Lyric Poetry with Narratology', *Narrative*, 22.2 (2014), 185-202, (187).
[52] Wesling (2003), 134; Barnes (2009), para. 1; Langbaum (1957), 158; Keller (1997), 22; Slot (2014), 165; Sinfield (1977), 35; Mermin (1983), 11; Eskin (2000), 383.

One of the earliest of such a complex series of poems is Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. This series of interlinked dramatic monologues offers a key example of a form in which we can see the seeds of what has developed into the contemporary polyphonic poetry sequence. Critic John Woolford argues that, at the time of being published, *The Ring* had 'no obvious precedent for its use of multiple narration of the same sequence of events by a variety of speakers' and that, among reviewers and critics of Browning's new work, there was 'a certain amount of good-natured perplexity as to what genre it does belong to'.[53] Browning scholar Loy D. Martin's examination of the form raises questions about what he refers to as the 'dramatic monologue collection'.[54] Martin notes, 'Browning experiments with a new set of poetic conventions. I can only call these conventions tentative devices of reciprocity and exchange' (28). He concludes that the structure of Browning's long poem is greater than simply a collection of monologues: 'one of its irreducible requirements is some principle of continuity between individual poems in the form of an enclosing fiction' (169). Martin's awareness of the importance of *The Ring and the Book* as a pivotal work in poetry is a canny one, and although Browning's collection differs in many ways from the polyphonic poetry sequence, it also employs similar techniques such as a dramatic rendering of events, a lyrical approach to time, and a narrative progression through the juxtaposition of parts. Perhaps it is because of the mixture of lyric, narrative, and dramatic tendencies in long sequences with multiple voices, that critics and poets alike are unsure of how to label these works.

In the long history of criticism engaged with defining the speaking subjects in the lyric poem or the dramatic monologue, there has emerged a gap in the discussion of the poetry sequence. In Rosenthal and Gall's monograph *The Modern Poetic Sequence,* the authors define the parameters of the poetry sequence without any reference to

[53] John Woolford, *Browning The Revisionary* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 173; 198.
[54] Loy D. Martin, *Browning's Dramatic Monologue and the Post-Romantic Subject* (London: The John Hopkins University, 1985)

multiple, distinct speakers. Their definition of a sequence is also quite limiting, while relying on an idea of the lyric qualities of poetry for its structural determination. A poetic sequence, they argue, is one whose organization is, 'finally lyrical', or one constructed 'on a progression of specific qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness' (9; 6). In the defining of such a broad type as 'the modern poetic sequence' the focus of Rosenthal and Gall's text is strictly limited to sequences that have a 'fundamental character of lyrical structure', a structure that they deem to be 'organic' as opposed to one where a dramatic or narrative plotline or thematic 'framework' operates to structure the individual sequence parts (7; 11).

Although a useful early gathering of some lyric sequences, their insistence on the lyrical properties of a sequence, those they describe as the 'balancings of stress and interplay among its centers of passionate preoccupation', operates as a type of ring-fencing within poetry (9). This exclusionary practice relegates non-lyrical sequences to the margins, either as unsuccessful dramatic or narrative poems or only, 'on the verge of the modern sequence' (78). Critic Lynn Keller's text, *Forms of Expansion* (1997), addresses Rosenthal and Gall's tightly-controlled category of the lyrical poetic sequence in its introduction.[55] Keller suggests that the omission of other types of sequences from their survey is quite damaging to the body of critical writing on poetry because 'a particular subtype is portrayed as occupying the space where multiple subtypes in fact exist' (10). By distinguishing the tendencies of multiple poetic speakers from those of individual speakers in dramatic monologues or lyric poems, I will focus my arguments in this thesis on sequences that would have been excluded from Rosenthal and Gall's category of the poetry sequence.

One of the key differences between the tendencies of the lyric and that of the dramatic monologue is the way the 'I' of the poem is situated. Typically, the 'I' of a

[55] Lynn Keller, *Forms of Expansion: Recent Long Poems by Women* (London: University of Chicago, 1997), pp.1-22.

lyric poem is accompanied by few clues as to whether the speaker is intended to be read as the autobiographical 'I' of the poet, or a separate 'I'. Brian McHale notes of the lyric 'I' in his essay 'A Poet May Not Exist' (2003), 'the assumption of autobiographical authenticity, of an identity between the poem's "I" and the poet's self, is something like the "default setting" for lyric poems'.[56] Unless there are textual details in a lyric poem to suggest which way the 'I' is to be read, many readers still assume a close connection between the speaking 'I' and the flesh-and-blood poet.

Susan S. Lanser's map of discourse, as set out in her article 'The "I" of the Beholder' (2005), focuses on the relationship between textual speakers and readers and argues that readers of lyric poetry are likely to assume a close correlation between the first-person 'I' of the text and the author, even when presented with explicit information to suggest otherwise. Lanser posits that there is a spectrum of attachment levels, with the lyric poem falling at one extreme. Of the lyric she suggests the following:

> The likelihood that readers will form some attachments between the 'I' of an author and an 'I' in the text seems to me to be in large measure generically contingent […] Lyric poetry, with its conventional singularity, its commonplace anonymity, its almost axiomatic reliability, its likelihood of evoking aspects of its author's identity, and its relatively low narrativity, is primed for authorial attachment.[57]

This attachment, she notes, sits at the opposite extreme to types of literature where the textual 'I' is situated as separate, and therefore as detached from the author. Drama falls

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[56] Brian McHale, 2003. 'A Poet May Not Exist: Mock-Hoaxes and the Construction of National Identity', in *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publication from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century,* ed. by R. J. Griffin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 233–52, (235).

[57] Susan S. Lanser, 2005, 'The "I" of the Beholder: Equivocal Attachments and the Limits of Structuralist Narratology', in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 206-219, (211-213). This quote is a point in summary of Lanser's five criteria for readerly attachment 'between an author and a textual "I"' (212).

into this category opposite the lyric, and in her map of discourse, on the middle ground between the two, resides literature which she refers to as ‘equivocal’, or largely narrative (210). In this middle ground, narrative speakers exist within a shifting level of closeness and distance from their authors through a variety of transgressions against specific linking criteria (215). In her list of such criteria for attachment, Lanser highlights that ‘singularity’ of voice is a key aspect that the reader looks for as confirmation of a relationship between speaker and poet (212). Where a text contains multiple speakers, it ‘disturbs the tendency’ for the reader to equate the speaking ‘I’s with that of the flesh-and-blood poet as one might do with a lyric ‘I’ (212). The multiplicity of speakers in a polyphonic poetry sequence, for example, would problematize the reader’s susceptibility for closely equating any one of the voices for a poetic rendering of the voice of the flesh-and-blood poet.

In T.S. Eliot’s essay, ‘The Three Voices of Poetry’ (1957), he classifies different poetic modes of address including broad definitions of the lyric voice, and the ‘dominant voice of epic’ or narrative voice. Of his dramatic vocal category, Eliot argues, that dramatic monologue and dramatic poetry ‘must be essentially different’ (103-105). The difference, Eliot notes, is due to the way poets of the two forms approach the creation of their speakers. In a dramatic monologue, the poet assumes ‘a role […] he is speaking through a mask’, and in the writing of the speaker’s utterance, the poet ‘imposes his poetry upon it’ (103-104). Eliot argues that, in dramatic poetry, which he associates with verse drama and plays, but not the dramatic monologue, due to the multiplicity of voices required, the poet is in a different relationship to the speakers. The only verse, therefore, that Eliot considers truly dramatic is verse that presents two or more speakers in some form of interaction or connection.

Eliot’s intriguing binary for what constitutes the dramatic in a poetic context demonstrates the knotted territory of determining the type of speaker a poem contains.

But perhaps one of the most important additions to this thesis is a question he poses in his essay when meditating on this distinction: ‘Is there, perhaps, another voice which I have failed to hear, the voice of the dramatic poet whose dramatic gifts are best exercised outside of the theatre?’ (103). It is a question for which Eliot offers no definitive answer, yet his binary approach suggests that we must look beyond our commonly-used categories of poetic speakers if we are to create new distinctions for the speakers of the polyphonic poetry sequences. An examination of the operation of the speaker in the dramatic monologue, as well as in the lyric poem, can shed some light on the techniques poets use to construct multiple ‘I’s in a polyphonic sequence.

In the dramatic monologue for example, the poet employs the construct of a first-person speaker, the poem’s ‘I’, as an artifice and as a go-between with the reader. On the surface, this construct appears to mirror the seemingly direct relationship between poet and speaker in a conventional lyric, however, whereas generic conventions of lyric discourse often assume that the poet’s ‘I’ and the speaker’s ‘I’ are one and the same, whereby the poem is deemed to be in the authentic voice of the poet, in the dramatic monologue this authenticity is cultivated in and through the poetic artifice.[58] This artifice creates room for the close attachment presented by the lyric, and gives the poet a potential arena to exploit her reader’s tendency to equate the first-person speaker with the flesh-and-blood poet.

In Robert Langbaum’s early study, *The Poetry of Experience* (1957), his key questions concern the function of the speaker of dramatic monologue, and what this can tell us about the relationships between the poet and speaker as well as between the poet and the reader. Although Langbaum’s study of the dramatic monologue focuses heavily on the experience of the reader, one of the contributions his work has made is to posit that there is an ‘essentially circular movement of all dramatic monologues’, what he

[58] See Byron for further reading, as well as Scott Brewster, *Lyric* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009).

terms, ‘the method of the lyric’ (200-201). Langbaum’s theory highlights the cyclical development of the speaker by suggesting that, through its utterance, the speaker *becomes* the poem: ‘he not only acts in the situation but contains within himself, as feeling, the residue of meaning not dramatized by the situation’ (200). This ‘circular movement’ is, in essence, a ‘closed circuit’ that mirrors the first-person utterance in a conventional lyric (191). The concept of a potentially closed lyrical utterance within the dramatic monologue problematizes an approach such as Rosenthal and Gall’s that situates these two types of discourse as separate, mutually exclusive entities, and it directs our attention to the range of speakers in a polyphonic poetry sequence where all three discourse types are used.

Langbaum’s theory on dramatic monologue’s ‘method of the lyric’ also adds a layer of nuance to the disambiguation of the concept of the poetic artifice residing in a first-person textual voice. The dramatic discourse in a monologue may bring with it a presumption that the speaking ‘I’ is in fact a unified voice; it is, after all, a monologue. However, when looking closely at the poetic artifice as a device, the reader may become aware that what appears to be a unified speaker actually contains a bifurcation. Sinfield reminds us that the speaker of a dramatic monologue is ‘very often used as a mouthpiece, more or less indirectly, for the poet’s views’, and that dramatic monologue ‘may be primarily a strategy by which a thought is given force by being proposed from the point of view of a speaker for whom it has special significance’ (13-14). There are a variety of reasons a poet might use a first-person speaker as such a ‘mouthpiece’, for example, as an exploration of a historical figure through which to express opinions, as a way of trying on of various fictional personalities, or to try and persuade the reader into opinions and thoughts he or she brings to the text.

Elsewhere, Byron posits the following: ‘The problematizing of the speaking ‘I’ caused by the reader's constant awareness of the pressure of the poet's controlling mind

is […] something that becomes an increasingly self-conscious strategy in contemporary variations of the form' (135). The artifice or 'mask' of dramatic monologue thus behaves like a boundary between poet and reader, although a problematic and sometimes nearly-invisible boundary. Critic Steven Knapp's article, 'Explaining Literature' (2010), argues that when engaging with the dramatic monologue's use of artifice, 'our imaginations pre-analytically make-believe that we are engaged with two separate agents', one of whom is the flesh-and-blood poet, the other of whom is a speaker entirely separate from the poet.[59] Dramatic monologue plays on artifice: the 'I' of the poem appears as the voice of someone other than the poet, a false sense of embodiment. Not only is this construct created in the poem itself, the function of the speaker in the text is to pretend that it is not a constructed fiction at all.[60] The artifice of the dramatic monologue thus relies on a double-sided inhabiting of the poem: the speaker is used as a means for the poet's own ends, and the reader enacts the other side of the artifice by making assumptions and interpretations as to the reality of the speaker. Ultimately, the artifice of the dramatic monologue acts as a way to make the reader question what is real.

This double-sided aspect of the poetic artifice sets up what Sinfield calls, 'an impossible reading experience' as, in dramatic monologue, structural poetic techniques 'indicate that the speaker is not the poet and hence has something to do with fiction; but the first-person mode makes an opposing claim for the real-life existence of the speaker on the reader's plane of actuality' (24; 30). The clash between these two realms sets up what Käte Hamburger (1973) terms 'feigning', and on this point Sinfield bases his argument for the construct of the 'feint' in dramatic monologue: 'Dramatic monologue feigns because it pretends to be something other than it is […] We experience the 'I' of

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[59] Steven Knapp, 'Explaining Literature: A Reflection on the Theoretical Contribution of Ralph W. Rader', *Narrative*, 18.1 (2010), 104-112, (107).
[60] This concept Byron developed based on the theories of Herbert F. Tucker, 'Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric' in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. by Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (London: Cornell University, 1985), pp. 226-243.

the poem as a character in his own right but at the same time sense the author's voice through him'.[61] Although there is an obvious disjointedness between the poet and the speaker, the first-person utterance can and often is compelling enough to suspend the reader's belief. Sinfield likens this perception to an experience of 'divided consciousness', suggesting that we as readers 'feel drawn into [the speaker's] point of view, but at the same time we are aware that he [or she] is a dramatic creation' (32). Perhaps the reason for the sense of division when perceiving the poet / speaker relationship in dramatic monologue is precisely because the artifice is not quite up to the task of dramatically shielding the implied poet from the reader's view. The feint itself, as it were, fails at feigning in the transparent nature of the form.

Gradations of Discourse

Ralph W. Rader's article 'The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms' (1976), uses both Eliot's categories of voice and Langbaum's theories on dramatic speakers as a springboard for the division of 'first-person poems' into four distinct nomenclatures.[62] These categories highlight the variety of expressions that poets have used which reside between the lyric poem and the dramatic monologue. Rader's 'expressive lyric', akin to a conventional lyric, and his 'dramatic monologue', reinforce the same constructs and tendencies already discussed here, but his 'mask lyric' as well as the 'dramatic lyric' demonstrate tendencies between the two. In a mask lyric we encounter a speaker whose relationship to the reader and the poet is different to the speaker of dramatic monologue because the speaker acts as a symbol for some emotional state that the poet explores within the poem. Rader notes that what distinguishes a mask lyric from a dramatic monologue or a conventional lyric is how the reader is addressed and he uses a

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[61] Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, trans. by Marilynn J. Rose, 2nd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1973); Sinfield, 25.
[62] Ralph W. Rader, 1976, 'The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms', *Critical Inquiry*, 3.1, 131-151, (150).

cinematic analogy to highlight his point: 'This relationship would be cinematically expressed by having the character speak in profile, between poet and reader, as it were, and able to look and speak out of the screen to the reader' (141). Although these connections may appear to mirror those of the dramatic monologue, in a mask lyric, the construct of the speaker is such an obvious artifice that no real feint is at play.

The 'dramatic lyric', a category established by Langbaum, is a term extended through Rader's argument; it is defined as a poem containing 'an occurrence, something that happens to someone at a particular time in a particular place'.[63] With this too-broad definition, a category into which most dramatic or narrative poetry might fall, Rader highlights a key factor of the form: the way in which the event of the poem is presented by the poet. Dramatic lyrics are written in the present tense, thus creating the illusion that the poem's central focus is an event taking place *in* the moment of reading. The dramatic lyric usually contains no indication that the poem's speaker is not the poet, or, in other words, it uses the techniques of its name: a lyric speaker who appears closely attached to the poet and a dramatic rendering of tense. Rader notes of this phenomenon: 'a real event of this kind could only be reported to us as a memory of something in the past […] The experience is not created but re-created, more accurately, its significance is re-created' (143). In this way, the dramatic lyric also feigns, but its feint is primarily a temporal one. The event of the poem is presented with clarity and detail that suggests *it is occurring* in the very moment that the reader engages with the text. In Peter Hühn's article 'Plotting the Lyric' (2005), he argues that the technique of such present tense narration 'is a very frequent device in poetry with the central function of confronting the readers directly with an ongoing story'; this device offers a reader 'almost total immersion' in the present experience of the speaker.[64]

[63] Langbaum, 47
[64] Peter Hühn, 2005. 'Plotting the Lyric: Forms of Narration in Poetry', in *Theory into Poetry: New Approaches to Poetry,* ed. by Eva Möller-Zettelman and Margarete Rubik (New York: Rodopi), pp. 147-172, (163-164).

Like the dramatic lyric, the polyphonic poetry sequence also frequently employs the first-person present tense. However, the use of such present tense, coming from not one but multiple first-person speakers, reconstructs the central event of the sequence while also aiming to persuade the reader that, with so many immediate accounts of one event, the likelihood of it being based on an occurrence in the real world is high. With so many utterances available, the reader has the opportunity to relate to the variations and nuances of the re-created incident, while experiencing the polyphony of the overlapping voices. And returning to Eliot's question–'Is there, perhaps, another voice which I have failed to hear, the voice of the dramatic poet whose dramatic gifts are best exercised outside of the theatre?'–I posit that the answer to his question can be found in the polyphonic poetry sequence alone (103).

Drawing on the variety of discourse offered by both lyric and dramatic poetry, the polyphonic poetry sequence employs elements of these types while also being the sole form to contain distinct multiple speakers. As poetic representations of utterance, the speakers of a polyphonic sequence reside differently in the text than the speakers of the dramatic monologue and the speakers of the conventional lyric by their very multiplicity. Therefore, to refer to a polyphonic poetry sequence as a series of dramatic monologues dismisses the unique connection among its speakers, and between reader and poet. So too, to use Rosenthal and Gall's characteristics of organic lyrical structure for sequences with a complex texture of multiple voices would cast the polyphonic poetry sequence to the outside of their continuum altogether. I suggest, however, that the multiple 'I's of a polyphonic poetry sequence allow for a more varied expression of lyric, narrative, and dramatic discourse than any sole category, as well as more potential in how the poet connects to her reader. For example, Kay's approach to weaving her three voices into a dramatic, multiple, first-person meditation on the passing of time and the loss and grief, yet joy and growth, of her speakers, offers narrative progression

through these themes. The texture of the mixed voices in the poems requires a reader to enter deeply into the sequence in order to make connections among the women and their individual stories.

At the foundation of the structure of a polyphonic sequence, speakers alternate to form patterns that, ultimately, aid a narrative progression of the sequence's theme by allowing the reader to engage closely with several speakers over the duration of many individual poetic sections. As already discussed, the inclusion of so many 'I's in the text disrupts the reader's tendency to attach multiple first-person speakers to the flesh-and-blood poet. Lanser also argues that another criterion of attachment, the lack of anonymity in the poetic speaker, further disrupts the lyric potential of the polyphonic sequence (212). As I will discuss in Chapter 3, the titling of poems and the naming of speakers in a polyphonic sequence is a key technique in aiding the reader's ability to bridge narrative segmentation in the text. This lack of anonymity in the speakers of a polyphonic sequence plays against the lyric's typical inclusion of an unnamed poetic speaker, a technique which, Lanser notes, 'nearly all lyric poems' share (212).

I also suggest that the inclusion of multiple first-person speakers in the formation of a poetry sequence exceeds the artifice of the dramatic monologue by aligning its speakers in dialogic connection with the reader *in* the world of the text. The reader is offered the opportunity to engage with multiple *detached* first-person speakers in a dialogic relationship based on the collective witnessing of the central event of the sequence. Like the temporal feint of the dramatic lyric, the polyphonic poetry sequences under examination here also flirt with time by simulating the illusion that the thoughts and emotions of speakers take place in the present moment. Thus, the reader encounters multiple, seemingly-simultaneous utterances that disrupt any lyric attachment of speakers to poet, and move the voices collectively beyond the feint of the dramatic monologue and more firmly toward the dramatic discourse that Eliot envisioned.

This move toward dramatic discourse also encompasses a narrative progression of individual parts in some sequence texts. Lanser reminds us that it is narrative discourse, that 'lends itself to a great diversity' of expression, and that it 'occupies a spectrum of possibilities between the singular "I" of most lyric poetry and the multiple "I" of most dramatic works' (212). As Martin suggested of Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, when a continuity is offered to the reader between poems with alternating first-person speakers, and the 'enclosing fiction' of this structure is acknowledged, the sum of parts becomes greater than simply a series of juxtaposed dramatic monologues (169). Through a close reading of Amanda Dalton's polyphonic sequence 'Room of Leaves', I will now demonstrate how the use of the present tense, as well as the positioning of speakers in dialogic relationship to the reader, becomes an invitation to engage in the world of the text.

Speakers on the Threshold: 'Room of Leaves'

Amanda Dalton's polyphonic sequence 'Room of Leaves' contains eighteen poems with three main speakers who always address the reader and each other in present tense. Dalton navigates the time shifts in her sequence, from present day 1994 to events in 1959-1960, by using many of the poems' titles to give two pieces of information: who speaks and from when. She arranges her speakers (an omniscient narrator and a couple, Grace and Frank) in an alternating pattern; for example: omniscient voice, Grace, Grace, Frank, Grace, Grace, Frank, omniscient voice… This pattern prioritises the central speaker Grace but also gives regularity to Frank's account and an omniscient distance in the observing of the other speakers. Grace's poems also sometimes contain a fourth voice, that of her mother, although the mother never speaks from her own poems in the sequence. In this vocal turn-taking Dalton juxtaposes the voices, allowing the disparity of emotion regarding the sequence's central event—the possible marriage of

Grace and Frank—to reside in the utterance. The three speakers continually intersect and play off of each other in the text. The resulting dramatic tension is one that captures multiple versions of 'truth' about the relationship.

Each poem in the sequence acts as an individual unit of address. Grace's poems capture her tumult of conflicting emotions, highlighting her vulnerability and yet strong desire to escape from her family home into marriage with a man who the reader comes to see as unstable, a construct that foreshadows her descent into madness. In her first poem, 'First Romance: 1959', she uses a triple address (29). Grace's voice opens the poem with details of her life before this pivotal day, details which show her to be an intelligent and competent pharmacist though deeply unhappy and unfulfilled in her personal life. This opening address appears to be spoken as if to anyone who might be curious about her, and thus, it operates as an introduction. A second level of address occurs in the centre of the poem, briefly, with the lines 'But today you asked me to the dance | and I accepted', when Grace speaks imaginatively to her, as yet, unnamed future lover Frank. But just as quickly as the intimate second-person address to Frank takes place, Grace quickly changes addressee again in the blank space after the word 'accepted'. Visually, it is clear to see that the line break here puts more white space between the final word of the line and the beginning of the next (29):

> But today you asked me to the dance
> and I accepted
> and now I cannot eat or breathe or speak.
> I am taking magnesium carbonate in rough doses,
> I have developed a shaking palsy
> and I have nothing to wear.

With this blank space and line break, comes a shift that now aims Grace's speech directly toward the reader instead of Frank, positioning the reader as closely as a potential lover through the pivotal adjustment of that 'you'. In the lines preceding the 'you', the vocal register and sensory details lack the intimacy of later lines; the lines that

come after the direct address to Frank contain a deeper level of speaking, where the register is that of conspiratorial closeness, one which positions the reader as a listener of secrets.

In his book of essays, *Narrative as Rhetoric* (1996), James Phelan examines the connection between speaker and reader in the use of a second-person address; he notes that, to ask who a second-person 'you' relates to in the text, 'depends on a clear and stable distinction between an intrinsic, textual "you"–a narratee-protagonist–and an extrinsic, extratextual "you"–a flesh-and-blood reader', and he highlights that, in the use of many second-person addresses, the boundaries between these two positions may be blurry.[65] When Grace's utterance shifts to focus on the reader, her use of 'you' allows her to reveal emotions that she would not tell a new lover: 'and now I cannot eat or breathe or speak', or 'and I will leave the room | to be sick in the lavatory, | to dance with a pillow in my arms' (29). Through these details, the reader is asked to be party to Grace's emotions as a thirty-five year old woman going on her first date, and we are asked to simultaneously witness this first romance and to take account of how unhappy she has been until this point. Once Grace's second-person address has moved from its focus on Frank, the 'you' becomes an address to the 'flesh-and-blood reader', thereby establishing a connection between herself, as a speaker within a fictional world, and a reader, who is being invited into the fiction as a witness to Grace's situation.

Phelan elaborates on this idea further: 'we [the reader] take on an observer role *within the fiction* […] in the observer role we believe in the reality of the events' (144-145). If read as a dramatic monologue, Grace's triple address in 'First Romance' would problematize the ability of the reader to take on such an observer role and would instead ask the reader to remain outside of the poem and the fiction, to 'distinguish the poem's

[65] James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1996), pp. 136-137.

meaning from that of its characterized speaker.'[66] In short, Grace's intimate second-person address would then be interpreted only as two-fold: to herself and to Frank, with no direct address to the reader. By using multiple first-person addresses of varying degrees of complexity in her sequence, Dalton moves the speakers out of the realm of the dramatic monologue and allows for an interpretation of the poems as dramatic in a broader sense, one which Eliot has already envisioned, where, 'a number of characters […] have claims upon the author' (103). A reading of the poem as a dramatic monologue would overlook Grace's appeal to the listener and would allow for a reader positioned only outside of the poem.

Phelan highlights that, while 'the text will not necessarily exert its force on all readers in the same way,' in taking on the observer role, readers have the opportunity to 'become believers in the reality of the fictional world' because they are positioned as audience to the events of the text (147; 145). This idea contains more than a little resonance of the dramatic monologue's feint, yet Phelan's stance is slightly different, focusing instead on the way a reader's expectation of a speaker influences the reading of a text (33). Drawing on Rader's distinctions between the mask lyric and the dramatic lyric, Phelan argues that the dramatic lyric's use of present tense creates a restriction on the speaker that determines his presence as a fictional construct. He suggests, however, that in this restriction, the reader is offered the possibility of relating to the speaker inside of the fictional world: 'This restricted characterization allows readers to project themselves into the poem, to experience vicariously the speaker's desire and choice' (34). The polyphonic poetry sequence's dramatic construction of multiple individual speakers, when brought together in the sum of its parts, adds intimacy to the text and the reader is invited into this intimacy.

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[66] Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985). Rosmarin argues that this is an apt definition of the dramatic monologue (56).

Dalton's vocal patterning in 'Room of Leaves' allows Grace her centre stage, but Frank is also given space to relate his perspective; the omniscient speaker then takes it in turns to give the reader an overview of them both.[67] Frank's poems in 'Room of Leaves' also contain a fractured address: they are either direct appeals to the reader for the understanding of his plight or they are intimate second-person dialogue that he longs to express to Grace. From 'Frank's Proposal' (31):

> I want to start again.
> I want to start again
> against a New York sky.
> Tyrone Power on the thirteenth floor
> breathing silk. Will you do it?

Frank's poems regularly reference 1950's film stars and other media of that era to allude to the emotion behind his requests and as justification for his later abandonment of Grace. This name-dropping within the poems helps to connect the flesh-and-blood reader with Frank's fictional reality by creating links to references in the real world. They also show Frank's character to be not what he first appears—an unreliable person who simply leaves Grace to her fate alone.

In her essay '*Room of Leaves*: Voice and Character in a Sequence of Poems' (2001), Dalton discusses the construction of Frank's voice: 'I saw the marriage proposal in terms of the emotion driving the moment as Frank's childlike stuttering to himself; a naïve, urgently gushing plea to be rescued, not from his dream, but from the harshness of the real world.'[68] She notes that the structure of Frank's poems mirrors the dramatic situation and emotional imperative of his voice and these, juxtaposed with Grace's poems, 'began to collage into a jigsaw kind of narrative' in the pattern the poems took within the sequence (115). The repetition of sensory information surrounding the sequence's central event places the reader in a position to witness the deeply personal

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[67] See Appendix for a visual representation of the pattern of speakers in 'Room of Leaves'.
[68] Amanda Dalton, 2001. '*Room of Leaves*: Voice and Character in a Sequence of Poems', in *The Creative Writing Coursebook*, ed. by Julia Bell and Paul Magrs (Oxford: Macmillan), pp.110-116, (114).

thoughts and emotions of both Grace and Frank, while also being party to the actions of secondary characters such as Grace's mother and Frank's friend Eddie through the perspective of an omniscient speaker.

In Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's polyphonic prose voices he notes that Dostoevsky depicted, 'the *crises* and *turning points* in [his characters'] lives; that is [...] their lives *on the threshold'* (1984: 73). The voices in Dalton's sequence are on such a threshold of crisis throughout the entire sequence: Frank on the point of leaving Grace, which he does; Grace on the threshold of madness, to which she succumbs, and the omniscient voice bringing together clues and strands at the turning points of the narrative. Dalton's use of first-person present tense for her main speakers, even as the poems progress through time from 1959 to 1994, encapsulates the heightened emotion and the creation of dramatic situation in two people at odds with one another. It represents two very different first-hand versions of personal truth. Rather than dramatic monologues, or individual lyrics, the poems in 'Room of Leaves' read like dramatically-lyrical letters that never reach their recipients in time to avert further crises, and it is only the reader who witnesses this almost-but-not-quite action and the sense of loss that comes in its wake.

As a polyphonic sequence with three alternating voices, Dalton constructs the loss and grief of the speakers by employing lyric, narrative, and dramatic discourse. Wayne C. Booth argues that literature can be 'dramatic in two senses', firstly in moments of direct engagement between characters with the outcome of events 'depending upon the resolution of motives', what we would typically refer to as dramatic discourse, and secondly, if the action takes place indirectly between characters, with a reader who observes and connects elements of the dramatic situations (1961: 162). Booth suggests that it is this latter type of discourse that employs both lyric and dramatic tendencies through the presence of an observer who infers the connections

between characters. Dalton's invitation to her reader to witness Grace and Frank's situation from inside of the fictional world allows the lyric present-tense utterance of the speakers to intersect with the dramatic tension that builds through the narrative progression of poetic parts.

Susan Stanford Friedman highlights a common difference between narrative and lyric discourse:

> Narrative is understood to be a mode that foregrounds a *sequence* of events that move dynamically in space and time. Lyric is understood to be a mode that foregrounds a *simultaneity,* […] Where narrative centers on *story,* lyric focuses on *state of mind,* although each mode contains elements of the other.[69]

Dalton has structured the poetic parts of her sequence in an accumulation of narrative progression, where the lyric 'state of mind' of each speaker is revealed in a dramatic arrangement with the other voices.[70] Although simultaneity is a key tenet of the polyphonic poetry sequence, as discussed in Chapter 1, the combination of both sequentiality and simultaneity are integral to its structure. A purely lyrical set of voices in sequence might still suggest a spatial and temporal movement, however, the pattern of voices set up by Dalton ensures that the reader returns to each speaker multiple times, deepening her connection to them through the narrative progression within a fictional world.

Monika Fludernik's monograph, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), examines the discourse of poetic speakers and she posits that, in lyric poetry, the speaker 'never becomes a character in her own right, never begins to exist within an

[69] Susan Stanford Friedman, 1989. 'Lyric Subversions of Narrative in Women's Writing: Virginia Woolf and the Tyranny of Plot', in *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*, ed. by James Phelan (Columbus: Ohio State University), pp. 162-185, (164).

[70] Like 'The Adoption Papers', 'Room of Leaves' was also adapted as a radio play. however, unlike Kay, Dalton's original sequence remained unchanged after the adaptation.

alternative fictional world'.[71] Dalton, like Kay and Calvocoressi, creates a fictional world for the speakers through the conjunction of lyric and dramatic discourse, and the development of a sequential structure that aids a narrative progression of sequence parts.[72] But not only do these sequences demonstrate work with multiple speakers and discourse types, I argue that the speakers of the polyphonic poetry sequence also behave as embodiments of consciousness in the text. By positioning multiple poetic speakers in this way, the poets offer their readers a dialogic engagement that is firmly rooted within the fictional world of the sequence.

Speaker as Consciousness

Within the study of discourse and consciousness in literature, there are two distinctly different trajectories of critical thought: cognitive and structural theorists tend toward a 'representationalist' approach to consciousness, one that positions the site of consciousness as embedded in textual clues created by the flesh-and-blood author; an 'enactivist' approach, however, argues that consciousness can be attributed to a character through an embodied interaction with the reader.[73] Both trajectories offer a useful approach to the discussion of consciousness in 'Room of Leaves' because they allow for an examination of the method by which the poet has offered the reader an experience of polyphony through multiple centres of consciousness in the world of the sequence.

Wallace Chafe's study, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time* (1994), stems from the representationalist angle, and he develops an examination of voices in texts that produce language by means of writing as consciousness.[74] 'Consciousness', he argues, is 'the place where internally generated experience becomes effective—the locus of

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[71] Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 266.
[72] I will examine the narrative progression of sequence parts in more depth in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
[73] See Marco Caracciolo, 'Fictional Consciousness: A Reader's Manual', *Style*, 46.1 (2012), 42-65.
[74] Wallace Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing* (London: University of Chicago, 1994)

remembering, imagining, and feeling' (38). Based on his theories, this 'locus' can be found in all writing, especially in first-person fictional speakers. Chafe links written language to consciousness by looking at how authors have positioned speakers within the fictional worlds of a text: 'the author [...assumes] a fictional self, so that the representing consciousness becomes a fictional consciousness that is at home in the fictional world' (225). Chafe observes that this fictional consciousness includes the same elements as a real human consciousness and is made up of four key aspects that interact differently, depending on point of view and spatial-temporal arrangement.

Extroverted consciousness reveals *how* a voice perceives, acts, and evaluates within its environment. A poetic speaker as extroverted consciousness is one who comments on or reconstructs his or her physical surroundings, or one who may meditate on the sensory world. An *introverted consciousness* shows a mind that imagines and remembers, it suggests a reflective quality in the personality behind the utterance of a poem. A speaker of this type would reminisce and focus on his own thoughts and emotions. *Represented* and *representing consciousnesses* are the aspects which represent a personality that exists in a specific spatial-temporal moment, demonstrating *when* and *where* the voice is as it speaks in the text.[75] In the world of the poem these aspects locate the voice of a speaker and give it context, and Chafe suggests that the four different aspects of consciousness overlap and work together to produce realistic fictional consciousnesses in literature.[76]

Chafe's four-fold nature of consciousness supports the theory that the consciousness of a fictional speaker is represented in the text as clues to be interpreted by the reader, details that give the speaker qualities of a flesh-and-blood person as a

[75] For the purposes of this argument I will discuss represented and representing consciousness as a collective spatial-temporal category. The differences between these two are best revealed through an examination of the use of past and present tense in narrative (see Chafe, 224-236). This thesis focuses solely on the use of the present tense as many polyphonic poetry sequences employ only present tense.
[76] This summary is of Chafe's extensive examination of the aspects of consciousness, both fictional and those based in reality (197-198).

fictional site of 'remembering, imagining, and feeling'. In the same critical camp, Dorrit Cohn (1978) argues that a key factor in producing a realistic consciousness is for the writer to approach the intimacy of a first-person interior monologue for her speakers, whether this is through written but unspoken thought or through autobiographical narration that focuses on the speaker's present situation.[77] She notes, that 'narrative fiction attains its greatest "air of reality" in the representation of a lone figure thinking thoughts,' one who 'has stood at the live center of his narration' (7; 204). Cohn's emphasis on the interior monologue allows for a focus on unmediated thoughts-as-speech in a first-person context and by the witnessing of such thoughts, the reader is offered a view of the inner life of a character, as if he or she were a real flesh-and-blood person (5).

The speakers in 'Room of Leaves' provide clear examples for Chafe and Cohn's methods of demonstrating the centres of consciousness in first-person utterance. Chafe states that the 'presence of a first-person point of view in the writing […] is established partly through references to the self's perceptions, actions, evaluation, and introspections' (236). In the written text of a poem, the speaker's utterance as a site of consciousness conveys several crucial things to the reader including how the speaker acts and reacts within his or her sensory environment, what he or she remembers or imagines, and how he or she evaluates and feels about the space and time upon which they reflect. Dalton brings a strong sense of individual consciousness into the writing of her speakers. Grace, for example, is continually caught up in imagining the potentiality of her future as Frank's wife, acting and reacting within her environment as she prepares to move out of her mother's house; from 'Wedding Dress' (32):

[77] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1978)

> If I stand at mother's mirror
> I can watch my fingers smooth the stomach
> of my half-made dress.
> A little stiffness in it hisses
> and a tickle runs the length of me.

Dalton's use of the present tense for Grace's utterance once again positions the reader as an observer of Grace's private moment. Here, Grace's speech is situated as an extroverted consciousness, immediately affected by her surroundings, yet Dalton also portrays her as an introverted consciousness, remembering and imagining within her setting. We hear her thoughts and follow them from the present to the distant past where she recalls the ugly faces she used to make at herself in the same mirror she now stands before in her half-made wedding dress. We follow Grace as she evaluates her own reflection and remembers the negative words of her mother; her focus then turns to a moment from her recent past which she connects again to her present situation (32):

> I went to Doctor Portlow.
> 'Don't wait too long, you'll need to rest,
> but no you're not, you're not too old.'
>
> I watch my lips rehearse the pull
> of 'married' 'husband' 'child'.
> I'm no desert, mother. I'm no maiden aunt.
> I'll be fat with it. I'll be teeming.
> I will, Frank. I will.

This poem serves as Grace's acceptance of the possibility that still remains in her life, as well as an acceptance of Frank's proposal ('I will, Frank. I will.'), which takes place in the preceding poem. The final stanza of 'Wedding Dress' is a composite of extroverted and introverted consciousness in Grace. As she rehearses the words that have, until now, been off limits to her, she tries on the ideas associated with them, and the reader sees Grace as a personality caught up in her own drama. Each word is loaded, and she rehearses their 'pull' into a different stage of her life, out of the interior world of her thoughts and toward the acceptance of a more extroverted being, one that nearly boils

over with possibility: 'I'll be fat with it. I'll be teeming.' In the two poems juxtaposed as they are, Dalton positions her speakers in separate halves of a dialogue and the connections between the voices provide a link between two consciousness centres in the process of reflecting and locating themselves in the world of the poem.

In the 'complex internal model of reality' that makes up consciousness for human beings, Chafe posits the following: 'Consciousness, it seems, cannot function properly without peripheral knowledge of spatial and temporal location, knowledge of the people with whom the self is currently interacting, and knowledge of what is currently going on' (27; 30). Dalton situates Grace as a speaker who is simultaneously extroverted and introverted, with an awareness of both where she is (in front of her mother's mirror) and when she is (some point in time between her 1959 first date and the 1960 wedding day) in the fictional world of the text. As such, from the representationalist perspective, Grace as a speaker in 'Room of Leaves' represents an active site of consciousness in the present moment of the text, a distinction equally shared in the sequence by her counterpart, Frank.

From an 'enactivist' reading of consciousness, however, Marco Caracciolo argues in his article 'Fictional Consciousnesses' (2012), that we must undertake a process of 'consciousness-attribution', 'based on our first-person understanding of what having a consciousness or subjective experience involves' (47). Caracciolo's stance strongly objects to the concept of consciousnesses as 'things in the text' and argues that 'a consciousness (be it fictional or not) cannot be represented' (43). Instead, he posits, the attribution of a consciousness to a fictional character takes place, firstly, by the reader's connection to their own, particularly bodily, awareness of self and experience in the real world. This experience of a fully embodied human consciousness can then be attributed to a fictional consciousness through the reader's engagement with the perspective, actions, and language used by an author to position a character in the world

of the text (47-49). Caracciolo bases his argument on the principle that the experience of being human in the world, by a flesh-and-blood person, allows for an attribution of similar qualities of experience in the acknowledgement of a consciousness in a fictional character. Instead of reading textual clues as a site for possible consciousness of character, the reader works to establish a consciousness in the text through his or her own experience of having a consciousness in the real world. An enactivist approach locates consciousness at the point of interaction between reader and character, thus a poet can create a first-person speaker who behaves in a way that the reader recognizes as 'like' a real person (47).

The consciousness of a first-person poetic speaker in the text is, by its very nature, acting from within a different environment than the real world of a flesh-and-blood reader. In 'Room of Leaves', Frank is often portrayed in the confusion of his own fictional situation. He is, in many ways, a speaker who acts irrationally in the moment, one who selfishly reacts, with logic coming much too late. The poem 'Frank in a Fog', placed immediately before the omniscient view of the jilting of Grace in 'Church: November 1960', shows Frank as a consciousness who is literally in a conundrum of mental and emotional fog (34).

> If only I could see to fix my tie
> and shut my case
> and find the door
> and say I love you
> but I'm swallowing the fog
> and I might just disappear.

Dalton's imagery in the poem conveys Frank's suffocating claustrophobia at his predicament as a soon-to-be-married man. His visceral, bodily experience is one that the poet uses to offer her reader an engagement with a fictional consciousness who the reader can relate to. Caracciolo notes that although it is 'natural to attribute a consciousness to fictional characters [...] There is a great deal of difference between

perceiving a body and imagining one, and authors strive very hard to keep readers under a mimetic illusion with regard to the characters' embodiment' (49). A fully enactivist reading of the poem would suggest that Dalton's use of short, list-like lines brings through an experience of breathlessness for the reader due to the reader's desire to connect the experience to her own. In order to fully enact the consciousness in the poem, the reader must reshape her own consciousness, thereby using a felt connection to Frank to experience his claustrophobia as her own by relating it to an event in the real world (57).

In the crafting of Frank's voice, Dalton notes that she used structure in lineation and rhythm to capture Frank's perspective: 'I tried to find a rhythm and a pattern of words on the page (especially line breaks) that echoed his state of mind: breathless and quick in his excitement, anxious, self-doubting and full of dreams' (2001: 114). In a fashion similar to that of the convention of the dramatic lyric, the reader has access to Frank in the moment of his panic. As creator of Frank as a fictional consciousness, Dalton uses poetic techniques to engage the reader in an experience of Frank as a flawed yet sympathetic speaker.

A reading of Frank's fictional consciousness as a representation of a flesh-and-blood consciousness is not, I argue, an incorrect conclusion, nor is it simply that of 'naïve representationalism'.[78] Chafe's analysis of first-person speakers, as representations of consciousness, identifies devices that authors can use to best offer their readers an engagement with fictional beings who they construct through written language, and as Caracciolo notes, 'language is commonly considered to be a telltale sign of consciousness' (48). I suggest, however, that the enactivist approach also identifies key components of a reader's experience. The identification with, attribution, and then enactment of consciousness in a literary text is a two-way act: 'the experiential

[78] Caracciolo argues that this slant is 'naïve representationalism' (44).

direction of flow is not only from the reader to the text, but also from the text to the reader' (54). The enactivist experience of a full engagement with the consciousness of multiple speakers in a polyphonic poetry sequence, for example, offers readers the opportunity to interact with many different internal perspectives by relating as a 'real body to the purely fictional body of a character' (58). Through the 'consciousness-enactment' activity with a text, the reader has the opportunity to reshape connections between their own embodied experience in the real world and the experience of consciousness within a fictional world. In Frank's poem above, when Frank chooses to disappear from Grace's life, the reader can take this opportunity to experience Frank's despair and inability to move forward. And while we, the reader, witness Frank's decision-in-the-making (the final word of the poem enacts his disappearance from Grace), we as a reader also actively evaluate what we have witnessed in the text.

Dalton's use of an omniscient narrator alongside of her first-person speakers brings a shift of perspective that grounds the experience of the two main consciousnesses in the text. As Rader's definition of dramatic poetry reminds us, Grace and Frank as speakers behave as 'embodiments […] of real experience' (133). The third-person speaker in 'Room of Leaves', however, is situated outside of the couple's experience, and Dalton uses this perspective to circumvent the simple telling of a narrative. Instead, the third-person speaker, who has its own place in the pattern of the sequence, operates by filling in the gaps of knowledge between Grace's consciousness and Frank's: it does not operate as a 'locus of remembering, imagining, and feeling', rather the omniscient voice reads like a record of facts, an idea that Dalton reinforces through the titles of the poems in this omniscient-voice such as, 'Notes for an Autopsy Report: 2.3.94' (28), 'Church: November 1960'(35-36), 'What They Say' (42).[79]

[79] Chafe, 41.

Dialogic Connections & Challenges

To label the speakers of a polyphonic poetry sequence as consciousnesses is to inscribe the textual voices with the ability to remember, imagine, and feel within their fictional worlds, but it is also to argue that each poetic voice exists in relationship with at least one other voice. As I have already highlighted, the voices in a polyphonic poetry sequence are distinctly individual, and yet each unique speaker forms part of a larger whole, sounding as one among many. To further my investigation of the dialogic relationships between polyphonic voices, I return to Bakhtin's analysis of the polyphonic novel. He suggests that in such a novel, 'we are dealing with an ultimate dialogicality, that is, a dialogicality of the ultimate whole […] It is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness […] but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses' (1984: 18). To discuss the dialogic connections among speakers in a polyphonic poetry sequence, it is essential to remember the relationship of parts to the whole so that, in an analysis of individual poems, we are also holding the dialogic nature of the entire sequence in mind. Bakhtin notes that, in the polyphonic novel, a consciousness exists not as a singular entity 'but rather alongside other consciousnesses […] always found in intense relationship […] it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person' (32). 'Room of Leaves' like many other polyphonic poetry sequences also aligns consciousnesses in close, parallel, relationship with each other. The pattern of juxtaposition that takes place in the sequence allows the dialogic connection to continue between Grace and Frank even when the love connection between them ceases. The structure of voices in the sequence creates a deep sense of loss that is made all the more tragic through the continuous echo of this theme in the accumulation of sequence parts as the narrative progresses.

Bakhtin argues that, 'the most important acts […] are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness. […] Not that which takes place within, but

that which takes place on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold*' (287). This is not the first reference Bakhtin makes to an existence of relationships 'on the threshold', nor is it the first reference I have made to it in this thesis. My repetition of the phrase, like Bakhtin's perhaps, is due to a need to emphasize that it is *at* the boundaries between voices, the boundaries where fictional consciousnesses meet, where the dialogic nature of the sequence is best felt and best explored. In Stephen Pierson's essay, 'Dialogism and Monologism in "Song of Myself"' (2014), he explores the features of Bakhtin's dialogic theory in relation to poetry:

> The dialogic of language use can also be heard in the two related features of the utterance–'the change of speaking subjects' and 'the finalization of the utterance'. […] the beholder perceives that the completion of the utterance is a sign, a 'silent dixi' ("I have spoken"), and that it is now the beholder's turn to respond, however actively or passively, to the utterance. [80]

In 'Room of Leaves' Dalton's technique, in her patterning of voices, keeps Grace and Frank dialogically linked even as they move away from one another in the world of the sequence. Through the placement of the poems, Dalton achieves this exchange by creating a tension between individual parts so that, after the end of one poem, the speaking subject changes, and then changes again, so that the two main speakers each in turn have their say about the nuances of the engagement and the aftermath of the jilting. Not only do Grace and Frank, between them, form the question and acceptance of the marriage proposal in their individual poems, the situated-ness of their utterances within

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[80] Stephen Pierson, 'Dialogism and Monologism in "Song of Myself"', in *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over*, ed. by Mara Scanlon and Chad Engbers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 20-38. Pierson quotes from Bakhtin, 1986, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. by Vern W. McGee, ed. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas), pp. 72; 76.

the sequence creates the effect recognised by Pierson and relegates each speaker, also in turn, as 'beholder' (listener) or speaker.

The order and regularity with which the voices alternate creates a dialogic pattern and momentum in their turn taking, and the sense that Grace and Frank speak to each other even when, at times, they do not do so directly. Dalton notes:

> I definitely wrote some [of the poems] as pairs. […] They didn't come in order, it was more a case of ok, there's that moment I can see, I want to capture it […] Then thinking it needs, what's the other side of that or what's the juxtaposition of that. […] I was thinking of it as a dialogue.[81]

Many of the insights and positions taken by either Grace or Frank come as a response to the other, and Dalton's use of switching speakers allows the gap between poems to hold the connection in the brief silence between the changes of speaking subjects. For example, once Frank fails to turn up for the wedding, Grace's utterance appears to become self-focused, yet it is an interior monologue that, nevertheless, remains in dialogue with him:

> I'll sing a marriage song behind my throat
> where everything is cold and trapped.
> Save me from losing my breath in the hard air.
> Save me from screaming like birds
> and wondering how things disappear.
>
> I'm setting up home without you
> ('Nest', 37)

Instead of the triple address, as discussed earlier in 'First Romance, 1959', where the second person 'you' refers at times to Frank and at other times to the reader, here Grace's utterance contains a new level of despair and only speaks directly to an absent

[81] Amanda Dalton, 2016. *Interview with Amanda Dalton* (interviewed by Liz Bahs on 'Room of Leaves'), unpublished interview (12 July 2016)

Frank. Her lover has humiliated her, abandoned her, he has failed to turn up for their wedding. He has failed also to send any word as to his disappearance, and yet Grace's poem acts as a plea to Frank. Grace's plea is loud in volume and yet silent. Her singing is not vocalized, not actualised much as her marriage itself is never actualised. To speak of her loss, Grace's utterance comes from a place 'where everything is cold and trapped', like the connection at this point, between her and Frank. Yet through her utterance she implores Frank to set her free from her situation and to give her relief from 'wondering how things disappear', the paradox of this line mirroring Frank's actual disappearance in the world of the sequence as well as echoing the last word of his poem in the moments he decides to leave her: 'and I might just disappear' (34).

In dialogic response to 'Nest', the next poem in the sequence is Frank's, 'Frank on the Edge', and here his speech is directed back to Grace, countering her avian imagery with his own fish-like experience of their situation. Where the air around Grace is 'hard', Frank suffers from a lack of air (38):

> if I told you
> that inside my heart
> there's a fish
> with a two inch hook
> in its mouth,
> gasping like crazy
> and I can't get it out,
> would you understand?

The internal dialogue between Grace and Frank continues throughout the remainder of 'Room of Leaves'. Though the speakers never encounter one another again, their parallel utterances form mini dialogues in the transition of voices and the increasing desperation of Grace as she becomes engulfed in grief and as Frank slowly forgets her.

The dialogic nature of the polyphonic poetry sequence is grounded in a polyphony derived directly from the overlapping boundaries of its multiple consciousnesses, their utterances juxtaposed, relationships that could not exist in the

singular and often circular speech of a dramatic monologue. In Chad Engbers' dialogic reading of psalms (2014), he claims the following as a general rule: 'works of literature are dialogic to varying degrees. The appropriate question is therefore not "is this poem dialogic?" but rather, "how dialogic is this poem?"'[82] At the heart of dialogism is the concept of multiplicity, or at the very least, duality. I argue that the polyphonic poetry sequence is so thoroughly dialogic that, not only does it position speakers in relationship with one another through their utterances, it also invites readers into relationship with the speakers. This double dialogicality is the 'dialogicality of the ultimate whole' that Bakhtin envisioned for the novel, yet it exists fully in the form of poetic polyphony as well (18). This double relationship in a sequence is the connection that allows it to exceed the feint of the dramatic monologue and to break the illusion of the artifice by moving away from a one-to-one relationship (however feigned) between the speaker and the reader.

Many contemporary poetry critics have wrestled with Bakhtin's pronouncements on poetry's inability to be dialogic, and the consensus in the early part of the 21st century suggests that if we are to engage with the concept of poetic dialogism, we must agree, at least partially, to disagree with Bakhtin.[83] Mara Scanlon, in her insightful examination of Bakhtin's issue with poetic dialogism in 'Ethics and the Lyric' (2007), posits that, 'to use Bakhtin's theories of dialogicity in discussing a genre for which he sometimes vehemently denied dialogic potential is not to contradict or forcibly mutate Bakhtin's own philosophy but to embrace it.'[84] She aligns herself with other contemporary critics such as Wesling who suggests 'that if we are careful to define our terms and our relation to what Bakhtin said, we can apply his most powerful ideas to poetic texts, to find them differently dialogic from the novel, but nonetheless

[82] Chad Engbers, 'Aesthetic Activity in Sir Thomas Wyatt's Penitential Psalms', in *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over*, ed. by Mara Scanlon and Chad Engbers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 39-56, (40-41).
[83] The anthology of essays *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over* is partly a result of this conclusion.
[84] Scanlon, 2007, 6.

dialogic' (10). It is from this same standpoint that I take up the discussion of dialogism in the polyphonic poetry sequence, not as a refutation of Bakhtin's stance, but as an additional voice in the positioning of critics already engaging both with poetry and Bakhtin's dialogism.

Scanlon's approach to Bakhtin's dialogism comes closest to my own theories in this thesis, although her focus is set more firmly on the ethics of the reader in response to the text. Our arguments regarding a dialogic examination on multiple levels–between textual speakers and in the 'dialogue between the reader and the text'–echo one another at times, and I owe much to her insightful reading of individual polyphonic poems and especially her question: 'What does [a dialogic poem] ask of us?' (2007: 8-9). By way of an answer to her question, I suggest that a dialogic poem asks its readers to engage with the voices in a text and to actively enter into their exchange. Scanlon returns to Bakhtin's point, that 'no text […] is complete without its reader: "The event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects.*"'[85] This threshold of Bakhtin's, in a dialogic sense, is situated between the voices of a polyphonic poetry sequence, in the silence indicated by a textual gap, where one voice completes its utterance and another voices begins, and it is here where the reader is offered the most room to engage.

The nature of the dialogic exchange in 'Room of Leaves' is indicative of a deep level of structure, one that goes to the very heart of all polyphonic poetry sequences. From *how many* speakers interact in a text, to *how often* each one is given utterance, the foundation of the polyphonic poetry sequence is formed in the tightly-woven alternation of voices that make up its texture and, thus, in the gaps between these voices as well. It is in these gaps that the reader can sense the shifts of voice, where one might stop before restarting or where another voice might take over the exchange. So too, the texture of

[85] Bakhtin, 1986, 106; Scanlon, 2007, 13. Italics are the originals.

Kay's 'The Adoption Papers' and Calvocoressi's 'Circus Fire, 1944', also operate with a similar level of dialogicality.

Earlier in the chapter I argued that while the polyphonic poetry sequence often gets categorised as a series of dramatic monologues, to refer to these sequences in this way misses the unique connection among its speakers. At the heart of the dramatic monologue's construction is a singular voice, one which, arguably, contains a circular movement in its utterance, whereas, the individual parts of a polyphonic sequence are utterances that seek to move outward in dialogue with one another and, read as a unified whole, the poems sit in the 'ultimate dialogicality' that Bakhtin named as a key factor in the definition of the polyphonic novel (18). But to quote literary critic Tzvetan Todorov is to make yet another, if more obvious, distinction: 'The poem is an uttering act whereas the novel represents one.'[86] It is in the act of utterance, in the active vocalisation of the poetic speakers through their dialogic exchange, that we can now move, finally, away from the polyphonic novel and begin to loosen our ties from the dramatic monologue. In the final chapter, I will examine the use of textual signposting and segmentivity to create countermeasure in the polyphonic poetry sequence. Through the double trajectories of narrative progression and the lyrical layering of time, I will argue that Gabrielle Calvocoressi's sequence 'Circus Fire, 1944' offers the reader a unique opportunity to experience the dialogic and polyphonic potential of the text by entering into an active engagement as a witness to the central event of the sequence.

[86] Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*, Theory and History of Literature, Vol 13, trans. by Wlad Godzich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 65.

Chapter 3: A Polyphonic Progression

In the two chapters thus far, I have explored the connection between polyphonic music and the polyphonic poetry sequence. I have asked whether the poems of a polyphonic sequence operate as a collection of dramatic monologues or whether they have the tendencies of the lyric. In this chapter I will examine how the individual poems, when read as parts of a whole, offer the reader an engagement with both a narrative and a poetic trajectory. This chapter will focus on defining poetic segmentivity and countermeasure, and highlighting the ways in which white space-as-gap affects the process of reading. Through a close examination of Gabrielle Calvocoressi's sequence 'Circus Fire, 1944', I will look at how the technique of signposting has been used in the poems to invite the reader into the fictional world of the text and I will trace the methods of narrative progression to construct a new spatial metaphor for the polyphonic poetry sequence.

This chapter will also investigate Wolfgang Iser's reception theory, and his concept of the wandering viewpoint, which suggests that the reader is offered an opportunity to engage dialogically with the poetic speakers through the negotiation of gap in the sum of a sequence's parts. Finally, I will argue for a triple reading of the polyphonic poetry sequence: one that recognises its poetic segmentivity, its sequential structure of parts, and the layering of its multiple voices. This *triple awareness* is one from which I construct my concept of a '*chronotope' of threshold,* a 'chronotope' of the polyphonic poetry sequence: a spatial-temporal arena where a reader can interact with the boundaries and edges between voices, parts, and segments in the unified whole of a sequence.[87]

[87] My argument for a triple awareness is an extension of Jason M. Coats's claim that 'poetic sequences require a double awareness of the vertical reading practices common to all countermeasured and segmented texts' (177). 'Sequence and Lyric Narrative in Auden and Isherwood's *Journey to a War*',

Since 2009 there has been a steady wave of response building from the call-to-arms issued by literary theorist Brian McHale. In his article 'Beginning to Think About Narrative in Poetry', he notes that, historically, discussions of poetry tend to omit deep exploration of the key elements that distinguish it from prose (namely its lineation and use of white space surrounding lines and stanzas). McHale's article identified a lack of critical thinking about the 'defining feature' of poetry, particularly within narrative scholarship, before introducing Rachel Blau DuPlessis's definition of poetry's essential quality of 'segmentivity' to the wider academic community.[88] DuPlessis sets out her definition in 'Codicil on the Definition of Poetry', in 'Manifests' (1996):

> Poetry is the kind of writing that is articulated in sequenced, gapped lines [...] units operating in relation to chosen pause or silence. [...] separated or grouped by the negotiation of space, pause, and gap. [...] To write poetry is, as George Oppen said, to control the 'sequence of disclosure' by segments [...] Therefore, I propose that *segmentivity*–the ability to articulate and make meaning by selecting, deploying, and combining segments–is the underlying characteristic of poetry as a genre.[89]

DuPlessis's key definition recognizes the creation of units of meaning in poetry—words, lines, and stanzas–but also the equally important white space or gap that surrounds these units. Poetry's 'underlying characteristic' of segmentivity is what 'makes poetry poetry' for DuPlessis and she extends this definition into a musical terrain as well: 'The specific force of any individual poem occurs in the intricate

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Narrative, 22.2 (2014), 169-184. The term 'chronotope' is borrowed from Bakhtin, 1981, 84.

[88] McHale notes the following: 'It was proposed over a decade ago by the poet and critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis, but as far I know remains undiscovered by academic poetry scholarship—a situation that I would like to rectify right now' (2009, 14).

[89] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'Manifests', in *Diacritics*, 26, 3.4 (1996), 31-53. (51); DuPlessis cites George Oppen, 'Statement on Poetics' *Sagetrieb* 3.3 (1984): 25-27, (26).

interplay among the "scales" (of size or kind of unit) or comes in "chords" of these multiple possibilities for creating segments' (McHale 2009: 14; DuPlessis 1996: 51). The polyphonic poetry sequence is a perfect example of where this type of interplay happens: sequence parts of various shapes are set up in patterns that allow for interplay among voices in the text, and the types of segments the poet uses has a direct effect on the experience of the poem as a whole.

McHale couples DuPlessis's concept of poetic segmentivity with another approach, one set out by John Shoptaw in his article 'The Music of Construction' (1995).[90] Shoptaw explores the 'countermeasure' of contemporary free verse poetry, and like DuPlessis, he begins at the smallest levels of meaning. He suggests that there is a 'need for a new system of measurement', one that recognizes the way a reader absorbs 'larger and larger units of meaning' as he or she progresses through a text (211-212). In the formulation of this new system, Shoptaw employs the ideas of the poet Charles Bernstein, especially his concept of the 'varieties of measurement' found in a poem.[91] He suggests that the ways a poem can be measured, these 'units of meaning', are at the level of the syllable, the word, phrase, line, sentence, the section, or even at the level of punctuation within the sentence or line (212). Bernstein argues that, in poetry, 'no one [of these] has primacy–the music is the orchestrating these into the poem, the angles one plays against another' (38). Shoptaw uses this concept, in particular, the playing of one measure off of another, one *against another*, to formulate his own stance on countermeasure in poetry:

[90] John Shoptaw, 'The Music of Construction: Measure and Polyphony in Ashbery and Bernstein', in *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry*, ed. by Susan M. Schultz (London: University of Alabama, 1995), pp. 211-257. McHale's coupling, in itself new, has since formed the basis for much contemporary criticism, particularly within the field of narratology. See *Narrative*, 22.2 (2014), especially, Coats, Gammelgaard, Gleich.
[91] Charles Bernstein, *Content's Dream*, (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1986), p. 38.

> I will define a poem's measure as its smallest unit of resistance to meaning. I say 'smallest' because we make sense of a text by absorbing larger and larger units of meaning […] Insofar as a unit of meaning calls attention to itself and either delays or disrupts the argument or movement or progressive development of a text, it establishes itself as a measure of construction (212).

Shoptaw recognizes that the meaning-making of a poem is not found just in the individual units themselves, but also in the place where meaning is resisted or delayed (212). In bringing together DuPlessis's concept of segmentivity and Shoptaw's poetic countermeasure, McHale notes that the 'smallest unit of resistance to meaning', is the gap between segments (2009: 16). He argues that the countermeasure between gap and segment is crucial to reading a text as a whole, and that the site of what Shoptaw calls 'resistance' is therefore, 'where meaning-making is interrupted or *stalls out*, where the text breaks off and a gap (even if only an infinitesimal one) opens up, [and] that the reader's meaning-making apparatus must *gear up* to bridge the gap' (16). In the combination of a poem's segments, the reader attempts to make sense of the poem by looking not just at the words but at the gaps as well, at the way the segments are *resisted,* or their meanings delayed. For example, when a sentence is broken across several lines in a poem, line break often highlights the meaning of the phrasal unit, and this unit countermeasures (disrupts or augments) the meaning at the level of the whole sentence. In a polyphonic poetry sequence, this countermeasuring might take place within the micro units of line and stanza, but also within macro or larger units, such as the section or individual poem; these larger units then operate in countermeasure to the sequence as a whole.

On the page, a poem is surrounded by gaps or blank space: lines end in white space and there is white space framing the poem; sometimes a poem will also have

indents at the start of or in the middle of a line. When read aloud, some of poetry's white space inevitably becomes inaudible; at other times silence or pause represents the white space of the page. This overlapping of terminology, of *white space* and *gap* for *silence* or *pause* is a convention used by many contemporary poets and critics in the discussion of poetry's segmentivity, and many acknowledge the dual presence of word and gap, especially in the creation of line endings and stanza breaks. Glyn Maxwell (2012) sees this tension as one that exists between space and text, and likens it to a songwriter's use of music: 'The other half of everything for the songwriters is music. For the poets it's silence, the space, the whiteness. […] Songs are strung upon sounds, poems upon silence.'[92] Visually, the white space of a poem is blankness on the page, yet this blankness represents a potential field in which a poem can exist.[93] White space countermeasures the words of the poem: it forms a clear and distinct visual presence as contrast to the text, and it works for, against or across the meaning of individual segments. White space also allows room around these segments for transition and emotion to arise in the reader, and for the poem's theme or meaning to become present.

In poet Betsy Warland's collection of essays, *Breathing the Page* (2010), she defines the white space around a poem as 'scored space' and suggests that, 'we might also think of scored space sculpturally–that a volume of words is dependent upon a corresponding volume of space just as a marble carving depends on the contrast of surrounding air.'[94] This contrast between white space and text creates tension in a poem where textual space outlines, yet contains, the utterance of a voice speaking, setting it as within a frame for the reader. And in the poems of a polyphonic sequence, white space often demarcates the boundaries between individual voices. Poet Fiona Sampson's

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[92] Glyn Maxwell, *On Poetry* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), p. 13.
[93] Charles Olson describes 'the FIELD' of the whole poem as something the reader enters, a space where all of the poetic components exist in one space. '*from* Projective Verse', in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. by W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2000), pp. 92-99.
[94] Betsy Warland, *Breathing the Page: Reading the Act of Writing* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2010), p. 79.

collection of lectures, 'Music Lessons' (2011), highlights the use of silence at the start of a new song and likens it to the silence surrounding a poem: 'song starts from silence because it starts with a preparatory in-breath […] breath measures, and stages, the beginning, middle and end of *every* phrase, in language as in song.'[95] In a musical score, breath or pause is written as a breath mark, a symbol that looks identical to a comma. For poetry to capture this sense of breath on the textual page, it can employ white space as a form of punctuation too, much as it already would full stops, semi-colons, or commas. Maxwell reminds us that there are several types of 'white punctuation' in a poem: indentions, stanza and line break, and I would add to this, section breaks within long poems and sequence, and even gaps within lines to suggest a breath or change of pace for the speaker.[96]

The largest individual segments within a poetry sequence are what Shoptaw identifies as a 'section'–'the largest measured unit […] Not exactly measures themselves, sections are spatially defined, sometimes numbered and even titled, relatively independent poetic units' (251). Sections, in the context of a poetry sequence, can be compared to chapters in a novel, and usually exist with a large amount of white space between them, requiring a turn of page or, at least, the navigation over a new sub-title or section demarcation.[97] In sequences with only one poetic speaker, section breaks often signal a change in time, subject matter or scene. The gaps between sections in a polyphonic sequence, however, regularly accompany a change of speaker as well as other shifts in the narrative progression. That this change of speaking position happens in a gap means the reader must engage with countermeasure, however briefly, before

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[95] Fiona Sampson, *Music Lessons: Poetry and Musical Form: Newcastle / Bloodaxe Poetry Series:10* (Newcastle University and Bloodaxe Books, 2011), p. 14.

[96] Maxwell, p. 58 but also see Denise Levertov, 'On the Function of the Line' *Chicago Review*, 30.3 (1979), 30-36.: 'The line-break is a form of punctuation additional to the punctuation that forms part of the logic of completed thoughts' (31). Levertov also refers to the use of such punctuation as a type of 'scoring' (also see Warland).

[97] Clare Regan Kinney, in her text, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992) poses the question as to whether the division of a poem into stanzas is 'comparable to the division of a novel into chapters', though I suggest that for the purposes of discussing a polyphonic sequence, a section is a more appropriate segment of measurement.

encountering a new speaker or re-encountering a speaker they have not seen since an earlier section in the poem.

Warland posits that such 'scored space' in poetry brings writer and reader into contact with 'the vast vocabulary of silence', and that this silence 'cue[s] the reader how to interpret the print on the page' (82). This cuing of the reader is like the in-breath noted by Sampson in the silence at the beginning of a new song or poem: a moment of pause before an encounter with voice. Bakhtin argues that it is in the silences wherein a change of speaking subject can occur: 'the speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other,' a silence that signals 'that the speaker has finished' (1986: 82). But as well as a signal of the change of speaker in the sequence, these gaps between sections offer fertile interpretative, narrative space for the reader.

Each polyphonic sequence is a balance of silence and utterance both, and it is in this combination where the reader is offered access to the voices and a part in the dialogic relationship with them. Suzanne Keen's *Narrative Form* (2003) identifies elements of 'sectioning' within narrative literature and suggests that gaps, as well as the use of section-labels, demand of the reader an engagement with the text, one where the reader is offered a chance to co-create a fictional world as they read, what she calls, 'the reader's world-making'.[98] Keen posits that, 'many narratives demand that the reader work to figure out what has happened to a character during a gap, a skip in the discourse in which plot events are implied, though not narrated' (56). Where the white space of a stanza or section break frames a speaker's utterance in a polyphonic sequence, this gap acts as a bridge between the voices. Most polyphonic sequences also use textual signposting to reinforce the narrative gaps between poems as well as the gaps at the change of speaker, and to offer the reader a way to make the leap from voice to voice. The signposting acts as an anchor, on each side of the gap, a readable / penetrable way

[98] Suzanne Keen, *Narrative Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 119.

for the reader to orientate themselves in the time of the text and with the change of speaker.

In Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), he argues that, 'to interpret the poem […] is to assume a totality and then to make sense of gaps, either by exploring ways in which they might be filled in or by giving them meaning as gaps.'[99] And I suggest that to look at how the gaps might be filled between sections brings us back, firstly, to silence. In the change of speaker, silence is necessary to the dialogic exchange. It operates like a pause between the speakers and it is the textual gap that touches the utterances on either side of it. The gaps between sections also provide countermeasure to the utterances they separate, disrupting the conclusive meaning of any one voice by also taking the others into account. Warland notes that within the scored space of a poem, 'meaning is interactive. Meaning accumulates and articulates itself in […] a poignant empty space' (84). The gaps between sections in a polyphonic sequence act like little doorways through which the reader is invited to enter the sequence.

The idea of meaning generation in the gaps between sections brings some intriguing questions into play. If the reader is asked to step into this gap and make sense of it, or, at the very least, to step into the silence and listen for what is not said or to the echo of what comes before it, what effect does this pattern of word and gap have among all the poems that create a texture of polyphony through countermeasure? What patterns of scored space arise in the sequence and what does the pattern add to the overall reading of the poems? In the next section, I will offer a close reading of Gabrielle Calvocoressi's polyphonic sequence 'Circus Fire, 1944', to answer these questions and

[99] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1975), pp. 200-201.

several others, while also continuing to explore the way countermeasure in the text offers the reader a unique experience of poetic polyphony.[100]

Narrative Trajectory & Countermeasure

Until now, this thesis has examined the lyric and dramatic tendencies of the polyphonic poetry sequence while also highlighting its musical connections. But to fully explore segmentivity and countermeasure in the polyphonic sequence, one must also question its narrative qualities. Hühn suggests that 'narrativity is constituted by the combination and interaction of two different dimensions, of sequentiality and mediacy: a sequence of incidents […] evolving in time, […and] the structured representation and communication of such a sequence' (2005: 148). Each sequence under examination in this thesis, as well as many other poetry sequences along the polyphonic spectrum, contains a strong level of narrative discourse with multiple first-person speakers who, when read *collectively*, convey a story based on many versions of one event or theme.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes that 'narration' is, 'a *communication* process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee […] *a succession of events.*'[101] As I will presently explore, in a close reading of Gabrielle Calvocoressi's 'Circus Fire, 1944', the succession of events in a polyphonic sequence also harnesses the segmentivity of narrative. McHale's concern in introducing the arguments of DuPlessis and Shoptaw is not just that of poetic segmentivity, but also the segmentation of narrative. He reminds us that, 'though segmentivity is not *dominant* in narrative, […] narrative is certainly segmented in various ways, at various levels and scales' (2009: 17). The structural segments of narrative, more often referred to as 'narrative units', take familiar forms such as that of the section, chapter, sub-part, as

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[100] I am in debt to Suzanne Keen's *Narrative Form* for the formation of these questions. She offers analytical strategies for reading narrative fiction from which I have borrowed her style of questioning in my approach to polyphonic poetry. See pp. 26-28.

[101] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 2.

well as the whole unit of the book.[102] In narrative poetry the unfolding of the poem's central event happens across the division of stanzas and sections. The development of a narrative in a poetry sequence uses a similar set of structural techniques, however, its poetic plot can also develop through the relationship between individual sequence parts and the choices the poet makes regarding the use of point of view, theme, and time.

Two extended studies in the field of narratology that focus on the division of narrative units are Clare Regan Kinney's *Strategies of Poetic Narrative* (1992), and Ken Ireland's *The Sequential Dynamics of Narrative* (2001).[103] Both critics examine narrative units as well as the spaces between these units and how the reader is asked to engage with various types of segmentation. For Ireland, engagement with a narrative is an encounter with the 'hinge-points' of sequencing, or the places where gap and text meet. His monograph includes twenty-two 'Categories of Transition' (with many more sub-categories) that focus on how narrative units affect continuity in prose (16; 81). Because sections in a polyphonic poetry sequence are often arranged in a similar manner to that of prose chapters, in terms of section-labels, transition of speakers, and progression of time, much of Ireland's theory of 'sequential dynamics' can also be applied to poetry sequences.[104] The sequencing of a narrative text, that is, the way in which a text is divided and ordered, as well as how its individual units interact with one another, involves the structuring of a narrative trajectory in the sum of its parts. Kinney suggests that, 'in the verse narrative […] poetic form does not merely coexist with the ordering of significance, but, in helping to determine it, becomes part of the sense-making process, part of plot itself' (14). Poetry's segmentivity is integral to the structure of a narrative in verse, however, in the division of the poem into stanzas and sections,

[102] Ken Ireland, *The Sequential Dynamics of Narrative: Energies at the Margins of Fiction* (London: Associated University Presses, 2001). Ireland's extensive monograph, the most in-depth on this topic, regularly refers to narrative segments as narrative units.
[103] See earlier footnotes in this chapter for full details of both of these texts.
[104] Though Ireland's focus is the prose chapter, he does not exclude poetry from his discussion.

narrative units and poetic units often coincide, and where this overlap takes place, so too does the progression of plot.

In his article 'Sequence and Lyric Narrative' (2014), Jason M. Coats argues for an approach to progression in poetry that encompasses a poetry sequence's hybrid tendencies of lyric and narrative. He likens the progress of the unfolding of poetic plot in a sequence to the function of montage in film. Coats suggests that the reader's 'continual reappraisal' of individual segments, including how these segments fit into the overall arc of the plot and in how they relate to each other, is crucial to an understanding of temporality in the sequence (177). He argues that a new type of reading practice can emerge by examining the countermeasure between parts and whole of a sequence: the poetry sequence as a complete entity resides in countermeasure to its individual poetic units, and as such, a meaning of the complete whole resists the 'closure a reader makes' out of individual parts (177). To fully engage with the operation of countermeasure in a polyphonic poetry sequence, one must read with both poetic and narrative segmentation in mind as well as with an awareness of the gaps between segments.

Critic Lewis S. Gleich (2014) suggests that, 'in poetic narratives, "segments" at the level of the discourse (words, phrases, lines, sentences, stanzas) […] interact with "segments" at the level of the story (distinct events, event sequences, temporal and spatial ontologies) to create a "countermeasuring" effect.'[105] In a polyphonic poetry sequence, the 'resistance' of countermeasure, as envisioned by Shoptaw, could occur between these levels or between two elements on the same level. For example, in 'Room of Leaves', poetic sections reside in countermeasure with each other so that the imagery and vocal register of Grace's poems move the narrative forward while the sensory detail and distance in Frank's poems attempt to stall time, to resist a forward momentum of events. Dalton uses poetic segmentivity at the level of discourse to

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[105] Lewis S. Gleich, 'The Phonetic and Spatial Effects of Discourse in Poetic Narratives: The Case of Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"', *Narrative*, 22.2 (2014), 219-233, (221). Gleich also bases his assessment on McHale's connections between Shoptaw and DuPlessis (2009).

construct the sequence's countermeasure, but this resistance also takes place on the level of the plot between the two speakers. It is this parallel use of poetic segment and narrative segment that the poet of the polyphonic poetry sequence harnesses when creating a space for the reader to engage with the sequence text.

To explore the structuring components of poetic polyphony, I will now employ a spatial metaphor in the discussion of countermeasure. To forge this metaphor, I begin with a visual approximation of what takes place in musical polyphony before moving on to construct a new spatial model that captures the dynamics of the polyphonic poetry sequence's combined use of poetic and narrative segmentation and countermeasure. I base my initial approach on that of Susan Stanford Friedman (1993), whose own spatial metaphor is, itself, an alteration of one of Julia Kristeva's textual graphs (1981) in line with Bakhtin's idea of *chronotope,* ('time space').[106] Friedman argues that a spatial metaphor is helpful in unpicking the interplay of techniques in a narrative text, and that such a reading, 'involves an interpretation of the continuous interplay between the horizontal and vertical narrative coordinates' (14). This 'reading strategy', she notes, 'encourages a notion of the text as a multiplicitous and dynamic site' (20). For my purposes, I shall draw solely on Friedman's model of the horizontal axis, as the workings of the vertical axis she proposes represents what is outside of the space and time of a text, and thus, focused on the intertextual layers between texts rather than on the counterpoint between segments.[107]

A spatial metaphor for polyphonic music would show a horizontal axis to represent time. This axis is one that is formed by the succession of sounds and voices as

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[106] See Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Spatialization: A Strategy for Reading Narrative', *Narrative*, 1.1 (1993), 12-23. Friedman notes, 'Kristeva's spatialization of the word has potential applications for narrative**.** I will alter her model of a text's vertical and horizontal axes' (p. 14). Also see Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), pp. 64-91. Bakhtin, 1981, 84.

[107] The combination of axes that Friedman suggests is concerned with 'historical, literary, and psychic intertextualities' and as such, a discussion of the connections to her metaphor for a vertical axis are of little use to the further development of this argument (19).

they move forward through the musical piece. Chagas highlights the connection between time and polyphony: 'Sound is the virtual form of polyphony as it presents itself as a complex *texture* [...] Music articulates sound complexity as an experience of temporality' (26). An important point to note from this quotation is the word 'texture'. Musical polyphony is much more of a texture than a structure, with layers of sound in patterns of consonance and dissonance, in counterpoint.

Crossing the horizontal axis is a vertical one comprised of a deep layer of voices. As the voices move forward in time (along the horizontal), the vertical axis grows in texture as voices move through different contrapuntal motions, forming overlap and simultaneity. In polyphonic music, counterpoint arises from the interaction of the voices, each retaining its individuality as it moves against the others. Voices overlap within the texture of the whole while also remaining distinct. But musical polyphony is a soundscape where silence plays little part through the duration of an arrangement. Professor of Music, Rachel Beckles Willson highlights that in polyphonic music, 'silence may be something that one can [...] remember, once a really striking voice has entered in a low or high register. But it's not really silence. It's presence, following absence.'[108] Unlike polyphonic music, polyphonic poetry sequences need textual silence, the gaps between voices, to remain accessible to its readers. I have already discussed how difficult it is to create polyphony in written language without simply confusing and disorientating the reader with a clash of textual voices on a page. However, I argue that the spatial dynamics of a polyphonic poetry sequence attain a vertical axis that operates in a similar fashion to that of polyphonic music.

Returning to narrative literature, the horizontal axis that Friedman employs is comprised of the internal events that take place in the space and time of the text as well as in the external time it takes for the reader to read the narrative. Seymour Chatman

[108] Rachel Beckles Willson, (r.beckleswillson@rhul.ac.uk). Professor of Music at Royal Holloway, University of London. (2016, August 2)—Music and Silence. Email to Liz Bahs (poetsbriefcase@gmail.com)

also tells us, in his ground-breaking text *Story and Discourse* (1978), that events in a story can be plotted 'as dots on a horizontal dimension representing time'.[109] In a polyphonic poetry sequence, the horizontal axis is one where the poetic plot unfolds, in one poem after the next. The poems of the sequence are ordered with the reading experience of the whole in mind, with a beginning, middle, and end in an arc of poetic plot, much as in the narrative units of prose. Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves' for example, begins with an autopsy report conducted in the year 1994 as the opening poem, before the second poem jumps back in time to 1959, from where the rest of the sequence progresses chronologically. This horizontal realm is, to use Chatman's words, where 'events travel as vectors, "horizontally" from earlier to later' (129). Dalton highlights the importance of poetic plot in her sequence through a discussion about the ordering of her poems in 'Room of Leaves':

> As I put the sequence together I did think about, 'somebody reading this needs to be able to make sense of it.' […] I think I decided quite early on, when it was becoming clear it was going to be a whole sequence that I wanted the autopsy report notes to start it and then we go back to the beginning […] that was partly thinking about the reader. It was partly thinking about the notion of a satisfying arc to the narrative (2016).

In a polyphonic sequence, the horizontal axis represents the development of the poems' narrative which the poet has created through the leaving of narrative gaps to build suspense, for the reader to gather information, and for connections to be made through repetition or flashback or other uses of time.

McHale notes that poetry 'offers different affordances, different potentials for

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[109] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (London: Cornell University, 1978), p. 44.

use, encouraging or discouraging different interactions with (in the case of narrative poems) narrative segmentation'.[110] In the polyphonic poetry sequence, then, it is crucial to determine how poetic segmentivity plays off of narrative progression along its horizontal axis. The polyphonic poetry sequence's vertical axis, like that of music, contains a layering of individual voices, yet here it also represents the segmentivity of poetry, the countermeasure that firstly takes place within the micro components of each poem and then within the segments of the sequence as a poetic whole. The layering of voices within poetically segmented units brings a unique depth to the vertical axis and, as it progresses along the horizontal axis where narrative segmentation is in play, it provides a double layer of countermeasure. I argue, that it is *the combination* of a poetry sequence's narrative in time, in conjunction with its deeply-interwoven structure of voices *and* poetic segmentivity (the vertical axis), that creates a unique *experience of poetic polyphony* for the reader. If one were to generate a spatial map for each polyphonic poetry sequence, one would find a visual variation of the vertical axis of polyphonic music, one where voices are layered in overlap at simultaneous moments in time with each voice interacting, as an individual, in counterpoint to the others and, as I have already shown, in dialogic exchange with the other voices.[111]

Polyphonic Layers: 'Circus Fire, 1944'

To demonstrate such a vertical axis in operation, I begin with a close reading of Gabrielle Calvocoressi's polyphonic sequence, 'Circus Fire, 1944'. 'Circus Fire' contains twenty-three poems with fifteen different speakers, a much busier polyphonic texture than 'Room of Leaves' or 'The Adoption Papers'. Calvocoressi presents each of

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[110] Brian McHale, 2013. 'The Unnaturalness of Narrative Poetry', in *A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative*, ed. by Jan Alber, Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University), pp. 199-222, (208).

[111] Although I have only mapped a handful of polyphonic poetry sequences, I have yet to find one that does not fall into a close approximation of this pattern. See Appendix for polyphonic maps of the three sequences explored in this thesis.

the voices individually with its own numbered and titled poem: among the speakers there is a range of circus performers, children, parents, and other audience members caught in or witnessing the fire in some way. Only two of the voices occur multiple times, a poet / narrator (eight times), and the representation of a historical figure, Robert Segee, the adolescent who confessed to starting the fire (two times).[112] When mapping the poems along a horizontal axis representing a span of sequence time (from approximately the early 1930's through to 2005), it is clear that the majority of the voices and instances of speaking occur in one of three moments: the moment when the fire becomes inescapable, in the aftermath with the identification of bodies, and later, during the 1950 interrogation of Segee. These three points in time, in particular, contain densely layered voices in a clamour of simultaneity.

Calvocoressi presents each speaker as unique, each one as a consciousness through whom the reader gains a first-hand experience of the event. Yet each of these three key moments in time is shared, and the voices overlap, portraying a mass trauma, which in historical reality, was experienced by hundreds. The unifying force of these temporal moments stops the forward momentum of the narrative along its horizontal axis, and allows a vertical vector to rise from the timeline of the sequence. Here, the sequence attains its deepest connection to the metaphor of polyphony, as it is along this vertical axis, at the point of simultaneity and overlap, that the song of each individual voice also remains distinct, a singular entity in the moment of its death. So the voices rise and fall away, creating a pattern of ebb and flow in a polyphonic texture sustained throughout the sequence.

In the connection of the two axes of a polyphonic poetry sequence, the two types of segmentivity create countermeasure in the text. Of the potential for this type of interaction, McHale observes the following: 'in poetic narratives, narrative's own

[112] The fifteenth poem in the sequence, however, is in the voice of the implied poet but addresses Segee directly.

segmentation interacts with the segmentation "indigenous" to poetry to produce complex interplays among segments of different scales and kinds—"chords," as DuPlessis calls them' (2009: 17). In 'Circus Fire', Calvocoressi plays these different types of segmentation off of one another to keep the reader from advancing forward in time, thus repeatedly forcing the reader to live through the moments of trauma. The sequence's narrative units are formed through the division of voices into clearly titled and numbered poems with a frame of blank space around each one so as to require a turn of the page to progress to the next sequential part. Some poems also contain epigraphs or opening quotes with contextual information. The structural poetic segmentivity throughout the sequence is extremely consistent: every poem is broken into free verse couplets and contains a minimum of ten and a maximum of eighteen lines, none of which end in rhyme. But the simplicity of the sequence's form is deceptively complex, and it is only through a reading of the whole that the significance of individual parts becomes clear.

Drawing on DuPlessis's theory of segmentivity to explore how countermeasure operates in a poetry sequence, Coats focuses on a holistic reading of sequences. Although he does not specifically address the use of multiple voices, his theories on the sequence are useful to my argument:

> Poetic sequences require a double awareness of the vertical reading practices common to all countermeasured and segmented texts, along with a further vertical recognition that each poetic text functions within a sequence of other texts that must be simultaneously considered before creating holistic judgments of the set. Segmentivity and countermeasure function within each constituent poem, before each poem then becomes a segment (possibly countermeasured) in the emergent poetic sequence (177).

Coats's argument focuses on the segmentivity and countermeasure *within* each poem, yet he also recognizes the distinct units of individual poems when read within a whole sequence where countermeasure also happens between them. It is only when one reads the poems in 'Circus Fire, 1944' as a large pattern of parts that thematic and structural concerns become clear. For example, for a sequence that embodies entrapment, claustrophobia and death, the quantity of space, in each and every poem, countermeasures with the sequence's structure in the repetition of short couplet stanzas. This textual poetic spaciousness runs like a visual tapestry throughout all of the poems, in direct countermeasure with the sequence's recurring imagery.

By asking the reader to witness over and over, the despair, fear, and grief of speakers involved in the fire, Calvocoressi creates a strong contrapuntal movement among the voices with the repetition of imagery to link poem with poem, speaker with speaker, creating a 'sensation that captures simultaneity' (Chagas 2005: 6). For example, early poems in the sequence (I—VII), whose speakers are caught in the fire, use imagery to echo one another, making links between individual experiences to create one unified experience of the quickness with which the fire takes hold inside the melting big-top tent: 'We were sweating already, | our heads cocked like chickens' (II); 'Women swoon but stay' (IV); 'Women swooned, children reared | up before melting away.' (V); 'When folks scream or clutch their hair' (VI); 'One hundred and sixty-eight people embracing, | holding hands, clutching at what small piece remains' (VII) (30-35). In 'Circus Fire', the reader is kept from advancing through the narrative units of the text because Calvocoressi keeps returning us to a re-living of the moments of most heightened tension. In his co-authored book, *Testimony* (1992), Dori Laub notes that, in the relationship between a reader or listener and a victim, 'the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event. […] The listener, therefore, by

definition partakes of the struggle of the victim.'[113] As the reader turns the pages, moving forward through the sequence, they, like the speakers in the sequence, are forced to remain suspended in time. This failure to progress narratively is amplified by the poetic segments of the poems, in particular through the technique of line break.

The individual lines in Calvocoressi's sequence highlight the suspension of the reader and speakers in time. She uses enjambment extensively through the poems, so that when the reader's eye pauses–briefly–at the end of a line, the segment of the individual line is often syntactically incomplete yet the reader is left with fragments that conjure eerie associations when read as parts of the whole. The pacing of lines in this way is in poetic counterpoint to the white space around line endings (and couplet breaks, where they occur) but also forms a micro-level of countermeasure against narrative progression. Here is a small selection of lines from the sequence that function in this way. I have spaced them down the page to retain the sense of segmentivity from their original placements:

The river lies still as an infant (p. 29)

an entire family suspended (p. 30)

held over flames till blisters (p. 36)

a canal of cartilage, a midway leading (p. 42)

Your path is lit by children (p. 43)

The time of the sequence is that of distilled trauma. The opening six poems progress narratively no further than the moment of the fire, and poem seven is the first to allow some forward movement, but only briefly, as fireman arrive and begin to carry the burned bodies out to night's darkness. But even this progression is halted as poem eight

[113] Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 57-58.

shifts the reader's attention abruptly to a moment in the narrative's past, to the dark and horrifying imagery from Robert Segee's childhood in the 1930's, his early encounters with flame. The six poems after this (IX–XIV) dwell in a present tense moment, post-fire, in simultaneity with many voices participating in the identification of the dead.

Critic Sharon Cameron (1979) notes that it is not uncommon for lyrics to slow down or pause time, and that they often 'collapse their progressions so that movement is not consecutive but is rather heaped or layered.'[114] Although the poems in 'Circus Fire' use a lyric approach to time, it is the accumulation of many voices in narrative suspension that lend weight to the sequence as a whole. This play with the relationship between time and textual space is Bakhtin's 'chronotope', and it is a concept often used in narrative theory to explore how time unfolds within the given world of a particular story. Bakhtin tells us that the chronotope 'is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied', and in their relationship, 'spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible' (1981: 84; 250). As a sequence, 'Circus Fire' uses time, particularly frequency, to suggest that the main occurrence, the fire itself, takes place multiple times, takes place anew in each and every speaker's utterance as it recounts the event: some from within the circus tent as it burns, others in the aftermath as survivors, and others still as those who witnessed the fire from outside the scene.

Once the sequence leaps forward in time (poem *XV. 'Six Years Later'*), Calvocoressi builds the narrative up again to another crescendo at Segee's interrogation, after which new voices emerge, simultaneously, to mourn those lost in the fire as well as those lost to (and not returning from) the Second World War. At each point where the sequence allows the reader to move on to the next narrative unit, he or she must negotiate gaps before being returned, yet again, to witness the trauma afresh. In an

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[114] Sharon Cameron, 'Time and the Lyric', in *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (London: John Hopkins University, 1979), pp. 201-260, (240-241).

article on trauma and storytelling, writer J.T. Bushnell (2016) discusses the use of time in reconstructing trauma in narrative. He argues that in the process of 'reconstructing our narratives […] the characters and dialogue and chronology keep looping back' because the characters in our narratives, like those who experience trauma first-hand in the real world, need to find a way to make sense of what has taken place; the speakers 'keep hoping […] that some version will finally cohere, have meaning, make sense'.[115] Thus, Calvocoressi uses frequency of poetic imagery to slow narrative progression and to allow the reader, as well as the speakers, to meditate on the loss and grief of the Hartford Circus Fire until some part of the trauma makes sense enough for the narrative to re-start and move forward, and for the speakers (as representations of the survivors) to move forward in their lives as well.[116]

'Circus Fire, 1944' engages the reader by drawing her into the sequence with an opening poem that foreshadows the coming tragedy: 'where women | working the cemetery-shift clucked | their tongues, spoke of children | burning the whole city down' (29). From this immediate narrative hook, through a suggestion of imagery and tension to come–'No rain for weeks | […] fireworks lit up | parched tobacco fields'– the poems develop their narrative arc while attaining a polyphonic texture that holds the reader captive in a close relationship to the themes of the sequence (29). As Keen suggests, 'Fictional worlds are comprised of the set of imagined materials presented by a text for re-imagining by the reader' (118). This 'world-making' process in 'Circus Fire' is offered to the reader in the opening poem, and from the beginning, segmentivity and countermeasure in the sequence's poetic and narrative discourse invites the reader to engage by making connections across and between textual gaps (119).

[115] J.T. Bushnell, 'This Is Your Brain On Fear: Trauma and Storytelling', *Poets & Writers*, 44.3 (2016), 25-35, (30).
[116] This is indicated by the progression in time to the penultimate poem, '*Field Day at Fred D. Wish Elementary School, 1998 on the site of the Hartford Circus Fire',* (50).

Sequence Signposting

In my examination of the polyphonic poetry sequence I have found that most sequences of this type share a set of similar structural signposts. Each sequence begins with either a prologue or an explanatory note (sometimes both), the contents of which set up key aspects of what I will call 'orientation' of the text for the reader. For example, 'Room of Leaves' begins with an autopsy report on a body that is, as yet, unknown to the reader (28). The details of this report contain clues to the poetic narrative that unfolds in the poems proceeding from it. Similarly, 'The Adoption Papers' is prefaced by a note on the typology of voices in the sequence, as well as a page of untitled poetry containing a brief interlude with each of the three voices. This untitled page comes directly before the section header, 'Part One: 1961-1962', which is placed before the first titled poem (8-12). 'Circus Fire, 1944's first poem, '*I. The Circus Makes Its Way Into Town'* also operates as a prologue that sets up themes and setting details for the whole sequence. Many other polyphonic poetry sequences actually have an opening poem labelled 'Prologue', while some also include quotes as epigraphs to highlight themes.

Peter Stockwell's chapter, 'Cognitive Deixis' (2002), in his introductory text on the school of cognitive poetics argues that deixis, or 'the capacity that language has for anchoring meaning to a context', plays an important role in the reader's experience of reading.[117] He suggests that in order for a reader to be able to see and experience as the characters would, he or she must shift viewpoint and project a deictic centre for themselves into the text. In order to imaginatively put oneself into the construct of the fictional world, the reader re-orientates such concepts as 'here' and 'now' to the time and place indicated in the text. Stockwell notes that there are various categories of deixis: *perceptual* (the use of pronouns), *spatial, temporal, relational* (point of view), *textual*, and *compositional* (literary stylistics) (45-46). In order to fully engage in a

[117] Peter Stockwell, 'Cognitive Deixis', in *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 41-57, (41).

fictional world, a reader must perform a ‘deictic shift’, and imagine herself located in the text. This mental re-positioning that takes place while reading, unconsciously for most readers, is also a technique that an author can harness to play with the boundaries she sets up for her reader. For example, a poem with a first-person speaker, as one among many first-person speakers in a polyphonic sequence, employs a feint when directly addressing the reader. It is implied that the voice speaking is not the voice of the poet as there are a cast of other voices in the same text, all speaking from a first-person point of view. In order for the reader to *experience* this first-person perspective however, she must *shift* deictic centre, projecting herself into the world of the sequence to identify with the inclusivity of the voice, the intimacy of this direct address.

Calvocoressi uses the opening poem in ‘Circus Fire’, as a prologue, to offer the reader an opportunity to shift deictic centres and be drawn into the text–from the real world setting to the fictional world from which the voices speak. As a way of orientating the reader, Calvocoressi employs signposting in the sequence, from the very first poem, to locate the reader in the temporal location of the fictional world (July 1944), its spatial arena (the rural outskirts of a city, in the midst of a drought), and the relational space from which the narrative begins (close-up, as if the reader is present in the scene). The imagery of threat and death that saturates the first poem of the sequence alerts the reader to impending tragedy. Calvocoressi’s use of textual deixis or signposting links each poem firmly to the inevitability of such a tragedy as the reader follows the progression sequentially from one poem to the next, each numbered as well as titled, in order to follow the sequence through to its conclusion.

The use of chapter titles to convey deictic information in a narrative text is a common technique in prose. Hühn notes that ‘poems are typically less explicit and circumstantial in the presentation of textual signals […] and therefore require the reader more extensively than in novels to infer the relevant schemata from implicit indications’

(151). While Hühn's observation is largely correct, he does not take the structural presentation of a polyphonic poetry sequence into consideration. Although there are a plethora of opportunities for the reader of a polyphonic poetry sequence to require a more implicit reading approach than she would take with prose narrative, I argue that in a poetry sequence with multiple voices, the poet must also rely on an explicit level of textual signposting to orientate her reader in the text. Dalton, Kay, and Calvocoressi employ titles for the individual section units that favour a prose-like tendency toward the inclusion of deictic details. In 'Circus Fire' alone, Calvocoressi uses individual poem titles to convey dates, names of speakers, setting details, plot action, dialogue, time shifts, coroner information, and interrogation transcripts. With so many shifts between distinct voices in the sequence, poem titles offer the reader a firm anchor on each side of every textual gap, to make transitions between speakers, time periods, and especially within the rolling emotional terrain of the subject matter. Through direct, clear signposting, Calvocoressi ensures that her reader will not get lost in the world of the text, nor will he or she easily overlook or confuse any of the voices with another. It is the sheer quantity of voices, the clamour of individual lives affected by such a tragedy that sits at the heart of her poetic narrative. Her use of signposting keeps the reader enmeshed as a witness, first before the fire starts, then inside the big top tent, then later, at the identification of bodies, and even more poignantly, in Robert Segee's own abusive past.

Coats suggests that the 'poetic sequence takes a collection of moments and then asks the reader to assemble them in a meaningful relation' (172). This composition of many individual poetic parts into a meaningful and decipherable whole is a different task than that of arranging a prose narrative. In a novel, narrative units often work with or against the pattern of chapter division in the text. Countermeasure can take place between narrative units and, structurally, the text is segmented to augment the plot or

theme. In a poetry sequence, Coats's 'double awareness' required for reading, acknowledges that poetic segmentivity is integral to the genre, and reminds us that individual segments are arranged in countermeasure with each other (within a poem or section), and that these individual poetic sections are also then countermeasured with other poems (177). To extend Coats's idea of the 'double awareness' then, I argue that the reader of a polyphonic poetry sequence must use a *triple awareness* of the vertical axis when reading, due to the additional level of countermeasure: first, on the level of poetic segmentivity within poems, second, as poems countermeasure with other poems in the sequence, and thirdly, as multiple, distinct speakers woven throughout the sequence.

In such a complex texture of vocal layering and segmentivity, the poet must keep a firm hold on the reader's attention if she wants to offer deep engagement with the text. By titling individual sections in a polyphonic sequence with clear information including who is speaking, and from where and when are they speaking, the poet allows gaps between sections to act as sites of resistance between poetic and narrative segmentation, while the reader is offered a brief pause before he must shift into a new deictic arrangement. The gap is also suggestive of the relationship between the sections on either side of it, and Warland argues that the gap allows for 'contiguity'(96-97):

> Narratives from different linear times, perspectives, and sensibilities can share contiguous space. Their adjacency may be conceptual, metaphoric, or emotive. With their adjacency, we see how they shed light on each other via their contrasts and surprising similarities. We see how they interrelate.

After the opening poem in 'Circus Fire', the next five poems take place in a simultaneous temporal moment, and although the time and location from which the voices speak doesn't change, the reader encounters an array of speakers: first a

collective adult voice (first-person plural), then a young child, a circus performer, a horn player in the circus band, and the Fat Lady.

These five poems develop the interlinked imagery of the raging fire and the entrapment of the speakers. Placed sequentially, the absolute horror of what is happening develops like a ripple among the voices in the circus tent. The gaps between sections allow the reader to transition between the voices but there is little room for escape and the pace of the poems mirrors the quick pace of the fire as it catches. In poem seven, Calvocoressi suddenly slows the pace down by using a title that brings a halt to the individual experience of those in the fire and allows a shift for the reader, a stepping out of the tent, with the rescue crew tallying the deaths (35):

> *VII. Call Them All Home*
>
> One hundred and sixty-eight people embracing,

This shift in pacing and deictic placement for the reader, 'acknowledges our human need for time to absorb and reflect' (Warland 2010: 6). Calvocoressi uses this seventh poem of the sequence as a bridge between the fire and its aftermath. It delivers up imagery of shock for all the witnesses and survivors, and at its heart is a double metaphor.

> The calliope
> of fire-trucks has subsided, they sit stupefied
> beneath the smoke signals these bodies transmit.

The 'calliope' that Calvocoressi conjures is that of a steam whistle, often found on fire trucks or circus trucks during this era, but Calliope is also the muse of epic poetry, and her name means, literally, *beautiful-voice*. In '*Call Them All Home*' the sound has

ceased, and the voice of this muse sits 'stupefied', all eloquence stopped. In this double meaning the poet places herself alongside of the speakers in the scene, silenced by what she / we have witnessed through stepping into the past and watching helplessly as the fire claims one hundred and sixty-eight lives.

As previously explored in the second chapter of this thesis, Bakhtin's concept of polyphony in literature excludes an author's use of a third-person (omniscient) narrator. Indeed, it is the equality of the voices, that no one speaker takes command or prescience over the others that allows for such intricate dialogic exchange to take place within a polyphonic structure. But in 'Circus Fire', Calvocoressi as implied poet also takes up a voice at intervals throughout the sequence, first leading the reader into the trauma with the opening poem, then in the double metaphor of the once singing / now silent muse, and finally, in the poem that comes as a finale to the sequence. In this, the title poem as epilogue, the personal connection between the implied poet's voice and the fire becomes clear (51):

> Hartford is a small town
> and news of fire travels fast. My mother
> is about to be born, and her mother wants her out.

At the completion of this sequence, and the explicit connection between subject matter and speaker-as-poet, the reader is presented with a way of making sense of what they have read. Calvocoressi's narrator lays bare a type of familial witnessing of an event that is based in historical fact. The last poem of the sequence sets the scene for the future appearance of the poet herself, yet it also leaves the reader in the immediate aftermath, once again, of the fire: 'They sky so full of smoke, | leopards pacing in their pens' (51). The urgency of the poem's imagery suggests a lack of resolution, both in the time period of the fire (and the Second World War), and in the possible generational experience of trauma.

In this exploration of signposting in ‘Circus Fire, 1944’, the textual labels as well as the gaps between narrative and poetic segments are key to an examination of how a reader is offered an engagement with the text on an experiential level. Philosopher Don Ihde’s study of sound in language, music, and silence, *Listening and Voice* (2007), offers a reminder that ‘in everything *said* there is the latent horizon of the *unsaid,* which situates the said’.[118] This concept is reminiscent of Wolfgang Iser’s theories on textual gaps as blanks and what he calls, the ‘wandering viewpoint’.[119] Iser argues that it is through the reader’s process of making sense of gaps and filling them in with what is not said, that he or she comes to experience the fictional world of the text. An overview of Iser’s theories will now shape the remainder of this chapter, offering an approach to the interpretation of the patterns of countermeasure in a polyphonic poetry sequence, not just within individual sections but when read as a cohesive whole.

Dynamic Interaction

In Wolfgang Iser’s formulation of his theories of reader-response, he developed two key ideas, both of which pertain to the reading process, what he refers to as ‘a dynamic *interaction* between text and reader’ (1978: 107). Iser’s theories begin with the premise that a single focus on only the text or the reader will not tell us anything meaningful about the relationship involved in the reading process. Instead, Iser argues, we must examine how the text conditions the way the reader responds to, and thus experiences, the fictional world presented by an author.

The first component of this mutual relationship is characterized by the blanks or gaps found in the text. Iser notes, ‘Between segments and cuts there is an empty space, giving rise to a whole network of possible connections which will endow each segment

[118] Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound,* 2nd edition (Albany: State University of New York, 2007), p. 162

[119] Wolfgang Iser, 1978. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: John Hopkins University), p. 111.

or picture with its determinate meaning' (1978: 196). These gaps or blanks between segments, Ireland's 'hinge-points', are what Iser calls 'the unseen joints', and he argues they 'indicate that the different segments of the text *are* to be connected, even though the text itself does not say so' (1978: 182-183). As such joints, the blanks denote where the author has intentionally left a gap, where she has stopped short of completing a fully-made connection for the reader. The poet of a polyphonic sequence leaves gaps between sections and asks the reader to make leaps or connections across the blanks in order to piece together what is juxtaposed on either side. In 'Circus Fire, 1944', Calvocoressi instigates such a leap by juxtaposing two key poems at a point where the sequence has begun to shift its pace and subject matter, from the quickness of the fire to the stunned shock in its aftermath. The gap between poem seven, '*Call Them All Home*', and poem eight, '*At Robert Segee's Interrogation*' marks a shift in the sequence that heralds the necessity for the reader to make a transition that is tonal, temporal, and mental in scope. If aligned without a gap and especially if without the clear titular signposting of poem eight, Calvocoressi would risk leaving her reader disorientated in the 'meaning-making' process of reading the sequence (McHale 2009: 16).

'*Call Them All Home*' takes place in the present time of the fire and the poem reinforces the shock of the aftermath with its collective, communal imagery: the group of victims is 'embracing | holding hands', there are mothers and fathers as well as children with their dolls, and so too are the surviving circus animals a collective: tigers and gorillas, elephants who 'will not depart, | walking tail to trunk' (35). The firemen take each body away, 'gently' and the tone of the poem leaves the reader with a sense of great care and respect amidst the quiet horror of the scene.

> These men carry
> bodies of children through the oncoming night—
> gingerly, as if the slightest wind could wake them.

The poem's final lines mark the edge of one segment, before the blank separates it from the next. This blank, while poetic in nature, is also reinforced by a narrative gap, marking the end of one narrative phase in the sequence, and a shift in time seemingly forward to Segee's 1950 interrogation. The actual juxtaposition of these two events would make narrative sense, yet Calvocoressi uses the title of her eighth poem to link the two segments before a startling twist: the reader is shifted back in time instead of forward, to abuse in Segee's childhood (36):

> He comes home,
>
> stokes the fire, drags me from bed,
> my hands no larger than sparrows
>
> held over flames till blisters
> come. I will not call for mercy

The textual gap before this poem is a request for the reader to make a significant leap: the imagery transitions between quiet care for the dead and the slow line-by-line relaying of a new horror. Through Segee as child speaker, Calvocoressi captures the unspoken answer to a question posed years later when he would be interrogated, a question that she only reveals toward the end of the sequence with the title of the twentieth poem, *'XX. "And were you abused Mr. Segee?...And do you set fires?"'*(48).

Iser argues that it is in blanks such as these that the reader 'is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. […] But as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said "expands" to take on greater significance' (1978: 168). Through an encounter with gaps, the reader can interact with the text to make connections based partly on the narrative material supplied by the author and partly on an imagined idea of what has been left out. Iser suggests that this action creates an interaction, one where 'the blank, as the unformulated framework of these interacting segments, now enables the reader to produce a determinate relationship

between them'.[120] This connection-making among segments allows the reader to interact with textual clues, and to enter into what Iser calls the 'author-reader dialogue' (1974: 46). As this dialogue occurs, the reader becomes immersed in the reading process:

> Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. […] the blanks leave open the connections between perspectives in the text, and so spur the reader into coordinating these perspectives—in other words, they induce the reader to perform basic operations *within* the text (1978: 169).

By entering into the gaps in a polyphonic poetry sequence, the reader observes the unsaid at work while also beginning to arrange the diverse perspectives and details in individual poetic sections. Iser's theory suggests that this process is doubly an inward one, that first the reader must perform this action by engaging deeply with textual gap and segmentation, but he must then allow himself to become 'entangled' in this operation, thereby sparking off the meaning-making within himself as reader (1974: 43). The process of entanglement for the reader takes place through the author's control of the text's form, and how much the reader is able to discover and how quickly. Through an alternation of gap and text, the author controls the pacing of information and therefore its pattern of segments and gaps.

Louise Rosenblatt's transactional application of reader-response theory is one which Iser supports and extends.[121] Her argument is that a key transaction takes place between reader and text in the process of reading a literary work, and that 'the

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[120] Iser 1995. 'Interaction Between Text and Reader', in *Readers and Reading*, ed. by Andrew Bennett (London: Longman Group), pp. 20-31, (26).

[121] Louise M. Rosenblatt, 1995. *Literature as Exploration,* 5th edn (New York: Modern Language Association)

transaction is the experiencing *in* the interaction'.[122] Developed in the early twentieth century, Rosenblatt's ideas, based on the concept of what she called 'mutualism' have had a long-lasting impact on reader-response criticism to date (Howard 2010: 55). For Rosenblatt, the text is a mutual space to which the reader brings her own thoughts, emotions, and background history.[123] Reading itself becomes a 'symbiotic' situation offered to the reader who undertakes a 'predominantly aesthetic' approach, assembling meaning from the words, phrases, images, and segments on the page (Rosenblatt 1988: 11; 16). Thus, 'the reader and the text act on each other' (Howard 2010: 55). I suggest, that in a polyphonic poetry sequence, the reader *acts on* poetic segmentivity as it is countermeasured with narrative segmentation. In 'Circus Fire', Calvocoressi continuously disrupts the flow of the narrative, giving the reader an abundance of gaps for him to assemble meaning: within the couplets of individual poems and in the brevity of each poetic section. The reader must keep bridging these gaps to progress sequentially and to gain even a tiny bit of narrative ground.

The second component of Iser's engagement between text and reader is what he calls the 'wandering viewpoint'. The metaphor of the wandering viewpoint describes *how* the reader becomes present or 'entangled' in the text. Iser notes that in order for an author to *entangle* readers, she must 'entice him into opening himself up […by giving] him a grandstand view of all the proceedings' (1974: 43). Calvocoressi does this by offering her reader information that is unavailable to many of the speakers. She allows the reader to hear, first-hand, Segee's suffering as a small child, and she also gives intimate access to first-person perspectives from fourteen other speakers. Polyphonic poetry sequences are structured to present their readers with such an all-encompassing view: multiple first-person encounters, each one subjective and each one conveying a

[122] This summary of Rosenblatt's concepts is from Patrick Howard, 'How Literature Works: Poetry and the Phenomenology of Reader Response', *Phenomenology and Practice,* 4.1 (2010), 52-67, (56).
[123] Louise M. Rosenblatt, 1988. 'Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory', *National Center for the Study of Writing*, Technical Report No. 13 (Berkeley: University of California), p. 6.

little portion of information directly to the reader. By allowing the reader to be party to a range of perspectives, she will be more involved in making links between what is known from the text and what is imagined from the blanks.

The wandering viewpoint, however, is also linked to time and to the interaction of textual parts in a whole, and it is only through the forward momentum of time (along the horizontal axis) that meaning of a narrative can also progress (Iser 1978: 149). Iser argues that the wandering viewpoint is how the reader amalgamates meaning, and 'as the reader's wandering viewpoint travels between all these segments, its constant switching during the time-flow of reading intertwines them' (1978: 197). Once a reader has begun to make meaning by combining segments, the action of this linking cause him to develop and re-develop an understanding of the text, and each new parcel of information is added to what he has already discovered. Iser highlights that, 'in the time-flow of the reading process, past and future continually converge in the present moment, and the synthetizing operations of the wandering viewpoint enable the text to pass through the reader's mind as an ever-expanding network of connections' (1978: 116). The connections that Calvocoressi sets up in 'Circus Fire' are between two experiences of trauma: the loss of life in the fire, and Segee's abuse at the hands of his father.[124] By poetically juxtaposing these events, the sequence takes on the theme of inescapable pairing, and Calvocoressi works every poem in the form of couplets to reinforce this idea. Her speakers mirror this pairing as well, especially those between Segee's first and second poems, where the characters given voice include 'Woman With Parasite Sibling', the rescue crew stacking bodies, parents who have lost two boys and are left with two empty beds, and a pair of 'Siamese Twins' (37-42). With this extreme coupling, Calvocoressi punctuates the narrative progression of the fire with poems in Segee's voice, poems that jar the reader out of a forward momentum by shifting them

[124] This is also, of course, underpinned by the backdrop of the Second World War.

briskly to a past time that sits in countermeasure to the fire. The transition between past and present conjures an unspoken possibility in the sequence, one that arises from the interaction of gap and segment and one that has the potential to 'act on' the reader's meaning-making: *might Robert Segee also be equally a victim in his own way?*

In Iser's discussion of the interaction that occurs in reading, he refers to Georges Poulet's theories (1969) and notes that although his approach mirrors Poulet's in his argument that the reader must enter a text in order to fully engage with it, Poulet takes this idea two steps further: that 'in reading the reader becomes the subject that does the thinking' (Iser 1974: 292). His concept suggests that in the process of becoming internal to the text, and thus under the control of the author, the reader's thinking goes through a metamorphosis, transitioning to become so embedded in the text that the 'I' of the speaker becomes the reader's 'I' as well. Although I would not argue that the reader becomes all of the multitude of 'I's in the polyphonic sequence 'Circus Fire', I do put forward that Robert Segee's 'I' becomes one with which the reader is not so distant by the end of reading, and that Calvocoressi's sequential poetic segments and gaps offer the possibility of pity or at least empathy and a dilution of anger and blame on Segee due to the nature of his own trauma.

Poulet's second point is that as the reader becomes part of the text, so too does the text become internalized and part of him: 'Whatever I think is a part of *my* mental world. And yet here I am thinking a thought which manifestly belongs to another mental world, which is being thought in me just as though I did not exist.'[125] However subjective each reader's response to 'Circus Fire' might be, the pairing of lines, images, poems, and traumatic events certainly lies at its heart. Perhaps the pairing of reader and text is also part of the deep transaction that Calvocoressi offers, the absorption of one into the other. As already discussed in Chapter 2, the reader of a polyphonic sequence is

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[125] Georges Poulet, 'Phenomenology of Reading,' *New Literary History,* 1.1 (1969), 53-68, (56).

offered the possibility of relating to multiple speakers as individual consciousnesses, separate from that of the implied author. By getting inside the text and allowing the unsaid and the said to mingle, readers can enter into a transactional relationship, thereby closely witnessing the poem's event and the reactions of the speakers from inside of their fictional world. Iser argues that in this relationship, 'we comprehend a fictional text through the experience it makes us undergo' (1978: 189). Chagas's definition of polyphony as *the sensation that captures simultaneity*, names the opportunity that the poets of the polyphonic poetry sequences here offer to their readers: an opportunity for an engagement with many voices, an experience of polyphony in literature.

A Sum of Parts

It is crucial to the examination of the polyphonic poetry sequence that one also steps away from regarding the minutia of individual segments within individual poems to look at the whole sequence, to read it as more than just the sum of many small parts. Like a musical polyphony, each part is a key element of the whole, and when one considers the entire pattern of voices, a texture emerges that allows for a meaning beyond that of any singular segment. The chapter units of most prose novels behave much like the individual poem-sections in a polyphonic poetry sequence in terms of temporal and thematic progression and development of speakers. Philip Stevick's exploration of the divisions of narrative prose focus on how the whole text is comprised of such smaller units. He argues that chapter units are 'units of time', and that they 'mark stages' of understanding as the reader assembles them into an over-arching whole.[126] Thus, each separate section is in relationship with the other sections.

Iser posits that every text has a 'negativity' or a double. Like a photographic negative, this double consists of the unsaid in the text, represented by the blanks, and it

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[126] Philip Stevick, *The Chapter in Fiction: Theories of Narrative Division* (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1970), pp. 100-101.

is only when the textual segments are put together with this 'negativity', that 'comprehension' takes place (1978: 226). The linking together of segments that Iser puts forward as part of the wandering viewpoint is a method questioned by critic Lasse Gammelgaard (2014) in the reading of narrative poetry. Gammelgaard suggests a 'modification' of Iser's wandering viewpoint for narrative poetry because, as he argues, the two trajectories (that of narrative and of poetry) must both be taken into account, and this changes the reading process due to the way these double trajectories impact each other in the reader's response.[127] Gammelgaard theorizes that the reader activates a poetic text in the opposite direction as that of narrative prose: 'it is mainly activated retrospectively (it can not really be said to generate anticipation)' (206). Although I disagree with Gammelgaard's hypothesis on the direction of reading for all narrative poetry and suggest that his emphasis may be best placed on particular poems only, his premise that the two trajectories require a different reading style is astute.[128] The double trajectories of a narrative poem, in addition to the layers of voices and super-segmentation of sequence structure means that the polyphonic poetry sequence also benefits from the consideration of both horizontal and vertical readings together.

To comprehend 'Circus Fire, 1944' as a narrative and as a sequence of poems requires a consideration of all the parts and progressions together, as you would if listening to an entire polyphonic musical arrangement. In the development of the narrative, Calvocoressi countermeasures sequence parts to focus time back on itself, and to create resistance to a simple assignment of blame on Segee. By the time the reader finishes the sequence, it becomes clear that the pattern of voices and plot operates as an interlinked unit of narrative and poetic progression. Although its form as poetry and narrative already invites a double reading, the polyphony of the sequence requires it.

[127] Lasse Gammelgaard, 'Two Trajectories of Reader Response in Narrative Poetry: Roses and Risings in Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes"', *Narrative*, 22.2 (2014), 203-218, (204).
[128] Gammelgaard also appears to lighten his insistence upon this method when he later states, 'Narrative poetry using stanzas has, in general, a great potential for creating suspense' (214).

Narrative and poetic connections among individual poems are what allow for an understanding of the themes and emotional imperatives of the sequence. For example, the pairing that is visible in poetic couplets mirrors the pairing of speakers, and these in turn reflect the narrative design of coupling the fire-trauma with Segee's childhood trauma. The power of 'Circus Fire's theme bleeds through into the structure and vice versa. These poems would not lend themselves to such deep thematic and emotional connections if pulled apart from one another and read in singularity. Thus, a vertical, poetic reading of the sequence, one focused on the voices and the poetic segmentivity as well as its countermeasure, also requires a horizontal, narrative reading due to the accumulation of voices that impel the reader into the time structure of the unfolding events.

In Coats' exploration of poetry sequence, he argues that many ideas surrounding a sequence 'must remain provisional or delayed' until reading is complete, 'since the principles of construction and assembly will only be available after the entire sequence has been presented' (175). He highlights that, through the recognition of segmentivity, a reader can be more alert to the way that a poem's countermeasure 'condition[s] audience reception of its speakers' utterances' (176). Ultimately, this awareness could also apply to the larger narrative gaps within the entire sequence text so that, when read as a whole, the reader could distinguish the meaning of this whole more easily.

The underlying premise for both a poetry sequence and a polyphonic musical arrangement is that of parts equalling a greater whole. Benson draws the metaphor of polyphony back to Bakhtin's dialogic connections among voices by suggesting that 'the spatiality of Bakhtinian polyphony is reliant on points of contact' and, as Bakhtin argues, 'contrapuntal relationships […] are only a musical variety of the more broadly understood concept of *dialogic relationships*'.[129] From Benson's view, polyphony

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[129] Benson, 299; Bakhtin, 1984, 42. Original italics.

works in literature due to the connections between the vertical and horizontal axes, at the point where voices intersect and therefore interact: '(horizontal) voices moving independently against one another, [give] rise, in the events of their meeting, to (vertical) harmonies that make the voices anew' (303). Both Coats and Benson stress the importance of an interaction of individual parts in literature, a concept at the foundation of Bakhtin's approach. Benson argues that the three key aspects of polyphony–'singularity, constitutive simultaneity in spatial combination, and plural wholeness'–rely on the reading of all of the voices, all of the parts of a sequence together (300).

The transactional reading strategies that I have explored highlight the necessity for a reading of the polyphonic poetry sequence as a complete summation of its parts in order to ascertain how poetic segmentivity and narrative progression operate together in the text. Most extreme, however, might be composer Alan Shockley's theory (2009) on what it means to attempt to write (and thus read) polyphonically.[130] Shockley acknowledges the importance of spacing in a text, as well as the use of counterpoint (especially in Joyce's *Ulysses),* and he concludes that it is through offering a reader a polyphonic way of reading that 'reading itself becomes a contrapuntal act' (174). Shockley draws this idea from the work of Joyce scholar David Herman (1994):

> Herman suggests another polyphonic reading of [Joyce] that is less about page layout or working method or even sound, and more about a way of *reading* […] Herman sees no fugue in the episode but thinks that one viable way of reading the entire chapter does at least resemble the way a listener listens to a fugue.[131]

[130] Alan Shockley, *Music in the Words: Musical Form and Counterpoint in the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009)
[131] Shockley, 63; His reading of Herman is taken from David Herman, "'Sirens" after Schonberg', *James Joyce Quarterly* 31. 4 (1994), 473-494, (485).

This contrapuntal act of reading is one that relies on the reader moving back and forth in the text to relate segments in a meaningful way and to locate the simultaneity of voices. The idea that the practice of reading itself can be an act of counterpoint, places the responsibility with the reader, for the reader to find individual segments in the text and to relate them to each other as simultaneity in time. Thus, in Shockley's act of counterpoint, it is within the reading experience rather than within the text that the vertical axis of simultaneity occurs.

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In this chapter I have explored poetic segmentivity and countermeasure among segments or between gap and segment in poetic and narrative texts. The reading of a polyphonic poetry sequence through a spatial metaphor allows for an interpretation of poetic polyphony alongside of the sequential progression of narrative. Perhaps it can even be said that the countermeasure of poetic segmentivity and narrative units, *with* poly vocals, *and* alongside of a sequence's own division into sections represents a unique poetic *chronotope*.[132] By borrowing doubly from Bakhtin's terminology as a way of representing space and time, I posit that the chronotope of the polyphonic poetry sequence would be one of *threshold*. It would be one where the reader could engage with a sequentially-divided text to observe the boundaries and edges between voices and parts. A threshold chronotope would recognise the polyphonic poetry sequence as a form that steps away from music, and away from the traditions of the polyphonic novel, as a type of poetry in its own right.

Through a close reading of 'Circus Fire, 1944', I have demonstrated how the poet offers her readers the opportunity to be drawn into the text through shifts in deictic centres brought about by the clarity of her signposting. Iser and his contemporaries suggest that it is through the combination of textual blanks and segments that the reader

[132] Bakhtin, 1981, 250.

has this opportunity to activate and thus enter the literary text, forming connections between the said and the unsaid. In the conclusion to this thesis, I will now explore how my own work attempts the techniques of poetic polyphony. I will also highlight the discoveries of each chapter in response to this thesis's primary question: *What are the distinguishing features of the polyphonic poetry sequence?*

Conclusion: The Polyphonic Poetry Sequence

While developing my poems for this thesis, I used three primary sources to gain insight into the methods of working with poetic polyphony: 'The Adoption Papers', 'Room of Leaves', and 'Circus Fire, 1944'. I was especially keen to investigate how poetic speakers come together in a polyphony on the printed page, and to question how the inclusion of many first-person speakers could affect a reader's engagement with the text. While writing my poems I aimed to connect both critical and creative practice by allowing my poetic voices to move from a simple polyvocal arrangement in a single poem to a more complex polyphonic layering in sequential parts. The decisions I made were consistently challenged throughout my writing, and I adapted the poems structurally and stylistically as I developed different approaches to the material. As my critical investigations advanced, I continued to return to the primary texts to explore how they used polyphonic techniques. By way of conclusion to this thesis, I will first discuss the connections between my original contribution of poetry and my research on the polyphonic poetry sequence. I will then draw together the concerns and themes in each chapter to demonstrate my argument for a *triple* reading of polyphony in the poetry sequence, as well as a new type of chronotope, that is, a *chronotope of threshold*, a concept that encompasses polyphony in the form of a poetry sequence.

Layers of Poetic Polyphony: 'The Calling'

My pamphlet-length sequence, 'The Calling', is the re-imagining of a Hebridean mermaid myth in the voices of four distinct speakers. Although it forms just over half of the poetry submission, it is the culmination of my experiments with the techniques of literary polyphony. The questions I began with when writing were based on the methods I saw in the primary sequences, in particular, how the individual poems interacted

lyrically, narratively, and dramatically, but also how their speakers interacted dialogically in the text and with the reader. The techniques that I used, first in writing a selection of individual poems, then in my sequence 'Composition', include the juxtaposition of voices, dialogic exchange between these voices, refrain, textual signposting, countermeasure, and the progression of parts. These early poems became sketchpads in which I took a microcosmic approach to the techniques of polyphony, and from which I went on to form more complex arrangements in 'The Calling'.

Robert Bringhurst defines polyphonic poetry as 'a cohabitation of voices', and this concept represents the initial intent I had in working with a mixture of speakers and points of view (1997: 116). While writing I attempted to situate a combination of voices in the close visual space of a single poem, as Jackie Kay does in 'The Adoption Papers'. I wanted the reader to encounter the speakers on the page without labels or titles to denote a change, much as a listener would encounter voices in musical polyphony. Poet Patience Agbabi (2008) notes of 'The Adoption Papers': 'At times these are separate monologues, at others, skilfully interwoven like plaits, like cornrows, creating a polyphonic symphony. The cumulative effect is of more than three voices.'[133] To approach poetic polyphony, I first tried arranging the voices of my speakers consecutively and without much signposting. Experiments took many attempts and I found that I could best suggest the simultaneity of polyphony by using one of two techniques: fragmenting a speaker's utterance and using a changing refrain (as I do in '38 to Islington'), or by juxtaposing voices so that, on the page, one speaker might interrupt a second speaker and their lines would visually interweave (as in 'Natural History Museum'). At the heart of this process was my desire to create a cast of voices and to situate them in relation to one another within the fictional world of a poetry sequence.

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[133] Patience Agbabi, 'Book of a Lifetime: The Adoption Papers, Jackie Kay', *Independent* (24 April 2008) <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/book-of-a-lifetime-the-adoption-papers-jackie-kay-814970.html> [accessed 21 January 2016] (para. 2 of 4)

As my writing transitioned from several voices in one poem to a sequence with multiple speakers, Amanda Dalton's 'Room of Leaves' set an example of how to move from a combination of voices to a complete sum of parts. Her speakers Grace and Frank exist in a dialogic relationship and their exchanges take place as two halves of a conversation from within their separate poems. While developing 'The Calling', I began with two poems from the point of view of the speaker Sarah. On research trips to the Outer Hebrides, I eavesdropped on conversations between locals and scoured one particular island for clues as to what life there, in such a remote community, might be like. The pieces of information and the richness of the voices prompted the writing of my second speaker Irmina. Her voice arose as a response to Sarah's and from this a narrative began to emerge, one that became anchored in the physical details of island life. The multiplicity of voices in the primary sequences set a benchmark for 'The Calling' and through the shaping of its poetic narrative, I began to build a progression of parts by allowing the speakers to respond to one another.

Bakhtin's concepts of literary polyphony and dialogism both prioritise the interaction of voices. He argues that 'human being's consciousness cannot be conceived as existing in isolation […] for the utterance always only occurs *between* people' (Dentith 1995: 43-44). When interviewing Dalton in 2016, I was intrigued to discover that, in her process of writing 'Room of Leaves', she also followed a similar pattern when developing the voices:

> It didn't happen sequentially. It didn't happen chronologically. So the first poem was 'Nest' […] it was a little bit of a quest for me to imaginatively try to piece something together. So the second poem was the one where she breaks the egg, the wedding gift. Then the third poem I wrote was 'Frank on the Edge' because I just decided I wanted his voice and I wanted him to be a presence in it. So

> actually there's a little cluster that's in the middle of the sequence that I wrote first, and then it became about telling a story.

Dalton's emphasis on her desire to use the techniques of poetry to tell a story, 'rather than trying to give us all the joining of the dots' as a novel might do, reflects a similar wish with which I began writing my sequences (Dalton 2016).

While drafting 'The Calling' I also experimented with the order of the poems, and thus, the order of the speakers in the sequence. Through the arrangement of points of view, I aimed to disrupt the reader's ability to make a complete judgement of any one aspect of the events in the sequence. By doing so, I hoped to place the reader alongside of the speakers in the role of a witness, much as I myself had been asked to witness the circumstances surrounding an adoption, the grief of a speaker jilted on her wedding day, and the mass experience of death and survival after the Hartford circus fire. In writing 'The Calling' I approached its theme, the mythology of mermaid sightings in the Hebrides, in a different way than the witness testimony of local newspapers and archival records. By positioning my speakers as multiple witnesses to a single mermaid encounter, I wanted to challenge the historical approach of publishing testimony from a single, often questionable, witness to an event of this type.

In James Anderson Winn's exploration of the musical sequence, he notes that one of the key 'formal principles of the sequence' is 'parallelism' and that the voices of a sequence 'are parallel versions of the same truth' (64-64). This concept of parallel versions led me further into my investigation of polyphonic music, and toward the structural properties of the polyphonic poetry sequence. When conceiving of the idea that my poetic voices could operate in the text as *parallel versions of the same truth*, I began to ask a new question of my poetry: How can my sequences offer readers an

experience of polyphony that is closer to that of music? The next step, I found, was to experiment with a literary version of counterpoint, that is, countermeasure.

In 'The Calling' I work with countermeasure on a large scale by distorting the narrative flow within sequence parts. As narrative units, the individual poems countermeasure the progression of the sequence as a whole. For example, in 'Second Chance', the quickness of the transition that Sarah undergoes when returning from the sea is resisted at the level of the line. Due to the placement of line breaks, I use gaps to countermeasure the syntax of the sentences and the progression of imagery. Instead of moving quickly along the segment of the line, the reader must pause: 'till I burst | into white and foam', and 'from deep | into a shriek | of moonlight, air'. In the sixteen poems in 'Composition', I use countermeasure between poetic sections to create a resistance to any singular interpretation of the events in the poems. Some poems contain two or three speakers with different perspectives on one photographic moment, and I juxtapose what the reader sees with what the speakers say, thus disrupting a smooth reading. This tension is further complicated by the ordering of poems such as 'Uncle' and 'Composition IV', for example, where the reader is faced with a speaker who contradicts what has been said by another voice in the previous poem. When building dialogic relationships between my speakers, I also use gaps between poetic sections as 'unseen joints' to suggest to the reader that the sections should be connected across the white space of the page (Iser 1978: 182-183).

While drafting 'The Calling', I was initially resistant to using signposting in my poems because I wanted to try to replicate polyphonic music's 'pure' experience, where the listener has the opportunity to immerse herself in sound without interruptions. I experimented with the order of poems, the idiolects of speakers, and typography and layout on the page instead of labelling the speakers. I attempted to weave a narrative plot-line throughout the poems, a thread that would be strong enough to carry the reader

into a narrative and through its gaps without confusion. Yet the responses I had from publishers always returned the same question: Why not label your voices?

Eventually I went back to my primary sources, to look again at what their signposting offers to the reader. And what I discovered in this process became integral to the direction of my writing and my research; I found that a literary polyphony exists on a fine line between its metaphorical connection to music, and a form purely its own. I acknowledged that in order to write polyphonically in sequence form, I needed to make a choice between accessibility for a reader and the potential confusion that polyphonic voices on a page can bring, as with Bringhurst's sequence 'The Blue Roofs of Japan' where two voices visually coincide. My discoveries also challenged Rosenthal and Gall's claim that the modern poetic sequence is a form that is 'finally lyrical', with an 'organic […] approach to structure' (7-9). Instead, I noted that the signposting in the sequences operated as guy ropes from poet to reader, and as a type of *map key* to the reading of their texts. In 'The Adoption Papers' this takes the form of a cast list to distinguish the voices. In 'Room of Leaves' and 'Circus Fire', both poets use titles to clarify who is speaking and from where. With this information in mind, I chose to aid the textual leaps in time, voice, and location in 'The Calling' by creating signposts to act as anchors for the reader on either side of the gap. My initial desire to offer readers an experience of polyphony akin to music shifted to become a desire to offer readers a way to engage with the layers of polyphony in my sequences.

The outcome of the practice element of my research has given me new awareness of the techniques of working with literary polyphony in a poetic context. The knowledge that I have gained is directly linked to my experiments with the characteristics of polyphony on the printed page: (*singularity*) the development of individual first-person speakers as consciousness-centres, (*simultaneity in spatial combination*) the juxtaposition of poetic parts and speakers to conjure a sense of

simultaneity, and, (*plural wholeness*) an engagement with textual gaps, signposting, and the pattern of a sequence's parts (Benson 2003: 300). Each stage of writing has played an important role in my growth as a poet, and has helped me to develop the arguments in my research on the distinguishing features of the polyphonic poetry sequence.

A Genre in Process: The Polyphonic Poetry Sequence

In Rosenthal and Gall's monograph, they focus their attentions on exploring the 'new genre' of the poetry sequence while also acknowledging that by doing so, they are 'dealing with a genre in process' (9; 155). Nearly thirty-five years have passed since the publication of *The Modern Poetic Sequence*, and although other studies have been conducted on poetry sequences, this thesis is the first extensive investigation into the properties of poetry sequences that contain multiple voices at the foundations of their constructions. As I have demonstrated, the sequences discussed in this thesis reside along a spectrum of polyphony in poetry. Other sequences in the spectrum, such as Alice Oswald's *Dart*, Rita Dove's *Thomas and Beulah*, and Muriel Rukeyser's 'The Book of the Dead', to name just a few, also transcend the boundaries of Rosenthal and Gall's definition for the poetry sequence, not just as anomalies on the margins of an exclusionary type, but as fully-crafted works that employ lyric, narrative, and dramatic discourse in their structures. To conclude the research in this thesis I will now return to the arguments in my chapters before looking toward the future of research on the polyphonic poetry sequence.

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As highlighted in Chapter 1, the use of the term *polyphonic* for a poetry sequence names the multiplicity of its speakers as they are presented in one unified yet segmented text. But more importantly, this concept acknowledges the unique methods and styles of the poets whose sequences offer readers an engagement with polyphony on the printed

page. The word polyphonic carries the weight of tradition from both music and the prose novel, and as Bakhtin's literary metaphor, it is one that some critics still hold in question with reference to poetry. Benson reminds us, 'the spatiality of Bakhtinian polyphony is reliant on points of contact', and I argue that Bakhtin's theories of polyphony and dialogism can easily be applied to the texture of a polyphonic poetry sequence (299). In developing his concepts, Bakhtin states that 'two discourses equally and directly oriented [...] cannot exist side by side without intersecting dialogically', and as I have clarified, such connections take place in the polyphonic poetry sequence as readers engage back and forth over textual gaps with multiple speakers and segments (1984: 188).

Bringhurst succinctly defines polyphony as, 'singing more than one song, playing more than one tune, telling more than one story, at once' (1997: 114). In my first chapter, I expand upon this definition by employing terminology from both music and literature to highlight the three key principles of polyphony in poetry. I also address Robyn Sarah's questions surrounding the circumstances under which 'the term "polyphonic" can be applied to poetry', and 'in what sense or senses' poetry can exist as polyphony on the printed page (207-209). By way of an answer to her questions, I argue that there are crucial similarities between the texture of polyphonic music and the structure of a polyphonic poetry sequence, especially in the way that a reader is offered an experience of simultaneity. Although Lee and Bringhurst disagree on the method of rendering such simultaneity on the printed page, I argue that, if a poem offers an experience of polyphony by producing a 'sensation that captures simultaneity' in the segmentivity of its parts, it should also be observed for the other key tenets, and not dismissed solely based on the consecutive rendering of its speakers (Chagas 2005: 6).

'The Adoption Papers' provides an excellent example of a sequence that utilises all aspects of poetic polyphony. Kay's innovative work with splicing the utterances of

her three speakers in one visual field and without excessive punctuation or signposting to disrupt the change of voices, intuits the shifts in counterpoint found in musical polyphony. The endless echoes of her voices throughout each section offer readers an immersion into a realm of poetic polyphony on the printed page.

In my second chapter, I analyse the labels that have been used for multi-voiced poetry sequences. Although many of the labels refer to particular qualities of the sequences, I argue that using a singular nomenclature, 'the polyphonic poetry sequence', acknowledges the connection between music and poetry and also best clarifies the texture of multiple speakers in the progression of a poetry sequence. In response to T.S. Eliot's question, 'Is there, perhaps, another voice which I have failed to hear, the voice of the dramatic poet whose dramatic gifts are best exercised outside of the theatre?', I conclude that the answer to his enquiry is, *yes* (103). The polyphonic poetry sequence utilises dialogic relationships to create the truly dramatic exchange that Eliot envisioned. The quantity of voices in each sequence disrupts a reader's 'tendency' to equate the 'I's of the speakers with the flesh-and-blood-poet, as is the convention of the lyric (Lanser 2005: 212). So too, the form exceeds the dramatic monologue by aligning its speakers in dialogic contact with the reader, thereby offering an interactive engagement with the text. In short, the polyphonic poetry sequence deploys all three types of discourse to construct a dramatic, lyric, and narrative collective of poetic voices for the reader to engage with on the page.

In 'Room of Leaves', Dalton's speakers use varying levels of address to interact with each other and with the reader. As I demonstrate, Dalton's particular way of pairing Grace and Frank offers the reader an opportunity to observe the responsive nature of their poems within the 'alternative fictional world' of the text (Fludernik 1996: 266). Although their fictional lives, inevitably, move away from one another as the sequence progresses, the focus remains on the interaction between the speakers and on

the intimate witnessing of Grace's despair. I argue that the 'ultimate dialogicality' that Bakhtin identifies in the polyphonic novel can also be traced in the polyphonic poetry sequence through the relationship of parts to whole, including the gaps in the text, the seams where the unspoken emotions of the poems reside (1984: 18). To read 'Room of Leaves' as a whole dialogic and polyphonic text, is to acknowledge that both speakers, not just Grace, exist on a tenuous edge. In discussion with Dalton, she suggested the following (2016):

> I want to create characters' voices, voices of people who could be judged negatively. […] Frank is not a baddie. And Grace is not a kind of eccentric crazy woman to laugh at, but has a complete internal logic to everything that's happening […] they are people who are potentially a little bit on the edge.

Bakhtin's claim that in Dostoevsky's polyphonic prose he depicted 'the *crises* and *turning points* in [his characters'] lives; that is […] their lives *on the threshold'*, resonates with the portrayal of the speakers in the sequences under discussion in this thesis (1984: 73). The 'ultimate dialogicality' that Bakhtin holds in regard for polyphonic literature is, I posit, fully present in the interactive layering of poetic voices in the polyphonic sequence. These too are speakers who reside on the thresholds, at the boundaries of segmentivity.

In my third chapter, I dissect the correlation between textual gaps and a reader's invitation to experience the multiple voices of a sequence interactively. Iser's concept of the wandering viewpoint, as well as Rosenblatt's transactional theories, supports my analysis of a polyphonic poetry sequence as the site of dialogic exchange. McHale's conjoining of DuPlessis and Shoptaw's definitions for the organising units of a poem established a need for response to the lack of critical thinking about gaps and segmentivity in poetry. In one of his subsequent articles, McHale highlights that the

strategy of interpretation used to engage with segmentivity and countermeasure is similar to that of cinematic montage and comics / graphic novels.[134] The blank spaces, or 'gutters', between squares of a comic, are, he notes, 'the reader's domain; it is here that we perform acts of "closure" that allow narrative to jump the gap between one panel and the next' (32). A polyphonic poetry sequence contains a plethora of such 'gutters', yet, through an examination of this thesis's primary poetic texts, as well as the experience I have gained in writing my own sequences, I posit that the addition of textual signposting between poetic sections operates to disrupt 'closure'.

In alignment with Coats's evaluation that poetry sequences require an extra consideration of the relationality of their individual parts, I extend this idea to argue that in a poetry sequence, the addition of polyphonic layering in the text augments its countermeasure and complicates the narrative progression. Instead of enacting 'closure' on the other side of a textual gap, the gaps between sections in many polyphonic sequences are reinforced by signposting, especially the use of titles. These signposts become sites of countermeasure between narrative segmentation and poetic segmentivity as they regularly signal a change of speaker, or request that the reader perform a 'deictic shift' to reposition her reading and, therefore, her engagement with the text. The shifts move a reader from one speaker's point of view to another's with the frequent addition of 'temporal', 'compositional', and 'spatial' leaps (Stockwell 2002: 45-46). Although signposts can provide anchors for the reader, they also have the effect of signalling the disruption of the narrative. In 'Circus Fire, 1944', Calvocoressi traps her reader in a cycle of paused time, so that she must re-witness the fire's devastation anew after each gap. In the sequencing of the poems, the progression of narrative units stalls at every gap and the reader is asked to circle back through the trauma.

[134] Brian McHale, 2010. 'Narrativity and Segmentivity, or, Poetry in the Gutter', in *Intermediality and Storytelling*, ed. by Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan (Berlin: De Gruyter), pp. 27-48. Coats also relates the segmented nature of a poetry sequence to montage in his extensive exploration of 'lyric-narrative hybrids' (175).

In my third chapter I also construct a spatial metaphor for the polyphonic poetry sequence and compare it with the spatial dynamics of musical polyphony. This experiment highlights the combination of horizontal progression *and* the conjunction of a polyphonic poetry sequence's interlinked vertical structures (multiple voices *with* poetic segmentivity *within* sequential segments) that create a unique experience for the reader. In Gammelgaard's focus on narrative poetry he surmises that the narrative and poetic trajectories require a type of reading that encompasses both aspects of its form. Similarly, Coats focuses on the 'double awareness' required by a reader when approaching a poetry sequence. His concept of the 'further vertical recognition' needed for sequence parts and the countermeasurement among these parts, lends weight to my claim for, yet, a third vertical reading (177).

Like Bakhtin's 'ultimate dialogicality', I argue that the reader requires a *triple awareness* when engaging with a poetry sequence whose multiple voices reside at the core of its construction. Due to the complexity of speakers and the countermeasure of segmentivity, an experience of poetic polyphony as a sum of parts exceeds any one voice, one poem, or one unit of narrative. In this culmination, the poetry sequence reaches back to its musical origins and to the counterpoint of voices within a unified arrangement. As a sum of parts, I also argue that the structure of a polyphonic poetry sequence represents a *chronotope of threshold.* As a concept of poetic time-space, this terminology acknowledges the way in which a polyphonic text 'becomes artistically visible' in the reader's *experience* of its multiple voices and parts (Bakhtin 1981: 250). Such a chronotope would recognise the brink, the verge, of the polyphonic poetry sequence as a form that, while employing the traditions of music and the polyphonic novel, is a type of poetry in its own right.

Beyond A Sum of Parts

As the culmination of practice and research, both components of this thesis develop concepts of literary polyphony, and the three thesis chapters together work as a sum of parts in detailing the distinguishing features of the polyphonic poetry sequence. The aim for my doctoral work was to explore a form that has remained largely invisible in critical scholarship, yet one that many contemporary poets have chosen when working with multiple first-person perspectives in a progression of parts. This thesis situates itself in the gap of knowledge surrounding the study of narrative in poetry as well as the study of sequence in critical writing on poetry.

As discussed in my introduction, my research does not seek to impose a single model of polyphony in poetry or even a single model of the poetry sequence, however, in making my claims about the polyphonic poetry sequence, especially in the construction of a spectrum of polyphony, I endeavoured to read as widely as possible, as many multi-voiced poetry sequences as I could find in the English language. My reading strategy was focused on sourcing sequences that have, however tenuously, some inclusion of polyvocality. But this search was, of course, by no means exhaustive, and I am sure that there are many tens if not hundreds of texts left to discover, especially those out of print, or published outside of North America and Europe. The sequences that I discuss at the end of my first chapter, for example, are just a tiny collection from this reading, and there are many others that reside easily along this first early rendering of a polyphonic poetic spectrum. In my future research, however, I plan to continue expanding the boundaries of this spectrum, rather than setting up an exclusionary zone for those poems that do not fit neatly into any of the categories discussed herein. Due to the constraints of this thesis, my research did not have room to address areas where the spectrum intersects with techniques of the verse novel and with sequences where the edges between voices remain less clearly defined.

In approaching aspects of narrative theory as a compass for my research, I encountered the debate surrounding the application of Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and polyphony to poetry. This thesis embraces the challenge that Bakhtin's theories present, and I have situated the arguments in my chapters within a 21st century approach that, while acknowledging him as 'the most notorious naysayer of poetic dialogism', concludes that there is 'the need for thoughtful engagement with Bakhtin' (Scanlon 2014: 3; 2007: 4). My engagement with narratology also highlights that my research as well as my poetry, fits the niche identified by McHale. As a unique contribution to knowledge, my arguments explore the gap in critical writing on multiple voices in poetry sequences, with a specific focus on polyphony. The work of contemporary scholars in the field of narratology, as evidenced by the 2014 special edition of the journal *Narrative*, will continue to provide a sounding board to my current and future research for a long while to come.

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Appendix

These diagrams represent the polyphonic spatial arrangements of the primary sequences discussed in this thesis.

‘The Adoption Papers’ by Jackie Kay

In this sequence the twelve poems progress chronologically, numbered along the horizontal axis, except where noted. The symbols in this diagram indicate the speakers, as well as the order in which voices appear within each poem, from top to bottom, along the vertical axis.

Vocal Layers

(PROLOGUE)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	EPILOGUE
						Δ					
						#					
	♦					Δ					
	#					#					
	♦					Δ					
	#					#	#				
	♦			♦		Δ	Δ	♦			
	#			#		#	#	Δ[r]			
	♦			♦		Δ	Δ	Δ		Δ	
	#			#		#	#	♦		♦	
#	♦		#	♦	(Δ)	Δ	Δ	Δ*		Δ	#
Δ[r]	#	(Δ)	(Δ)	#	#	#	♦	♦[r]*	Δ	#	♦
♦[r]	♦	♦	#	♦	♦	Δ	Δ	Δ	#	Δ	Δ

Time

Part One 1961-1962 · Part Two 1967-1979 · Part Three 1980-1990

*In poem 8 the speakers alternate an additional seven times during Birth Mother’s refrain.

Speakers:

Δ Daughter

Adoptive Mother

♦ Birth Mother

( ) flash-forward to 1980-1990

r speaker’s refrain

* see note

‘Room of Leaves’ by Amanda Dalton

In this sequence the eighteen poems progress chronologically except for the opening and closing poems. The numbers in this diagram refer to the position of the poem within the sequence. The symbols indicate the speakers in each poem, in no particular order along the vertical axis.

Vocal Layers / **Time**

First Date 1959	Proposal	Dress	Wedding Day 1960	Winter 1960-1961	1961-1993 [*approximate timeline*]				Grace Falls	Body Found	News Headline	Autopsy 1994
Δ2	Δ3, ♦4	(+)5, Δ5	(+)6, Δ6, ♦7, ♯8, Δ8, ♦8	Δ9, ♦10	Δ11	♦12, (+)13, Δ13	♯14, Δ14	Δ15	(+)16, Δ16	♯18	♦17	♯1

*Note: Grace’s mother only speaks within Grace’s poems.

Speakers:

♯ implied poet

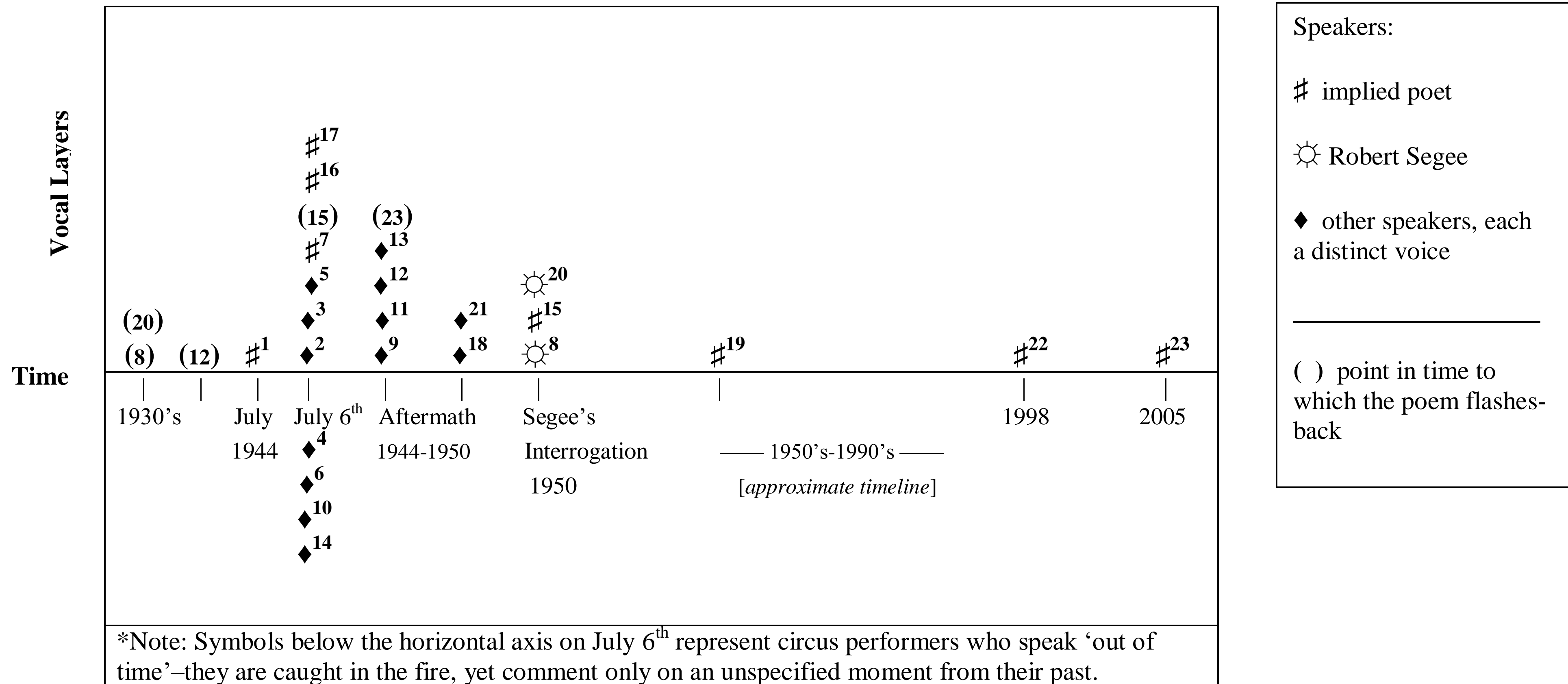
Δ Grace

♦ Frank

(+) Grace’s mother

‘Circus Fire, 1944’ by Gabrielle Calvocoressi

In this diagram, the numbers refer to the position of the twenty-three poems within the sequence. The symbols indicate the speakers in each poem, layered along the vertical axis.



*Note: Symbols below the horizontal axis on July 6th represent circus performers who speak ‘out of time’–they are caught in the fire, yet comment only on an unspecified moment from their past.