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Exile and Ecology:
the Poetic Practice of Gwyneth Lewis, Pascale
Petit and Deryn Rees-Jones

by

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Declaration

I declare that no material in this thesis has been used before or published previously. I declare that this thesis is my own work and that the thesis has not been submitted for another degree at another university. This thesis has been formatted using Chicago Style footnotes in line with the requirements of minor corrections suggested by examiners.

Abstract: Exile and Ecology: The Poetic Practice of Gwyneth Lewis, Pascale Petit and Deryn Rees-Jones

In this thesis, I discuss how three poets with a connection to Wales, Gwyneth Lewis (born 1959), Pascale Petit (born 1953) and Deryn Rees-Jones (born 1968), develop their poetic practice beyond ordinary notions of home and belonging. Drawing on Wendy Wheeler's *New Modernity? Change in Science, Literature and Politics*, this project is described as a poetics of 'ecology,' using the broader meaning of the term, which refers not only to the study of plants and animals, but also to institutions and people in relation to their sense of place. I argue that Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones promote an awareness of ecology or interconnectedness and they achieve this project by going beyond personal or individual concerns in a kind of poetic exile. This poetic exile entails the rejection of a 'whole' and 'bounded' selfhood and the acceptance of otherness or difference in one's own identity means that the boundaries between the self and other disintegrate or blur.

I proceed in the general introduction to the thesis to consider the problems of modernity as described by Wheeler and I use her model to identify the melancholy modernity of R.S. Thomas; Dylan Thomas' poetic mourning; and the preoccupation with maternity in Gillian Clarke's poetry. Wheeler suggests that such phases emerge from anxiety about lost teleologies or insecurity of the ontological self, and ecology is the acceptance that human beings are never hermetically sealed, secure units. In the body of the thesis, I explore how Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones exile themselves from ordinary selfhood to discover ecology with others. The chapter devoted to Lewis discusses her commitment to decreation, a project that unravels the dominance of the centre over the margin through poems praising angels of the minor, the diminutive and the bathetic. The next chapter considers Petit's exile to Latin America and I argue

that by interrogating the strangeness in other cultures, she forces Western culture to recognise its own strangeness unravelling the clear distinction between 'civilised' and 'barbaric' cultures. Rees-Jones similarly focuses on the strangeness of the human self in her representation of liminal, marginal subjects, such as the clone passing for human. I conclude that the angel, Latin America and the clone are all poetic tropes by which these poets dissolve the oppositional binary of self versus other.

Chapter 1: Introduction: Ecology and Exile

Ac yna y goddiweddodd Gwydion hithau ac y dywedodd wrthi, 'Ni'th laddaf di. Fe wnaif iti rywbeth sy'n waeth. Dyma yw hynny,' meddai ef, 'dy ollwng di yn rhith aderyn. Ac oherwydd y cywilydd a wnaethost ti i Leu Llaw Gyffes, na feiddia dithau ddangos dy wyneb fyth liw dydd.'¹

And there Gwydion overtook her and told her, 'I won't kill you. I will do to you something that is worse. Here is it,' he said, 'I will let you go in the form of a bird. And because of the shame you have brought Llew Skilful Hand, you are never to show your face to the light of day.'²

I begin with a myth from *The Mabinogion*, the Welsh book of legends and I quote from the story of Blodeuwedd, the woman of flowers. This story tells of the making of Blodeuwedd from flowers by the magician, Gwydion, to lift the curse on Llew Skilful Hand to never love a mortal woman. However, Blodeuwedd rebelled and as a result was changed into a seeker of darkness, an inhabitant of the night, a nocturnal owl. Exiled from the daylight world of human beings, Blodeuwedd had to fend for herself, but some women poets rewriting Blodeuwedd's story have seen this conclusion as a gift rather than a punishment. Glenda Beagan (born 1948) writes in 'Blodeuwedd' of the freedom in the loneliness of exile: 'My feathers are glad to be / dipped in the wind. After my catchings / I sit on a bough and clean myself. / So how is this punishment?'³ Nesta Wyn Jones (born 1946) is also inspired by Blodeuwedd's story suggesting that exile is a presence that haunts the creative process itself, since in her *Cymraeg* (Welsh-language) poem, 'Blodeuwedd,' the exiled owl appears and she describes how '[ei] dau lygad di-syfl / Yn herio'r inc i lifo dros y memrwn,'⁴ 'its two

¹ *Y Mabinogion* [The Mabinogion], ed. Dafydd Ifans and Rhiannon Ifans (Llandysul, Carmarthenshire: Gomer, 1995), 72.

² My translation.

³ Glenda Beagan, 'Blodeuwedd,' *Welsh Women's Poetry 1460 – 2001*, eds. Katie Gramich and Catherine Brennan, trans. Katie Gramich (Dinas Powys, Vale of Glamorgan: Honno, 2003), 260 (260.19-22).

⁴ Nesta Wyn Jones, 'Blodeuwedd,' *Welsh Women's Poetry 1460 – 2001*, eds. Gramich and Brennan, 250-51 (250.24-25).

motionless eyes / Challenged the ink to flow across the parchment.⁵ Finally in my own poem, 'Blodeuwedd,' I explore the possibilities of exile in opposition to the restrictions of home, as Blodeuwedd recognises the curtailment of her freedom, when 'agos at y tŷ yn y tywyll, / yr wyf I'n gweld y mae'r ffesnestr yn oleu,'⁶ 'close to the house in the dark, / I see that the window is lit.'⁷ For Wyn Jones and others, Blodeuwedd is the prototype of the creative woman who excels in exile, because such a state encourages her to consider new possibilities for human existence, or as Wyn Jones puts it in 'Blodeuwedd,' the possibility of '[g]wlad / Heb gaeau na therfynau,'⁸ 'a country / With no fields or borders.'⁹

In this thesis, I intend to discuss how three poets with a connection to Wales, Gwyneth Lewis (born 1959), Pascale Petit (born 1953) and Deryn Rees-Jones (born 1968), have developed their poetic practice beyond ordinary notions of home and belonging.¹⁰ Drawing on the theorising of Wendy Wheeler in *A New Modernity? Change in Science, Literature and Politics*, I describe this project as a poetics of 'ecology' focussing, like Wheeler, on the broader meaning of the term, which refers not only to the study of plants and animals, but also of institutions and people in relation to their

⁵ Jones, 'Blodeuwedd,' 251.24-25.

⁶ Zoë Brigley, 'Blodeuwedd,' *Poetry Wales* 38.3 (2003): 9.1-3.

⁷ My translation.

⁸ Jones, 'Blodeuwedd,' 250.1-2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.1-2.

¹⁰ In my title and in defining my thesis here, I use the term, 'poetic practice' rather than 'poetry' or 'poetics.' I use 'poetic practice' as an umbrella term that includes the poets' poetry, their statements of poetics, their responses to certain ideas when questioned in interview and their analysis of other poets in relation to their own concerns. This thesis centres on losing selfhood as a means to poetic inspiration and for this reason, it may seem ironic that I draw a great deal on biographical detail and interview to support by observations. However I want to make it clear that the personal circumstances and experiences of the poets are very useful as a means to understanding their specific views on cultural marginality and alienated identities (e.g. Gwyneth Lewis' experience of depression, Pascale Petit's working out of her childhood suffering and Deryn Rees-Jones' cosmopolitan selfhood). The reader may also note that the order in which I present my case studies of the poets is not chronological in terms of their ages. However, it seemed appropriate to deal with the poets non-chronologically, featuring Lewis, then Petit and finally Rees-Jones, because Lewis is closest to home in her poetics, Petit moves beyond national boundaries and Rees-Jones spirals away from any certainty, even the idea of being human. So in ordering the poets in this manner, I map a journey away from home, belonging and certainty.

environment and sense of place. I argue that Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones promote an awareness of ecology or the interconnectedness of subjects and things and they achieve this project by going beyond personal or individual concerns in a kind of poetic exile. This poetic exile dictates a breaking down of the boundaries between self and other, as the poets discover the otherness within the self and the familiarity of the other. Their poetic project is nothing less than an attempt to discover how one and another might interact on an equal footing.

As a junior contemporary of these three Welsh women poets (born 1981), I bring a shared experience of exile to my understanding of how the specific concerns of the poets. These concerns include Lewis' exile into the English language, Petit's commitment to writing narratives drawn from Latin America and Rees-Jones' uncanny plots and characters. I suggest that these poets' approaches are related to what Owen Sheers describes in his essay, 'Not I,' as the 'famously tricky border area' of the poetic 'I.'¹¹ Like Sheers, I am interested in how suspicion of border areas and those who inhabit them, 'translates to the border "I" in poetry.'¹² The following chapters offer thorough textual analysis and comprehensive readings of specific poems significantly illuminated by in-depth interviews with the chosen poets as I develop my thinking about exile and interconnectedness.

Before proceeding with detailed accounts of the poets, this general introduction explores my understanding of interconnectedness and exile in three main sections. 'Part I: Beyond Nation, Beyond Home' investigates current literary and critical trends in theorising exile and focuses on developments in feminism and in thinking about 'Welshness.' In particular, I explore the theories of Kristeva and Irigaray, who, particularly in their later works, have focussed on the possibility of

¹¹ Owen Sheers, 'Not I,' *Poetry Wales* 41.2 (2005): 6 -8 (7).

¹² Sheers, 'Not I,' 7.

connecting with an other through different kinds of exile. I also discuss how some Welsh editors and commentators have moved beyond a simple notion of nationality towards a feeling of interconnectedness with other nations and cultures.

'Part II: The Path to Ecology' offers a retrospective glance at different movements in Welsh poetry using the model outlined in Wheeler's *A New Modernity?* Wheeler suggests that the twentieth century was dominated by three main trends: a modernity characterised by its melancholia, a version of postmodernism that focuses on mourning the modern loss of certainty and the return to the mother as a figure offering fruitful possibilities for cultural experience. Under three subsections, 'Melancholy Modernity,' 'Cathartic Postmodernism' and 'The Return to the Mother,' 'Part II' discusses how Wheeler's trends manifested themselves in twentieth-century literary movements in Wales and explores what Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones have inherited from such developments.

'Part III: The Success of the Exile' moves away from past trends in Welsh poetry and considers the current poetics of ecology in the writing of Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones. The first sub-section, 'The Interconnectedness of Things,' discusses Wheeler's notion of ecology in detail and argues that this desire for interconnectedness demands going beyond one's own personal context, which in the case of the three poets discussed means going beyond ordinary kinds of womanhood or conventional belonging to Wales. I use the subsection, 'Models of Exile,' to discuss in a more detailed manner how these poets enact exile and I orientate the reader as to the structure of the thesis.

This general introduction summarises the argument of my thesis that in questing towards interconnectedness, or put in the language of critical theory, in seeking the other, the poets use exile as a tool. Rather than remaining within the

bounds of their personal context, being women of Wales, these poets move *beyond* homeliness to discover new relations with others and to offer representations of marginality that are relevant universally. The marginal is mingled with the universal; the stranger blurs with the native; and the other is no longer so antipathetic to the one. This is a creative process described by Sheers in 'Not I' in terms of travel and journeying: 'I often travel a long way from the original "lived" experience, but when I arrive at the final destination it hopefully still resembles where I left, or at least echoes the most important elements of that point of departure.'¹³ In a situation of exile, these poets are not commenting on the deficiencies of Welsh culture or the lack of creative possibilities that it offers a writer. Rather, they are using their own minor perspective and in using adjectives such as 'minor' and 'marginal,' I do not mean to evoke a subject that is blinkered, myopic or lacking in scope, but to conjure a subversive, off-centre perspective. This is what the poets take to the world, simultaneously speaking as and with what Sheers calls, '[t]hose from the "other side".'¹⁴

Part I: Beyond Nation, Beyond Home

[T]he experience of modernity, for many people, is distressingly unrelenting: uncushioned, the demand to 'face the realities of the modern world' may become intolerable. We have indeed, been freed in some senses: freed from the grip of tradition and superstition; freed from an all-encompassing religious intolerance; freed to say and do more or less what we want, and to make whatever we have the energy to make. But then there is, famously, the other side, in which we experience our freedom as also a kind of alienation and rootlessness. We are no longer restrained, but we are not held either.¹⁵

If there is one aspect of modernity that is of utmost concern in the Western world, it is the anxiety that accompanies exile and its accompanying features described

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵ Wendy Wheeler, *A New Modernity? Change in science, literature and politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), 1.

by Wendy Wheeler in *A New Modernity?* in terms of ‘alienation’ and ‘rootlessness.’ This is both the physical exile that exists in the modern world, a sphere of migration, immigration, commuting and communication across continents, and an emotional and intellectual exile from the certainty of earlier teleologies. It is this vision of the world that propels Andrew Gurr’s suggestion in *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* that the modern writer cannot remain at home in the world. Gurr states that exile might be very necessary for the ‘modern writer’: ‘Deracination, exile and alienation in varying forms are the conditions of existence for the modern writer the world over.’¹⁶ However, Gurr does clarify his statement by differentiating between ‘metropolitan regions – Britain and America for instance’ and ‘provincial or colonial situations’ such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand; while metropolitan regions produce writers who ‘search for a past, for a cultural heritage,’ writers in provincial or colonial situations quest ‘for a social or national identity, a country of the body as well as the mind.’¹⁷ Yet what of those minor cultures that do not lend themselves so readily to this binary? What about provincial communities that exist within metropolitan regions: Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales within the United Kingdom; the Basques in Spain and France; Catalonia in Spain; Rousillon in France; and others?

This study devotes itself to the study of one such context, that of Wales and it argues that as a culture that falls between metropolitan and provincial or colonial categories, between identities as imperialist agents or colonial sufferers, Wales offers rich possibilities for a writer who wants to consider questions of difference and otherness. I suggest that the three poets to be discussed in the thesis, Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones, are all concerned with exiling themselves from their own personal

¹⁶ Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*, Harvester Studies in Contemporary Literature and Culture, Vol. 4 (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981), 14.

¹⁷ Gurr, *Writers in Exile*, 14.

contexts. While to some extent exiling herself from *Cymraeg* (the Welsh language) to write in the English idiom, Lewis also writes allegories that move beyond a specific cultural identity towards a more collective, spiritual project that praises the invisible, the diminutive and marginal in a more general way. Petit invests her own personal suffering in marginal subjects and cultures in different contexts, such as the silenced voice of nature in the Amazon rainforest, disenfranchised indigenous cultures of the Amazon and the cult-figure of the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo. Petit removes herself from the Welsh context, but she still finds rich possibilities for writing out of marginality. Rees-Jones constructs a novel-in-verse that, in the workings of its narrative, plays out a more universal story about difference and the possibility of reconciling one and an other. Rees-Jones' narrative is inspired by Wales and yet it is written beyond that country's borders constructing a narrative that speaks universally about what it is to be different. The distinction between one and an other is deconstructed in this poetics.

All three poets are women and their work grows out of the latest feminist phase in Welsh poetry, which has offered alternatives to the melancholy and mournful movements of twentieth-century flowerings. Developments in Welsh and feminist criticism recognise the problematic nature of defining identity in a narrow way. Western feminism has expanded its view of how different women experience the world and as Kim Whitehead explains in *The Feminist Poetry Movement*, this has meant having to realise, 'that "Woman" is often too confining a collective identity, and that difference between and within women challenges the assumption that has sometimes structured feminist political organizing and even feminist literary publishing and criticism – that gender can be separated from race, ethnicity, class and sexuality, and that white middle-class women first and foremost have the tools and the know-how

for the enterprise of analyzing gendered experience and literary production.¹⁸

Expressing a similar view in the context of *Feminism and Poetry*, Jan Montefiore explains that there exists ‘an immense variety of women poets, often divided by major differences of class, race and circumstances, and writing in a multiplicity of discourses.’¹⁹ Montefiore concludes that one ‘has to take account of these differences.’²⁰ The poets in this study move towards dealing with questions of marginality more universally and they concord with Julia Kristeva’s version of feminism, when she states, in interview with Rosalind Coward, that ‘every difference is significant.’²¹

Recent developments in feminist theory are particularly relevant to this thesis, and models are drawn particularly from the group of theorists entitled the “French Feminists,” including Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Feminists like Kristeva and Irigaray reiterate the point made above that feminist criticism cannot be focused solely on the figure of woman, but must consider a variety of configurations of identity, and it is for this reason that the thesis steers away from the woman-centred feminism of Hélène Cixous.²²

¹⁸ Kim Whitehead, *The Feminist Poetry Movement* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 1996), xvii-xviii.

¹⁹ Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women’s Writing*, 1987 (London: Pandora, 2004), 58.

²⁰ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 58.

²¹ Julia Kristeva, ‘Julia Kristeva in Conversation with Rosalind Coward,’ *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 331-348 (337).

²² Since the publication of her infamous essay, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (first published 1981), Cixous has proclaimed ‘difference feminism’ as transformative of negative qualities sometimes associated with the feminine via the jubilant energy of *écriture féminine*. In that essay, Cixous tells women to write ‘as a woman, toward women’ and she elides the search for writing with the search for the female body adding: ‘This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful.’ Although this kind of theorising has been an important gesture in feminism, it is not so useful for the poetics of exile discussed in this thesis where the three poets extend their analysis of marginality beyond their own experience of being a woman and being Welsh. (Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ *Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 225-228 (226)).

However, new possibilities for 'difference feminism' have occurred *via* more recent works by Irigaray that suggest a possibility of bridging. Although her earlier theorising instigated charges of essentialism, in more recent books, such as *The Way of the Heart*, Irigaray moves beyond the male/female binary.²³ As Irigaray stated in a recent lecture, 'The Path towards the Other,' the dialogue between one and an other is not necessarily gender specific and could occur between man and woman, parent and child, the teacher and the student, the rich and the poor, or simply between 'myself and the stranger.'²⁴ In proper communication with an other, Irigaray recommends the creation of a third space formed via new invented means of communication. This space is bound up with mystery, poetry and silence and it enables one and the other to listen to each other without becoming one and the same. It becomes in Irigaray's words 'a third world' in which both participants are exiled from the familiar in order to discover the other and to construct 'work in common and space-time to be shared.'²⁵ Rees-Jones, who refers to Irigaray as the 'Fierce Luce' in her poem 'Quiver,' draws primarily on Irigaray's notion of moving beyond oneself and one's personal context to

²³ Jan Montefiore defends Irigaray from charges of essentialism in *Feminism and Poetry*, suggesting that critics have misconstrued Irigaray's philosophy, '[b]ecause her work of deconstruction was not widely available until now' and so Irigaray has been 'typed and dismissed as an exponent of naively essentialist feminism, who valorises a stereotyped description of Woman as an inarticulate being whose buried "language" expresses only the biological materiality of her body.' According to Montefiore, 'Irigaray's arguments for female identity and language are [...] much more subtle than that.' (See: Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 139). However, feminists still find elements to criticise in Irigaray's work. For example, in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Judith Butler criticises Irigaray's claim in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* that 'the question of sexual difference is *the* question of our time.' Butler wonders whether this privileging of sexual difference puts a 'taboo on homosexuality' and she also suggests that it works out of 'a complex set of racial injunctions which operate in part through the taboo on miscegenation. (See: Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993) 167). Butler asks a pertinent question, but as I will suggest in the description that follows and in my use of Irigaray as a frame for Rees-Jones' poetry, Irigaray has moved away from focusing solely on the heterosexual male-female binary and where she does use the configuration of man and woman as one and other, the juxtaposition is meant to have a greater significance applying to a variety of situations not simply heterosexual relations.

²⁴ Luce Irigaray, 'The Path Towards the Other,' Luce Irigaray Research Seminars, Warwick Art Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry, 9th May 2006.

²⁵ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London: Continuum, 2002), 10.

discover an other and as I describe in more detail at the end of this introduction, *The Way of the Heart* becomes particularly instructive in analysing Rees-Jones' poetry.²⁶

Although Irigaray and Kristeva are often seen as quite different theorists, their philosophies are not so dissimilar, as is clear when Kristeva comes to talk of the stranger in *Strangers to Ourselves*. In this study, Kristeva thinks about otherness in terms of the stranger or the foreigner and her account suggests that proximity with the other or the stranger can teach one of 'the possibility or not of *being an other* [...] *being in his place*, and this means to imagine and make oneself for oneself.'²⁷ As in Irigaray's formulation, there is room between one and an other for a space which is created by poetry and silence and which breaks down the binary between self and other. According to Kristeva, this space is that of strangeness or foreignness (rather than the third space as defined by Irigaray) and the realm of the stranger or of strangeness is 'silence,' the absence and rupture of poetic language. Kristeva describes it as 'cold diamond, secret treasury, carefully projected, out of reach.'²⁸ Silence has the beauty and rarity of the diamond, but it is also oblique and 'out of reach.' When writing about poetic or semiotic language in *Desire in Language*, Kristeva describes the poet who 'wants to make language perceive what it doesn't want to say, provide it with its matter independently of the sign, and free it from denotation' and she states that 'it is this *eminently parodic* gesture that changes the system.'²⁹ If going beyond the normal function of language is seen as useful by Kristeva, moving beyond the normal locus of selfhood is essential. This is not always an easy process, but it is fruitful and as Kristeva argues in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, loss of a whole selfhood can be difficult, yet it

²⁶ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 29-34(33.124)

²⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 13.

²⁸ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 16.

²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 31.

allows the possibility of a metaphysical distance or exile that allows one to understand one's own difference and that of others in a more enlightened manner (much in the manner of Irigaray's third space). I concentrate on the ideas within *Black Sun* to illuminate my reading of Lewis' poems and *Strangers to Ourselves* is a frame through which to analyse Petit's poetry. As in the case of Rees-Jones (read through the matrix of Irigaray), Lewis and Petit reach beyond their own personal circumstances as women with a connection to Wales, to discuss difference and otherness in other contexts. Like Sally Minogue in her essay 'Prescriptions and Proscriptions: Feminist Poetry and Contemporary Poetry,' Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones seem to realise that 'poetry can't simply be cut off in a feminist chunk and severed from the rest of the body of poetry.'³⁰

Debates in feminism about exploring otherness in all its configurations, have also encouraged theorising in Wales about the value of a narrow Welsh identity. In 2003, Richard Gwyn edited an anthology titled *The Pterodactyl's Wing: Welsh World Poetry*, and in his preface, he explains that he rejects the melancholia of poets like R.S. Thomas who deny the presence of mystical pterodactyls in the supposed cultural deficit of Wales. He also explains the subtitle, 'Welsh World Poetry,' and indicates that, in his choice of poets, he is less interested in nationalism and more concerned with representing poets that offer 'an outward-looking Welshness, or at times an exile's view of Wales, written from beyond our borders and inciting a deeper reflection on what Welsh poetry is and might be.'³¹ Some critics have reacted negatively to such a notion, such as David Kennedy, who, reviewing *The Pterodactyl's Wing* for *Planet: the*

³⁰ Sally Minogue, 'Prescriptions and Proscriptions: Feminist Poetry and Contemporary Poetry,' *Problems for Feminist Criticism*, ed. Sally Minogue (London: Routledge, 1990), 184 -919 (194).

³¹ Richard Gwyn, 'A Preface in Fragments,' *The Pterodactyl's Wing: Welsh World Poetry*, ed. Richard Gwyn (Cardigan: Parthian, 2003), xix – xxxvii (xxix). It is no coincidence that one of the poets featured in this thesis, Pascale Petit, appears in *The Pterodactyl's Wing*, while Gwyneth Lewis is mentioned in the preface. The three poets included in my study all encapsulate Gwyn's notion of 'an outward-looking Welshness.'

Welsh Internationalist, is frustrated because the poetry included in the anthology is apparently ‘too wide to be included under anything called Welshness’ and he concludes that ‘Gwyn’s new Welshness is either culturally meaningless or identifiable only as a kind of “don’t mention the war” embarrassment.’³² However, other critics such as Kirsti Bohata have found diversity and confusion about ‘Welshness’ to be a positive thing. In her essay ‘A Place Without Boundaries,’ Bohata notes that ‘the multiplicity of Welsh voices, of “languages”, of worldviews, is increasingly being embraced as central to contemporary Welsh identity.’³³ Bohata rejects a project of creating a whole and bounded Welsh selfhood and instead offers difference and variety as gifts for artists: ‘Rather than searching for “one voice” that will unify us, artists and commentators alike are beginning to see that the multiple inheritances of Wales, the differences and diversity contained within its borders, are a great source of strength, vitality and creativity.’³⁴

What seems to be the real problem with such a view of Welsh literary identity is whether a poetics of exile can maintain the political urgency that has been characteristic of Welsh nationalism. This is evidenced by Daniel G. Williams’ response to Chris Williams’ essay, ‘Problematizing Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality.’ Chris Williams rejects ‘monoculturism’ and he directs the reader towards the notion of ‘postnationality’³⁵ derived from critics in the Subaltern Studies Collective. In contrast to postnationality, nationalism works, ‘by “othering,” by

³² David Kennedy, ‘Towards Post-Welshness?’ rev. of *The Pterodactyl’s Wing* ed. Richard Gwyn, *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist* 162 (2004): 98-100 (100).

³³ Kirsti Bohata, ‘A Place Without Boundaries,’ *Planet, the Welsh Internationalist* 145 (2001). 77-82 (82).

³⁴ Bohata, ‘A Place Without Boundaries,’ 82.

³⁵ Chris Williams uses ‘post-colonial’ and ‘post-nation’ to signify ‘a particular period or epoch (literally, after colonialism [...])’ or after nationality, and ‘postcolonial’ or ‘postnation’ in relation to theoretical issues (surrounding colonial rule, post-colonial development and the processes of the nation state). See: Chris Williams, ‘Problematizing Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality,’ *Postcolonial Wales*, ed. Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 3-22 (3-4).

identifying borders between “us” and “them”.³⁶ It is these ‘reactive and essentialist binarisms’ that ‘erect psychological barriers between peoples, excite unnecessary antagonisms towards others, and render marginal or invisible those whose characteristics do not fit those of the imagined nation.’³⁷ Williams’ vision of ‘post-national Wales’ offers ‘a partially autonomous Wales where that autonomy has a liberating effect for all citizens, and not just for those who subscribe to conventional views of what the characteristics and direction of that nation-state should be.’³⁸ This society would reject ‘the notion of a homogenous nation-state with singular forms of belonging, in favour of inclusivity and diversity.’³⁹ In his review of the volume, *Postcolonial Wales*, in which Chris Williams’ essay appeared, Daniel G. Williams recognises that Chris Williams is adopting ‘a language of marginality, difference, borders, otherness, diversity, ambivalence,’ yet he is concerned about how such an ideology would work practically in the world.⁴⁰ Daniel G. Williams suggests that ‘to assume (as Chris Williams and some of the contributors [...] seem to do) that a nationalist should change his views in the light of the fact that Wales sent Members of Parliament to Westminster [...] is to misunderstand the nature of radical politics.’⁴¹ While Daniel G. Williams may have a point in questioning how such a philosophy could be deployed in relation to activism in the world, the construction of a poetics devoted to postnationality and exiled from a narrow idea of Welshness is central to the argument of this thesis.⁴² While Daniel G. Williams and Kennedy reveal anxiety about

³⁶ Williams, ‘Problematizing Wales,’ 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁰ Daniel G. Williams, ‘Back to a National Future? Wales and Postcolonialism,’ rev. of *Postcolonial Wales* ed. Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist* 176 (2006): 78-85 (81).

⁴¹ Williams, ‘Back to a National Future?’ 81.

⁴² It is for this reason that where I do construct a picture of a specifically Welsh literary approach, I draw not on models of a national literature, but on models of marginality. For example, in the chapter on Lewis, I use Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s model of a minor literature, a theory that imagines

whether a postnational consciousness can be political, I argue that in the work of Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones, the resulting poems offer a political view of marginality beyond specificity and open to otherness. This kind of poet should be, according to Gwyn, ‘fascinated by borders, the liminal, the spaces between things, and intrigued by the vicissitudes of parenthood that allocate to each of us a particular cultural identity over and above any other of the hundreds available on this planet.’⁴³ He or she must be, ‘detached as well as being a part of the things they detach from.’⁴⁴ This poet is both a native and an exile, one and an other.

If detachment from a whole, straightforward Welsh identity has been a problem for writers and critics, estrangement from the Welsh language, *Cymraeg*, has also been a difficult issue. The texts analysed in this study are all written in the English language, although Lewis did write only in *Cymraeg* at the beginning of her career and has written further *Cymraeg* collections. Lewis’ choice to write in English is significant in relation to my argument about exile and so I focus only on her English-language poetry in this study. It is worth noting that I avoid the term, ‘Anglo-Welsh,’ to describe these writers, as I feel that the term might suggest, as Jeremy Hooker notes in *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English*, a ‘negative implication of only being half Welsh.’⁴⁵ Such narrow views of what it might mean to be a ‘Welsh’ subject and how a ‘Welsh’ poem might be written are increasingly being challenged by poets of Wales.⁴⁶ As Kathryn Gray writes in her essay, ‘At Home and Abroad,’ the kind of

a minor culture in the process of subverting a more dominative culture. I summarise this model at the end of this chapter and I describe it in detail in ‘Chapter 2: Becoming Minor: Gwyneth Lewis’ Journey into Decreation’ (see p. 5).

⁴³ Gwyn, ‘A Preface in Fragments,’ xxii.

⁴⁴ Ibid., xxii.

⁴⁵ Hooker, Jeremy, *Imagining Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 6.

⁴⁶ Although I reject the term, ‘Anglo-Welsh,’ I do later highlight Petit’s Welsh-French heritage. However, I want to make it clear that these two terms are very different in the way that they define poets. ‘Anglo-Welsh’ is a term forced on writers who may have never visited England, but whose lack of

poetry being produced in Wales is now ‘unclassifiably various,’ challenging any notion of ‘a true “Welsh” seam of poetry.’⁴⁷ All of the poets in this thesis believe themselves to have an intimate relationship with Welsh culture and yet they all make challenges to conventional ideas of what Welsh poetry should be: Lewis by moving beyond *Cymraeg* language and culture; Petit by studying contexts for marginality in Central and South America; and Rees-Jones by writing a narrative of marginality beyond the specific context of Wales. Like Gray, as a critic, I am ‘delighted and confused’ by such developments, because this poetry resists shoring up the certainty of past teleologies and rather than internalising the lost certainty or mourning it, these poets embrace such loss.⁴⁸

Yet if such developments exist, how have they come about and what has provoked them? In this introduction, I want to initially lay the foundations for my analysis by offering a brief account of the development of Welsh poetry in English from the 1940s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, the period in which the poets featured in this study are working.⁴⁹ To do so, I draw on Wendy Wheeler’s study, *A New Modernity?*, which argues that the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century imposed its ‘analytic, dissecting and calculating mathematical spirit’ onto Western society before it had the tools to deal with this change.⁵⁰ Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Wheeler suggests that the resulting modernity was a

Cymraeg condemns them to be tainted by Englishness. This is very different to my definition of Petit as Welsh-French, because she actually does have equal experience of the two cultures and each one has had an influence on her poems.

⁴⁷ Kathryn Gray, ‘At Home and Abroad,’ *The New Welsh Review* 76 (2007): 27-36 (36).

⁴⁸ Gray, ‘At Home and Abroad,’ 36.

⁴⁹ The specific period that I will be focusing on in this study is between the years 1994 to 2005. All three writers came to prominence in this period. Lewis published her three English language collections in: 1995 – *Parables and Faxes*, 1998 – *Zero Gravity*, and 2004 – *Keeping Mum*. Petit began by publishing *The Heart of a Deer* (1998) and followed up with *The Zoo Father* (2001) and *The Wounded Deer* (2005). (She also published *The Huntress* in 2005 and while I cannot study it in detail, I do refer to it in passing). Rees-Jones’ debut collection, *The Memory Tray*, came out in 1994, while *Signs Around a Dead Body* appeared in 1998 and *Quiver* was published in 2004. It is interesting to note in passing that by the end of this ten year period, all three poets had been listed as ‘Next Generation’ poets by the Poetry Book Society.

⁵⁰ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 11.

melancholic one that internalised its object of loss and so became stuck in a cycle of self-punishment. With reference to Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, Wheeler suggests that such an internalisation equals, 'an intensification of deathliness (hatred, unbinding, atomisation and alienation) which will spell an end to the Enlightenment dream of progress.'⁵¹ Beyond modern melancholia, Wheeler sees possibilities in the coda of postmodernism which is able to mourn the lost object of cultural certainty. However, the real answer to Wheeler's question about a possible new Enlightenment emerges from a return to the mother, to the emotional aspects of human life in the late twentieth century and to a desire for balance between emotion and reason. In Wheeler's view, developments in science, literature and politics might reach towards an 'ecological' philosophy which emphasises that human beings are 'richly obscure affective creatures who are what we are because we are absolutely embedded in natural and social worlds.'⁵²

I proceed by using Wheeler's model to display the development of Welsh poetry through melancholy modernity of R.S. Thomas (1913 – 2000), the coda of postmodernism's mourning in the poetry of Dylan Thomas (1914 – 1953) and Gillian Clarke's (born 1937) return to the mother.⁵³ The first section is titled, 'Melancholy Modernity' and it focuses on how R.S. Thomas' poetry enacts a melancholic posturing that laments the loss of nineteenth-century teleologies and internalises that loss to create an uncanny, melancholic speaker. 'Cathartic Postmodernism' considers the work of the poet, Dylan Thomas, in relation to Wheeler's specific definition of

⁵¹ Ibid., 23.

⁵² Ibid., 160.

⁵³ I am well aware that R.S. Thomas' first published works appeared after Dylan Thomas' death, but Wheeler's model is not necessarily a linear one. R.S. Thomas and Dylan Thomas represent two traditions of poetry in Wales that are carried on by poets working today. Although I do not have the space to complete a full analysis here, I suggest that poets of melancholia writing in the English language in Wales might be Jeremy Hooker (born 1941) and Ifor Thomas (born 1949). Poets of mourning following Dylan Thomas' example could be Alun Lewis (1915 – 1944), John Powell Ward (born 1937) and Robert Minhinnick (born 1952).

postmodernism in which the subject is initially trapped in a punitive state of mourning but later discovers a healthy kind of mourning that is restorative. Finally, 'The Return to the Mother' uses the poems of Gillian Clarke to map out the return to the mother as a figure of possibility for the experience of culture.

I argue that out of the representations of modernity presented by the trends outlined above, emerges the ecological sensibility of Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones (the term "ecological" being used here in its sense as networking rather than simply describing environmental concerns). In my reading of Wheeler, such an ecological philosophy can only be constructed by going beyond one's own personal context and making ecological connections between oneself and others, between a specific cultural situation and the world, featuring different marginal landscapes and identities. The poets to be discussed in this thesis all perform this exiling action embedded in the ecological sensibility. As a culture embedded in Western civilization, Wales has suffered the same trials as any other post-Enlightenment culture and I argue that Wheeler's model is useful in tracing developing literary attitudes as to how the margin and the centre might successfully discover kinship breaking down the boundaries between one and other to create a dialogue on a more equal footing.

Part II: The Path to Ecology

Melancholy Modernity

At the beginning of *A New Modernity?*, Wheeler gives a definition of modernity as 'an essentially melancholic response to the loss of traditional beliefs.'⁵⁴ Wheeler describes this sensibility emerging after the Enlightenment beginning in the 'opposition between the individual and the whole, or between the individualist,

⁵⁴ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 8.

atomising and mechanistic view (essentially utilitarianism), and the organicist view associated with Romanticism.⁵⁵ Turning to Sigmund Freud, Wheeler considers the binary responses to trauma described in his essay, 'Mourning and Melancholia.'⁵⁶ Wheeler explains that, in Freud's theory, the subject either responds with healthy mourning or with a feeling of object loss manifesting itself in 'aggression [...] directed towards the self because the relation to the source of loss or betrayal (whether a person or an idea) is narcissistic: that is to say, there is an overidentification with the lost loved thing, which is "saved" from final departure by being psychically introjected.'⁵⁷ As Freud puts it, melancholia is 'a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance and a reduction in the sense of self.'⁵⁸ Wheeler's reading of Freud is keen to stress that the lost object that causes melancholia might be 'a person or an idea' and she soon extends this theory of melancholia and mourning to apply to culture after finding a gap in the thinking of Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Wheeler explains that it is in *Civilization and its Discontents* that Freud ponders what would happen should the 'internalisation of aggressivity (in the form of the superego)' prove 'intolerable.'⁵⁹ Freud considers a 'fateful question for the human race' about 'whether, and to what extent, the development of its civilization will manage to overcome the disturbance of communal life caused by the human drive for aggression and self-destruction.'⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁶ Reproduced in Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005), 201 - 218.

⁵⁷ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 20.

⁵⁸ Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, 204.

⁵⁹ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 23.

⁶⁰ Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, 106.

In Wales, one poet that might represent this trend towards 'deathliness' is R.S. Thomas, a poet who seems to fulfil the symptoms of object loss as described by Wheeler in relation to the loss of a culture of certainty. Thomas' typical pose is described by Tony Brown in his study, *R.S. Thomas*, as 'detached, looking on, or looking in from the outside, aware of himself as an outsider, deracinated, and seeking some sense of involvement in a way of life which would give him a sense of belonging, a place which could allow him to *be*, to realize himself, emotionally, imaginatively and spiritually, a place which would give him a sense of home.'⁶¹ As a poet *and* priest, R.S. Thomas' role might have been to shore up the certainty of the Christian teleology, yet his poetry is full of melancholy longing, regret and uncertainty concerning the self and Welsh identity.

In fact, Brown's reading in *R.S. Thomas* concords very closely with Wheeler's vision of the melancholic modern subject. Noting Wales' history partly as a site of industry and capitalism from the period after the Enlightenment to the mid twentieth century, Brown is very aware of the struggle in Thomas' poetry in accepting the effects of mechanisation and utilitarianism. According to Brown, Thomas' poetry often takes a melancholic view of such developments and Brown notices the role of the machine in Thomas' melancholy. Brown compares the motif of the machine to Ted Hughes' *Crow*, a juxtaposition that is particularly interesting since Thomas' *H'M* seems to have been influenced by *Crow*.⁶² However, Brown states that, 'whereas *Crow* seems to represent a determined and ineradicable natural energy, Thomas' Machine represents the life-denying capacity of the mechanical.'⁶³ In *H'M*, the wheels of the machine turn

⁶¹ Tony Brown, *R.S. Thomas*, The Writers of Wales Series (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 4-5.

⁶² Ted Hughes' *Crow* was published in 1970 and R.S. Thomas' *H'M* appeared just two years later in 1972.

⁶³ Brown, *R.S. Thomas*, 75.

'[o]ver the creeds/ And masterpieces' of the poem, 'No Answer,' indicating that the mechanical denies beauty, art and culture.⁶⁴ The 'Machine' also manifests itself in poems such as 'Cynddylan on a Tractor' and 'On the Farm' in which it is linked to the degeneration of humankind:

There was Llew Puw, and he was no good.
Every evening after the ploughing
With the big tractor he would sit in his chair,
And stare into the tangled fire garden,
Opening his slow lips like a snail.⁶⁵

In 'On the Farm,' as in other poems, the modernity of the efficient, mechanistic tractor is linked to the degeneration of the farmer whose listless stare and snail-like lips signify his inner depravity. Reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's 'Apeneck Sweeney,'⁶⁶ Thomas' creation of Llew Puw and other degenerate labourers, such as Iago Prytherch, represent not only 'the industrial and technological processes by which our modern world is run' but also 'the materialistic, commercial attitudes which are the result.'⁶⁷

Yet Brown also recognises that encounters with 'Iago and the other labourers and farmers' are figured 'in terms of Thomas' own insecurity of identity.'⁶⁸ In 'A Peasant,' although Thomas initially expresses disgust at Iago's 'half-witted grin / Of satisfaction,' he comes to realise that 'this is your prototype, who, season by season / Against siege of rain and the wind's attrition, / Preserves his stock.'⁶⁹ Drawing on Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* or 'uncanny,' a quality of strangeness and familiarity, Brown sees 'Iago, the reader and, implicitly the poet' as 'not different but connected; one might indeed argue that what we have here is another aspect of the uncanny [...]

⁶⁴ R.S. Thomas, 'No Answer,' *HM* (London: Macmillan, 1972) 7-8 (7.19-20).

⁶⁵ R.S. Thomas, 'On the Farm,' *R.S. Thomas*, 1996, ed. Anthony Thwaite, Everyman's Poetry Series (London: J.M. Dent, 2001), 58 (58.6-10).

⁶⁶ T.S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales,' *The Wasteland and Other Poems*, 1940 (London: Faber, 1990), 19-20 (19.1).

⁶⁷ Brown, *R.S. Thomas*, 75.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁹ R.S. Thomas, 'A Peasant,' *R.S. Thomas*, 1996, ed. Anthony Thwaite, Everyman's Poetry Series (London: J.M. Dent, 2001), 3 (3.5-6, 3.17-19).

when something that we normally repress in ourselves is revealed.’⁷⁰ Brown’s reading of Thomas’ divided self lends itself well to the melancholy modernity described by Wheeler, in which the subject internalises a lost object: in this case, the certainty of previous teleologies.

At one point in her argument, Wheeler suggests that a symptom of utilitarian modernity and its deathliness is what psychologists call the ‘as if’ personality, or a ‘false self’ characterised by depersonalisation and uncertainty of identity.⁷¹ In such a state, the subject plays out the part that they think *should* be played without really experiencing any *affective* results. Similarly, Brown sees Thomas as ‘detached from the world around him’ and even while ‘he records its loveliness,’ his description is full of ‘its sheer monotony and the ultimately illusory nature of such beauty.’⁷² One might take the example of ‘Judgment Day,’ a poem in which Thomas describes from the mirror a ‘bony figure’ and he longs for God to ‘breathe once more/ On that sad mirror,’ so he can ‘be lost / In mist for ever.’⁷³ While the poem is certainly involved with representing uncertainty of identity, Brown believes that it is also bound up with the poet’s sense of his own uncanniness, that synthesis of the strange and the familiar: ‘We hardly need Freud to enable us to see that Thomas’ poem is about the operation of conscience; however, when the operation of the conscience becomes particularly acute and stressful, [...] [it] becomes a source of profound self division and insecurity.’⁷⁴ For Brown, ‘Judgment Day’ is not simply ‘a confessional poem,’ but it ‘manifests a sense of anxiety about identity, a sense of the poet’s feeling “not-at-home”

⁷⁰ Brown, *R.S. Thomas*, 68. See p.5 in ‘Chapter 4: The Way of Love: The Third Space Between Belonging and Exile in Deryn Rees-Jones’ *Quiver*’ for an in-depth account of uncanniness.

⁷¹ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 40.

⁷² Brown, *R.S. Thomas*, 53.

⁷³ R.S. Thomas, ‘Judgment Day,’ *Selected Poems 1946 – 1968*, 1973 (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994) 64 (64.3, 64.11-14).

⁷⁴ Brown, *R.S. Thomas*, 46.

in his life.’⁷⁵ This deathly or uncanny selfhood is typified in Thomas’ autobiography in verse, *The Echoes Return Slow*, in which doubt and loss of the self are powerful emotions:

In a dissolving
world what certainties
for the self, whose identity
is its performance?⁷⁶

As teleologies disappear, Thomas wonders how the individual self can survive and it seems that he has internalised the loss of faith and unity in the modern world.

This uncertainty is not eradicated in Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones, the poets studied in this thesis, and indeed, their poetry proceeds from the question of how to be at home in the world and how to be at home in one’s self. However, this thesis argues that Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones have progressed beyond the melancholy modernity of Thomas’ poetry, so that when they do deal with “unhomeliness”, uncanniness becomes a liberating strategy rather than a source of uncertainty. Like Thomas, Lewis’ poetry represents distress at the loss of cultural certainty (in her case relating to the diminishment of *Cymraeg* as in some of Thomas’ poems), but for Lewis, the breaking down of the self and the embracing of nothingness is a necessary step on a path to spiritual enlightenment. Petit deals with “unhomeliness” particularly in relation to the supposedly “savage” tribes of the Amazon and she implies that Western culture cannot use “barbarous” tribes as a mirror for its own sophistication, because its own culture is often primitive. Similarly, Deryn Rees-Jones uses uncanniness as a tool of knowledge, since its uncertainty, between life and death, between one and another, offers possibilities for human progress. These poets have developed the questions of loss addressed by writers like R.S. Thomas, but rather than maintaining a restrictive

⁷⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁶ R.S. Thomas, *The Echoes Return Slow* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 33.15-18.

view of what modernity might offer, they recognise the benefits of uncertainty and out of postmodern mourning, there emerges a new view of what it might mean to be a human subject in a modern world.

Cathartic Postmodernism

According to Wheeler, the ethos of the postmodern emerges directly out of the deathly depersonalisation inherent in modernity. Wheeler's version of postmodernism (which, while linked to a literary definition, is separate in its theorising referring to a kind of culture), envisions it as 'a coda to modernity inasmuch as it restages cultural grieving in all its potential aspects, but at a new level of intensity – both in punitive melancholic modes and also, latterly, in tentative attempts at wholesome mourning.'⁷⁷ Wheeler describes the 'initial cultural symptoms' as following on from this state since they manifested 'a nostalgic attempt – sometimes ironic or parodic [...] – to refuse modernism's futurism and to hold on to the past.'⁷⁸ Wheeler also suggests that postmodernism's 'theoretical languages [...] were punitive in their view of human beings, as fragmented and decentred.'⁷⁹ However the 'second stage of postmodernism' is more positive because it is 'orientated towards the future, towards ways of rethinking human beings as whole souls in a newly-conceived world, and towards a "postmodern" rebuilding which might constitute a true mourning of what was lost in the first modernity.'⁸⁰ It is from the 'second stage of postmodernity' that 'ways of thinking about the world' might be found.⁸¹ Wheeler suggests that in postmodern texts, there is 'a brush with a sublimely (that is to say traumatically)

⁷⁷ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

unbinding apprehension' and the point is to 'make sense of present terror.'⁸²

Postmodernity 'involves the attempt to move from a failed mourning to a successful one.'⁸³

Dylan Thomas is not necessarily thought of as a postmodernist in literary criticism and yet he might fit Wheeler's definition of postmodernity as embedded in processes of grieving and mourning. Wheeler's definition is not the same as a literary definition of postmodernism, but it follows on from one aspect of the literary term which is 'nostalgia.'⁸⁴ Nostalgia, of course, refers to sentimental recollections that conjure feelings of happiness and sadness in remembering a person, object or idea from the past. Nostalgia then perfectly sums up the feeling of Wheeler's postmodernism, which is a kind of mourning that, on the one hand, is painful and detrimental in remembering the past and, on the other hand, positive in the closure that it achieves and the future that it offers.⁸⁵

Thomas' poetry is full of nostalgia for the beginnings of life and looking back to the origins of human beings is a means to mourn the current fallen human state. As William T. Moynihan suggests in *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas*, Thomas progresses 'from an obsession with genesis and womb' as the infant is born into a journey towards death towards 'the objective world that suffers and loves' (representing a fall much like that in the Biblical book of *Genesis*).⁸⁶ Thomas' poetry then might be thought of as a kind of mourning, since in Moynihan's words, he represents '[t]he anguish of a creation whose end is decay, and of a fallen world characterized by a fatal

⁸² Ibid., 18.

⁸³ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁵ I want to make it clear at this point that I am not arguing that Thomas is postmodern in terms of the literary definition, but in terms of Wheeler's culture-orientated definition. Therefore, when I describe the poetry of Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones as coming after the postmodern, I am still taking in terms of Wheeler's cultural model and not a literary one.

⁸⁶ William T. Moynihan, *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 222.

marriage to sex and time and by the opposition of flesh and spirit.⁸⁷ Consequently, in one of his most eponymous poems, 'Fern Hill,' Thomas laments the decomposition of the human body that begins an irrevocable journey towards death from birth onwards: 'Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means, / Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea.'⁸⁸ This mourning extends to the fragmentation of the poet himself, who presents his 'craft and sullen art' that brings 'no praise or wages.'⁸⁹ In poems like 'In my craft and sullen art,' Thomas wonders what place there can be for a poet in a society where 'the strut and trade of charms' mask 'the grief of ages.'⁹⁰

The painful mourning in Thomas' poetry might represent the first stage of mourning in Wheeler's formulation of postmodernity, yet some of his poems also have aspects of the second stage that, proceeding from the mournful past, looks into the future and builds new possibilities for human beings. Moynihan is right to note that 'the dominant tone of the later poetry is restorative' and that it 'becomes reconciled in a gigantic body which creates and recreates deathlessly.'⁹¹ Thomas' later poems, such as 'In Country Sleep,' are particularly bound up with mourning and in his essay, 'In Country Heaven: Dylan Thomas and Rilke,' Eric J. Sundquist offers a comparison between Thomas' later poems and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*.⁹² Sundquist suggests that both Rilke and Thomas 'inhabit poetic landscapes which, if not governed

⁸⁷ Moynihan, *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas*, 264.

⁸⁸ Dylan Thomas, 'Fern Hill,' *Collected Poems: 1934 – 1953*, 1988, ed. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), 134-135 (135.52-54).

⁸⁹ Dylan Thomas, 'In my Craft and Sullen Art,' *Collected Poems: 1934 – 1953*, 1988, ed. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), 106 (106.8, 106.18).

⁹⁰ Thomas, 'In my Craft and Sullen Art,' 106.8, 106.18.

⁹¹ Moynihan, *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas*, 264.

⁹² It is significant that Sundquist finds Rilke to be working on a similar project to Thomas, since Rilke's poetry and particularly his idea of the angel, are important to Lewis and Rees-Jones in their representations of marginality, difference and possibilities for a human future. As I will detail in their specific chapters, both Lewis and to some extent, Rees-Jones, draw on Rilke's angels from the *Duino Elegies*.

by exactly the same theological assumptions, are markedly alike in their terrain,' as they 'explore a borderline realm inhabited by the living and the dead.'⁹³ This 'realm' is simultaneously 'an interior psychological construct' and a 'conjectured external world,' so that it applies both to a personal state of mind and an imagined version of reality.⁹⁴

In 'In Country Sleep,' this poetic landscape is the backcloth for the play of mourning, as Thomas presents a sleeping female figure loved by the narrator and threatened by the "Thief."⁹⁵ The Thief "[c]omes designed to my love to steal not her tide raking / Wound, nor her riding high, nor her eyes, nor kindled hair, / But her faith that each vast night and the saga of prayer / He comes to take."⁹⁶ The Thief comes to take the sleeper's faith in certainty and fate, yet a number of items remain: her fertility (in the moon cycles that define 'her tide raking /Wound'); her sense of her own autonomy and her desires ('her riding high'); her own vision ('her eyes'); and the possibility of combusting into another mode of being via the sexual image of 'her kindled hair.' Sundquist describes this 'country heaven' as offering 'praise of what is and what could be on this lump in the skies,' a statement that concords with Wheeler's account of the second stage of postmodernism, in which hopes for a new future and rebuilding are expressed.⁹⁷ In the poetry of Rilke and Thomas, Sundquist sees a desire to reconstruct an idea of 'home' by 'making everything into it, by animating life with the surging existence of the dead and reading the earth as a transparent script of what has gone before and what is to come.'⁹⁸ To make this happen though dictates a recapitulation which 'becomes a means of transformed redemption for Thomas, and

⁹³ Eric J. Sundquist, 'In Country Heaven: Dylan Thomas and Rilke,' *Comparative Literature* 31.1 (1979): 63-78 (63).

⁹⁴ Sundquist, 'In Country Heaven,' 63.

⁹⁵ Dylan Thomas, 'In Country Sleep,' *Collected Poems: 1934 – 1953*, 1988, ed. Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), 139-142 (141.93).

⁹⁶ Thomas, 'In Country Sleep,' 142.100-104.

⁹⁷ Sundquist, 'In Country Heaven,' 72.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

to a lesser extent for Rilke.’⁹⁹ Sundquist notes that while ‘Rilke is always on the verge of achieving the invisible earth, always near a passage into the space of angels, but not quite over the border,’ Thomas finds this possibility in his ‘country heaven’ which represents the reciprocity of life and death, remembrance and desire, rise and fall.’¹⁰⁰ What makes Thomas different from Rilke, is what makes him fit Wheeler’s definition of postmodernism. While Rilke is left in an unbearable gesture towards the possibility of achieving his goal, Thomas is able to build possibilities for a human future through the process of mourning which manifests itself in the contradictory emotions of nostalgia.

The feelings associated with nostalgia are similar to those of homesickness and what the process of mourning offers Thomas is the possibility of finding a new home in a possible future. In some parts of their poetry, Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones suffer the contradictory emotions of nostalgia and homesickness and they do engage with the notion of constructing new possibilities out of the mourning of the past. Lewis engages with the diminishment of the Welsh language, *Cymraeg*, by writing in a kind of deterritorialized English idiom, while her exile into poetic nothingness rejects previous clinging to a concept of Welsh nationality and embraces a more universal expression of what it is to be marginal. Petit breaks out of the mourning concerning Wales’ place in the context of the UK and rather than always looking to England or Britain to explore her identity, she turns to the continent of Latin America. Rees-Jones’ novel-in-verse, *Quiver*, begins in a state of mourning for a murder victim but her heroine soon discovers that there are new possibilities for a human future through the scientific practice of cloning, a process beyond the normal routine of life and death. However, although these poets emerge out of a literary sense of mourning, their poetics are also

⁹⁹ Ibid., 76-77.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 77.

influenced by the theorising of specific others, such as women, and inspiration is gleaned from consideration of how women can make a place for themselves in the production of culture and modernity.

The Return to the Mother

During and after the mourning of postmodernism, Wheeler suggests that the figure of the mother becomes particularly important in thinking about the possibilities for Western cultures. She notes how in post-war psychoanalysis, the mother is both a subject 'within the localised dynamic of the family and *also* a powerful figure for the possibility of cultural experience generally.'¹⁰¹ Symbols of mothering in psychoanalysis were developed alongside the study of a growing number of borderline cases and it was suggested that the false selves of brutalising modernity might be produced as a result of insufficient 'mothering.' Wheeler recognises that this post-war theorising did not argue that 'men cannot be nurturing,' but that 'modernity makes something particularly distressing of normative masculinity.'¹⁰² Wheeler sees the 'transitional space' described by Donald Winnicott as extremely significant in thinking about the return of the mother. Winnicott outlines 'transitional space' in his study *Playing and Reality* in which he suggests that a space for the play of the transitional object ('the first not-me possession') initiates one into 'the interplay between there being nothing but me and there being objects and phenomena outside omnipotent control.'¹⁰³ Wheeler praises Winnicottian space because it is 'making space for the mother's way of doing things' and it synthesises 'both an anarchic, playful capacity *and* a law-making one, in

¹⁰¹ Wheeler. *A New Modernity?*, 53.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰³ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 1971 (London: Routledge, 1990), 96, 100.

which some semantic symbolic stability is also achieved.¹⁰⁴ In Winnicottian transitive space, ‘the infant finds a way of being merged with the mother, finds a way of projecting itself into the world as a symbol (transitional object) of the mother.’¹⁰⁵ In its ideal state, this space is anti-patriarchal, since the mother acts as the ‘upholder of the law’ and ‘a *subversive*’ who helps the child to construct a creative ‘work of mourning’ which can be ‘a work of art’ and ‘a communicative action in the real world.’¹⁰⁶ What is most interesting is that Western culture might be read in terms of Winnicott’s theorising, since as he suggests in *Playing and Reality*, in investigating ‘the cultural life of the individual,’ it is helpful to ‘study the fate of the potential space between any one baby and human (and therefore fallible) mother-figure.’¹⁰⁷

The interest in the mother in Welsh literature intensified at the time of the second-wave feminist movement with its emphasis on matrilineage and “learning from our mothers”. In Wales, the rise of feminist movement was particularly urgent, since as Delyth George states in ‘The strains of transition: contemporary Welsh-language novelists,’ ‘Welsh literature before the latter half of the twentieth century is considered to have been something of a male preserve.’¹⁰⁸ In ‘Women, Criticism and the Anglo-Welsh,’ Kenneth Smith identifies the rise of feminist literary criticism as extremely relevant to Welsh writing in English and he suggests that feminist theory was initially sidelined in Wales, ‘because Anglo-Welsh critics have been reluctant to break new ground or deal with problems which are universal rather than regional.’¹⁰⁹ Jane Aaron

¹⁰⁴ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 55.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 100. Winnicott emphasises that the mother is fallible here, because he realises that his ideal state of transitional play is not always realised and his study also devotes space to considering what happens when mothering is not fully achieved.

¹⁰⁸ Delyth George, ‘The Strains of Transition: Contemporary Welsh-language Novelists,’ *Our Sister’s Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, ed. Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vicentelli (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), 199-213 (199).

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth R. Smith, ‘Women, Criticism and the Anglo-Welsh,’ *Poetry Wales* 24.3 (1988): 46 -52 (50).

reiterates Smith's thoughts in 'Finding a voice in two tongues: gender and colonization.' In Aaron's view, feminist criticism 'is still frequently viewed with suspicion by Welsh-identified communities as an alien and divisive Anglo-American phenomenon,' but she suggests that 'its influence has, since the seventies, combined interestingly with a resurgence of confidence in Welshness to produce a new and strong female voice within both the Welsh and English-language cultures of Wales.'¹¹⁰

In 'The Portrait Poem: the Reproduction of Mothering,' Kenneth Smith addresses the rise of interest in the figure of the mother in poetry by women of Wales, drawing on Ruth Bidgood (born 1922), Sally Roberts-Jones (born 1935), and especially Gillian Clarke (born 1937). Smith begins by contrasting the 'portrait poem,' a familiar genre in Welsh poetry that deals with individual human experience, and the traditional Welsh praise poem. While praise poems are 'extraordinary, beyond reality or life, and are aimed at social memory,' portrait poems are usually 'critical or satirical, they deal with the ordinary, and are aimed at social reproduction.'¹¹¹ According to Smith, Clarke's portrait poems are 'significantly different [...] because they show motherhood from a personal, self-revealing stance which initiates the reader into the conflicts of a woman tied to her children and the hostilities between a mother and daughter.'¹¹² Smith's reading draws on theorists of mothering such as Melanie Klein, Nan Bauer Maglin and Nancy Chodorow, to interpret the daughter's rebellion against the silence in Clarke's poems. However, I suggest that Clarke's poems can also be read in relation to Wheeler's theory of the mother figure developing to take on mother/father roles and offering the transitional space of play for its dependents. In 'Catrin,' Clarke's

¹¹⁰ Jane Aaron, 'Finding a voice in two tongues: gender and colonization,' *Our Sister's Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, ed. Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vicentelli (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), 183-198 (183-184).

¹¹¹ Kenneth R. Smith, 'The Reproduction of Mothering,' *Poetry Wales* 24.1 (1988): 48-54 (48).

¹¹² Smith, 'The Reproduction of Mothering,' 52.

vision of the mother presents her in the mother/father role suggested by Wheeler. She has a traditional father's role in the '[f]ierce confrontation' of law-making signified by the binding 'Red rope of love which we both / Fought over.'¹¹³ Yet she also provides transitive spaces of play, such as 'a square / Environmental blank' in which the mother can write 'All over the walls with my / Words.'¹¹⁴ It is interesting that it is the mother who is pictured playing in the space, rather than the child, which suggests that the speaker is also trying to find a space for her own mothering. However, being a law-making and enabling mother herself, she also enables the child to develop coherently in 'the wild, tender circles / Of our struggle to become / Separate.'¹¹⁵ While this is not an easy process, the proper mothering allows the daughter to emerge beyond a melancholy modernity or a postmodern mourning into the exciting possibility of the unknown future: 'As you ask may you skate / In the dark, for one more hour.'¹¹⁶ In this poem and others, Clarke's poetics of mothering present the poem itself as a kind of transitional space in which, while the poet sets the rules and laws of how the poem will unfold, there is also space for the reader to play through the rich imagery of the text.

This poetics of mothering is also extended to a cultural level rather than simply dwelling on personal relationships. Clarke's seminal poem, 'Letter From a Far Country,' is a complicated view of the mother-country and Clarke's speaker is a mother to her family *and* the daughter of a country. The poem is an 'apologia' to 'husbands, fathers, forefathers,' a statement that indicates the narrator's rejection of

¹¹³ Gillian Clarke, 'Catrin,' *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), 14 (14.7-9).

¹¹⁴ Clarke, 'Catrin,' 14.9-10, 14.12-13.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.14-16.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.28-29.

patriarchal models.¹¹⁷ The narrative of the poem sets up a conflict between the domestic interior where the narrator takes on a mother's service and the expanse of the nation which mothers the narrator. In the domestic space, the narrator must 'move in and out of the hive / all day, harvesting, ordering.'¹¹⁸ However, in writing her letter, the narrator travels 'far away' to '[h]ill country / essentially feminine.'¹¹⁹ It is this space that offers possibilities for creativity especially when the subject of the 'far country' is working out what that culture means and how she relates to it:

We read this perfectly white page
for the black head of the seal,
for the cormorant, as suddenly gone
as a question from the mind,
snaking under surfaces.
A cross of gull shadow on the sea
as if someone stepped on its grave.¹²⁰

As in 'Catrin,' a blank space for play is represented here by the 'perfectly white page' on which Clarke can experiment in thinking about what her mother-country is. The series of images signals that the 'far country' is unexpected, transitory and difficult to grasp. It lies beneath what is obviously perceptible like the seal's head that emerges from beneath the waves or the cormorant/question that is 'snaking under surfaces.' The glimpsing of the cormorant also suggests that understanding of 'the far country' is fleeting as in the case of the sight of the gull's shadow but not the gull itself. Clarke's explorations are equivalent to those of a child and its mother in Winnicottian space, since they represent a play of '*inner psychic reality*' and '*external reality*,'¹²¹ as the cormorant becomes equivalent to 'a question in the mind.' While the space is one of real objects,

¹¹⁷ Gillian Clarke, 'Letter From a Far Country,' *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), 52-64 (52.8-9).

¹¹⁸ Clarke, 'Letter From a Far Country,' 53.37-38.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.41-43.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.60-67.

¹²¹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 96.

it also allows for objects from the narrator's creative imagination and this play 'expands into creative living and into the whole cultural life of man [or woman].'¹²²

Clarke creates a poetics of mothering that offers a new relationship between the subject and Welsh culture which is neither of melancholy nor mourning, but of making and creating through the relation of mother and child which extends to a cultural context. This move also represents the beginning of recognition of the interconnectedness of things, as Clarke uses a mode of relation (between mother and daughter or culture and native) which is more ambiguous than the simple binary of self and other. Rather, *via* the oceanic space of a vast maternity, a new set of relations is suggested.

This oceanic maternity is the gateway to ecology. Wheeler notes that at the beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud is inspired to write by his protégé, Romain Rolland, who describes a kind of 'oceanic feeling' of 'being indissolubly bound up with and belonging to the whole of the world outside oneself' experienced when the subject is 'informed of his connection with the world around him through an immediate feeling.'¹²³ Although Freud associates this feeling with the connectedness of the child with the mother, he does not provide any comprehensive answer about this 'oceanic feeling.' As Jessica Benjamin states in *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, Freud is uncomfortable about 'the ecstasy of oneness' that oceanic feeling invokes.¹²⁴ However, he does note that the feeling may hark back to a previous mode of being: 'Our present sense of self is [...] only a shrunken residue of a far more comprehensive, indeed all-embracing feeling, which corresponds to a more

¹²² Ibid., 102.

¹²³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2004), 2-3.

¹²⁴ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1990), 141.

intimate bond between the ego and the world around it.¹²⁵ Freud's rejection of the 'oceanic feeling' as a source of spiritual feeling is connected by Wheeler to 'the Freudian focus on the patriarch.'¹²⁶ In Wheeler's view, it is Freud's patriarchal approach with its emphasis on the whole, bounded, separate human being that clouds his view of the oceanic feeling. Developing out of the interconnectedness of the mother and child, oceanic feeling is another manifestation of what Wheeler describes as a sense of ecology, a phrase used in this context to express the same kind of interconnectedness. Journeys beyond a 'normal' idea of selfhood, influenced by the mothering poetics of writers like Clarke, offer new insights into human relations and how one and an other might meet. In the final section of this introduction, I will outline how Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones too forge connections and ecologies so that in spite of a 'sense of unity and autonomy,' their representations of identity 'continue[s] "inward" into the unconscious and [...] outward so that the boundary between self and other is, indeed, blurred.'¹²⁷

Part III: The Success of the Exile

The Interconnectedness of Things

Human reason has asserted its ascendancy before, but, as far as we know, no 'modernity' of antiquity ever brought forth the comprehensive loss of a coherent religious world-view in the manner achieved by European Enlightenment since the seventeenth century. In this radical breaking with tradition, the cultures of the West have increasingly experienced a most terrifying loss of spiritual comfort, ethical certainty and social cohesion, and have been more and more obliged to rely, with considerable courage, on the formidable powers of human reason alone. In the contingency of our particular modernity, we might have mourned better than we did; for all that it has yielded, our dualistic and mechanistic modern world-view finds its counterpart in the drained and reduced vision of the depressive. Our frantic desire has been for the melancholic mastery of an alienated other; and all the

¹²⁵ Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, 6.

¹²⁶ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 30.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

differences which humankind has always recognized – of sex, caste, and the varieties of kinship – have fallen easily, in modern times, into melancholia's world of violent and dualistic splitting.¹²⁸

Near the end of *A New Modernity?*, Wheeler summarises her argument and she suggests that the legacy of European Enlightenment has brought about change never seen before in the recorded human history of the West. The loss of the great teleologies that held society together in previous centuries has produced anxieties that prevail in modern communities concerning spiritual fulfillment, moral certainty and the structure of society. The response after the Enlightenment was, according to Wheeler, to base all important forms of human knowledge on reason, a strategy that denied the proper emotional response of mourning for the lost cultural certainty and that created a melancholic splitting which Wheeler compares to the state of mind of a depressed subject.¹²⁹ The most damaging aspect of this strategy though has been the violent attempt to appropriate the other as a supporting actor in the psychological drama of a subject or culture. Much of the work of the poets studied in this thesis expresses a desire to repair this damage and to offer new poetic metaphors for how one and an other can interact, yet this can only be achieved by recognizing the interconnectedness of different subjects and things. This is what Wheeler describes as 'the possibility of symbolising – that is, making a meaningful language of and for – the world.'¹³⁰

To create such a language, Wheeler draws on the balance of the mother's role which is in fact a 'mother/father' function as a disciplining force and an agent of play. Wheeler suggests that there is a need to 'understand the importance of the emotions,

¹²⁸ Ibid., 133.

¹²⁹ As I will show in the following chapter, Gwyneth Lewis, is particularly interested in depression and she depicts a movement away from the splitting of the depressed subject to redemption in embracing and accepting the lack of certainty in selfhood.

¹³⁰ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 133.

and the creativity and “hunch-like” nature of human reasoning, and see the human as a complex being interacting with larger complex systems.’¹³¹ Emerging from the reconstituting of the maternal in a more balanced role, a lobby for the importance of feeling in parallel with reason has been made possible. This has occurred according to Wheeler, ‘because of a widely experienced sense that aesthetic modernism, and cultural modernity, are sometimes brutal and brutalising; because of the sense – acutely felt in the post-war period after the experience of nazism – that forms of rationality which exclude feeling and popular sentiment (good or bad) as forms of knowledge, as *active* (good or bad) common sense, can lead to something inhuman in one way or another.’¹³² Thinking of human beings sympathetically rather than rationally creates what Wheeler describes as, a ‘more interesting world than that imagined and promoted by utilitarianism’s ice-cold and inhuman rationality.’¹³³

Wheeler’s demand is for Western society to recognise that, ‘social health depends upon understanding that *every* living element has effects in a social and natural ecology.’¹³⁴ The word “ecology” is used commonly to refer to the scientific study of plants and animals, but it also describes the study of people and institutions. In fact, it derives from the Greek, *oikos*, meaning “house”, and *logos*, meaning “discourse”, and the sense in which Wheeler uses it here is not only in relation to its meaning in Environmental Studies, but to convey how human beings exist in a network of interconnected subjects and things. Drawing on new developments in neuroscience and organicism, Wheeler outlines how ‘adaptation and development in humans has involved the development of brains in which the feelings derived from experience in the world interact with conscious cognition in complex ways that are irreducible to

¹³¹ Ibid., 159.

¹³² Ibid., 16.

¹³³ Ibid., 159.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 134.

simple competition.’¹³⁵ In this view, human beings cannot be easily split apart from their others, but are deeply rooted in their connections with other beings and things in the world, so that ‘human creatures and the world in which they live are in a state of constant and developing interaction.’¹³⁶ This is not a Cartesian view of human identity, but a vision of a state in which: ‘To be a human being is to be part of a vast, complex, interacting, feedback-looping system.’¹³⁷ Like Wheeler, the poets discussed in this thesis desire a new modernity in which the ecology or interconnectedness of things and people is all important. For Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones it is not enough to address the problems of the minor culture of Wales and being a woman in it, but this poetry must exile itself from the specificities of difference to create a narrative which admits interconnectedness with other situations and contexts of marginality and in doing so manages to undermine the binary of self versus other.

Models of Exile

Kenneth Smith begins his essay, ‘Women, Criticism and the Anglo-Welsh,’ with some prescient remarks on ‘Anglo-Welsh’ writing. He suggests that criticism of Welsh texts must ‘move beyond the myopic limitations inherent in provincialism and develop a critical theory which tries to cope with all the facets of literature from aesthetics to linguistics.’¹³⁸ In this thesis, a number of models from critical theory are applied to frame discussion of the chosen poets and all of these models are concerned with how an off-centre view of the world can be useful in thinking about one’s self and about one’s relation with others. Firstly, Lewis’ ecumenical poetic project is explored using Deleuze’s and Guattari’s minor literature, a model of deterritorialising

¹³⁵ Ibid., 140.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 140.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 153.

¹³⁸ Smith, ‘Women, Criticism and the Anglo-Welsh,’ 50.

linguistic play, political allegory and collective annunciation and it is also informed by use of Kristeva's *Black Sun*, a study of how depression can offer the sufferer a unique metaphysical sense of self. Secondly, Petit's exploration of geographical boundaries between civilised and 'barbaric' countries is discussed with reference to *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva's account of how strangers and the foreign have been treated in Western society. Finally, Rees-Jones' desire for people and objects to be something other while still being themselves is considered with reference to Irigaray's *The Way of the Heart*, in which she describes how the subject can venture beyond his or her selfhood into a third space that is shared with an other. In using these models, I follow Smith's recommendation that Welsh criticism needs 'a flowering of thought which fearlessly grapples with all literary theory from a Welsh perspective, whether formalist, marxist, feminist, or other.'¹³⁹

I now want to offer a detailed map of my account of how the poets challenge notions of 'home' and 'belonging.' Chapter One, 'Becoming Minor: Gwyneth Lewis' Journey into Decreation,' uses Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's model of a minor literature in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*¹⁴⁰ as a starting point. Its trajectory explores how Lewis' unique spiritual views and practices (a combination of Nonconformist influences and Zen-Buddhist practices) enable her poetry to present a divine vision of new human relations. Through detailed analysis of her poem, 'Pentecost,' I describe how Lewis exiles herself from her first language, *Cymraeg*, to deterritorialise the English idiom and, in doing so, she embraces the Biblical symbolism of Pentecost rather than

¹³⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁰ In discussing Franz Kafka's writing, Deleuze and Guattari are particularly interested in the interaction between German and Czech in the Prague of the Hapsburg Empire. The former was a language of power and bureaucracy, while the latter was marginalised, yet Kafka chose to write in Prague German. Deleuze and Guattari believe that Kafka's use of a hybrid language deterritorialised the imperialist German as a means to create a 'minor literature.' In my use of Deleuze's and Guattari's model, however, I am less interested in comparing Kafka and Lewis who work in different genres and from different contexts and I am more interested in exploring how the model of a 'minor literature' might relate to Lewis' practice.

the mournful narrative of Babel. The rest of my analysis focuses on Lewis' seminal collection, *Keeping Mum*, and the three sequences within it: 'The Language Murderer,' 'Keeping Mum' and 'Chaotic Angels.' Throughout the collection, political questioning of the infantilising mother-tongue, *Cymraeg*, and the construction of a collective annunciation are paramount. 'The Language Murderer' draws on Lewis' interpretation of Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun*, and it tells a narrative of object loss when the lost language becomes internalised by the female narrator and later is a subject for mourning. 'Keeping Mum' draws on Lewis' Zen-Buddhist practices, as the heroine slowly sheds her ordinary identity, exiling herself from ordinary modes of being, to become 'nobody.' Finally, 'Chaotic Angels,' constructs a series of divine beings, invoked *via* Rilke, to represent praise for the minor, the diminutive and the invisible, all of which are forces beyond human reason. In my analysis of Lewis' poems, I trace her journey away from her mother-tongue towards the possibility of turning the margin into the centre and consequently undermining the binary of the powerful and the diminutive.

In Chapter Two, titled 'Strangers Here Ourselves: Pascale Petit's Poetic Employment of Amazonian Nature, Indigenous Latin American Cultures and the Mexican Artist, Frida Kahlo,' I focus on Petit's Welsh-French background and I suggest that her unique cultural placement enables her to write thoughtfully about foreignness. Petit was also abused as a child, an experience that provoked feelings of alienation and strangeness which filter into her poetry. The model used to facilitate readings of Petit's poems is Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, in which Kristeva claims that through recognising the strangeness of others, the human subject must admit to his or her own strangeness, consequently challenging the idea of the native and the stranger, the one and the other being at odds. Kristeva suggests that human

antipathy might be avoided by recognising that while human beings may not share the same difference, they can at least admit that they are all different and strangers to each other. Petit is preoccupied with moving beyond a bounded poetic selfhood in order to explore the otherness of foreigners and to examine her own strangeness. I explore Petit's strategies of estrangement and exile based on the three most important influences on her poetry: the otherness of nature in *The Heart of A Deer*, the foreignness of indigenous people of the Amazon in *The Zoo Father*, and the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, as a figure embodying strangeness in *The Wounded Deer*. Petit's complex rendering of civilisation and barbarity in both Western and Latin American cultures questions easy divisions between supposedly 'cultured' and 'rudimentary' communities.

Chapter Three, 'The Way of Love: the Third Space between Belonging and Exile in Deryn Rees-Jones' *Quiver*,' focuses on Rees-Jones' desire to move beyond a conventional selfhood and beyond normal relations with others. I focus on Rees-Jones' seminal novel-in-verse, *Quiver*, which was written as a means to explore Rees-Jones' ambiguous hybrid identity as a resident of cosmopolitan Liverpool. Rees-Jones' view of identity is informed by her own experience of challenges to her Welsh identity by people concerned that she cannot be readily identified as Welsh by her accent or appearance. Rees-Jones is interested in duality and she evokes the feeling that while one might seem to have a conventional identity, something more subversive can be happening secretly beneath the surface of familiar things. To discuss Rees-Jones' work, I use Luce Irigaray's *The Way of the Heart*, a study that ponders how the philosopher (or poet) can connect with an other by moving beyond conventional selfhood. Irigaray suggests that a 'third space' between one and an other is important and I argue that like Irigaray, Rees-Jones can see the possibility of transformation in venturing towards

a less easily categorised and more immaterial selfhood. When identities are fixed and polarised, dialogue between one and an other is not possible as I show in my analysis of the long title poem, 'Quiver,' which displays violently opposed sexes *via* the Ovid story of Artemis and Actaeon. However, the main narrative of *Quiver* offers possibilities for human relations *via* the act of passing, a state first associated with African Americans passing for white. In *Quiver*, the act of passing is extended to describe a universal marginal subject whose difference is hidden or eclipsed by a seemingly conventional selfhood. The uncanniness of passing is heightened in the figure of the clone that passes for human, which represents both a male desire to control reproduction and possibilities of for a new human future. Rees-Jones' concerns in *Quiver* about the transformation of human identities and relations reflects Irigaray's emphasis on the destabilising consequences in recognising human difference as 'between two, meaning quivers.'¹⁴¹

From these chapters of detailed textual analysis, the fundamental claims of this thesis are elicited.¹⁴² Overall, my argument is that all three poets are concerned with the ecology of things and people, concentrating on how one subject can interact with an other in a manner that defies binaries of difference. To address this concern, the poets must exile their poetry from a personal context: that of being a woman associated with Wales. Moving beyond the melancholic modernity and postmodern mourning that

¹⁴¹ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 28.

¹⁴² At this point, I want to explain that in my detailed analysis of poetic techniques, the rhythm of the poetic line is given much scrutiny and to explain the rhythmical possibilities adequately, I use the traditional metrical terms for feet (iambs, trochees etc) and types of metre (dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter etc.). In using these terms, I am advocating a detailed approach to discussion of stresses and the need to analyse rhythm even in the case of those poets who do not use a regular metre. In my analysis, I tend to use the word "rhythm" rather than "metre," because the patterning of stresses in the poetry of Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones is less tailored to traditional metre and more concerned with creating a rhythm that complements the form and content of a particular poem. I do use the word "metre" though when referring to traditional, stricter patterning of stresses. To sum up, I am far from arguing that the poets discussed are constructing a traditional kind of metre, but I do find metrical terminology (e.g. "iambic," "tetrameter" etc.) useful to describe the kinds of rhythms that emerge.

have influenced sensibilities in the twentieth century, these poets offer new possibilities for rebuilding a way of being in the world as they reject Enlightenment modernity and 'its emphasis on rationality at the expense of emotions.'¹⁴³ Rather, they reach towards the 'ability to empathise with other human creatures' and the recognition of our connectedness 'in the natural and social worlds.'¹⁴⁴ Put another way, Gwyn talks of how poetry must be 'relevant to writers in all places,' while it, 'reflects only incidentally upon the writer's own subjectivity.'¹⁴⁵ Gwyn concludes: 'By walking out into the world, we can more truthfully envision ourselves.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 160.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁴⁵ Gwyn., 'A Preface in Fragments,' xxxi – xxxii.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

Chapter 2: Becoming Minor: Gwyneth Lewis' Journey into Language, Identity and Decreation

It is necessary not to be 'myself,' still less to be 'ourselves.'
 The city gives us the feeling of being at home.
 We must take the feeling of being at home into exile.
 We must be rooted in the absence of place.¹⁴⁷

For many years, the poet, Gwyneth Lewis, found it impossible to write in anything other than *Cymraeg*, the Welsh language, and although *Cymraeg* is her first language, Lewis found the experience difficult. During a period of study at Cambridge University, Lewis tried to write in English, but negative responses to her work discouraged her.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, Lewis found that rather than making life easier, her total rejection of poetry invoked 'fantasies of becoming invisible and disappearing into a womb-like cubby-hole in the wall.'¹⁴⁹ What saved Lewis from her self-obliteration, as she explains in the interview, 'Gwyneth Lewis Talks to Richard Poole,' was her realisation that she is 'primarily a religious poet.'¹⁵⁰ She describes this discovery as 'a tremendous liberation in relation to language because it means that the values which are most important to me reside not in any one language, but beyond language itself.'¹⁵¹ Language, the speaker and the self are all servants of a divine purpose in Lewis' poetics and in her recent poetry, the exile from an ordinary selfhood is not so much a debilitating illness, as a means to enact a spiritual project concerned with communication and the realisation of one's interconnectedness with others.

The idea of one's selfhood as a servant of God is discussed in Simone Weil's philosophical tract, *Gravity and Grace*, in which she ponders how one might reach a

¹⁴⁷ Simone, Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 1947, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 39.

¹⁴⁸ Lewis describes this episode in pages 46 to 47 of her memoir, *Sunbathing in the Rain* (Gwyneth Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain: A Cheerful Book about Depression* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006)).

¹⁴⁹ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 52.

¹⁵⁰ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Gwyneth Lewis talks to Richard Poole,' *Poetry Wales* 31:2 (1995): 24-29 (27).

¹⁵¹ Lewis, 'Gwyneth Lewis talks to Richard Poole,' 27.

state of grace. In a particular section titled 'Decreation,' she offers a different mode of creativity in which one's own ego is not privileged at all. Without the need to discover a whole identity ('myself') or to categorise others in groups ('ourselves'), Weil offers the possibility of being 'at home' in a state of exile, of discovering gifts in an 'absence of place.' Like Weil, the poet, Lewis is interested in undermining the privileged 'bounded' selfhood *via* her Christian vision of exile and a deconstruction of identity informed by her unique religious beliefs and practices based in Zen Buddhism and Nonconformist Christianity.

Lewis was brought up in the Presbyterian Church, a branch of the Methodist movement, which in Wales, as D.W. Bebbington states in *The Nonconformist Conscience*, has always been 'as socially acceptable as church-going.'¹⁵² In discussing Nonconformist politics, Bebbington suggests that Wales is an 'extreme case' because 'national resentment against the Church of England helped Nonconformity to become the religion of the people.'¹⁵³ To be part of a Nonconformist Church has traditionally been linked to political movements in Wales and a feeling of being different or opting out of Englishness. Nonconformity became a symbol of difference especially after the 1847 *Report into the State of Education in Wales* (known by the Welsh as *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* or 'The Treachery of the Blue Books'), which criticised the supposed decline of Welsh morality blaming the speaking of *Cymraeg*, degenerate Welsh women and the Methodist movement. Nonconformity then represents resistance to cultural homogeneity and this emerges in the political discussions of language and identity that occur in Lewis' poems.

¹⁵² D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870 – 1914* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), 1.

¹⁵³ Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, 3.

Although Nonconformity does represent a choice to be different to the norm, the Welsh spiritual tradition as a whole also offers insights into the universal as Lewis' later confirmation into the Anglican Church in Wales will have taught her.¹⁵⁴ In *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, Dorian Llywelyn draws on the ideas of philosophers such as J.R. Jones to discuss how Welsh spiritual movements have recognised that 'micro and macro expressions all contain the same significance, irrespective of their size: in the small worlds of Wales, whole universes are contained.'¹⁵⁵ Lewis seems to be very aware that the minor can become the universal, the pinnacle of her achievement being a series of sonnets which creates divine beings that praise the marginal, the diminutive and the invisible as sources of inspiration.

However, this universal view is also inspired by the ideas of Zen Buddhism which Lewis encountered on taking part in Zen Buddhist retreats in an effort to ease the depression that she has suffered since her youth.¹⁵⁶ This religious perspective moves away from the Christian tradition in which, as Llywelyn describes, there is an obsession with 'the disparate spheres of the material and the spiritual, the divine and the human [which] are brought into relation with one another, acting as channels of meaning to a world which continually threatens to break down into meaninglessness.'¹⁵⁷ In contrast, Zen Buddhism embraces meaninglessness as Jack Engler confirms in 'Being Somebody and Being Nobody: A Re-examination of the Understanding of Self in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism.' Engler notes that Buddhism moves beyond a notion of the self as multiple, integral or unselfconscious and instead promotes an experience of 'no-self' in which focus shifts 'from representations of the

¹⁵⁴ Although the Anglican Church in Wales is a more mainstream choice, it is still off-centre in its detachment from the main English Protestant Church.

¹⁵⁵ Dorian Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 178.

¹⁵⁶ Lewis gives an account of her experience of a Zen retreat in pages 81 to 83 of *Sunbathing in the Rain*.

¹⁵⁷ Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 178.

self to awareness itself.¹⁵⁸ As Lao Tzu states in the *Tao Te Ching*, only in exile from ordinary ways of thinking and being can one discover the mysteries of life:

The Master stays behind;
that is why she is ahead.
She is detached from all things;
that is why she is one with them.
Because she has let go of herself,
she is perfectly fulfilled.¹⁵⁹

For Lao Tzu and for Lewis, one can only make progress, feel at ease in the world and find one's calling when one embraces the loss of certainty, attachments and conventional selfhood. The privileging of the 'one,' the bounded and whole selfhood, must be deconstructed.

In this chapter, I intend to study how Lewis exiles herself from her home, language and ordinary selfhood in order to discover a new poetics that speaks beyond the personal context of her own selfhood and gestures towards divine grace. I proceed from Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's definition of a minor literature, a model for regional or marginal traditions that posits three significant factors: the deterritorialisation of a major language (in this case the English idiom), the collective annunciation and a political agenda. In using this model as a starting point, I am extending the scholarship of Ian Gregson in *The New Poetry in Wales*, which focuses on deterritorialisation in Lewis' poetry in particular. Gregson argues that Lewis' poetry contains a sense of deterritorialisation: 'the key sense in Welsh literature of a national identity unsettled by the driving apart of language.'¹⁶⁰ However, in contrast to Gregson, I suggest that all three factors that create a minor literature are at work in

¹⁵⁸ Jack Engler, 'Being Somebody and Being Nobody: A Re-examination of the Understanding of Self in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism,' *Psychoanalysis and Buddhism: An Unfolding Dialogue*, ed. Jeremy D. Safran (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 35-79 (65).

¹⁵⁹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (London: Frances Lincoln, 1999), chapter 7, lines 8 - 13.

¹⁶⁰ Ian Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 61.

Lewis' poetics and that they demand moving beyond an ordinary idea of selfhood. The deterritorialisation of English dictates that she must operate *outside* her mother-tongue, *Cymraeg* (the Welsh language), while the construction of political and collective allegories insists on an agenda that goes *beyond* the personal and gestures to the universal. Extending Gregson's sense of deterritorialisation, I present intricate analysis of how Lewis actually goes about making a *Cymraeg* influenced version of English like a strange, new Pentecostal tongue. Drawing on Lewis' Christian and Zen-Buddhist beliefs, I argue that Lewis' poetics signal a desire to turn the marginal into what is central. Lewis poses the possibility of a state of spiritual fulfilment through channelling divine messages that promote the minor as a universal subject.

In exploring Lewis' vision of the marginal, I explore the deterritorialising linguistic experiments of Lewis' first poetry collections such as *Parables and Faxes*, which promote an ecumenical notion of language with minor modes of speech having just as much value as more conventional voices. In addition, I follow the journey of *Keeping Mum*, a narrative that includes three sequences. The first, 'The Language Murder,' portrays a female protagonist who loses her mother-tongue, *Cymraeg*, while 'Keeping Mum' features her mental disintegration and loss of selfhood. Finally 'Chaotic Angels' offers a transcendent sequence of sonnets about angels, which speaks *collectively* and *politically* about the minor, the marginalised and the periphery. I argue that through an act of decreation, the breaking down of language, culture and selfhood, Lewis is able to present a powerful literary voice that promotes minor cultures blurring the boundaries between the margin and the centre and rejecting the tendency to simply visualise the exigencies of Wales.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ All of my quotations from Lewis' poetry derive from the volume of her collected poems in English, *Chaotic Angels* (2005), rather than from the three separate volumes, *Parables and Faxes* (1995), *Zero Gravity* (1998) and *Keeping Mum* (2004).

Like many Welsh poets, Gwyneth Lewis has an ambivalent relationship to belonging which is bound up with the Welsh notion of *hiraeth*, a longing for home that can never be satisfied even on one's return. Lewis is one of the few poets in this study whose place of domicile is Wales, yet she is not simply a poet of nation-building or cultural consolidation. In her essay, 'The Rhyming Detective,' Ruth McElroy notes that poets whose careers began during the nineteen seventies have a more cosmopolitan outlook than the previous generations. Although Lewis was educated through *Cymraeg* in school, she later attended Oxbridge and she has had opportunities to live and work in the US, Australia and elsewhere. McElroy describes Lewis as, 'representative of a contemporary generation of women and men whose sense of Welshness emerges from a privileged, educated access to Welsh culture and history, which combines with an intimate knowledge of the limitations and strictures which that can bring, as well as the mundane experience of being Welsh in different parts of the world.'¹⁶² It is this ambivalent attitude towards home that leads Lewis towards exile and it manifests itself in Lewis' memoir, *Sunbathing in the Rain: A Cheerful Book About Depression*. Take for example a jotting from Lewis' notebook, which she includes in her memoir to try to explain her divided feelings about home and elsewhere:

Staying at home is the hardest thing.
Then travel!
How do I know that this is home?
Home is boring.
So is travel. Stay.¹⁶³

In dialogue with herself, Lewis presents the arguments for and against staying at home and ultimately realises that travel can be as limiting as staying at home. However, Lewis' poetry reveals that the desire to reach elsewhere and to escape belonging can be very powerful. In Lewis' poem 'Hedge,' which appears in her first collection, *Parables*

¹⁶² Ruth McElroy, 'The Rhyming Detective,' *Planet: the New Internationalist* 141 (2000): 21-26 (25).

¹⁶³ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 190.

and Faxes, the speaker tries to escape her origins but she finds that she has only 'pulled up a country' which is 'still round my shoulders, with its tell-tale scent.'¹⁶⁴ The narrator struggles to hide the heritage that follows her around like a bridal train, but eventually the hedge becomes the centre and she is forced to the margin:

for I've lost all centre, have become an edge
and though I wear my pearls like dew
I feel I've paid for my sacrilege

as I wish for autumn with its broader view.
But for now I submit. With me it will die,
this narrowness, this slowly closing eye.¹⁶⁵

The conclusion of 'Hedge' plays with notions of exile and belonging and Gregson is right to suggest in *The New Poetry in Wales* that the poem is 'threatening the integrity of the self, as involving the invasion of the self by alien forces.'¹⁶⁶ The speaker has been carrying home around her like a cloak and her enforced devotion to her place of origin has been detrimental. Although it allows her the trappings of beauty, those dew-like pearls, such attachment to home has also exacted payment. The desire for autumn manifests the need for cycles of death and renewal and the possibility of change. In autumn and winter, the hedge will retract and wither and the speaker describes her own death attached to that of the burden carried: 'With me it will die.' The speaker's existence becomes narrower and narrower as slowly the self diminishes figured by the metaphor of the closing eye.

The conclusion of the poem is redolent with regret and a desire for home, as well as a need for autonomy, and resentment towards the dominative landscape that the protagonist must carry around. However, what Gregson does not include in his analysis is the possibility that such a loss of selfhood and exile from proper identity

¹⁶⁴ Gwyneth Lewis, 'The Hedge,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 11-13 (11.30, 12.31).

¹⁶⁵ Lewis, 'The Hedge,' 13.67-72.

¹⁶⁶ Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales*, 65.

brings a possibility of new life and experiences. The question is how to belong and still maintain one's autonomy while discovering new gifts beyond one's origins. I argue that it is only by going *beyond* that Lewis is able to create a minor literature.

The idea of a 'minor literature' originates in Deleuze's and Guattari's book, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, a study that rejects traditional means of analysis, such as finding 'archetypes,' making 'free associations' or 'trying to interpret, saying this means that.'¹⁶⁷ Rather Deleuze and Guattari attempt to enter Franz Kafka's work via a series of rhizomes or burrows that tackle Kafka's work from different angles. One angle discusses 'Kafka *politics*' via the definition of a minor literature.¹⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari break down the characteristics of the minor literature into three components: the deterritorialisation of a major language, the expression of a collective annunciation and the adoption of a political agenda. While I do not intend to compare Lewis' poetics with Kafka's approach to the novel, I do find that the Deleuze and Guattari model useful, because three significant elements of Lewis' work are linguistic play, writing with a subtle political bent and speaking beyond the individual concern, although in Lewis' case, these factors are also linked to the spiritual and religious vision of decreation or the breaking down of language, culture and identity.

The first characteristic to be dealt with is Lewis' exile from her mother-tongue. Lewis, who originally wrote solely in *Cymraeg*, has made considerable innovative demands on poetry through writing in the English language. In thinking about her separation of English and *Cymraeg* in 'On Writing Poetry in Two Languages,' Lewis explains that for much of her early life, she found being bilingual very difficult. However, eventually she began to create a new generative set of poetics, which

¹⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Theory and History of Literature Series 30, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 7.

¹⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 7.

encouraged her to move away from simply translating her poems into English but instead to actually make innovative demands on the English idiom: 'I find the labour of translation far less interesting than writing itself, that pleasure of riding meaning like a wave.'¹⁶⁹ Like Kafka, Lewis' writing exists in the interstices of languages and Lewis' bilingualism makes her identity as a poet of Wales even more difficult and ambivalent, since in belonging neither solely to Welsh writing in English nor to literature *Cymraeg*, she is, as Andrew Gurr puts it in *Writers in Exile*, 'like a bird forced by chill weather at home to migrate, but always poised to fly back.'¹⁷⁰ While Lewis will always be a writer of *Cymraeg*, exiling herself into the English language offers new poetic possibilities, even while Lewis' bond to her mother-tongue still inflects her writing to create a Welsh version of the English idiom.

From a minor use of a major language, there emerges a minor literature and I argue that there is an analogy to be made between Kafka's use of Prague German and Lewis' writing in English. Just as Kafka subverts a major language (German) to create Prague German, Lewis' poetry in English emerges from the dialects, language and poetic tradition of Wales to subvert the English idiom (English of course having been first introduced in Wales for commercial, bureaucratic and vehicular purposes).¹⁷¹ However as a writer invested in the themes of spirituality, Lewis' act of deterritorialisation is always a religious one and Lewis sees language in terms of service with no one idiom being better than an other. Rather, as Lewis tells Richard Poole in interview, every language is, 'a wonderful carriage that can only take you part of the

¹⁶⁹ Gwyneth Lewis, 'On writing poetry in two languages,' *Modern Poetry in Translation* 7 (1995): 80-83 (81).

¹⁷⁰ Gurr, *Writers in Exile*, 18.

¹⁷¹ The case of Kafka and Lewis is of course different, because they are writers of different cultural contexts and of different genres, yet in extending Deleuze's and Guattari's model in this manner, I am merely following their recommendation that the model of the 'minor literature' can be applied to other circumstances; for example they mention the literature of African-Americans, of Irish writing in English and English-French hybrid texts. (See: Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 17, 19).

way towards expressing what you want.’¹⁷² In my analysis, I note that some Welsh critics have used the themes of the Biblical narrative of Babel as means to investigate Lewis’ poetry, but I argue that it is the symbolism of Pentecost that inspires Lewis’ deterritorialisation of the English language. Through detailed analysis of the long poem, ‘Pentecost,’ I discuss how Lewis uses Welsh traditional forms to create a deterritorialised version of the English idiom that celebrates linguistic difference.

In addition to the linguistic play at the heart of a minor literature, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s model suggests two other factors in the creation of a minor literature which are very relevant to the Welsh tradition. These include the adoption of a collective voice that speaks for more than individual concerns and the constant preoccupation with the political slant. In my analysis, I see these two characteristics as interlinked, since to write politically can mean to speak collectively for particular marginalised groups and to write in a collective voice can dictate writing about political concerns. Focussing on Lewis’ seminal collection, *Keeping Mum*, I suggest that the narrative threaded through the three sequences that make up the book is a journey in collective and political poetics. I draw on Lewis’ memoir, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, in which depression is a state intimately linked to the poetic gift. Lewis’ subtle political poetics proceed from the notion that because poetry is a marginalised genre, poets know more about how it feels to be sidelined or in Lewis’ words, ‘what it is to be nobody.’¹⁷³ Lewis first describes her descent into depression as becoming nobody, as falling into a void and as becoming a corpse. Using Julia Kristeva’s study, *Black Sun*, Lewis describes the advantages and disadvantages of being in the thrall of depression. Like Kristeva, Lewis believes that her feelings of nothingness can be useful to achieve

¹⁷² Lewis, ‘Gwyneth Lewis Talks to Richard Poole,’ 27.

¹⁷³ Gwyneth Lewis, ‘Gwyneth Lewis in America,’ interview with Katherine Gray, *New Welsh Review* 70 (2005): 8-13 (13).

a metaphysical state and in Lewis' view, this allows the poet to become a conduit for the stories and concerns of others. Adopting Zen Buddhist notions of *atma-yajna* or self sacrifice, Lewis uses her feelings of unreality as a means to escape personal concerns in her poetry and I analyse her finely tuned allegory in order to show how she speaks for the collective and political concerns of minor subjects.

So to summarise, my argument about Lewis' spiritual rendering of the minor and the marginal unfolds in the following manner. 'Part I: Deterritorialising the Language: Babel or Pentecost?' begins with a discussion of Lewis' spiritual view of language and this is accompanied by detailed analysis of Lewis's long poem 'Pentecost' in a subsection of the same title. In 'Part II: Politics and Collectivism,' I give a general introduction to how a political agenda and collective annunciation intersect in Lewis' collection, *Keeping Mum*, and in the subsection, 'The Politics of Language,' I map out the allegorical narrative of Lewis' first poetic sequence in the collection, 'The Language Murder.' The subsection, 'Depression and Selflessness,' discusses Lewis' breakdown of the self in relation to Zen Buddhist philosophy and 'Falling into the Void' analyses how these ideas are executed in the title sequence of *Keeping Mum*. 'Part III: In Praise of the Minor' examines how out of decreation emerges a sequence of sonnets entitled 'Chaotic Angels' and influenced by Rainer Maria Rilke's vision of angels. The subsections that follow ('Diminutive and Invisible Angels,' 'Harmonic Angels' and 'Angels of the Celestial Void') analyse the different kinds of angels invoked and they discuss how Lewis produces a macrocosmic rendering of the minor and the marginal through the breaking down of her own certainties.

Beyond a comfortable sense of belonging, Lewis discovers gifts of inspiration. By removing herself from her own personal context, Lewis discovers a new generative poetics and the kind of decreation that Weil recommends. Like the early Christian

ascetics or the Buddhist sects of wandering asceticism, Lewis strips away her selfhood and as she explains in ‘Gwyneth Lewis in America,’ an interview with Katherine Gray, what she loses ‘is ideas about yourself [...] ideas about what poetry is about, what you’re about, as well as others’ ideas about you.’¹⁷⁴ As Anne Carson states in her book, *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*, the act of decreation as defined by Weil is ‘an undoing of the creature in us—that creature enclosed in self and defined by self,’ yet the path to such decreation is difficult since, ‘to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition.’¹⁷⁵ Moving through and unravelling her selfhood, Lewis discovers what is beyond simple and conventional identity: selves of the periphery, of nothingness and of the margin. Such loss can be useful for a writer in a culture like that of Wales, which according to Mary Lloyd Jones’s essay ‘Between Two Worlds’ has ‘a damaged psyche.’¹⁷⁶ Lloyd Jones sets the scene with urgency, when she writes that a woman writer in Wales can either ‘stay in the culture and be crippled as an artist – or escape into nothing.’¹⁷⁷ Lewis chooses the latter option and her journey is mapped through the course of this chapter.

Part I: Deterritorialising the Language: Babel or Pentecost?

In interview with Richard Poole, Lewis describes how the poetic traditions of England and Wales have different tendencies depending on the language in which they are written. She compares the traditional metres of English verse with the lyricism and prosody of poetry in *Cymraeg* and she suggests that transference of traditional poetic techniques from one language to the other can be beneficial, especially when it offers

¹⁷⁴ Lewis, ‘Gwyneth Lewis in America,’ 12.

¹⁷⁵ Anne Carson, *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2006, 179.

¹⁷⁶ Mary Lloyd Jones, ‘Between Two Worlds,’ *Our Sister’s Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, ed. Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vicentelli (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), 273-279 (276).

¹⁷⁷ Lloyd Jones, ‘Between Two Worlds,’ 277.

the remedy of *Cymraeg*'s music for English poetry's 'flat-footedness.'¹⁷⁸ Lewis is determined to adopt techniques that subvert one language with the poetic techniques of another in order to offer new cultural, emotional and especially spiritual views of the world in which the minor or marginal becomes more central.

In this section, I argue that Lewis' reproduction of aspects of *Cymraeg* in English language poetry enables her to explore language and the self and I am particularly interested in the reconstitution of *Cymraeg*'s poetic techniques. Comparing the Biblical symbolism of stories about Babel and Pentecost, I suggest that Lewis' view of language is closer to the symbolism of Pentecost. As in the story of Pentecost, Lewis gives tongue to an idiosyncratic, deterritorialised version of English and she becomes a conduit for a message of linguistic difference. By adopting the self denial of *Cymraeg* poetry, she offers an ecumenical spiritual message about the beauty of different languages or versions of languages.

I proceed by outlining my argument in detail, first discussing how Lewis' poetic practice relates to Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of deterritorialisation and then outlining how Lewis' use of deterritorialisation expresses a specific view of language inspired by her spiritual beliefs. I offer detailed analysis of her long poem, 'Pentecost,' and I suggest that Lewis is able to create a deterritorialised version of the English idiom that celebrates linguistic difference. She does this through injecting the English idiom with the pattern of Welsh traditional forms such as: the *awdl* (a long poem in traditional metre), *cynghanedd* (a form of sound-chiming within a line of poetry); the *gywydd* (a couplet using *cynghanedd* with each line of seven syllables and the accent falling alternately on the last and penultimate syllables); the *englyn* (a monorhyming quatrain that also uses *cynghanedd* and the *gair cyrch*); the *gair cyrch* (extra

¹⁷⁸ Lewis, 'Gwyneth Lewis Talks to Richard Poole,' 28.

words/syllables that lengthen a line and chime with the words at the beginning of the next); and most of all, *proest* (a kind of half-rhyme in which the end consonant is the same while the vowel is different though of a similar length).

As I explained in the introduction, one of the defining factors of a minor literature suggests, 'that in it language is affected with a high co-efficient of deterritorialization.'¹⁷⁹ In the context of the study, *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari explain how, living in Prague during the reign of the Habsburg Empire, Kafka was 'one of the few Jewish writers in Prague to understand and speak Czech,' a vernacular language that was 'forgotten and repressed' under the influence of 'the vehicular language of the towns, a bureaucratic language of the state, a commercial language of exchange' which was, in this case, German.¹⁸⁰ Such a language is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, 'appropriate for strange and minor uses.'¹⁸¹ However, deterritorialisation of a major language is not specific to Kafka and they suggest that their model might also apply to African American use of dialects and Pidgin English, James Joyce's subversion of English and Samuel Beckett's use of French and English.¹⁸² I would argue that the model also applies to Welsh poets like Lewis writing in English, who via a specific kind of poetic practice are reorientating the English language towards the territory of Wales.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 16.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 17, 19.

¹⁸³ It is, of course, the case that Kafka's Jewishness gives him a different quality of exile in his society where anti-Semitism thrived and Deleuze and Guattari do note in passing that Kafka had access to a language that inspired fear, Yiddish, and later to the mythical language of Hebrew. However, Kafka's Jewishness is sidelined for much of in Deleuze's and Guattari's commentary on the 'minor literature,' since most significant to this concept is the relationship between the repressed Czech and the German which is 'an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses' (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, (16)). According to Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka's greatest works were written in Prague German and this is the preoccupation in their consideration of Kafka's project so that Kafka's Jewishness is not so dominative in this formulation.

In the specific case of Lewis, this reorientation is intimately connected to poetry of *Cymraeg* and Lewis is extremely dedicated to her idiosyncratic linguistic play. In interview with Kathryn Gray, Lewis recalls her time living in the US and she remembers it being suggested by a friend, 'that if I stayed I would become an American poet.'¹⁸⁴ Lewis does not explain this comment, although one might suggest that the American poet represents a spirit of wandering and adventure which Lewis embraces. However, what does worry Lewis about being an 'American poet' is the idea of 'losing my grip on a kind of internal metre.'¹⁸⁵ Lewis does not explain further, but her account is suggestive because it is drawn from the period when, as she tells Kathryn Gray, she reconciled the problem of 'bilingualism' which was 'immensely painful.'¹⁸⁶ Managing the exigencies of English-language and *Cymraeg* poetics is difficult and while the experience of cosmopolitan New York has offered poetic gifts, Lewis' 'internal rhythm,' possibly originating from the *Cymraeg* poetry written before her visit, is also at the heart of her poetics.

Lewis is aware that from childhood her poetry has been devoted to strict rhyming forms and consonantal patterning. In *Sunbathing in the Rain*, Lewis recalls writing her first poem as a child and she tells how her mother, who was an English teacher, corrected the poem regularising spellings, standardising the poetic lines and making the language sound more poetic. Although Lewis appreciated her mother's efforts, she also found them limiting and she notes: 'This well-meaning re-writing had undone the most promising aspect of the poem – the way I was willing to subordinate reality to the required rhyme scheme.'¹⁸⁷ Along with the desire to rhyme, Lewis also recognises her feeling for prosody and she describes, in a comment that smacks of the

¹⁸⁴ Lewis, 'Gwyneth Lewis in America,' 12.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁷ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 35.

Welsh poetic tradition, ‘unless you have that compulsive pleasure in consonant sound, to the point of nonsense, you’ll never be a poet.’¹⁸⁸

Through detailed analysis of Lewis’ poetry, I will show that the reconstruction of these techniques in English constitutes what Deleuze and Guattari describe as ‘deterritorialized sound or words that are following their line of escape.’¹⁸⁹ Lewis’ comments on her linguistic practice certainly echo the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, since in ‘On Writing Poetry in Two Languages,’ Lewis praises linguistic contributions from other languages and cultures. She mentions ‘Milton’s Latinate English, James Macpherson’s Hebrew-sounding Ossian poetry, the stark surrealism of postwar Polish poetry’ and she suggests that these versions ‘have all *added* new tones to the palette of English verse.’¹⁹⁰ Lewis is adamant that this use of language also reveals ‘new philosophies and visions as well’ and these visions are often religious or spiritual ones.¹⁹¹

In thinking about Lewis’ vision of language, Angharad Price’s essay, ‘Travelling on the Word Bus: Gwyneth Lewis’ Welsh Poetry,’ uses the symbolism of the Biblical story of Babel as a means to describe Lewis’ attitude to poetic language. The story of Babel appears in Genesis and it tells how human beings decided to further their power by building a tower that would reach up to God. However, God destroyed the tower and divided the people by instilling different idioms in different groups.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build a city. Therefore the name of it is called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹⁸⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 22.

¹⁹⁰ Lewis, ‘On Writing Poetry in Two Languages,’ 81.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 81.

¹⁹² Genesis 11.8-9.

Themes of the Babel story, such as linguistic division and nostalgia for a protolanguage, are used by Price to describe Lewis' practice and she notes how Lewis, 'has described the double-edged venture of that other bilingual creature, the translator, who ignores God's hand in the creation of the Tower of Babel, as one that is conciliatory and blasphemous at the same time.'¹⁹³ Price suggests that for Lewis, bilingualism has dictated that she, 'view every individual language as a reflection of the *Ursprache*, the "Holy Writ" of which Walter Benjamin spoke.'¹⁹⁴ In this view, Lewis is preoccupied with *Ursprache*, the German word for a protolanguage from which all other languages have derived. As Walter Benjamin states in 'The Task of the Translator' (published 1923), to which Price refers, while a translation cannot 'claim permanence,' it might direct one to 'the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages.'¹⁹⁵ Price concludes: 'For a Christian poet such as Gwyneth Lewis, the words of any language are paths leading to God's original Word.'¹⁹⁶

It is not surprising that the Babel metaphor pervades criticism by Price and others, since in Wales, there do seem to be powerful unwritten rules about what you can or cannot do with language and there is a prevailing desire for linguistic purity. Counterparts in Scotland seem to have embraced deterritorialising techniques, for example Hugh Macdiarmid's synthetic Scots (or Lallands) that blends and combines different versions of Scottish languages, yet not much experimentation of this nature has been recognised in Wales. Rather there has been a focus on the purity of language, so that to be a poet in Wales, you must write in English or in *Cymraeg* but not both. It

¹⁹³ Angharad Price, 'Travelling on the Word-Bus: Gwyneth Lewis's Welsh Poetry,' *PN Review* 25:5 (1999): 49-51 (51).

¹⁹⁴ Price, 'Travelling on the Word-Bus,' 49.

¹⁹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator,' *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), 70-82 (75-76).

¹⁹⁶ Price, 'Travelling on the Word-Bus,' 49.

is worth noting that other poets of *Cymraeg*, such as Menna Elfyn, have chosen not to write in English at all, while some others have refused even to be translated. Twm Morys in 'A Refusal to be Translated' writes that when writing in *Cymraeg*, he is, 'speaking with Welsh-speaking people' and he adds: 'If others would like to join in, well they can bloody well learn the language!'¹⁹⁷ The attitudes of critics in Wales have often similarly embraced *Cymraeg* as the mother-tongue of Wales and reviled English as foreign and irrelevant, while in some enclaves, attitudes have not changed much since the publication of Ned Thomas' *The Welsh Extremist: A Culture in Crisis*. For Thomas, Welsh writing in English must be associated with industrial South Wales, where inhabitants are supposedly humiliated by the loss of *Cymraeg* and Thomas wonders, 'how far does he [the English-speaking Welshman] feel himself to be Welsh at all?'¹⁹⁸ The speakers of 'a despised and comic dialect of English' are the Anglo-Welsh, a category that is now rightly rejected by many writers and theorists.¹⁹⁹ Lewis is suspicious about the vision of *Cymraeg* as a mother tongue and in a personal interview, when I asked her about political issues of interest, she posed the question, 'if language is our mother, are we always infantilised?'²⁰⁰

Price is right to note that the English idiom and *Cymraeg* are intimately connected in Lewis' writing, yet the Babel metaphor is inadequate. Underlying the Babel symbolism is the assumption that diversity of languages is negative and there is a desire to make languages into the same, to create an omniscient protolanguage or even a mother-tongue.²⁰¹ However, this metaphor does not allow room for one language and an other to exist simultaneously (as in the practice of Macdiarmid and others). It

¹⁹⁷ Twm Morys, 'A Refusal to be Translated,' *Poetry Wales* 38:3 (2003): 55.

¹⁹⁸ Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist: A Culture in Crisis* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), 101.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist*, 110.

²⁰⁰ Gwyneth Lewis, Personal Interview (by telephone), 3rd April 2007.

²⁰¹ The metaphor of a mother-tongue is not necessarily a positive one in Lewis' symbology as I will show in later analysis of her collection *Keeping Mum*.

does not allow room for the notion of glossolalia as a gift or for the creative chaos of deterritorialisation. In searching for a religious metaphor to express Lewis' practice, I turn to A.M. Allchin who in his study, *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition* contrasts Babel with the spirit of Pentecost. Occurring in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles, the Pentecost story tells how the apostles are visited by the Holy Spirit which enables them to speak in new languages:

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. And when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded because that every man heard them speak in his own language.²⁰²

On one level this story is a pragmatic rendering of the universality in the apostles' message about Christianity, yet it also celebrates difference of language and culture and allows for each individual to retain that difference. Allchin suggests that Pentecost has more progressive symbolism than Babel because it celebrates a multiplicity of tongues: 'The unity which the Spirit brings is thus seen as a unity in difference, a unity in freedom, which brings out rather than suppresses the multiplicity, the richness of the universe which God has made.'²⁰³ This vision occurs in the hymns and sermons of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783 -1872), a Danish theologian who had a great influence on Welsh nationalism. According to Allchin, Grundtvig's vision has had much currency in the religious traditions of Wales and while Grundtvig 'sees the event of Pentecost not as an isolated wonder, nor as something altogether without precedent in human history,' the mystery of salvation represented by the occasion is 'the totally unmerited fulfilment of a divine activity which despite the fall has never ceased throughout

²⁰² The Acts of the Apostles 2.3-6.

²⁰³ A.M. Allchin, *Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 126.

creation.²⁰⁴ Allchin recommends an appreciation of different languages which emerges from, ‘a vision of the world as made by God in diversity as well as unity, from a vision of a qualitative catholicity of life, which respects and does not destroy human differences and variety.’²⁰⁵

As in the metaphor of Pentecost, Lewis celebrates diversity in languages and in her bilingual state, she is able to appreciate both their similarities and their differences. In interview with Richard Poole, Lewis explains that any language is ‘only a servant in the project of praising God’ and this attitude fits into a particular literary tradition typified by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 -1889), who studied at a Jesuit house in Wales and is thought by some critics to have derived his idiosyncratic ‘Sprung Rhythms’ from Welsh *cynghanedd*.²⁰⁶ Like Hopkins, Lewis does not try to deny ‘that irregularity which all natural growth and motion shews [sic]’ as Hopkins describes it in the 1883 preface to his manuscript poems.²⁰⁷ One idiom is never better than another in this philosophy; neither can one language be made one and the same as another. Lewis expresses this view of equivalency again in ‘On Writing Poetry in Two Languages’ when she describes the languages of English and *Cymraeg* as two separate rivers that nevertheless have, ‘a complex underground system of seepage and mutual irrigation [...], subtle connections which make the whole literary landscape between them fertile and pleasant to inhabit.’²⁰⁸ The two languages have different paths yet Lewis understands them both: ‘Taken together they are both one language to me – I know them both so intimately that they are often transparent to me, so that I’m aware not of

²⁰⁴ Allchin, *Praise Above All*, 128.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁰⁶ Lewis, ‘Gwyneth Lewis Talks to Richard Poole,’ 27.

²⁰⁷ Manley Hopkins, Gerard, ‘Author’s Preface,’ *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory: Concise Edition*, Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle (Letchworth: Broadview, 2000) 671-673 (672).

²⁰⁸ Lewis, ‘On Writing in Two Languages,’ 82.

hearing Welsh or English but of understanding the thoughts of another person speaking.²⁰⁹ Situated between *Cymraeg* and English, when Lewis uses deterritorialised language and sounds in her poetry, what she enables is the possibility of eavesdropping on the thoughts of another idiom, another culture in a sphere where languages cooperate and inter-relate. For Lewis, the ability to live in two languages is the gift of Pentecost rather than the punishment of Babel with its longing for a lost protolanguage.²¹⁰

‘Pentecost’

It is no coincidence that the opening poem of Lewis’ first collection, *Parables and Faxes*, is entitled ‘Pentecost’ and it is this poem that I intend to analyse in detail as an example of deterritorialisation performed through the use of *Cymraeg* poetic and linguistic techniques. The poem is typically idiosyncratic in its use of language and the deterritorialisation of the English idiom can be seen to full effect. As the title indicates, the subject matter taps into Lewis’ spiritual vision of language. The stanza uses a sestet with a regular rhyme pattern with rhymes, half rhymes and *proest*²¹¹ between: lines one and four; lines two and three; and lines five and six. In addition, lines one and four use

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 82.

²¹⁰ It is interesting to note in passing that in adopting this view of language, Lewis contrasts with that other Welsh poet so preoccupied with language, R.S. Thomas. As I have noted in the general introduction to this thesis, Thomas’ view of language and culture is a melancholic one so that the lost object is internalised to create feelings of worthlessness and a mindset of self-punishment. When Thomas writes in ‘Drowning’ in a melancholic manner of ‘irreplaceable and forgettable, / inhabitants of the parish and speakers / of the Welsh tongue,’ his attitude could not be more different to Lewis’ celebration of heteroglossia. Where as Lewis represents an opening up to difference and an embracing of heterogeneity, Thomas envisions ‘men [...] clung to the last spars of their language, / and gone down with it, unremembered but uncomplaining.’ (See: R.S. Thomas, ‘Drowning,’ *R.S. Thomas*, 1996, ed. Anthony Thwaite, Everyman’s Poetry (London: J.M. Dent, 2001), 110 (110.1-3, 110.19-20)).

²¹¹ I remind the reader at this point that *proest* is a kind of half-rhyme in which the end consonant is the same, but the vowel is different though of a similar length, for example the English word ‘cap’ makes a *proest* with the *Cymraeg* word *twp* (meaning ‘stupid’). I take this example from Mererid Hopwood’s *Singing in Chains: Listening to Welsh Verse*, in which there is a longer explanation of *proest*. (See: Mererid Hopwood, *Singing in Chains: Listening to Welsh Verse* (Llandysul, Carmarthenshire: Gomer, 2004), 67).

the same rhyme in each stanza, a technique reminiscent of verse forms like the *awdl* and *gywydd*, in which main rhyme is repeated throughout the poem.

The traces of these strict verse forms are accompanied by use of *proest* and *cynganedd* and all of these techniques combine to reproduce an important characteristic of *Cymraeg* poetry described by Allchin in *Praise Above All*: 'One of the qualities which marks the whole Welsh tradition is a desire for a kind of epigrammatic terseness, a desire to say much in little.'²¹² Allchin sees comparisons between Welsh verse forms and the religious icon, since the painter of an icon, 'forces his lines to practice a certain self denial' in order to convey universal spiritual messages.²¹³ Similarly, Lewis' use of *cynganedd* here is not simply a matter of prosody. In an editorial for *Poetry Wales*, J.P. Ward is adamant that *cynganedd* is not simply, 'a matter of ornamentation' but the form demands 'that the poet emphasize a certain feeling very deeply by making all the words he chooses practice a certain self-denial in reinforcing that feeling.'²¹⁴ For Ward, the effect is that of feeling that 'the words are forced into position against their will, and this, paradoxically, makes them strain like bent metal, giving them great tension and power.'²¹⁵ Similarly, *cynganedd* 'makes each different line or phrase seem to belong to and be contained by some over-all hidden idea binding it.'²¹⁶ I will show that the reproduction of these techniques not only evokes Welsh terseness in the English idiom, but also is a means to display a larger vision which comments on catholic acceptance of the gift of languages and the blurring of minor and major idioms.

In 'Gwyneth Lewis: Taboo and Blasphemy,' Nerys Williams notes how the poem, 'Pentecost,' 'alerts us immediately to the gift of languages or "glossolalia",

²¹² Allchin, *Praise Above All*, 143.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 144.

²¹⁴ J.P. Ward, Editorial, *Poetry Wales* 14.1 (1978): 3-4 (3).

²¹⁵ Ward, Editorial, 3.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

which enables the speaker's safe passage through the checkpoints of Europe to Florida.²¹⁷ In *The New Poetry in Wales*, Gregson suggests that this gift of more than one language indicates 'a dialogic [...] view of experience.'²¹⁸ Gregson sees this dialogism evoked *via* the 'Christian idea of speaking in tongues' as potentially problematic for Lewis as it represents 'speakers' being 'invaded by alien voices.'²¹⁹ However, I offer a more positive reading of 'Pentecost' as a celebration of travel, communication and exploration. I argue that Lewis' deterritorialisation works not only to promote an ethos of catholicity and a celebration of human difference, but also to show that breaking down of a whole and bounded selfhood can be useful.

The Lord wants me to go to Florida.
I shall cross the border with the mercury thieves,
as foretold in the faxes and prophecies,
and the checkpoint angel of Estonia
will have alerted the uniformed birds
to act unnatural and distract the guards.²²⁰

The poem begins as a kind of hymn or sermon and in the spirit of Pentecost is a kind of rhapsody of prosody. This kind of poetry would seem to correspond with a general characteristic of Welsh poetry described by H.I. Bell in *The Development of Welsh Poetry* as, 'a peculiar sensitiveness to the music of words.'²²¹ According to Bell, this represents, a 'love of accomplished and eloquent speech' as in the case of the peculiar speaking manner of the Welsh preacher (labelled with the *Cymraeg* word, *hwyl*).²²² The opening line begins with a description of a religious mission and the stress on 'Lord' and the first syllable of 'Florida' is highlighted as the two stresses resemble a *cynghanedd*

²¹⁷ Nerys Williams, 'Gwyneth Lewis: Taboo and Blasphemy,' *Poetry Wales* 38.3 (2003): 23-28 (25).

²¹⁸ Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales*, 65.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

²²⁰ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Pentecost,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarnet, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 10 (10.1-6).

²²¹ H.I. Bell, *The Development of Welsh Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 5.

²²² Bell, *The Development of Welsh Poetry*, 6.

lwg or “drag Harmony” where one syllable in the first half of the line chimes with the penultimate syllable. The rigidity of the form is counter-balanced by the ghostly speaker who can slip through borders much as Lewis slips between the conventions of Welsh and English. Lewis’ metaphor of the “mercury thieves” is telling, since it refers to the drifters that invade Florida when the mercury in the thermometer plunges in the northern states of the US. To the dismay of the rich American classes, the “mercury thieves” steal the heat and light of the sunny state and similarly Lewis’ heroine invades an imperialist language to pillage its riches for her own poetic satisfaction.

However, this visit is not simply an unauthorised plundering, but a mission from God revealing Lewis’ spiritual vision of language. According to the speaker, who continues in her sermon-like speaking style, her journey to Florida has been foretold, although here the story has been recounted not only by ancient prophecies but also via the modern fax which acts as a bathetic twist to the religious mystery. Similarly, the speaker’s guardian angel belongs to an East European checkpoint rather than a mystical vision and creatures of everyday life, like birds, appear as heavenly messengers and helpers sent to distract the guards. While the accomplice birds are described as uniformed, the distracted guards are not. This confusion is emphasised by the *proest* between ‘birds’ and ‘guards,’ which seems to indicate that the two are interchangeable or at least that the birds have as much force in their uniforms as the guards. When the speaker does describe the bird’s behaviour, the prosody is reminiscent of *cynghanedd* with the chiming of the word ‘act,’ the second syllable of ‘natural’ and the second syllable of ‘distract.’ There is a kind of uncanniness about the reappearance of familiar sounds that gives a sense of fatefulness, while the adherence to strict rules indicates the poet’s self denial as described by Allchin and Ward. In addition, the expression, ‘to act unnatural,’ is characteristic of South Walean dialects when in colloquial practice

adverbs are replaced with adjectives. In the spirit of the title, 'Pentecost,' to act unnaturally might then refer to the act of writing in complicated forms and to the kind of linguistic play in which Lewis engages here.

The speaker passes 'unhindered' through the border thanks to this linguistic play and she describes how her glossolalia, the possibility of speaking spontaneously in an unknown language, is stamped on her passport. Yet what is on the speaker's tongue is not a fiery flame but rather she 'shall taste the tang / of travel on the atlas of my tongue.'²²³ Although one line runs into another here, it resembles a line of *cynghanedd groes* or "criss-cross harmony" where consonants appear in the same order before the main stress in each half of the line with a mirroring of consonant sounds. In this example, 'tang' chimes with 'tongue,' 'shall' chimes with the second syllable of 'travel,' while 'taste' and 'atlas' echo each other too. One effect of this prosody is to escape for a moment into a sound-world, where the sensual experience of language is paramount and where prosody even supersedes the speaker's persona.

As the poem proceeds, it is revealed that the speaker is only 'a slip of a girl,' a colloquial expression that indicates frailty, but it is her gift of tongues that translates her into 'a standing flame,' a servant of God whose purpose is to convey a spiritual message that praises linguistic difference.²²⁴ The speaker pauses for a moment though to consider linguistic separation reminiscent of themes in the Babel story. She refers to the Bulgarian city of Sofia where 'thousands converted' seemingly gesturing towards the city's movement from Byzantine to Ottoman rule, while her description of 'hundreds slain/ [...] along the Seine' recalls the 1961 massacre of Algerians in Paris.²²⁵

²²³ Lewis, 'Pentecost,' 10.8-9.

²²⁴ Ibid., 10.13-14.

²²⁵ Ibid., 10.17-18.

The speaker seems to suggest linguistic separation and the impossibility of communication as causes of the violence.

In spite of these negative, Babel-like images of miscommunication, the narrator's religious mission in the US is not without hope. Possibilities are available in the linguistic experimentation with the English idiom that has taken place in the US. (Take for example the African-American dialects referred to by Deleuze and Guattari as a possible site of deterritorialisation.) However, the location also tallies with Lewis' interest in the US after studying at University of Columbia, New York. In interview with Kathryn Gray, Lewis explains how during her stay in the US, she spent much time, 'looking at the worst of American cultural excesses,' but she finally realised that the US was a site of both restriction and freedom: 'I came away from America feeling tremendously positive about many of the cultural freedoms that you had there that weren't maybe visible from Britain.'²²⁶ In 'Pentecost,' the possibilities of language in the US seem fruitful:

[...] prepare your perpetual Pentecost
of golf course and freeway, shopping mall and car
so the fires that are burning in the orange groves
turn light into sweetness and huddled graves

are the hives of the future – an America
spelt plainly, translated in the Everglades
where palm fruit hang like hand grenades
ready to rip whole treatises of air.²²⁷

In another *cyngbanedd*-like rhapsody, the speaker calls on Florida to 'prepare your perpetual Pentecost,' but in bathetic style, the religious experience is not mystically rendered but constructed by mundane objects of consumer culture, perhaps the excesses that Lewis complains of in interview. In *Consorting with Angels: Essays on Modern Women Poets*, Deryn Rees-Jones reads the US context of the poem negatively and she

²²⁶ Lewis, 'Gwyneth Lewis in America,' 9.

²²⁷ Lewis, 'Pentecost,' 10.21-18.

states: 'Such speaking in tongues is to be admired, and works as a metaphor for secular many-tonguedness, but such abilities are simultaneously seen less positively in the context of European war and American capitalism and globalisation.'²²⁸ Rees-Jones is right to point out that Lewis sometimes feels ambiguously about the effect of linguistic and hence cultural separation, but I would like to unpack the lines that follow the damning indictment of consumer culture. These lines turn to a site of nature, the Florida orange groves, and it is here that the speaker finds the flame of Pentecost. Just as oranges are generated from sunlight, so the graves seem to hold the possibility of sweet fruit for a future. *Proest* is used once again to emphasise this point through the chiming between 'groves' and 'graves' and through using a kind of *gair cyrch* or an echo, in this case using *proest* in the first line of the next stanza, with the word 'hives.' The emphasis on 'groves,' 'graves' and 'hives' signals a movement from fruitfulness to death to a new productivity and this again reflects the spirit of Pentecost, which in a basic sense represents the new age following the resurrection of Christ. The language of the US is celebrated here for its plainness ('spelt plainly'), its explosive energy ('hand grenades') and for what makes it different to the treatise or other works that deal with a particular subject systematically and formally.

Like her mentor at University of Columbia, Joseph Brodsky, Lewis retains a love for the power of American linguistic experimentation. In interview with Kathryn Gray, Lewis describes Brodsky's feeling of admiration for 'the throwaway remark, the catch-all in American speech' and she suggests that that, 'he recognised that [popular culture] was where vitality in language is,' quoting him as saying: 'What rots is what's alive.'²²⁹ In Lewis' view, Brodsky equates decomposition with linguistic energy and

²²⁸ Deryn Rees-Jones, *Consorting With Angels: Essays on Modern Women Poets* (Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 191.

²²⁹ Lewis, 'Gwyneth Lewis in America,' 11.

growth and this seems to be the hidden meaning of the equivalent 'groves,' 'graves' and 'hives.' Lewis refers not only to separate languages but also to languages that run into one another, languages that are decomposing and languages that evolve. The gift of tongues as it exists in the US is celebrated and in the final line, God closes the gap between Europe and the US: 'He shifts his continent: / Atlantic closes.'²³⁰ Lewis gestures to the linguistic play of subjects in the US, much as Deleuze and Guattari direct one's attention to the African-American uses of the English idiom. It is no surprise that in interview, Lewis is adamant that it was her reading and experience in the US that began 'encouraging me to write in English, showing me that it was possible to do that.'²³¹

To conclude, while the content of 'Pentecost' praises the experimentation with language that occurs in the US, Lewis performs that very linguistic play using her own experience of *Cymraeg* to subvert the English idiom. Behind the epigrammatic terseness, the chiming of *cynghanedd*, the *gair cyrch* and *proest* in addition to the strict form, Lewis is spelling out a serious message about languages and identity. Like the painter of icons who conveys a spiritual truth, Lewis' poetic mechanics are working in a state of decreation so that the rigours of *Cymraeg* can recreate a spiritual vision that undermines the notion of major versus minor languages, but rather attributes all languages and versions of languages with equal importance. The protolanguage of Babel is a fallacy for Lewis, because the myth of purity is restrictive for the poet. Deterritorialisation is ruled by chaos, deconstruction and the unravelling of 'proper language.' This is the gift of glossolalia, because the Pentecost story emerges from a spirit that celebrates diversity and to ignore such a message indicates, according to Allchin, 'a degree of blindness which is disabling indeed, an unwillingness to recognize

²³⁰ Lewis, 'Pentecost,' 10.35-36.

²³¹ Lewis, Personal Interview, 3rd April 2007.

the existence of the other and to let him speak in his own terms, which, while it is universal in our fallen humanity, is yet a special affliction of peoples with an imperial past.²³² To allow for difference in language or for different versions of languages represents an act that rises above what Allchin calls our 'fallen humanity' gesturing towards spiritual states of salvation, mercy and grace. Yet to reach such a feeling, Lewis has had to reach across a divide, exiling herself first from her mother-tongue and then employing the self-denial of *cynghanedd* and *proest*. Lewis' journey towards this poetics has not been easy and the process is allegorised in Lewis' third poetry collection, *Keeping Mum*.

Part II: *Keeping Mum*: Politics and Collectivism

As Deryn Rees-Jones notes in *Consorting with Angels*, Lewis' third English-language collection, *Keeping Mum*, was written 'at a point in Welsh history when, after the establishment of the Welsh assembly in 1997, Welsh interests in relation to Britain have ostensibly not been stronger.'²³³ Rees Jones also notes earlier that in the censuses of 1981 and 1991, the percentage of speakers of *Cymraeg* in Wales fell by 19%.²³⁴ However, she does not mention the 2001 census which revealed a halt in the flagging figures and an increase of around 80,000 *Cymraeg* speakers. The figures also showed that 37.7% of three to fifteen year olds now speak the language. It is strange then that inspiration for the *Keeping Mum* is Lewis' earlier Welsh collection, *Y Llofrudd Iaith*, ("The Language Murderer" in English), which offers a murder mystery where *Cymraeg* is the dead victim. However, I suggest that the collection, *Keeping Mum*, is a retrospective glance at Lewis' journey towards writing in English which would

²³² Allchin, *Praise Above All*, 139.

²³³ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 192.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

culminate in the deterritorialising strategy outlined in my analysis of 'Pentecost.' Just as poems like 'Pentecost' explore the relationship between minor and major languages, so *Keeping Mum* offers insights into how the otherness of the minor subject can survive. While *Keeping Mum* begins with the irrevocable loss of a mother tongue, it travels far beyond negative self-loss towards a celebration of difference and a blurring of the self and other.

Following on from my analysis of Lewis' linguistic play, I suggest that *Keeping Mum* does replay many of the themes that are pertinent in poems such as 'Pentecost': the problems of a 'mother-tongue' and the difficulties or possibilities in being bilingual. However, I now want to consider *Keeping Mum*, not in the context of deterritorialisation as in the case of Lewis' earlier poems like 'Pentecost,' but in terms of the two other overlapping characteristics of the minor literature. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the first of these dictates that 'everything in [the minor literature] is political.'²³⁵ In Deleuze's and Guattari's view, the literature of a more powerful, major culture must be characterised by use of the 'individual concern (familial, marital and so on)' in conjunction with other individual concerns using the social milieu as a kind of backdrop.²³⁶ In contrast, a minor literature connects individual concerns with politics: 'The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it.'²³⁷ This sense of the universal within the marginal is essential to Lewis' poetic project, but it is only through a loss of ordinary selfhood that it is brought about.

As a political narrative, *Keeping Mum* displays this process of losing language, losing identity. In *Sunbathing in the Rain*, Lewis draws extensively on the feminist

²³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 17.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

theorist Julia Kristeva, and I argue that Kristeva's ideas about language acquisition and her figuring of the abject are significant in a reading of this sequence. To map out Lewis' view of language, I analyse the first of three sequences that appear in *Keeping Mum*, 'The Language Murderer,' which is a reinterpretation of Lewis' collection in *Cymraeg, Y Llofrudd Iaith*.²³⁸ Through detailed analysis, I argue that Lewis' political agenda is similar to that in her strategy of deterritorialisation: to detach her cultural identity from the dominative mother-tongue. This journey is by no means easy as is shown by the second sequence which is named after the title of the collection, *Keeping Mum*. This sequence figures the struggle of the protagonist, now identified as Miss D and figured through the eyes of a psychiatrist in case notes and tapes. Quoting Lewis' belief in the tenets of Zen Buddhism, I discuss her depiction of a woman facing what Kristeva would call the void of depression, which is produced by the lack of a mother-tongue. Enabled by the Zen Buddhist focus on nothingness as a positive attribute, Lewis is able to allow her character to journey towards an allegorical death figured again in imagery of abjection.

It is this death which will enable the acting out of another factor related to the minor literature: the adoption of a 'collective value' where an 'individuated enunciation' cannot be separated from 'collective enunciation.'²³⁹ This kind of literature, 'produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge

²³⁸ Although *Y Llofrudd Iaith* is similar in content to 'The Language Murderer,' Lewis generally maintains her strategy of writing directly in English or Cymraeg and not translating and she states in the introduction to *Keeping Mum*. 'Only a handful of poems are literal versions.' (Lewis, Preface to *Keeping Mum. Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 143-144 (144)).

²³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 17.

the means for another consciousness and another sensibility.²⁴⁰ In this scenario, ambivalence about where one's home is and how one fits in intensifies one's ability to generate an imaginary community capturing aspirations for a possible future.

This selflessness is influenced by Lewis' study of Zen Buddhism and her participation in Buddhist retreats. Through exile from the narrow mind, the protagonist of *Keeping Mum* is able to discover what Zen Buddhists would call the salvation of the universal mind which occurs in the final sequence 'Chaotic Angels.' In *Consorting with Angels*, Rees-Jones suggests that the purpose of 'Chaotic Angels' is to 'suggest ways of knowing the self,' but I offer an alternative possibility: that the purpose of the angelic sonnets is to go beyond a normal, narrow selfhood with its concerns of culture, sex and nationhood to a kind of angelic *apatheia*.²⁴¹ It is this lack of selfhood that allows Lewis to speak, through the medium of the praise poem, to extol the virtue of the minor, the diminutive and the marginalised and consequently, by positioning the minor as something that is central, the orientation between the centre and the margin is blurred.

In *Consorting with Angels*, Rees-Jones praises *Keeping Mum*, for 'never falling prey to the straightforwardly or reductively allegorical,' a statement with which I agree, yet I want to add that the fact that the collection is an allegory is important and necessary.²⁴² In *Black Sun*, Kristeva offers the power of beauty and the aesthetic as a powerful antidote to the negative experiences described in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*. 'In the place of death and so as not to die of the other's death, I bring forth – or at least I rate highly – an artifice, an ideal, a "beyond" that my psyche produces in order to take

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 17.

²⁴¹ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 192.

²⁴² Ibid., 192.

up a position outside itself – *ek-stasis*.²⁴³ For Kristeva, the aesthetic sphere offers the possibility of sublimating the instinctual impulses in depression so that they are diverted into a culturally higher activity and ‘beauty emerges as the admirable face of loss, transforming it in order to make it live.’²⁴⁴ Allegory is one mode of going beyond one’s self and one’s depression since it is a mode that, according to Kristeva, is ‘shifting back and forth from the *disowned meaning*, [...] to the *literal meaning*.’²⁴⁵ Consequently, the story is operating on two levels: on the one hand as a straightforward story and on the other a narrative that in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s words, ‘renounces the individual act of singing in order to melt into the collective enunciation.’²⁴⁶

The Politics of Language

Although she may not seem initially to be an obviously political poet, Lewis was appointed as the inaugural National Poet of Wales (2005 – 2006) and in a personal interview, when I asked her about her politics, she was adamant that she had always been a political poet:

Although I am not party political, *I am* political even if I don’t use a political vocabulary. I am very, very interested in politics although in my poetry it is often not explicit. In *Y Llofrudd Iaith* for example the politics are in code. Politics is, of course, part of the Welsh tradition and a lot of Welsh poetry is overtly political. I am interested in political questions that haven’t been asked.²⁴⁷

Lewis clearly has a firm interest in politics and these thoughts echo her comment in interview with Richard Poole, where she admits that she is ‘fascinated by history,

²⁴³ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 99.

²⁴⁴ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 99.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

²⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 18.

²⁴⁷ Lewis, Personal Interview, 3rd April 2007.

politics and goings-on out there in the world.’²⁴⁸ Interestingly, Lewis notes that the politics in her writing is coded and subtle and her political questioning ventures into areas that are normally sidelined. Again in my personal interview with Lewis, as an example of a political enquiry that she is concerned with, Lewis offered a question about language and the culture of Wales. Lewis’ query, which I mentioned in my analysis of her view of language, challenges the notion of a mother-tongue: ‘One question could be about the metaphor of the mother-tongue: if language is our mother, are we always infantilised?’²⁴⁹ Lewis also mentions this in the introduction to her collection, *Keeping Mum*, in which she explains the context of her poetic sequence, ‘The Language Murderer’: ‘I wanted to explore how we could free ourselves of the idea of a “mother tongue” with all its accompanying psychological baggage and its infantilising of native speakers.’²⁵⁰

This notion of the dominative mother-tongue is significant from the beginning of ‘The Language Murderer,’ which opens with the female protagonist confessing that she has killed her own mother; or rather we discover that she has murdered her ‘mother-tongue.’ Motherhood and language are themes that feature prominently in *Sunbathing in the Rain* and Lewis draws on Kristeva’s study, *Black Sun*. Focussing on psychoanalytical concepts such as ‘the death drive,’ Kristeva embarks on her analysis of melancholia and depression using ‘a Freudian point of view.’²⁵¹ This approach proceeds from Freud’s assumptions about depression in *Mourning and Melancholia* in order ‘to bring out [...] what pertains to a common experience of *object loss*’ and to investigate ‘*the signifier’s failure* to insure a compensating way out of the states of withdrawal in which the subject takes refuge to the point of inaction (pretending to

²⁴⁸ Lewis, ‘Gwyneth Lewis Talks to Richard Poole,’ 25.

²⁴⁹ Lewis, Personal Interview, 3rd April 2007.

²⁵⁰ Lewis, Preface to *Keeping Mum*, 143.

²⁵¹ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 10.

be dead) or even suicide.²⁵² Kristeva's aim is to examine how such self-obliterating behaviour transforms itself into a discourse mediated via language. At the heart of this discourse is *object loss* read through Freud and Melanie Klein; *object loss* describes the oscillation between hate and love in the perception of a lost object of desire and the eventual incorporation of that object within oneself as a means of coping with such a confused state of mind. This often leads to self-loathing for the shadow self that represents the lost object. Hatred that rages against a lost object becomes self-hatred. Developing this theory, Kristeva points towards an extreme version of this *object loss* in which: 'The depressed narcissist mourns not an Object but the Thing.'²⁵³ According to Kristeva this Thing is 'the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center [sic] of attraction and repulsion, seat of sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated.'²⁵⁴

According to Kristeva, the source of this *object relation* emerges in childhood when the child moves beyond a two person unit with their mother, the so-called mother-child dyad. Kristeva describes how at this moment the child recovers the mother 'as sign, image, word.'²⁵⁵ Lewis interprets this theorising in *Sunbathing in the Rain* describing the moment of separation where 'the child finds herself alone.'²⁵⁶ Lewis describes how, to combat the feeling of being 'bereft,' the child calls to the mother and thus 'learns words to enable her to manipulate the world.'²⁵⁷ However, Lewis is aware that the child never really grieves properly: 'The infant has lost her mother but found her again in language, thus masking the original loss.'²⁵⁸

²⁵² Ibid., 10.

²⁵³ Ibid., 13.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 63.

²⁵⁶ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 41.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 41.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 41.

The allegorical symbols of 'The Language Murderer' reflect Lewis' interest in Kristevan theory. The story is that of a mother who is murdered and a daughter, who whether she actually killed the mother or not, nurtures feelings of guilt and loss. However, the allegorical symbolism visualises the mother not simply as a literal maternal figure, but also as the mother-tongue. While replaying the scenario that instigates *object loss* and loss of the mother, Lewis also offers an escape route from her depressed state, since if it is the daughter's mother-tongue that has been obliterated, she must now come to terms with the loss of the mother rather than masking it through language. This reading is anchored by Lewis' comment in *Sunbathing in the Rain* that, 'language is a child's way of evading coming to terms with depression.'²⁵⁹ Conventional language covers up for loss and Lewis suggests that moving beyond language is particularly difficult for the poet, 'who has schooled herself in fluency and technique for years.'²⁶⁰

The poem in which the unnamed daughter-heroine of 'The Language Murderer' first describes the loss of her mother is called 'A Poet's Confession,' and the fact that the alleged murderess is also a poet is no coincidence:

I did it. I killed my mother tongue.
 I shouldn't have left her
 there on my own.
 All I wanted was a bit of fun
 with another body
 but now that she's gone –
 it's a terrible silence.²⁶¹

Speech marks indicate that the subject speaking is a persona, a voice speaking out loud and an allegorical character separate from Lewis' lyric voice. The daughter begins by talking in an emphatic manner, 'I did it,' before falling into a more regular rhythm in

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 42.

²⁶¹ Gwyneth Lewis, 'A Poet's Confession,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 146 (146.1-7).

the second half of the line. The stresses fall on 'killed,' the first syllable of 'mother' and 'tongue,' the emphasis hammering home the finality of the act. Yet the sentences that follow are less certain in their meaning. When the speaker describes how she abandons the mother, it is not the matriarch who is left 'on her own' as one would expect.

Rather the murderous agent who leaves finds herself 'on my own.' Similarly when the speaker explains that she just wanted to enjoy herself 'with another body,' it is unclear whether the expression, 'another body,' is simply a roundabout way to describe spending time with another person, a darkly humorous reference to the mother's corpse or a sexual innuendo. What is clear is that the mother's body has the potential to be a site of exhilaration or 'fun,' yet the *proest*-like chiming between 'own' in line three, 'fun' in line four and 'gone' in line six indicates that any such possibility is now redundant.

The final two lines see a shift from monosyllabic words that knell the death of the mother and of the language, to more polysyllabic expressions that mark the uncertainty of the resulting silence. The question of speaking or not speaking is a significant one in the context of Lewis' reading of Kristeva's on loss and the acquisition of language and it is clear that 'The Poet's Confession' works on a number of levels. On the one hand it simply tells a narrative about a daughter who may or may not have committed matricide. On the other hand, it also replaces the loss of the mother and the acquisition of language with the loss of one's mother-tongue and the acquisition of the English-language in particular. Just as a child struggles to extricate him or herself from the mother-child dyad, so Lewis' protagonist fights to evade the dominative influence of the mother-tongue. I would agree with Rees-Jones' account of this poem in *Consorting with Angels*, in which she argues that the poem represents 'a simultaneous acknowledgement of that language's [i.e. *Cymraeg*'s] importance at the

same time as advocating a relationship between language and nation which is freed of essentialist notions of intrinsic Welshness which are solely dependent *on* the language.²⁶² In response to Rees-Jones' comment, it is worth noting the comparisons between the narrative about escaping the mother-tongue, *Cymraeg*, and Lewis' decision to write in English in earlier poems like 'Pentecost.' The narrative of 'The Language Murderer' could almost be the story of Lewis' journey into the English idiom and the question is how to retain one's internal metre, how to keep the part of one's identity connected to Wales intact when one does not have *Cymraeg*.

Lewis' depiction of the struggle to detach the self from the *object loss* of the mother or mother-tongue is not an easy one, as *Cymraeg* is often figured in imagery of bodily fluid, broken skin and rent tissue. As Rees-Jones notes in *Consorting with Angels*, such imagery recalls Kristeva's definition of the "abject." In *Powers of Horror*, the term, 'abjection,' is used by Kristeva to describe the destabilisation of selfhood when it is in proximity to margins between inside and outside, one and an other. The abject is described as 'a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside.'²⁶³ Kristeva describes it as 'an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion' that 'places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.'²⁶⁴ Kristeva's abject is a significant concept in relation to Lewis' representation of the mother and/or the mother tongue and again it seems to suggest the possibility of *ekstasis* or going beyond one's self. A dictionary definition of "abject" describes something 'mean; worthless; grovelling; base or contemptible' but it can also mean to 'cast away,' the Latin source of the word being *abjicere* or *abjectus* from *ab* meaning 'from' and *jacere* meaning 'to throw.' The abject then is something which must be thrust away because it threatens

²⁶² Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 193.

²⁶³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

²⁶⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.

the whole bounded self with its ambiguous existence on borders. What threatens bounded identity threatens hegemonic logic and so it must be expelled, cast away, thrown out or separated from the whole self. As Italo Calvino writes in 'La Poubelle Agrée,' 'if the gesture of throwing away is the first and indispensable condition of being, since one is what one does not throw away, then the most important physiological and mental gesture is that of separating the part of me that remains from the part I must jettison in order to sink away into a beyond from which there is no return.'²⁶⁵ However, if a person is infected by this abject confusion, they themselves become an exile according to Kristeva: 'The one by whom the abject exists is [...] a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing.'²⁶⁶ In confronting the abject and being infected by it, Lewis' narrator is becoming an exile.

One signal of such infection is the presence of words in *Cymraeg*, which often explode into the poetry of this sequence along with the "abject" bodily fluids of the corpse. Rees-Jones describes the effect of the abject in poems like these as 'dramatising the separation between mother and child, poet and the mother tongue.'²⁶⁷ It seems fitting then that Kristeva associates feelings of abjection with the confrontation with the mother and the breaking up of the mother-child dyad. Kristeva suggests that 'the advent of one's own identity demands a law that mutilates, whereas *jouissance* demands an *abjection* from which identity becomes absent.'²⁶⁸ Later in this sequence and in 'Keeping Mum,' Lewis' narrator will begin to suffer a deconstruction of selfhood, but for now she confronts what Kristeva would call an abject 'devouring

²⁶⁵ Italo Calvino, 'La Poubelle Agrée,' *The Road to San Giovanni*, trans. Tim Parks (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993) 91-126 (104).

²⁶⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 8.

²⁶⁷ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 194.

²⁶⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 54.

mother.²⁶⁹ For example, in 'Her End,' Lewis flashes back to the spectacular death of the mother or mother-tongue with the garrulous gossip of English speakers and the ancient rhythms of *Cymraeg* being pitted against one another:

The end was dreadful. Inside a dam burst
 and blood was everywhere. Out of her mouth
 came torrents of words, *da yw dant*
I atal tafod, gogoniannau'r Tad
 in scarlet flowers – *yn Abercuawg*
yd ganant gogau – the blood was black,
 full of filth, a well that amazed
 with its vivid idioms – *bola'n holi ble mae 'ngbeg?* –²⁷⁰

The initial gossip tone of the narrator falls into a fairly regular rhythm, but the placing of 'everywhere' in the second line induces a pause to contemplate the profusion of the image, of the blood. The expectant line-break after 'Out of her mouth' propels us on to the inclusion of the expunged and bloodied language. The phrases in *Cymraeg* are emphatic ('good is the tooth to stop the tongue'), avowed ('the glories of the Father') and nostalgic ('in Abercuawg sing the cuckoos'). In contrast, the English-language is associated with examination, description and fascination and cannot build up a similar rhythm. Lingering over the abject expelling of fluids/words, the cadenced monosyllabic words are broken up when the English speaker suddenly becomes self-conscious about language using the word 'idioms.' Meanwhile, the beat of *Cymraeg* continues even if the message is confused ('the stomach asking where my mouth is?') and the identification of the *Cymraeg* words with abject bodily fluids, recognises the threat that the mother's body or rather the body of the language poses to the speaker's selfhood. This also explains the effort to make the English language maintain its

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 54.

²⁷⁰ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Her End,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 154 (154.1-8).

distance and detachment, while *Cymraeg* maintains its inconsistent, confused and elliptic style in an abject fashion:

And after the crisis, nothing to be done
but watch her die, as saliva and sweat
of words poured out of her like ants – *padell pen-glin*,
Anghydfurfiaeth, *clefyd y paill*,
and, in spite of our efforts, in the grey of dawn
the haemorrhage ended, her lips were white,
the odd drop splashing. Then she was gone.²⁷¹

In her final death throes, the mother's body becomes an abject border between the inside and outside of the body observed in detail and fascination in the English language commentary. The words that evacuate her form are associated with bodily fluids that emerge from inside of the body, and finally with the image of ants, a metaphor that provokes the horror of bodily invasion. The final *Cymraeg* words to emerge direct us to the sphere of the body (*padell pen-glin* or 'knee-cap'), to the Welsh religious tradition that kept *Cymraeg* alive (*Anghydfurfiaeth* or 'Non-conformity') and to the rural and infectious landscape (*clefyd y paill* or 'hay fever'). These are the last *Cymraeg* words to be uttered though, and the colours suddenly fade to 'grey' and 'white' as the haemorrhage stops. The link to the mother, or rather to the mother-tongue, has at last been severed, yet the response seems to be not a feeling of liberation but of loss. As in 'A Poet's Confession,' the heroine's feelings, signalled by the fading out of colour, are 'numb, / not free, as I'd thought...'²⁷²

As Kristeva suggests in *Black Sun*, the subject must now embark on a period of mourning which is normally masked by language. In 'The Language Murderer,' the heroine's grieving for the mother-tongue is marked by a breaking down of communication. For example, in 'Aphasia,' Lewis' heroine appears to be suffering from a loss of articulated language as she 'ask[s] for "hammer" but am given "spade,"

²⁷¹ Lewis, 'Her End,' 154.19-25.

²⁷² Lewis, 'A Poet's Confession,' 146.17-18.

/ feel like some “tea” but order “orangeade” / by mistake.²⁷³ This breakdown in language is part of the grieving process for the mother-tongue, which cannot be masked by the manipulative tools of words. Rather, after breaking with her mother/language, the heroine finds that, ‘[s]omeone’s cut the string / between each word and its matching thing.’²⁷⁴ This feeling of loss of language concurs with the idea of the mother as the subject of loss that is incorporated within the child. Extending this psychoanalytic notion to apply to the symbol of the mother-tongue, Lewis suggests that losing language dictates the loss of identity and the ability to function or communicate. In ‘Aphasia,’ the heroine concludes: ‘I’ll never know now what I really mean.’²⁷⁵ These final words resonate not only for the narrator, nor for the personal concerns of Lewis, but for an entire culture. Lewis is questioning what many other Welsh critics have also pondered: how to maintain a culture that is losing its language.

At the end of the sequence, ‘The Language Murderer,’ Lewis imagines her heroine sleeping beside Taliesin’s stone. In local mythology this act was supposed to have one of two outcomes; either it would drive you mad or make you a poet. The title of the poem, ‘Brainstorming,’ reflects this duality as it ponders whether an act of daring will provide a generative thought process or a tempest in the brain. Figured as a crisis moment for the heroine, the poem imagines birds falling ‘in silence,’ an image that reflects her own state of uncertainty and loss, but which also indicates the state which she needs to find if she is to discover grace.²⁷⁶ The situation resembles the quest for grace in Weil’s *Gravity and Grace* which asserts that the divine ‘can only be present

²⁷³ Gwyneth Lewis, ‘Aphasia,’ *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 155 (155.1-3).

²⁷⁴ Lewis, ‘Aphasia,’ 155.5-6.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.8.

²⁷⁶ Gwyneth Lewis, ‘Brainstorming,’ *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 156 (156.8).

in creation under the form of absence.²⁷⁷ The argument continues by demanding silence and the negation of words. Such a process brings about two effects much as in the mythology of Taliesin's stone; Weil describes how, while 'some begin to talk to themselves like madmen,' the successful supplicants 'give their whole heart to silence.'²⁷⁸ By the end of the sequence, 'Brainstorming' shows that the protagonist wants to undergo this test to determine 'what survives forgetting' as if to discover what is left after the broken communication and selfhood of 'Aphasia.'²⁷⁹ This resulting loss of identity may seem to be a negative, destructive view of what it is to exile oneself from the mother-tongue, yet it is also liberating and as I will show in the next section of analysis, this shedding of selfhood and sacrifice of conventional identity can be useful.

Depression and Selflessness

At the end of the sequence, 'The Language Murderer,' Lewis imagines her heroine sleeping beside Taliesin's stone to drive herself mad or make her a poet and in the sequence that follows, 'Keeping Mum,' she finds herself in an asylum having seemingly lost her self completely. This loss of selfhood and the feelings of nothingness described in the sequence recall Don Paterson's essay, 'The Dilemma of the Peot [sic],' in which he tries to explain where poems come from and he notes in an aside that, 'in a Buddhistic sense the poem teaches you that you're no more than an infinitely malleable, reprogrammable set of habits and characteristics: nothing, in other words.'²⁸⁰ This sense of nothingness at the heart of the poet's selfhood is particularly

²⁷⁷ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 109.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁷⁹ Lewis, 'Brainstorming,' 156.9.

²⁸⁰ Don Paterson, 'The Dilemma of the Peot [sic],' *How Poets Work*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren, 1996) 155-172 (157).

relevant to Lewis who explains in *Sunbathing in the Rain* that as a result of her depression, she has struggled to deal with feelings of a lost selfhood. Lewis suggests that the feeling was, ‘as if my personality had been wiped,’ and she adds: ‘There was no way of knowing who I was any more, or who I might be when I finally got out of bed.’²⁸¹ Yet Lewis admits that the loss of self can be useful for a poet who wants to discover a new vision, comparing it to ‘the sense of magic about leaning out of a window and looking back into the room you’ve left.’²⁸² Lewis is adamant that such an experience, ‘gives the objects inside, which are suffused with your smell, and are part of your dream life, a new objectivity.’²⁸³ This strategy translates into Lewis’ poetics and she tells Richard Poole in interview that she consciously rejects ‘subject matter that’s merely personal,’ preferring to focus on ‘goings-on out there in the world.’²⁸⁴ Through leaning out of the window and looking back, Lewis is able to make an entire universe out of her small bedroom and the minor becomes macrocosmic undermining the privileging of more powerful subjects.

However, this poetics demands the precarious positioning of self outside the window. In *Sunbathing in the Rain*, Lewis describes her struggle to overcome the loss of her personality which she envisions *via* Francisco Goya’s series of etchings entitled *Caprichos*. One particular image with the title, *Que se la llevaron!* (“They carried her off”) (see fig. 1) haunts Lewis, because the etching features a woman being bodily carried away by faceless figures. Lewis describes the etching as portraying ‘the sensuality of this woman’s self-loss’: a temptation with the possibility of addiction.²⁸⁵ Lewis also associates the picture with an experience of a mugging on the streets of New York and

²⁸¹ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 29.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁸⁴ Lewis, ‘Gwyneth Lewis Talks to Richard Poole,’ 25.

²⁸⁵ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 101.



Que se la llevaron!

Fig. 1: Francisco Goya, *Que se la llevaron!* (1797-1798), in Janis Tomlinson, *Francisco Goya y Lucientes 1746 – 1828* (London: Phaidon, 1994), 137.

she describes the feeling afterwards that ‘the mugger had taken something of mine’ suggesting that part of herself or perhaps her very identity had been carried away by the mugger.²⁸⁶ Lewis concludes that her feelings of unreality about her identity are intimately connected with her poetry which entails the sacrifice of a whole selfhood: ‘The price of writing was abandoning part of yourself that went, obediently, with your lover, Hades, into the dark.’²⁸⁷ The void or black hole is a significant symbol for Lewis and in *Sunbathing in the Rain*, she refers to Kristeva’s conception of the void in *Black Sun*. Lewis is particularly interested by Kristeva’s demands that the subject faces the void of depression. Proceeding with a psychoanalytical approach, Kristeva describes

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 109.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 109.

the absence that seems to be at the heart of depression: ‘Absent from other people’s meaning, alien, accident with respect to naïve happiness, I owe a supreme, metaphysical lucidity to my depression.’²⁸⁸ As Kristeva makes clear in this comment, there are advantages as well as disadvantages in being depressed. Although it provokes extreme suffering, depression can also offer a specific metaphysical view of the world that is ‘supreme’ in its intensity. For Kristeva this view emerges from a confusion of self and other so that ‘we shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the *loss* of that essential other.’²⁸⁹ This is the void, the bottomless lack that extreme depressed subjects mourn over and incorporate into themselves. Kristeva uses a metaphor from Gérard du Nerval to describe it in poetic fashion as ‘an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time.’²⁹⁰ In wondering how to approach such a state of being, Kristeva recommends a poetic slant tackling the condition ‘through melody, through rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes signs.’²⁹¹ Kristeva concludes: ‘For those who are depressed, the Thing like the self is a downfall that carries them along into the invisible and the unnameable.’²⁹²

Like Kristeva, Lewis recognises that there are advantages and disadvantages to allowing one’s selfhood to become part of the void as a result of depression. One reward according to Lewis’ reading of Kristeva, is the poetic gift, since like poetry, depression is, in Lewis’ words, ‘beyond words, beyond sense, beyond beauty even.’²⁹³ Both enable a specific view of the world described by Kristeva as ‘metaphysical’ and

²⁸⁸ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 4.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁹³ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 42.

by Lewis as 'beyond.' This is the compensation of depression's void as it enables a new and complex vision.

Lewis' discovery of the gifts of depression and poetry is enabled by her interest in Zen Buddhism and she explains in *Sunbathing in the Rain* that her practical experience of Zen retreats led her to study its philosophy more closely, because she 'no longer wanted to live like a ghost, but to feel the present fully.'²⁹⁴ Lewis explains these ghost-like feelings in terms of what she calls Zen 'poverty of spirit,' a state of 'being so bereft of personality that, even if you wanted to hang yourself you couldn't find a self to hang.'²⁹⁵ However, Zen practices have allowed Lewis to turn her lack of selfhood and the emptiness of the void into positive and useful preoccupations: 'The Zen meditations which I've learned offer a safe passage through meaninglessness, and prove that confronting it is part of being mentally stable.'²⁹⁶ Lewis has a particular experiential investment in Zen Buddhism and she describes her process of learning through talking to her Japanese Roshi and other spiritual advisors; one such tutor named 'Sister Elaine' explains that, in Zen Buddhism, one's selfhood is a 'monolith,' something that seems initially to be massive, immovable and unchanging.²⁹⁷ Energy, however, is derived, according to this philosophy, 'from the Buddha nature, or larger mind, which is infinite.'²⁹⁸ It is one's ordinary selfhood, described by Lewis as 'conscious or narrow minds' which impedes this universal energy and Lewis describes the process using the metaphor of 'boulders in the river' which 'impede the energy current, but are worn down slowly by the flow, until the Buddha nature eventually

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 88.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 76.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 136.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 88.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 88.

breaks through.²⁹⁹ Only by experiencing the world through the universal mind can higher insights be reached, an achievement that Lewis describes in *Sunbathing in the Rain* through the metaphor of an intuitive ‘hand’ which ‘without looking, picks up an unrecognisable shape and completes a continent.’³⁰⁰

The intuitiveness of Zen is enabled by emptiness and exile from selfhood as Lewis clearly recognises when, in *Sunbathing in the Rain*, she quotes Robert Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an Enquiry into Values*. Pirsig writes that Zen practices such as ‘koans, deep breathing, sitting still and the like’ are designed to cultivate a feeling of ‘stuckness’ in the mind which rather than being a negative state offers gifts of new perception: ‘Your mind is empty, you have a “hollow-flexible” attitude of a “beginner’s mind”.’³⁰¹ In response, Lewis writes that one has to be ‘fully present in any experience, pleasant or otherwise,’³⁰² a thought that links to Buddhist *atma-yajna* or self sacrifice and the calling described by Allan W. Watts in *The Way of Zen* as ‘a progressive disentanglement of one’s Self (*atman*) from every identification.’³⁰³ Lewis embraces ‘suchness’ (*tathata*), a quality that is ‘void and empty because it teases the mind out of thought.’³⁰⁴ For Lewis, the disciplining of the mind to accept emptiness and to resist the attraction and repulsion of ordinary being is very attractive:

When the Buddhists say that ego is a fiction, I don’t think that they mean that the ego isn’t there, but that it isn’t real. It’s only when you learn to live outside it – relying on the stomach as opposed to the head is another way of describing this – that the personality takes its proper place.³⁰⁵

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 88.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 176.

³⁰¹ Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an Enquiry into Values*, 1974 (London: Vintage, 1999), 285.

³⁰² Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 216.

³⁰³ Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (London: Penguin, 1957), 57.

³⁰⁴ Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 151.

³⁰⁵ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 239.

In Lewis' reading of Zen Buddhism, it is only when the unreality of selfhood is accepted, that negative knowledge or decreation can be embraced. As Watts states, negative knowledge is 'not unlike the uses of space – the empty page upon which words can be written, the empty jar into which water can be poured, the empty window through which light can be admitted, and the empty pipe through which water can flow.'³⁰⁶ Similarly, Lewis' empty or absent selfhood acts as a conduit for the concerns of an entire community and this act conveys the value of negative knowledge which lies 'in the movements it permits or in the substance which it mediates and contains.'³⁰⁷

Lewis' quest for negative knowledge through the practice of Zen rituals and exploration of its philosophy, gives a different facet to her religious and spiritual vision and yet it is not necessarily incompatible with her commitment to Welsh Christianity. In *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, Llywelyn emphasises that elements of Welsh nationalism have been 'anything but imperialist' even if other strands of the nationalist movement rely on 'the bipolar, besieged model of holiness as separation.'³⁰⁸ Llywelyn focuses on Welsh theologians, such as Gwynfor Evans, who imagined 'a nationality and nationalism based on Christian duty and responsibility' and this ideal is inextricably linked to 'the historical Welsh instinct that the nation has some particular role to play in divinely guided history, an instinct in which national distinctiveness equals universal spiritual distinction.'³⁰⁹ The individual can serve a universal cause, because, as Llywelyn summarises in a discussion of the philosopher, J.R. Jones: 'Since each individual is a separate existence of the world, each person having the value of the whole world, in a certain sense, then the wholeness of the world is within each one of us, as a micro-

³⁰⁶ Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 57.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 57.

³⁰⁸ Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 59.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 59.

kosmos or sacred space.³¹⁰ What Lewis might be doing in using Zen Buddhist practices is discovering the ‘micro-*kosmos*’ within herself, or as Lewis describes it in *Sunbathing in the Rain*, ‘a new inner cosmology’ in which there is ‘no “out there”,’ but only a new and ‘unselfish’ means of looking at the world that provides ‘a more accurate mode of perception.’³¹¹ Mirroring my discussion of religious representations of linguistic variety, a choice has to be made by Lewis about whether to adopt an exclusive religious nationalism that speaks only of its own concerns, or whether, through the ‘no-self’ of Zen, to discover how a leap can be made from talking in a specific cultural context to an universal expression of marginality. The journey through ‘Keeping Mum’ towards ‘Chaotic Angels’ maps the path from feelings of being overwhelmed by meaninglessness towards understanding what Zen Buddhism calls negative knowledge. Lewis’ acceptance of self-sacrifice gestures to the possibility of speaking about the marginal in a universal and collective mode as Deleuze and Guattari recommend.

Falling into the Void

I intend now to analyse the title sequence from *Keeping Mum*, which appears after the loss of language in ‘The Language Murderer.’ This section relates very closely to Lewis’ writings about depression in *Sunbathing in the Rain* as it investigates loss of language and reconciliation with a selfhood lacking in substance and reality. The allegorical symbols bear a striking resemblance to Lewis’ prose descriptions of depression, when Lewis describes how ‘depression is a murder mystery’ where in place of the ‘old self [...] is a ghost that is unable to feel any pleasure in food, conversation or in any of your usual forms of entertainment.’³¹² The mission for Lewis is ‘to find

³¹⁰ Ibid., 69.

³¹¹ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 239.

³¹² Ibid., xiii.

out which part of you has died and why it had to be killed.³¹³ Once again Lewis is tracing a journey from negative feelings on approaching the void to reconciliation and the ability to use such lack of being to discover what Zen Buddhists call negative knowledge. This is the possibility that exists in the collection's title, *Keeping Mum*, a phrase that echoes 'mum's the word,' an idiom indicating that complete silence is demanded or promised. Such silence could mean a journey into the oblivion of the void or in a more positive light might suggest self-sacrifice as a means of attaining knowledge so that personal concerns are superseded by larger, human ones. As Lewis writes in the introduction to the book, 'wordlessness is usually a clue that something more truthful than our own account of the world is being approached: the "keeping mum" of this book's title.'³¹⁴

The structure of the sequence alternates between poems from the point of view of a psychiatrist and from the point of view of the heroine. Having been committed to an asylum, the heroine's story is told through case notes, tapes and dreamwork and she is labelled with the anonymous title, Miss D, reminiscent of names given to protect psychiatric patients in published accounts of mental illness. As in Goya's *Que se la llevaron!*, Miss D has been literally carried away and while the psychiatrist is confident that he is 'the one who can make the statues move,' the heroine seems to be disappearing into nothingness.³¹⁵ In 'Dissociation,' Miss D seems to be spiralling away from the everyday world as she describes how 'rain's small hands / tap braille on the windows.'³¹⁶ This image records both the sound of rain drumming on the window and the sight of it gathering in drops on the pane. The result is a

³¹³ Ibid., xiii.

³¹⁴ Lewis, *Chaotic Angels*, 144.

³¹⁵ Lewis, 'Consultant,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 160 (160.1).

³¹⁶ Lewis, 'Dissociation,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 161 (161.2-3).

language that can be read through the fingertips (Braille) and through an idiom heard out loud like Morse Code ('tap'). Miss D responds: 'I don't understand.'³¹⁷ Miss D's confusion seems to echo that of nineteenth-century society on the discovery of new communicative technologies, such as Morse Code and radio waves, which disembodied the speaker from the message.³¹⁸ Marina Warner describes the effect in her study, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the Twenty-First Century*: 'Radio waves could not be grasped by the human senses, only the effects of the new methods of transmission, as the mark of a needle quivering on a drum as the taps came through, as the translated and disincarnate voices from the radio set and phonograph.'³¹⁹

In Lewis' rendering, identity itself is a source of mystery and awe and the title of the poem, 'Dissociation,' might indicate that Miss D is in fact communicating with a disembodied or ghostly part of herself. In psychiatry, dissociation can refer simply to the tendency in neurotics 'to perform actions, think thoughts, dream day and night dreams [...] unconnected with and dissociated from their usual, real, or true personalities' or it can manifest itself in an extreme version as dissociation of the personality or split personality, which 'calls into question a basic assumption we all make about human nature, namely that for every body there is but one person; that each of us, despite the passage of time and changes in mood and activity, remains the

³¹⁷ Lewis, 'Dissociation,' 161.4.

³¹⁸ The sense of magic about seemingly ordinary means of communication might reflect Lewis' Nonconformist roots, since as Reginald Nettel explains in 'Folk Element in Nineteenth Century Puritanism,' certain elements of the Methodist movement 'used the Bible as a form of magic more powerful than the superstitions which held the people in fear' (Reginald Nettel, 'Folk Elements in Nineteenth Century Puritanism,' *Folklore* 80.4 (1969): 272-285 (272)). As Mark Knight and Emma Mason put it, Nonconformity has always entailed 'an emotive *and* rational relationship with God' and certain elements of Nonconformism have maintained, alongside a more rational view, an aspect of mysticism and mystery (Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20).

³¹⁹ Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 259.

same person, with a single biography and store of memories.’³²⁰ ‘Dissociation’ presents Miss D in a state of uncertainty about who she is and whether the actions attributed to her are ‘real’ or authentic:

Someone was killed here,
 but no one will tell.
 I watch as patients
 play games of bowls,

 rolling wood planets
 under sighing trees.
 That corpse that I mentioned?
 I think it’s me.³²¹

A murder mystery is figured in the uncertainty of the assertion: ‘Someone was killed here.’³²² The comment echoes Lewis’ symbology in which depression is represented as a murder mystery with the depressed subject playing the role of detective and corpse. The prevailing silence (‘no one will tell’) suggests disapproval of Miss D’s curiosity and the small actions of games are expanded to a planetary scale. The final suggestion that she herself is a corpse echoes Lewis’ previous descriptions of depression and ties in with the idea of dissociation. A dissociation of personality has occurred in which one half of the self has succumbed to the void, the black hole of death, while another part remains driven only by curiosity and the desire to detect the truth behind the mystery.

This duality of death and life is carried into other poems, such as ‘Finding the Bodies’ in which Miss D describes digging up ‘my father’s vegetable patch’ evoking a world of fertile and decomposing matter.³²³ The poem is subtitled ‘DREAM WORK’ and it depicts a vision in which corpses ‘are given a tent / where their body’s located,

³²⁰ “Dissociation of the Personality,” *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, ed. Richard L. Gregory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³²¹ Lewis, ‘Dissociation,’ 161.5-12.

³²² *Ibid.*, 161.5.

³²³ Lewis, ‘Finding the Bodies,’ *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarncliffe, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 163 (163.1).

an official camp / for the start of enquiries.³²⁴ On the one hand, these ‘dead’ seem to be able to walk around, communicate and receive directions, yet the narrator’s final sardonic comment, ‘We’ll have asparagus from that,’ suggests that they are also in a state of decomposition creating putrid compost for new growth.³²⁵ Where as in ‘The Language Murderer,’ the protagonist’s mother was an abject subject existing on borders between the inside and outside of the body, in ‘Keeping Mum,’ it seems that Miss D herself has become an abject subject. As Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror*, ‘the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.’³²⁶ In this state of affairs, it is, ‘no longer I who expel, “I” is expelled.’³²⁷

The feeling of abjection is heightened in ‘A Promising Breakthrough’ in which Miss D recounts a memory of a broken egg. Miss D remembers carrying the egg in her ‘six-year-old palms’ before ‘the jolt – / a blue hydrangea as I bit my tongue’ and a dog comes ‘to lick the horrible yolk.’³²⁸ In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes food loathing as ‘the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection’ as food, an external object, moves inside becoming part of one’s body.³²⁹ However, in this poem the broken egg, an object of loathing, is symbolic of Miss D herself when she states, ‘it was me who was broken.’³³⁰

In other poems, Miss D chooses and even enjoys an abject loss of self as displayed in ‘A Talent for Fainting’: ‘I found a living bird / being eaten by ants. It sounds absurd, / but I quite like falling.’³³¹ In these lines, Lewis often uses the

³²⁴ Lewis, ‘Finding the Bodies,’ 163.6-8.

³²⁵ Ibid., 163.11.

³²⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

³²⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

³²⁸ Lewis, ‘A Promising Breakthrough,’ *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 167 (167.3, 167.5-6, 167.9).

³²⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

³³⁰ Lewis, ‘A Promising Breakthrough,’ 167.12.

³³¹ Gwyneth Lewis, ‘A Talent for Fainting,’ *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 169 (169.4-6).

continuous form of verbs ('living,' 'being,' 'falling') which give a sense of duration and length appropriate for the metaphor of falling. The reference to birds is reminiscent of 'Brainstorming' in which the protagonist imagined birds falling, but in this poem, the bird is dead and it is Miss D who falls. The bounded body of the bird is invaded and perforated by parasites and in response Miss D faints. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes how in response to the sight of a corpse, one response might be to '*fall in a faint*.'³³² This fainting often occurs when seeing a corpse, 'that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything,' and in meeting such a spectacle, the watcher discovers, 'the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away.'³³³ The corpse then threatens a whole and bounded selfhood and inducts the subject into a chaotic and arbitrary world that opens up like a black hole.

From this point onwards, Miss D appears to disintegrate. In 'A Question,' she describes herself as a ghost whose body can be obliterated simply by being touched by intimates. Lewis uses a collocation of imagery preoccupied with nothingness to describe Miss D including: 'liquid dirt, / spattered and macerated into an ooze' and 'a molecule thin.'³³⁴ In 'Seaside Sanatorium,' Miss D describes her selfhood as hanging by a 'thread' which if pulled would 'unravel a slackening tide' and she describes her life as 'a party / in another room.'³³⁵ Such imagery of nonexistence culminates in 'Memorial Service' in which it finally seems that Miss D has died. The psychiatrist states that in death, Miss D, 'drew a blank,' an idiom that means literally to be unable to find some information or to forget something.³³⁶ However, in the context of Lewis' ideas about

³³² Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

³³⁴ Gwyneth Lewis, 'A Question,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 171 (171.10 – 11, 171. 12).

³³⁵ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Seaside Sanatorium,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 173 (173.5-6, 173.15-16).

³³⁶ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Memorial Service,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 177 (177.11).

Zen Buddhism, however painful and difficult the journey towards blankness may be, the ultimate sacrifice of selfhood and confrontation of the void brings fruitful results as I will show in my analysis of *Keeping Mum*'s final sequence, 'Chaotic Angels.'

Part III: In Praise of the Minor

In the final part of *Keeping Mum*, Lewis moves away from the disintegration of language and the self and in the concluding sequence, she offers a sonnet sequence on the angel. In *The Angel's Corpse*, Paul Colilli compares the angel and poetic logic and he suggests that as figures of thought that are now marginalised in society, they, 'share the same fate.'³³⁷ It is appropriate to consider Colilli's account of poetry and the angel here, as he draws on Kristeva's *Black Sun*, a text established as significant to Lewis' poetics. In Colilli's view, 'poetry is not able to know what it enjoys,' or as in the sensing of a divine presence ('the Angel's perfumed corpse'), there is a division between 'joy' and 'knowing.'³³⁸ Colilli writes that although it is obvious that melancholy has played a part in the creation of poetry, it is still pertinent to remember that, 'there is a psychological component to poetic logic, and it consists in the conjugal closeness linking the poetological strategy of excogitating things belonging to different temporal realms and *the black sun* of an originary sadness' [my italics].³³⁹ This black sun represents the state of *acedia*, or a chronic state of ennui and discouragement, which is caused by 'the fracture separating the space of the signified from that of the signifier.'³⁴⁰ The cure for this ailment is 'the new space of semiotic invention' and

³³⁷ Paul Colilli, *The Angel's Corpse* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), ix.

³³⁸ Colilli, *The Angel's Corpse*, 106.

³³⁹ Ibid., 108.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 107.

Colilli concludes that, 'the closest that humans come to such a state of being is through the unbearable empty truth of the poetic sign.'³⁴¹

While the sequence, 'Keeping Mum,' could be described as a downward spiral into *acedia*, in the context of the whole collection, it is simply one step towards the negative knowledge embraced in Zen Buddhism expressed by the empty poetic sign. In fact, Lewis believes that the poet has a particular responsibility to embrace the void, since, as she explains in interview with Kathryn Gray, the poet has a special role in relation to feelings of worthlessness and nothingness:

It seems to me that one of the reasons that poets might be of interest to other people is that they know more than most about the chaos of life, about living with incompleteness, with hopelessness, living with the feeling that what you value and cherish most is not valued and cherished by the rest of society. All basic human emotions. Except poets know more about it because we spend more time doing that. Not because we are superior, more sensitive... But because we know what it is to be nobody.³⁴²

Like Colilli, Lewis believes that the poet has a special relationship with the marginalised because of poetry's sidelined status in society, 'as ruins deprived of any functional value.'³⁴³ In addition, Lewis' lack of selfhood and feelings of unreality come into play, since significance is attributed to knowledge of what it is to be nobody. Like the angel, the poet exists in what Colilli calls, 'a realm of the void.'³⁴⁴ This nothingness can be figured in positive or negative ways, since on the one hand it is visited on the poet as a feeling of worthlessness, yet on the other hand, it is a gift that enables understanding of other minor subjects undervalued by society. Through analysis of the sonnet sequence, 'Chaotic Angels,' I will show that Lewis strives to praise the minor as an antidote to such negative feelings of nothingness and I suggest that writing the traditional Welsh praise poem is strategy that is useful in making marginality central. In

³⁴¹ Ibid., 109, 162.

³⁴² Lewis, 'Gwyneth Lewis in America,' 13.

³⁴³ Colilli, *The Angel's Corpse*, ix.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

an oblique manner, Lewis is able to foreground the marginal undermining the primacy of the centre.

Lewis' view of angels also has some aspects in common with that other great poet for whom angels were a preoccupation: Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926). The *Duino Elegies* (1989; first published 1923), in particular, linger over the figure of the angel as a figure of transcendence which human beings can only aspire to understand. In *Transcending Angels: Rainer Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies*, Kathleen L. Komar explains how Rilke's elegies were influenced by the work of Henrich von Kleist whose model of 'a progression of consciousness' created three levels: the unconscious inanimate object (manifested in Rilke via the motif of the puppet); self-conscious man; and the superconscious state of the divine.³⁴⁵ Komar explains that the inanimate object and the figure of the divine are always have a higher consciousness than human beings, because they 'share the ability to participate in a unified existence from which self-conscious human beings are always excluded.'³⁴⁶ While Rilke recognises that the superconscious being of the angel is a means to discover a higher state of being, he also recognises that the angel is beyond human understanding and invokes terror as a result. For this reason, in the *First Elegy*, angels are 'terrifying,' because although angels are beautiful, 'beauty is nothing / but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure.'³⁴⁷ The *First Elegy* tells how angels see no 'too-sharp distinctions' between the living and the dead,³⁴⁸ and the *Second Elegy* describes the angels as 'deadly birds of the soul' existing 'behind the stars' whose presence would make 'our own

³⁴⁵ Kathleen L. Komar, *Transcending Angels: Rainer Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 9.

³⁴⁶ Komar, *Transcending Angels*, 10.

³⁴⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Duino Elegies,' *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. Stephen Mitchell, trans. Stephen Mitchell (London: Picador, 1987), 149 - 223 (151.7, 151.4-5).

³⁴⁸ Rilke, 'Duino Elegies,' 155.83.

heart, beating /higher and higher, [...] beat us to death.³⁴⁹ As Ralph Freedman notes in *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke*, Rilke's divine being is not a 'human Angel,' but it is 'magnified into an outsized projection of a figure, formed like earthly men and women yet threatening in his infinite range of perception and power.'³⁵⁰ Drawing on biographical detail in Rilke's life, Freedman suggests that '[p]rojecting the figure of the Angel as an original construct of an overpowering and distant consciousness was Rilke's way of breaking through the limits of the private self, confined by the certainty of death.'³⁵¹ Freedman's recognition of the Angel's superiority as a result of its deathlessness complements Komar's statement on Rilke's view of man's inferiority: 'Since man possesses self-consciousness, he is constantly aware of and in dread of his separation from all, of nothingness itself.'³⁵²

Lewis' vision of angels has some similarities with Rilke, since she is interested in different states of consciousness and in selflessness. Freedman's description of Rilke in the *Duino Elegies* as transforming 'the poet's visionary self' into 'a passive recipient' could also apply to Lewis, whose poetic voice is given over in 'Chaotic Angels' to the praise of angels rather than exploration of self.³⁵³ Like Rilke, she becomes, in Freedman's words, 'an Aeolian harp.'³⁵⁴ Lewis' journey towards the angel begins in the descent into nothingness and abjection in 'The Language Murderer' and 'Keeping Mum,' which could be compared with Rilke's vision of the unconsciousness of the inanimate puppet. In the *Fourth Elegy*, Rilke calls out for such unconsciousness: 'the puppet. It at least is full. /I'll put up with the stuffed skin, the wire, the face / that is

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 157.2, 157.7-9.

³⁵⁰ Ralph Freedman, *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 324.

³⁵¹ Freedman, *Life of a Poet*, 324.

³⁵² Komar, *Transcending Angels*, 10.

³⁵³ Freedman, *Life of a Poet*, 324.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 325.

nothing but appearance.³⁵⁵ However, Lewis' heroine is already unconscious having entered the void of death and selflessness at the end of 'Keeping Mum' and that is where a difference lies. The fear of nothingness described by Komar is already irrelevant by the time Lewis comes to talk of angels, because her protagonist has already become the puppet, an inanimate object without human self-consciousness. Also in contrast to Rilke's angel, described by Freedman as 'the perfect, all-powerful figure of God's creation,' Lewis' angels are imperfect and belong to the realm of the diminutive, the mundane and the transitory.³⁵⁶

If Lewis' idea of the angel has its differences to those of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, it does not concord fully with Benjamin's 'angel of history' either. In 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' Benjamin describes the angel of history caught in a storm of progress as it is driven backwards into the future while looking back at the past represented by a 'pile of debris' that 'grows skyward.'³⁵⁷ Lewis' angels are not stuck in this manner, but rather their connection to the minor and the diminutive allows them power and freedom. Lewis' statement in *The City of London Festival Programme 2002*, an event at which her angel sonnets were performed, tells how she wanted to 'bypass traditional theological language about angels' and to do so, she draws on 'the language of modern Chaos Theory.'³⁵⁸ Chaos Theory famously emphasises 'the importance of the small difference in initial conditions' as having a large effect on subsequent events, and Chaos Theory was to 'reject reductionism and determinism in favor of a holistic embrace of complexity and flux.'³⁵⁹ It is fitting that Lewis is attracted to the ideas of

³⁵⁵ Rilke, 'Duino Elegies,' 169.26 – 27.

³⁵⁶ Freedman, *Life of a Poet*, 324.

³⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), 245-255 (249).

³⁵⁸ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Chaotic Angels: A Programme Note,' *The City Of London Festival Programme 2002* (London: City of London Festival, 2002), 18.

³⁵⁹ "Chaos and Complexity". *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*. Ed. J. L. Heilbron. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003.

Chaos Theory, since her commitment to speaking for the minor and representing the interconnectedness of things is heightened in the 'Chaotic Angels' sequence, in which she imagines 'even the smallest particles passing messages on to us from the void.'³⁶⁰

Drawing on the origins of the word 'angel' from the Greek *Angelos* and the Hebrew *Malek* which both refer to a 'messenger,' Lewis explains that her angel represents a communication between one and another that, at first, is not necessarily totally understood. In a personal letter, quoted by Rees-Jones in *Chaotic Angels*, Lewis describes how in researching angels, she discovered that, 'the technical term for an unidentified object on a radar screen is "an angel," that is a message which we can register, but not fully understand.'³⁶¹ This concept of the angel is comparable to the poet who offers a special kind of writing which is pregnant with ellipsis, slant meanings and clues. The angel is both the messenger and the message and acts in terms reminiscent of Weil's vision of religious devotion in *Gravity and Grace*, when she writes of the aspiration, '[t]o be what the pencil is for me when, blindfold [sic], I feel the table by means of its point – to be that for Christ.'³⁶² Angels enable those they visit to fulfil an instruction from God and such an exchange recalls the traditional view of angels, as described by Warner in *Phantasmagoria*, as mediators 'between worlds, able to inhabit the intermediate realm because they are themselves intermediaries, messengers from another realm, translating differences of earth and heaven, flesh and spirit.'³⁶³ As Lewis states in 'How to Read Angels,' what is received from angels is 'information, but

³⁶⁰ Lewis, 'Chaotic Angels: A Programme Note,' 18.

³⁶¹ Gwyneth Lewis, qtd. Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 195.

³⁶² Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 40.

³⁶³ Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 72.

that's never all'; rather the angel offers instruction for you to 'do something' and the gift in return is 'peace.'³⁶⁴

However, it is a lack of self-consciousness or angelic *apatheia* that allows messages to be transmitted and this *apatheia* chimes with Rilke's vision of the angel's superconsciousness. The term, *apatheia*, first emerged from Stoicism and it described the denial of emotions that might lead to mistaken beliefs negating the value of virtue. Later in religious tradition (particularly the East European Christian Church), the positive value of such a denial continued to define the term as *apatheia* became 'a technical term for human perfection, denoting mastery of the passions or serenity.'³⁶⁵ Echoing the selflessness of decreation and Zen Buddhist negative knowledge, and in a similar vein to the *ekstasis* of allegory, *apatheia* offers new discoveries through self-denial and service. The quest in the poetic sequences, 'The Language Murderer' and 'Keeping Mum,' is towards this *apatheia* and what is discovered in the concluding section, 'Chaotic Angels,' is how to speak for a minor literature, how to adopt the collective annunciation recommended by Deleuze and Guattari. Lewis does fulfil Deleuze's and Guattari's recommendation to speak for the minor, yet rather than being tied to stereotypical cultural production and the dominative issues surrounding the infantilising mother-tongue, *Cymraeg*, Lewis prefers to speak of minor subjects as universal subjects situated in the centre rather than the margins. As Weil's maxims reveal, in such a mode there is no need, 'to be "myself",' rather the subject must, 'take the feeling of being at home into exile,' and, 'be rooted in the absence of place.'³⁶⁶ This process can be difficult, but Weil concludes, 'by uprooting oneself one seeks greater

³⁶⁴ Gwyneth Lewis, 'How to Read Angels,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 186 (186.1, 186.7-8).

³⁶⁵ "Apatheia", *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁶⁶ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 39.

reality.³⁶⁷ Lewis fulfils Deleuze's and Guattari's criterion in an oblique manner through a succession of 'angel' sonnets that praise the minor, the diminutive and the marginal.

The praise tradition in Welsh poetry is a powerful one and Lewis describes in interview how fundamental it is to the poetic heritage: 'The religious tradition is very strong here in Wales and praise is one of the things that you do.'³⁶⁸ A.M. Allchin's study, *Praise Above All*, points out that in the genre of praise poetry, the roles of priest and poet overlap; according to Allchin: 'Both are called, in different ways to bless; and to bless (*bendicere*) in its original meaning is to speak good things, to declare the goodness which is latent in the world around us.'³⁶⁹ In 'Praise of the Past: The Myth of Eternal Return in Women Writers,' Kenneth R. Smith suggests that women poets of Wales use the Welsh praise tradition simply to 'look to past women.'³⁷⁰ However, Lewis does not follow Smith's simple maxim in using the praise poem, since she commends the figure of the angel. If Lewis does not fall into the simple, gendered practice allotted to women poets by Smith, neither does she obviously create praise poems that 'still serve the function they did among the ancient Brythonics: remembering.'³⁷¹ Lewis' purpose is rather to go beyond her own personal context whether that be sex, nation or culture and in an oblique manner, she does speak for a collective in her praise of angels that belong to qualities of the invisible, the minor and the silent.

Interestingly, Lewis notes in interview that while writing a praise poem about 'a beautiful day' is 'easy,' she is keen to set herself much more difficult tasks, such as

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 39.

³⁶⁸ Lewis, Personal Interview, 3rd April 2007.

³⁶⁹ Allchin, *Praise Above All*, 6.

³⁷⁰ Kenneth R. Smith, 'Praise of the Past: The Myth of Eternal Return in Women Writers,' *Poetry Wales* 24.4 (1988): 50-58 (50).

³⁷¹ Smith, 'Praise of the Past,' 50.

'how to praise cancer.'³⁷² Lewis recalls the American poet, John Berryman's *The Dreams Songs*, in which he praises cancer as a reward and Lewis finds it 'amazing to think of cancer in that way.'³⁷³ Lewis follows this strategy in her earlier collection, *Zero Gravity*, and particularly in the title sequence. Subtitled the sequence, 'A Space Requiem,' Lewis confounds the journey of her astronaut cousin into space with the death by cancer of her sister-in-law:

Out of sight? Out of mind?
 On her inward journey
 she's travelled beyond
 the weight of remembering³⁷⁴

In this poem, Lewis praises the invisible and the unseen. The repetition and stress on 'out' emphasises that the subject of the poem has been expelled from her fleshly body. The account echoes Weil's description of the nothingness of devotion in *Gravity and Grace*: 'The soul transports itself outside the actual body into something else.'³⁷⁵ Like Weil, Lewis admires the liberation from the body, while the line-break after 'beyond' teases with the frustration of not knowing what freedom the unknown will bring. Lewis synthesises the macrocosmic and microcosmic so that a journey into outer space becomes a voyage into inner space, yet the outcome of such an experience is forgetting and nothingness. The space journey could be a metaphor for Lewis' poetic journey into the void and it is clear that this strategy enables Lewis, in her own words, to 'change the terms of how something is situated' and to 'create a different

³⁷² Lewis, Personal Interview, 3rd April 2007.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Zero Gravity: A Space Requiem,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 79-96 (93.6-9).

³⁷⁵ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 140.

perspective.³⁷⁶ Lewis' angel sonnets do just this: they change the way in which the minor is situated.

The analysis that follows shows how Lewis creates angels that are associated with the diminutive or everyday, with powerful invisible forces imperceptible or ignored by human senses, with the invisible harmonics of music, with death and with the loss of a conventional or whole selfhood. I deal with the poems of the sequence in groupings related to what kind of periphery they represent and I argue that these angels of the disregarded, of the overlooked and of the unseen represent a political and collective message that brings the minor subjectivity to the centre.

Diminutive and Invisible Angels

While in *Zero Gravity*, Lewis' desires to embrace the void are frustrated, 'Chaotic Angels' offers representations of unseen forces, self denial and the power of the minor object and subject. In the Bible, angels are sometimes pictured as glorious figures aflame, yet Lewis' depiction of angels praises another kind: angels that are bathetic, diminutive and minuscule and that exist in the practical world. In 'Minimal Angel,' Lewis offers a glimpse of what angels might be and to what they might be dedicated:

The smallest angel of which we're aware
is a 'spinning nothing.' Angel of dust,
angel of stem cells, of pollen grains,
angel of branches which divide to a blur
as they're ready to bud, becoming more
than their sum was even an hour before.³⁷⁷

In praising these minimal angels, Lewis begins with a contradiction when she imagines an angel as 'a "spinning nothing".'³⁷⁸ One questions how 'nothing' is spinning, or one

³⁷⁶ Lewis, Personal Interview, 3rd April 2007.

³⁷⁷ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Minimal Angel,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarncliffe, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 184.1-6.

imagines a void revolving in space and time. In Lewis' view, angels belong to both death and life with allegiances on the one hand to particles of dust, the waste of human bodies, and on the other to life-giving, renewable stem cells and to pollen grains that contain the reproductive gametes of seed plants. The image of angels as pollen is very like the line in Rilke's second elegy which describes the angel as 'pollen of flowering godhead.'³⁷⁹ As in Rilke, the reproductive qualities of pollen are not simply human but divine too: the reproduction of a spiritual message. Angels also belong to the process of growing as is shown in the image of branches dividing and blooming. The finality of the rhyming couplet lends emphasis to the praise for this development while a rhythm of alternating anapaestic and iambic feet in the last line of the extract cements the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in such growth.

Angels are connected to subjects of wonder and fear like death, life and growth, but Lewis deals with this in a manner relevant to the contemporary, everyday world. The volta in the seventh line of the sonnet marks a change in focus and the list that follows associates angels with objects from the practical, modern world:

Angel of dog smells, angel of stairs,
 of gardening, marriage. Cherubim
 of rotting rubbish, of seeing far,
 of rain's paste diamonds after a shower.
 Radiation angels, angels of mud,
 angels of slowing and of changing gear,
 angels of roundabouts, and of being here
 all say: 'You were made for this – prayer.'³⁸⁰

These lists of angels are seemingly unglamorous, bathetic and low-key, but they are just as relevant to the high-minded themes of death, life and growth. These angels belong to unpleasant and musty sensorial experiences, such as 'dog smells' and 'rotting

³⁷⁸ Lewis, 'Minimal Angel,' 184.2.

³⁷⁹ Rilke, 'Duino Elegies,' 157.14.

³⁸⁰ Lewis, 'Minimal Angel,' 184.7-14.

rubbish,' incidents resulting from waste and decomposition, processes evocative of death and decay.³⁸¹ The angels emerge from practical human technologies taken for granted like 'stairs' and from more ambiguous elements, like radiation, which can effect humans negatively or positively depending on their uses. Angels exist in human endeavours too, such as the creative act of cultivating a garden, the commitment to another person in marriage, the possibility of extending one's vision and the skill in noticing the beauty of nature after a rainstorm. Angels can be part of the everyday lives of human beings; the strong rhyming couplet in the penultimate lines focuses on the mechanics of driving as a metaphor for growth, as the act of changing 'gear' translates into a moment in the journey that is 'being here.' All of these angels exist in the practical, modern world and rather than emerging as spectacular or startling occurrences, they are stored in miniscule cells invisible to the human eye, in the slow growth of trees that goes unnoticed, in the low-key, practical existence of the modern world and in the objects that people cast away from them or ignore. The message of prayer, signalling the desire to develop a personal relationship with the divine, exists in the margins, in the unspectacular and in the invisible.

'Pagan Angel' focuses particularly on the invisibility of angels and Lewis concords with Warner's suggestion in *Phantasmagoria*, that the supernatural spirits of the past are still alive but in a different sense to those of the past: 'Angels and spectres have changed character, and meaning and impact, but they are visible and powerful through entertainment media in ways that cohere with their past appearances.'³⁸²

³⁸¹ Similarly in a poem that I do not have space to deal with here, 'Angel of Depression,' the narrator begins in disbelief questioning why an angel would visit a depressed person entering 'stuffy rooms / smelling of cabbage.' However later she praises the decomposing and decrepit body as a site of excellence: 'Oh yes, I'm broken but my limp / is the best part of me. And the way I hurt.' (Gwyneth Lewis, 'Angel of Depression,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 185 (185.2-3, 185.13-14)).

³⁸² Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 335.

Lewis' angels are not winged figures or spectacular warriors, but the invisible forces that move through air and bodies:

You ask me how it is we know
 God's talking, not us. When even a stone
 can photograph lilies and, as it falls,
 prove that gravity's no more than speed?
 When loquacious skies call
 in gamma rays, radio, infra-red,
 and that's if we're not listening at all.³⁸³

The opening line of the poem seems straightforward enough with one speaker addressing the query of an offstage questioner. Although it is stated in a fairly regular iambic rhythm, the line break after 'know' signals that this response may not be as straightforward as it initially seems. The rhythm teeters on the next line, with the stresses falling on 'God's' and 'us' emphasising that a dialogue is to take place between the divine and the human and the question is how to ascertain the message and presence of God. The rhythm picks up speed in stating the difficulty in recognizing God's message (adopting an anapaest and iamb), but uncertainty pervades the rhythm in the next few lines that describe the improbable properties of the stone. Polysyllabic words invade the lines with technological and scientific lexicon such as 'photograph,' 'gravity' and 'infra-red.' These are all powers or forces that work invisibly, yet Lewis asserts that human beings have become blind, or rather deaf, to them.

Warner's comments in *Phantasmagoria* seem very relevant here when she explains that 'technologies of reproduction and representation act as the chief catalysts of a new phantasmagoria masquerading as empiricism.'³⁸⁴ The result is the realisation of fantasies (e.g. 'the voice of the beloved in one's ear from a mobile phone in a faraway country') and the reproduction of 'the generative, image-making faculties of

³⁸³ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Pagan Angel,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarncliffe, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 180 (180.1-7).

³⁸⁴ Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 335.

mind.³⁸⁵ In contrast to this modern trend, Warner places the wonder of nineteenth-century scientists, theologians and philosophers about the invisible forces at work in the environment around them and she describes their amazement at the discovery 'that there was so much more to empty air.'³⁸⁶ Similarly, Lewis expresses wonder at the unseen forces at work in the world such as the processes of geology that create a fossilised imprint of a flower, the force of gravity and invisible technologies such as gamma, radio and infrared waves. However, the way in which this discovery is framed registers society's lack of wonder about such discoveries and the difficulty of faith in a world in which everything can be explained. As a remedy for this failure, Lewis looks to the human body:

The heart's a chamber whose broody dead
stage pagan rituals. Wind blows
across stone lintels, making a tune
about absent bodies.
You ask me again:
'Where's the angel acoustic?'
My dear, the curlew. The quickening rain.³⁸⁷

The first line of this section marks a volta in the poem's structure, since the content moves from considering human beings' disbelief in divine external forces to detailed examination of the human interior. The opening line is rhythmic and emphatic, accentuating the message that the heart is much more than a mechanical organ. Rather Lewis describes the heart as inhabited by dead people, a comment that might gesture to a kind of immortality. The presence of the dead signals though that the human body might be a space in which improbable or unbelievable things could occur. The action performed by the dead in the heart is that of staging 'pagan rituals,' a reference that recalls the pagan sub-culture that has existed in the margins of European Christianity

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 336.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 258.

³⁸⁷ Lewis, 'Pagan Angel,' 180.8-14.

making its presence felt through symbols in religious festivals such as the Christmas tree. Lewis' vision inserts supernatural elements and marginalised sub-cultures into the human body. Their presence is seemingly beyond human control and Lewis envisions the invisible force of the wind blowing through the chamber of the heart, blustering around the lintels, those stone slabs that discharge the weight of the structure above. This breeze creates a music 'about absent bodies,' an ambiguous phrase that offers two meanings; either the 'tune' is on the theme of absent bodies, or the preposition, 'about,' is used to describe the movement of the wind around the location of the heart and between the 'absent bodies' of the dead. In either case, the tune emerges from nothingness and the heart becomes a kind of Aeolian harp played by the wind. The final question demands to know what the 'angel acoustic is,' but Lewis can only answer obliquely and elliptically gesturing to the everyday sounds of nature: birdsong and rainfall. The curlew is a wading bird renowned for its musical cry, but this reference may also direct the reader to the 'curlew sign,' a notation in musical score that directs the singer or musician to 'listen and wait until the other performers have reached the next barline or meeting point.'³⁸⁸ In this context the curlew might represent the emptiness that enables human beings to communicate with the divine. The 'quickenning rain' would also relate to human and divine dialogues, since rain has always been a source of life and vigour for human beings and the emergence of a downpour has often been represented in religious narratives and mythologies as evidence of celestial grace. The rhyme between 'again' and 'rain' emphasises the rain as a reoccurrence of God's presence in the world and it answers the disbelief of the first part of the sonnet.

The angels praised in 'Minimal Angel' and 'Pagan Angel' are not necessarily dominating or powerful, omniscient or commanding. Rather they exist in the everyday

³⁸⁸ "Curlew sign," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. Michael Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

objects or activities not normally thought of as valuable and in the margins of understanding. Lewis fortifies and praises such angels and in revealing that the debris of the periphery can be divine, she outlines the possibilities for a subject of the periphery who can maintain a belief in the importance of otherness.

Harmonic Angels

Belief and disbelief are themes that reoccur in this sonnet sequence and in a number of sonnets, the invisible force that makes its presence felt is that of music or sound. In *Phantasmagoria*, Warner describes the initial amazement in the nineteenth century at ‘the possibility of previously undetected acoustic phenomena.’³⁸⁹ Warner describes the sense of wonder at the fact that, ‘that harmonic maps hummed beyond the reach of human senses, and that the universe was vibrating with imperceptible forces.’³⁹⁰ Themes of music and the imperceptible are also significant in Christian theology. For example, when Weil writes about faith in *Gravity and Grace*, she uses the metaphor of music:

When we listen to Bach or to a Gregorian melody, all the faculties of the soul become tense and silent in order to apprehend this thing of perfect beauty – each after its own fashion – the intelligence among the rest. It finds nothing in this thing it hears to confirm or deny it, but it feeds upon it.³⁹¹

Weil’s choice of words seems relevant to Lewis’ vision, since Weil’s statement suggests that faith rests upon the act of listening and maintaining silence. In *The City of London Festival Programme 2002*, Lewis describes music as ‘an angelic force at the centre of current world turmoil,’ and she situates music in opposition to violence.³⁹² Rather than

³⁸⁹ Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 258.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

³⁹¹ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 129.

³⁹² Lewis, ‘Chaotic Angels: A Programme Note,’ 18.

harming others, music, like faith, forces the subject to be silent in a contemplative mode that offers sustenance to others in the shared moment of melody.

'Fire Angel' uses a similar metaphor when Lewis suggests that, 'it's music that holds up this church.'³⁹³ Expanding the metaphor, Lewis imagines further fortifications such as 'chromatic buttresses' and 'a spandrel wall/ of finest vibrato.'³⁹⁴ The use of the word 'chromatic' to describe an architectural support is unusual, but it appears to tie in with the theme of praising the minor since the term, 'chromatic,' is used in music to describe notes that are absent from the scale of the key of a particular passage (i.e. non-diatonic notes).³⁹⁵ Meanwhile the spandrel wall that supports an arch is made not from bricks but from the singing technique, vibrato, which describes a fluctuation of pitch, intensity, and timbre. Far from being sturdy fortifications, these supports are off-key and insubstantial. This feeling is intensified with the image of a church spire, which 'narrows to nothing on its rising scale, / leaning the weathercock to turn at will / prompted by any weathery whim.'³⁹⁶ The spire directs the parishioners to the weathercock, which like the heart that becomes an Aeolian harp in 'Pagan Angel,' is moved by the invisible force of the wind. As in Weil's use of the music metaphor, melody and faith seem to be interchangeable and in fact, the chromatic and insubstantial music becomes building blocks for belief leading to the emptiness that enables the grace of God.

However, in conflict with the music that enables silence and emptiness, Lewis depicts fire. The first half of the sonnet concludes with the lines: 'Melody, for once,

³⁹³ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Fire Angel,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarncliffe, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 182 (182.1).

³⁹⁴ Lewis, 'Fire Angel,' 182.2-3.

³⁹⁵ It is also interesting to note that the specific 'chromatic scale' plays an important part in post-Romantic and serial techniques in the composition of classical music. For example, Arnold Schoenberg's (1874 – 1951) experimentation in chromatic harmony led to atonal compositions which are very demanding, but rewarding for listeners. What the 'chromatic buttresses' might represent then are the hard but worthwhile work of receiving musical messages.

³⁹⁶ Lewis, 'Fire Angel,' 182.4-6.

has overcome fire.³⁹⁷ The volta occurs when Lewis states: 'But I've seen different.'³⁹⁸ The narrator now conjures Acco, an ancient city mentioned in the Old Testament as part of a parcel of land belonging to the Sheret of Asher.³⁹⁹ Situated in modern-day Israel, Acco has historically always been a site of contest fought over by the Egyptians, Syrians and Chinese. By the time of the thirteenth century, French and English crusaders had gained control of the city and they constructed a vast network of underground passages beneath the city. In the second half of 'Fire Angel,' Lewis recalls entering this secret complex following a boy 'who lit up plastic-bottle flares / and guided me, nervous, underground.'⁴⁰⁰ The 'plastic-bottle flares' situate the experience firmly in the modern day, yet as Lewis describes fearlessly entering the passages, the language moves from the throwaway materials of the contemporary moment 'into flickering vaults, a garrison / built by crusaders, remembered in flame.'⁴⁰¹ On a visual level, the vaults might be 'flickering' as the subjects view them by candlelight, yet there is also a feeling that the garrison, a body of troops to protect a town, is not human at all, but embodied by fire like the Old Testament angels. The most eponymous example of a fiery angel is in Exodus 3.2, when the Angel of the Lord appears to Moses in the form of a burning bush. This kind of angel is associated in Lewis' poem with the violence and warfare of Acco, recalling how in her poem 'Pentecost,' she laments the linguistic separation and cultural conflict in European cities such as Sofia and Paris. The flame is seductive, yet Lewis' philosophy of the angel rejects the Old Testament angel with its punitive aspect and the abrupt conclusion to the sonnet signals that the

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 182.7.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 182.8

³⁹⁹ See Judges 1.31.

⁴⁰⁰ Lewis, 'Fire Angel,' 182.9-10.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 182.13-14.

consuming fire made by man is far inferior to the church supported and created by invisible musical harmonics.

The conflict between music and destruction occurs again in the sonnet, 'In Memory of Katherine James,' a poem dedicated to a victim of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. In this poem, Lewis wonders how one can differentiate between the voice of God and the voice of demons, false angels that offer 'an excuse / to megaphone the ego's madness.'⁴⁰² After the volta, Lewis describes the victim as someone supported and enriched by music much as the church is supported in 'Fire Angel.' As a musician, she is described as habitually 'leaving her body and strolling through / the wide avenues and porticoes / that melody built.'⁴⁰³ This imagery recalls supernatural imaginings of the nineteenth-century about communicative technologies; for example, the possibility of moving 'an individual through time and space' which in turn recalls the magical element in Nonconformist beliefs of that era.⁴⁰⁴ In a less literal sense though, Lewis emphasises the woman's ability to go beyond her own ego and its 'madness' to discover a whole other divine world in music. Lewis sums this up stating: 'She had an ear / for what was beyond herself.'⁴⁰⁵ Lewis makes it clear that Katherine James represents a certain selflessness and sets this music against the 'terrible roar' of destruction at the site of 9/11.⁴⁰⁶ Warner has written in *Phantasmagoria* that images of the September 11th terrorist attack are sublime, because 'they open up visions of the abyss.'⁴⁰⁷ In this poem, Lewis represents the musician, Katherine James, as having fallen into the ultimate void and

⁴⁰² Gwyneth Lewis, 'In Memory of Katherine James,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 187 (187.6-7).

⁴⁰³ Lewis, 'In Memory of Katherine James,' 187.9-11.

⁴⁰⁴ Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 258.

⁴⁰⁵ Lewis, 'In Memory of Katherine James,' 187.11-12.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.14

⁴⁰⁷ Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 373.

eraser of identity: death. However even through the destruction of the World Trade Centre, Lewis imagines that the victim's 'lovely harmonics' can be heard.⁴⁰⁸ The sonnet, 'Angel of Healing,' seems to explain Lewis' thought in setting up an image of music in the midst of destruction, because 'The Angel of Healing' suggests that in facing a debilitating disease or illness, 'your job's to compose yourself round about / its formal restrictions, and make that sing, / even to death.'⁴⁰⁹ This poetic metaphor compares the difficulty of writing in form to the painful fighting off of a disease and it demands a quest to create and praise even in the most hopeless situation.

This theme is heightened in 'Angel of Dying,' another poem on the subject of music and destruction. Where as 'In Memory of Katherine James' and 'Fire Angel' both inhabit cities that have been sites of violence and destruction in the past, New York and Acco, 'Angel of Dying,' situates itself in city where violence is taking place in the present moment, since it depicts, '[a] young boy dying on a ward in Kabul.'⁴¹⁰ Like Acco, Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, has been a site of contest throughout its history, most recently in the Afghanistan War waged by the US and Britain supposedly as a result of links in Afghanistan to the tragedy of 9/11. Like the musician in 'In Memory of Katherine James,' the boy depicted is a victim who manages his death *via* music. Using the finality of the rhyming couplet, Lewis explains how he 'wouldn't stop singing – made music from screams, / wouldn't sleep, wouldn't drink, but chanted dreams.'⁴¹¹ The repetition of 'wouldn't' in these lines indicates that while the boy's death may be out of his control, he still has choices and perhaps like the musician, Katherine James, the boy's use of music offers an escape from his earthly body. Lewis

⁴⁰⁸ Lewis, 'In Memory of Katherine James,' 187.14.

⁴⁰⁹ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Angel of Healing,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarnet, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 189 (189.10-12).

⁴¹⁰ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Angel of Dying,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarnet, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 188 (188.1).

⁴¹¹ Lewis, 'Angel of Dying,' 188.2-3.

certainly sets the boy as an example, since she describes how he 'held his dying like a torch of flame / for us to follow.'⁴¹² Lewis repeats the imagery that appeared in 'Fire Angel,' when in the underground passages of Acco, a boy is her guide. This is anchored in the following lines when she describes the setting which resembles the underground complex at Acco: 'Arches leapt darkly overhead / threw shadows over us.'⁴¹³ As in 'Fire Angel,' the imagery suggests uncertainty over how substantial these passageways are: do the arches leap and shimmer in the candlelight or does the description signal something more supernatural? In either case, the comparison between Kabul and Acco is obvious; while Acco was a site of war between Christians and Muslims during the Crusades, the Afghanistan War is the modern equivalent: a conflict drawing on fundamentalist antagonisms.

However, in following the boy's song, Lewis enters not only the passageways of war and destruction, but pursues the boy, 'past comfort, past reason or blame,' towards, 'the terrible energy of the dead / whose death is more life than flesh can bear.'⁴¹⁴ The boy moves through a number of states; he cannot be soothed with platitudes about his oncoming death and it is also too late to understand or place blame for his injuries. In describing his death, Lewis uses an oblique statement, 'death is more life than flesh can bear,' as if to suggest that death is simply an overload of sensorial experience that is too much for the fragile human body.⁴¹⁵ Lewis' admiration for the courage of the boy is rooted in her perception of how he faces his death. His reward is, after death, living on invisibly: 'The silence sang of him instead ...'⁴¹⁶ In the

⁴¹² Ibid., 188.5-6.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 188.6-7.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 188.8-10

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 188.10.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 188.12.

nothingness of his death, there is still something of the boy left, a presence in the absence of silence existing like imperceptible harmonic maps.

These poems of music and violence emphasise two forms of consciousness that can be adopted by human beings: the oblivion of death and the escape of the imagination. As Elaine Scarry states in *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*, 'pain and imagining are the "framing events" within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur; thus, between the two extremes can be mapped the whole terrain of the human psyche.'⁴¹⁷ In Lewis' poems, the choice is whether to descend into the unconsciousness of death becoming an object much like Rilke's puppet, or to enter the realm of imagination, which can allow an escape into divine superconsciousness. In either case, one must go beyond the conventional understanding of being and enter the margins, the periphery and silence.

Angels of the Celestial Void

The descent into silence suffered by the boy of Kabul in 'Angel of Death' prefigures and echoes the theme of self-sacrifice and self loss, which appears in other poems. As in 'The Language Murder' and 'Keeping Mum,' the problem of losing self as a result of losing language reoccurs. In 'Tarot Angel,' the Tarot symbol referred to is the collapsing tower with its origins in the Babel story, as Lewis follows the angel 'through the Tarot de Marseilles' to 'the Tower with its tumbling men.'⁴¹⁸ The first half of the sonnet (lines one to seven) riff over the difficulties of communication. Lewis warns the reader: 'Take great care / as you decide what it might all mean: / that's his

⁴¹⁷ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 165.

⁴¹⁸ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Tarot Angel,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarncliffe, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 181 (181.1-2).

department.⁴¹⁹ Human beings are not allowed to have a definitive grasp of meaning according to this angel, which resembles avenging angels in Revelations who celebrate the linguistic division of humankind (e.g. Revelation 14.8). Lewis suggests that such a control over language is inaugurated through our own fear 'of the Death card and the Hanging Man / though what they signify is far from clear.'⁴²⁰ In the Tarot pack, the symbol of Death represents a literal or metaphorical death and the anxiety described by Lewis is provoked by the uncertainty over what kind of death is signified. The symbol of the Hanging Man has its origins in Germanic mythology and the story of Odin, who in a quest of self-sacrifice for the gift of wisdom hung himself on the cosmic tree to learn the secrets of the runes. Both symbols dictate a loss of selfhood and recall the slipping into the void represented in 'The Language Murderer' and 'Keeping Mum.'

As in *Keeping Mum* as a whole, 'Tarot Angel' traces a journey towards embracing the void and after the volta half-way through the poem, it moves from the difficulties of linguistic difference to praise the seemingly impossible belief in immortality.

Who says this is folly? It might come true.
 Step over the cliff with me, the Fool,
 take a chance on changing. Die every day
 as if you were living and that you knew
 that broad roads score the blazing sky.⁴²¹

Lewis questions disbelief boldly, while the iambic feet in the phrase, 'It might come true,' contrast with the undecidability of the statement. In spite of such uncertainty, Lewis' invitation (in the second line) to fall into the void is commanding using an iambic rhythm broken by an anapaest in the second foot. The emphasis falls on the

⁴¹⁹ Lewis, 'Tarot Angel,' 181.3-5.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 181.6-7.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 181.10-14

word 'cliff' revealing that this poem is situated on the edge or margin of conventional thinking and being. The trochaic rhythm in the clause, 'take a chance on changing,' is convincing, but when Lewis again broaches the topic of death, the rhythm becomes far more disordered as if to express the jumping off into chaos. The broken rhythm highlights the uncertainty of faith and its difficulty, yet the final line with its three long stresses on 'broad roads score' lingers over the possibilities of faith. Also the *proest*-like rhyme between 'day' and 'sky' focuses on the possibilities and vastness of time and space. In conveying a message of hope, 'Tarot Angel' contrasts with the Biblical angel of Revelations in the first half of the poem. Lewis rejects this kind of angel and rather the poem itself is the Tarot angel signalling the possibilities and freedom in symbols such as Death and the Hanged Man.

Angels are not aggressive apparitions or dominative presences as is shown in 'Angels of Stage and Screen,' a poem that pits the cult of the celebrity against the grace of selflessness. In a personal letter quoted by Rees-Jones in *Consorting with Angels*, Lewis explains that the angel is 'a particularly sympathetic concept in the age of the mass media, when we understand a lot about the process of communication.'⁴²² Schooled in filmic and media languages, the modern subject is saturated by communications of one kind or another, but in 'Angels of the Star and Screen,' Lewis directs the reader to dialogues that emerge *via* silence and ellipsis. Lewis begins by wondering how a star cultivates his or her own cult of personality and she imagines a celebrity dispensing advice. Lewis describes what a celebrity might recommend: to keep the head 'still' when 'talking to girls' in an effort to 'let the action come to you'; to cultivate the ego to embody 'charisma'; and to 'mortify flesh in the latest gym.'⁴²³ In exposing the

⁴²² Lewis qtd. Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 195.

⁴²³ Gwyneth Lewis, 'Angels of the Stage and Screen,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarnset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 183 (183.1-6).

routines of the star, Lewis recalls the origin of the word 'idol,' which as Warner points out in *Phantasmagoria*, derives from the Greek, *eidolon*, meaning something not incarnate or real. Warner is similarly suspicious of celebrity and she is concerned that most human beings now envision themselves through 'a camera's eye view.'⁴²⁴ In the context of the divine and spiritual aspirations of 'Chaotic Angels,' such desires seem petty and superficial and Lewis seeks to undermine the cult of celebrity. Like Warner, Lewis seems to envision tyranny in, 'the pale and trembling existence of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, for ever and ever here and now, of Hugh Grant and Catherine Zeta-Jones for ever in the future as they are now.'⁴²⁵

After the volta in the middle of the sonnet, Lewis describes angels as 'opposite' to the Hollywood star described in the first part of the poem.⁴²⁶ Lewis returns to the image of an angel as identified objects on a radar screen, which, as I noted earlier, represents 'a message which we can register, but not fully understand.'⁴²⁷ In 'Angels of the Stage and Screen,' the phenomenon that appears on the radar screen is far superior to that of the cinema screen, since it allows one to see 'much deeper than distance.'⁴²⁸ In trying to define what angels are though, Lewis tends to speak in terms of negation of self and being. The angel is described as having: 'No "Me, Me, Me".'⁴²⁹ It conveys, 'messages without a source,' although Lewis qualifies this statement, adding 'at least to our knowledge.'⁴³⁰ The final rhyming couplet chimes the joy of such uncertainty as the crew are described 'surrounded by angel anomalies / dancing, invisible on a flat-calm sea.'⁴³¹ Rather than cultivating the ego at the heart of celebrity, Lewis recommends a

⁴²⁴ Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 336.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁴²⁶ Lewis, 'Angels of the Stage and Screen,' 183.8.

⁴²⁷ Lewis qtd. Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 195.

⁴²⁸ Lewis, 'Angels of the Stage and Screen,' 183.10.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.10.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.11-12.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 183.13-14.

lack of selfhood, a complexity of communication and the difficulty of uncertainty as modes of being in the world. 'Tarot Angel' and 'Angels of the Star and Screen' recognise the importance of sacrificing self-consciousness in order to communicate with the superconscious.

The final poem in the sequence, 'Christ as an Angel of the Will of God' dwells on this message going beyond even 'our need for angels' suggesting the possibility of a relationship with the divine without the need for mediators or by becoming the mediator oneself.⁴³² In a personal letter quoted by Rees-Jones in *Consorting with Angels*, Lewis presents her belief that Christ can appear in any kind of everyday setting: 'I think of Christ as anything or anyone who shows up the nature of God, like dust in a stream of sunlight.'⁴³³ Lewis describes how it is possible to glimpse the divine in everyday life, and to express this, Lewis creates complex metaphors, such as the pondering of how it might be possible to 'calculate the logarithms of grace / to easy solutions in our sleep.'⁴³⁴ It is significant that Lewis imagines a condition of unconsciousness, sleep, as the best possible state in which to discover the divine; this representation recalls Weil's comment in *Gravity and Grace*: 'Grace fills empty spaces but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself that makes this void.'⁴³⁵ It is only in the void, a space lacking in selfhood, that grace can be received.

Even while Lewis is constructing what Deleuze and Guattari would call a 'minor literature' through deterritorialisation and a political, collective agenda, the loss of self and exile from home or belonging is inextricably woven through Lewis' poetics.

⁴³² Gwyneth Lewis, 'Christ as an Angel of the Will of God,' *Chaotic Angels: Poems in English* (Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 191 (191.2).

⁴³³ Lewis qtd. Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 195.

⁴³⁴ Lewis, 'Christ as an Angel of the Will of God,' 191.5-6.

⁴³⁵ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 10.

While the deterritorialising strategy of her early poems like 'Pentecost,' challenge linguistic separation and the imperialism of major global languages, 'The Language Murderer' figures her escape from the political construct of the mother-tongue via the *ekstasis* of the allegorical narrative. Drawing on her experience of depression, Lewis shows in 'Keeping Mum' that the process of exiling oneself from ordinary selfhood (or in terms of Buddhism, from the narrow mind) can be extremely painful. Yet there are advantages to moving beyond oneself into a more collective annunciation (or again in terms of Buddhism, into the universal mind). The account of angels that Lewis offers encapsulates a spiritual vision that places value and glory on messages from diminutive and everyday objects, from imperceptible forces beyond human sensation, from the invisible healing of music, from death and from the denial of a conventional mode of being in the world. Lewis' focus on the marginal, the periphery and the seemingly detrimental offers a message of praise for the minor. Lewis speaks beyond her personal marginality to offer a collective voice that emphasises the interconnectedness of marginalised subjects. The possibilities in the decreation of the self for the future of human thought and being are fruitful and as Lewis concludes in *Sunbathing in the Rain*: 'Being unselfish is important [...] not because it's virtuous but that way you gain the most reliable picture of reality.'⁴³⁶

⁴³⁶ Lewis, *Sunbathing in the Rain*, 239.

Chapter 3: Strangers Here Ourselves: Pascale Petit's Poetic Employment of Amazonian Nature, Indigenous Latin American Cultures and the Mexican Artist, Frida Kahlo

While Gwyneth Lewis rethinks notions of a minor language through exile from her mother-tongue, Pascale Petit considers national boundaries via exile from a mother-land and she constructs her poetry through the juxtaposition of minor cultural contexts. Petit is of Welsh-French origin and much of her work tends to unknit notions of whole selfhood gesturing instead to the interconnectedness of people and things in different cultural contexts. Often these contexts focus on people or things in developing countries with a history of colonisation, a strategy that is not without its dangers, since Petit could be accused of appropriating the experiences of the colonised, of assuming an identification that does not allow the other its difference, but makes it into the same. However, I argue that Petit is not engaging in this neo-colonialism, but that rather she writes out of the exigencies of developing countries as a means to deconstruct binaries of the 'advanced' versus the 'primitive,' the 'civilised' versus the 'barbaric,' the 'restrained' versus the 'indulgent.'

For this reason, I read Petit's poetic project *via* Julia Kristeva's definition of the foreigner in *Strangers to Ourselves*. In this study, Kristeva offers a history of attitudes or philosophies about the foreigner or stranger in Western history and she presents the conflict of strangeness and familiarity as essential to the development of human empathy and understanding of the other. Rather than suggesting that human beings are united in their sameness (recalling the familiar saying, 'We're all human'), Kristeva suggests that the same versus the other binary can only be undermined when human

beings accept the indelible strangeness in others and in themselves. 'If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners,' Kristeva proclaims.⁴³⁷

I intend to use this model of strangeness and the stranger to analyse Petit's poetry. Of all the poets in this study, Petit is probably less familiar with critical theory than Lewis and Rees-Jones who have both read theorists like Kristeva and Irigaray. However, I still feel that the use of critical theory in the case of Petit is important, because Kristeva's model elucidates how Petit goes about creating a kind of ecology or interconnectedness. Where as Lewis used a strategy of décreation, foregrounding the minor as a means to dissolve the privileging of the centre, Petit plays on strangeness as a means to undermine Western culture as the dominant side of a binary, so that the boundaries between the developed and developing worlds become blurred and confused.

Before I go into more detail about Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, I want to briefly discuss Petit's biographical experience of strangeness or otherness, which might have some bearing on her poetic practice. Petit is very forthright about her experience of abuse as a child and that she sees comparisons between her own exploitation and the destruction of nature (the Amazon rainforest and the Himalayas), the oppression of minor cultures (indigenous tribes in Latin America) and cult figures of suffering (the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo). However, in writing poetry from these sources, Petit is not simply appropriating a symbolism from the developing world, but she moves beyond her own personal circumstances to consider the otherness of the foreign. Rather than following the trend of some Western writers that make the foreign into a mirror for their own culture's greatness, Petit undermines simple categories that privilege the West.

⁴³⁷ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 192.

Pascale Petit is of course a poet of Wales, a poet who chooses an alliance with a minor culture, because according to Petit, although the people of Wales are ‘smaller,’ they are also ‘homelier’; Wales is associated with ‘a love of myth and nature,’ two important elements in Petit’s work.⁴³⁸ Petit lives in London and being an exile from Wales enables Petit to meet ‘people from all over the world’; her attraction to cosmopolitanism is the fruitful expression of her own mixed heritage.⁴³⁹ Born in Paris, Petit spent her early childhood shuttling between different locations; she lived with her mother in Paris and spent some time in children’s homes in France, but also lived part of the time with her Welsh-Indian grandmother in mid-Wales. Later, the family became more settled in South Wales, but Petit describes how her early life generated a consciousness of her own otherness that filtered into the concerns of her art and poetry. Petit describes how she, ‘always felt I came from another planet.’⁴⁴⁰ A strangeness or foreignness of identity is evoked in poems like ‘Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,’ in which the speaker enacts self-negating rituals and her conventional identity falls away along with the hair that she shaves off to tie around her waist. While this belt of hair reminds her of her abusive father’s embrace and the possibility of being hurt by others, the strange item of clothing is also something that ties and fastens her identity together.⁴⁴¹

Petit rarely writes of identity or belonging in an obvious manner, as is clear in her poem, ‘A Parcel of Land,’ from *The Zoo Father*. This is one of Petit’s few poems which approaches the idea of possessing a nation or a homeland:

This is the last piece of wild land,
left to me by accident, by dream.
I want to unwrap it like a parcel,

⁴³⁸ Pascale Petit, Personal Interview (by e-mail), 7th December 2006.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Pascale Petit, ‘Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,’ *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 52.

a pass-the-parcel in newspaper,
promised but always snatched away.⁴⁴²

The land described is a place of freedom and imagination and Petit describes it as her inheritance: it was 'left to' her. Yet it remains elusive; layer after layer is removed and yet this 'homeland' is never truly found. Petit displays the Welsh *hiraeth*, a desire that can never be truly fulfilled because, according to H.I. Bell in *The Development of Welsh Poetry*, it quests 'for dead friends, vanished youth, the peace of Heaven, some satisfaction which life can never give.'⁴⁴³ Petit journeys towards a place that cannot exist and so she remains an exile in her poetry, a stranger to nation and belonging. I argue that such a relation to home is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's definition of the foreigner in *Strangers to Ourselves*.

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva's project is much like that of Petit, since the aim is to interrogate Western views of foreignness and the foreigner. Kristeva begins with a poetic rendering of modern views of foreignness (in 'Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner'), before constructing an account of the treatment of foreigners throughout history, especially developments that still have relevance in society today. This includes: the creation of *proxeni* (representatives for foreigners) and *metics* (a class of resident foreigners) in Ancient Greece; the choice of foreignness for the Jewish people; the construction of the early Christian church as a community of foreigners; notions of universalism and cosmopolitanism during the Renaissance; Enlightenment development of universal trade; the foreigner as a philosophical tool; and the Terror after the French Revolution as instigating a denial of rights for foreigners that still exists today.

⁴⁴² Pascale Petit, 'A Parcel of Land,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 61 (61.1-5).

⁴⁴³ Bell, *The Development of Welsh Poetry*, 13.

Only in summarising these historical developments can Kristeva construct a manifesto regarding how one is to deal with foreignness, but it is when Kristeva finally reaches a discussion of Freud that an ethics for dealing with the foreigner is mapped out. Kristeva draws on what she calls, 'a heterogeneous notion of the *unconscious*' which influenced Freud: 'With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness*.'⁴⁴⁴ This meant that in future the foreigner would be 'within us' and Kristeva concludes that 'we are our own foreigners, we are divided.'⁴⁴⁵ In investigating the anguish of the psyche and the dynamics of the unconscious, Freud produced his essay, 'The Uncanny,' and Kristeva sees the uncanny's synthesis of familiarity and strangeness and one's reaction to it, as a 'metaphor of the psychic functioning itself.'⁴⁴⁶ In confronting the other, the stranger, the foreigner, the subject must suffer deconstruction of the self which may either create a 'psychotic *symptom*' or 'an *opening* toward the new, as an attempt to tally with the incongruous.'⁴⁴⁷ As described in Lewis' poem, 'Brainstorming,' the uncanny deconstruction of self can either lead to madness or enlightenment, either to the "as if" personality and melancholic splitting of R.S. Thomas or the embracing of loss and discovery of ecology in Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones. I argue that Petit embraces such loss specifically as a means to discover a new ecology existing within developing and developed worlds.

To summarise, the ultimate claim made by *Strangers to Ourselves* is that rather than rejecting uncomfortable experiences of otherness, human beings must seek them out and embrace them. A natural reaction would be to feel that one's own selfhood and identity is threatened, because in seeing the strangeness of others, the human

⁴⁴⁴ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 184.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

subject must recognize the strangeness in himself or herself. Kristeva is adamant though that such an experience can be useful:

To discover our disturbing otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront that “demon”, that threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid “us”. By recognizing *our* uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners.⁴⁴⁸

Kristeva recommends that human equivalence comes not from making all human beings into the same, but by recognising the difference in oneself and others, an aspiration that is very relevant to Petit’s project. Just as Kristeva recommends using the foreignness within oneself to provide ‘an opening to the new,’ so Petit uses her experience of strangeness to move beyond a bounded and whole selfhood. This action allows her to discover not only the otherness of those foreign to herself, but also to examine her own otherness, strangeness, foreignness.

Before I begin detailed analysis of Petit’s poems, I want to elucidate my claim about her relationship with foreignness and to investigate how her identification with Welshness might have influenced her poetic project. At the beginning of *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva gives a definition of the foreigner as a figure that ‘lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder.’⁴⁴⁹ The ‘foreigner’ then is something uncanny with the potential to destroy ‘home’ and such a figure is normally beyond ‘understanding.’ In *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, Stephen Knight explains that the term, ‘Welsh,’ is ‘a Germanic adjective meaning “foreigner”.’⁴⁵⁰ For Knight, to be labelled ‘Welsh’ is then, ‘a damaging mockery of the native language’ and I would also suggest that the

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁵⁰ Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), xv.

foreignness within the English name for Welsh language and culture is significant.⁴⁵¹

Wales and the Welsh are situated as foreign in British culture, as is noted by Kirsti Bohata in *Postcolonialism Revisited*. Bohata suggests that in the cases of minor cultures such as Wales, Ireland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and other nations of the former Hapsburg Empire, there is an oscillation between feelings of assimilation and difference: '[W]e find a long history of cultural assimilation and/or political co-option, yet also a persistent, self-defined sense of cultural difference.'⁴⁵²

As a Welsh-French subject, Petit does not feel herself to be British. Rather she seems to uphold Bohata's comment that Britishness can sometimes be 'a misleading label that disguises English cultural hegemony and a project of assimilation.'⁴⁵³ Petit looks to Asia and Latin America for models and creates a dialogue with minor cultures made foreign by their proximity to an imperial power. As Kristeva states: 'The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities.'⁴⁵⁴ The sense of 'strangeness' or 'foreignness' manifests itself in relation to one's own feelings of difference and it is obliterated when it becomes clear that human beings are all strangers, irreconcilably different and separate. Only by realizing that communities and bonds are never fixed but always in the process of being established or being maintained can there be a kind of co-existence or communion. 'Unamenable' is a significant word and the use of it suggests that the foreign subject denies co-operation, accountability or judgment. To be the foreigner then is perhaps to deny being policed by one's community.

⁴⁵¹ Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, xv.

⁴⁵² Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 3.

⁴⁵³ Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, 6.

⁴⁵⁴ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1.

Although a feeling of foreignness and estrangement is at the heart of Welsh culture, the poetic tradition has at least attempted to imagine a nation. In *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, Glyn Jones writes specifically of the Welsh poet as, ‘not a man apart, a freak, but rather an accepted part of the social fabric with an important function to perform’⁴⁵⁵ Jones describes the importance of commitment to the nation for the Welsh writer: ‘The type of writer who turns his back on society and abjures all responsibility towards it in a rootless Bohemianism is almost unknown in Wales.’⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, Harri Webb states: ‘A Welshman writing in English only acquires significance when he is seen to be inextricably committed to and involved in the predicament of his country.’⁴⁵⁷ Without *Cymraeg*, there is little to consolidate the Welsh poets’ identity and the obsession with politics within Wales is a direct result of such a predicament.

Petit turns to alternative models stating in interview that she does not, ‘fit into English poetics’ and adding that, ‘by English I really mean British.’⁴⁵⁸ In an interview with Lydia Vianu, Petit explains that as a Welsh/French subject, she does not feel herself to be British and her identity is not linked to any idea of Britishness:

Apart from the gender thing, there’s also the fact that I’m not British, and haven’t looked to British poetry for models. I’ve looked more to America, Europe, Australia. So, to try and answer you: I don’t have British roots, nor any firm roots.⁴⁵⁹

Rather than adopting a label that includes her in English culture, Petit looks to Europe, Australia and particularly the continent of Latin America. Petit prefers to be estranged from the problem of ‘Anglo-Welshness’ and instead creates a dialogue with the models and poetics of other countries. As Robert Crawford states in *Identifying*

⁴⁵⁵ Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing*, ed. Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2001), 127.

⁴⁵⁶ Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, 127.

⁴⁵⁷ Harri Webb, qtd. Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, 127.

⁴⁵⁸ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁴⁵⁹ Pascale Petit, ‘Your definition of a Desperado poet suits me,’ Interview by Lidia Vianu, *Desperado Poetry Website*, 1 January 2003, <<http://lidiavianu.scriptmania.com/>> (accessed .26 February 2007).

Poets: 'It is the outward-looking, expansive gaze which makes possible the interaction with a "significant other", a foreign culture in which gifts for the future of one's own culture may be located, and in which an illuminating reflection of one's own identity (or desired identity) may be glimpsed.'⁴⁶⁰ Crawford points out that consideration of another culture is fruitful, because it offers a glimpse of interconnectedness and mirroring between cultures, even if the selfhood that one attempts to construct is only 'desired' and still in the process of being created.

Similarly, in *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva suggests that there are different stages in communicating with the strangeness of other cultures and she posits two kinds of foreigners: Ironists and Believers. Believers are 'those who transcend: living neither before nor now but beyond, they are bent with a passion [...] for another land, always a promised one, that of an occupation, a love, a child, a glory.'⁴⁶¹ In contrast, Ironists are 'those who waste away in an agonizing struggle between what no longer is and what will never be—the followers of neutrality, the advocates of emptiness; they are not necessarily defeatists, they often become the best of ironists.'⁴⁶² Like the Welsh male poets described by Jones, the Believer is keen to embrace a country and to invest his or her dreams and imaginings in it. However, the Ironist is a cynic who expects nothing, and who always retains a certain distance. Unlike, the nation-building poets of Wales (who might be Believers), Petit inhabits the role of Ironist allowing the poetic muse to enter her through the foreignness of nature, of indigenous Latin American cultures and of cult figures of subjugation. At '[a] crossroad of two othernesses,' a

⁴⁶⁰ Robert Crawford, *Identifying Poets: Self and Territory in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 12.

⁴⁶¹ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 10.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 10.

meeting between one and another 'welcomes the foreigner without tying him down, opening the host to his visitor without committing him.'⁴⁶³

In this chapter, I will map out Petit's strategies of estrangement and exile based on three influences on her poetry: the otherness of nature, the foreignness of indigenous people of the Amazon and the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, as a figure embodying strangeness. Interestingly, all three of these influences emerge from Central and South America, and it may be useful to briefly consider why Petit chooses this particular continent. Latin America is very relevant for a Welsh writer, since historical and literary links between Wales and Latin America are strong. If the emigration of Welsh subjects to Patagonia initiated the dialogue, Welsh writers cemented it. T.H. Parry Williams' (1887 -1975) 'Yng Ngwlff Mexico' ('On the Gulf of Mexico') considers a young man's experience of a foreign country as foreign names and a feeling of distances. Poets, like R. Bryn Williams (1902-1981), celebrate the suffering of colonists in Patagonia, while others such as Gareth Alban Davies (born 1926) and Iwan Llwyd (born 1957) express solidarity with oppressed peoples of Latin America. Robert Minhinnick (born 1952) is a prolific travel writer who has written in his poetry and prose about his impressions of Latin America among other places. Petit's engagement with Latin America is an extension of Welsh poetic projects of exploration and sympathy. In this mode, Petit can speak for 'uncivilised' figures disinherited by their own foreignness.

Not only Welsh writers and commentators have noticed the link between Wales and Latin America. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the Chicana critic, Gloria Andalzúa, quotes a Welsh artist living in the US, Ray Gwyn Smith: 'Who is to say that

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 11.

robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?⁴⁶⁴ The eradication and control of the Welsh language is compatible with hybrid and indigenous languages on the borderlands between Mexico and the US. Petit is aware of the links between Wales and Latin America and in interview, she suggests that there are some parallels between them, describing her impression that, 'Welsh poets do seem to be more interested in Latin America than English poets,' and she wonders whether a reason for this might be that, 'Wales is the Latin America to England's North America.'⁴⁶⁵ Petit's poetry is of the minor, the disenfranchised and the eclipsed, whether she is writing about the Amazonian rainforest, the indigenous peoples of the Amazon or cult figures like Frida Kahlo.

Petit's first poetic inspiration was nature. In interview, Petit remembers her experience as a child of working in her grandmother's garden. She describes how her grandmother's home was, 'a council house with no running water or flush toilets but she had a large garden where she grew virtually everything we ate.'⁴⁶⁶ Petit describes how she loved working in the garden and it was here that she developed, 'a passion for the natural world.'⁴⁶⁷ Later when her mother bought a vineyard in Languedoc, France, the 'teeming insect life' was Petit's 'first "Amazon".'⁴⁶⁸ In her adult life, Petite did visit the South American Amazon inspired by, 'stunning photographs of remote gigantic waterfalls.'⁴⁶⁹ Petit's journey to these waterfalls is also bound up with her abusive father who, during a visit to the Angel Falls, visited her in a dream and as Petit

⁴⁶⁴ Ray Gwyn Smith qtd. Gloria Andalzúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, California: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 75.

⁴⁶⁵ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

explains to Valerie Mejer in interview: 'A few days later the miraculous letter arrived, saying he wanted me to visit him.'⁴⁷⁰

In thinking about her nature poetry, Petit is adamant that she is 'trying to give voices for those who appear silent' and I examine how Petit humanises the majestic waterfalls, breaking nature's supposed 'silence' and undermining the privileged status of the human speaking subject, so that the very notion of what makes the human is challenged.⁴⁷¹ The first section of this chapter, 'Part 1: The Secrets of Nature' explores how far from being the other to garrulous human subjects, nature is identified as having a speaking voice. Nature invades the human sensibility in order to perform a deconstruction of the human self. In the sub-section 'The Water Cycle,' I analyse a cycle of poems from her debut collection, *The Heart of A Deer*, which is inspired by the waterfalls of South America that first motivated Petit's preoccupation with the continent. In these poems, I draw on Petit's statement that 'the plight of nature seems to be much the same as the plight of women,' to argue that the treatment of the waterfalls is political in that it mingles the ill-treatment of women with the abuse of nature so that the boundaries between nature and humanity are no longer so fixed and obvious.⁴⁷²

The second biggest influence on Petit's poetry would emerge from her visits to Venezuela during which she experienced, 'the Pemón Indians, the rainforest, the ethereal table-mountains of Amazonia's Lost World.'⁴⁷³ This experience would collide with the re-emergence of Petit's abusive father after thirty-five years of absence, since after one visit to climb Mount Roraima, Petit's father contacted her. The result was

⁴⁷⁰ Petit, Appendix, 5. In the course of this chapter, I draw on three interviews of Petit, two with Valerie Mejer and the other with Edward 'Mac' Test. Petit sent these to me by private e-mail on 5th December 2006 and I include them in the appendix of this thesis.

⁴⁷¹ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

The Zoo Father, a collection which transfigures Petit's abusive father as an explorer or anthropologist of the Amazon. In 'Part 2: Speaking Beyond the Civilised,' I analyse poems from this collection to consider how Petit explores both Amazonian and Western cultures and breaks down conventional ideas about what is civilised and what is barbaric. The first sub-section, '*The Zoo Father*,' focuses on a series of self-portrait poems in which Petit writes of herself as a Warao violin, a Yanomami daughter and so on. In these poems, Petit forces the reader to identify with tribes that are supposedly uncivilised, barbaric and uncultured, yet she compels the reader to face the otherness of such a culture and to reveal the strangeness within Western societies as the abusive father becomes the 'Zoofather.' The second sub-section, 'Becoming an Amazonian' considers Petit's engagement with modern Amazonian anthropologists such as Napoleon A. Chagnon and Jacques Lizot, focussing on poems that embrace the strange operations and rituals of Amazonian cultures. In both sections, I argue that the privileging of Western culture is undermined, as significations of barbarity and civilization float free from easy definitions and blur the boundaries between the West and Latin American indigenous culture.

The third factor in Petit's poetic concerns emerged after a visit to the house of Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, in Mexico City. 'Part 3: Frida Kahlo and (Auto) Biography' explores how the mythology and art of Kahlo, a cult celebrity, becomes an inspiration for Petit in writing poems about sexual intercourse. Petit explains: 'It was as if by pretending to be her I could tackle a difficult subject, and I could use her accident as a metaphor to write about a subject fraught with a limited vocabulary.'⁴⁷⁴ Kahlo is a cult figure of suffering who endured pain for most of her life as the result of a trolley accident when she was a teenager. I examine Petit's pamphlet, *The Wounded Deer*, in

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

order to interrogate her fascination with Kahlo and I refer to Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* to consider to what extent Petit's art must be a dialogue between suffering and imagining and to imagine how the processes of art can absorb pain. 'Self-Portraits' investigates Petit's fascination with Kahlo's self-portraits in which the presentation of self is far from a simple confession. Petit's version of Kahlo projects her exigencies onto others, who exiles herself from home and belonging and who embraces the foreignness of others and in herself. 'Monkeys and Masks' studies Petit's use of Kahlo as a cult figure of pain that is both the subject of Kahlo's biography and the teller of Petit's autobiography.

To sum up, I explore in this chapter how Petit breaks down the boundaries between one and an other, whether that be human beings and nature, the Western world and the developing world or the spectator and the cult celebrity. Ian Gregson suggests in *The New Poetry in Wales* that Petit's strategy in her juxtapositions 'works satirically through interposing a primitivist or childish ingenuousness which unsettles the civilized maturity of Western realism by introducing generic elements that are profoundly alien to civilized Western culture.'⁴⁷⁵ However, in this chapter, I will argue that Petit's aim is not simply to shock a Western audience with the exoticism and strangeness of nature, barbarous tribes and gorgeous idols in some new brand of Orientalism. I argue that what Petit intends is to blur the boundaries between self and other, not to create some kind of false universal human kinship, but as Kristeva recommends, to reveal the mingling of strangeness and familiarity in one's self and in others, so that this poetry forces its readers to become strangers to themselves.

⁴⁷⁵ Gregson, *The New Poetry in Wales*, 118.

Part I: The Secrets of Nature

The richness of silence is a preoccupation in Petit's poetry and it is often connected to encounters with nature. In interview, she admits that one part of her poetic project in relation to writing about nature has been, 'trying to give voices for those who appear silent,' indicating that silence may in fact conceal a hidden form of communication.⁴⁷⁶ In her first collection, *The Heart of a Deer*, Petit writes of: 'a vast, silent system';⁴⁷⁷ 'storms of words/ about to burst';⁴⁷⁸ 'rooms of white silence, rooms of black silence';⁴⁷⁹ 'a silence [...] / like soft dust from the stars';⁴⁸⁰ 'a secret language';⁴⁸¹ 'no words';⁴⁸² and 'repressed thunder.'⁴⁸³ Silence is prevalent then as a theme or trope that signals a secret or a pregnancy of meaning and I will show that such silences are inextricably linked to nature in the poet's journey towards dialogue with non-human entities in the natural world.

In creating such a dialogue, Petit is less interested in pastoral scenes in which nature is consolatory, domestic and homely and more concerned with wild spaces of nature. Although Petit avoids English or British models of poetry, she is influenced by some aspects of the English Romantic tradition, which she believes to be unpopular in the contemporary literary scene. Petit has drawn illustrations for poems by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats, yet her view of nature does not draw so much on Wordsworth's egotistical sublime in which nature is a lever for a personally fulfilling experience. As Petit explains in interview, she is more attracted by other aspects of

⁴⁷⁶ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁴⁷⁷ Pascale Petit, 'Among the Sequoias,' *The Heart of a Deer* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1998) 21 (21.13).

⁴⁷⁸ Pascale Petit, 'The Cachamay Rapids,' *The Heart of a Deer* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1998) 26 (26.2-3).

⁴⁷⁹ Petit, 'The Cachamay Rapids,' 26.17.

⁴⁸⁰ Pascale Petit, 'Cloud Forest,' *The Heart of a Deer* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1998) 33-34 (34.33-34).

⁴⁸¹ Pascale Petit, 'Kanaima,' *The Heart of a Deer* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1998) 41-55 (41.5).

⁴⁸² Petit, 'Kanaima,' 46.121.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 49.173.

Romanticism, such as the oceanic capacities of the imagination described by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* as ‘a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.’⁴⁸⁴ The interconnectedness described in Coleridge’s poetics reflects Petit’s own interest in the blurring of nature and humanity for example. Petit draws from the Romantics’ project elements that centre on interconnectedness and communication with otherness and she admires the Romantics, because they ‘tackled nature full-on,’ an approach that Petit believes to be ‘out of fashion [...] in the UK.’⁴⁸⁵ Fewer English poets write about wildernesses according to Petit: ‘English poets are more likely to write about fields and parks than jungles or plateaus.’⁴⁸⁶ Petit tries to represent the strangeness of wild natural places and spaces and this aspiration is in the spirit of the Welsh tradition. As H.I. Bell notes in *The Development of Welsh Poetry*, Welsh poetry has manifested ‘a peculiar responsiveness to natural influences’ and it has celebrated ‘the storm and the wilder aspects of nature.’⁴⁸⁷

At the beginning of his essay, ‘Nature and Silence,’ Christopher Manes considers the silencing of wild spaces of nature and he quotes a Tuscaroa Indian who tells how ‘the uncounted voices of nature... are dumb.’⁴⁸⁸ Manes supports this statement and suggests that the silence of nature is a result of human volubility: ‘Nature *is* silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative.’⁴⁸⁹ Manes notes that, in animistic cultures, nature is usually inspirited as, ‘animals, plants and even “inert” entities such as stones and rivers are perceived as

⁴⁸⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, ed. J. Shawcross, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 202.

⁴⁸⁵ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Bell, *The Development of Welsh Poetry*, 6, 11.

⁴⁸⁸ Tuscaroa Indian qtd. Christopher Manes, ‘Nature and Silence,’ *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 15-29 (15).

⁴⁸⁹ Manes, ‘Nature and Silence,’ 15.

being articulate and at times intelligible subjects, able to communicate and interact with humans for good or ill.⁴⁹⁰ Manes is adamant that alongside human languages, ‘there is also the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves and waterfalls – a world of autonomous speakers whose intents (especially for hunter-gatherer peoples) one ignores at one’s peril.’⁴⁹¹ Manes believes that we need ‘a viable environmental ethics to confront the silence of nature,’ because, ‘within this vast, eerie silence that surrounds our garrulous human subjectivity [...] an ethics of exploitation regarding nature has taken shape.’⁴⁹² Manes recognises that nature is viewed in much of human culture as a foreigner and its languages are misread, misunderstood or ignored. Nature can only speak in its own language and cannot adopt human ones, yet it is necessary for humans and nature to communicate.

In the opening of *The Language of Silence*, Ernestine Schlant describes the Grunewald Monument in Berlin dedicated to those deported from that station to die at Auschwitz. Schlant explains that monument consists of the outline of human figures cut into the walls and here she makes an important point: ‘The figures themselves are nonexistent; it is the surrounding cement that makes their absence visible.’⁴⁹³ Schlant suggests that an absence can become a presence and in spite of some feminist critics (such as Tillie Olsen in *Silences*) who have suggested that silence is restrictive for writers, Schlant is adamant that, ‘silence is not a semantic void; like any language, it is infused with narrative strategies that carry ideologies and reveal unstated assumptions.’⁴⁹⁴ Schlant affirms that silence is a language like any other.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹³ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

⁴⁹⁴ Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, 7.

In 'Silence and the Poet,' George Steiner makes a claim for the generative properties of silence. Using examples as varied as Friedrich Hölderlin, Arthur Rimbaud and Rainer Maria Rilke, Steiner argues that silence is an inevitable part of the poet's subversive persona:

The poet enters into silence. Here the word borders not on radiance, on music, but on night.⁴⁹⁵

The proximity of 'the word' to 'night' indicates a strategy of negation and the adoption of 'negative capability.' The poetics of John Keats certainly seem to be a stimulus for Steiner, as he traces his argument back to a Keatsian emphasis on, 'the word unspoken, of the music unheard and therefore richer.'⁴⁹⁶ Keats is another particular influence on Petit and in an interview with Valerie Mejer, she quotes Keats' letter⁴⁹⁷ to J.H. Reynolds of 19th February 1818:

Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel—the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering, of distinctness for his luxury.⁴⁹⁸

Keats' description of the creative process recommends imitation of the spider, a creature that is often figured as a feminine entity that weaves its web as a woman weaves material. The web is here equivalent to a poem, yet the language of nature is very different to human languages and it is only readable for those with a 'spiritual eye.' It is no coincidence that Petit chooses a feminine metaphor to describe the secret language of nature, since in many of her poems nature and woman, while not exactly

⁴⁹⁵ George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (London: Faber, 1967), 66.

⁴⁹⁶ Steiner, *Language and Silence*, 68.

⁴⁹⁷ Petit, Appendix, 5

⁴⁹⁸ John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Maurice Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 104.

becoming the same, are certainly blurred in identity. Although one is human and the other is non-human, both share the burden of otherness, strangeness, foreignness.⁴⁹⁹

In relation to Keats' letter and its spider metaphor, Petit tells Valerie Mejer in interview how on reading this passage at the age of sixteen, she, 'decided then that I would create my own "two-and thirty Pallaces" where I could live (in my imagination) and escape from my home life which I hated.'⁵⁰⁰ Petit describes one of her mansions of the mind as the Amazon, praising its vastness and its luxuriance. The empyrean tapestry that Petit creates is the empowerment and expansion of the Amazon itself in her imagination: 'By making these mansions of memory, I am also preserving the outer world – e.g. the Amazon forest, which is shrinking, isn't shrinking in my poems, it's expanding!'⁵⁰¹ Petit's poetic project is on the one hand to preserve nature and on the other to make the spider's web coherent for human readers, to translate the 'thought' and 'speech' of nature into a readable text.

Jonathan Bate's *Song of the Earth* is aware that although human beings have always been set apart from nature for their attributes of reason and speech, it has now been discovered that animals also have languages and Bate wonders what else, apart from speech, defines us as human. There are of course qualities such as justice and liberty and the disciplines of science, philosophy and poetry, yet it is these aspects of being human that have created a divisive view of nature, which was instigated

499 In blurring woman and nature in Latin American landscape, Petit seems to be playing on the idea of the New World landscape figured as a maternal garden. As Annette Kolodny notes in 'Unearthing Herstory,' there is often a male fantasy of, 'harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply land as mother, but the land as a woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose and painless and integral satisfaction.' Petit seems to create a subversive version of this fantasy in which woman and nature are indeed blurred to such an extent that human identity itself is in question. (Annette Kolodny, 'Unearthing History: An Introduction,' *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Glotfelty, Cheryl and Harold Fromm (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 170-181 (171)).

⁵⁰⁰ Petit, Appendix, 5.

⁵⁰¹ Petit, Appendix, 5.

according to Bate by, 'Baconian empirical science and Cartesian philosophical dualism.'⁵⁰² Bate recognises the human project of othering nature and denying it the attribute of speech that can only belong to human beings.

However, Bate finds hope in the project of poetry and he is inspired by the Romantics' view of poetic language as a special means of expression with the potential to reunite man and nature. The project in *The Song of the Earth* is to recommend a new dialogue in contemporary poetry via Martin Heidegger's notion of *dwelling*. Bate suggests that in *poetical dwelling*, the emphasis is on the imagination rather than possession. Though the verb, 'to dwell,' often refers to residing in a specific place, its etymology reveals that it derives from the Old Dutch word, *dwellen*, meaning 'to stun, make giddy or perplex.' The origin of 'dwelling' reveals the stretching of identity and understanding that is key to *poetical dwelling*. According to Bate, poetry is an, 'opening to the nature of being, a making clear of the nature of dwelling.'⁵⁰³ However, poetry is divided in two ecological senses according to Bate, 'as it is either (both?) a language (*logos*) that restores us to our home (*oikos*) or (and?) a melancholy recognizing that our only home (*oikos*) is a language (*logos*).'⁵⁰⁴ There is both a desire to find a home in a reconciliation with nature and the admittance that such a resolution is impossible when working in the distancing construction of language. Strangeness cannot be eradicated from relations with other people and things.

Ultimately though, Bate asks us to discover the poem as, 'not only a making of the self and a making of the world, but also a response to the world and respecting of the earth.'⁵⁰⁵ *Poetical dwelling* then might be a means to create interconnectedness between the self and the world, not in a manner that makes one and an other into the

⁵⁰² Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), 244.

⁵⁰³ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 280.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 281.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 282.

same, nor to exoticise the other or make it into a mirror for the one's own identity. Rather, *poetical dwelling* can allow one and an other to co-exist in a more equal state of relations without privileging the dominant side of the binary. Petit uses *poetical dwelling* alongside a blurring of the human and nature in order to foreground this enlightened mode of relation and I now intend to map out her strategies in detail focusing on her cycle of poems about waterfalls and rivers in the Amazon.

The Water Cycle

Like Bate, Petit is interested in coming to terms with nature through respect and dialogue, yet she is also interested in going so far as to blur humanity and nature, especially women and nature. In interview, Petit states that, 'the plight of nature seems to be much the same as the plight of women,' qualifying her statement with the comment, '[t]hat's if, like Frida Kahlo, we see the city and urbanization as a masculine construct.'⁵⁰⁶ In Petit's poems, the exploitation of nature is often blurred with the exploitation of women, particularly in her water cycle of poems in *The Heart of the Deer*. The waterfalls of Venezuela are a huge inspiration to Petit's poetry; it was pictures of waterfalls that first inspired Petit to visit the Amazon and they have become part of a personal poetic iconography. In interview with Mejer, Petit describes how she would dream of waterways such as the Angel Falls and how she, 'always felt that they were a god – my god.'⁵⁰⁷ In one dream, she describes how the vapours of the falls, 'formed into a veil like a bridal veil' and Petit remembers how a face emerged from the vapours: 'The harder I looked at this organic veil, the more I realised there was a giant face in it – my father's.'⁵⁰⁸ As in her dream, Petit's poetry presents the voices of nature

⁵⁰⁶ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁵⁰⁷ Petit, Appendix, 5.

⁵⁰⁸ Petit, Appendix, 5.

so that they become readable texts and this construction of nature as a speaking subject challenges the centrality of human volubility. In this series of water poems, Petit transposes the power relations of abuser and victim onto man and nature and the explorer in the wilderness becomes an agent of oppression and mistreatment. I intend to proceed with detailed analysis of these poems in sequence as they are ordered in *The Heart of a Deer*.

The first in the cycle, 'Angel Falls in Love' refers to the world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls, in Venezuela. Petit writes a monologue in the voice of the Angel Falls in order to reveal the silent 'thoughts' of nature and to make the complaints of the waterfall readable to human beings. Initially, the waterfall gauges the reaction of the explorer to her grandeur and mystery: 'Nobody had seen a waterfall so high. He thought / I was the last thing people see when they die.'⁵⁰⁹ The pristine condition of the waterfall is emphasised and the meeting of man and nature seems to be necessary. The suspense of the line break impels the reader onwards to focus on the thoughts and impressions of the explorer and indicates the ability on the part of nature to understand and communicate with this new presence. The internal rhyme between 'high' and 'die' chimes a melodic note in the poem, but the irregular rhythm undermines this harmony. The explorer's thoughts are obsessed with the natural world as a mysterious other and this denies the possibility of dialogue. For the explorer, the waterfall is merely a manifestation of an omniscient, spiritual presence and the lever for a new stage of human experience: the illuminating moments before dying.

The majesty of the waterfall is heightened in the next stanza when the explorer is pictured hovering above the giant stream of water:

His plane rose vertically until it reached the dot

⁵⁰⁹ Pascale Petit, 'Angel Falls in Love,' *The Heart of a Deer* (London: Enitharmon, 1998), 23 (23.1-2).

my three-thousand-foot fall pours out of.
 Then he crash-landed on my mountain
 and called it Devil's Mountain.⁵¹⁰

A sexual act is implicit in the vertical rise of the plane, but the explorer's mounting of the waterfall is also a search for origins. In seeking to penetrate the depths of the waterfall, the explorer prevents a dialogue from occurring as he cannot allow the waterfall to simply exist as a counterpart, but must seek to explain it in a logical manner. However, the emergence of the waterfall from such a small aperture is not logical, nor can such an opening be readily penetrated; the explorer responds to the crash by naming the mountain as a site of the devil.

The waterfall describes the explorer standing over the waterfall shouting his name, Angel. This is of course a reference to the US pilot, Jimmy Angel, who is credited in the Western world with the discovery of this waterfall. However, Petit's poem undermines such a possessive attitude to nature, since the speaking, conscious voice of the waterfall in the poetic monologue indicates that it has existed autonomously before the presence of Angel. The indigenous people of Venezuela were aware of the waterfall's existence long before Angel 'discovered' the phenomenon and the waterfall has a Pemón name, Kerepakupai Merú, meaning 'fall from the deepest place.' However, Angel rebrands the waterfall an object to be possessed, not a speaking subject. The water explains, 'I think he married me because / he gave me his name,' and it describes how in his eye, 'I saw myself.'⁵¹¹ The discovery, penetration and renaming of a natural phenomenon is compared here with marriage. The explorer's act is exploitative, because in order to strengthen his sense of himself, he must mark out the waterfall as his own territory.

⁵¹⁰ Petit, 'Angel Falls in Love,' 23.3-6.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 23.8-7, 23.11.

The waterfall itself is left without sustenance receiving only 'the rare visitor' after Angel's return to civilization.⁵¹² Ultimately there is silence again: 'Then they left and there was this silence.'⁵¹³ However, this is not silence on the part of nature, whose voice speaks volubly, but silence on the part of human beings who do not recognise the language of nature nor its desire to communicate. The irony is that as readers, we know that the explorer is wrong in his attitude and the feeling that humanity and nature are no longer so obviously separate is very powerful.

The next poem in the water cycle, 'Waterfall Climbing,' intensifies the blurring of nature and woman and its concerns are reminiscent of Deborah Slicer's questioning in 'The Body as Bioregion,' about which representation was first used to represent the other: the violation of women's bodies or the rape of the land. According to Slicer, both are sometimes viewed as a resource, as property and as a guarded secret. Barrenness in women and in nature is often thought of in terms of wasted production. Women of non-European origin who are pregnant and poor are legally mere bodies. Similarly, the land, 'does not, *cannot*, own itself.'⁵¹⁴ Minor subjects are continually thought of as chattel and eco-systems are denied subjecthood. In both cases, there is a desire to extract resources. This kind of utilisation of nature is clear in 'Waterfall Climbing,' which begins by describing climbers ascending the frozen waterfall:

I can't get out of this dress
 now that the ice has bound my limbs.
 Have they come to help?
 They do not talk to me.
 I don't think they even notice
 that they are clinging to a bride.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹² Ibid., 23.16.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 23.20.

⁵¹⁴ Deborah Slicer, 'The Body as Bioregion,' *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment*, ed. Michael P. Branch, Rochelle Johnson, Daniel Patterson and Scott Slovic, (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1998), 107-116 (111).

⁵¹⁵ Pascale Petit, 'Waterfall Climbing,' *The Heart of a Deer* (London: Enitharmon, 1998), 24-25 (24.5-10).

The language is matter-of-fact and passive as the waterfall is bound by the dress, an icon of femininity with the capacity to freeze water and to transform the power of the waterfall into submission. For the climbers, the waterfall is not a sentient being and so it can be treated without respect, care or the reverence due a 'bride.' The reference to the bride recalls the waterfall vapours that became a bridal veil in the dream that Petit described in interview to Mejer and it is clear that Petit is drawing on her own suffering at the hands of her abusive father whose face emerged in her dream of a bridal veil. In this poem, a discrepancy in understanding is highlighted, as what seem to be lifeless, silent and inviolate to the male climbers reveals emotions, needs and desires:

One of them is hanging to my hem.
 Another is perched on one of my breasts.
 The third is sticking his ice-pick
 into my thigh. He levers himself up.
 A fourth is crawling over my veil,
 embedding a crampon in my cheek.
 [...]
 It's not often that men can climb all over me.
 The conditions have to be just right.
 A day too late, and I'd thaw, escape.⁵¹⁶

This section of the poem ostensibly describes the progress of the climbers as they ascend the frozen waterfall, yet the insertion of body imagery and the collocation of words associated with penetration ('sticking,' 'ice-pick,' 'levers,' 'crampon' etc.) create a far more sinister aspect to the interaction. The passive waterfall is slowly defrocked as the climbers progress from her hemline (the border between outside and underneath), to her breast and thigh, until her whole 'body' has been conquered. An ice pick penetrates her thigh, a climber 'levers himself up' to mount her body and a crampon pierces her cheek. The domination of the waterfall is portrayed almost like an act of

⁵¹⁶ Petit, 'Waterfall Climbing,' 24.11-16, 24.19-21.

rape and it is reminiscent of Petit's comment that 'the plight of nature seems to be much the same as the plight of women.'⁵¹⁷ The tone of the speaker is regretful as she notes that such indignities would not be able to take place were she in a stronger position and under the right circumstances, she could escape.

The climbers view the waterfall as less than human and consequently, it is not worthy of respect let alone attention:

They complain I give them frost-nip.
 Their gloved fingers are rough.
 They think nothing of staring
 through my petticoats and lingerie
 in to my white bones
 and the black cave beyond.
 They hack and hack at loose hair.
 Then the boldest hauls himself
 over my forehead, crows to his mates.
 All along they were joined
 by the rope of friendship.⁵¹⁸

The climbers focus on the pain of their own cold fingers, yet they fail to recognise the discomfort of the waterfall touched by their rough hands. The waterfall is non-human and therefore the climbers think nothing of penetrating its depths. The line break after 'staring' allows the continuous form of the verb to extend out into the white space of the poem. The climbers' gazes appear here as an incisive x-ray vision that sees not only beneath the 'underwear' of the waterfall but into its bones and womb. The cutting off of hair reflects a dehumanising aspect to the climber's attitude, so the waterfall is positioned with victims of torture or concentration camps. The mounting of the waterfall's summit and the boasting that ensues is a humiliation and the waterfall is not only excluded from the climbers' 'rope of friendship' but also from any kindness or consideration. When the waterfall is 'conquered,' the climbers return 'to their wives

⁵¹⁷ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁵¹⁸ Petit, 'Waterfall Climbing,' 24.27-25.37.

and children,' the hierarchical family unit from which nature is excluded again.⁵¹⁹ The barbaric treatment of the waterfalls in 'Angel Falls in Love' and 'Waterfall Climbing' challenge the conventional juxtaposition of primitive nature and civilized humanity blurring the boundaries between one and an other.

However, in other poems in this water sequence, nature has its own mysterious power and in 'The Cachamay Rapids,' Petit describes clouds, 'full of words, tropical storms of words / about to burst, held in a moment.'⁵²⁰ 'The Cachamay Rapids' rejects the monologue form that has dominated the last two poems and instead uses a dialogue between nature and the poet in a mode not dissimilar to Bate's notion of *poetic dwelling*. Having established that nature is a speaking entity in 'Angel Falls in Love' and 'Waterfall Climbing,' Petit now takes a step back to inhabit a human lyric voice that observes and engages in dialogue with nature. Petit tries to translate the silent language of nature, which in the image of storms of words, is on the verge of speaking, while the possibility of rain suggests the likelihood of nature becoming a readable text for human beings. This idiom of nature is compared with the human speech on a boat below the clouds, where a human guide is speaking on behalf of and/or on the subject of the Orinoco, 'a benign whitewater river.'⁵²¹ However, the narrator immediately gestures back to a passionate language of nature when (bringing attention to the guide's error) she states immediately in the following lines, 'but we are not on the Orinoco, / we are on the Caroni, which is black.'⁵²² The black and white rivers are associated later in the poem with different kinds of silences: 'rooms of white silence, rooms of black silence.'⁵²³ There is the white silence of the blank page, unspoiled

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 25.38-39.

⁵²⁰ Pascale Petit, 'The Cachamay Rapids,' 26.2-3.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 26.7.

⁵²² Ibid., 26.8-9.

⁵²³ Ibid., 26.17.

sheets, fog and snow, yet there is also black silence representing the dark, the chasm and the self-negation that Steiner described via the word 'night.'⁵²⁴ Interestingly, the speaker's passage into the 'heart' of the Cachamay rapids with its white and black silences is characterised by lack of ordinary sensory perception. Vision is disorientated: 'The river is so wide I can't see the banks.'⁵²⁵ Hearing fails: 'I don't hear the thunder anymore.'⁵²⁶ In order to 'read' the language of nature, the speaker must go beyond human perception and open herself to silence.

'Iguaçu Falls, Brazil' is another poem in this cycle that represents the possibility of dialogue between natural and human worlds, since nature is allowed to have a mind and will of its own in the waterfall's noisy cascade. The poem is another kind of monologue, in which nature challenges the human monopoly on volubility, yet it is slightly different to the earlier use of a speaking subject, because it presents many voices of different waterways that exist within a bioregion. This riotous clamor is an effort to, 'drown the voices in Rio / where the president is talking too loud.'⁵²⁷ The waterfall defies politicians, yet it is also aware of its inextricable link to human beings:

We were the sweat
 on the arm of a soldier
 who shot a child

 to clean up the streets of the One World City.
 And we are the fear
 that ran down the child's leg.⁵²⁸

The water that is now falling is inextricably connected to human life whether that be in the body of a transgressor or a victim. In 'The Body as Bioregion,' Slicer suggests a new point of view in which human communities or bodies and the bioregion are

⁵²⁴ This second kind of silence is also reminiscent of the concerns in Lewis' poetry about the abyss, the black sun and loss of self. See p. 5.

⁵²⁵ Petit, 'Cachamay Rapids,' 26.12.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 26.15.

⁵²⁷ Pascale Petit, 'Iguaçu Falls, Brazil,' *The Heart of a Deer* (London: Enitharmon, 1998), 27-28 (27.2-3).

⁵²⁸ Petit, 'Iguaçu Falls, Brazil,' 27.4-9.

equivalent. Slicer does not mean that the human body is identical with a geographical place, because for a person to make this leap ‘denies others their subjectivity, the coyote her otherness’ and ‘risks mistaking her or his own desires for the desires of [...] others.’⁵²⁹ A bioregion is a region defined by characteristics of the natural environment, while humans create man-made divisions. A bioregion constitutes a natural ecological community in parallel or sometimes in synthesis with the human community as described in the sweat on the arm of the soldier or urine on the child’s leg. In their primitivism and barbarism, human and natural worlds are connected and consequently, the Iguazu Falls gesture not only to the beauty and danger of the human world, but also to the multiple experiences of nature which also contain splendour and menace. The waterfalls describe themselves as all the beautiful and vicious creatures of the jungle such as ‘flowers, birds, butterflies, snakes’ and they invite the reader to, ‘stare right into our jaws / as we shout our own treaty / on biodiversity.’⁵³⁰

Petit’s ‘spiritual eye’ is drawn in this cycle to the secret language of nature that is silent when human beings turn such natural phenomenon into a mysterious other. Rather than using nature as a lever for her own reveries, Petit uses blurs the suffering of nature with that of women. As a foreigner to the human, civilized world, nature supposedly cannot speak and as a consequence it is perceived as silent. However, Petit’s imagination enables her to expand our view of the wild natural spaces of the Amazon spinning her web until the empty silence becomes a ‘Citadel.’ While the monologue format of ‘Angel Falls in Love’ and ‘Waterfall Climbing’ laments the inability of humans to understand the language of nature, it challenges the reader with its blurring of human volubility and the concerns of nature. Perhaps even more subversively, ‘The Cachamay Rapids’ moves outside nature into the form of a human

⁵²⁹ Slicer, ‘The Body as Bioregion,’ 112.

⁵³⁰ Petit, ‘The Cachamay Rapids,’ 28.30, 28.31-33.

lyric. From this human voice, a feeling emerges that there is legibility in nature's silences and that the human subject cannot simply be privileged as a higher form of life. 'Iguaçu Falls, Brazil' gives voice to an omnipotent version of nature which demands human attention to shout its 'treaty on biodiversity,' drawing attention to the parallelism in natural and human communities. The cycle then represents a journey in which nature is figured as a stranger or foreigner challenging the volubility that is closely guarded as something that defines humanity. Ironically, in order to represent such a journey, Petit must herself be exiled from the concerns of a human speaking subject, in order to give voice to nature. Such an exile allows an ecology between human beings and nature to develop and by the end of the sequence, there is less of a sense that humanity is more advanced, as people exhibit as much barbarity and primitivism as nature.

As Petit states in interview with Valerie Mejer, 'as human beings, we use very little of the capacity of our minds, so we need poetry to use more, and therefore perceive more.'⁵³¹ Poetry enables one to go beyond one's ordinary identity and to explore the exigencies of others. It is only by remaking the world, that the poet can find a way, 'of fully and freshly re-experiencing the world.'⁵³²

Part II: Speaking Beyond the Civilised

If in *The Heart of a Deer*, Petit devotes her poetry to the blurring of the human and nature, she is also committed to challenging binaries between different types of cultures, especially those regarding the developed and developing worlds. In *The Zoo Father*, Petit's earlier affinities with the natural world and eco-criticism are transposed on endangered, indigenous cultures. Jhan Hochman's comments in the essay, 'Green

⁵³¹ Petit, Appendix, 5.

⁵³² Ibid., 5.

Cultural Studies: an introductory critique of an emerging discipline,' are relevant here when he claims that cultural studies has as a discipline missed the parallels between the characterization of the 'subaltern' and the representation of nature. Hochman asserts that oppressed cultural groups are often associated with negative representations of nature in discriminatory discourses: 'living "close to nature" as abject poverty; nature as punishing mother goddess or innocent child; youth as wild or nature as the past or immaturity of culture.'⁵³³ Hochman uses the example of the African and he suggests that it was not only racial difference that made these peoples so other in Western eyes but also their attitudes to nature, 'the fact that they behaved like a part of nature, that they treated nature as their undisputed master, that they had not created a human world, a human reality, and that therefore nature had remained, in all its majesty, the only overwhelming reality – compared to which they appeared to be phantoms, unreal and ghostlike.'⁵³⁴

If one adopts Hochman's view of prejudicial attitudes about nature and the societies that venerate it, then the extension of Petit's poetic project is a logical progression, since, as Hochman states: 'Because nature is routinely and reductively construed as unconscious, as raw material, any entity associated with nature stands to lose rights to ethical culture.'⁵³⁵ Interestingly, Petit identifies the utilisation of nature with the abuse of people and in neither case does Petit approve of commercial or exploitative attitudes. In interview she identifies the exploitation of nature with the abuse of women in developing countries and in the West:

⁵³³ Jhan Hochman. 'Green Cultural Studies: an introductory critique of an emerging discipline.' *Literature Online*. 1996-2007. ProQuest-CSA LLC. <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R01527025&divLevel=0&queryId=../session/1188898963_19632&trailId=1143567B9E3&area=abell&forward=critref_ft>. (accessed 4th September 2007.) (This essay was originally published in *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. 30.1 (1997): 81-96).

⁵³⁴ Hochman, 'Green Cultural Studies,' <lionchadwyck.co.uk>.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

I don't believe that land belongs to people just because they can buy it. Doesn't land belong to the earth? Similarly with women, in the third world they are often treated brutally, as my mother was by my father.⁵³⁶

After *The Heart of a Deer*, Petit's poetry is concerned with the disenfranchised peoples of the Amazon whose association with nature has suggested a lack of civilization to Western observers. By voyaging into these indigenous cultures which have normally been thought of as savage or brutal, Petit on the one hand gestures towards an acceptance of the strangeness of this other society but also reveals the strangeness within Western culture. For Petit, the West cannot simply be the civilized one to the Amazonian's barbaric otherness. The painful exigencies of Petit's early life become very useful in these poems as she uses her experiences as an abused child to reveal the equivalent strangeness in Western culture.

In Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, one aspect of her analysis of the stranger involves the representation of foreigners encountered by Westerners during travels abroad. She describes the genre of voyage literature that emerged during the Renaissance thanks to explorers like Marco Polo. Yet these writers either presented a fantasy completely detached from reality or offered, 'another, just as ethnocentric, reduction that amounted to bringing down the foreigner's strangeness to the same universal logic that Western tradition had brought to the fore.'⁵³⁷ According to Kristeva, this kind of ethnographical discourse was developed by Western writers such as François Rabelais, Thomas More and Jonathan Swift, and later adopted by novelists such as Edgar Allen Poe, Henry James and James Joyce. For Kristeva, the wisdom of writers like Rabelais was clear from his consciousness that 'those *mirabilia* [marvels or miracles] had their source in our own world, in our dreams and political conflicts.'⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁵³⁷ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 114.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

There emerged a genre in which by taking a journey, one discovers the imperfection in one's own country and such voyage literature, 'remained a privileged means for showing our individual flaws or the political weaknesses of our own countries.'⁵³⁹

However, Kristeva notes that foreigners cannot simply be the lever for one's own philosophising but, 'the other is simply... other.'⁵⁴⁰

Petit's positioning of her own voice in relation to the 'uncivilised' Amazonian cultures is complex. On the one hand, she owes a great deal to the kind of voyage literature that Kristeva describes. In mapping her own suffering of abuse over the painful exigencies of the indigenous people, her voice bridges the supposed divide between 'sophisticated' and 'rudimentary' societies. In doing so, there is an implicit criticism of the hypocrisy of Western society which damns the less 'civilised' practices of Amazonian peoples, but chooses to ignore what Petit calls 'the private wars' of everyday life. In 'Private and Public Wars,' Petit expresses this kind of criticism openly in a challenge about what should be the material of poetry: 'Private wars – so often the mistreatment of women and children – are waged more than we like to admit in our first world country.'⁵⁴¹

However, while Petit is keen to make such a criticism through revealing a similarity between Western and Amazonian cultures, she does not use the foreign culture simply as a lever for her own illumination. Rather Petit's exile into such indigenous cultures of Latin America is a means to discover the strangeness of another culture, to embrace its foreignness and to represent its operations. Through detailed analysis I will show that Petit allows the Amazonians to remain other rather than reducing them to Western logic and she does so through use of detailed allusions to

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁴¹ Pascale Petit, 'Private and Public Wars,' *The New Welsh Review* 72 (2006): 8-14 (8).

Amazonian mythology and through the recreation of some of the rituals that make up everyday life for these indigenous cultures.

The Zoo Father

Petit's second poetry collection, *The Zoo Father*, is inspired by her experience of travelling in the Amazon rainforest amongst indigenous peoples and the collection interrogates the early explorers of the Amazon like Alexander von Humboldt and also more contemporary anthropologists such as Napoleon A. Chagnon and Jacques Lizot. As the title suggests, these men are represented as patriarchs that reduce the complex cultures and biologies of the Amazon to a zoo. Interestingly, these patriarchal anthropologists bear a striking resemblance to the commissioners who produced the imperialist 1847 *Report into the State of Education in Wales* (known by the *Cymraeg* nickname, *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*, or 'The Treachery of the Blue Books'). As Bohata states in *Postcolonialism Revisited*, the Blue Books, 'depicted the Welsh language, Nonconformity and Welsh women in particular as degenerate.'⁵⁴² In the case of the Welsh, the Amazon and many other minor cultures, their communities became a mysterious other against which imperialist commentators could shore up their own omnipotence. David Maybury Lewis describes in 'Demystifying the Second Conquest' how nineteenth-century anthropologists used 'the backwards peoples of the world' as a lever for their own 'higher rationality.'⁵⁴³ According to Maybury Lewis, *modern views* on indigenous peoples of the past and present can be typified by the dialogue between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de Las Casas in the sixteenth century. In a junta ordered by Charles V of Spain, Las Casas argued against Sepúlveda that Indians

⁵⁴² Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, 10.

⁵⁴³ David Maybury-Lewis, 'Demystifying the Second Conquest,' *Frontier Expansion in Amazonia*, ed. Marianne and Charles H. Wood (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1984), 127-134 (129).

had souls, while for Sepúlveda, indigenous people, 'were cannibals, and therefore not deserving of human compassion.'⁵⁴⁴ Maybury Lewis notes that because indigenous peoples, 'abused the weak in their society,' it was thought that their government had to be replaced by Spanish rule which supposedly did not exploit the weak in the same fashion.⁵⁴⁵ Maybury Lewis describes such excuses as 'self-serving' and the desire to 'civilise' Indians indicates that indigenous people must make way not for rationality, but development.

Petit would disagree with Sepúlveda's views on indigenous people and the implementation of oppressive governments, as we will see in my analysis of her poems inspired by the head-shrinking of the Jivaro peoples.⁵⁴⁶ In 'Private and Public Wars,' Petit describes how in *The Zoo Father*, she places her abusive father in the context of Amazonian tribes like 'the cannibalistic Yanomami and the headshrinking Jivaro/Shuar,' cultures that 'raised ethical questions much debated by anthropologists.'⁵⁴⁷ However, like Maybury Lewis, Petit defends the indigenous cultures stating that 'none of their shocking practices were gratuitous, but possibly neurotic responses to cultural and survival demands.'⁵⁴⁸

Petit obviously rejects Sepúlveda's view of indigenous peoples, yet she would also disapprove of Las Casas' desire to "civilise" them. Foreign cultures are not useful material for Petit, because they can be made into Western models of civilisation, or because they offer opportunities for appropriating another culture's experiences for one's own benefit only. Rather there is a sense in which the strangeness or foreignness in one culture can highlight that quality in another. In 'Private and Public Wars,' Petit

⁵⁴⁴ Maybury-Lewis, 'Demystifying the Second Conquest,' 128.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁴⁶ See p. 5 of this study.

⁵⁴⁷ Petit, 'Private and Public Wars,' 13.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 13.

provides a useful anecdote about a conference in Lithuania. After Petit performed a reading of poems at the conference, one delegate suggested that the slow reduction of an abusive father's power (via the symbolism of a Jivaro head-shrinking ritual in one poem) could be relevant to Lithuanians who suffered under the KGB.⁵⁴⁹ The Lithuanian delegate realised that although Petit had written about a specific, personal experience, she is gesturing to the strangeness of cultures and contexts closer to home: the strangeness in our selves.

Just as *The Heart of a Deer* uses the figure of the explorer in the Amazon and his relation to nature in order to reveal the barbarity of this Western visitor, so *The Zoo Father* interrogates anthropologists of the Amazon revealing that beyond their civilized appearance is an unsettling, sinister strangeness. One of the 'Zoo Fathers' is Alexander von Humboldt whose Latin American journey from 1799 to 1804 was celebrated as the second scientific discovery of South America. In 'The Embrace of the Electric Eel,' Petit dwells on one of Humboldt's more bizarre experiments in which he herded horses into a stream infested with electric eels.⁵⁵⁰ Anthony Smith describes Humboldt's encounter with 'gymnotids' or electric fish in Calabozo. According to Smith, the fish were not exactly eels but, they 'swam in eel-like manner and possessed an eel-like smoothness,' and they could produce six hundred volts.⁵⁵¹ Humboldt had already experimented with electricity and was fascinated by the creatures, so he decided to proceed with an experiment in which horses were driven into the water to be attacked by the gymnotids until the 'battery-like supply' of electricity was exhausted.⁵⁵² The fish could then be taken from the water safely to be examined. However, in Petit's poem,

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵⁵⁰ Pascale Petit, 'Embrace of the Electric Eel,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 8.

⁵⁵¹ Anthony Smith, *Explorers of the Amazon* (London: Viking, 1990), 232.

⁵⁵² Smith, *Explorers of the Amazon*, 232.

the narrator becomes akin to one such horse and her abusive father parallels the behaviour of Humboldt:

“such a picturesque spectacle of nature”

those great eels clamped against the bellies
of his threshing horses, how their eyes

almost popped out and their manes stood on end.
Though the jolt alone did not kill them.⁵⁵³

Humboldt's reaction to the experiment shown here in speech marks is a polysyllabic, non-musical expression of fascination and awe. Humboldt is an elevated and omniscient observer as the grotesque otherness of the vampiric scene guarantees his whole subjecthood. The line lingers with four long stresses on 'those grey eels clamped,' reiterating Humboldt's fascination, yet the rhythm moves with rapidity over the details of the animals' suffering. Humboldt's experiment is more important than the agony of its subjects. When we reach three long stresses ('how their eyes'), the enjambment jolts to the next couplet which pictures those eyes suffering and bulging with pain. The rhythm moves in rapid anapaests through the detail of the horses' manes to the 'jolt' of electricity. At the end of the line, it settles on a pyrrhic foot and the stress emphasises that the pain of electrocution is not the sole factor in the death of the horses. The culprit is rather the observer's deadening gaze of fascination and detachment that forces the horses into a pose of aggression towards the gymnotids. The gymnotids themselves could act as a metaphor for the so-called 'barbaric' tribes of the Amazon described by Napoleon A. Chagnon as the 'fierce people.' In a desire to examine the fascinating but dangerous subjects, Humboldt must induce a situation of violence and suffering for the horses and the gymnotids. He cannot allow the

⁵⁵³ Petit, 'Embrace of the Electric Eel,' 8.12-16.

gymnotids to be simply other but must fathom their secrets. By recasting her own abusive father as Humboldt, Petit removes her own experience from its original context and rather than trying to articulate the inexpressible pain of abuse through a simple retelling, she creates a useful cultural comparison that reveals similar powers at work in each context. The supposedly barbaric aspects of the Amazon are also present in Western society.

In other poems, Petit delves further into questions of victimization and agency. In 'Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin,' the speaker becomes the violin and the abusive father figure becomes the player. This poem is one of a series of self-portraits, such as 'Self-Portrait as a Dug-Out Canoe,' 'Self-Portrait as a Were Jaguar' and 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter.' The notion of a 'self-portrait' suggests the reproduction of an authentic self, yet Petit contradicts this idea by investing identity in inanimate objects, animals and foreigners.

In 'Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin,' it seems initially that the speaker has placed the 'Zoo Father' as an indigenous part of the community: the player of the tribe's violin. However, the following lines complicate this interpretation: 'Even the jaguar and monkey / stand on their hind legs.'⁵⁵⁴ These lines reveal that Petit is using mythologies about the origins of the Warao violin, which are described in Dale A. Olsen's *Music of the Warao of Venezuela*. Olsen explains that the Warao's mythology tells of a creature – half–man, half–monkey – named Nakurao, who brought the violin from a foreign country. When Nakurao plays the violin, the animals dance including all kinds of birds, the jaguar, the deer and the howler monkey.⁵⁵⁵ By using this Warao mythology, Petit introduces criticism of the father-figure who in Petit's version is an

⁵⁵⁴ Pascale Petit, 'Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 20 (20.5-6).

⁵⁵⁵ Dale A. Olsen, *Music of the Warao of Venezuela: Song People of the Rain Forest* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996), 106-110.

outsider imposing his music in a process that is painful for both the animal listeners (in the awkward hind legs position) and the music-maker as the father 'rub-rubs' her body.⁵⁵⁶

The symbol of the Warao violin appears again in 'The Musical Archer,' in which Petit describes 'my father / playing his musical bow.'⁵⁵⁷ The bow's 'throb' is, 'more insistent than insects' and this image as in 'Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin' suggests that the experience of hearing the music is both pleasurable and painful.⁵⁵⁸ In addition, the music seems to control the animals and subjects of the forest as an expression of the power of the 'Zoo Father,' since he uses it, 'to lull his prey into a trance.'⁵⁵⁹ There is also something sexual about the hypnotic music which is emphasised by a punning use of the verb, 'to come,' as a euphemism for ejaculation:

When the animals came, how quickly

he turned his lure into a weapon,
and shot them. When I approached,

he pulled me onto his lap
and filled me with hot arrows.⁵⁶⁰

In writing about the Warao bow, Olsen quotes Johannes Wilbert's "The House of the Swallow Tailed Kite" which discusses the bow's uses. Wilbert writes that, 'the Warao hunter uses his bow and arrow as a lure to attract his prey [...] [but] [w]ith the animal in shooting range, the hunter quickly converts the musical bow into a deadly weapon and lets fly.'⁵⁶¹ Once the animals are possessed by the 'Zoo Father,' the bow for making music becomes a penetrating instrument with the stresses and assonance

⁵⁵⁶ Petit, 'Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin,' 20.8.

⁵⁵⁷ Pascale Petit, 'The Musical Archer,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 54-55 (54.9-10).

⁵⁵⁸ Petit, 'The Musical Archer,' 54.11-12.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.15.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.16-20.

⁵⁶¹ Johannes Wilbert, 'The House of the Swallow Tailed Kite: Warao Myth and the Art of Thinking in Images,' *Animal Myths and Metaphors in South America*, ed. Gary Urton (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 145-182 (155).

falling on ‘turned’ and ‘lure.’ The finality of the three long stresses, ‘and shot them,’ indicates that there can be no escape. The change is reminiscent of Elaine Scarry’s observations in *The Body in Pain* about malleability of purpose in the case of implements that could be tools or weapons: ‘If one holds the two side by side in front of the mind – a hand (as weapon) and a hand (as tool), a knife (weapon) and a knife (tool), a hammer and a hammer, an ax [sic] and an ax[sic] – it is then clear that what differentiates them is not the object itself but the surface on which they fall.’⁵⁶² The persistent bow becomes an unrelenting spear that impales not only the animals, but the speaker herself.

However, to return to ‘Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin’ for a moment, the woman/violin in this poem is not simply a passive object and there is some hope for agency when the violin is hung and all are asleep:

No one but my father can touch me.
When he sleeps

the night breeze blows across my strings
and makes them hum.⁵⁶³

Irregular rhythm dominates the initial line; the feeling is of uncertainty, yet the stresses that fall on the second syllable of ‘no one,’ the first syllable of ‘father’ and on ‘touch’ emphasise the woman/violin’s isolation, the overbearing presence of the ‘Zoo Father’ and his relation with her/it. The consequent curtailed line, with its three long stresses, creates a sense of expectation and the enjambment leads to an act of creation from the previously passive woman/violin. Sets of three long stresses are used in both lines of the next couplet to highlight firstly the active agent, ‘night breeze blows,’ but also the action, ‘makes them hum.’ The image is reminiscent of the Aeolian Harp, as the wind

⁵⁶² Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 173.

⁵⁶³ Petit, ‘Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin,’ 20.19-22.

produces music from an inanimate instrument. However, although the wind appears to be the player, the feeling of expectation created by the long stresses suggests that the woman/violin is willing the music into being. At the very least the woman/violin is free from the violinist's influence, which is fitting in light of Warao traditions described by Olsen. He notes that for the Warao, it is not the player or singer but, 'the song-text that is believed to carry the weight of evoking the spirits.'⁵⁶⁴ The violin is not an inanimate object or simply the property of the violin player, but rather an autonomous subject that can create its own music even while it is being subjugated. Petit's view of the violin here is self-consciously incongruous and it contradicts simple dichotomies between passivity and activity. The symbol of the Warao tribe, its violin, is possessed and dominated by the 'Zoo Father,' yet although he believes that he has fathomed its depths, when it is free of his influence, it can work independently as an autonomous subject. This again could be a metaphor for the Warao themselves, since although some authorities may feel that the Warao system of government needs to be replaced in order for the tribe to be civilised, when free of such influences, the Warao people are able to generate a tune of their own. Petit questions notions of civilisation and barbarity and questions the need to interfere in the traditions and behaviours of other cultures. The 'Zoo Father,' figured here as the foreign incomer who dominates the magical violin with his playing, fails to perceive the possibility that the violin can produce a tune of its own.

Another challenge to the dominance of the 'Zoo Father' occurs in 'The Fish Daughter' in which the 'Zoo Father' appears as a fisherman violently hauling the mythical pirarucú from the water. The pirarucú is a large fish of the Amazon river that can be as long as two metres and weigh up to 100 kilograms. According to Nigel J.H.

⁵⁶⁴ Olsen, *Music of the Warao of Venezuela*, 17.

Smith in *The Enchanted Amazon Rain Forest*, the pirarucú is valued for its 'high value and savoury taste' as well as for its 'byproducts.'⁵⁶⁵ Strips of its meat can be stored for months; its fifteen centimetre long tongue can be used as a grater, while its scales, the size of credit cards, can be used in woodwork too. In 'The Fish Daughter,' the speaker recalls how her father 'loved fishing' and when she lies across his bed, she imagines herself as 'a giant pirarucú.'⁵⁶⁶ As this mythological fish, the speaker can address the 'Zoo Father' in a powerful and defiant manner:

You could make a rasp
from the teeth on my tongue,
with the things I'm saying,
and grate the past with it.
I open my cavernous mouth
so you can see how everything
is toothed: my jaws,
palate, pharynx [...]⁵⁶⁷

The father/fishermen has an unpleasant surprise, because this is no passive victim but a subject of power and strength. Its tongue is no longer a tool for human beings to shape wood, but a mystical object that can obliterate past suffering. The 'cavernous mouth' seems to contain almost infinite space, but rather than exposing the soft flesh of the tongue, the open jaws bristle with weapons and probes. The face to face encounter depicted here seems to draw on the Amazonian mythology of the *panama*, which Smith explains is 'a hex that prevents people from catching fish or killing game.'⁵⁶⁸ This punishment is often associated with *Mãe de Peixe*, the mother of fish, described by Smith as, 'a chimera of many guises which looks after fish populations.'⁵⁶⁹ Sometimes *Mãe de Peixe* manifests herself as a pirarucú and the challenging voice

⁵⁶⁵ Nigel J.H. Smith, *The Enchanted Amazon Rain Forest: Stories from a Vanishing World* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1996), 101.

⁵⁶⁶ Pascale Petit, 'The Fish Daughter,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 11 (11.1-3).

⁵⁶⁷ Petit, 'The Fish Daughter,' 11.6-13.

⁵⁶⁸ Smith, *The Enchanted Amazon Rain Forest*, 101.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

attributed to the fish in this poem resembles this matriarchal figure. *Mãe de Peixe* is also associated with the *Yara*, a beautiful woman who manifests herself to men on the eve of marriage, but, as Smith notes: 'If they hear yara's enchanting voice and linger to catch a glimpse of her, they later become ill.'⁵⁷⁰ The 'Zoo Father' thinks that he has captured, 'the biggest prize in the Amazon,' but his actions will result in castigation.⁵⁷¹ When the speaker returns to a human context and catches the father, 'peeing into a bottle,' an activity indicative of weakness, impotence and loss of mobility, it almost seems as though the hex is already working on its victim.⁵⁷² However there is still further punishment to be meted out as the speaker transforms herself into another fish, the candirú:

I know just what I've to do:
shrink myself to a tiny candirú,
the most feared fish in the river,
swim up your stream of urine
into your urethra, Father,
and wedge my backward-pointing barbs
deep inside your penis.⁵⁷³

The monosyllabic words and regular rhythm show purpose in these lines, while the rhyme of 'to do' with 'candirú' indicates finality. As William Burroughs puts it in *Naked Lunch*, 'the candiru is a small eel-like fish or worm about one-quarter inch through and two inches long patronizing certain rivers of ill-repute in the Greater Amazon Basin, will dart up your prick [...] and hold himself there by sharp spines with precisely what motives is not known.'⁵⁷⁴ Part of the mythology concerning the candirú is that it can swim up a stream of urine, which in this case becomes the real punishment that the speaker enforces in her guise of *Mãe de Peixe*. The iambic rhythm

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁷¹ Petit, 'The Fish Daughter,' 11.14.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 11.17.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 11.18-24.

⁵⁷⁴ William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 1959 (London: Flamingo, 1993), 47.

in the long penultimate line lingers over the grotesque punishment, yet while, the alliterative 'b,' 'p' and 'd' sounds reflect the penetrative process, the change to a trochaic rhythm in the final line means that the poem is left on a less conclusive note.

Becoming an Amazonian

Other poems in *The Zoo Father* dwell more on the ceremonies and customs of Amazonian peoples; for example, rituals of mourning in 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,' which I mentioned in the introduction. What I did not explain in my earlier note on the poem,⁵⁷⁵ is that it also introduces an anthropological debate concerning the Yanomami tribe, a group described by Napoleon A. Chagnon as 'the fierce people.' In interview, Petit explains her preoccupation with contemporary anthropologists like Chagnon and she suggests that her concern is bound up with the complexity of brutal and 'civilised' aspects of Yanomami culture:

There have been, mainly by French anthropologists, many studies of the ethics of Amazonian tribes. I'm thinking particularly of Napoleon A. Chagnon's *The Yanomamo*. His conclusions are dark. Others (I'm thinking of Jacques Lizot's *Tales of the Yanomami*) were similarly shocked by this tribe but came to different conclusions and I've attempted to read most source books on this, because it's a study of human nature in isolation. Yanomami raped girls and practiced cannibalism. They also happen to have a highly sophisticated and ritualized spiritual world.⁵⁷⁶

Chagnon and Lizot present two views of the Yanomami. In *The Yanomamo*, Chagnon is preoccupied with the brutality and violence of Yanomami society. He notes that the Yanomami concept of love, *bubi yabraö*, does not apply between a husband and wife and he dwells on the violence occurring between young men and the punishments that are meted out to wives, 'with the sharp edge of a machete.'⁵⁷⁷ Chagnon's theorising concludes that violence is fundamental to Yanomami society; he works on the one

⁵⁷⁵ See p.5 of this study.

⁵⁷⁶ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁵⁷⁷ Napoleon Chagnon, *The Yanomamö*, 1968 (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1997), 124.

hand in a neo-Darwinian vein to explain the Yanomami's desire to control resources and he also uses sociobiological theory to elucidate the Yanomami's desire to produce more offspring by dominating as many women as possible by whatever means possible. In 'On Warfare: An Answer to N.A. Chagnon,' Jacques Lizot criticises the sociobiological aspect of Chagnon's argument that, 'all behaviors [sic] observed in the animal kingdom have a genetic foundation' and Lizot notes that in Chagnon's view of Yanomami warfare, 'the actors are no longer considered except as simple organisms, submissive to their biological constitution.'⁵⁷⁸

Lizot's *Tales of the Yanomami* concurs more fully with Petit's idea of the tribe, since he is aware that it is both 'civilised' and undeveloped:

The Yanomami are warriors; they can be brutal and cruel, but they can also be delicate, sensitive, and loving. Violence is only sporadic; it never dominates social life for any length of time, and long peaceful moments can separate two explosions. When one is acquainted with the societies of the North American plains or the societies of the Chaco in South America, one cannot say that Yanomami culture is organized around warfare. They are neither good nor evil savages: These Indians are human beings.⁵⁷⁹

Whilst Lizot does not deny the violence that exists within the Yanomami community, particularly towards women (take for example the story of Hiyomi who is 'deflowered without subtlety'⁵⁸⁰), he is aware that this strange brutality is not unique to the Yanomami, but chimes with other indigenous peoples and indeed with the Western world. Lizot is adamant that it is far too easy to position this culture on the savage side of a civilized/brutal binary.

In 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,' the narrator enacts Yanomami funeral rituals calling on *hekura*; she has 'painted *hekura* on the walls – / my only

⁵⁷⁸ Jacques Lizot, 'On Warfare: An Answer to N.A. Chagnon,' trans. Sarah Dart, *American Ethnologist* 21:4 (1994): 845-862 (846).

⁵⁷⁹ Jacques Lizot, *Tales of the Yanomami: Daily Life in the Venezuelan Forest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), xiv-xv.

⁵⁸⁰ Lizot, *Tales of the Yanomami*, 68.

visitors, these helper-spirits.⁵⁸¹ According to Lizot, the *bekura* represents, '[s]upernatural beings of the imaginary world of shamans,' or, 'the spirits of plants, animals, or natural elements.'⁵⁸² Here the Yanomami daughter calls on such spirits to make her into a shaman, something that ordinary Yanomami society would probably not allow. It soon emerges that a funeral ritual is taking place, which becomes a ceremony of self negation: the Yanomami daughter hasn't 'been out since you died' and she has 'kept our fire alight' until her hair is 'singd.'⁵⁸³ Later the *bekura* speaks to the daughter telling her to, 'shave my hair / and braid it into a belt,' and the shaving of hair is a motif used in earlier poems such as 'Waterfall Climbing' to signify the loss of humanity.⁵⁸⁴ It is a symbol reminiscent of victims of concentration camps (a symbol of Western barbarity) or torture and thus it is no surprise that in wrapping the hair belt around her waist, the daughter recalls her father's embrace, 'when you turned into a demon / and tore me with your penis.'⁵⁸⁵

Interestingly, Chagnon discusses violence and rituals of mourning in his essay, 'Life Histories, Blood Revenge and Warfare in a Tribal Population,' and he asserts that violence is an inherent part of Yanomami bereavement. Chagnon notes that the Yanomami, 'describe the feelings of the bereaved as *bushuwo*, a word that can be translated as "anger verging on violence",' and he suggests that a bereaved Yanomami may react violently.⁵⁸⁶ 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter' seems to belie Chagnon's view of Yanomami bereavement since rather than the daughter enacting her bereavement in a violent manner, she ritualistically remembers the violence that *she*

⁵⁸¹ Pascale Petit, 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 52-53 (52.2-3).

⁵⁸² Lizot, *Tales of the Yanomami*, 192.

⁵⁸³ Petit, 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,' 52.4-8.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.12-13.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.16-17.

⁵⁸⁶ Napoleon A. Chagnon, 'Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population,' *Science* 239.4843 (1988): 985-992 (986).

herself has suffered. Petit's rendering of the ceremony seems to chime more with Lizot's comments on funerals in *Tales of the Yanomamo*, in which he points out that, 'the community is stricken by a brutal amnesia that ends as suddenly as it began, producing this dramatic alternation of excessive despair and feigned indifference.'⁵⁸⁷ The Yanomami funeral then alternates between an outpouring of suffering and a forgetting of the past, which is here utilised by Petit as a means for the Yanomami daughter to empower herself through distancing and forgetting:

This is how Night was made,
my thighs sticky with star-blood,

my mouth flooded with moonseeds.
Now, I wear a child's necklace

threaded with toucan beaks.
I shake my rattle

stamp my clapping stick.
I pour your ashes into plantain soup.

The first sip makes me retch,
then I learn to like the taste.⁵⁸⁸

Part of the ritual of forgetting is for the daughter to conjure a mythical story made from her own suffering; the emphatic, 'This,' that begins these lines indicates the omniscient yet distanced voice of a storyteller. The content of the story focuses on the 'Night' and its making, which recalls George Steiner's comment that the poet, 'borders [...] on night.'⁵⁸⁹ For Steiner, the night was linked to a Keatsian negative capability and here too the structure of the mythical story lends distance to the narrator. The act of rape is rendered poetically and euphemistically as eternal symbols like the stars and moon reframe the act with epic proportions. The rhythm of the second and third lines uses an iamb to emphasise the body part violated, a dactyl that skips over the state of

⁵⁸⁷ Lizot, *Tales of the Yanomami*, 23.

⁵⁸⁸ Petit, 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter', 52.18-27.

⁵⁸⁹ Steiner, *Language and Silence*, 66.

that body part and a pyrrhic foot that lingers over the magically described semen. The sound of words like 'sticky' and 'star' are onomatopoeic and may indicate the soiled and gummy nature of the woman's body. However it is also a means of creating a lilting, poetic sound to the writing which also occurs in the internal rhyme between 'blood' and 'flooded' and the alliterative 'moon' and 'mouth.' A sordid act of abuse suddenly becomes a tragic and poetical sacrifice distanced from the tearing of flesh described earlier in the poem.

The daughter seems to be going backwards in time, as now she wears the child's necklace strung with disembodied beaks, the mouths of birds that cannot cry or tell the past as the nightingale does in Western mythologies of Philomela. The rattle may also be reminiscent to a Western audience of the child's toy and infancy, reiterating the regression to childhood and a time before sexual relations. The rattle signals that Western and Amazonian worlds are connecting and blurring.

Although the rhythm moves between iambic and trochaic stresses, the lines describing the rattle and stick beat out a basically regular rhythm that is only broken when the ashes are mixed into the plantain soup. This rhythm is only resolved after the retching and difficulty of ingesting the father's ashes; then the daughter describes in trochaic rhythm how such unpleasant experiences have become a custom and habit and the extra stress at the end of the line sounds a note of finality.

What is most interesting about Petit's account of the Yanomami daughter is its relation to the anthropological debates about the Yanomami. Indeed, this poem might be addressed to Chagnon as a 'Zoo Father' who simplifies the rituals and beliefs of the Yanomami to sociobiological necessity. Chagnon's assertions about the obsession with violence in Yanomami society are undermined in 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,' because rather than expressing her suffering through violence, the

Yanomami daughter accepts her pain through a ritual of outpouring and forgetting as described by Lizot. It is also important to remember that the poem has another context – that of the Western world – since it is a self-portrait transposed onto the exigencies of the Yanomami. Petit's voice is one of civilization and barbarity, of poetry and violence and it is clear that this applies to the complex cultures of indigenous people and to societies in the West. While Lizot gestures to a shared humanity, Petit emphasises a shared otherness; while she forces the reader to confront the foreignness of the Yanomami with respect and sympathy, as a Westerner, she demands that we reader to examine our own otherness and the strangeness in our own society.

This strategy is heightened in Petit's poems based on the Jivaro tribes of the Amazon and their practice of head-shrinking. In interview, Petit explains her fascination with the ritual of head-shrinking and how the idea of creating a ceremony to reduce an enemy's power was enabling for her poetry:

I was as fascinated by the Shuar/Jivaro, famed for their head-shrinking practices, and again, a people with a highly-developed spiritual world, lots of it to do with sacred waterfalls. They are also known as the People of the Sacred Waterfalls. Before young boys gain arutam – killing power, and are powerful enough to shrink an enemy's head, they undergo a vision quest at their world's highest waterfall. This reminded me of how I went to Angel Falls before my father contacted me, and how I shrank his head – metaphorically of course – in two poems.⁵⁹⁰

The two poems that Petit mentions are 'Trophy' and 'My Father's Body' both of which appear in *The Zoo Father*. 'Trophy' begins with the speaker addressing the 'Zoo Father' with the phrase, 'my dear tormentor.'⁵⁹¹ The address is reminiscent of Sylvia Plath's style in poems like 'Lady Lazarus,' in which she calls on a threatening male

⁵⁹⁰ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁵⁹¹ Pascale Petit, 'Trophy,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 28-29 (28.1).

figure with the words, 'O my enemy.'⁵⁹² It is in Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' that the woman speaker is deconstructed: her skin becomes 'a Nazi lampshade'; her foot is '[a] paperweight'; and her face is 'Jew linen.'⁵⁹³ However, rather than adopting a Plathean self-destructiveness, Petit's woman speaker deconstructs the body of the threatening male in grotesque detail with the help of the Jivaro tribe. After the rituals of skinning, sewing, skewering and boiling, the head resembles the Nazi paperweight described by Plath, yet here there is a certainty that the shrunken head belongs not to the abused but to the abuser:

He swung your half-fried face by your hair.
 There was a smell like supper cooking.
 He put coarse pebbles inside you now,
 they rattled, the oil bubbled out.
 Your head shrank to the size of a fist.
 You were cured, my perfect trophy father.⁵⁹⁴

The imagery here is grotesque while the generally regular rhythm conveys a strange sense of the everyday and the monotonous. Human flesh is equated with food: the 'half-fried face,' the 'smell of supper cooking,' the oil bubbling and the pun on 'cured' indicating the cured meat of the father's flesh and the purging of his sins. The barbaric ritual that the Jivaro tribesman employs is sickening, yet by taking on this routine and becoming a savage herself, the speaker can manage the barbarity and savagery of Western society.

In 'Trophy,' the woman speaker must be guided by a Jivaro tribesman, but 'My Father's Body' enables her to enact the ritual in her imagination and this time she applies the shrinking process to an entire body rather than just a head. Indulging in

⁵⁹² Sylvia Plath, 'Lady Lazarus,' *Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1981) 244-247 (244.11).

⁵⁹³ Plath, 'Lady Lazarus,' 244.5, 244.7, 244.9.

⁵⁹⁴ Petit, 'Trophy,' 28.31-29.36.

savagery, the narrator imagines the ease with which she would complete the task and revels in the power that it allows her:

I wouldn't stop until
 you'd shrunk enough to be my doll.
 I'd hang you from a hook
 and stare at my naked Papa –
 your miniature penis
 that couldn't hurt a mouse.⁵⁹⁵

This passage is marked by a preponderance of monosyllabic words, which allow the speaker to forcibly state the results of the shrinking process: the abuser becomes a child's plaything, a puppet hung from a hook and stripped to its bare body. The iambic rhythm stumbles when the familial relationship is mentioned as the line, 'and stare at my naked Papa,' trips from an iambic stress to an anapaest to an amphibrach. The polysyllabic word, 'miniature,' is another obstacle to the flow of rhythm and it seems that the speaker cannot be so self-assured when dwelling on the figure and weapon that caused her harm. The narrator manages to recollect herself though and the iambic rhythm of the final line signals finality. The Jivaro ritual is once again put to good use as the otherness of the shrinking process allows Petit to consider the barbarity of Western culture.

There are many more ritualistic poems in *The Zoo Father*. Some rituals bring pain to the speaker of the poems, such as 'The Ant Glove,' in which the speaker commits to a coming-of-age ceremony involving ants to deal with the fact that she is 'the fruit of [her mother's] rape.'⁵⁹⁶ Amazonians put 'giant hunting ants' into 'the palm fibres of a glove' and this is what the speaker must wear.⁵⁹⁷ Initially the ants represent the letters read by the speaker that revealed the fact of her mother's rape, but later they

⁵⁹⁵ Pascale Petit, 'My Father's Body,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 32-33 (32.27-32.32).

⁵⁹⁶ Pascale Petit, 'The Ant Glove,' *The Zoo Father* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), 24-25 (24.3).

⁵⁹⁷ Petit, 'The Ant Glove,' 24.8-10.

become the words in her own letter to the 'Zoo Father': 'Are your fingers swelling as they stroke my signature? / Are your lips and tongue numb from kissing my kisses?'⁵⁹⁸

The 'barbarous' rituals of Amazonian tribe become a means to combat the barbarism hidden in Western culture and what Petit seems to be offering in many poems in *The Zoo Father* is an explanation for rituals that seem to be uncivilised to Western eyes.

Petit maps her own suffering over the Amazonian mythologies and rituals, as she works out the parallels between her own relationship with an abusive father and the interaction between anthropologists and indigenous peoples. There is always a struggle for power in these poems whether it be between Humboldt and his subjects, the fisherman and *Mãe de Peixe*, the musician and the violin, Chagnon and the Yanomami, the Yanomami and their women or the victim and the Jivaro head-shrinker. What all of these poems have in common is that while admitting the complexity of foreign cultures and allowing them to be other, undeniably different and resistant to Western logic, Petit will not allow the West to take a position of superiority and dismiss such cultures as savage and subordinate to developed countries. Rather in offering a glimpse of her own experience of barbarity and savageness, she indicates the lack of civilization that exists in Western society even if it is not admitted by its inhabitants. Petit negotiates a tricky position in tackling such a complicated subject matter and while she always refers back to her own experience, the exile of a new context is generative and useful. Her hand remains in painful ant glove, 'always [...] writing goodbye.'⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 25.27-28.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 25.29.

Part III: Frida Kahlo and (Auto) Biography

As I have argued in my analysis of *The Zoo Father*, Petit's poetry is very much about forcing the marginal to invade the centre, so that boundaries are blurred and binaries are undermined. This project is clear in her writing about Amazonian indigenous cultures, but it also extends to her use of the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo. Like the Amazonian peoples, Kahlo has a certain kind of signification. Kahlo was born in Mexico City of Mexican and German parentage. Like Petit, her national allegiances were divided although she was a passionate advocate of Mexican indigenous culture. In 1925, Kahlo was the victim of a trolley car accident and it was this that initiated her mythology, since reportedly the handle of the trolley entered Kahlo's torso and exited via the vagina. Kahlo would have to suffer painful operations many times in the rest of her lifetime. Kahlo later became a painter in a surrealist style and an associate of the Mexican Muralists (Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, Alfaro Siqueiros) and she married Rivera in what was to become a publicly tumultuous marriage. Kahlo then is associated with the indigenous rather than the colonialist, with the disabled rather than the able-bodied, with the irrational rather than reason and with indulgence rather than self-discipline. It is this persona that becomes a mask for Petit's more confessional vein of writing.

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva notes that simulation and masks can be integral dimensions of the contemporary figure of the foreigner: 'Without a home [the foreigner] disseminates on the contrary the actor's paradox: multiplying masks and "false selves" he [or she] is never completely true nor completely false.'⁶⁰⁰ Tracing the history of foreigners, Kristeva writes that it was during the Enlightenment that the notion of 'good savage' underwent change, observing how, 'philosophical fiction

⁶⁰⁰ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 8.

became peopled with foreigners who invited the reader to make a twofold journey': the journey to an unknown place and the journey into one's own society and identity.⁶⁰¹ For writers like Denis Diderot, the foreigner then became, 'the figure onto which the penetrating, ironical mind of the philosopher is delegated—his double, his mask.'⁶⁰²

Petit adopts a strategy not unlike that described by Kristeva, as in her pamphlet *The Wounded Deer*, she uses Kahlo as a kind of mask and in telling Kahlo's biography also hints at her own autobiography.⁶⁰³ This autobiography is rooted the abuse that she suffered as a child at the hands of an abusive father and a mentally ill mother. However, the use of Kahlo as a mask enables Petit to extend the poetic project of her earlier collections so that Kahlo, the supposedly primitive artist of a developing country, mingles with the poets herself who is both telling and refusing to confess, as her identity itself is blurred. Before analyzing Petit's *The Wounded Deer* in detail, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the debates around art, pain and confession, particularly as Kahlo herself challenged notion of authenticity and confession in her art.

While Petit's earlier collections, *The Heart of a Deer* and *The Zoo Father*, do contain references to her childhood sufferings, later poems appear to focus more on her own experience of sexual violence in particular and are less removed in context from her own situation. Petit's poem, 'Lunettes,' marks a progression towards a more explicitly personal poetry and it is one of a very few directly personal poems written by Petit. The poem was to appear in Petit's collection, *The Huntress*, but it was first

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 133.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 133-134.

⁶⁰³ It is interesting to speculate whether this masking might be influenced by Petit's cultural background. In *The Welsh Extremist*, Ned Thomas describes the Welsh people as 'two-faced.' The first face is 'turned towards England and concerned with getting on (again like the Scots),' while the second face turns away, 'having to look away to survive' (Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist*, 21).

published in 2003 in *The Manhattan Review*. The poem begins with a memory of Petit's father entering her room at night and what she recalls most vividly is, 'his glasses in the moonlight.'⁶⁰⁴ The narrator remembers that she used to call his glasses 'lunettes' and after looking it up in a dictionary, a chain of association ensues. A collocation of images is used to depict penetration and decapitation. Lunettes might be: '*an arched aperture for the admission of light*'; '*in the guillotine – the hole for the victim's neck*'; and ultimately, '*a forked iron plate / into which the stock of a field-gun carriage is inserted*.'⁶⁰⁵ The seemingly innocent lunettes become a weapon of violence that inflict suffering and I recall my use of Scarry's *The Body in Pain* in relation to 'The Musical Archer' in which a musical bow becomes a weapon for hunting animals or women.

If Petit's more recent work has been interested in how violence unfolds from seemingly innocent-looking sources, she is also concerned with how one responds to violence. In *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, Antonio Damasio devotes much time to thinking about pain and pleasure as 'two different genealogies of life regulation' and he suggests that pain or punishment can dictate that 'organisms [...] close themselves in, freezing and withdrawing from their surroundings.'⁶⁰⁶ Damasio uses the metaphor of the sea anemone which must either 'open up to the world like a blossoming flower – at which point water and nutrients enter its body and supply it with energy – or close itself in a contracted flat pack, small, withdrawn, and neatly imperceptible to others.'⁶⁰⁷ In 'Private and Public Wars,' Petit is adamant that when a poet opens up to expose personal vulnerability, it can make an important political statement, because, 'when confessional poets remove the mask they

⁶⁰⁴ Pascale Petit, 'Lunettes,' *The Huntress* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), 49 (49.2).

⁶⁰⁵ Petit, 'Lunettes,' 49.9, 49.13, 49.18.

⁶⁰⁶ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (London: Heinemann, 1999), 78.

⁶⁰⁷ Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 78.

speak of society's representative victims because their personal crises reflect a larger social and cultural breakdown.⁶⁰⁸ However, she admits that there are difficulties in opening up to take a confessional stance in concordance with Rees-Jones in *Consorting with Angels*. Rees-Jones suggests that the confessional woman poet, 'is frequently read as testifying only to her anguish and her own "weakness"; she is simply revealing the awfulness of femininity which was known to be there all along, and which, in the most simplistic terms has led to her oppression in the first place.'⁶⁰⁹ Petit seems to sympathise with Rees-Jones' view when, in 'Private and Public Wars,' she describes the supposedly 'awful femininity' of Sylvia Plath. Petit notes that Plath made 'the personal into her own symbolic language, a new mythos,' but Petit regrets that, 'one of the disadvantages of confessional poetry in the work of male and female poets is that its sensational content can attract too much attention so that the quality of the writing is neglected and Plath has especially suffered from an undervaluing of her original and vital style.'⁶¹⁰ Opening up can be dangerous.

Clearly, Petit desires to write a serious kind of confessional poetry, but she cannot do so by simply opening up, but instead she needs the double or mask that Kristeva recommends as a means of philosophising about the world. Scarry's analysis in *The Body in Pain* is useful here, when she suggests that pain can actually enable a kind of imagining, because its estrangement demands a new lexical set, new metaphors and new comparisons to express it:

[T]o be present when the person in pain rediscovers speech and so regains his powers of self-objectification is almost to be present at the birth, or rebirth, of language. That the person in pain very typically moves through a handful of descriptive words to an "as if" construction, and an "as if" construction that has a weapon on the other side, indicates the primacy of the sign in the elementary work of projection into metaphor. To describe one's hurt in an

⁶⁰⁸ Petit, 'Private and Public Wars,' 10.

⁶⁰⁹ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 25.

⁶¹⁰ Petit, 'Private and Public Wars,' 11.

image of agency is to project it into an object which, though at first conceived of as moving toward the body, by its very separability from the body becomes an image that can be lifted away, carrying some of the attributes of pain with it.⁶¹¹

Scarry is, of course, describing physical pain rather than emotional suffering, but in the case of Petit, her comments seem to apply, because the memory of physical suffering is so raw in Petit's description of emotional pain and so often, she compares emotional suffering to violent physical pain. To some extent, Petit has always used an "as if" construction to express this pain. She explores exploited and denigrated Amazonian nature and its disenfranchised indigenous peoples in her early collections with distance and respect for the otherness of the Amazon, whilst also pointing out the otherness of Western society too. However, never is her own pain and suffering dealt with more plainly than in her later work and particularly in her poems dedicated to Frida Kahlo, which are included in the pamphlet, *The Wounded Deer*. In interview, Petit spoke of her difficulty in writing autobiographical poems and she notes how writing biographically about the strangeness of Kahlo enabled her to tap into her own strangeness:

After I wrote *The Zoo Father* I wished I could write some poems about sex. I'm not sure how it happened but my favourite painting of hers is 'Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird' and I found myself writing a couple of poems about sex through that painting [...] I was so pleased to have managed to do that. It was as if by pretending to be her I could tackle a difficult subject, and I could use her accident as a metaphor to write about a subject fraught with a limited vocabulary.⁶¹²

Kahlo then becomes the foreigner to Petit who has just enough strangeness in common to allow the poet to open up her own otherness, her own strangeness alongside that of Kahlo. It is no coincidence that the subject matter of Kahlo's art was often concerned with being *chingada*, which Tanya Barson translates in 'All Art is at

⁶¹¹ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 172-173.

⁶¹² Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

Once Surface and Symbol' as meaning 'wounded, broken, torn open or deceived.'⁶¹³ In *Textured Lives*, Claudia Schaefer writes about Kahlo's 'permanent wounds' reiterating the notion of *chingada*.⁶¹⁴ Being opened up purposefully or forcedly is a preoccupation of Kahlo's art.

However, as in the case of Petit, Kahlo's presentation of a wounded and suffering selfhood is far from simple. Barson notes that friends of Kahlo nicknamed her 'La Gran Oscultadura (the great concealer)' and in Kahlo's art, Barson notices, 'a constant oscillation between making and unmasking, self-concealment and self-exposure.'⁶¹⁵ Barson refers to Kahlo's 1945 self-portrait, *The Mask*, in which Kahlo is pictured wearing a Malinche mask. Barson highlights the difficulty in assessing the authenticity of the self presented: 'The emotion of the fake face perhaps conceals Kahlo's habitually inscrutable expression, thus by adopting a mask, she paradoxically reveals more feeling than she does unmasked.'⁶¹⁶ Andrea Kettemann makes similar remarks in *Frida Kahlo 1907 -1954*, when she writes that Kahlo's self-portraits 'suggest that the face shown is in fact a mask, behind which her true feelings are hidden.'⁶¹⁷

Oriana Baddeley recognises this tendency in 'Reflecting on Kahlo: Mirrors, Masquerade and the Politics of Identification.' For Baddeley, the 'projected Frida' is, 'a woman whom we think we know,' and who invokes aspects of 'our own emotional lives.'⁶¹⁸ However, Baddeley concludes that assumptions cannot be made about Kahlo's identity: 'There is no more one true Frida than there is one true Mexico.'⁶¹⁹

⁶¹³ Tanya Barson, "'All Art is at Once Surface and Symbol": A Frida Kahlo Glossary,' *Frida Kahlo*, ed. Emma Dexter and Tanya Barson (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 54-79 (60).

⁶¹⁴ Claudia Schaefer, *Textured Lives: Women, Art and Representation in Modern Mexico* (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), 16.

⁶¹⁵ Barson, 'All Art is at Once Surface and Symbol,' 70.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶¹⁷ Andrea Kettenham, *Frida Kahlo 1907 – 1954* (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 2003), 46.

⁶¹⁸ Oriana Baddeley, 'Reflecting on Kahlo: Mirrors, Masquerade and the Politics of Identification,' *Frida Kahlo*, ed. Emma Dexter and Tanya Barson (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 46-53 (50).

⁶¹⁹ Baddeley, 'Reflecting on Kahlo,' 52.

For Baddeley, it is of the utmost importance to admit that, ‘denial of absolute identity is key to an understanding of Kahlo.’⁶²⁰

Kahlo’s numerous self-portraits are renowned for subverting the idea of the face as a means of expressing identity, thus undermining the idea that selves presented in her paintings are authentic or to be believed in.⁶²¹ As I have discussed in my analysis of *The Zoo Father*, Petit writes numerous self-portraits such as ‘Self-Portrait as a Warao Violin.’ The deflection set up by the portrayal of herself as an object, invokes doubt in the reader about whether her authentic self is being presented or not. Petit’s ‘portraits’ of Kahlo then in *The Wounded Deer* are another self-conscious way to ironically refer back to her own practice. In addition, Petit deflects her supposedly confessional voice by writing of and in the voice of a double or mask, and Kahlo’s own preoccupation with masking and doubles only adds further layers of meaning to the already complex rendering of Kahlo’s biography and Petit’s autobiography.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁶²¹ Surprisingly, Kahlo’s intentions are often misread as a result of being a supposedly ‘confessional’ artist. In *Frida Kahlo*, a pamphlet to accompany an exhibition of Frida Kahlo’s work (Tate Modern, 9th June – 9th October 2005), Jane Burton suggests that Kahlo’s painting was influenced by Western art movements: ‘This dream-like imagery may owe something to Surrealism, of which, despite her statements to the contrary, Kahlo was very likely aware’ (Jane Burton, ‘Drawings,’ *Frida Kahlo* (London: Tate Modern, 2005), 14-15 (15)). When writing on Kahlo’s death, Burton writes: ‘Doctors reported a pulmonary embolism, relating to a bout of pneumonia, though it has also been suggested that she committed suicide’ (‘Achieving Equilibrium,’ *Frida Kahlo* (London: Tate Modern, 2005), 27-30 (29–30)). I list Burton’s comments here to show how much room is made for speculation and how often confessional, self-driven art gives the viewer (or reader) a sense of knowing the artist intimately.

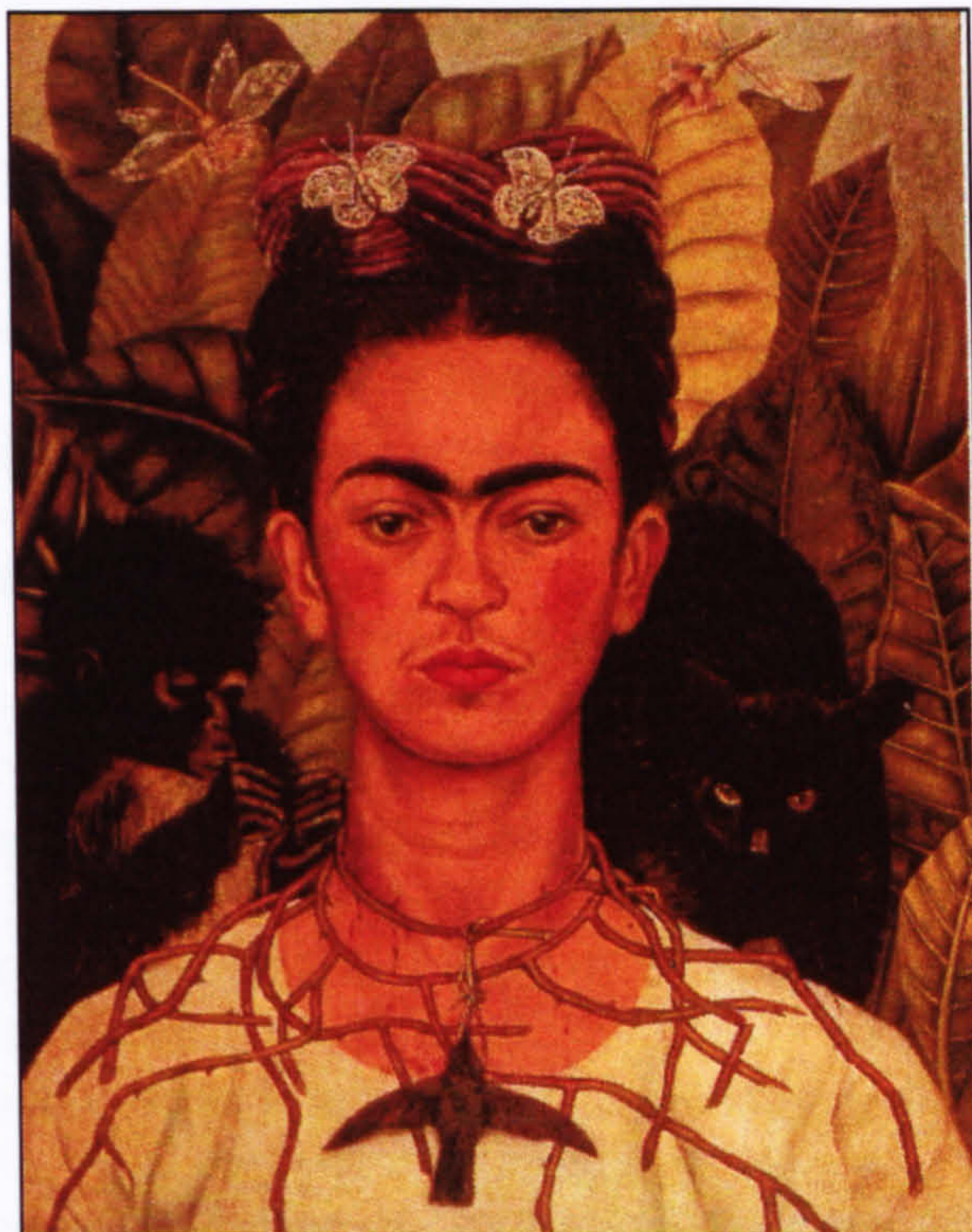


Fig 2. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940), Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas, Austin.

Self-Portraits

Some of Petit's poems are based on Kahlo's self-portraits, such as 'Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird.' While some critics have seen the thorn necklace simply as a pseudo-religious icon of suffering, Petit uses the painting as a jumping off point for her own discussion of sex and its problems. In the biography, *Frida*, Hayden Herrera titles one of her chapters, 'A Necklace of Thorns,' after the Kahlo self-portrait and it is a chapter that focuses on Kahlo's husband, Rivera, and his infidelity. However, it is interesting to note that in this section, Herrera tells of Kahlo's difficulty with sexual intercourse: 'One friend recalls that when Frida returned to Mexico, she was unhappy because a "handsome American man" had jilted her, and for

a cruel reason: her physical ailments hindered the free expression of sexual love.⁶²²

When Petit writes in Kahlo's voice, this difficulty is the subtext:

When I came to you last night in my thorn necklace
with the dead hummingbird, its wings
were flying me back to the day of the accident.
When the moment came for you to enter me
I grinned at the sugar skulls and wax doves
and tried not to think of the crash⁶²³

The symbols from Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (see fig. 2) reappear here: the thorn necklace with its connotations of self-sacrifice and Catholic suffering and the Aztec icon of the hummingbird. According to Maria Longhenna in *Maya Script: A Civilization and its Writing*, the Aztecs believed that, 'the soul of a warrior who fell ill in battle became a hummingbird.'⁶²⁴ The dead hummingbird then signifies a malady of the soul which could refer to the difficulty for the victim in overcoming a 'crash,' an event that later is shown as clearly akin to a rape.

In the moment of intercourse, the hummingbird transports Kahlo/Petit back to the instant of trauma. The totemic symbols of 'sugar skulls' and 'wax doves' represent the remedy of art and are objects that Kahlo made during her life. As Malka Drucker explains in *Frida Kahlo*, the skulls and doves are a gesture of defiance made by Kahlo because: 'She didn't want death, or her fear of it, to take away her laughter or joy in life, so she dressed cardboard skeletons in her clothes, called death by insulting nicknames, and had a skull painted with her name on it, all in an effort to defy

⁶²² Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, 1963 (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 270.

⁶²³ Pascale Petit, 'Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird,' *The Wounded Deer* (Huddersfield, Yorkshire: Smith/Doorstop Books, 2005), 8 (8.1-6).

⁶²⁴ Maria Longhenna, *Maya Script: A Civilization and its Writing*, trans. Rosanna M. Giammano Frongia (New York: Abbeville Press, 2000), 162.

suffering and death.⁶²⁵ The paraphernalia enables the maker to come to terms with death and to make manifest a desire for peace. The figures that accompany Kahlo in her painting, *Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, have a similar purpose. The monkey reminds one of the Aztec god, Ozomatli, described by Longhenna as ‘the patron god of scribes, artists, and mathematical calculation,’⁶²⁶ while according to Helga Prignitz-Poda in *Frida Kahlo: The Painter and her Work*, the black cat may represent Kahlo’s interest in ‘imagery of voodoo and magic.’⁶²⁷ However, in Petit’s poem, even these icons cannot distract from the trauma of the rape/crash:

the handrail piercing me like a first lover,
and bounced me forward, my clothes torn off,
my body sparkling with the gold powder
spilt from a fellow passenger. [...] ⁶²⁸

The infamous accident of Kahlo's youth is referred to here and particularly the moment when the handrail of the trolley pierced her stomach and exited via her vagina. Petit sees room for comparison with sexual violence as the imagery of torn clothes and jolting intercourse is more like that of a rape. In this extract, Petit also subverts accounts of the accident relayed in Herrera’s *Frida*, such as that of Kahlo’s companion, Alejandro Gómez Arias:

Frida was totally nude. The collision had unfastened her clothes. Someone in the bus, probably a house painter, had been carrying a packet of powdered gold. This package broke, and the gold fell all over the bleeding body of Frida. When people saw her they cried, ‘*La bailarina, la bailarina!*’ With all the gold on her red, bloody body, they thought she was a dancer.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁵ Malka Drucler, *Frida Kahlo: Torment and Triumph in Her Life and Art* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 29.

⁶²⁶ Longhenna, *Maya Script*, 120.

⁶²⁷ Helga Prignitz-Poda, *Frida Kahlo: The Artist and her Work*, Trans. Bram Opstelten (Berlin, Germany: Schirmer/Mosel, 2003), 41.

⁶²⁸ Petit, ‘Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird,’ 8.7-10.

⁶²⁹ Alejandro Gómez Arias, qtd in Herrera, *Frida*, 49.

Gomez Arias' account is highly sexualised and in both versions it appears that Kahlo must become aware of danger and the physical constraints of life rather than remaining as the guileless creature from before the accident described by Kahlo as, 'an intelligent young girl, but impractical.'⁶³⁰ After the rape/collision, Kahlo's body is simultaneously an object of suffering and a glittering object of desire. In Petit's version, Kahlo describes how: 'They laid me on the billiard table / [...] thinking me dead.'⁶³¹ Petit echoes Gómez Arias' description of how he, 'picked up Frida and put her in the display window of a billiard room.'⁶³² In Gómez Arias' version, Kahlo is described as an object on display that arouses and gratifies others and it is no coincidence that Petit excludes this humiliating image of exhibition from her version.

Petit contradicts other parts of Gómez Arias' story, such as his description of a piece of iron being pulled from Kahlo's body and how, 'her screaming was louder than the [ambulance] siren.'⁶³³ In Petit's telling of the story, Kahlo is silent:

[...]In that slow silence
it's not true that I cried out. I only thought
about the toy I'd bought that day,
staggered about searching for it, before I collapsed.⁶³⁴

Petit changes the focus from the victim and the suffering of the body to the interiority of the mind and her own imagining. In Kahlo's painting, *Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, foliage surrounds her, signifying enclosure and as Prignitz-Poda notes, the leaves 'are clearly built up into protective walls.'⁶³⁵ Prignitz-Poda also suggests that in showing the reverse of leaves, Kahlo echoes the Mexican phrase,

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁶³¹ Petit, 'Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird,' 8.14-15.

⁶³² Alejandro Gómez Arias, qtd in Herrera, *Frida*, 49.

⁶³³ Ibid., 49.

⁶³⁴ Petit, 'Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird,' 8.10-13.

⁶³⁵ Prignitz-Poda, *Frida Kahlo*, 32.

“turning a leaf” which means “changing the subject” and she concludes: “The inverted leaf thus always indicates another level of meaning behind the apparent one.”⁶³⁶ However, Petit recognises in her interpretation of the painting that the notion of ‘changing the subject’ is not only relevant in the context of the art and its meaning, but also in relation to the psyche of victim. Petit’s version of Kahlo changes the subject to think of ‘the lost toy,’ a symbol for a kind of womanhood that is threatened by trauma. The condition of womanhood that is lost, is a state, if not of innocence, then of impracticality as Kahlo puts it. However, Petit does not believe that this condition (lacking in self-consciousness or awareness of danger) is lost irrevocably and so she describes Kahlo going to ‘buy another toy to replace the one I’d lost.’⁶³⁷ The act of buying the toy is then compared to a striving towards sexual love: ‘Just as tomorrow night I’ll try again / to get this sex thing right, and the night after that.’⁶³⁸ The end of the poem rethinks the notion of victim as it presents a courageous attitude to sexual difficulty. This corresponds with the presence of the butterflies and bird in Kahlo’s painting, *Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, since as Margaret A. Lindauer states in *Devouring Frida*, they represent ‘the souls of warriors, thereby intimating that Kahlo is a combatant.’⁶³⁹ The speaker here is a soldier, not a victim.

The whole of the poem has been a diversion from the sexual act that initiates the poem and to which we finally return. Petit has been ‘turning the leaf’ in order to return to a moment of trauma that may or may not enable Kahlo/Petit in working out the difficulty of the present moment. According to Prignitz-Poda, masks can be very effective for the woman artist: ‘Masks are ideal for hiding, for protecting oneself from

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁶³⁷ Petit, ‘Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird,’ 8.19.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 8.20-21.

⁶³⁹ Margaret A. Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (Hartford, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 164.

other people's gazes.⁶⁴⁰ In the case of Frida Kahlo, Prignitz-Poda is adamant that masks were, 'a perfect instrument for assuming a different personality' and that in her work they 'skillfully disguise the fact that it was not the obvious that preoccupied her, but rather something inexpressible.'⁶⁴¹

'Remembrance of an Open Wound' is another poem of pain and imagining, of life and death. Kahlo's 1938 painting, *Remembrance of an Open Wound*, is a self-portrait of the artist in traditional Mexican dress. From the flowers in her hair, veins or roots sprout guiding the viewer's eyes down to the bottom of the picture, in which Kahlo is pictured lifting her skirt. Beneath the skirt are her bare legs; her left foot is bandaged and a large gash in her thigh blossoms blood onto her white petticoat. According to Herrera, it was Kahlo's right leg that was deformed by childhood polio and fractured in eleven places after her accident and this small variation of reality emphasises that the woman in the painting can never be the 'real' Kahlo but rather she is a representation or mirror image.⁶⁴² The Mexican notion of being *chingada* (broken apart or open) is presented boldly here and it is interesting that, in *Textured Lives*, Schaefer suggests that Kahlo's art offers, 'science and technology as vehicles for opening up, for opening what has been a closed wound' in women's bodies and social bodies.⁶⁴³ Schaefer lists relevant works here including *Remembrance of an Open Wound* as paintings created as an outlet for pain: 'The suffering image [...] is narcissistic in its self-examination and exhibition, yet it is also cathartic in its public display of self-affirmation.'⁶⁴⁴ Schaefer refers to paintings that show Kahlo's despair at the failures to repair her wounded body. In these works, Kahlo's body is both a passive object of

⁶⁴⁰ Prignitz-Poda, *Frida Kahlo*, 39.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁴² See Herrera, *Frida Kahlo*, 39.

⁶⁴³ Schaefer, *Textured Lives*, 17.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

scientific study and a subjective, autonomous being: ‘The eyes – being both observer and observed, looking outward yet into a mirror – are always gazing at themselves, as does the artist for the creation of her self-portrait, to discover the identity being presented to the public and to look simultaneously at the observer, possibly attempting to analyze the reaction to their appearance or solicit complicity in consideration of this dilemma.’⁶⁴⁵

As a poem that follows immediately after ‘Self-Portrait with a Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird’ in the order of the pamphlet *The Wounded Deer*, ‘Remembrance of an Open Wound’ seems to continue the theme instigated by the final line of the previous poem – the difficulty of sexual love. In discussing this difficulty, Petit takes up a similar strategy to Kahlo’s painting as outlined by Schaefer; the narrator looks both inwards at herself by speaking the thoughts of her lover about her and she looks outwards with a persona of public self-affirmation. Petit begins the poem with Kahlo addressing her lover who is probably her husband, Rivera:

Whenever we make love, you say
it’s like making love to a crash –
I bring the bus with me into the bedroom.
There’s a lull, like before the fire brigade
arrives, flames licking the soles
of our feet. Neither of us knows
when the petrol tank will explode.⁶⁴⁶

The point of view is reflective as the speaker presents us with her lover’s view of events with the tension of the first line break driving on towards the crash image. The ambiguity of the description makes it difficult to know whether the sexual act is pleasurable or traumatic; sex is compared to a violent collision as a bus roars through the space of love-making. The private space between the two lovers will soon be

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁴⁶ Pascale Petit, ‘Remembrance of an Open Wound,’ *The Wounded Deer* (Huddersfield, Yorkshire: Smith/Doorstop Books, 2005), 9 (9.1-7).

invaded by the fire brigade and even their private moments seem to be painful as the intimate act of licking is performed by flames rather than human tongues. The image of burning figures is also reminiscent of the Judas figures that are burnt traditionally in Mexican Easter celebrations. Drucker explains Kahlo's preoccupation with these papier-mâché figures: 'As despised enemies the figures are exploded in the town square to boisterous cheers, and in the year following her accident, Frida cheered loudest of all.'⁶⁴⁷ The Judas figures are burnt in defiance of death and similarly in 'Remembrance of an Open Wound,' the burning of human beings represents courage. The Judas theme continues when after describing the lover's comments about her house ornamented, 'to recreate the accident,' the speaker explains that 'my skeleton [is] wired with fireworks.'⁶⁴⁸ Like the Judas figures, Petit's version of Kahlo is wired for destruction.

Kahlo is also figured as another Mexican symbol, the female version of death figured as the crone, the bald one or *la fea*, when she describes herself in 'gold underwear' as 'a crone of sixteen, who lost / her virginity to a lightning bolt.'⁶⁴⁹ In Mayan and Aztec culture, one aspect of the moon was the 'elderly moon' which often figured as 'a decrepit, sometimes toothless woman.'⁶⁵⁰ The contrast between the youthful sexuality of the gold underwear and the image of the elderly woman is bizarre, as is the moment of intercourse which seems to have been precipitated by a god with a 'lightning bolt.' However, when the moment of human sexual intercourse occurs, the process is reversed since what occurs is not a penetration, but a release:

It's time to pull the handrail out.
I didn't expect love to feel like this –

⁶⁴⁷ Drucker, *Frida Kahlo*, 29.

⁶⁴⁸ Petit, 'Remembrance of an Open Wound,' 9.9-9.10.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.12, 9.13-14.

⁶⁵⁰ Longhenna, *Maya Script*, 122.

you holding me down with your knee,
 wrenching the steel rod from my charred body
 quickly, kindly, setting me free.⁶⁵¹

The iambic rhythm of the first line in this passage creates a feeling of readiness and expectancy about the possibility of release. The act of pulling out the handrail is not only a physical experience, but the removal of a memory of trauma, a remembrance that is just as substantial as the bodily impalement. The uncertainty and confusion of the next line demands a less rigorous rhythm; emotional and sexual love are beyond the expectations of the speaker. In the third line, the stresses that fall on the first syllable of 'holding,' on 'down' and on 'knee,' all emphasise the lover's power over Kahlo. He seems almost to be hovering above her like the angels in Mexican *retablos* and *ex-votos* that Kahlo found so inspiring. As Sarah Lowe writes in 'Frida Kahlo,' the *ex-voto* 'pictures two registers of reality: the earthly – an incident recorded with journalistic verity – and the divine, in the form of a patron saint shown floating above the victim.'⁶⁵² Here the lover becomes a kind of divine patron saint who with superhuman strength wrenches the handrail out and that struggle is performed in one set of two long stresses, 'steel rod' before jolting to fall on another set of stresses that emphasise 'charred' and the first syllable of 'body.' The succession of adverbs reveals though that this is a liberating process rather than a debilitating one and the surging rhythm of the final choriamb reflects the entire poem's movement into pain as a means to find affirmation. When the poem concludes, Kahlo is no longer in a state of *chingada*, although it has been necessary to tear open her old wound, to recall her remembered pain in order to overcome trauma. On the level of writing Kahlo's biography, there has been an opening up, yet the level of Petit's own autobiography is

⁶⁵¹ Petit, 'Remembrance of an Open Wound,' 9.15-19.

⁶⁵² Sarah Lowe, 'Frida Kahlo,' *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920 -1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 58-67 (61).

more ambiguous and the mingling of Kahlo's and Petit's life stories creates uncertainty over who is who.

Monkeys and Masks

Although there is a tearing open of Kahlo's biography in some of these poem, often Petit allows Kahlo to remain unknowable, an attitude that she would no doubt like to be applied to her own confessions. In 'Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti,' Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen discuss Kahlo's masquerade and they observe that in Kahlo's painting (and particularly her self-portraits), 'whatever the degree of pain implied, by tears or wounds, her face remains severe and expressionless with an unflinching gaze.'⁶⁵³ Mulvey and Wollen notice though that often, 'the mask-like face is surrounded by luxuriant growths, accoutrements, ornaments and familiars – a monkey, a doll, a hairless dog.'⁶⁵⁴ Typical examples might be *Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot* and *Self-Portrait with Monkey*, both of which are paintings that Petit has written about. Mulvey and Warren note that, 'ornament borders on fetishism' and they construct an interesting theory regarding the paraphernalia that surrounds Kahlo's figure.⁶⁵⁵ Noting Kahlo's 'particular fetishization of nature,' Mulvey and Wollen initially wonder whether the natural surroundings represent, 'the defence against her knowledge of her own barrenness, one of the products of her childhood accident.'⁶⁵⁶ Mulvey and Wollen suggest that there are three kinds of self-portraits in Kahlo's paintings: 'the body damaged, the body masked and ornamented, the body twined and enmeshed

⁶⁵³ Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 'Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti,' *Art in Modern Culture: an Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris (London: Phaidon, 1992), 145-159 (157).

⁶⁵⁴ Mulvey and Wollen, 'Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti,' 157.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

with plants.⁶⁵⁷ However, they realise that the meshing with plants is more than a gesture to Kahlo's barrenness, because, 'nature is being turned into a complex of signs,' just as Kahlo's body, 'becomes a bearer of signs, some legible, some esoteric.'⁶⁵⁸ Kahlo's masquerade then extends also to the symbols of nature that surround her, which are, according to Mulvey and Wollen, 'a mode of inscription, by which the trauma of injury and its effects are written negatively in metaphor.'⁶⁵⁹ This also refrains the spectrum of pain and imagining described by Scarry, since Mulvey and Wollenn explain that it is, 'the intensity of trauma,' that, 'brings with it a need to transfer the body from the register of image to that of pictography.'⁶⁶⁰

The appeal of Kahlo for Petit may lie in the fact that Kahlo herself has enacted the transference of suffering onto a double whether that is a metaphorical stand-in, a mask to represent her, or a metonymic symbol onto which her thoughts and feelings can be displaced. Kahlo's familiars (monkeys and parrots) and the meshing natural backdrops are certainly significant in Petit's renderings of *Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot* and *Self-Portrait with Monkey* and they recall Petit's earlier experiments in *The Heart of a Deer* with the merging of nature and the human.

Fulang-Chang, the monkey, appears in 'Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot' as a figure that both is and is not Kahlo. The poem begins with the artist in the act of creation posing a statement of uncertainty concerning identity:

I who painted this with brushes of flame
cannot tell you where I have been
this morning. But I can't silence Bonito.
He perches just below my left ear, repeating
sounds he learnt from the sun, when he flew
into its core. Fulang-Chang went with him,

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 157-158.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 158.

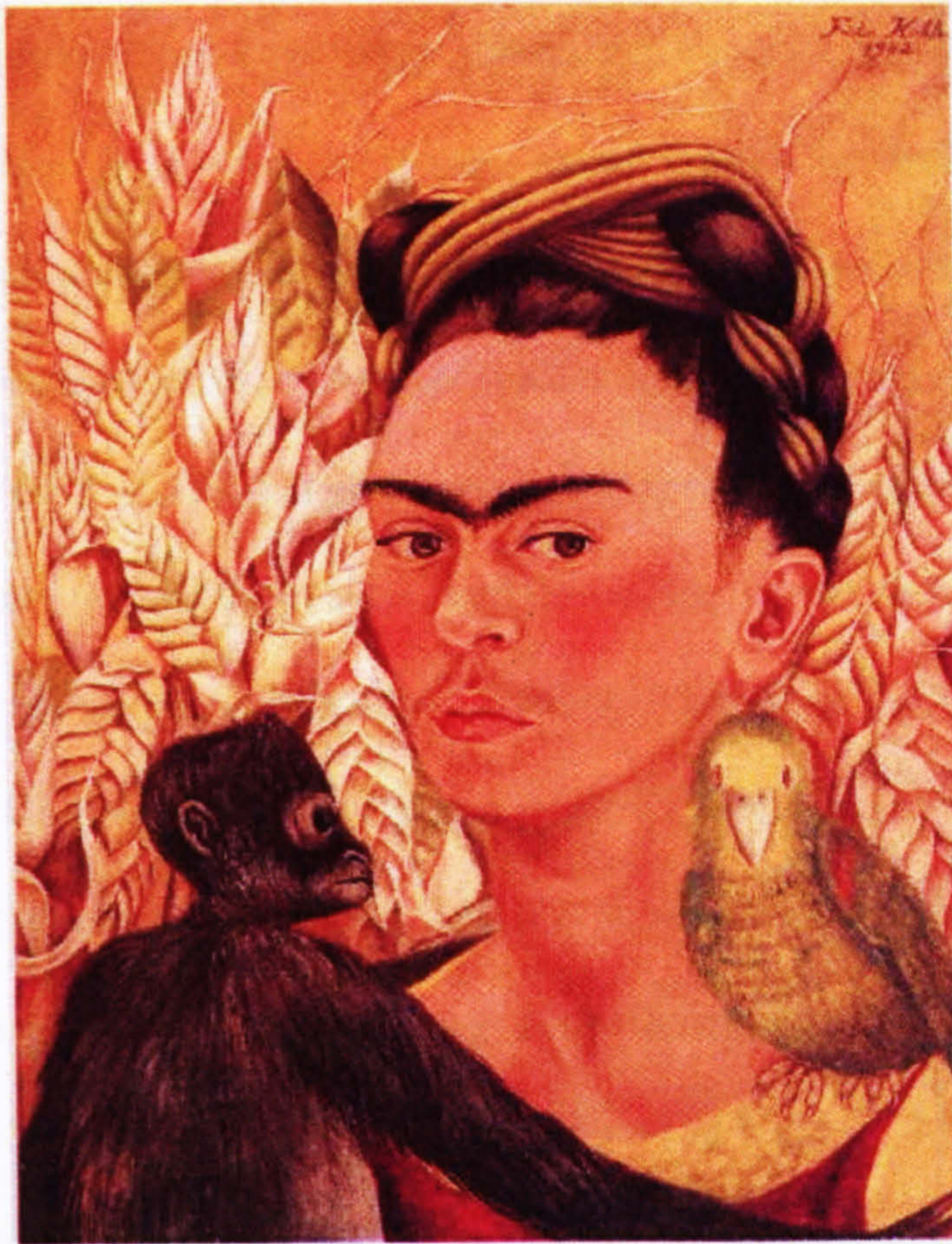


Fig. 3. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot* (1942), Banco de Mexico, Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico City.

swinging through the canopies of fire forests,
 searching for the tree that burns
 at the centre of my life.⁶⁶¹

The opening lines present an artist who is aware of her own authorship and its power and this is reflected by the strong trochaic which uses an extra beat at the end of the line to fall on 'flame' with finality. However, the choriamb at the end of line two indicates confusion and difficulty as the artist describes a loss of memory, a lapse of self. Petit refers back to Kahlo's painting and the presentation of an impassive face that refuses to convey emotion or narrative. In *Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot* (see fig. 3), Kahlo pictures herself bound up with a golden background, as the sheaves of corn that brighten the backdrop are reflected in yellow material wound through Kahlo's hair, while roots seem to emerge from her head reaching towards the natural

⁶⁶¹ Pascale Petit, 'Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot,' *The Wounded Deer* (Huddersfield, Yorkshire: Smith/Doorstop Books, 2005), 18 (18.1-9).

surroundings. Corn is a significant vegetable to include, since it is the most essential ingredient for Mexican cooking and it was a sacred symbol for the Maya and the Aztecs. As Longhenna states in *Maya Script*: 'According to ancient belief, maize, a primary element of the myth of creation, was a vital part of human beings and partook of their daily lives.'⁶⁶² Some myths even suggest that man was made from maize and Longhenna writes that the Maya associated the golden ear of corn and its colour, yellow, with the power in the 'jaguar's spotted skin' and the life-giving sun.⁶⁶³ When Petit mentions Kahlo's familiar, the parrot Bonito, and his journey to the sun, it seems that he is flying into the heart of life itself. It is no coincidence that the blue-yellow feathers of parrots like Bonito were hung on the head-dresses of Mayan warriors and kings and here he is an emissary for the regal figure of Kahlo.⁶⁶⁴ In *Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot*, Bonito fixes the viewer with a comical stare that conveys more emotion than the human subject. In Petit's poem, while Kahlo cannot speak, the parrot can, although it is not a standardised language. The sounds that he makes are gifts gained after proximity with fire, the sun being to the Maya and Aztecs, 'the star of life and light,' without which, 'the most dire consequences would ensue, the world would end, as had already happened in a previous era, according to the sacred scriptures.'⁶⁶⁵ Yet if yellow is symbolic of life to the Aztecs, to Kahlo, it was also the colour of 'madness sickness fear' as she writes in her diary.⁶⁶⁶ The corn, the sun and fire then may stand not only for life but also for death, not simply for creation but also for the decay and fecundity that allow such generation to take place.

⁶⁶² Longhenna, *Maya Script*, 156.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁶⁶ Frida Kahlo, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait*, trans. Barbara Crow de Toledo and Ricardo Pohlenz (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 211.

In Petit's poem, the proximity of Kahlo's monkey, Fulang-Chang, to a forest fire is part of a mission or errand for his mistress and one might infer that the search is for inspiration itself, the material of art. Fulang-Chang's associations with Ozomatli, the Aztec monkey god and patron of scribes and artists, indicate that he has a special significance and in Kahlo's painting, he looks away to one side towards Bonito and out of the frame as though there were something were to be observed hidden from the viewer. In Kahlo's painting and Petit's poem, the subject remains unknowable. One cannot follow Fulang-Chang's gaze beyond the edge of Kahlo's painting, nor can one follow him in his search for the burning tree of Petit's poem. The mysterious, painful and enlivening inspiration remains a presence though, hidden in the undergrowth of the poem:

These gold leaves are the few he brought back -
 they still hum many years
 after my body has cooled. And you -
 how long will you listen to these colours
 before you hear the language of light?⁶⁶⁷

The 'gold leaves' might be the sheaves in the background of Kahlo's painting referring back to the cycle of life and death inherent in Mayan and Aztec culture. They might be the gold leaf which was prized by pre-Columbian cultures as being the 'sun's sweat' and consequently being, 'impregnated with its light and strength.'⁶⁶⁸ The 'leaves' brought back may also simply be paper thus gesturing to the process of art itself. The humming and throbbing of the paper would then represent the sealing of pain in a work of art *via* the imagination. The trauma of the past is displaced onto the leaves which contain the fiery pain while the body cools. The fourteen-line, sonnet-like poem makes a challenge in a final volta, turning to address the voyeuristic viewer/reader and to tease with its enigmatic, riddling subject. Whether the subject of art is ever really

⁶⁶⁷ Petit, 'Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot,' 18.10-14.

⁶⁶⁸ Longhenna, *Maya Script*, 130.

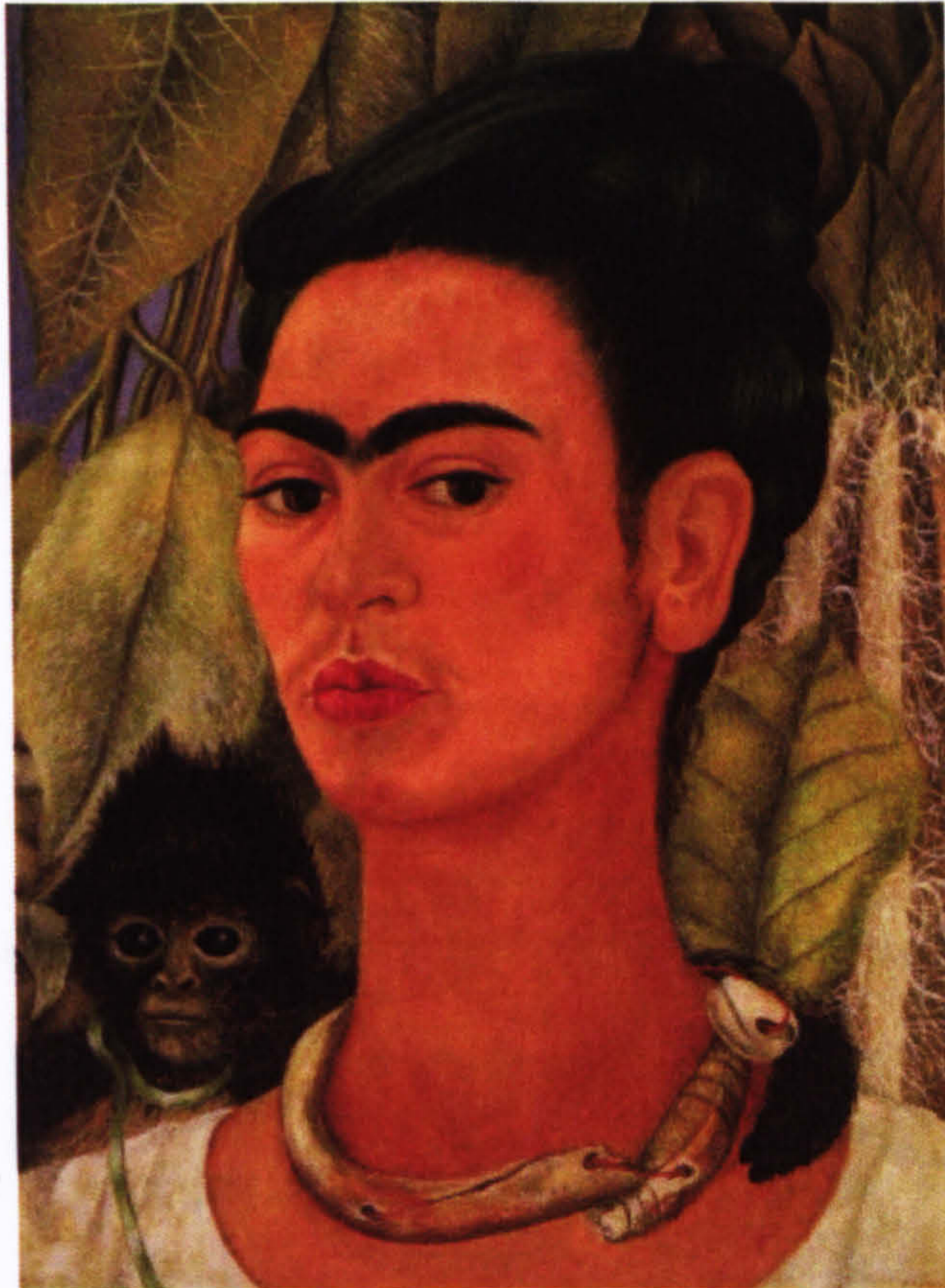


Fig 4. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Monkey* (1938), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

knowable seems irrelevant, as the mystery and silence that inhabit the poem have a kind of volubility even if the ‘language of light’ is not exactly legible in an ordinary manner.

While the colour, yellow, is significant in ‘Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot’ as it refers to a cycle of life and death, creation and silence, ‘Self-Portrait with Monkey’ is based on a painting dominated by the colour, green. Kahlo writes in her diary that green represents, ‘good warm light.’⁶⁶⁹ The Maya also associated green with water that allows plants to grow and it was linked to jade, one of the most precious commodities of the pre-Columbian world. In Petit’s poem, it is not jade, but a mirror of leaves that appears like a door to another world:

The bristles on my brush work
like furtive birds. Hours pass.

⁶⁶⁹ Kahlo, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo*, 211.

When the mirror starts to rustle,
 Fulang-Chang grips my neck,
 too frightened even to yelp. [...] ⁶⁷⁰

Petit pictures Kahlo engrossed in an act of creation, but her brush is 'furtive' working with the nervous movements of a bird. Time seems to be against her. Again Petit plays on the feeling that the monkey is Kahlo's emissary. In the painting, *Self-Portrait with Monkey* (see fig. 4), while Kahlo's face is impassive, the monkey's eyes are wide with fright and it seems to grip Kahlo's neck in need of reassurance. The source of the monkey's fears is the mirror of leaves and its rustling that closes in claustrophobically around the figures in the painting and which recalls the Mayan Cosmic Tree which was associated with the colour, green. Longhenna explains that this tree, 'dug its roots into the netherworld and stretched its branches up to the Upper World, while the trunk crossed the earth.'⁶⁷¹ The fear of the monkey described in Petit's poem may be caused by standing at a place between worlds, while the meshing of hair and fur indicates sympathy and doubling of Kahlo in the figure of monkey: the monkey's fear is her own.

Interestingly, an earlier version of 'Self-Portrait with Monkey' was published in *Free Verse: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, which included further references to the Mayan Cosmic Tree and I include this section for the benefit of a fruitful reading of the text:

His fur has the same texture as my hair.
 His left hand looks like a loose braid
 that could choke me. Some days
 are like this - my black hair
 must be restrained by red ribbons. ⁶⁷²

⁶⁷⁰ Pascale Petit, 'Self-Portrait with Monkey,' *The Wounded Deer* (Huddersfield, Yorkshire: Smith/Doorstop Books, 2005), 22 (22.1-5).

⁶⁷¹ Longhenna, *Maya Script*, 70.

⁶⁷² Pascale Petit, 'Self-Portrait with Monkey,' *Free Verse Website: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 8 (2003): 2 poems, <<http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/freeverse/>

Imagery of choking is also iconic in Kahlo's work, as she often paints herself with objects around the neck restraining her. In *Self-Portrait with Monkey*, it is not only the monkey's hand that chokes her but a shell necklace strung with red string that echoes Petit's mention of the restraining red ribbons. This may also be another reference to the Cosmic Tree, since as Longhenna notes: 'To cross from one universe to the other, souls and gods slid along the red lymph of the tree.'⁶⁷³ Petit's mention of the red ribbon indicates the possibility of moving into other worlds: that of pain and death (the netherworld) or imagination and beauty (the 'Upper Worlds'). Many of Kahlo's paintings feature the red, umbilicus-like ribbon, yet this one does not – in this painting, her hair is braided with green that blends and merges with furred leaves in the background, while Fulang-Chang's small throat is also restrained by a green ribbon cementing his connection to Kahlo as a double or stand-in.

The meshing of green vegetation, hair and ribbon anchors Kahlo's link to the Cosmic Tree and in the version of 'Self-Portrait with Monkey' in *The Wounded Deer*, Petit's rendering of Kahlo finds the artist gesturing to other worlds:

[...] As if
 the leaves are hiding a forest floor
 where I have buried a troop of monkeys
 alive. As if the only sound in this
 whole house, is the breathing of animals
 through thin straws; even tonight,
 when it's too late, and I am long dead.
 And you, brave viewer, meet my gaze.⁶⁷⁴

The 'as if' construction that Scarry describes as a means to understand an experience of pain is used by Petit in an ironic way, since within the 'as if I was Kahlo'

Archives/Spring_2003/poems/P_Petit.html>, lines 6-10 (accessed 16 February 2007).

⁶⁷³ Longhenna, *Maya Script*, 70.

⁶⁷⁴ Petit, 'Self-Portrait with Monkey,' *The Wounded Deer*, 22.5-12.

construction, Petit figures Kahlo herself trying to explain her pain and difficulty through metaphor. The leaves grow ever bigger and more restless and the anticipation in the line break after, 'As if,' heightens tension. The waning of concentration is figured as a netherworld of monkeys and if Fulang-Chang represents a double of Kahlo, then this army of monkeys must represent a shedding of selves. However, an abrupt line break reveals to one's surprise that the monkeys' punishment is to be buried 'alive,' since though Kahlo can displace her pain onto the monkeys, she cannot erase it entirely. Petit imagines their breathing covered only by 'thin straws,' a flimsy barrier between worlds. This netherworld is conjured by the painting that Kahlo leaves behind and, even after she is dead, Kahlo's presence in the painting remains. While the painting removes her in the moment of creation from pain and suffering, it also cheats death with its longevity. As in 'Self-Portrait with Monkey and Parrot,' there is a final challenge to the reader/viewer as Petit allows Kahlo to speak from beyond the grave to maintain the fierceness and indomitableness of her gaze. Detached from the physical body and its intentional states, Petit can allow Kahlo to journey into the 'Upper Worlds' that crown the branches of the Cosmic Tree: the sphere of imagination that perseveres beyond the fleshly body.

In 'Self-Portrait with Monkey' and other poems about Kahlo, Petit plays between the spheres of pain and imagination using the artist to create a set of literary relations in which the two artists merge and become blurred. Like Kahlo, Petit is not interested in the obvious, but rather through metaphor and comparison, she wants to remake or recast the confessional artist as a more ambiguous creature. In doing so, Petit deflects the binary of self-restraint versus indulgence, since it is unclear who exactly is confessing.

As I stated earlier, in 'Private and Public Wars,' Petit suggests that, 'when confessional poets remove the mask they speak as society's representative victims because their personal crises reflect a larger social and cultural breakdown.'⁶⁷⁵ However, Petit herself is a consummate wearer of masks and her work is far more complex than critics of confessional poetry might suggest. By adopting the mask of another cultural tradition or another woman's life, Petit makes the emotional content of her poems more ambiguous and she foregrounds the significance of 'private wars,' dissolving the privileging of public conflicts. In interview, she is adamant that her poetry is 'not pure autobiography,' but it is 'very fictionalized.'⁶⁷⁶ She describes how her poems, 'draw on my experiences but make myths from them': mythologies of an ecology between nature and the human, mythologies of strangeness in both disenfranchised Amazonian cultures and the supposedly civilised West and mythologies that undermine the straightforward reception of confessions from a confessional artist.⁶⁷⁷ Beyond her own experience, the gifts for Petit's poetry are rich and it is only through this kind of estrangement that she can write effectively about what it is to be foreign, to be other. In *The Heart of a Deer*, Petit manages to travel beyond the human to inhabit a vocal, voluble version of nature whose language is legible to those who try to read it. *The Zoo Father* exiles the poet into the mythologies and rituals of Amazonian tribes dismissed by anthropologists as barbaric and uncivilized; these poems reveal the complexity of these indigenous cultures and the barbarity at the heart of Western society. Finally in *The Wounded Deer*, Petit deals with personal pain by inhabiting the mask of Kahlo and estranging herself from the context of her own suffering. Like the experience of 'unraveling transference,' Petit's journey chimes with the philosophy of Kristeva who

⁶⁷⁵ Petit, 'Private and Public Wars,' 10.

⁶⁷⁶ Petit, Personal Interview, 7th December 2006.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

describes the discourse of psychoanalysis as, 'a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, towards an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable.'⁶⁷⁸ In interview with Valerie Mejer, Petit describes the most 'marvellous way to work' as 'to forget yourself and your surroundings, and be hyper-alert but absent.'⁶⁷⁹ This kind of exile can be fruitful and generative, since as Kristeva states: 'Confronting the foreigner, whom I reject and whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries.'⁶⁸⁰ From her first collection to her most recent, Petit is constantly generating poetry through her very rootlessness, her estrangement and the embracing of her own foreignness. In an interview with Mack Test, she writes that she has, 'always suspected home was not on earth,' and she adds, 'I have no sense of roots or belonging.'⁶⁸¹ When Test asks Petit why she does not write about London, the city that she now calls 'home,' she replies: 'English cities don't interest me much, but mainly because I live in my imagination, always had to when I was a child, to escape from home.'⁶⁸² Petit's gift is the ability to accept the difference and otherness of foreign places and figures as a result of her own sensitivity about the foreignness or strangeness of herself. Petit can only be perplexed by the other poets' celebration of home; ironically she visualises poets with a home as 'strange' ('What strange people these are!'), cannily emphasising the quality that all subjects (even those that feel belonging) must endure.⁶⁸³ Petit's scope is not reduced by embracing strangeness, but her poetic gift is expanded and as she tells Test:

Home is in my imagination, and it's a big place! Every poem I write adds a room to it.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁷⁸ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 182.

⁶⁷⁹ Petit, Appendix, 5.

⁶⁸⁰ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 187.

⁶⁸¹ Petit, Appendix, 5.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

Chapter Four: The Way of Love: the Third Space between Belonging and Exile in Deryn Rees-Jones' *Quiver*

The word, 'love,' is particularly ambiguous; with its origins in the Latin, *lubere*, meaning 'to be pleasing,' it can, in modern usage, refer to romantic or sexual passion, the act of intercourse with another person, a personification of sexual affection or (in tennis) a score of zero or nothing. However, it is particularly significant in Deryn Rees-Jones' poetic project and it represents new possibilities for human relations as the foregrounding of the one and othering of difference is undermined. To discuss the ecology created by this new set of relations, I read Rees-Jones' poetry through the matrix of Luce Irigaray's study, *The Way of the Heart*, in which dialogues between different subjects are enacted through what Irigaray calls the third space.⁶⁸⁵ Irigaray's *The Way of the Heart* sets out to explore the 'wisdom of love,' which, in Irigaray's view is 'the first meaning of the word, "philosophy",' deriving as it does from *philia*, the Greek word for 'amity' or 'fondness.'⁶⁸⁶ Rejecting philosophy's preoccupation with *sophia*, or love of wisdom, Irigaray quests to discover the possibilities for reconciliation with human difference and for creating meaningful connections or dialogues with others beyond the self/other relation.

To inform my reading of Rees-Jones' subversive practice, I use Irigaray's ideas about exiling conventional selfhood for a time in order to enter a third space of

⁶⁸⁵ Rees-Jones is a university lecturer and she is quite familiar with Irigaray's work and in conversation with Rees-Jones, I have discovered that Irigaray has been an influence on her poetry. A particular influence has been Irigaray's writing on angels in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (see my discussion of this in more detail on p. 5). Rees-Jones has not read *The Way of the Heart*, but the ideas are similar to that of Irigaray's writings on the angel and I intend to use this study as a matrix through which to read Rees-Jones' poetry. Although I do refer in passing to *Prières Quotidiennes / Everyday Prayers*, a collection of poetry by Irigaray, and to her lecture, 'The Path Towards the Other,' the theory used to explicate Rees-Jones' poetry is on the whole drawn from *The Way of the Heart*. I do also bring in Irigaray's study, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, but only as a means to illuminate Irigaray's comments in *The Way of the Heart*.

⁶⁸⁶ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 1.

dialogue.⁶⁸⁷ Focussing on Rees-Jones' novel-in-verse, *Quiver*, I argue that Rees-Jones' aim in this book is to explore the negative effects of being categorised in conventional identities (both cultural and gendered), and how one might evade such groupings to undermine boundaries and exist in-between. Unlike Gwyneth Lewis, who performs a dramatic obliteration of self to find a new mode of being, and contrasting with the interconnective 'as if' structures of Pascale Petit's poetry, Rees-Jones is interested in interstices of being, where the human subject can both be one thing and an other.

Before, I explain the relevance of Irigaray's model in greater detail, it is worth surveying some brief biographical detail from Rees-Jones, which reveals the divisive nature of her cultural identity. Rees-Jones grew up in the cosmopolitan city of Liverpool, yet as she explains to me in interview, when she was eight years old, her family 'bought a house in North Wales, in the Conwy valley, and we started to spend time there during the summer holidays.'⁶⁸⁸ As in the case of Petit, Rees-Jones spent only part of her time in Wales when she was growing up and like Petit, she had a strong relationship with her Welsh grandmother. As a result, Rees-Jones finds that she has a 'very complicated relationship to Wales and Welshness,' that she claims, 'has preoccupied me all the way through my life as a writer.'⁶⁸⁹ Defined as Welsh living in the city of Liverpool but having a Welsh-sounding name, Rees-Jones admits that as a child, she 'didn't know exactly what Welsh meant [...] in terms of culture or language.'⁶⁹⁰ She is adamant, however, that 'it – whatever it was—was important and

⁶⁸⁷ It is interesting to compare these models to the Kristevan theories that have aided the explication of Lewis and Petit. Like Kristeva's metaphysical lucidity in *Black Sun* and the useful exile of *Strangers to Ourselves*, Irigaray recommends 'an exile of self' However, the difference is that this exile can only take place as long as 'it is accompanied by a return to self.' What Rees-Jones develops in her poetry is not an obliteration of self, as in Lewis' poetry, but a representation of the subversive possibilities in stretching conventional identities and blurring the boundaries between the familiar and the strange, between male and female, between the human and the otherworldly. (See Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 89).

⁶⁸⁸ Deryn Rees-Jones, Personal Interview (by e-mail), 12th June 2007.

⁶⁸⁹ Rees-Jones, Personal Interview, 12th June 2007.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

very central to who I was as I was growing up': having an affinity with Wales gave her the feeling of being 'both different, and connected.'⁶⁹¹

Although Rees-Jones was initially embraced by the Welsh literary establishment, she has more recently felt herself to be something of an exile. She explains how 'the response I get at readings in Wales is "Are you Welsh? You don't sound Welsh"', and I find that hard, that sort of direct and uncomplicated accusation.'⁶⁹² Rees-Jones finds such suspicions about her Welsh heritage particularly difficult as so much of her poetry is devoted to questions of her Welsh-orientated identity; she suggests that in her novel-in-verse, *Quiver*, she is 'trying to explore a bit about that hybrid identity I feel I have and how that simultaneous sense of belonging and estrangement is a part of what it means for me to write.'⁶⁹³ Rees-Jones is clear that 'playing with and testing the boundaries of those [national] identities, for me, here in the UK, rather than making them hard and restrictive, has been good for me as a writer.'⁶⁹⁴

In thinking first about the theme of exile, Irigaray also writes of the possibilities if one were 'to expropriate oneself from a familiar same.'⁶⁹⁵ What this rejection of the familiar entails is 'a suspension of the becoming of self and one's own world in order to make oneself available for what such a growth has to construct with the other, without for all that renouncing oneself.'⁶⁹⁶ This dialogue between two worlds does not, in Irigaray's view, 'amount to naming things,' but requires 'a different language' in which the act of 'speaking with' is not reduced to 'speaking together about

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 89.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 132.

the same things.⁶⁹⁷ To create this language, one has to assume that ‘there does not exist a world proper to all subjects,’ but that ‘each must bring a meaning of one’s own into the dialogue.’⁶⁹⁸ The balance between retaining one’s identity and being selfless for the sake of the other is a third space outside of two subjects’ conventional identities.

Bound up with this notion of selflessness is a theory of communication and language in which silence is needed: ‘[T]here exist different worlds that require silence in order to say themselves, to hear one another, to communicate between them.’⁶⁹⁹ The blank space or silence between two subjects allows a transcendental relationship to exist; or, as Irigaray puts it, to ‘ek-sist,’ in a punning reference to *ekstasis*, the Greek term meaning that part of the mind or body is removed from its normal place or function.⁷⁰⁰ In this exiled state of being, ‘little by little [...] words can draw near to the transcendental’ and the point is not to create a fixed meaning.⁷⁰¹ Rather, ‘[m]eaning is sensed but never conceived in only one word.’⁷⁰² The importance of the third space is clear when Irigaray describes how ‘between the two something exists that belongs neither to the one nor to the other, nor moreover to any word’ and for this to exist, ‘something must, in part, remain indeterminate.’⁷⁰³ It is ‘[a] saying other than in words’ like ‘that of the poet who, having experienced that everything cannot be expressed, passes to song.’⁷⁰⁴ In her conclusion, Irigaray compares this kind of communication to faith in God, when resisting ‘the light of our so-called reason,’ human beings adopt faith in His being which Irigaray describes as a ‘Nothingness which is not nothing.’⁷⁰⁵

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁰² Ibid., 22.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 174.

Irigaray's riddling description of faith is reminiscent of the title of Rees-Jones' essay, 'Nothing That Is Not There and Nothing That Is,' in which she discusses her poetics with reference to Wallace Stevens. Rees-Jones quotes from Stevens' 'The Snowman,' a poem that interrogates interaction between an observer and his landscape: 'For the listener, who listens in the snow, / And nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and nothing that is.'⁷⁰⁶ 'The Snowman' is traditionally thought of as a critique of a particular kind of trope: pathetic fallacy, which was defined by John Ruskin in *Modern Painters* as 'a fallacy caused by an excited state of feelings' associated with 'prophetic inspiration.'⁷⁰⁷ Pathetic fallacy is often applied to the depiction of nature, and Ruskin explains that in 'representing any natural object faithfully,' such 'expressive language' is 'invaluable as the vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing.'⁷⁰⁸ In 'The Snowman,' Stevens' language in describing nature is less an expression of thought than an expression of nothingness. However, Jon Cook has noted in his paper, 'Wallace Stevens: Poetry, Belief and Non-Belief,' Stevens' poems are 'invitations to imagine,' a phrase that encapsulates the desire to move beyond the limits of ordinary human expression and imagine the possibilities in silence, blankness and nothingness.⁷⁰⁹ Rees-Jones' choice of 'The Snowman' to represent her poetics chimes with Irigaray's fascination with silence, blankness and uncertainty. I will argue that Rees-Jones is preoccupied with imagining how the unseen, the mysterious and the emergent can communicate difference and offer fruitful possibilities for human relations.

⁷⁰⁶ Wallace Stevens, 'The Snow Man,' *Collected Poems*, 1955 (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) 9-10 (10.13-15).

⁷⁰⁷ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 1873, ed. David Barrie (London: Andre Deutsch, 1987), 363, 366.

⁷⁰⁸ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 6.

⁷⁰⁹ John Cook, 'Wallace Stevens: Poetry, Belief and Non-Belief,' Poetry and Belief Conference, Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature, The University of Warwick, 25 February 2005.

Human dialogues are present even in Rees-Jones' early poetry, for which she earned a reputation for being an excellent love poet. In a review of *Quiver*, Janet Phillips praises Rees-Jones' previous collections, *The Memory Tray* and *Signs Round a Dead Body*, specifically mentioning her 'characteristic love poem which meanders through the quietly beautiful images of stars and snow that suffuse these earlier collections.'⁷¹⁰ This cold imagery, reminiscent of Stevens' 'The Snowman,' represents a concern with vacating the self and listening to an other. As Rees-Jones suggests in interview, the importance of snow is that 'it's something that transforms itself, it's lots of things while being itself,'⁷¹¹ or as Rees-Jones puts it in 'A Brief Inventory of Facts About Snow' which appears in *Signs Round a Dead Body*, 'all these words become a kind of rhapsody / On the way that snow transforms itself.'⁷¹²

The cold imagery of snow is present again in Irigaray's collection of poetry, *Everyday Prayers*. 'October 21st' describes the snow: 'Its charm is sensed, / Its silence is almost palpable, / Even here / Where it is not seen.'⁷¹³ Like Rees-Jones, Irigaray envisions snow as a magical substance that asserts its presence even in silence. Following on from 'October 21st,' 'October 28th' links the transformative qualities of snow to the dialogues described in Irigaray's *The Way of the Heart*: 'Access to the other / Who I shall never be, / Who will never be me.'⁷¹⁴ Communication with an other is bound up with mystery and silence, which enables one and the other to listen to each other without becoming one and the same. The end result is what Irigaray describes in *The Way of the Heart* as, 'never a completeness of One, but constitution of two worlds

⁷¹⁰ Janet Phillips, 'Don't Look Back,' rev. of *Quiver* by Deryn Rees-Jones, *Poetry Review* 94.3 (2004): 72-74 (74).

⁷¹¹ Rees-Jones, Personal Interview, 12th June 2007.

⁷¹² Deryn Rees-Jones, 'A Brief Inventory of Facts About Snow', *Signs Around a Dead Body* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), 48-49 (49.53-54).

⁷¹³ Luce Irigaray, 'October 21st', *Prières Quotidiennes / Everyday Prayers*, trans. Luce Irigaray with Timothy Matthews, (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Press, 2004), 74 (74.8-11).

⁷¹⁴ Luce Irigaray, 'October 28th', *Prières Quotidiennes / Everyday Prayers*, trans. Luce Irigaray with Timothy Matthews (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Press, 2004), 74 (74.13-15).

open and in relation with one another, and which give birth to a third world as work in common and space-time to be shared.⁷¹⁵ One enters the third space to reconcile oneself with the strange difference of the other in a project that demands a kind of exile from the familiar or conventional ideas of selfhood.

Like Irigaray, Rees-Jones works toward an exile from ordinary selfhood in a third space that belongs to neither one nor the other. Consequently, when Rees-Jones analyses Vicki Feaver's poem 'Hemingway's Hat' in her study, *Consorting With Angels*, she approves of the dialogue between man and woman in the poem: 'last night, me riding you, / our shared penis / a glistening pillar / sliding between us.'⁷¹⁶ Rather than seeing the penis in terms of phallic theory, or viewing the scene as a simple moment of intimacy, Rees-Jones writes how '[a]t the end of the poem male and female share the penis [...] as making love they become neither male nor female.'⁷¹⁷ In Feaver's poem, Rees-Jones sees an exile from self-conscious categories of gender, an attitude that seems to echo the thoughts of Rainer Maria Rilke on lovers. In *Letters to a Young Poet* (published in 1904), Rilke describes how 'human love (which will consummate itself infinitely thoughtfully and gently, and well and clearly in binding and loosing) will be something like that which we are preparing with struggle and toil, the love which consists in the mutual guarding, bordering and saluting of two solitudes.'⁷¹⁸ In interview, Rees-Jones has described Rilke as an influence on her as a poet and like Rilke, Rees-Jones seeks to move beyond ordinary categories of selfhood so that in communion with an other, she can create what Rilke would describe as two solitudes, or what Irigaray would call a third space, into which two subjects venture. However, it

⁷¹⁵ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 10.

⁷¹⁶ Vicki Feaver, 'Hemingway's Hat', *Modern Women Poets*, ed. Deryn Rees-Jones (Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2005), 220-221 (220-221.31-34).

⁷¹⁷ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 157.

⁷¹⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 1904, trans. Reginald Snell (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1945), 34-35.

is worth remembering that in contrast to Rilke, Rees-Jones' approach to the other is not thought of in simply male-female terms, which will be important for *Quiver's* avoidance of a heterosexual love story. In *The Memory Tray*, Rees-Jones' 'Metamorphoses' describes a relationship between a man in the process of becoming women via a sex change and his seemingly female 'Shrink' who he describes as: 'More of a man than me.'⁷¹⁹ The love scene between the two characters is described as 'more perfect than a wedding ring – our bodies rising, / Falling. There, growing between us, an exquisitely shaped O.'⁷²⁰ The 'exquisitely shaped O' represents the circular dialogue from one to another, while the physical representation of the circle, 'O,' contains the space that is needed for one to communicate with an other. The metamorphosis that takes place in this poem is both of self, as the characters' sexes become indeterminate, and of relations between the self and other as the characters find an interconnectedness via their subversive identities.

Rees-Jones avoids simply conflating the dialogue between one and an other to heterosexual relations, just as she does not make her poems rely solely on the difference between Welsh and English identities. As Irigaray recommends, Rees-Jones is not interested in naming or categorising identities and it is for this reason that, in interview, she recognises the limiting nature of 'national identity' as 'a neat pigeon hole if they're not sure what else to do with you.'⁷²¹ Exiling herself from specific categories of difference that create 'whole' identities, Rees-Jones tries to achieve a representation of a universal marginal subject in *Quiver* and she denies that identities can be easily categorised without ambiguity. *Quiver* is a very appropriate title that describes the uncertainty of meaning and identity that Rees-Jones wants to achieve in

⁷¹⁹ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Metamorphoses', *The Memory Tray* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994), 57-58 (57.9, 57.11).

⁷²⁰ Rees-Jones, 'Metamorphoses', 58.32-33.

⁷²¹ Rees-Jones, Personal Interview, 12th June 2007.

concordance with Irigaray's suggestion that 'between two, meaning *quivers* and always remains unstable, incomplete, unsettled, irreducible to the word' [my italics].⁷²²

This quivering of meaning is also characteristic of Rees-Jones' other two collections: *The Memory Tray* and *Signs Round a Dead Body*. The lyric or omniscient voices in these earlier collections include only three poems that refer to Rees-Jones' Welsh background. Those poems that do mention Wales are filled with a sense of loss and distance and *Cymraeg* is a mark of difference that is often used in a dialogue between one and an other. In *The Memory Tray*, 'Connections' describes a telephone conversation between a speaker of the Welsh language, *Cymraeg*, and a distanced narrator: 'I have stars, I say, English stars, a Welsh mountain I can / Just remember – *mynydd* – a word I can't pronounce too well.'⁷²³ The word just about remembered is *mynydd*, the *Cymraeg* word for mountain, yet the constancy of this mass of land is undermined as what defines Welshness becomes hazy and misremembered. 'Half Term' (again in *The Memory Tray*) features an epigraph that quotes Jean Rhys: 'Speaking her old, old language of words that are not words.'⁷²⁴ The poem itself tells of a holiday in the Welsh seaside resort of Aberystwyth with an aunt who speaks *Cymraeg*. The narrator's inability to understand the language translates into a dream and the loss of language is inscribed on the body of a ghostly woman: 'in a long white dress [she] moved spookily, / hiding her nakedness, the terrible lop-sidedness/ of only one breast. She clambered in / beside me.'⁷²⁵ The narrator's loss of language manifests itself in the missing breast of an overwhelming mother-figure. Finally, in *Signs Round a Dead Body*, 'The Oral Tradition' describes a dialogue between a man and a woman and their communication via different languages, one of which is *Cymraeg*, and Rees-Jones

⁷²² Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 28.

⁷²³ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Connections', *The Memory Tray* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994), 46 (46.14-15).

⁷²⁴ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Half Term', *The Memory Tray* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994), 14.

⁷²⁵ Rees-Jones, 'Half Term', 14.9-12.

highlights the linguistic and cultural trade in the couple's '*paned o de/cupán té* exchange,' *paned o de* being *Cymraeg* for a cup of tea and *cupán té* meaning the same thing in Irish Gaelic.⁷²⁶ The encounters in these poems – the conversation on the phone, the girl and her *Cymraeg*-speaking aunt, the girl and the ghostly other woman and the exchange of cultures in a man's and woman's conversation – all represent encounters with difference. The poems are concerned with the half-remembered, the ghostly and the minor: a *Cymraeg* word faintly remembered, a lost language manifesting itself as a mutilated woman's ghost; or the possibility of speaking in a shared minor language. Welshness is never clearly defined as a strong cultural identity and this reflects Rees-Jones' comment that though she has 'always been engaged with Wales' in her writing, she is 'more unsure about my own sense of being Welsh,' noting that she 'never felt that I had a claim to be a Welsh person.'⁷²⁷

More recently, this relation with Wales has 'become more painful' as rather than having the freedom to embrace her Welsh and English roots, she has been put in a situation where neither places of origin accept her.⁷²⁸ Rees-Jones explains that that 'the Welsh think I'm not Welsh, and that the English think I probably am Welsh.'⁷²⁹ In this conundrum, Rees-Jones is accused of passing for Welsh by the Welsh establishment, yet is defined as not-English by her English audiences. The term, passing, emerges from African American studies and it is defined by James E. Conyers and T.H. Kennedy in 'Negro Passing: To Pass or Not to Pass' as 'the entry into the white group of Negroes whose appearance is such that they can make this transition

⁷²⁶ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'The Oral Tradition', *Signs Round a Dead Body* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), 55-56 (55.9).

⁷²⁷ Rees-Jones, Personal Interview, 12th June 2007.

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

intentionally or unintentionally, permanently, temporarily, or partially.⁷³⁰ Usually, the term 'passing' refers to subjects 'who are identified as white without initiative being taken by them to conceal their racial identity,' but in my analysis of Rees-Jones' *Quiver*, I argue that 'passing' can be extended to apply in a more universal context to describe all those subjects who must conceal their difference in order to survive.⁷³¹

There have been many readings of passing, some positive and some negative. As Linda Schlossberg writes in the introduction of *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion*, 'passing can be experienced as a source of radical pleasure or intense danger; it can function as a badge of shame or a source of pride.'⁷³² As Schlossberg elaborates, passing can either be 'a uniquely pleasurable experience, one that trades on the erotics of secrecy and revelation,' or it can be 'conservative' as it 'holds larger social hierarchies firmly in place' via the invisibility of its subjects.⁷³³ Rees-Jones has described the unpleasant experience of an accusation that she is passing for Welsh fuelled by narrow nationalist exclusivity. However this does not translate negatively in her poetics and I argue that in *Quiver*, passing allows dialogues with other marginal subjects to take place while upholding the principle of Irigaray's *The Way of the Heart*, which demands that human relations be 'unstable, incomplete, unsettled, irreducible to the word.'⁷³⁴ *Via* passing, Rees-Jones moves beyond an ordinary selfhood towards what Irigaray would call 'ek-sistance,' a way of moving beyond ordinary selfhood or conventional human relations.

⁷³⁰ James E. Conyers and T.H. Kennedy, 'Negro Passing: To Pass or Not to Pass,' *Phylon* 53.6 (1963): 215-223 (215).

⁷³¹ Conyers and Kennedy, 'Negro Passing,' 215.

⁷³² Linda Schlossberg, 'Introduction: Rites of Passing,' *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion*, ed. Maria Carla Sanchez and Linda Schlossberg (New York; London: New York University Press, 2001), 1-12 (3).

⁷³³ Schlossberg, 'Introduction: Rites of Passing,' 3.

⁷³⁴ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 28.

Although, this quest for ek-sistance is told via a novel-in-verse, it is the poetic language that enables its journey and which ties in to the ambiguity of the passing metaphor. It is no surprise that in thinking about the 'third space' in *The Way of the Heart*, Irigaray is positive about the possibilities for poetic language in making such a process occur: 'In a world otherwise lived and illuminated, the language of communication is different, and necessarily poetic: a language that creates, that safeguards its sensible qualities so as to address the body and soul, a language that lives.'⁷³⁵ Later Irigaray extends this endorsement in thinking about the other and the third space of silence: 'Poetic language sometimes keeps available a part of the energy of the coming into relation, and that of thinking when it exists.'⁷³⁶

In Rees-Jones' poetry, the language reflects the relations that are constructed in the content, as the poetic voice echoes with cadences and phrases of other writers passing through for a moment. Rees-Jones' use of intertextuality leaves one in doubt as to whether the poet is speaking authentically or whether she is passing for another poet; the boundaries between one writer and another are blurred.⁷³⁷ In 'Nothing That is Not There and Nothing That Is,' Rees-Jones admits that she wants 'to consciously haunt my poems with fragments or rhythms of other writers' and she explains that 'the poem never is your voice' but is 'an echo of voices.'⁷³⁸ Rees-Jones gives the example of her poem, 'Song for Winter' from *Signs Round a Dead Body*, in which she tries to capture

⁷³⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., 136.

⁷³⁷ This recalls Petit's use of the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, and the blurring of her poetic persona with the cult mythology of Kahlo. However, where as Petit performs this exercise with regard to one artist, Rees-Jones constantly references other poets or writers challenging the fundamental claim to a fixed identity.

⁷³⁸ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Nothing That Is Not There and Nothing That Is', *Contemporary Women's Poetry: Reading/Writing/Practice*, ed. Alison Mark and Deryn Rees-Jones (London: Macmillan, 2000) 58-63 (59). The uncertainty concerning the poet's voice is reflected in the plot of *Quiver* itself, which is told from the point of view of Fay Thomas, a poet and writer of a 'treatise on cloning ethics' (Rees-Jones, *Quiver*, 38.6). The notion of the double or the echo is significant in *Quiver* and it is no coincidence that the protagonist bears a striking resemblance to her creator. As a palimpsest of Rees-Jones, Fay shares her vocation as a poet, her Welsh origins, her abode in the city of Liverpool and her interest in science and art.

the rhythms of Rilke's First Elegy in the *Duino Elegies*.⁷³⁹ This kind of practice is intimately linked to uncertainty about one's self, since Rees-Jones suggests that, in writing such a poem, there is 'the disintegration of self through an acknowledgement of such loss.'⁷⁴⁰ In *Quiver*, Rees-Jones' intertextual style is deployed with references as varied as the *bandolero*, the *bas bleu* or bluestocking, composers like Aaron Copland, religious figures such as the Virgin Mary, gods from Greek mythology, Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history' and pop songs like John Lennon's 'Imagine.' As in the act of passing, intertextuality offers a way of haunting the text with hints and clues and creating a feeling of uncanniness as the reader comes across familiar phrases in an unfamiliar setting.

Giving consideration to Rees-Jones' intertextuality, I divide my analysis of *Quiver* into three sections that proceed from her recycling of specific genres: the first section discusses her recycling of mythology; the second part deals with her use of detective fiction; and the third section offers insights into her use of the science fiction trope, the clone. 'Part I: Polarisation, Mythology and the Solitude of the Gendered Mind,' is an in-depth study of the long title poem, 'Quiver,' which appears in the main

⁷³⁹ It is interesting to compare Rees-Jones' 'Song for Winter' and Rilke's First Elegy of the 'Duino Elegies'. Rilke's poem describes the possibility of confronting angels and it suggests that an encounter with an angel would be too overwhelming for human beings: 'Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' / hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence' (Rilke, 'Duino Elegies,' 151.1-4). In 'Song for Winter,' Rees-Jones adopts the careful phrasing of Rilke's poetry in English translation. This phrasing places stresses not in an orderly metrical fashion but on the points that are most significant to the philosophy of the poem. (For example the stresses in Rilke's poem on 'who,' 'I,' 'out,' 'hear' and the first syllable of 'angels' all focus on the difficulty of listening to an other). The difference is that where as Rilke is interested in a superhuman divine figure, Rees-Jones describes how human love can be all-consuming: 'These days, even love is terrible, / Like a plane, taking off inside the heart. / And now there's nowhere left to go. / For you've brought me to the edges of hell' (Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Song for Winter,' *Signs Round a Dead Body* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), 35 (35.1-4)). Echoing Rilke's comment in the First Elegy that '[e]very angel is terrifying' (or 'terrible' in some translations), Rees-Jones swaps the dreadful figure of the angel for human love (Rilke, 'Duino Elegies,' 151.7) As I have already explained with reference to Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rees-Jones' interest in human love as a means of transcendence is similar to Rilke's aspirations for lovers. However, rather than reaching towards heaven and the angel, human love forces the narrator to descend into hell. Like the angel, human love has possibilities not only for transcendence but also for destruction as I will show in my analysis of the title poem, 'Quiver.'

⁷⁴⁰ Rees Jones, 'Nothing That Is Not There and Nothing That Is', 60.

plot of *Quiver* as a piece of evidence seized by the police and which is supposedly written by the protagonist, Fay.⁷⁴¹ Paralleling Irigaray's discussion of human relations with that of Jessica Benjamin in *The Bonds of Love*, I argue that 'Quiver' is Rees-Jones' critique of men and women who try to communicate from polarised points of gendered experience. As a retelling of Ovid's story of Artemis and Actaeon, 'Quiver' recycles mythologies to present Actaeon and Artemis as two poles of extreme gender. Actaeon represents the transgressive, brutal male gaze, while Artemis retains a violent, vengeful femininity. Between these polarisations exists Faith, a new addition to the Artemis-Actaeon mythology, transplanted from Christian morality tales. Faith, whose name is deliberately close to that of the heroine of *Quiver*, Fay, laments over the solitude of mind that separates the converse characters. By the end of the poem, Faith has come to realize that both extremes of gendered behaviour are destructive and she desires to go beyond simple categorisations, groupings and divisions like those that exist in man and woman.⁷⁴²

The movement away from easily categorised identities is discussed in 'Part II: Passing, Uncanniness and the Detective's Story,' in which I argue that the genre of

⁷⁴¹ Although 'Quiver' appears half-way through the collection, I present my analysis of it before thinking about the main narrative of *Quiver*, because it is a moment of hesitation in *Quiver*'s plotting and an exploration of the obstacles to discovering new ways of being in oneself and with others.

⁷⁴² It is interesting to note that while Rees-Jones evades categories such as gender and race when she is imagining possibilities for human relations in the main plot of *Quiver*, when thinking about obstacles to this progress in 'Quiver,' she focuses particularly on the conflict between male and female or man and woman. In doing so Rees-Jones echoes the approach of Irigaray to problems of the self and relationships in focusing on men and women as the archetypal players in human conflict. As I noted in the general introduction to this thesis, Irigaray is sometimes accused of essentialism and heterosexual bias as a result of this approach, but more recently Irigaray has backtracked from her focus on men and women. In a lecture about *The Way of the Heart* titled 'The Path Towards the Other,' Irigaray suggested that the other need not be woman, but could be 'a companion, a child, a friend, a foreigner,' and she asserted that her discussion of human relations is relevant to not only man and woman but also to the parent and child, the teacher and student, the rich and the poor and one's self and the stranger (Irigaray, 'The Path Towards the Other', 9th May 2006). Similarly, I think that Rees-Jones' use of men and women in poems about obstacles to human relations is not meant to apply only to a heterosexual context, since in interview, Rees-Jones has stated that she wishes to 'resist the heterosexual romance' (Deryn Rees-Jones, Personal Interview (in person), 15th July 2006). In this case, I suggest that the relations between men and women or male and female represent a wider set of issues for universal human relations.

detective fiction is useful to Rees-Jones because of its preoccupation with uncanniness. In this section, through detailed analysis of poems in parts one and two of *Quiver*, I explore how Rees-Jones uses the uncanniness of detective fiction to promote the trope of passing and I proceed from the strange discovery of a corpse by the protagonist, Fay, which disrupts the establishment of her everyday life with her husband, Will, who has an unusual line of work as a geneticist. In these supposedly 'homely' poems, a feeling of uncertainty pervades the domestic scene and the couple's 'bed without love.'⁷⁴³ In these poems, I identify the experiences of uncanniness as defined by Freud, Jentsch and Modleski and I discuss the posturban setting of Liverpool where marginal subjects pass; the deconstruction of ordinary selfhood through a kind of passing over of boundaries between death and life; and the possibility of passing as another person in poems about Fay's empathetic relationship with Mara. Drawing on classic feminist accounts of passing such as Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian*, I interrogate the possibilities of passing as what Irigaray would call 'a poetic mode of dwelling,' a mode in which one gestures towards a greater interconnectedness with others via new languages and modes of being.⁷⁴⁴

The next part of my analysis, 'Part III: Avenging Goddess or Passing Subject? The Destruction and Reconstruction of the Clone,' explores how the passing metaphor develops in parts two and three of *Quiver* via the clone which passes for human. It considers Rees-Jones' use of the science-fiction genre and how the plot of *Quiver* is full of hints and clues about Fay's true identity that recall the 'secret' narrative of science fiction films like Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner*. This section focuses on the possibilities for Fay and Mara as clones and I show that the clone is represented as maintaining both negative and positive possibilities for human relations. On the one

⁷⁴³ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Sky Canoe,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 16 (16.1).

⁷⁴⁴ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 152.

hand, it appears to be a creature of patriarchal science, descended from man's desire to control reproduction, yet on the other hand, like the symbol of snow, it has a quality of being one thing and another simultaneously. Ultimately, the resemblance of Mara to Artemis, the vengeful goddess, means that she has to die, but the possibilities of the clone metaphor live on in Fay's ambiguous selfhood and in the act of giving birth to a new baby, to a new self. Like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, the clone exists in-between one place and another and consequently it is the talisman of Rees-Jones' concern about being able to go beyond a conventional selfhood. Like Irigaray, Rees-Jones balances belonging and exile to 'arrive at you, / Finding and losing myself / In this inappropriable / Nearness.'⁷⁴⁵ Thus, the clone and the clone poem are third spaces through which a dialogue about difference and identity can be performed. This exile from ordinary identity into a third space of undecidability and poetic language is central for Rees-Jones' thinking about questions of difference.

Part I: Polarisation, Visibility and Mythology

The quest for dialogue and the desire for an uncategorisable selfhood are both evident in the epigraph of *Quiver* which quotes Plato's *Symposium*: 'God mingles not with man; but through Love / all the intercourse of god with man, / whether awake or asleep, is carried on.'⁷⁴⁶ In *Symposium*, the nature of love is discussed by the philosophers and this quotation describes how God, which symbolises divine inspiration or the muse, will not make His presence felt to the solitary mind, but appears in 'intercourse' with an other. The words of the epigraph are spoken by the character Diotima, a sharp-witted crone paraphrased in Socrates' speech, and Socrates' telling of Diotima's story is in turn retold by Apollodorus, the primary narrator of the

⁷⁴⁵ Irigaray, 'October 28th,' 74.8-11.

⁷⁴⁶ Deryn Rees-Jones, *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 5.

text. Diotima's and Socrates' version of love creates a third space between the divine and the mortal, while their double speech balances male and female voices. The theme of mediation between extremes seems to be important, as does the theme of inspiration, as the mediator, Love, becomes a muse or a third space. It is interesting that Rees-Jones chooses to quote Socrates' speech, since of all the philosophers' accounts of love in *Symposium*, Aristophanes' story is the most infamous. Aristophanes describes how the human was once 'entirely round, with backs and sides making a circle, and it had four arms, an equal number of legs, and two completely similar faces on a circular neck; a single head for both faces, which looked out in opposite directions.'⁷⁴⁷ However, in *The Way of the Heart*, Irigaray criticises Aristophanes' tale suggesting that only destruction can be found in a search for 'the lost whole, the complement of its amputated Being, the instrument of its division or of its reunification.'⁷⁴⁸ Instead, Irigaray demands the 'virgin-matter or space belonging neither to the one nor to other but in which the one and the other can enter into presence,' which is absent from Aristophanes' account.⁷⁴⁹ Aristophanes speaks only of 'great eagerness to take pleasure in the other' which figures human beings as selfish desiring subjects hoping to dominate an other to satisfy their own longing.⁷⁵⁰ Again, there is a need for a third space and the admittance that there can be no easy reunification of different subjects.

The impossible quest to encompass or engulf a lost other within one's own being is explored in the title poem, 'Quiver,' which is a retelling of Ovid's Artemis and Actaeon story. That Rees-Jones decides to recycle this myth is appropriate, since the use of mythologies in the poetry of women writing about Wales has influenced the

⁷⁴⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, ed. C.J. Rowe, trans. C.J. Rowe (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1998), 51.

⁷⁴⁸ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 79.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁵⁰ Plato, *Symposium*, 57.

poetics of mothering that I described in the introduction to this thesis. For example, Gillian Clarke reinvents her daughter as a 'Horse Goddess' to explore mother-daughter relationships.⁷⁵¹ However, rather than using mythological tropes to create a usable past and culture and to shore up selfhood, myth is used by Rees-Jones to deconstruct identity and to express dissatisfaction with current modes of being.

'Quiver' tells the story of Artemis, the hunter goddess, and Actaeon, the huntsman, drawing on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and his telling of the mythical transformation of Actaeon into a stag after the huntsman catches Artemis bathing. Often in 'Quiver,' there is examination of the other as a physical object to be consumed or violated and the eyes appear as instruments of domination and power. The issues at the heart of the poem echo those of the entire novel-in-verse: interconnectedness with others is significant and sacrifice of a whole and bounded selfhood is figured through the servant, Faith, who tries to merge with the identities of others and offers herself as an object of exploration. This is a necessary part of the process of communing with an other as Irigaray highlights in *The Way of the Heart*. Irigaray suggests that the 'world of one's own' must not be 'imposed upon the other,' but that there must be 'availability' between the two which 'prepares a free space for a common mediation.'⁷⁵² This 'free space' does not contain 'emptiness but a silence deliberately safe-guarded for the task that the relation with the other represents': in other words, it is what Irigaray calls 'a third space.'⁷⁵³ Irigaray's juxtaposition of imposition and mutuality echoes Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love*, and it is useful to consider Benjamin's ideas for a moment, because her theorising seems to offer a more detailed version of Irigaray's commentary on the problems of relation.

⁷⁵¹ Gillian Clarke, 'Horse Goddess,' *Five Fields* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998), 69-70.

⁷⁵² Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 88.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*, 88.

In *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin critiques psychoanalytical accounts of domination particularly between the sexes and in the oedipal triangle. Proceeding with an intersubjective view (an approach that ‘maintains that the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects’⁷⁵⁴), Benjamin studies childhood experience of differentiation from the mother, the child practicing being an independent subject and *rapprochement*, in which the child comes to terms with ‘the perceived reality of his limitations and dependency.’⁷⁵⁵ However, in oedipal development, the repudiation of the mother that is supposedly necessary for the child’s independence, sets in motion a process whereby the mother becomes ‘something other – as nature, as an instrument or object, as less than human.’⁷⁵⁶ What seems most significant in Benjamin’s argument in relation to Rees-Jones, is her suggestion that, ‘within the oedipal model, difference is constructed as polarity’ and ‘[e]ach gender is able to represent only one aspect of the polarized self-other relationship.’⁷⁵⁷ In contrast to this polarisation, Benjamin poses a different mode of being that offers recognition and mutuality, which is remarkably similar to Irigaray’s third space, since it is described as ‘the intersubjective mode where two subjects meet.’⁷⁵⁸ Like Irigaray’s third space, Benjamin’s mode of inbetweenness represents a meeting of self and other as it invokes ‘the sense of losing the self in the other and the sense of being truly known for oneself.’⁷⁵⁹

Benjamin’s desire to move beyond an oedipal model of human relations is very relevant to Rees-Jones’ view of gender. Rees-Jones quoted *The Bonds of Love* in her paper, “‘Not a Ghost at All’: lineage and apparitionality in the poetry of Carol Ann

⁷⁵⁴ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 20.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 167, 171.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

Duffy and Colette Bryce,' given at the British and Irish Poetry Conference.⁷⁶⁰ In that paper, Rees-Jones praised Duffy and Bryce for moving beyond oedipal models of relation and in *Quiver*, she discusses the problems of oedipal polarity between what Benjamin would call 'the archaic, dangerous father' and 'irrational, maternal powers.'⁷⁶¹ In the sections that follow, I study why it is impossible for the characters in the poem to create a proper relation of mutuality and recognition, to discover a third space of inbetweenness. I discuss the violent encounter between Artemis and Actaeon in 'The Violence of the Gaze and the Goddess'; and 'Dogs of Love and War' gives further consideration to the detrimental consequences in the polarisation of man and woman. In studying these couplings, I suggest that what prevents recognition and mutuality in 'Quiver' is a polarity between the male and the female and what is needed to create a proper relation is 'to transcend the opposition of the two spheres [conventional masculinity and femininity] by formulating a less polarized relationship between them' and to 'integrate the gender division, the two sides of which have previously been considered mutually exclusive and the property of only one sex.'⁷⁶²

The Violence of the Gaze and the Goddess

Although Rees-Jones tells us at the beginning of 'Quiver' that there will be 'No hedging, no prevarication,'⁷⁶³ there are a number of false starts. There seems to be some difficulty in confronting the narrative as the speaker avoids telling the story in a linear fashion. The first line begins at the end with Actaeon's transformation into an

⁷⁶⁰ "Not a Ghost at All": the Apparitional in Poetry of Carol-Ann Duffy and Collette Bryce,' The British and Irish Contemporary Poetry Conference, St Anne's College, Oxford, 23rd September 2006.

⁷⁶¹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 146, 147.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 92, 130.

⁷⁶³ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 29.2.

animal: 'Let's start with the stag.'⁷⁶⁴ The focus then shifts back to the process of metamorphosis: 'Let's start, simply, with this tale of transformation.'⁷⁶⁵ The speaker finally poses the tangible experience of the man-beast transformation:

I'll begin by simply asking you,
 Imagine this! The weight of the antlers,
 the staggyiness of the moulting coat;
 the staggy eyes with their bushy lashes,
 the intimacy of the moment
 when for the first time
 a man sees the body of a woman.⁷⁶⁶

The speaker engages the reader with self-conscious storytelling then transports the scene into the lonely mind of the man-beast. Harold Skulsky in *Metamorphosis: the Mind in Exile* suggests that 'it is the incurable solitude of mind of which the groaning pseudo-deer is merely the sardonic emblem.'⁷⁶⁷ Actaeon's punishment is to be separated from the world of humans 'to the status of an anomalous object, a metaphysical castaway in a class by itself.'⁷⁶⁸ The sensations of being a stag are conjured in a tangible and vivid manner and yet it seems to be a fitting punishment, because the 'solitude of mind' experienced by Actaeon as a stag reflects the feelings of Artemis who, in one reading of the story, is made into pure flesh when Actaeon gazes at her naked body.

This is a beginning, yet the perspective shifts again when Rees-Jones flashes forward to Actaeon's violent and abrupt death at the hands of his own dogs and fellow huntsmen:

let's start with the head at the feet of the huntsman,
 the stag's blood, his rite of passage

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 29.1.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 29.4.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 29.6-12.

⁷⁶⁷ Harold Skulsky, *Metamorphosis: the Mind in Exile* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 30.

⁷⁶⁸ Skulsky, *Metamorphosis*, 29.

daubed on his skin as if accidents with a razor
 – the cheek-torn, cotton-woolly kind –
 were all it took to make a man of him⁷⁶⁹

This is a seemingly sympathetic account of Actaeon with his castrated head as a site of horror and distress. The first line of the extract falls after ‘Let’s start’ into a loose anapaestic meter which suggests an orderly beginning. In the second line, ‘stag’s blood’ forms a spondee, its two long stresses emphasising the horror of Actaeon’s bloodied body as a tragic warning. However, as the rhythm becomes more disordered, the tone is sceptical with its references to teenage ‘accidents with a razor’ indicating that Actaeon is not a man but a juvenile.⁷⁷⁰ Actaeon’s immaturity gives the impression that the punishment is all the more harsh and unjust and the dashes that emphasise the ‘cheek-torn woolly’ face, announce the awfulness of Artemis’ revenge. This beginning focuses on the tragedy of Actaeon’s mistake and Artemis’ terrible retribution which is a more Ovidian telling of the tale. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid writes that ‘destiny was to blame for Actaeon’s misfortunes, not any guilt on his own part; for there is nothing sinful in losing one’s way.’⁷⁷¹

Yet Rees-Jones that offers an alternative, linear version of the story starting with, ‘what [Actaeon] once was / that day as he peeked and pried, / a young man, bold as brass.’⁷⁷² This scene sets up the voyeuristic gaze, which is developed by the comment that ‘in those days [...] seeing was doing.’⁷⁷³ Eyes and the gaze are significant in *Quiver* and in ‘Quiver’ in particular, the gaze does not lack certainty nor does the object of that gaze seem immaterial. This is an objectifying gaze which focuses on the physical embodiment of the goddess and performs a transgressive act. Eyes are not

⁷⁶⁹ Rees-Jones, ‘Quiver,’ 29.16-20.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., 29.18.

⁷⁷¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M Innes (London: Penguin, 1955), 78.

⁷⁷² Rees-Jones, ‘Quiver,’ 29.21-23.

⁷⁷³ Ibid., 29.4.

only 'seeing' but also 'doing' and Rees-Jones moves away from Ovidian sympathy to a more sinister interpretation of Actaeon's intentions. This is where 'Quiver' begins properly as the water 'rids the privacy of [Artemis'] well-formed body / then gives itself up / like the body gives up perfume, sweat.'⁷⁷⁴ Locked in her bodily form, the goddess is penetrated without her knowledge and exudes sexuality unknowingly. The goddess' body can be transgressed, yet this very permeability is what pains her, because the story begins with the naked goddess being found by Actaeon's male gaze and her shame at the discovery as 'the divine inviolate.'⁷⁷⁵ When Rees-Jones describes how, from the water, the goddess 'emerges / clavicle, breastbone, / the blue vein at her childfree nipple,' the body appears like a statue rising from the water portrayed in its chastity as a site of cold splendour.⁷⁷⁶ The spondaic 'blue vein' recalls the veins in marble and these statuesque connotations are reminiscent of the Pygmalion myth. The lowering of the goddess to the level of a mortal woman displaying the intimate 'thatch of hair that covers the pubis,' is a shame to her.⁷⁷⁷ Rees-Jones describes her as 'singleminded / casting around red-cheeked, / groping for her bow and arrow / refusing to be naked for this man,'⁷⁷⁸ reminding us that Artemis was known as the chaste hunter goddess unblemished by sexual intercourse.⁷⁷⁹

After lingering on Artemis' statuesque body, Rees-Jones shifts to the standpoint of the male gaze and explores the watcher's desire for the female body. Rees-Jones describes how 'desire runs – / upwards on the spine's ladder, to the nape'

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., 30.29-31.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 30.41.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 30.32-34.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 30.35.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid. 30.36-39.

⁷⁷⁹ When the bow and arrow appear in 'Quiver,' they echo the title of the sequence and the title poem. Their appearance also echoes events in the realist narrative of *Quiver*, in which the victim is found pinioned to a gravestone by an arrow.

and down to the place 'between labia and coccyx.'⁷⁸⁰ She calls the place 'that private space the huntsman longed for' in order to 'know in himself interior joy.'⁷⁸¹ The huntsman is on a quest for selfhood in which woman seems to be an instrument or tool with which he can perform his task. This is the significance of the male gaze which represents a patriarchal tendency to judge, criticize and measure, to transgress in its narcissistic search for itself in the depths of an other. A relation with the other does not seem to be possible here, since as Irigaray states, such communication can only be achieved through 'being attentive to what the other says, or wants to say, including in his, or her, silences' and it is clear that 'the other does not receive who they are univocally from my speech, even if I were God.'⁷⁸² What occurs instead is a violation, which Benjamin interprets in *The Bonds of Love* as 'the attempt to push the other outside the self, to attack the other's separate reality in order to finally discover it.'⁷⁸³ Actaeon's attack on the goddess might then be interpreted as a desire to discover the other, yet it is a transgressive mode of relation and consequently incurs the wrath of Artemis.

If Rees-Jones is suspicious of the male gaze, she is also ambivalent about violent women. Like Philomela who 'leaped forward [...] her hair spattered with the blood of the boy she had madly murdered,' Artemis is a woman who can exact revenge for the uses and abuses of the female body.⁷⁸⁴ In the writings of Homer, Artemis' powers are not as extensive as the other gods and her arrows are painless rather than being penetrating weapons.⁷⁸⁵ However, Rees-Jones' goddess has more in

⁷⁸⁰ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 30.44-45, 30.48.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 30.49, 30.52.

⁷⁸² Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 162.

⁷⁸³ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 68.

⁷⁸⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 152.

⁷⁸⁵ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, n.d.), book 15, line 411.

common with the description in Ruth Padel's *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self*, where Padel notes that Artemis' arrows are 'ambiguous: a "painless" release in labor [sic], but also the labor's pain, and death in labor.'⁷⁸⁶ This ambiguous version of Artemis might emerge from the goddess' traditional associations with Hecate, the high priestess of witches and it comes as no surprise when Barbara Smith explains that Artemis' name derives from *artamos* meaning 'butcher or 'slaughterer.'⁷⁸⁷ A similar view of Artemis is presented by Annis Pratt in *Dancing with Goddesses: Archetypes, Poetry, and Empowerment*, when she admits that 'Artemis' punishments are more painful and terrifying to men than those of Medusa, who turns you (presumably painlessly) to stone.'⁷⁸⁸ Euripides portrays Artemis' hunter persona comically in *Hippolytus*, yet in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the heroine has to sacrifice her life to cool the goddess' wrath.⁷⁸⁹ Although the goddess is a midwife, she also claims the lives of her mortal daughters. These mythologizing images (Ovid, Euripedes) and feminist debates (Padel, Smith, Pratt) about Artemis' ambiguous nature are tapped in 'Quiver.' Rees-Jones is very aware of Artemis' potential to be helpful or harmful, as is shown in interview, when she describes Artemis as a figure of contradiction recognising the ambiguity in her roles the 'chaste' hunter goddess and 'the patron saint of child birth.'⁷⁹⁰

While Artemis herself contains doublings and contradictions, 'Quiver' also creates two sets of beings, the human and the immortals, and it questions why desire between them is always 'ill-fated.'⁷⁹¹ A catalogue of mythological encounters between

⁷⁸⁶ Ruth Padel, *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 153.

⁷⁸⁷ Barbara Smith, 'Greece,' *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992), 65-101 (68).

⁷⁸⁸ Annis Pratt, *Dancing with Goddesses: Archetypes, Poetry and Empowerment* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 293.

⁷⁸⁹ Euripedes, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, trans. W.S. Merwin and George E. Dimock Jr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 91.2043 – 92.2046.

⁷⁹⁰ Rees-Jones, Personal Interview, 15th July 2006.

⁷⁹¹ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 30.55.

mortals and immortals is listed and each one sets up a triangle of characters. Semele was tricked by Hera into being consumed by fiery Zeus during her pregnancy (and her son Dionysus was sewn into his father's thigh). Echo was 'damned by Hera till her bones turned to stone,' while her lover Narcissus was 'transformed to a lonesome waterside flower.'⁷⁹² In each case, the mortal becomes a figure of contention for extremes of male and female behaviour and although the mortal has the potential to bridge difference, his or her involvement with the immortals is often self-destructive.

The vulnerability of mortals is reflected by a new character added to the Ovid story: 'the goddess' companion' named Faith.⁷⁹³ In *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of Female Form*, Marina Warner describes the myth of Faith, Hope and Charity as told in the play, 'Sapientia,' by the Saxon writer, Hroswitha of Gandersheim:

When Hadrian tries to force her and her daughters to worship Diana [a version of Artemis], they refuse, and Sapientia tells Hope, Faith and Charity, 'I nourished and cherished you, that I might wed you to a heavenly bridegroom.' Faith is then beaten horribly and her nipples are cut off. They spurt milk not blood [...]⁷⁹⁴

Like Hroswitha's version of Faith, Rees-Jones' character is a direct challenge to Artemis' authority. The denial of child-birth and the violent oppression of maternity are themes played upon through Faith 'for whom chastity is a spiritual heist.'⁷⁹⁵ Rather than despising the peeping tom, Faith 'longed to push her breasts against his back' and 'covets most the watermark streaks, / stretchmarks on a mother's skin.'⁷⁹⁶ Faith defies a version of selfhood that is hermetically sealed from contact with others, yet Rees-Jones imagines her 'in Titian's painting failed again / under the skull of a stag.'⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹² Ibid., 31.66, 31.69.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 31.71.

⁷⁹⁴ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Vintage, 1996), 182.

⁷⁹⁵ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver', 31.75.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., 31.73, 31.76-77.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 31.78-79.



Fig. 5: Titian, *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-1559), National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Rees-Jones refers to the Titian's painting *Diana and Actaeon* and she points to its portrayal of the goddess' handmaiden who washes Artemis' feet nonchalantly (see fig. 5). In the painting, the other servants of Diana, or Artemis, struggle in alarm to cover the spectacle of their naked bodies, while the head of a stag is mounted ominously on the pillar above the foot-washing maiden. In Rees-Jones' version, it is not that Faith is unaware that she is being observed, but that she revels in displaying her body 'prolonging the moment of her nudity' to show 'the flex and tautness of her limbs / the narrow triangle of her unmarked back, / the downy base of the fragile neck.'⁷⁹⁸ If this description is compared to the earlier account of Artemis' body, Faith seems less statuesque. The strung limbs have the potential to sag; the unsoiled back may be spoiled; soft skin can be weathered; and the delicate neck can be broken. This is a far more vulnerable body and it is a mark of Faith's mortality, yet Faith is

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., 32.86-89.

comfortable to display herself as such. The desire is to reject solitude of mind and to become open and vulnerable to an other.

The narrative pauses for a moment to imagine the sequence of events 'had Artemis not spotted him [Actaeon].'⁷⁹⁹ The imaginings that follow are specifically mortal ones imbued with the promise of death: 'For here it was, dark as a plum, / the genesis of a ruined moment, / the intoxication of a bird's first flight.'⁸⁰⁰ The plum will decay, the unfolding of desire will lead to a tragic conclusion and the three long stresses that highlight the 'bird's first flight' also sound a death knell as a journey begins towards death. Mortal desires are spelled out: there is the huntsman's desire '[t]o feel [Artemis'] goodness / not a violation'; and Faith's desire to 'find a part of herself in this man / as she felt his body as a line of pleasure.'⁸⁰¹ Actaeon and Faith are mirror images or doubles of each other: he is desirous to unlock the secrets of the goddess and mortality, while she hopes to find herself in her interaction with Actaeon, or if not to find herself then perhaps to find 'a belief in self.'⁸⁰² Yet although the desires of the male and female mortals echo each other, the erroneousness of such aspirations is also doubled, since Actaeon's desire for the virgin goddess can never be consummated, nor while he is committed to such a task can Faith's desires be fulfilled. However, Faith's desires are less appropriating than Actaeon's, since her hope is to return or challenge the penetrating male gaze, 'to look at the man without fear or shame / with an image of herself with which to begin.'⁸⁰³ The hope is for an equal relation with the other.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., 32.91.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid., 32.92-94.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 32.97-98, 32.100-101.

⁸⁰² Ibid., 32.103.

⁸⁰³ Ibid., 32.107-108.

Dogs of Love and War

Actaeon's dominative desire for the other dictates his terrible punishment and the scene of the chase and the hunting of Actaeon after he has been turned into a stag, is one of suspense in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid builds tension by describing the dogs, their personalities and histories in intricate detail: 'Pterelas, the swift runner, was there, and keen scented Agre, Hylaeus who had lately been gored by a wild boar, Nape, offspring of a wolf, Poemenis, the shepherd dog.'⁸⁰⁴ Rees-Jones subverts Ovid's description of the hounds by transforming them from a lineage of proud beasts to a lineage of feminist women. Here is the lineage of gynocracy figured as hounds or furies demanding justice for the endangered goddess:

and the stag ripped apart by the hounds....
 Those hounds! Imagined now as what?
 An ever-changing line of mothers, daughters, long-lived women?
 Antigone and Clytemnestra, Penelope and Joan.
 The names might go on, being all things and nothing,
 finding within themselves routes to becoming:
 lovers of women, lovers of men. Names
 trip off the tongue: Millicent, Sylvia,
 Christabel, Emily, Angel Virginia, No-nonsense Simone,
 Glorious Gloria, Unblushing Germaine;
 Fierce Luce, Brave Julia, la belle Hélène.
 They burn like a catechism, are worthy of praise.
 Here's hound Catherine, now, with her crown of thorns,
 Little Saint Bride with her cow print jacket,
 Agnes the Borzoi, the Windhound Poor Clare.
 Here's Sappho, Felicia, Aphra, Christina,
 so many Elizabeths they can't all be named.⁸⁰⁵

Like Ovid, Rees-Jones adopts an intense rhythm which gives a sense of the speed and ferocity of the dogs as they make their interminable chase. The lineage of dogs/women begins with figures from Ancient Greek mythology and literature, like

⁸⁰⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 79.

⁸⁰⁵ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver', 33.114-130.

Antigone, Clytemnestra and Penelope, and it extends to women poets like Sappho, Sylvia Plath, Felicia Hemans and Christina Rossetti. There are female novelists such as Aphra Benn, Virginia Woolf who wrote of the 'Angel in the House' and Simone de Beauvoir as well as significant historical figures like Joan of Arc, Millicent Fawcett (who founded the National Union of Women's Suffrage in 1897) and the suffragettes, Sylvia, Christabel and Emeline Pankhurst. Visionaries appear like Anne 'Catherine' Emmerick (a stigmatist at the turn of the eighteenth century), Saint Birgitta (known as Saint Bride) and Jeanne de Jussie (who wrote *The Short Chronicle: A Poor Clare's Account of the Reformation of Geneva* in the fifteenth century) while there are references to contemporary feminists such as Germaine Greer, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and of course, Luce Irigaray.

The list teeters on a haunting absence: the Elizabeths who cannot be named. The Elizabeths mentioned could be any number of acclaimed women, yet there is a sense that one exists at the heart of the list: Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Rees-Jones draws not only on the Victorian poet, but also on Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (published 1857). Like *Quiver*, *Aurora Leigh* is a novel-in-verse and it tells the story of a young woman striving to be a poet without help from her friends and family. In 'Casa Guidi Windows and *Aurora Leigh*: The Genesis of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Visionary Aesthetic,' Dolores Rosenblum suggests that *Aurora Leigh* is also the expression of a new aesthetic vision:

Through this narrative of the growth of a female poet and the development of a female poetics, Barrett Browning, who urged the female poet to look for her poetic "grandmothers", has come to serve as a poetic grandmother herself, a model of the female poet whose imagination is epic in scope, and whose inner – and domestic – life foster the poetic energy to tackle social and political mystifications. *Aurora Leigh* shows Barrett Browning working out an aesthetic

which [...] identifies women as originators of meaning, rather than as reflecting mirrors for the male poet's search for self-transcendence.⁸⁰⁶

Rosenblum's comments explain the multiplication of Barrett Browning's presence amongst the hounds, since, as Rosenblum indicates, Barrett-Browning's epic *kuentslerroman* reveals her to be a remarkable presence in the female lineage created in the pack of dogs. In *Aurora Leigh*, when Romney Leigh asks Aurora to leave her poetical aspirations and join him in his work, she tells him, 'What you love, / Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause.'⁸⁰⁷ Aurora recognises that Romney desires 'a helpmate, not a mistress' and 'A wife to help your ends / in her no end!'⁸⁰⁸ What Actaeon searches for in Artemis and what Romney searches for in Aurora is one and the same: it is what Rosenblum calls 'self-transcendence.' Neither Artemis nor Aurora will stand for such employment, although Aurora's rejection of romantic love is not as violent as Artemis' revenge via the blood-thirsty hounds.⁸⁰⁹ Artemis is a fury, the voice of the wronged woman and she is doubled with Philomela as she 'scratches out words with a stick on the floor.'⁸¹⁰ This description echoes *Titus Andronicus* when Shakespeare's stage directions describe how his version of Philomela, Lavinia, holds a staff in her mouth and uses her stumps of arms (her hands having been cut off by her rapists) to write the names of her attackers in the dust.⁸¹¹

⁸⁰⁶ Dolores Rosenblum, 'Casa Guidi Windows and Aurora Leigh: The Genesis of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Visionary Aesthetic,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 4:1 (1985): 61-68 (61).

⁸⁰⁷ Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1857, ed. Kerry McSweeney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), book 2: 400-401.

⁸⁰⁸ Barrett-Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 2:402-403.

⁸⁰⁹ However, by the end of *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning allows her heroine to reconcile work and love. Romney becomes a reformed character, foregoing his earlier chauvinism, and a marriage is able to occur. Aurora writes in her letter to Lady Waldemar: 'Our work shall still be better for our love, / And still our love be sweeter for our work' (Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 9.925-926). Like Aurora, Faith signposts the reader to a less combative set of sexual relations even if the hounds are a necessary antidote to Actaeon's crime.

⁸¹⁰ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 34.149.

⁸¹¹ William Shakespeare, 'The Most Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus,' *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt *et al* (London; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 371-434 (4.I).

The punishment exacted by a matriarchal lineage dictates that Actaeon must take on an animal shape just like the dogs/women, who suffer the isolation and solitude of mind described earlier by Skulsky.⁸¹² Without Actaeon, Faith searches for her desires in Artemis, whom she sees as a double and mirror image when she aspires ‘to look at the goddess / to see something of herself too.’⁸¹³ The goddess is an ideal to live up to, yet when Faith poses a question, she finds that ‘that bronzed creature [...] / [...] / was no answer.’⁸¹⁴ Faith finds no resolution in the violent femininity of Artemis, so she turns to study her own reflection.⁸¹⁵ There is a sense that Faith is becoming aware of her folly; on observing the dead Actaeon, he is described as ‘Actaeon, whom she has loved’ but the speaker adds ‘or the idea of him.’⁸¹⁶ As in the case of Orsino, Faith’s love is insecure. However, Faith is described as ‘the mother perhaps of all invention,’⁸¹⁷ a phrase which refers to the sixteenth century proverb, ‘Necessity is the mother of invention.’⁸¹⁸ Perhaps Faith will find a way to fulfil her frustrated desires through invention and imagination.

⁸¹² This is emphasised in a version of ‘Quiver’ that was published in *Poetry Review*, with an epigraph – ‘desires like fell and cruel hounds’ – from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, specifically the scene in which Duke Orsino describes his love for Olivia. Orsino describes how on seeing Olivia, ‘That instant was I turned into a hart, / And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds, / E’er since pursue me’ (William Shakespeare, ‘Twelfth Night, or What You Will,’ *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt *et al* (London; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 1761-1822 (1.1.20-24). Orsino laments the pain of his love here, yet it is clear by the end of the play that such love has poor foundations and it is incited only by Olivia’s appearance. Orsino is blind to his true love, Viola, and in using this quotation, Rees-Jones laments reliance on the eyes as instruments for categorising identity, a tendency that brings Actaeon’s downfall. (See: Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘Quiver,’ *Poetry Review* 94.1 (2004): 34-38 (34)).

⁸¹³ Rees-Jones, ‘Quiver,’ 32.104-105.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.109-111.

⁸¹⁵ The heroine of *Quiver*, Fay, also turns to her silent reflection to understand the ghostly presence of her opposite number, Mara, and in Rees-Jones’ poetic symbology this gesture signals the first step towards understanding one’s self and the other. Further indications that Faith and Fay are synonymous occur when Rees-Jones pictures Faith looking into the pool and ‘seeing the stag by her own face, / pregnant now, though she doesn’t know it, / and the stag ripped apart by the hounds....’ (Rees-Jones, ‘Quiver,’ 32.112-114). Fay does indeed become pregnant in the story of *Quiver* and Rees-Jones seems to be suggesting that the main plot is a replay of the narrative in *Quiver* but with a happier outcome for Fay than for Faith.

⁸¹⁶ Rees-Jones, ‘Quiver,’ 33.136-137.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.132.

⁸¹⁸ “Necessity...” *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, ed. Elizabeth Knowles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Faith and Artemis must maintain their double relationship, yet there is a sense that the project for the future will be Faith's quest for autonomy.

[...] Faith dresses, rolls back her sleeves,
her eyes knowing more than she is telling
as she holds up a mirror to the goddess,
looks at herself, behind her, through it,
and on.⁸¹⁹

Faith goes about her duties, yet there is a feeling that she is now armed with some undetectable secret knowledge which will enliven her. However, the poem ends once more with the reunification of the women and there is a sense that the goddess is inescapable, that the identities of these two women cannot be severed.

Faith's quest for interconnectedness fails in 'Quiver,' perhaps because of the problems of 'revisionary storytelling,' described by Jan Montefiore in *Feminism and Poetry* as an inability to 'exorcize nor assume the power of the original.'⁸²⁰ In 'Quiver,' Faith is an observer, the servant of Artemis and the unrequited lover of Actaeon. She is helpless to act or to change the course of events. Thus the entirety of the poem represents her silence. By the end of the poem, no authentic relation with the other has occurred and Faith's submissiveness causes her pain as she watches Actaeon's death and returns to enforced virginity. This passivity resembles Benjamin's description in *The Bonds of Love* of 'women's own acceptance of her lack of subjectivity, her willingness to offer recognition without receiving it in return.'⁸²¹ It also recalls Benjamin's warning that '[m]utual recognition cannot be achieved through obedience, through identification with the other's power or through repression.'⁸²²

⁸¹⁹ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 34.151-155.

⁸²⁰ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 53.

⁸²¹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 78.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 48.

By the end of 'Quiver,' Faith seems to have realised that she is trapped in a mode of oedipal relations, trapped between polarities of masculinity and femininity. However, this realisation enlivens her because it enables her to come to her own conclusions as she considers her doublings with Artemis or Actaeon and as she observes the polarisation of Artemis and Actaeon. The end of the poem represents a rejection of the old gods and its hope for a new set of relations might be read *via* Irigaray's desire for 'a divine not only living with humans but in them, and to be greeted and listened to between us.'⁸²³ Irigaray continues:

The gods are far away – in us. It is not by searching for them far outside that we will discover them. To be sure, we will perhaps discover in foreign lands traces of gods that we are lacking. But, without a journey in ourselves, to celebrate with them will not really be possible.⁸²⁴

Irigaray explains that it is not possible to experience the divine, a feeling of worship and discovery, without journeying not into oneself, but into 'ourselves.' If the relations of 'Quiver' are read through Irigaray's philosophy, it might explain the failure of Faith's quest, which founders because Artemis and Actaeon maintain their solitude of mind, that disabling habit that denies a positive relation with an other. Faith's story does not end in success, but there is a sense that she desires to be an individual and there is a hint that Fay's story in *Quiver* will have a different conclusion.

Part II: Uncanniness, Passing and the Detective's Story

In addition to the recycling of mythology in 'Quiver,' *Quiver* employs a detective narrative and in this second section, I argue that use of this specific genre – bound up as it is with physical and psychological uncanniness – allows Rees-Jones to explore interconnectedness with others in a quest for dialogue. This use of the

⁸²³ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 50.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

uncanny is rooted in the setting: the city of Liverpool with its communities of Welsh, English, Irish and Chinese and with its history of involvement with colonial projects. Both Fay and Mara pass in this society disguising their difference. Their otherness is signaled by uncanniness and this is a first step towards listening to and recognising the other.

The uncanny (often known by the German, *unheimlich*, or literally ‘unhomely’) is often associated with the hidden, the secret and the invisible and it signals a frightening quality of otherness that emerges from seemingly familiar objects and things. Freud’s 1919 essay, ‘The Uncanny,’ defines the uncanny in relation to the human psyche. Freud recognises that the *unheimlich* is a kind of sub-category of *heimlich*: the term, *heimlich* meaning ‘belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly,’⁸²⁵ in addition to signifying ‘[c]oncealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others.’⁸²⁶ *Unheimlich* is only used, according to Freud, ‘as the contrary only of the first signification of “heimlich”,’ the opposite of homely, but not the opposite of concealed.⁸²⁷ I am not the first critic to highlight that this feeling of hiddenness is also a characteristic of some versions of passing, where a seemingly ‘normal,’ conventional subject is suddenly revealed as different or strange, whether that be in terms of race, sexuality, culture or religion. For example, Justin D. Edwards’ *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* asserts that the issues surrounding miscegenation and passing are bound up with ‘ambiguity, paradox and confusion,’ which ‘are present in Freud’s theory of the

⁸²⁵ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ *Art and Literature*, ed. Albert Dickson, trans. James Strachey, 1985, vol. 14 (London: Penguin, 1990), 335 – 376 (342).

⁸²⁶ Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ 344.

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 345.

uncanny.⁸²⁸ Edwards emphasises that the uncanny is so important in areas such as passing because it ‘may prompt questions about the boundaries and limits of self, as well as the very logic of identity’ and its doubling ‘strikes at the heart of individuality’ dictating that the subject ‘face the fiction of a stable self.’⁸²⁹

This challenge to the notion of a whole and bounded or ontological self reflects Irigaray’s quest towards understanding selfhood and one’s relation with an other, since Irigaray suggests in *The Way of the Heart* that the ‘mystery’ of human beings must be ‘cultivated thanks to a poetic way of dwelling.’⁸³⁰ This poetic mode of dwelling is tied up with the unfathomable secret of otherness, since as in the case of the subject who passes, identity is a ‘secret’ that ‘unfolds without any mastery by our seeing.’⁸³¹ Irigaray denies any easy logic of categorisation via one’s visual appearance, but concludes that what is strange about the other must remain ‘hidden,’ so that the verisimilitude of difference ‘can be safeguarded.’⁸³² Rather than being stripped of his or her uncanniness, the ‘mystery of the other’ must be maintained so that it can ‘surprise without being reduced to some familiar evaluation at our disposal.’⁸³³

This view of a positive aspect to hidden or eclipsed otherness corroborates with certain critical readings of passing such as Martha J. Cutter’s essay, ‘Sliding Significations: Passing as Narrative Strategy in Nella Larsen’s Fiction.’ Cutter begins her essay on Larsen’s seminal passing fiction by emphasising that the strategy of passing is ‘a subversive strategy for *avoiding* the enclosures of a racist, classist, and sexist society’ and in Larsen’s 1929 novel *Passing*, such a strategy becomes a way to ‘not be

⁸²⁸ Justin D. Edwards, *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2003), xxv.

⁸²⁹ Edwards, *Gothic Passages*, xxv.

⁸³⁰ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 152.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸³² *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, 152.

confined by any one signification, be it of race, class, or sexuality.⁸³⁴ Cutter suggests that one of the characters in *Passing*, Clare, ‘founds her identity [...] on a self that is composed of and created by a series of guises and masks, performances and roles,’ so that she ‘transcends the labeling [sic] of society, for the more she passes, the more problematic and plural her presence becomes.’⁸³⁵ For Cutter as for Irigaray, it is the strangeness of eclipsed otherness that enables passing since the passing subject ‘functions as a signifier whose meaning cannot be stabilized, fixed, confined limited; and “passing” becomes the ultimate mechanism for creating a text that refuses to be contained, consumed, or reduced to unitary meaning.’⁸³⁶ Just as in her use of intertextuality, Rees-Jones enacts a feeling of uncanniness and a sense that the poetic voice is far from ‘authentic,’ so in the plotting of her uncanny detective story, she undermines conventional identities. It is through this exile from an ordinary selfhood, that Rees-Jones can discover what Irigaray would call ‘poetic dwelling,’ a way of finding ‘another means of approaching,’ which allows ‘an un-covering, of oneself and of the other, which reopens the place where each one takes shelter to prepare the moment of encounter.’⁸³⁷

Before beginning detailed analysis it is worth surveying theories of the uncanny and their relation to passing as manifested in different aspects of *Quiver*. Jentsch’s 1906 essay, ‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny,’ forms what Forbes Morlock calls in ‘Introduction to “On the Psychology of the Uncanny”,’ ‘the starting point, the point of disagreement, for Sigmund Freud’s celebrated essay.’⁸³⁸ Jentsch defines the uncanny’s

⁸³⁴ Martha J. Cutter, ‘Sliding Significations: “Passing” as a Narrative and Textual Strategy in Nella Larsen’s Fiction,’ *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), 75-100 (75).

⁸³⁵ Cutter, ‘Sliding Significations,’ 75.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸³⁷ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 152.

⁸³⁸ Forbes Morlock, ‘Introduction to “On the Psychology of the Uncanny”,’ *Angelaki* 2:1 (1995): 17-21 (17).

literal meaning as being ‘not quite “at home” or “at ease” in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems foreign.’⁸³⁹ He anchors this by suggesting that the uncanny invokes ‘a *lack of orientation*.’⁸⁴⁰ This confusion regarding literal and psychological orientation is played out in Rees-Jones’ representation of the city of Liverpool, which becomes a site where marginal identities enact an uncanny existence passing under the surface of the place. The first subsection in my analysis, ‘Passing Through Liverpool,’ focuses on the lack of orientation in Rees-Jones’ imaginary city using Anthony Vidler’s notion of a posturban city. This kind of city is inhabited by the architectural uncanny that exists as a kind of ‘unhomeliness’ offering spaces in which it is possible to pass in a familiar and strange landscape.

Liverpool represents a lack of orientation, yet the events that unfold against its backdrop are bound up with other aspects of the uncanny too. For example, Jentsch emphasises that feelings of uncanniness can be caused by ‘*doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate*.’⁸⁴¹ Jentsch continues by describing the uncanniness of the corpse: ‘The horror which a dead body (especially a human one), a death’s head, skeletons, and similar things cause can also be explained to a great extent by the fact that thoughts of latent animatedness always lie so close to these things.’⁸⁴² Freud also comments on uncertainty about the animate and inanimate when, in ‘The Uncanny,’ he discusses the return of the dead, the animation of severed limbs and animism.⁸⁴³ This kind of ambiguity also occurs in *Quiver* where the borderlines between the living and the dead are blurred, as is appropriate to a genre in which there is much currency between the

⁸³⁹ Ernst Jentsch, ‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906),’ *Angelaki* Vol 2:1 (1995). 7-16 (8).

⁸⁴⁰ Jentsch, ‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny,’ 8.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁴³ Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ 364-366.

dead and the living. My second subsection, titled 'Passing Over,' considers Fay's uncanny encounter with a corpse at the beginning of *Quiver*. Drawing on Judith Butler's identification of deathliness and passing in *Bodies That Matter*, I argue that the otherness of the dead body is viewed with suspicion as an object that might be passing for dead and I suggest that these suspicions infect Fay's whole and bounded identity 'instigating fears that through contact with the corpse, she herself might pass over.

If confusion about the dead and the living is a significant aspect of uncanniness, uncertainty as to the identities of one and an other is also a source of ambiguity. Freud extends Jentsch's analysis in this area discussing the repetition of events and the reoccurrence of numbers for example. Otto Rank's *The Double* is also a useful source for Freud, as a study that analyses literary and cultural narratives. Freud takes particular interest in Rank's chapter on E.T.A. Hoffmann, which outlines a number of motifs associated with uncanny doubles. According to Rank, the double may have 'a likeness which resembles the main character down to the smallest particulars'; it may emerge from a mirror as the protagonist's 'mirror image' and it 'works at cross purposes with its proto-type.'⁸⁴⁴ Freud extends Rank's theories, studying the character of Olympia, the clockwork doll taken for human in Hoffmann's short story 'The Sandman' which appeared in *The Golden Pot and Other Tales* published in 1814. Freud suggests that Olympia represents doubt about one's own identity, so that the subject is 'in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own' and 'there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self.'⁸⁴⁵

Critics of passing literature are often keen to point out that passing narratives are bound up with duality concerning 'real' or 'true' selves. Cheryl A. Wall's *Women of*

⁸⁴⁴ Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytical Study*, 1914, ed. & trans. Harry J. Tucker, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 33.

⁸⁴⁵ Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 356.

the Harlem Renaissance suggests that passing is concerned not only with ‘marginality,’ but also with ‘cultural dualism.’⁸⁴⁶ Confusion about identity in *Quiver* is analysed in the subsection, ‘Passing for Myself,’ which focuses on the empathetic powers of the detective, a staple of the detective genre, are extended to an uncanny level. As the detective, Fay must seek out the ghostly Mara in encounters that destabilise her sense of self until Mara and Fay could almost pass for each other. Drawing on Tania Modleski’s *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, I suggest that the painful doubling between the women is an example of Modleski’s female uncanny, which is defined as a feeling of overwhelming interconnectedness. I argue that while the experience of interconnectedness in *Quiver* is painful, as in Wall’s account, it is also liberating, since as Cutter writes: ‘To assume a single identity in a world in which identity itself is often a performance – a mask, a public persona – is to ensure psychological suicide.’⁸⁴⁷

It is appropriate that Cutter mentions performance, because the acting out of visual uncanniness as a source of inspiration and freedom is analysed in the subsection, ‘The Success of Passing.’ Freud focuses on the vulnerability of the eyes and uncertainty about what is being seen as a significant part of his analysis and the visual is one strong common link that binds uncanniness and passing together.⁸⁴⁸ This version of uncanniness emerges from passing as it challenges the assumption that, as Schlossberg explains, ‘we are subjects constituted by our visions of ourselves and others, and we trust that our ability to see and read carries with it a certain degree of

⁸⁴⁶ Cheryl A. Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 88. Wall uses the context of African American literary passing, yet her comment seems relevant to passing in general.

⁸⁴⁷ Cutter, ‘Sliding Significations,’ 76.

⁸⁴⁸ Freud, ‘The Uncanny,’ 350-352.

epistemological certainty.⁸⁴⁹ As it undermines the ‘intimate relationship between the visual and the known,’ passing ‘disrupts the logics and conceits around which identity categories are established and maintained.’⁸⁵⁰ Similarly, in *Looking for Harlem: Urban Aesthetics in African-American Literature*, Maria Balshaw argues that the visible spectacle is intrinsically important to passing and in seminal works of passing from the Harlem Renaissance, she notices ‘attention to the construction of self as spectacle and through the repeated use of the motif of the exchanged glance between women in a public space.’⁸⁵¹ Proceeding from Fay’s and Mara’s empathetic relationship, I explore how Fay learns from her companion how to become invisible and escape the categorising knowledge of eyes evading figures of authority and regulation. Both women are concerned with what Balshaw describes as ‘negotiations of visual economies, economies that are bound up with the representation of very specific forms of difference.’⁸⁵² It is this economy of the visual that Rees-Jones seeks to evade and one escape route is found via Fay’s interconnectedness with Mara. Drawing on Terry Castle’s *The Apparitional Lesbian*, I suggest that strategies that express a subject’s otherness through the negation of difference can be a liberating strategy when it brings the presence of strangeness beneath familiar appearances into uncanny focus.

Seeking otherness and discovering it through an interconnectedness with an other is the quest in the first half of *Quiver* and it is enabled via the uncanniness of passing, whether that be passing in the posturban city, passing over from death to life, creating an exchange of passing with an other, or using passing a means to evade visual categorisation. As Marion Rust suggests in ‘The Subaltern as Imperialist: Speaking of

⁸⁴⁹ Sclossberg, ‘Introduction: Rites of Passing,’ 1.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁵¹ Maria Balshaw, *Looking for Harlem: Urban Aesthetics in African-American Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 55.

⁸⁵² Balshaw, *Looking for Harlem*, 63.

Olaudah Equiano,' the passing subject 'mocks our melancholy, ridiculing essentialist notions of a "true" self.'⁸⁵³ Beyond conventional, bounded identity, the protagonist of *Quiver* discovers the transcendent pleasures of passing along with its paradox of belonging and exile that begins in the strangeness and familiarity of Rees-Jones' Liverpool.

Passing Through Liverpool

The most basic staple of the detective story is the setting of the city and the urban *mise-en-scène*. As John Rignall writes in 'From City Streets to Country Houses: The Detective as Flâneur,' '[t]he emergence of modern detective fiction in the mid-nineteenth century is clearly related to one of the salient social features of the age, the development of the modern metropolis.'⁸⁵⁴ Similarly, in *The Architectural Uncanny*, Anthony Vidler notes the link between the rise of the metropolis, detective fiction and the uncanny. Vidler emphasises that 'the uncanny [...] was born out of the rise of great cities, their disturbingly heterogeneous crowds and newly scaled spaces demanding a point of reference that, while not refuting a certain instability, nevertheless served to dominate it aesthetically.'⁸⁵⁵ In contrast to this chaos, Vidler explores how 'the privileged point of view – of Hoffmann's observer keeping his careful distance from the marketplace, looking through "The Cousin's Corner Window" with opera glasses; of Poe and of Dickens watching the crowd; of Baudelaire losing himself in the swarming boulevards – attempted to preserve a sense of individual security that was

⁸⁵³ Marion Rust, 'The Subaltern as Imperialist: Speaking of Olaudah Equiano,' *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), 21-36 (23).

⁸⁵⁴ John Rignall, 'From City Streets to Country Houses: The Detective as Flâneur,' *The Art of Murder: New Essays on Detective Fiction*, ed. Gustav H. Klaus and Stephen Knight (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1998), 67-75 (67).

⁸⁵⁵ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994), 4.

only precariously sustained by the endless quest of the detective tracking his clues through the apparent chaos of modern life.⁸⁵⁶ Traditionally, the detective story is a battle between the ‘privileged point of view’ of the observant detective and the ‘disturbingly heterogeneous crowds’ of suspects. The uncanniness of detective fiction then emerges in the contrast of the detective’s interiority with a frightening quality of otherness that is hidden under the surface of ordinary objects and things.

In *Quiver*, Liverpool becomes a place to stage such encounters and in thinking about Rees-Jones’ version of that city, a chapter on the ‘posturban’ in *The Architectural Uncanny* by Anthony Vidler is particularly relevant. Before outlining what the posturban means, Vidler considers how memory was important in the making of cities as a means of keeping alive their previous inhabitants and events. These memories would become part of what Vidler calls the city’s ‘complex mental map of significance by which the city might be recognized as “home”, as something not foreign, and as constituting a (more or less) moral and protected environment for actual daily life.’⁸⁵⁷ This imagined city became a mental map of the ideal, the familiar and remembered city and Vidler describes such cities as ‘memory theaters [sic].’⁸⁵⁸ However, he suggests that after modernism, the city changes so that the fullness of being, so essential to the cities of the past, is erased and instead the presence of absence is significant. From this moment emerges the posturban city, a site that provides no inscriptions or epigrams for its inhabitants. Rather Vidler suggests that it is made of subtexts and infratexts, prosopoeia and apostrophe. It is a state that provides both the signature and the

⁸⁵⁶ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 4.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

erasure of a 'city without names'; consequently it is uncanny in its mingling of strange and familiar elements.⁸⁵⁹

Vidler states that, in the posturban city, the margins have invaded the centre and disseminated its focus. The city can no longer be thought of with the body as a guiding metaphor and the result is homesickness or unhomeliness. Vidler's argument is indebted to Homi Bhabha and particularly to Bhabha's thoughts on the uncanny in his essay, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,' and his study, *The Location of Culture*. Vidler cites Bhabha's suggestion that the uncanny destabilises notions of centre and periphery and notes that in 'DissemiNation,' Bhabha refers to Freud's essay on the uncanny in order to gesture towards an idea of 'double-time'; that is, 'a liminal, uncertain state of cultural belief when the archaic emerges in the midst or margins of modernity as a result of some psychic ambivalence or intellectual uncertainty.'⁸⁶⁰ A similar kind of uncanniness is described in *The Location of Culture*, in which unhomeliness dictates a 'borderline existence.'⁸⁶¹ This uncanniness 'inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive "image" at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world.'⁸⁶² Using Bhabha's theorising, Vidler imagines the return of once shunned and exiled subjects to the city. These marginals pass beneath the surface of the posturban city emerging to reveal themselves in uncanny encounters.

This description of the posturban city could apply to Rees-Jones' version of the city in *Quiver*. In an interview on the website *icLiverpool*, Rees-Jones describes

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 186.

⁸⁶⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,' *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 291-322 (295).

⁸⁶¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.

⁸⁶² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 13.

Liverpool as a place that 'doesn't seem to be part of England at all.'⁸⁶³ To Rees-Jones, Liverpool 'seems very much to be its own place'; she describes it as 'an in-between place' and 'somewhere where the surroundings can change quite rapidly.'⁸⁶⁴ Liverpool does not belong to the centralising power of England rather it is in-between or 'a borderland' as Rees-Jones describes it in 'Liverpool Blues.'⁸⁶⁵ This correlates with Vidler's and Bhabha's view that a borderland's mingling of the strange and familiar, of the public and private, of the centre and periphery allows marginalised and exiled subjects to pass beneath the cover of the posturban city emerging in interstices of uncanniness.

As a kind of borderland, cultural origins in Liverpool are unclear or ambiguous in *Quiver's* version of Liverpool. Rees-Jones presents the heroine, Fay, and her husband, Will, as outsiders. 'The Story of a Life' pictures the characters' origins returning to haunt them:

Our ancestors collude in corners.
My grandparents from Bethesda, Liverpool.
His grandfather from Tipperary,
grandmother from Guangzhou.
I see them speaking Welsh/Chinese⁸⁶⁶

The characters' ancestors are depicted in a conspiratory fashion as if the narrator fears exposure. This is the only point at which Rees-Jones mentions Wales and it is the sole example of Rees-Jones classifying characters explicitly in terms of race, culture or nationality. None of the other characters are written of in such a manner and race or culture is generally ambiguous. When a line of inheritance cannot be ignored as in the

⁸⁶³ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Author Brings Poetic Justice to Her Heroine,' Interview with Mike Chapple, *icLiverpool*, 26 May 2004 <http://icliverpool.icnetwork.co.uk/0100news/0100regionalnews/tm_method=full%26objectid=14276391%26siteid=50061-name_page.html> (accessed 6th June 2007).

⁸⁶⁴ Rees-Jones, 'Author Brings...', <<http://icliverpoolnetwork.co.uk>>.

⁸⁶⁵ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Liverpool Blues,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 27 (27.13).

⁸⁶⁶ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'The Story of a Life,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 13-14 (13.10-14).

case of Fay's friend, Erica, who has a new-born baby, there is a feeling of doubt.

'Wonderland' describes the child as 'uncannily like her' as if to throw doubt on the lineage.⁸⁶⁷ Rees-Jones establishes in 'The Story of a Life' that Fay is of Welsh-English ancestry and that Will has Irish-Chinese roots and interestingly, these cultural groups all have strong communities in the city of Liverpool. The marriage between Fay and Will then destabilises the supposed English centre of the city of Liverpool by revealing the marginal subjects that make up three quarters of the couple's lineages. In the Liverpool of *Quiver*, different kinds of otherness emerge from the homely landmarks and mingle with one another, so that those of the margins can speak to each other in strange new languages like 'Welsh/Chinese.'⁸⁶⁸

The plot of *Quiver* revolves around Fay's excursions into the city to track down the look-a-like of the murdered woman in order to discover whether she is an automaton, a ghost or a twin. It is no coincidence that when the double of the murdered Mara does emerge as an uncanny presence, familiar yet infinitely unknowable, she materialises out of the familiar/strange landscape of Liverpool itself: out of 'Paradise Street'; out of 'a droopy cloud'; out of 'Mothers with their kids in /

⁸⁶⁷ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Wonderland,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 23 (23.13).

⁸⁶⁸ In Liverpool, there is a feeling that something can be familiar and strange at the same time and that something can be one thing and an other simultaneously as in the case of the language, 'Welsh/Chinese.' 'The Story of a Life' goes on to describe the two subjects in this dialogue as 'Two dragons – east and west – [that] collide' (Rees-Jones, 'The Story of a Life,' 13.16), and in interview, Rees-Jones explains that in *Quiver*, she imagines 'the Welsh and Chinese dragons as a synchronicity of the East and West' and that there is 'the comparison of Western festivals, such as Easter, with Chinese regenerative celebrations' (Rees-Jones, Personal Interview, 15th July 2006). Consequently, when in 'Square One,' Fay describes the Chinatown celebrations and 'the dragon dance that binds the people,' there is a hidden suggestion of her own Welsh origins, a meaning that is beneath the obvious reading of the text. (See Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Square One,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 75-76 (76.21)). The binding of the people signified by the dragon dance might gesture then to an interconnectedness of different marginal groups which reflects the relationship between Fay and Mara who are bound together by difference. This comparison seems particularly relevant, since Mara herself might be Chinese; in 'A Confrontation,' Fay examines a photo of Mara 'back-dropped by concrete buildings daubed in Chinese characters.' (See Deryn Rees-Jones, 'A Confrontation,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 64 (64.6)).

buggies' and out of 'Hawkers' and 'shoppers.'⁸⁶⁹ The city colludes with Mara as an uncanny, liminal, marginal subject.

However, Mara is not the only uncanny presence to emerge from the city of Liverpool. In 'A Visitation,' the city communicates with historical others:

Liverpool opens like a rent in time. The centuries elide

to a collage of water, newspaper print.
The songs of slaves with their branded foreheads

rise to the heavens in a shift of pain,
and then the refugees take up their song,

abandoned in an unknown port.
Choleric children shake and cry.⁸⁷⁰

Liverpool's uncanniness emerges as the familiar cityscape is invaded by marginal subjects of history. The interaction between the real and spectral occupants of Liverpool creates an uncanny effect as it seems unclear as to whether a particular subject is real, imagined or a ghost. Liverpool allows those abandoned by grand narratives to take centre stage and these figures, the slave, the refugee and the choleric children, represent those displaced by history. The menial, alien and disabled others are the lost or repressed history of the city, which manifests itself not in a visual landscape but in a landscape of sound: the songs of slaves and refugees and the moans of diseased children. Rees-Jones' Liverpool reveals an emergent otherness passing invisibly within the familiar landscape.

In *Quiver* then, Liverpool is presented as a bridge between the norm and that which passes for the norm, particularly in relation to race and culture. It is a bridge between the English city and the marginal communities of Welsh, Chinese and Irish and between modern city dwellers and oppressed others of the past. In 'An Ending'

⁸⁶⁹ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'A Second Sighting,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 41 (41.1-4).

⁸⁷⁰ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'A Visitation,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 44 (44.2-8).

when Fay sweeps the cityscape for meaning, there is the recognition that the city is in communication with what is hidden or 'beyond' easy understanding:

[...] a figure of Christ looking out at the city,
his arms embracing the theatres and restaurants,
the students and prostitutes, the crown-like peaks
of another cathedral, the seagulls, the river,
the skyline, what is beyond.⁸⁷¹

When Rees-Jones describes the Christ figure and his gesture of embrace, she could be describing Liverpool and its potential to bring the conventional and the other into communication. Liverpool includes sites of culture, hedonism, education and prohibition. It is multiple as the uncanny double of 'another cathedral' indicates and it is concerned with the 'beyond.' Rees-Jones' representation of Liverpool creates a backdrop for uncanny happenings: the lack of a coherent imagined or remembered city; confusion over whether objects are alive or inanimate; the return of the historically and culturally passing subjects; and the erasure of memory to create a borderland in which others can manoeuvre their selves. Rees-Jones' novel-in-verse tells the story of how the passing subject might overcome the frightening difficulty of the uncanny in order to use it as a source of power and energy and it signals the reactivation of the city by those defined as outsiders or others. It is, in Bhabha's words, a declaration of 'how easily that boundary that secures the cohesive limit of the western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious *internal* liminality that provides a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exile, the marginal, and the emergent.'⁸⁷²

⁸⁷¹ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'An Ending,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 81 (81.18-22).

⁸⁷² Bhabha, 'DissemiNation,' 300.

Passing Over

While detective fiction is rooted on one level in its exchanges with its metropolitan setting and frightening underworlds, another aspect of the genre's *mise-en-scène* is the corpse. The body is a site of mystery and the preoccupation of the detective is to discover how the body came to exist in such an abject state. The mutilation of the human body denies the subject a whole and bounded self and the result is the corpse, an event horizon between life and death. The detective genre's unusual preoccupation with the body or corpse gives rise to much exploration of the uncanny in relation to abject feelings of disgust, fear and loathing. There is often something very uncanny about the corpse and this corresponds with theorising of the uncanny. For example, Freud's analysis of Hoffman's Olympia, the clockwork doll taken for human, brings him to the conclusion that uncanniness sometimes emerges 'when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one.'⁸⁷³ This kind of uncanniness occurs in the classic 1939 detective novel, *The Big Sleep*, when Raymond Chandler's hero, Philip Marlowe, encounters a corpse: 'His glass eye shone brightly at me and was by far the most lifelike thing about him.'⁸⁷⁴ Chandler's corpse is less alive than the inanimate props about his person and the description creates an uncanny sensation conjured by the brightness in the glass eye: a sign of life. The detective fears the corpse's presence and suspects that it may be passing for dead rather than passing over.

The magical uncanniness of a deathly return is intimately connected to passing and in her study, *Bodies That Matter*, Butler asserts that, 'passing carries the double meaning of crossing the color [sic] line and crossing over into death: passing as a kind

⁸⁷³ Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 354.

⁸⁷⁴ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, 1939 (London: Penguin, 1970), 40.

of passing on.’⁸⁷⁵ In her detailed analysis of Larsen’s seminal novel, *Passing*, Butler examines, among other aspects of the text, the role of literary deaths in relation to the passing subject and she suggests that such a death represents ‘rage boiling up, shattering, leaving shards of whiteness, shattering the veneer of whiteness.’⁸⁷⁶ What is most important in this account for my analysis is the idea that death itself might be used in literary texts on the theme of passing to disrupt or shatter normative, conventional modes of being. This shattering affects not only the passing subject but even infects those with whole and bounded selfhoods.

Deathly uncanniness is a concern of Rees-Jones’ first collection, *Signs Round a Dead Body*, which is preoccupied with the corpse. In this early work, Rees-Jones is already using literary encounters with death as a way of disrupting conventional identities and modes of being. The title poem of *Signs Round a Dead Body* might be a dry run of the opening poem of *Quiver*, ‘The Cemetery’: ‘Some day, by chance, you’ll find that you’re the first / To find the body of a man.’⁸⁷⁷ This encounter with death is also a meeting with otherness and Rees-Jones focuses on the detail of the corpse:

Note how each toe is unresponsive when it’s tickled,
By opening door, by rabbit, or a sleepy tide; the way that
Pine cones, or novellas have been thoughtlessly
Strewn round him – silent as himself, like meteors, unopened gifts,
Like huge forgotten shells.⁸⁷⁸

The units of the body’s toes are emphasised by the monosyllables in the choriamb: ‘Note how/ each toe.’ However, the line then lapses into an irregular rhythm indicating that the unresponsiveness of the corpse cannot be contained within strict metre; it is something difficult and unknowable. This feeling pervades the rest of the

⁸⁷⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London: Routledge, 1993), 183.

⁸⁷⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 173.

⁸⁷⁷ Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘Signs Round a Dead Body,’ *Signs Round a Dead Body* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), 9 (9.1-2).

⁸⁷⁸ Rees-Jones, ‘Signs Round a Dead Body,’ 9.14-18.

extract and although the body is lifeless and silent, the intense scrutiny to which it is submitted raises the suspicion that the corpse may still be animated even in its passivity. There is also a sense that the detritus that surrounds the corpse has taken on more life than the human body with an uncanny effect: the pine cone has potential for growth and the novella, a shorter novel, is imbued with a sense of brevity, but it also derives from the Latin, *novus*, meaning 'new.' These objects are familiar to the reader, yet the body and its surrounding dead paraphernalia are also imbued with the extra-terrestrial power of meteors and with the unknowable quality of unopened gifts. The uncanny gathering of the familiar and the strange emerges to disrupt the deadness of the body and to offer it new life. The conch shell is an object that a person might hold to his or her ear to hear from inside a sound that mimics the sea, signalling the possibility of communication with other places and subjects. Yet paradoxically these immense shells have been forgotten. The shell appears in other poems as a paradoxical object which is full although it seems to be empty. In *The Memory Tray's* 'Iconographies,' the narrator states: 'Empty as a seashell, I give myself to you entirely.'⁸⁷⁹ In the same collection, 'Following,' a lament for lost unity, describes: 'The lost curve of a perfect shell.'⁸⁸⁰ The shell is rather like the passing subject, since at its heart there is an absence, an emptiness or an invisibility. In listening, one can hear the ghostly sound of the sea, the ghostly presence of otherness.

Just as in 'Signs Round a Dead Body' where the corpse passes between life and death, so Rees-Jones' treatment of the dead body in *Quiver* can be read as a play on the act of passing over. At the beginning of the novel-in-verse, Fay's jog in 'The Cemetery' is interrupted when she discovers Mara's body, an experience that offers rich

⁸⁷⁹ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Iconographies,' *The Memory Tray* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994), 9-10 (9.1).

⁸⁸⁰ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Following,' *The Memory Tray* (Bridgend: Seren, 1994), 27 (27.10).

opportunities for investigating otherness. The corpse appears as a subject of difference that infects the observer with its otherness:

What is it like to know death so slowly,
 hair and fingernails still growing
 like Lizzie Siddall's in the grave?
 What is it like – the presence of absence –
 The space you keep in that clenched right hand?⁸⁸¹

Rees-Jones writes of the corpse in the detached manner of one who is uncertain over what is animate or inanimate. The speaker surveys the body as the murderer would have and focuses on the detail. Fay remembers that the fingernails and hair of the body continue to grow although this body lacks the usual signs of life or identity. As in 'Signs Round a Dead Body,' there is an uncanny sense that the body is not truly inanimate. The 'clenched right hand' is an apt metaphor for the corpse as its fleshly structure closes around nothingness. The centre is absent within the fist's empty hand, just as animation is absent from the body's empty shell.

Amongst other images of deathliness, Rees-Jones mentions Elizabeth or Lizzie Siddall who was the muse and model of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelite artists.⁸⁸² Elizabeth Siddall is a powerful figure of deathliness in Victorian iconographies and her presence in the poem emphasises uncertainty over life and death.⁸⁸³ In *Christina Rossetti: A Biography*, Frances Thomas retells a significant incident

⁸⁸¹ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'The Cemetery,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 9-11 (10.43-47).

⁸⁸² Siddall's name has a number of spellings. Dante Gabriel Rossetti encouraged her to change the original spelling, 'Siddall' to 'Siddal,' because as Hawkesley notes in *Lizzie Siddal*, "Siddal" was thought to be 'more genteel.' I maintain the same spelling as Rees-Jones. (See Linda Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel* (London: Andre Deutsch, 2004), 32).

⁸⁸³ Siddall's status as an uncanny, deathly figure was assured when she posed in a bath of cold water for John Everett Millais' 1852 painting, *Ophelia*. Elizabeth Bronfen writes in *Over Her Dead Body* of the mythology surrounding the painting: 'Apocrypha has it that Millais was so absorbed by his work that during one session he allowed the candles to go out and when some friends saved the model from the chilly water she was close to pneumonia.' Bronfen also writes of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting Siddall commenting on his obsession: 'It is remarkable that Rossetti was possessed by the notion of a dead beloved while his chosen muse was still alive.' Siddall died in 1862 from an overdose of laudanum. (See Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 169 & 170-171).

in which Dante Gabriel Rossetti ‘dug up Lizzie Siddall’s coffin to retrieve his poems.’⁸⁸⁴ When Rees-Jones describes Siddall’s fingernails growing in the grave, it recalls Lucinda Hawksley’s account of the exhumation in her biography of Siddall, *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel*. Hawksley paraphrases Dante Rossetti’s agent, Charles Augustus Howell, who described the uncanny appearance of Siddall’s corpse: ‘She was not a skeleton, he claimed, she was as beautiful as she had ever been in life and her hair, which had kept growing after death, now filled the coffin and was as brilliantly copper-coloured as it had been in life.’⁸⁸⁵ The uncanny uncertainty over whether the corpse is alive or dead is reflected in the reference to Siddall’s nails and hair still growing in the grave.

Rees-Jones further explores the body and its possible animation by citing its existence in other forms: in the photo album, in the snapshot, in memory. ‘It’s a body I know from snapshots, old albums / Carrying histories, other lives, other selves.’⁸⁸⁶ The importance of the body as a narrator of history and the past is emphasised in the image that visualises the body carrying a precious load of selfhood. However, the feelings of horror that surround the corpse chime with Calvino’s comment in ‘La Poubelle Agréée,’ that the purpose of producing a detritus of objects or props is ‘to confirm that for one more day I have been the producer of detritus and not detritus myself.’⁸⁸⁷ The uncanny is conjured by the relation of identity to its detritus or its props, which has been reversed much in the manner of the example of the glass eye in Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*.

The corpse is then a site of fear and horror, yet, in ‘The Cemetery,’ there is an empathetic connection between Fay and the dead woman. Rees-Jones’ exact phrasing

⁸⁸⁴ Frances Thomas, *Christina Rossetti: A Biography* (London: Virago, 1994) 9.

⁸⁸⁵ Hawksley, *Lizzie Siddal*, 211.

⁸⁸⁶ Rees-Jones, ‘The Cemetery,’ 10.48-49.

⁸⁸⁷ Calvino, ‘La Poubelle Agréée,’ 104.

provokes uncertainty: 'I think of her now, the twist of flesh/ on her stripped lean torso, remember a smile' suggests an intense, intimate knowledge of the dead woman.⁸⁸⁸ The relation between Fay and the murdered woman is particularly intense when Fay falls beside the corpse in a faint: 'suddenly I stumble, hit the ground, / become myself stretched out among the graves.'⁸⁸⁹ The action of falling beside the corpse in a pose like that of dead body signals an equivalence between Fay and the cadaver and it is clear that boundaries of identity become more uncertain and Fay seems to pass over into deathliness. The faint represents a reaction to the threat to whole identity, but in spite of this danger, there is a sense of liberation in losing a sense of certainty.⁸⁹⁰ Consequently Fay loses a sense of there being omniscient 'voice from on high' and finally she concludes: 'Everything's still.'⁸⁹¹ This is the first occasion of many in which Fay will be uncertain about who is who and it is this uncanny feeling that enables her to pursue a strategy of passing not between life and death, but between one and an other.

⁸⁸⁸ Rees-Jones, 'The Cemetery,' 11.57-58.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 11.37-38.

⁸⁹⁰ It is tempting to read Rees-Jones' treatment of the relationship between Fay and the corpse in relation to Kristeva's model of the abject, which I use in 'Chapter 2: Becoming Minor: Gwyneth Lewis' Journey into Decreation' when I analyse Lewis' treatment of the corpse of the mother or mother-tongue in *Keeping Mum*. As in Lewis' 'The Language-Murder,' Rees Jones represents her narrator fainting at the sight of a dead body, a scenario that is described in Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. 'In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away' (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4). However, apart from her representation of the corpse and narrator, Rees-Jones' depiction of otherness does not present Kristeva's definition of abjection as the 'massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness' (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2). Abjection is an extension of uncanniness and Kristeva describes it as '[e]ssentially different from "uncanniness," more violent, too' and 'elaborated through a failure to recognize [sic] its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory' (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 5). Although Rees-Jones does seem to evoke abjection in certain poems, *Quiver* is dominated by an unsettling mixture of the familiar *and* strange, so I focus on the whole on the uncanny in analysing the text. Rees-Jones' adoption of the uncanny, rather than imagery of abjection, indicates how her approach is different to that of Lewis, since where as Lewis wants to obliterate the self, Rees-Jones wants to extend it into ambiguity and uncertainty.

⁸⁹¹ Rees-Jones, 'The Cemetery,' 11.66-67.

Passing from Myself

The relationship between the detective and his or her other, the culprit guilty of a crime, is at the heart of the detective genre. In 'Tracking Down the Past: Women in Detective Fiction,' Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple write of the 'passive' deductive powers of investigators and it is established there that the empathy between detective and criminal resists the bounded identity associated with 'traditionally masculine, active qualities.'⁸⁹² Similarly, in 'Psychoanalysis, Detection and Fiction: Julia Kristeva's Detective Novels,' Colin Davis writes of the relationship between the detective and criminal as representing a deeper set of human relations: 'The gift of meaning, or the gift of a story, is made by one subject to another, analyst to analysand, detective to criminal, author to reader; it is thus in some sense simultaneously the story of both, though it clearly can never be the *only* story of either.'⁸⁹³ Davis' account, like that of Coward and Semple, chimes with Freud's theorising of the uncanny, when he writes about doubleness, uncertainty and identity and poses the notion of an uncanny subject who 'identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own.'⁸⁹⁴

This exchange between the detective and the criminal is often rendered as a macho relationship between men or as part of the combative relationship between the hard-boiled detective and his *noir* heroine. Coward and Semple describe this aspect of the detective genre as revealing its masculine tendencies, in which women are threatening, dangerous or noxious, particularly in the case of woman culprits.⁸⁹⁵ In the

⁸⁹² Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple, 'Tracking Down the Past: Women in Detective Fiction,' *From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in a Postmodern World*, ed. Helen Carr (London: Pandora, 1989), 39-57 (50).

⁸⁹³ Colin Davis, 'Psychoanalysis, Detection and Fiction: Julia Kristeva's Detective Novels,' *The Journal of Contemporary French Studies* 6.2 (2002): 294-306 (302).

⁸⁹⁴ Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 356.

⁸⁹⁵ In 'Victors and Victims: The Hard Boiled Detective and Recent Feminist Crime Fiction,' Claire Gorrara writes that women in male dominated detective fiction 'are typified as either Madonna or

representation of women in *Quiver*, the relationship between the detective and the culprit is more specific. Coward and Semple suggest that one strategy for that subverts this trend is the use of closed circles of women and they suggest that 'the relationships between women are presented as deep, often passionate.'⁸⁹⁶ This treatment of women in detective fiction is interesting with regard to 'the sympathetic portrayal of women's relationships.'⁸⁹⁷

Mirroring between women is an important aspect of *Quiver* and Rees-Jones has said in interview that in writing this collection, she wanted to avoid a conventional heterosexual narrative.⁸⁹⁸ The empathetic uncanny relationship that develops between Fay, the detective, and Mara, the suspected criminal, is erotic, and while it is never suggested that there is a romantic relationship between the women, each can pass for the other as if they were twins or clones, a notion that will be significant when I come to analyse the second half of *Quiver*. Mara haunts Fay, first as a corpse and later as a ghostly presence and she is also an 'other woman' who may have seduced her husband and who now appears to be seducing Fay.

A haunting female figure also appears in Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance*, where Modleski links the ghost of detective and Gothic fiction to her definition of the female uncanny. This kind of uncanniness emerges from a particular kind of story, which begins, as Modleski notes, when, the female protagonist

whore, passive helpmate or brutal murderess' (169). (See Claire Gorrara, 'Victors and Victims: The Hard Boiled Detective and Recent Feminist Crime Fiction,' *The Art of Murder: New Essays on Detective Fiction*, ed. Gustav H. Klaus and Stephen Knight (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1998), 167-179 (169)). Raymond Chandler's archetypal, hard-boiled detective novel, *The Big Sleep*, reveals typical anxiety concerning women. The murderer is Carmen Sternwood, who is described as having 'the scraped bone look' and Chandler sums her up as: 'Aged deteriorated, become animal, and not a nice animal' (Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, 210). Philip Marlowe associates Carmen with bestiality and decomposition. Her appearance is abject in the Kristevan sense in this horrifying scene when she finally reveals herself as the culprit. The relationship between the detective and the female culprit is one of provocation and disgust.

⁸⁹⁶ Coward and Semple, 'Tracking Down the Past,' 53.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁹⁸ Rees-Jones, Interview, 15th July 2006.

experiences 'a strong identification with a woman from either the remote or very recent past, a woman who in almost every case has died a mysterious and perhaps violent or gruesome death.'⁸⁹⁹ This plot is similar to that of *Quiver*, since it tells a story in which Fay comes to empathise with Mara, who was possibly her husband's lover and later she becomes convinced that the woman was murdered perhaps even by her husband. In 'My Husband, Will,' the beginnings of identification are evident; after imagining Will and Mara in an intimate moment – 'his hand a compass, her spine a map' – Fay thinks of her own identity and 'in the mirror it is her [Mara's] face / not mine.'⁹⁰⁰ Much of *Quiver* is devoted to the haunting of the Fay by the dead woman who she glimpses constantly in her everyday life. As the story develops it is clear that contrary to the gothic model, Mara is not a ghost but a doppelganger of the dead victim. Thus the uncanny effect is intensified as empathetic doubling of Fay and Mara is balanced by the dead Mara and live Mara.⁹⁰¹

Modleski's definition of the female uncanny emerges from the doubling of one woman with another and it is a development of Freud's theorising when he diagnoses two classes of the uncanny, one engendered by 'repressed complexes' and the other 'proceeding from forms of thought that have been surmounted.'⁹⁰² Modleski reading Freud concludes that there are 'two possible sources for this sensation [of the

⁸⁹⁹ Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (Hamdon, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982), 69.

⁹⁰⁰ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'My Husband, Will,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 18 (18.10, 18.14-15).

⁹⁰¹ The mirroring between Fay and Mara in Rees-Jones' novel-in-verse recalls her critical interests in a passage of *Consorting with Angels* in which she analyses the poem, 'The Mirror,' by Edith Sitwell. Rees-Jones describes the poem as 'a monologue in the voice of a lady's maid [...] who sees a ghost in the moonlight of her mistress' chamber, only to realise that this "ghost" is her "lady's image" in the mirror' (Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 52). In fact, 'the mirror cries out to the maid to the effect that the lady's reflection and the maid's reflection are one and the same' (Ibid., 53). Rees-Jones consequently praises Sitwell stating that 'the dynamic set-up in this poem is quite brilliant in the way it suggests complex lines of identification between reflection and recognition of self and other' (Ibid., 53). It is significant that Rees-Jones associates this mirroring with the connection between the self and an other and what Rees-Jones enjoys about Sitwell's poem – the creation of confusion about who is who – is bound up with feelings of uncanniness.

⁹⁰² Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 374.

uncanny]: the fear of repetition and the fear of castration.’⁹⁰³ Modleski recognises that women can experience the fear of repetition which relates to a return to primitive modes of thought that envision life in inanimate objects for example. However, Modleski notes that according to Freud, women cannot experience the uncanny conjured by the castration complex and she contests the exclusion of women from this equation. Posing another kind of uncanniness that recognises women’s experience of the uncanny, Modleski states, ‘suppose we view the threat of castration as part of a deeper fear – fear of never developing a sense of autonomy and separateness from the mother.’⁹⁰⁴ Modleski suggests that the heroines of gothic or detective fiction ‘fear *being* their mothers’ as represented by the haunting other woman.⁹⁰⁵

It is interesting, then, to read Fay’s and Mara’s empathetic relationship in terms of Modleski’s notion of the female uncanny, a feeling of desire for separateness. The identification that occurs between Fay and Mara is at times painful and difficult. For example, in ‘The Haircut,’ Fay is portrayed cutting Mara’s long hair to a crop, but later in ‘White Nights,’ Fay displays Mara’s characteristic haircut: ‘I’m a leper that sleep avoids: / my cropped head festering in the pillow.’⁹⁰⁶ The use of the leper motif evokes the figure of outcast and leprosy is significant because it is associated with the breakdown and decay of the bounded, whole self. Fay now displays the cropped head that should belong to Mara and there is a sense that the protagonist is uncertain about who she really is. The protagonist’s head is cropped in mimicry of Mara and the imagery of decay indicates that her selfhood is associated with otherness and the uncanny. Fay and Mara can pass for each other and their collision conjures feelings of uncertainty and bewilderment about which identity can truly be claimed as their own.

⁹⁰³ Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 71.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁰⁶ Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘White Nights,’ *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 58 (58.1-2).

This identification with Mara may be painful, but as I will show in the next section of analysis, it offers gifts in passing beyond one's own identity and selfhood. According to Ninian Smart, the name, 'Māra,' refers to Buddha's 'satanic adversary [...] who hoped tempt him back to the world.'⁹⁰⁷ Māra appears as part of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment; after the Buddha suffers 'the sphere of nothing and that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception' in addition to 'severe self-mortification,' Māra appears to tempt Buddha.⁹⁰⁸ Buddha eventually dismisses his Māra (as Fay will too later on in *Quiver*), not through aggression, but simply by acknowledging the creature 'who was both deceptive and ultimately powerless.'⁹⁰⁹ However, Fay's strong empathetic relationship initially binds her tighter to her own Mara, because there are gifts to be gathered from Mara's way of passing and in the meantime, the poem, 'Then,' poses a double question: 'Who's following who?'⁹¹⁰

The Success of Passing

The dematerialisation that takes place as a result of Mara's and Fay's empathetic relationship is not only painful and difficult, but is also liberating and enabling. In understanding the possibilities in this spectrality, it is useful to consider Terry Castle's study, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, which, I argue, discusses a kind of passing in its analysis of how lesbianism in literature has had to exist in 'a recessive, indeterminate, misted-over space in the collective literary psyche.'⁹¹¹ Mimicking the uncanny visual uncertainty of racial passing, the history of lesbianism as represented in

⁹⁰⁷ Ninian Smart, 'The Buddha,' *The Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy*, ed. Brian Carr and Indira Mahalingam (London: Routledge, 1997), 305-317 (307).

⁹⁰⁸ Smart, 'The Buddha,' 307.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁹¹⁰ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Then,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 42 (42.6).

⁹¹¹ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 31.

literature is, in Castle's view, a 'history of derealization.'⁹¹² However, in studying twentieth-century culture, Castle suggests that there is a positive side to the apparitionality of lesbianism when its ghostliness is not so much about 'derealization [sic]' but about 'rhapsodical embodiment, a ritual calling up, or *apophrades* in the old mystical sense.'⁹¹³ In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom defines *apophrades* as 'the return of the dead' and he explains that the word derives from 'the dismal or unlucky days upon which the dead returned to reinhabit their former houses.'⁹¹⁴ Castle sees the apparitional subject as a negated, dead figure that returns to a kind of embodiment and in its new guise, 'the feeble, elegiac waving off – the gesture of would-be exorcism – becomes instead a new and passionate beckoning.'⁹¹⁵

Castle's description of the apparitional subject who returns from the dead is very much like the character of Mara in *Quiver*. First encountered as an uncanny corpse that refuses to pass over but remains animated, Mara continues to appear as a ghostly presence that beckons to Fay seductively. While this apparitionality seems to derive from literary representations of lesbianism, it gestures beyond the context of homosexual difference to a wider perspective. Rees-Jones' conference paper, 'Not a Ghost at All,' extends Castle's ideas about spectrality and the failure to recognize lesbian desire. Rees-Jones' believes that Castle's ideas might signify something further: a poetic model of interconnectedness that offers an alternative to an oedipal model of

⁹¹² Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 34.

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹¹⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 141. In fact, Bloom extends the meaning of *apophrades* to describe poets in a mature creative phase. He describes how these poets can 'achieve a style that captures and oddly retains priority over their precursors, so that the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that they are being *imitated by their ancestors*' (Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 141). This notion ties in to Rees-Jones' own haunting of the text with 'an echo of voices' and it is fitting that the spectrality of the apparitional subject is reflected by the intertextual references embedded within the text (Rees-Jones, 'Nothing That is Not There...', 59). The passing identity of *apophrades* is reflected by Rees-Jones' intertextual strategy, which dictates that, as Bloom puts it, '[t]he mighty dead return, but they return in our colors [sic], and speaking in our voices' (Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 141).

⁹¹⁵ Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 47.

human relations and in which one might find 'bodily continuity with an other.'⁹¹⁶ This theorising might explain Rees-Jones' expectations for the character of Mara and later for Fay who becomes Mara's double. Rees-Jones adopts Castle's idea that '[t]he spectral figure is the perfect vehicle for conveying what must be called – though without a doubt paradoxically – that "recognition through negation".'⁹¹⁷ However while there is an ambiguity about the women's relationship, the performance of their difference through disembodiment is not so much about a specific otherness, such as female homosexuality in Western culture, but rather it is concerned with representing difference through negation and creating new possibilities for human relations where an interconnectedness is achieved through the recognition of each other's difference. The otherness suppressed by the status-quo is re-embodied through the visual uncertainty of passing in what Castle describes as an 'uncanny return to the flesh.'⁹¹⁸

In *Quiver*, apparitionality and the visual uncertainty of passing are inherited by Fay from the ghostly figure of Mara and as Phillips notes, '[Fay's] attempt to discover who Mara was becomes a search for a kind of muse.'⁹¹⁹ When Fay glimpses Mara in the busy street, it seems inevitable that she will return. 'Wonderland' describes how '[a]t every corner now, or so it seems, is Mara's face, / a Cheshire Cat which grins and disappears.'⁹²⁰ The description of Mara's face instigates an uncanny feeling, since it is not clear whether Fay is hallucinating, being visited by a ghost or glimpsing a mortal Mara. However, as a Cheshire Cat, Mara is an aid to Fay on her journey and the subject of questions as in Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel, *Alice in Wonderland*, when Alice asks the Cheshire Cat: 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from

⁹¹⁶ Rees-Jones, 'Not a Ghost at All,' 23rd September 2006.

⁹¹⁷ Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 60.

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁹¹⁹ Phillips, 'Don't Look Back,' 72.

⁹²⁰ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Wonderland,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 23 (23.8-9).

here?’⁹²¹ The Cheshire Cat replies that mad people are to be found whichever route is chosen and this answer does not comfort Alice, who does not ‘want to go among mad people.’⁹²² When the Cat replies that ‘we’re all mad here’ and that Alice must be mad too ‘or you wouldn’t have come here,’ it seems that Alice is inextricably bound up with uncanniness just as Fay is.⁹²³ Finally, Alice cannot believe her eyes as the cat ‘vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.’⁹²⁴ It is clear that mental and visual uncertainty is captured by the reference to Carroll’s novel and Mara’s role as the Cheshire Cat is that of inaugurating Fay into the mysteries of the uncanny.

The visual uncertainty climaxes in ‘Ash Wednesday,’ a day which is traditionally a time of penitence. It is also the beginning of the Christian religious festival of Lent, a forty day period which reflects Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness fasting and praying. This poem commences on Fay’s period of self-denial in a quest to communicate with the other: ‘there, at the lights I swear I see her: / her straight body, those even shoulders, // combat trousers, a ballerina cardigan in grey.’⁹²⁵ Once again, it is unclear how animated Mara is, even if the mundane detail of her outfit suggests that she is mortal. When she disappears again, Fay is disappointed: ‘But as soon as she’s there, she’s gone, / part *bandolero*, part *bas bleu*. / And all I have left is my dumb reflection.’⁹²⁶ Mara’s visibility is unreliable and the presence/absence in the phrase, ‘as soon as she’s there, she’s gone’ recalls the recognition through negation that is characteristic of both the apparitional subject and the passing subject. There is

⁹²¹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland / Through the Looking Glass And What Alice Found There*, 1865, ed Roger Lancelyn Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 57.

⁹²² Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures...*, 58.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹²⁵ Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘Ash Wednesday,’ *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 25-26 (25.7-9).

⁹²⁶ Rees-Jones, ‘Ash Wednesday,’ 25.18-26.20.

something uncanny in the definition of her as ‘part *bandolero*, part *bas bleu*,’ a description which mingles the bluestocking, a *familiar* figure, sometimes ridiculed, with the *strange* identity of the bandit or guerrilla. Mara is the strange and the familiar, an uncanny female subject and her uncanniness seems to extend to Fay, who in looking for Mara, finds only her own reflection.

The feeling that Fay has inherited Mara’s apparitional or passing powers continues in ‘Tail,’ in which Fay describes being followed by a policeman marked by his ‘paunch’ and ‘greying crop’ as an authority figure or a male critic.⁹²⁷ The policeman represents the social norm that would categorise Fay in with a particular type of identity, but the gift of passing is the ability to disguise oneself, to perform one’s selfhood as something indefinable, apparitional and always passing:

He marvels at my knack of disappearing into doors,
how with a half-turn of the head

I can transform the everyday so swiftly,
silk handkerchiefs pulled from a folded palm,

a dove emerging from a hat. The outline of my frame,
now scattered in a mist of dust and light,

reminds him of the fingerprints he took, rolling each finger
across the page; fingers, he saw, still stained with ink⁹²⁸

Fay has the ability to elude social categorisation and the eyes of the male critic as a result of her uncanniness. She has the ability to erase herself from the scrutiny of authority. The destabilised identity is compared in the policeman’s mind with the fingerprints of identity, yet a categorised, bounded selfhood has been breached. The policeman here is ‘a train of thought’ that dogs Fay, yet as she escapes, he ‘marvels’ at how she ‘can transform the everyday so swiftly, / silk handkerchiefs pulled from a

⁹²⁷ Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘Tail,’ *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 21 (21.2).

⁹²⁸ Rees-Jones, ‘Tail,’ 21.7 -14.

folded palm.⁹²⁹ The everyday handkerchief becomes a subject of magic and Rees-Jones reiterates the image of the closed hand which should contain nothing, but instead conjures the unexplained. By assimilating uncanny qualities, Fay is able to rob the policeman of his eyes as her image is 'scattered in a mist of dust and light.' Fay eludes the authorities that police her imagination and creativity and an important aspect of that identity is the uncanniness of passing which provokes confusion over who is who.

As an uncanny female subject who passes in the city of Liverpool, Mara is the muse that enables Fay to elude social categorization and policing of identity. Fay passes through the city of Liverpool; she passes over into deathliness in her encounter with the corpse; and she passes for an other due to her interconnectedness with Mara. The gifts in these processes are the possibility of moving beyond the oedipal triangle of Western relations to discover a new interconnectedness with other subjects of difference. This is enabled by the recognition through negation represented by the uncertainty, ambiguity and visual shadows of the uncanny which makes the strange out of the familiar. As I will show in my analysis of the second half of *Quiver*, later the plot becomes less concerned with solving the crime and more interested with the complexities of Fay and Mara who are represented via the trope of cloning. Interestingly, Coward and Semple suggest that the readers of detective fiction are more concerned with the process of delving into the mystery than the conclusion and restoration of law: 'The journey in detective fiction is often more interesting than the destination.'⁹³⁰ The transgression of the law supersedes the restoration of law, a view supported by Sally R. Munt in *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel*.

⁹²⁹ Ibid., 21.19, 21.7, 21.9–10.

⁹³⁰ Coward and Semple, 'Tracking Down the Past,' 51.

We are reminded of the crime narrative's convention of Eden disturbed by chaos, loss and conflict, the primary hermeneutic being the reinstatement of paradisiacal unity. But the reader also knows that the return will never be completed, as evil has entered the garden for good, its presence is perversely eradicable.⁹³¹

In *Quiver*, it is not evil that has entered the garden but difference and its resistance to authority. It is this that allows Mara and Fay to manoeuvre themselves through the uncanny and to pass away from the policing of laws about identity and human relations. As Fay states in 'Tail' when she evades the policeman, 'the stretch of my shadow [is] his only hope.'⁹³²

Part III: Avenging Goddess or Passing Subject? The Destruction and Reconstruction of the Clone

So far, my analysis of *Quiver* has detailed the polarisation of Artemis and Actaeon in the long poem, 'Quiver,' and it has mapped the uncanniness of the passing or apparitional subject that occurs in the posturban city of Liverpool. However, later poems in *Quiver* build on hints and clues provided earlier to invoke the clone, a divine being derived from science and the genre of science-fiction. In *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge notes that science-fiction writers have always to some extent 'imagined the future by invoking, modifying and recombining images [...] [of] what [...] readers, consciously or unconsciously already knew.'⁹³³ The politics of science fiction are concerned with magnifying aspects of unconscious narratives that are already unfolding in social 'reality.' Thus, Lodge writes that the strategy of science-fiction writers, like George Orwell, 'is indistinguishable from that of the traditionalist realist novel, though his purpose was different: not to reflect contemporary social reality, but

⁹³¹ Sally R. Munt, *Murder By the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), 147.

⁹³² Rees-Jones, 'Tail,' 21.18.

⁹³³ David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts* (London: Penguin, 1991), 136-137.

to paint a daunting picture of a possible future.⁹³⁴ Science fiction issues warnings and invokes untold possibilities. Consequently, the genre becomes a mixture of fact and fiction, science and superstition, imagination and social 'reality.' Rees-Jones uses advances in reproductive technologies to imagine new modes of being which are not simply products of the imagination, but a projection of what it might mean to be human. However, in the introduction of *Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood?*, Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli Klein and Shelley Minden ask a pertinent question: 'Each time a new technological development is hailed the same question arises: is this liberation, or oppression in a new guise?'⁹³⁵ Rees-Jones explores the rise of new technologies in relation to gender and maternity and gauges the emancipatory or oppressive possibilities.

In 'The New Poetry in Wales,' Ian Gregson's analysis of *Quiver* pinpoints the science-fiction mythology surrounding *Quiver*'s 'first person-narrator [...] a geneticist who has published a book on the ethics of cloning' and he is adamant that cloning 'provides a core metaphor in the poem, a premise for its doublings and its compulsion to repeat, and a half-answer to the detective-story mystery in the twinning of Mara, the victim of the original murder.'⁹³⁶ As Gregson points out, the narrator, Fay, reveals in the second poem of section two, 'Symposium: A Geneticist's Dinner Party,' that she has written a 'treatise on cloning ethics,' and it seems that the clone-trope is indeed a core metaphor in *Quiver*.⁹³⁷ Gregson also argues that cloning is the metaphor that

⁹³⁴ Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, 137.

⁹³⁵ Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli and Shelley Minden, Introduction, *Test-Tube Woman: What Future for Motherhood?*, ed. Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli and Shelley Minden (London: Pandora Press, 1989), 1-7 (2).

⁹³⁶ Ian Gregson, "'The New Poetry in Wales': Deryn Rees-Jones and Owen Sheers,' *Poetry Wales* 40.3 (2004/05): 7-11 (9).

⁹³⁷ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Symposium: A Geneticist's Dinner Party,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 38-39 (38.6).

answers 'the compulsion to repeat' which I discussed in part one of *Quiver* in relation to the uncanny and passing.

The visual uncertainty and breakdown of identity that is initiated in the play of uncanniness at the beginning of *Quiver* continues through the rest of the novel-in-verse. In 'Flashback,' Fay considers the memories of the dead woman and she suggests in viewing a photograph that she might adopt a memory belonging to someone else: 'How does a photograph become a memory? / This one's not even mine.'⁹³⁸ The photograph-memory uncertainty is also reminiscent of Ridley Scott's film, *Bladerunner*, in which androids are implanted with false memories to make them believe that they are human. Once again there is sense that from beneath the familiar surface of things, something strange is emerging.

However, in the later poems of *Quiver*, the human difference represented through passing and uncanniness in earlier poems, emerges more fully. In the sections that follow I explore the clone trope and its positive or negative possibilities. In 'Symposium: The Geneticist's Dinner Party,' I discuss how Rees-Jones links the clone to a lineage running through mythology and religion that concerns male control of human reproduction. In the next section, 'The Clone as the Angel of History,' I consider a number of poems in which Rees-Jones compares Mara to Benjamin's angel of history, a creature existing between the past and future. Similarly in 'Dreaming of the Clone,' I explore how the poem, 'A Dream,' dwells not only on the clone's debt to patriarchal institutions, but also on its ability to be both one thing and something else at the same time, a characteristic that Rees-Jones relates to identities existing between categories. I argue finally in 'Beyond the Clone' that the positive potential of the clone is represented by the character of Fay herself, who in contrast to Mara's more forceful

⁹³⁸ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Flashback,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 15 (15.1-2).

presence, remains in a state of passing, uncategorisable and undefined. Fay's new muse is her own baby who represents a rebirth of self and the possibility of a new kind of human interconnectedness defined not by categories but by mutual exile from ordinary selfhood.

Symposium: The Geneticist's Dinner Party

The poem 'Symposium: The Geneticist's Dinner Party' is the first blatant reference to the clone trope that pervades *Quiver*. The title's reference to *Symposium* is reminiscent of the doublings that occur in Plato's text, particularly with reference to Socrates' use of Diotima who describes 'Love' as a mediator (or what Irigaray would describe as a third space) between the mortal and the sublime. In contrast to Plato though, it is the clone rather than Love that is a divine mediator:

Tonight the talk's of twins and clones
a parlour game of metaphors to illustrate
the double helix of DNA⁹³⁹

The iambic tetrameter of the first line echoes the doublings in the content of the poem. Twins and clones are compared with the double helix of DNA, in which base pairs are necessary for human genetics to function; doubling seems to be an important part of human existence. Doubles are significant for Fay who continues by informing the reader that she has written 'a staccato treatise on cloning ethics / and our perception of death.'⁹⁴⁰ The description of the 'staccato treatise' suggests that its content is disjointed, disconnected or faltering. A vital part of the puzzle is missing:

I try hard to remember a line of thought,
reel in the Virgin Mary,
Athena sprung from the head of Zeus.⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁹ Rees-Jones, 'Symposium,' 38.1-3.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.6 -7.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., 38.10-13.

Fay mentions a number of female models all of whom are associated with unnatural births. The shorter seven syllable line highlights the New Testament story of Mary in particular, who conceived independently of mortal man *via* God. The following longer line recalls the story of Athena in Greek mythology, who was born from the head of Zeus, the Ancient Greek king of the gods. Other unnatural births throughout *Quiver* follow a similar pattern; for example in the title poem, 'Quiver,' Rees-Jones writes of Semele:

[...] consumed by fire
 in the face of Zeus, Dionysis her son
 left to mature in the incubator of
 his father's thigh [...]⁹⁴²

The pregnant Semele was consumed by the fire of Zeus' presence, yet her baby remained and was stitched into Zeus' thigh. These clues are reminiscent of the unnatural birth of clone, which is compared with mythological births where a male figure (God or Zeus), not woman, is the creator. Feminist readings of mythical births by male gods have linked this kind of story with a patriarchal desire to appropriate maternity. Adriana Cavarero notes in *In Spite of Plato* that in giving birth to Athena, 'the Zeus of mythical tradition stages a mimesis of maternity,' and she views the appropriation of birth in the case of Dionysus as 'pervaded with envy/appropriation of maternal power, and over-shadowed by the preventative matricide of Semele, the woman whom Zeus impregnated with the future Dionysus.'⁹⁴³ Similarly, in 'From Mice to Men? Implications of progress in cloning research,' Jane Murphy describes a patriarchal continuum through mythology (Zeus and Athena) and religion (the Virgin

⁹⁴² Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 31.59-62.

⁹⁴³ Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 108.

birth) 'to the development of cloning technology.'⁹⁴⁴ This description echoes the imagery used to represent the clone in *Quiver* and it might be argued that Rees-Jones is constructing a lineage through mythology and religion to the clone. The question is whether this inheritance is rich or fulfilling. In science and mythology, the appropriation of maternity has a sinister aspect as the patriarch fuelled by jealousy gains control of birth.

In thinking about the connection between mythological births and the clone, language begins to fail Fay and she associates her loss of words with decay as 'my sentences, like some decomposition, / lie like a corpse, are eaten away.'⁹⁴⁵ The speaker's words recall the discovery of Mara's 'ruined body' in the poem, 'The Cemetery,'⁹⁴⁶ the confusion in part one of *Quiver* about whether Mara is alive or dead and the empathetic relationship between Fay and Mara. The loss of language flashes back to the uncanny relationship between Fay and Mara and it indicates that Mara has a special significance in relation to the conversation about genetics and cloning.

In answer to Fay's contemplative silence, Nate Devine, the mysterious scientist at the heart of the mystery is introduced. 'Devine,' a cross between 'divine' and 'devil,' reveals his hypocrisy and confirms his role as a divine patriarch. His forename, 'nate,' derives from the Latin *natus* meaning to be born which links to his role as a geneticist. Fay describes him as 'some well-dressed dazzly god' emphasising his role as a Zeus-like figure.⁹⁴⁷ His white hair and oppressive manner identify him as a patriarch: 'He bothers me with his eyes and laughs, / touches my arm like he's known me forever. /

⁹⁴⁴ Jane Murphy, 'From mice to men? Implications of progress in cloning research,' *Test-Tube Woman: What Future for Motherhood?*, ed. Rita Arditti, Renate Duelli and Shelley Minden (London: Pandora Press, 1989), 76-91 (84).

⁹⁴⁵ Rees-Jones, 'Symposium,' 38.16-17.

⁹⁴⁶ Rees-Jones, 'The Cemetery,' 10.41.

⁹⁴⁷ Rees-jones, 'Symposium,' 39.23.

My cheeks redden for a moment.⁹⁴⁸ Devine's attention discomforts Fay and his eyes are particularly critical and appraising in relation to Fay. Like the policeman that Fay evades in 'Tail,' he seems to want to categorise her and fathom the depths of her identity. Since Nate Devine is represented via the image of sinister, knowing eyes, his gaze may signify the evil eye, described by Freud in 'The Uncanny' as 'a secret intention of doing harm, and certain signs are taken to mean that that intention has the necessary power at its command.'⁹⁴⁹ Nate's eyes make Fay uncomfortable and this may be caused by the way in which he sees her or his secret intentions towards her. The eyes also connect to themes discussed in analysis of 'Quiver' in relation to the male gaze and Actaeon's transgression.

Nate's laughter also makes Fay uncomfortable and this indicates a contrast between the two figures in mood and thought: she does not share in the laughter. The last comment is the most significant when Fay describes how Nate 'touches my arm like he's known me forever.'⁹⁵⁰ The only possible way that Nate Devine could have known her forever is if he was there at her birth or perhaps, even her conception, but this is their first meeting. This is a clue to a possibility never fully explained that the heroine herself is a clone. Fay's refusal to reveal whether she is a clone or not suggests that, in contrast to Mara's queering presence, she remains in a mode of passing with the full extent of her difference never to be revealed. It is appropriate then that the poem ends on a metaphor that emphasises the nothingness of self. Fay tells of how her husband, Will, wishes for a Buddhist 'sky-burial' where the 'cleaned flesh and

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid., 39.25 - 28.

⁹⁴⁹ Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 362.

⁹⁵⁰ Rees-Jones, 'Symposium,' 39.27.



Fig. 6: Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus* (1920), repr. in Mark Roskill, *Klee, Kandinsky and the Thought of their Time: a Critical Perspective* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992), Fig. 27.

bones [are] hurled up to the vultures – / those holy birds I'd learned to love.⁹⁵¹

Vultures are holy birds in Buddhist culture and the 'sky-burial' allows the vultures to slowly dismember the bodies until even the bones have disappeared. The spirit of the dead is then carried to the sky in the bellies of the vultures and such a decimation of the self seems useful and liberating as a means of extending beyond the boundaries of one's own physical and spiritual selfhood.

The Clone as the Angel of History

I have so far explained the clone as the manifestation of a male desire to control reproduction and as a subject passing for human. However, the clone is also a figure of the in-between, extending the performance of passing in earlier poems of *Quiver*. One way in which Rees-Jones displays the clone's liminality is by comparing it to Walter Benjamin's angel of history. Rees-Jones' interest in this trope is shown in her study, *Consorting with Angels*, in which she devotes one section to analysing Jo

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., 39.41-42.

Shapcott's poem, 'Phrase Book.' Rees-Jones suggests that because 'Phrase Book' is 'a poem about difficulty and about conflict,' it is useful to compare the poem's narrator with the angel of history.⁹⁵² Benjamin describes the angel in his 1940 essay, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' and it emerges from Benjamin's reading of Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus* (see fig. 6). Benjamin describes the angel who desires to 'stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed' but 'a storm propels him into the future.'⁹⁵³ In thinking about Jo Shapcott's 'Phrase Book,' a poem that explores the difficulties of miscommunication between natives and foreigners, Rees-Jones uses the in-betweenness of the angel of history to explain a cultural dilemma:

[...] [The poem] seems held together by a centrifugal force as, throughout the poem, phrases and themes pull against each other: meaning becomes doubled and ambiguous. Like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, the speaker of the poem is caught between the past and the future, she is a cultural refugee, her suitcase in hand.⁹⁵⁴

Rees-Jones' description is significant: the phrases and themes that pull against one another could be the opposing factions in Rees-Jones' thematic and textual strategies and the 'cultural refugee' could be Rees-Jones herself who is both a literal exile between Wales and England and an exile in terms of her literary strategy of going beyond conventional types of selfhood or being with others. As Benjamin explains, the angel of history seems 'as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating' and this hesitation between one location and another is particularly significant in Rees-Jones' representation of the clone.⁹⁵⁵

The angel of history appears in 'A Visitation,' in a scene where Fay is about to meet Mara in person for the first time. Like a herald of Mara's presence, the angel of

⁹⁵² Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 210.

⁹⁵³ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), 245-255 (249).

⁹⁵⁴ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 210.

⁹⁵⁵ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' 249.

history appears in the wake of ‘slaves,’ ‘refugees’ and ‘[c]holeric children’ who, as I argued earlier in my analysis of posturban Liverpool, represent the return of a repressed and marginal history of the city.⁹⁵⁶ Rees-Jones describes how ‘The angel of history throws back her shoulders, / her violet eyes look forward and back.’⁹⁵⁷ The act of throwing back the shoulders is an ambiguous one that might suggest pride, defiance or the bracing of the body before a shock. The violet eyes seem unnatural, a colour created by unusual genetic mutations or more likely through the interference of science, a scenario that fits with the cloning trope. Like Benjamin’s version, this angel of history looks, albeit through artificial eyes, forwards and backwards and as neither one thing nor another, it exists in a space in-between. In this respect, its status reflects that of the clone, which is neither an ‘authentic’ human being nor an automaton.

If like Shapcott, Rees-Jones exalts in the inbetweenness of the angel of history, her view of the angel might also be influenced by Rainer Maria Rilke and by Irigaray. In *Consorting with Angels*, Rees-Jones uses Rilke’s and Irigaray’s angels to discuss the ‘inner and outer worlds’ that emerge in Shapcott’s poetry⁹⁵⁸ and she quotes Jonathan Bates’ *Song of the Earth* in which he describes Rilke’s angel as ‘the creature in whom the transformation of the visible into the invisible, of the earth into consciousness is already complete’ and a representation of shared being ‘as inner and outer were gathered together into a single “uninterrupted space”.’⁹⁵⁹ Rees-Jones connects this joining of two worlds with Irigaray’s notion of the angel in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* as ‘that which unceasingly *passes through the envelope(s) or container(s)*, goes from one side

⁹⁵⁶ Rees-Jones, ‘A Visitation,’ 44.4, 44.6, 44.8.

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid., 44.9-10.

⁹⁵⁸ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 224.

⁹⁵⁹ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 263.

to the other.⁹⁶⁰ Rees-Jones is particularly intrigued by Irigaray's notion of angels as 'swift angelic messengers, who transgress all enclosures in their speed, tell of the passage between the envelope of God and that of the world as micro- or macrocosm.'⁹⁶¹ Rees-Jones quotes from Margaret Whitford's *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, which suggests Irigaray's angel as 'an alternative for the phallus' which 'has sometimes been thought of as that which "goes between", creates a bridge between the two lovers.'⁹⁶² The angel emerges then as a kind of replacement for the bridging penis identified by Rees-Jones in Feaver's poem, 'Hemingway's Hat,'⁹⁶³ and it creates the space between one and an other which Rilke calls two solitudes and which Irigaray describes as a third space.

However, while the influence of Rilke and Irigaray are significant in the formulation of Rees-Jones' angel/clone, it is the image of the angel of history that dominates her poetic symbology in poems like 'A Bout de Souffle,' the title of which derives from the French phrase meaning 'out of breath.' In this poem, Fay left breathless by her 'pill-dreams' in which Mara features prominently as a tiny being that climbs Fay's knees 'like reticulate sorrow.'⁹⁶⁴ The word 'reticulate' derives from the Latin, *reticulum*, a diminutive of *rete* meaning 'net' and it describes a network pattern. The description evokes a sense that there is something artificial or man-made about Mara's construction and that there is something sorrowful connected to this feeling. Mara appears as a victim whose 'palms are bleeding' while there is 'an arrow in her heart.'⁹⁶⁵ The comparison of Mara to a sufferer of stigmata and to the Catholic symbol

⁹⁶⁰ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 15.

⁹⁶¹ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 16.

⁹⁶² Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 163.

⁹⁶³ See p. 5 of this study.

⁹⁶⁴ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'A Bout de Souffle,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 56 (56.1, 56.6).

⁹⁶⁵ Rees-Jones, 'A Bout de Souffle,' 56.7-8.

of the damaged heart (evoking the sacred heart of Christ and the immaculate heart of Mary) suggests that she is a martyr. However, though Mara laughs, Rees-Jones describes her face as 'a stone that's fallen from the heavens,' a fallen angel cast out from the presence of God.⁹⁶⁶ The dream ends as Mara's 'wings thrash a hailstorm, blow the night away.'⁹⁶⁷ In Benjamin's description of the angel of history, he tells how 'a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them.'⁹⁶⁸ As a clone, Mara is between one mode of being and another and cannot be restored to a conventional mode of being. Like the angel of history, she cannot stop flying but must continue to thrash her wings in a predicament of liminality.

Dreaming of the Clone

Rees-Jones's clone exists in the edges of human awareness and knowledge and consequently it often makes its presence felt in dreams as in 'A Bout de Souffle.' Another poem, 'A Dream,' explores in great detail what the clone might represent and to do so, it uses the metre and rhyme scheme of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1798 poem, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.' The poem is written in four line stanzas with alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter, but the rhyme scheme and meter are not as regular as in Coleridge's poem. A driving movement is inherent in Coleridge's rhyme scheme, so like the Ancient Mariner, Fay is compelled to tell the story of her strange and difficult experiences. However, in contrast to Coleridge's poem, Rees-Jones' rejection of regular meter and her occasional use of half-rhymes means that the story is less confidently told, which is fitting in describing the clone

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., 56.10.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., 56.11.

⁹⁶⁸ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' 249.

which passes beyond easy recognition or categorisation. Rees-Jones may have drawn on the form of this particular poem, because some critics, such as John Livingstone Lowes in *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*, think of Coleridge's poem as signifying 'supernatural machinery.'⁹⁶⁹ As R.L. Brett explains in *Reason and Imagination: A Study of Form and Meaning in Four Poems*, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is very much about the creative process itself since, the Mariner 'is the poet himself' and the albatross 'is the gift of poetic power.'⁹⁷⁰

Like 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' 'A Dream' describes a visitation from a creature that might be a ghost, a vision or a thought. Rees-Jones mentions Coleridge's albatross, but she states that unlike that trope, the creature in dream is not 'living,' but represents 'life' itself, or at least a way of being in the world.⁹⁷¹ Fay's role in the poem is to explore the creature's significance in a number of false starts that echo the hesitation at the beginning of 'Quiver':

Some said it was some female god
 Descending from above,
 Making a genealogy of souls
 From her idea of love.⁹⁷²

This goddess traces her own lineage of souls according to her 'view of love,' much in the way that in 'Quiver,' Artemis traces a feminist lineage through the dogs that pursue Actaeon to his death. This connection concords with the phrase, 'female god,' which is a curious one. Rather than using the term, 'goddess,' Rees-Jones chooses to couple the words 'female' and 'god' suggesting that this creature is first and foremost masculine in its nature although it appears to be female. Rees-Jones also describes the creature as

⁹⁶⁹ John Livingstone Lowe, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (London: Pan, 1978), 201.

⁹⁷⁰ R.L. Brett, *Reason and Imagination: A Study of Form and Meaning in Four Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 79.

⁹⁷¹ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'A Dream,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 59-61 (60.32).

⁹⁷² Rees-Jones, 'A Dream,' 60.33-36.

‘[s]prung from a head in brilliance’ referring again to Athena’s birth from Zeus’ head.⁹⁷³ Marina Warner’s description of Athena in *Monuments and Maidens* tallies with that of Rees-Jones, since Warner describes Athena as creating ‘a split between the superimposed images of motherland and the mother’s body, to produce a socialized fatherland, which she [Athena] represents.’⁹⁷⁴ Warner suggests that Athena supports ‘[t]he rights of the father to identify and claim his children and the necessary control of women’s powers of reproduction.’⁹⁷⁵ For Rees-Jones and Warner, Athena is a goddess who represents the patriarchal ‘civilized state’ and as in ‘Symposium: The Geneticist’s Dinner Party,’ there is a palpable fear that the clone might deny new possibilities for human relations.⁹⁷⁶

The violent, polarised version of masculinity and femininity that appears in ‘Quiver’ via the figures of Artemis and Actaeon occur again and anxiety is expressed about the potential for the creature to be exploited for the purposes of a patriarchal progenitor. This patriarchal figure might be the god-like Nate Devine and the clone is reminiscent of Mara who is described in ‘Second Look’ as ‘like Artemis the hunter god, / chaste and secure in her life without men.’⁹⁷⁷ Like Artemis, Mara seems to take up a polarised position based on her relations with men, which undermines the potential of her clone identity.

However, the clone need not be exploited or exploiting and further on in ‘A Dream,’ Rees-Jones offers a more positive view of its possibilities:

Others a life in utero,
Gametes hurled into the several world

⁹⁷³ Ibid., 60.41.

⁹⁷⁴ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, 120.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁷⁷ Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘Second Look,’ *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 51 (51.2–3). It is interesting to note that Rees-Jones again uses the term ‘hunter god’ rather than the word goddess to describe Mara and as in ‘A Dream,’ it seems that the clone’s associations with the symbology of Artemis links her in some way to patriarchal motives.

Where male and female slipped away
And couldn't be recalled.⁹⁷⁸

The second opinion ('Others') suggests the opposite to the previous comment, indicating that the creature could represent an experience beyond gender. The reference to gametes, sexual reproductive cells, ties in to a desire for sexes to be reconciled and its origin in the Greek word, *gameein*, meaning 'to marry' anchors the meaning. The potential of the creature is clear in the phrase 'life in utero,' since 'utero' is a prefix usually used with reference to the womb, thus there is a sense that the clone is a life in the process of becoming. Rees-Jones also describes the creature as 'a melody of differences, / A snowflake drifting by.'⁹⁷⁹ As I explained in the introduction to this chapter, snow is a significant image for Rees-Jones, because it represents 'something that transforms itself' or that is 'lots of things while being itself.'⁹⁸⁰ The success of the clone lies in its ability to shape-shift and perform different identities. Its in-between status is anchored when Rees-Jones refers again to the angel of history: 'It looked behind, it looked beyond.'⁹⁸¹ As in previous descriptions, the clone does not belong to the past or the future, to one thing or an other, but exists in-between the two.

The beauty and possibility of the clone's difference is expressed when the creature is described as 'a chemistry of splitting cells / A bright infinity...' which makes an explicit link with science.⁹⁸² The clone's existence begins in the laboratory, but in its placement between humanity and artificial life-forms, it emerges from riddles to gesture to a different mode of being. This kind of existence is not easily reached and Mara might also become a female god, or a monster of the Western imagination. However, the clone also has the potential to bridge the gap between one and an other

⁹⁷⁸ Rees-Jones, 'A Dream,' 60.37-40.

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid., 60.43-44.

⁹⁸⁰ Rees-Jones, Personal Interview, 12th June 2007.

⁹⁸¹ Rees-Jones, 'A Dream,' 61.45.

⁹⁸² Ibid., 61.55-56.

and it is linked to Rees-Jones' double-faced strategy of mythologising and recycling mythologies as it is a descendent of the Artemis mythology. Fay's entrancement with the clone reflects her intense preoccupation with Mara and her exploration of the clone trope in her dream reiterates her own desire to be like Mara as she observes and appropriates the clone's problematic but emancipatory identity: 'The mouth amazed to open / To a voice that's not my own.'⁹⁸³

The Clone Poem

It is clear from the analysis of 'A Dream' that the clone can be both a negative figure for polarised and irreconcilable opposites and a positive figure for a new mode of being human. Some of the poems in *Quiver* celebrate the latter possibility, such as 'Beatitude' which is a praise poem that celebrates different modes of reproduction: 'the earthworm' and 'its hermaphrodite wriggle';⁹⁸⁴ 'the complicated gender games of clown fish';⁹⁸⁵ 'the heroic rabbit' and 'her cheerful lesson of reproduction';⁹⁸⁶ and finally in thinking about human men and women, Rees-Jones praises the 'sperm and ovum's heady clash' as well as 'the love between men, /the love between women.'⁹⁸⁷ Relations between one and an other are far more complex than a simple heterosexual love story, although that is one possibility among others.

One of the most celebratory poems in the entire collection concerning the clone's possibilities is entitled 'Clone' and besides being a poem about cloning, it is also a poem that performs an act of cloning. The dedication of 'Clone' reads 'After PM' which refers to Paul Muldoon and the poem is a clone of 'As' in Muldoon's *Moy*

⁹⁸³ Ibid., 60.27 – 28.

⁹⁸⁴ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Beatitude,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 40 (40.8).

⁹⁸⁵ Rees-Jones, 'Beatitude,' 40.9.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid., 40.11-12.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid., 40.15, 40.17-18.

Sand and Gravel. In 'Clone Poems and the Microcomputer,' Estelle Irizarry defines the clone poem as one 'that maintains the structure of a well-known poem but substitutes some of the original content words for others.'⁹⁸⁸ It may be argued that 'clone poetry' is nothing more than pastiche, yet there are subtle differences. *Pastiche* is defined in relation to parody since 'both imitate a work's form and content, although in pastiche imitation is an end in itself, while in parody the imitation is a means to mockery.'⁹⁸⁹ Clone poetry does not imitate as 'an end in itself' or as 'a means to mockery,' but actively seeks to appropriate the properties of a particular poet's work to create a new work of art that speaks in two voices.

In order to understand the specific type of clone poem that Rees-Jones creates, it is useful to consider a passage in her study, *Consorting with Angels*. In particular, Rees-Jones' analysis of 'Slips,' a poem by Medbh McGuckian, is interesting, because the poem discussed is cloned from Freud's essay, 'Screen Memories.' Rees-Jones is impressed by McGuckian's poem, because she 'so seamlessly [...] allows Freud to speak so lyrically in her poem as a *feminine* voice, with so little alteration of his text.'⁹⁹⁰ Rees-Jones is adamant that the cloning of Freud's words in a new context allows McGuckian 'to reveal something about women, perhaps as the underslip erotically appears from beneath the layer of the woman's exterior clothing.'⁹⁹¹ In Rees-Jones's view, McGuckian goes further than simply '“stealing” Freud's text'; rather she

⁹⁸⁸ Estelle Irizarry, 'Clone Poems and the Microcomputer,' *Hispania* 72.3 (1989): 787-791 (787). Irizarry relates clone poetry initially to Federico García Lorca's poetry which cloned the structure of poems by established writers like Jorge Manrique to gain properties of gravitas, stature and dignity, and later to the Nicaraguan poet, Ernesto Cardenal, who used clone poetry for political purposes. Irizarry describes how in the case of Cardenal new terms had to be invented to describe such techniques such as *técnica de sustituciones alucinantes* (the technique of hallucinating substitutions) and *arte de injerto* (the art of graft).

⁹⁸⁹ "Burlesque," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger *et al* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁹⁹⁰ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 185.

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

absconds with 'the male voices and experiences which his text carries.'⁹⁹² The poem is also stolen in another sense in that it is 'at one remove from Freud's own text by virtue of the fact that it has already been translated.'⁹⁹³

Rees-Jones' admiration of McGuckian's strategy of cloning is rooted in the recognition that by stealing the male voice and experience of Freud, McGuckian enables a synthesis of male and female within the poem, a dialogue between writers of different sexes. The comparison of McGuckian and Freud echoes that of Rees-Jones and Muldoon in 'Clone,' since like McGuckian, Rees-Jones chooses to 'steal' from a male figure. Muldoon's 'As,' the source poem for 'Clone,' is a mish-mash of cultural references. This intertextuality creates an overall feeling of one subject being superseded by another. The word, 'as,' gives an indication as to the degree, proportion or manner of something and is often associated with measuring or comparing things. It is relevant to note that the word, 'as,' was also used to refer to a Roman unit of weight and to a Roman copper coin. Muldoon's poem is all about weighing, measuring and comparing one thing and another. In contrast to Muldoon, Rees-Jones' title is 'Clone,' a word that conjures asexual reproduction and the conjuring of a new being who is both identical to their parent and yet unique. Like the clone, Rees-Jones' poem is a copy of Muldoon, but it also manifests subtle changes.

The balance of sameness and difference can also be seen in the form and content of the two poems. In 'As,' the sense of judgement and comparison is anchored by Muldoon's nine line stanza which is dominated by images of one thing superseding another: 'As naught gives way to aught / and ox-hide gives way to chain-mail / and byrnie gives way to battle-ox.'⁹⁹⁴ Muldoon's poem is concerned with

⁹⁹² Ibid., 185.

⁹⁹³ Ibid., 185.

⁹⁹⁴ Paul Muldoon, 'As,' *Moy Sand and Gravel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 33-36 (33.1-3).

movement iterating progress or change in a variety of social spheres in order to express the central image of the poem: one subject giving way to another. 'Naught,' an archaic word for 'nothing' gives way to 'aught,' which means 'anything,' 'a whit' or 'jot,' and 'aught' in turn derives from 'ought.'⁹⁹⁵ The etymology of 'ought' reveals that it is an 'illegitimate corruption of naught' and thus we come full circle back to 'naught.'⁹⁹⁶ Muldoon uses the progress of language as a metaphor for the central movement of the poem. In addition, Muldoon uses historical warfare as a theme so that oxhide, the most basic kind of armour used by the Celts, gives way to chain-mail. Byrnie, a Scottish word referring to an early kind of mail-coat or breast plate, gives way to the battle-ox. The two main factions of the English Civil War are mentioned as the defeated Cavaliers recede and the triumphant Roundheads supersede. The refrain that ends each stanza, 'I give way to you,' anchors the feeling that one subject must lose, submit or perform obeisance to another.

Rees-Jones' 'Clone' uses the same stanza structure as 'As,' and each stanza also begins with 'As,' yet in this case the word conveys less of a sense of weighing or measuring and more of a feeling of interconnectedness and simultaneity: 'As *The Comedy of Errors* becomes *Twelfth Night* /and *A Stolen Life* becomes *The Double Life of Veronique* /and *Aechmi* becomes *Amphitryon*.'⁹⁹⁷ While in 'As,' the central movement of the poem was that of giving way, Rees-Jones' version creates a sense of assimilation, of one thing becoming another or one person passing for someone else. Shakespeare was able to borrow elements of his previous comedies about mistaken identity, so that *The Comedy of Errors* was a source for *Twelfth Night* because both plots use twins and

⁹⁹⁵ "Aught", *The Chambers Dictionary*, 1998, ed. Sandra Anderson, Lynda Carey, Kay Cullen *et al* (Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 2001).

⁹⁹⁶ "Ought," *The Chambers Dictionary*, 1998, ed. Sandra Anderson, Lynda Carey, Kay Cullen *et al* (Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 2001).

⁹⁹⁷ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Clone,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 65-66 (65.1-3).

mistaken identity as a staple of the plot.⁹⁹⁸ Rewriting of plays is echoed by remakes of films, as the good and bad twins in the director, Curtis Bernhardt's 1946 film, *A Stolen Life*, also emerge in Krzysztof Kieslowski's 1991 movie, *The Double Life of Veronique*.⁹⁹⁹ Finally 'Aechmi' refers to Plautus' Roman comedy about twins, *Menaechmi* (sometimes known as *The Brothers Menaechmus*), which was the source for Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. In a kind of replay of *Menaechmi* that reflects Shakespeare's recycling of the doubling theme, Plautus wrote the play, *Amphitryon*, which tells how the god, Jupiter, seduces Alcmena by taking the form of her husband, Amphitryon. A sense of interconnectedness and interchangeability is evoked by the references and cross-references in this quotation and even while one thing becomes another, there is not the sense of ascendancy as in Muldoon's poem. This is anchored by the refrain at the end of each stanza in 'Clone,' which reads, 'so this becomes you.'¹⁰⁰⁰ The feeling from this phrase is one of beautification as the sense of change in the word 'becomes' is balanced by punning on the meaning of the word associated with being attractive or 'becoming.' Like McGuckian, through "stealing" from a male figure, Rees-Jones creates a kind of clone, but it does have specific differences from the original and her references to doubling and interconnectedness reject a model of supremacy to demand a more open way of being with an other. The clone, like the clone poem, has the potential to become a third space between one and an other.

⁹⁹⁸ The major difference is that the twins in *Twelfth Night* are a boy and a girl and therefore not completely identical, though their resemblance is used as a device in the plot.

⁹⁹⁹ It is also interesting to note that Bernhardt's *A Stolen Life* starring Bette Davies and Glenn Ford was cloned from an 1939 film of the same name directed by Paul Czinner and starring Elizabeth Bergner and Michael Redgrave. Throughout 'Clone,' there is a huge amount of cloning references to be unpacked and the effect is a feeling of powerful interconnectedness and submergence in a world of doubling and cloning.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Rees-Jones, 'Clone,' 65.9.

Beyond the Clone

Although the clone does have significant potential as a trope that represents possibilities for human relations, it is still problematic particularly as it manifests itself in the goddess-like character of Mara. In my essay, 'Replication, Regeneration or Organic Birth: The Clone in Deryn Rees-Jones' *Quiver* and Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto",' I compare Rees-Jones' vision of the clone and Haraway's cyborg (in the study, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*), a philosophical trope that offers new possibilities for human life. The cyborg is removed from 'natural' human reproduction; on the one hand it rejects the father figure which would make it 'an agent for [...] Western logic,'¹⁰⁰¹ but on the other hand, the matriarch is also spurned, since Haraway states: 'It's not just that "god" is dead; so is the "goddess".'¹⁰⁰² This statement represents an eradication of extreme, violent positions of gender (like those in Rees-Jones' 'Quiver'), as it 'expresses a desire to destroy Man and his opposite' since both are implicated in the combative relations between human beings.¹⁰⁰³ Like Haraway, Rees-Jones is concerned about the potential of her creation to be 'a tool [...] exploited by patriarchy.'¹⁰⁰⁴ Fay is trapped 'between the untameable matriarchy of the clone and the devious patriarch' and consequently the supreme progenitor, Nate Devine, and his tool, the goddess/clone, Mara, must die.¹⁰⁰⁵ Fay is adamant that this conclusion is necessary: 'Let her die, / there in the arms of a man who can't save her.'¹⁰⁰⁶ In *Six Myths of Our Time: Managing Monsters, The Reith Lectures*, Warner affirms that '[t]he mythology of the ungovernable female appetite can't be made to work for women;

¹⁰⁰¹ Zoë Brigley, 'Replication, Regeneration or Organic Birth: The Clone in Deryn Rees-Jones' *Quiver* and Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto",' *Critical Survey* 18.2 (2006): 16-30 (20-21).

¹⁰⁰² Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 162.

¹⁰⁰³ Brigley, 'Replication, Regeneration or Organic Birth,' 21.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Rees-Jones, 'An Ending,' 81.14-15.

ironies, subversion, inversion, pastiche, masquerade, appropriation – these post-modern strategies all buckle in the last resort under the weight of culpability the myth has entrenched.¹⁰⁰⁷ It is clear that Rees-Jones concurs with Haraway's statement that the goddess must die and this also recalls the detrimental polarities of gender in the characters of Artemis and Actaeon as represented in 'Quiver.'

The scene of Mara's death recalls the issues of 'Quiver' as Mara emerges as a blatant version of Artemis. This presence first makes itself fully felt in 'Year of the Horse,' the title of which refers to Chinese astrology and which might carry with it negative connotations, since as Michael Carr explains in "'Mind Monkey" Metaphors in Chinese and Japanese Dictionaries,' in South Asia, the horse is often thought of as a symbol of foolishness.¹⁰⁰⁸ Mara emerges in 'Year of the Horse' as figure of polarised, violent femaleness:

[...] And then
 like something walking out of a myth,
 pulled from a vase in the British Museum,
 in an elegant movement from start to finish
 a familiar figure reaches for an arrow, loads a bow.
 As Nate looks up, he's realised too late.¹⁰⁰⁹

The rhythm of the first two lines beats out the tension in iambs as Mara becomes the vengeful goddess of 'Quiver' and the female god of 'A Dream.' When a myth is mentioned, the rhythm becomes more irregular lapsing from an anapaest ('of a myth') to a more irregular rhythm in the third line which describes Mara as a figure of Western art and imagination like those in Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.' It is clear though that Mara exists in the present moment and the elegant movement of reaching

¹⁰⁰⁷ Marina Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time: Managing Monsters, The Reith Lectures 1994* (London: Vintage, 1994), 11.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Michael Carr, "'Mind Monkey" Metaphors in Chinese and Japanese Dictionaries,' *International Journal of Lexicography* 6.3 (1993): 149-180 (150).

¹⁰⁰⁹ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Year of the Horse,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 79 (79.18-23).

for her weapon of vengeance is reflected by the stylish anapaestic tetrameter in the fourth line. In bringing out her bow and arrow, Mara is no longer passing but has emerged to commit murder, piercing the patriarch, Nate Divine, with an arrow. In relation to Mara's violent appearance in this poem, it is interesting to recall Butler's differentiation in *Bodies That Matter* between passing and queering. Butler notes that the word, 'queer,' is associated with 'a longing to be freed of propriety.'¹⁰¹⁰ Queering is often 'what upsets and exposes passing; it is the act by which the racially and sexually repressive surface of conversation is exploded, by rage, by sexuality, by an insistence on color [sic].'¹⁰¹¹ As in Butler's vision of queering, Mara violently demands recognition of her difference, exploding her previous repression as a passing subject by violently attacking Nate Devine, who represents both the authority that polices human categories of identity with his penetrating eyes and who threatens the possibility for the clone by making it a creature of patriarchy that serves a division of men and women. In contrast to Mara's queering presence, Fay remains in a state of passing and she describes her own hiddenness in 'Take Two' (the poem that follows 'Year of the Horse') via the images of 'the veins and arteries / that lie beneath the skin / like trembling tattoos' in comparison with the bleeding Mara and Nate Devine.¹⁰¹²

In comparing Fay's passing and Mara's act of queering, it appears that Fay's tactic is the more successful, since in 'An Ending,' Mara is hunted through the city streets and she suffers the same solitude of mind as Actaeon did in the form of a hunted deer. This time though it is Fay who decides how far the victim is pursued: 'I'll let her go this far [...] / [...] / [...] flying like the goddess / or the muse she is.'¹⁰¹³ Like Faith, Fay is opposed to divided, irreconcilable polarities of gender and by

¹⁰¹⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 176.

¹⁰¹¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰¹² Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Take Two,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 80 (80.14-16).

¹⁰¹³ Rees-Jones, 'An Ending,' 81.8-11.

expelling Mara and Nate Devine, Rees-Jones solves the quandary of existing between the goddess and the centaur, between the clone and its progenitor. The death of the clone goddess is significant and brings Rees-Jones closer to Haraway's destruction of polarised genders.

However, even if the potential of the clone fails in Mara, it may still reside in Fay herself, who, it is suggested, may be a clone passing for human. In the penultimate poem of the collection, 'Relics,' Rees-Jones describes Fay and Will driving in the city and the Mersey is described as being 'like the name of someone unremembered,' a phrase that indicates the uncanniness of *déjà vu* and which may be a clue to Fay's ambiguous clone identity.¹⁰¹⁴ Extending the silence that hangs over Fay's being, the image of snow occurs to blank out past events as a symbol of transformation for the self and for being in the world:

[...] And so the soft straightforward night
begins with snowfall, snowdrifts – or do we just imagine that? –
as winter's ending colours us, imagines us as people
we have never been. And though a thousand different stories
quiver in the moment – a hand unclasped, a darting word unsaid –
I don't look back.¹⁰¹⁵

The image of snow is significant, whether it is real or imagined. It returns us to Wallace Stevens' 'The Snowman' with its associations of vacancy, emptiness and silence and it has the effect of highlighting the figures in the landscape as the whiteness almost enables the presence of people ('colours us'). The snow imagines Fay and Will 'as people / we have never been' indicating possibility as does the image of 'a thousand different stories' that 'quiver in the moment,' while the 'hand unclasped' and the 'darting word unsaid' could represent the possibility of openness in the transformation of one's self and one's relations with others. The future is tangible in

¹⁰¹⁴ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Relics,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 84 (84.2).

¹⁰¹⁵ Rees-Jones, 'Relics,' 84.4-9.

this scene especially in the comment, 'I don't look back,' which indicates that Liverpool is not so much a city on which memory can be inscribed, but rather a site for forgetting, a hypotext or borderland from which the periphery can emerge or from which the centre can be dispersed. The phrase also suggests avoidance of such past stories indicating a secret, perhaps that Fay herself is a clone. Whether this is the case or not, there is certainly a sense of what Irigaray calls 'letting be and letting come to us what reaches us through the other.'¹⁰¹⁶ Fay's extraordinary clone identity that works on the level of passing rather than on the level of queering, enables her to create a story of one and an other and their progress towards each other and as Irigaray states, this is 'the gift that he, or she, offers us of self, of the world, of ourselves.'¹⁰¹⁷

A Birth and Death of Self

While *Quiver* concludes on the one hand with the death of Mara, it also ends with the birth of Fay's child, an event that has a special resonance in thinking about Rees-Jones' quest to create a relation with an other. Mara is a useful muse in *Quiver*, who teaches Fay about the possibilities in passing and creating an in-between or third space between one identity and an other. However, there is another presence that fleetingly makes itself felt: a developing foetus in Fay's womb. Although the baby is not mentioned very often in *Quiver*, it emerges in poems like 'Liminal,' in which Fay describes herself as she 'hover[s] in between the spaces' and then imagines Will as the 'father of my child,'¹⁰¹⁸ which in turn refers back to 'Quiver' and Faith's desire for 'the spillage of silver.'¹⁰¹⁹ However, Fay is racked with doubt and appears to reflect Irigaray's thoughts in *The Way of the Heart*, when she writes cautiously about equating

¹⁰¹⁶ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 149.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰¹⁸ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Liminal,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 67 (67.1, 67.6).

¹⁰¹⁹ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 31.81.

the third space with the creation of the child. Irigaray suggests that in reaching towards an other one must find a way of 'perceiving of oneself and of the other [...] and also to that third which arises and to [sic] grows from the two and which, too quickly and to its detriment, is assimilated to a child.'¹⁰²⁰ Rees-Jones also portrays Fay as suspicious about the implications of giving birth to a child. In 'A Vacillation,' Fay's indecisiveness about having a child are discussed as she realises that she is pregnant; this realisation recalls the cryptic comment in 'Quiver' that describes Faith as 'pregnant now, though she doesn't know it.'¹⁰²¹ Fay's unborn child is 'a thin blue line,' a phrase which refers to a positive result in a pregnancy test and to an aphorism for the authority of law and policing.¹⁰²² The description displays ambiguous feelings, since while it recognises the vulnerability of the 'thin blue line,' it also suspects that the child is embedded in social policing that Fay is trying to evade and may therefore deny the freedom of its mother. As Whitford puts it in *Luce Irigaray*, the problem has been how to 'symbolize the relation between the girl-child and her mother in a way which allowed the mother to be both a mother *and* a woman.'¹⁰²³

Like Fay, Irigaray is cautious about equating the third space of dialogue with a child, yet it is significant that Fay's child is a daughter. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray reiterates the sentiment that all too often the child replaces intimacy between man and woman, yet she also suggests that in woman's quest to restore herself from the limiting roles allotted to women (which Irigaray describes as a kind of *internal exile*) that the mother-child metaphor might be a way of knowing and understanding the female self and being in the world and of creating a female divine. Irigaray suggests that 'self-intimacy' can only be achieved for women 'through the mother-daughter,

¹⁰²⁰ Irigaray, *The Way of the Heart*, 149.

¹⁰²¹ Rees-Jones, 'Quiver,' 32.113.

¹⁰²² Deryn Rees-Jones, 'A Vacillation,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 73 (73.9).

¹⁰²³ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 88.

daughter-mother relationship which woman re-plays for herself.’¹⁰²⁴ This exploration might enable a woman to ‘become[s] capable of respecting herself in her childhood and in her maternal creative function.’¹⁰²⁵ Montefiore summarises this thought in *Feminism and Poetry*’s account of Irigaray’s imaginary: ‘If women are to find their own identity and meaning, it is necessary to repossess our primitive love for the mother: the baby’s first, pre-Oedipal bond.’¹⁰²⁶ Montefiore concludes: ‘In other words, we need to repossess our identities through reclaiming as women our lost Imaginary state.’¹⁰²⁷

Rees-Jones has expressed interest in Irigaray’s imaginary in interview and in *Consorting with Angels*, she also mentions Irigaray’s view that ‘female “becoming” is dependent on the creation of the divine.’¹⁰²⁸ In ‘Relics,’ Rees-Jones deals with the communication and bridging of one and an other, yet the final poem, ‘Afterthought,’ is dedicated to Fay’s daughter. The fact that it is a daughter is significant, because as Irigaray notes in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, one of the factors needed for the love of the female self invoked in the female divine is ‘love for the child that she once was, that she still is, and shared enveloping of the child by the mother and of the mother by the child.’¹⁰²⁹ Rees-Jones’ representation of maternity shuttles between devotion and alienation with an ebb and flow of dialogue between the mother and child:

See! I have pressed the soft vowels of your imagination
and made them part of me. They pull me open, stitch me up,
your animal grunts and hungry gestures –
so much a noise that might come from my own mouth,

I can’t tell us apart. When I do daughter, I’ll admit, I’m lost,
my new body wandering the forest¹⁰³⁰

¹⁰²⁴ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 68.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰²⁶ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 141.

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁰²⁸ Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels*, 195.

¹⁰²⁹ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 69.

¹⁰³⁰ Deryn Rees-Jones, ‘Afterthought,’ *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 86-87 (86.9-14).

Fay replays the mother-daughter, daughter-mother relationship but when the real or imaginary child is apart from herself, she relapses into wandering and returns to the forest of violent gender types in 'Quiver.' The process of knowing herself as child and mother is difficult; it is a 'slow process of making and undoing' that demands space and recognition of difference.¹⁰³¹ However, the child represents possibility in the 'eyes, which might turn any colour,' and while the blue eyes that all babies have in their early life is part of their development, the focus on the eyes echoes a preoccupation with looking that appears throughout *Quiver*.¹⁰³² In particular, the changeability of the eyes recalls the unusual violet eyes of Mara, the clone, and her possibilities for transformation.

In motherhood, Fay finds another clone or angel and her discovery concurs with Gail M. Schwab's reading of Irigaray in 'Mother's Body, Father's Tongue: Mediation and the Symbolic Order.' Schwab suggests that, 'the angel is the mother's body, where mediation always already took place between the fetus [sic], the mother and the placenta.'¹⁰³³ Quoting Irigaray, who writes in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* that 'mucous should be [...] related to the angel,'¹⁰³⁴ Schwab suggests that the most important role of the angel is to be 'a medium of exchange' performed via mucus, the placenta, the mother's body or love itself.¹⁰³⁵

In 'Afterthought,' the mother and child perform play *via* transformative messages. Fay describes how she 'let[s] them rise inside me, birds cased in glass. / And all the while snow falls, depositing on lawns and roofs / its subtle metamorphic

¹⁰³¹ Rees-Jones, 'Afterthought,' 86.18.

¹⁰³² *Ibid.*, 87.23.

¹⁰³³ Gail M. Schwab, 'Mother's Body, Father's Tongue: Mediation and the Symbolic Order,' *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carloyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 351-378 (367).

¹⁰³⁴ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 17.

¹⁰³⁵ Schwab, 'Mother's Body, Father's Tongue,' 367.

chemistry.¹⁰³⁶ The child's eyes have the potential for flight, yet they are cased in glass, an image that represents the restrictive body that encases the self. However the motif of snow appears again, signalling the possibility of a mode of being in the world that is not restricted by where one's body is situated or how it appears in the world. Like the clone, which was also described using imagery of snow, this baby might be able to move beyond ordinary human categories while still existing in a human world.

The mother and child inhabit a 'lonely country' yet the 'pink coil of your [the baby's] ear' is reminiscent of a rich vein of imagery that runs through Rees-Jones' poetry: the spiral of the shell.¹⁰³⁷ The shell, which occurs in Rees-Jones' early poems as a symbol of dialogue and communication, represents a space in which one can communicate with the other by listening, but in hearing the oceanic noise of a conch shell, one actually listens to the blood beating in one's own ear. Interconnectedness with the real or imagined child enables knowledge of Fay's own identity and to conclude, I suggest that while maternity is not necessarily emancipatory, involving as it does sacrifice and stasis, Fay discovers that the relation with one's own daughter can be useful for identity and human relations. The interconnectedness with an other so longed for is finally possible and Fay finds a new muse in a reborn self that both belongs to and exceeds human categories. Her daughter represents her own voice and it is a powerful one, appearing in poems like 'The Lantern Festival' to offer a new fertility out of emptiness and nothingness: 'A life flutters and turns inside me. / Elsewhere I've started to imagine. / Words spill across an empty page.'¹⁰³⁸

¹⁰³⁶ Rees-Jones, 'Afterthought,' 87.25-27.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid., 88.31, 88.29.

¹⁰³⁸ Deryn Rees-Jones, 'The Lantern Festival,' *Quiver* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), 83 (83.22-24).

Chapter 5: Conclusion: The Emptiness of Self and the Fullness of Ecology

Just as Rees-Jones ends *Quiver* with a play on emptiness and fullness of identity, so I conclude this thesis with some brief comments on how the idea of a conventional ontological self is rejected by Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones. For these poets, representing the emptiness of selfhood offers new possibilities in relation to interconnectedness, or what Wheeler would call ecology. In *A New Modernity?*, Wheeler concludes that 'Enlightenment modernity, with its emphasis on rationality at the expense of emotion, has proved detrimental to our ability to empathise with other human creatures, and thus has tended to produce generations of individuals whose actions are inimical to the development of wholesome, integrated human beings.'¹⁰³⁹ What human beings lack in the Enlightenment mode, according to Wheeler, is a healthy relation with literal and imaginary others. Wheeler amplifies this argument by explaining that after the loss of past certainty-bearing teleologies, 'science stepped in and declared war on everything beyond logic, reason and empirical proof.'¹⁰⁴⁰ Wheeler suggests though, that 'sections of the scientific community have begun to see the folly of this approach and are turning back to what, in an earlier mode, scientists thought they should exclude.'¹⁰⁴¹ This has meant 'allowing us to rethink ourselves as obscure affective creatures who are what we are because we are embedded in the natural and social worlds,' thereby providing 'a more humanly decent way of being in the world.'¹⁰⁴²

This thesis argues that the poetic practice of Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones echoes the new modernity of Wheeler's philosophy. These poets emerge from the melancholy movement of poetry represented by R.S. Thomas, the mournful poetics of

¹⁰³⁹ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 160.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid.*, 160.

writers like Dylan Thomas and the more progressive poetics of mothering led by Gillian Clarke who has enabled writers of Wales to see beyond their own context to a greater interconnectedness. Beyond the certainty of earlier teleologies, Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones are committed to discovering new representations of being that address the issue of how the disabling binary of one and an other can be reconciled into a more progressive mode of relations. To meet this challenge, the poets have had to exile their poetic voice from normative ideas of the self. It is only by going beyond conventional identities that these poets can undermine the binary of orthodox human relations to discover a binding interconnectedness beyond the notion of the human subject as a hermetically sealed unit.

In the case of Lewis, this interconnectedness is found by moving beyond *Cymraeg*, the language that dominated her poetry during much of her poetic career. This move beyond the mother-tongue is also intimately connected to a move beyond any idea of an ontological self related to the nation of Wales. In the sequences, 'The Language Murderer' and 'Keeping Mum,' the protagonist, Miss D, loses *Cymraeg* at the same time as failing to maintain a whole and bounded selfhood. While it is partly Lewis' dehumanising experience of depression that enables her to go beyond conventional identities or ordinary selfhood, it is her sense of ecumenical spirituality that creates a sense of interconnectedness. Speaking collectively for many minor subjects, such as the victim of violence, the depressed subject, the diminutive and the invisible, Lewis uses the figure of the angel to represent the possibility of moving beyond the relation of one and an other. Rather, by centring the angel as a subject of the minor, Lewis' poetics invade the primary of the one, the major or the universal putting otherness, the minor and the microcosmic at the centre of things. This is not a

message of spiritual perfection, but an otherness that dissolves the centre and its dominative ideologies of value.

Petit has been a literal exile during her peripatetic childhood between Wales and France and in adult life journeying into one of the most mysterious and alien environments on earth: the Amazon rainforest. Petit merges her experiences of the Amazon and Latin America with the abuse she suffered as a child. Yet in exiling herself from Wales and the context of her abuse, she discovers a way to speak about the strangeness and familiarity in Western centres in relation to the strangeness and familiarity in other cultures which creates a kind of interconnectedness. Petit manages to break down the boundaries between her own experience of barbarity in the West and the distress of subjects in Latin America. Petit's suffering merges with the destruction of the Amazon, with the oppression of indigenous people and the physical and psychological torments of the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo. In revealing a parallel between abuses in the Western world and those in Latin America, Petit is on the one hand making a political statement about the culpability of Western influence in Latin America, whilst also challenging the West's assumptions in making itself the centre and developing countries the marginal. The strangeness of the other invades the homeliness of the centre, forcing Western subjects to recognise the strangers in themselves, as Kristeva would put it.

In a similar mode to Petit's imagining of dissolving the binary between the strange and the familiar, Rees-Jones explores how the ontological self provides a hiding place for a secret otherness that is performed in interstices, silences and doubling. Rees-Jones asserts that uncanny difference can pass under the cover of conventional appearances. For her, this eclipsed difference blurs the boundaries between the bounded self and more apparitional identities. This exile from

conventional selfhood is what enables interconnectedness with others as characters discover each other through the recognition of each other's difference. They share this recognition without resorting to the usual strategies of human relations: trying to make each other into one and the same or using the other as a mirror to shore up the familiarity of the self. Rees-Jones' novel-in-verse concludes with a new Imaginary, a vision of female divinity, via the representation of the co-existence of mother and child in an interconnected fashion. This use of maternity as a means to inspire a new kind of human existence binds Rees-Jones' approach to the 'oceanic feeling' conjured by Clarke's maternal poetics, a link which is not quite as obvious in the visions of Lewis and Petit.

However, between these three accounts of exile, there is some overlap of perspective. Lewis uses an allegorical detective story in the sequence, 'Keeping Mum,' as does Rees-Jones in *Quiver*. It is no surprise that in seeking to understand the mysteries of the self and other, Lewis and Rees-Jones use detective fiction, especially as it is a genre bound up with the abject figure of the corpse and the uncanniness of empathetic relationships, yet both poets approach the genre in different ways. Lewis focuses on abjection, locating the mother's (or mother-tongue's) decomposing body as a site of disgust that expresses the breakdown of selfhood following a loss of language. In contrast, Rees-Jones uses uncanniness to signal, not an irrevocable loss of self, but an identity hidden beneath the subject's conventional appearance. This tendency in Rees-Jones' approach brings her closer to the poetics of Petit, since Petit and Rees-Jones do not commit themselves to total self-obliteration and self-sacrifice as Lewis does, but rather they manage to deal with issues surrounding their own experience of identity and relations with others through a distancing 'as if' construct: 'as if' I was a clone or 'as if' I was Frida Kahlo. For Petit, this involves exiling herself into the

exigencies of another continent, Latin America, while Rees-Jones manages to play out her concerns through the plotting and intertextuality of her novel-in-verse, *Quiver*.

Another overlapping feature of these poets' approaches is the influence of Rainer Maria Rilke. Lewis recycles his angel from the *Duino Elegies* as a creature emerging from the obliteration of conventional identity. Rilke's idea of the angel is extended by Lewis so that it is a messenger that represents the collective concerns of marginal subjects, as it becomes particles of dust, rotting vegetables or a dying boy in Kabul. In contrast to Rilke, Lewis seems to believe that hyper-consciousness can be achieved by human beings through the sacrifice of normal being, as posited by Zen Buddhist philosophy. Rees-Jones' poetic voice does not transform itself so utterly as Lewis,' but rather seeks to change conventional objects and subjects by working out the otherness hidden within them. For this reason, when she draws on Rilke, she is not preoccupied with Rilke's angel, but with the contact of two human beings in what Rilke describes as 'two solitudes.'¹⁰⁴³ This discovery of interconnectedness can enable an experience similar to that of the superconsciousness experienced by Rilke's angels. What Rilke represents for both of these poets is the possibility of moving beyond self-conscious identities towards a mode of being that represents a greater interconnectedness with others, which has great gifts for the potentialities of human lives.

There are similarities and differences between these three poets, but what ultimately binds them together is the search for subjects beyond conventional identities through which they suggest the interconnectedness of one and an other. For Lewis, this figure is the angel, which acts as an antidote to the primacy of the one, the

¹⁰⁴³ Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 35. When Rees-Jones does write of the angel, she draws on the liminality of Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history' rather than Rilke's 'terrible' angel. See pages 262-266 in 'Chapter 4: The Way of Love: the Third Space Between Belonging and Exile in Deryn Rees-Jones' *Quiver*' for my full argument about Rees-Jones' angel.

major or the universal, through its foregrounding of difference, the minor and the microcosmic. Petit discovers the possibilities in exiling herself to the standpoint of Latin America where she highlights the strangeness both in Western cultures and the developing world, again undermining a binary that gives primacy to Western culture. Rees-Jones presents interconnectedness in the form of subjects of otherness or difference who, figured as clones, pass for human and invade the easy familiarity of conventional identity. The poetic projects of these women, as I have interpreted them, must lead to consideration of what contributions a minor literary tradition, like that of Wales, might make to the process of imagining human relations in the West and beyond. While analysis of Welsh poets has tended to focus solely on the poetry's relevance to Wales, Welshness and *Cymraeg*, the point of this thesis is that Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones move far beyond the confines of their own cultural experience. Only by exiling themselves from what is homely or familiar can they discover the potential in foregrounding the margins or the minor and the possibility of moving beyond binaries that privilege the one, the homely or the familiar over the other, the unhomely and the strange. Beyond such binaries, we might find a kind of ecology in which the centre dissipates and boundaries between the privileged and the marginal are at last blurred.

The conceptualisation and analysis applied in this thesis have revealed novel themes in the poetic projects of Lewis, Petit and Rees-Jones. However, this thesis clearly could be complemented with studies of other writers with a connection to Wales. For example, the poet, Patience Agbabi, has a unique take on cultural belonging having been born in London by Nigerian parents, but growing up in North Wales. It would also be relevant in future to examine the development of Welsh poetry by men, particularly work by Owen Sheers, Robert Minhinnick and Ifor Thomas, as well as

considering other devolved poetries in Britain and their responses to the issues of exile and ecology.

This thesis claims to have demonstrated to critics and researchers that a minor perspective need not be a narrow one. For the poets discussed in this study, the possibilities of an unique view are fulfilled through exile from the specificity of their minor context and through their gesture towards ecologies with other minor subjects. This ecology or interconnectedness does not represent the whole and bounded identity desired in the Enlightenment project, nor does it provide new certainties regarding the ontological self. However, in moving beyond the limits of a hermetically sealed selfhood, Lewis' angel, Petit's Latin America and Rees-Jones' clone suggest that certainty of selfhood or culture is no longer necessary in a new ecology of people and things. As Wendy Wheeler concludes:

The old Enlightenment is truly over. The new modernity has begun.¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰⁴⁴ Wheeler, *A New Modernity?*, 160.

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Appendix: Interview with Pascale Petit

The following interviews were provided by Pascale Petit in an e-mail of 7th December 2007 for use in my research. They originally appeared in the Spanish-language version of *The Zoo Father* which is now out of print. The citation is as follows: Petit, Pascale. *El Padre Zoológico*. Trans. Valerie Mejer and E.M. Test. Mexico City: El Tucán de Virginia, 2004. Interviews on pages: 134-157.

Interview of Pascale Petit by Valerie Mejer

Valerie Mejer (V.M.): For many people leaving something they devoted themselves to and moving on fully to a different field in a truly committed way is quite difficult. You trained as a sculptor at the Royal College of Art and left that to devote your self to poetry. My question goes in this direction: How were the last days that you sculpted and realized that you were going to devote yourself to poetry?

Pascale Petit (P.P.): I wasn't moving on to a different field because I'd been writing poetry and prose all along. I would spend a year being a sculptor, then 8 months writing. Whichever one I was doing I did exclusively and was very committed. It was quite schizophrenic! Since I was at school, I knew I wanted to be an artist and a poet, but I couldn't choose between them. I stopped making paintings and sculptures gradually. There wasn't a last day. It faded out. I found that I could get what I wanted much more through metaphor and images than by making artefacts. In the end sculpting became frustrating, and my poems started to get prizes, so I felt encouraged to concentrate on them. Once I stopped making visual art, I found my poems got better, because I could no longer switch to sculpture when the writing was going badly. I had to keep at it. And it's keeping at it that eventually leads to breakthroughs. It's

those times when I am experimenting and exploring but not getting immediate results that lead later to good writing.

V.M.: In the poem "The Strait-Jackets" you seem not only to imagine an exceptional situation (packing in cloth strait-jackets forty live hummingbirds) but to follow a whole procedure, like if you were saying "a poem is not only an image but the full experimenting with a vision"...Can you elaborate on this?

P.P.: In "The Strait-Jackets" I am acting out a ritual. It would not be enough for me to just present the strange image of the forty hummingbirds in their suitcase. I have no idea why I did what I did with them, not really. I just followed my nose as I wrote. I wrote this poem very quickly and easily. A wonderful photo I found in a library prompted it. There were these hummingbirds in their little pyjamas. It was black and white – an old photo, but with a tint, so their pyjamas were pale pink and beige, or am I imagining this? This photo was like a talisman – I just loved it. I found it tremendously exciting, and knew straightaway it was a poem for me. It was in an old book about hummingbirds, about how Augusto Ruschi, a Brazilian hummingbird-fancier, used to transport his birds when he flew to sell them abroad. The hummingbirds go into torpor when they are cold, and thus are easily carried in a suitcase. It was obvious to me I should take them to my father and show them to him. The whole process was trance-like. The simple act of revivifying them and letting them loose around his tiny room, then capturing them again, somehow said what I wanted to say, without words (conversation). This feels like a poem without words – a mime. People have offered me various explanations as to what the hummingbirds symbolise. All of them seem right. I would think the forty birds were the forty years of my life.

V.M.: In *The Zoo Father*, you build an alternative world where the memory of abuse, Amazon rituals, and animal behavior mixes with a present where you witness your old torturer dying. Apparently you were able to do this not only because of an intellectual or emotional disposition but also because of how the events presented themselves. A kind of synchronicity that became part of what the book resulted to be. Can you talk about this?

P.P.: Yes that's it, synchronicity. Until I realised I could use all the research I was doing on the Amazon to write about my father, I couldn't write about him. I was in shock, it was such a shock that he reappeared after 35 years. I couldn't write about it as an ordinary event with ordinary details. The furniture in his tiny overcrowded flat didn't convey the strangeness.

I had travelled to the Venezuelan Amazon in the years preceding his appearance. I'm convinced now that the reason I went there was because I was going to meet him, and would need help from a rich source to write about this. By rich, I mean imagistically rich, ritually rich, from tribes that really know how to conjure spells. From these tribes I got knowledge about how to deal with difficult things, how to enlist the natural world – with which they are so familiar – to come to my aid. Their legends and myths were also helpful to me. I especially drew on initiation rites for young men – rites designed to make men strong and fearless in warfare. Reading about these rites, such as the ant glove trial, the wasps' nest trial, and the head-shrinking process, I felt I was delving into the secrets of the human soul. But however shocking their behaviour might seem to us, there was always a cultural reason for it, it was never gratuitous. I do believe that people are basically good, and I needed to find out that my father was basically good. I think I saw the Amazonian tribes as prototypes for the male psyche – they are mostly (but not all) male-dominated.

V.M.: *The Zoo Father* started to exist in a notebook where you gathered all this material together in a hotel in Paris, coming back from visits to your father. “All morning I walked through the rain until I’d seen every animal in the Ménagerie”(…) this is how I spend my mornings, Father, then I return to the hotel, prepare my mask. The mask is the book.” Does this notebook still exist? Can you describe what’s in it?

P.P.: That notebook still exists. I’ve kept all of them, the ones where I drafted poems (I didn’t have a computer then) and the large wide notebooks where I collected words and lines I liked about creatures and notes from my Amazonian researches. That notebook where I started writing my book *The Zoo Father* has the first draft of a poem in it. The poem is called ‘The Zoo Father’ and is about my visits to the Menagerie in the Jardin des Plantes. I loved that zoo, and went almost every day. It was within easy walking distance from my hotel in the rue des Écoles and my father’s flat. Each verse of this poem is a portrait of my father as a different animal I’d seen in the zoo. He was a snake, a coati, a vulture (I couldn’t believe the zoo had king vultures, one of the top predators of the Amazon, and even a baby king vulture, in the nursery. That was wonderful), a puma, and a giant stick insect. I soon saw that I would be able to write about him in this way, and make him fun, that it could be enjoyable even to write about some of the painful feelings. The poems that followed were short and elemental, the beasts chthonic and dark, primordial, such as anacondas, black jaguars, caimans. These were the early Zoo Father poems, and they got published in magazines, but I didn’t include them in the collection.

V.M.: One amazing fact (among others) is that the book’s civilizing force is presented in a way we are accustomed to identify with the uncivilized. As in the poem “Trophy,” you describe the ritual by which you shrink your father’s skull. So, the extraordinary resource is not in the

verbal experimentation, or in the accomplished structure of verse, the resource is found in the action that takes place, in the daring way in which you face it. Can you elaborate on this in connection with your experience in the Amazons?

P.P.: I wanted the forms of the poems in this book to be very straightforward, no-nonsense. It wasn't a time to play with fancy forms or words. I had to write fast, while my father was still alive and as events unfolded, such as my mother's death at this time, followed by his death. And the subjects were sometimes quite shocking, so to be formally playful with them felt wrong. The poems were too urgent and I wanted to keep to essentials. I wanted to convey the intensity of my experience, as plainly as possible, but have fun with the images, which I did! Poems like 'Trophy' are about a process, a rite of passage. It also may have a dissociated cool feel to it, but this poem was saving my life. I rarely read that poem at readings. But I had to write it, to "shrink" my father's power. I was quite shocked by the violence in myself. I'm a gentle person!

V.M.: Can you talk about the importance of a specific dream that you had of your father's face on the Cataratas del Ángel, in connection with this book?

P.P.: Several years ago I had a long-term illness, and it was then that I had this dream, so the dream has a feverish quality to it, which I can still feel. I was at the foot of Angel Falls, in a church. The front of the church was the base of the falls. The walls of the church were damp and mossy. There were a few stone stools to sit on, and I sat there, knowing this was my last chance to look at the falls properly. I always felt that they were a god – my god. But even in the dream, I felt weak and ill, so this visit was hard. At first the stinging swirling mists that form the base of the falls (their drop is so deep, one kilometre, that by the time the water

reaches the base it's vapour) formed into a veil like a bridal veil. The harder I looked at this organic veil, the more I realised there was a giant face in it – my father's. About two days later, the miraculous letter arrived from my father's lawyer, saying he wanted to see me, and there was his address and phone number in Paris. It was so utterly unexpected, I hadn't seen my father for 35 years, and I didn't allow myself to think about him. But there was the letter, as if written on angel-skin, just after my dream of Angel Falls.

V.M.: In the past you have said that you like to write in a state of trance. I've heard Les Murray say a similar thing. Can you talk about this?

P.P.: I am very interested in altered states, and the altered states that Amazonian tribes access with the help of various techniques – such as sleep-deprivation, fasting, abstinence, solitude, and the ritualised use of hallucinogenic drugs. I don't take drugs though! What I'm after when I'm writing is to write as deeply and wholly as I can – a total immersion. I don't really want a conscious voice there, or to know where I'm going. I want to be surprised. I'm sure all poets must know what I'm talking about, all artists, because I used to get there when painting or sculpting sometimes, and I loved my work best when it was in this trance. If someone called me I wouldn't hear. That's a marvellous way to work – to forget yourself and your surroundings, and be hyper-alert but absent. When I look back at my poems, I can see the lines where I was in a trance to some degree, they are my favourite lines. And my favourite poems are the poems with the most trance-lines in them.

V.M.: Your most recent book *The Huntress* just came out. Apparently this time the subject was your mother. Can you talk about it and also in comparison with "The Zoo Father", I mean the differences in the process of writing it, etc...?

P.P.: It was much harder for me to write about my mother. I knew her better than my father. I was frightened of her. I wasn't frightened of my father – he was a mere man. My mother – what was she? I don't know. To say she was mentally ill doesn't explain her. To say she scared me and was cold and made me want to vanish in her presence doesn't describe her. I hope some of the poems in *The Huntress* go some way to summon her, to show the reader how otherworldly and how terrifying a person can appear, not just to a child, but to a grown woman. The last time I saw her was in hospital not long before she died. I might as well have been a child again, for all the power she had over me. In *The Huntress* she is a rattlesnake, a horse, a praying mantis, a ghost orchid. She is also a series of Aztec gods. When I first came to Mexico and went to the Templo Mayor and the Anthropology Museum, I thought how like my family the Aztecs were. My mother could wear me as Xipe Totec wore a young girl's skin to renew the earth at spring. Yet my mother was also vulnerable and fragile, a victim herself. I could not do to her what I did to my father in *The Zoo Father*. That wouldn't have been right. The main poem in the book is a version of a long poem by the Hungarian poet Ferenc Juhász, 'The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets.' Mine is a version of his poem, where a daughter changes into a cosmic stag to escape her mother. I feel I got somewhere in this poem. It's both compassionate towards my mother (phew!) and shows just how much I had to escape her, out into the forests of the night sky. And there are, for me at least, a lot of trance-lines.

Interview of Pascale Petit by Mack Test

Mack Test (M.T.): How has growing up in France and Wales, living in England, and traveling to the Amazons shaped the sense of place in your poetry?

Pascale Petit (P.P.): I've always written poems about being elsewhere. I live in London but don't write about it, partly because English cities don't interest me much, but mainly because I live in my imagination, always had to when I was a child, to escape from home. The Amazon felt like 'home,' and the Pemón tribe I met there felt like relatives, though to tell the truth, I've always suspected home was not on earth. I have no sense of roots or belonging. Though I do feel enormous homesickness, especially for the past, I get very homesick for memories. As soon as I was born (in Paris) I was flown to Wales, and when I was two I was sent back to Paris. At seven I was sent back to Wales. Not only did I frequently move country but also guardian, and was rarely brought up by my parents. I spent many childhood summers in the South of France, and this was like my first Amazon – hot, lush, with huge colourful insects and desolate dinosaur-haunted plateaux. And it has become one of the places I write about as if it once was home, but it wasn't. A lot is said about a sense of place in poems, and I'm amazed how some poets have a place they really call home that they can celebrate in their poetry. What strange people these are! Home is in my imagination, and it's a big place! Every poem I write adds a room to it.

M.T.: You bring many scientific specifics to your poetry. The Hummingbird's ultrasonic cheeps, for instance, and the lungfish's film of mucus that protects it underground. Do you look for these details during the process of writing a poem, mining a large knowledge base, or does the research sometimes produce the poem?

P.P.: The research produces the poem. I trust my instincts and follow my nose when I do research, which I do a lot of in considerable depth. The more excited I feel about an animal, or an indigenous tribe's rite, or about the composition of a feather under the scanning electron

microscope, the surer I feel that there's something there that resonates for me. The more excited I get the deeper the meaning is for me. Usually what the poem is going to be about – my father's lungs for example, comes to me as I read the research. Then, yes, I do more research with a more conscious sense of what it's for. Except that then it'll lead to another poem which will be a cousin to the first. As a child I developed a passion for the natural world; animals and plants were friends. As a poet, this passion has increased. With the fascination for the creature/object comes a love of the vocabularies that are used to describe that creature/object. I write them down and often the words themselves are the stimulus for poems. During the writing of *The Zoo Father* I kept large thick notebooks crammed with facts, words, phrases and quotes. I made lists such as the names of hummingbirds – they were like a prayer or a box of jewels I could open however dark the day.

M.T.: When did you first develop an interest in South America, and why?

P.P.: I was mad about waterfalls at the time – which was twelve years ago, in 1992. I found this book *Waterfalls of the World* – it was my bible then. The earth's highest and widest waterfalls were in it, they were my friends around the world. The highest was Angel Falls in Venezuela. They looked so remote and ethereal, like a god. I went into a travel agent's and asked if they had any trips to them – I wasn't expecting them to say yes but they did! So I went. I've been twice now because when I got there and saw them, the reality was so much better than my fantasy. I also had dreams about the falls and my father's face appearing in them (before he made contact). So that's why I went back, because the dreams told me to. Their setting was otherworldly, like heaven, but hard – a cruel heaven. (I wasn't fit enough to climb those table mountains but I did climb Mt Roraima and it almost killed me). Then this obsession for Angel Falls went sideways to obsessions with the rainforest fauna and the

Pemón Indians, and again sideways from that to other Indians deeper in the forest. I searched for a lot of ethnographic books, some of which were hard to track down. I don't have the same obsession about African tribes and animals – isn't that odd?

M.T.: Do you see your use of Indian words as fitting into a specific kind of English literary tradition? I am thinking as far back as the renaissance when English explorers began returning with accounts of New World explorations. In particular, Sir Walter Raleigh's *Discovery of Guiana* is chock full with native words for plants and animals, and talks about the Amazon and Orinoco rivers.

P.P.: No, I don't see myself fitting into any kind of English literary tradition. It's unfashionable here to write about South America. I don't think the British are very interested in far off Latin America. When I started using this imagery, I did get quite a negative response from one or two magazine editors here to my new poems. They said they were too exotic and not about "their neck of the woods". However you're right, there is a tradition historically, but I link that with the Victorian love of natural history and exotica. And I did read lots of those documents. They're great because they're excited firsthand accounts and often beautifully written by natural historians and explorers who took pride in their writing style. In contemporary poetry I'd say the trend here in Britain is not to relish the details and names of plants and animals, not to go into scientific depth, to keep poems simple and unspecific, and not to use extended metaphors.

M.T.: What is your concept of form in poetry? I notice that you often employ two-line stanzas, or shape a poem into a single stanza. Do you agree with Robert Creeley, that content dictates the form, or do you decide on a form prior to composing the poem?

P.P.: I'm with Creeley. My form comes out of the content, and also out of the particular music that that content is adopting. But in my third book I'm avoiding couplets, and tercets. I don't want it to look like *The Zoo Father* take two! The long block I'm keeping, it's such a useful form for conveying intensity, urgency and claustrophobia. In my third book I'm experimenting with form more, partly because it's a more variegated and expansive book. I got dissatisfied with the medium-length line couplets. They serve well enough in *The Zoo Father* but I don't want to get stuck in a rut. The important thing with this second book was to write the poems quickly, while my father was alive then just after his death. I didn't have time to fuss about the shape of the stanzas too much, though I did work at getting them to look as much as possible like the chant that they felt they were for me. If I was lucky, they were written in a trance state, and I didn't want some regular beat ruining that. The couplets reflect my relationship with my father I suppose, as we were both isolated at the time, both living on our own, so there's this dance we did as a duo, that we had to do, wearing our animal masks.

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I'm not interested in using traditional formal metre. The iambic pentameter still seems to rule in the UK, even in free verse. It lurks behind a lot of rather regular stressed so-called free style poems. I don't want my poems in straitjackets. I want them to be as primitive as possible – not too well behaved and civilised. I don't know why.

M.T.: In the western tradition, when poets mention certain animals and plants readers can't help but think of a whole slew of hereditary meanings —associating a lion with courage, the nightingale with Philomela's rape, or the Oak tree with England. Do you use any lesser-known Amerindian myths about South American animals and plants in your poetry that might not be readily apparent to the reader?

P.P.: For Amerindian peoples, every plant and animal in the Amazon forest has a rich heritage of living mythic significance. They are interconnected in marvellous ways, and are often imbued with magical forces in the context of hallucinogenic trance. For example, each subspecies of the hallucinogen 'vine of the soul' is linked with a different perfume, flavour, texture, animal, mineral, song, and colour, including "colours we don't even know the name of" (Desana shaman). It does help for readers to know something about this, but it's not essential. I hope these poems convey the richness and metaphorical depth of Amazonian culture. I find it in many ways richer than, for example, Greek mythology. What I've tried to do in *The Zoo Father* is not only make the story of my relationship with my father clear, but also some of the stories of the Amazon. There are two poems about the cedar tree; for example, the white cedar, which is carved into a canoe then a coffin after its owner's death, and the red cedar, which is carved into a violin. My poem 'Self-Portrait as a Yanomami Daughter,' while telling my story, tells Yanomami tales – how rape is part of their women's lives, how they drink the ashes of their dead, and there's also a reference to their myth 'How Night Was Made.' I interweave elements of the Indian stories with my stories, but naturally, these are just the tip of the iceberg. Their mythologies and legends are highly complex and sophisticated. However violent some of the rituals, I think of these peoples as spiritually highly evolved. I particularly admire their profound knowledge of their natural environment

M.T.: Two of the animals that occur often in *The Zoo Father*, are the Hummingbird and the Wasp, both small and rapid wing-flapping creatures. What do these particular animals represent to you?

P.P.: When I use an animal in a poem, it's not because it represents something for me, it's more that I'm drawn to the animal and instinctively feel it has meaning for me, though I don't

at the time articulate why to myself. After writing the poem, I might have a go at guessing why I've used that animal as a metaphor. Your linking of the hummingbird with the wasp is intriguing. It occurs to me now that they are both highly aggressive dynamos. They are also tiny – what could that mean? Are they souls? They both have rapid-beating wings, as if they really belong to another dimension. They are both jewel-like – one is like a velvet fire opal and the other like a miniature flying tiger. They are both penetrators – they have a sharp bill and a stinger. But I'm just guessing! And they both make great nests. Which brings me back to homes – microcosmic plush paper homes (like poems!) and weavings of hair and collected treasures like a little head.

Interview of Pascale Petit by Valerie Mejer

Valerie Mejer (V.M.): Can you talk to me about the title *The Zoo Father*?

Pascale Petit (P.P.): When I discovered my father he was living in Paris next to the Jardin des Plantes (in the Latin Quarter), where there is an old-fashioned zoo full of Amazonian species. As breaks from visiting him I used to walk there daily. That's how I called him that. At the beginning, there was a poem titled 'The Zoo Father,' where every stanza portrayed him as one of the Amazonian animals. That poem grew into the book. I remember writing that first poem vividly, because I was supposed to go to a reading at Shakespeare & Co bookshop that evening (and I was on my own always), but I started writing and stayed in the hotel. Until then and since he'd made contact, I'd felt blocked, for 8 months!

Someone said to me the animals are a tribunal for him, he's on trial. Though it could also be called *The Animal Father*, I do not mean that he's "animalistic" and bad in an animal way. I think the animals in the book are very good. They are our masks, to make things bearable and fun.

V.M: The element of metamorphosis is very important in your poems. It makes me think of Kafka's Gregorio Samsa transformed into an insect. In the poems you get transformed as well as your father and your mother in animals that exist in their world where they manage to survive. Also rituals and elements of their mythology help them. I think you chose this form, this Amazonian mythology because it was the only way to explain survival. Even if you disagree with my theory, can you talk about your motivations in the expositions of these metamorphoses?

P.P: Transformation was essential for me to survive the two years this book spans: from the time my father reappeared (I hadn't seen him for 35 years since I was eight) until both he and my mother died two years later. I did not want to write realism, did not want to be stuck with his reality. His tiny, dingy Paris flat where he was a prisoner to his Emphysema was very haunting but not adequate to the drama that was being enacted in it, so I 'took' him to my favourite place, the Amazon, and filtered our story through that. There were two amazing bookshops nearby on the rue des Écoles – L'Harmattan, and a Latin American bookshop – and I would spend hours browsing in there, then bring back ethnographic books to show him. He had no idea what I was doing with them though. It was my secret and it gave me power. I'd go back to my hotel and jot down notes and a few poems, then return home to London to work on them. I enjoyed writing these poems immensely, and that was a great solace. I can't imagine having coped without them. I enjoyed the transforming aspect because it turned him into something positive and beautiful for me, into somewhere full of longing and magic.

V.M.: What did Keats' mansions of the mind mean for you?

P.P.: Keats wrote in a letter that "any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel...with the fine Webb of his Soul.... full of Symbols for his spiritual eye". I first read this when I was sixteen, and decided then that I would create my own "two-and thirty Pallaces" where I could live (in my imagination) and escape from my home life which I hated. The Amazon is in one of these mansions because it's a vast place, so these rooms could be immense and luxuriant. The luxuriance is important because it has to be a more appealing place than the outer world, though it's made from the outer world. By making these mansions of memory, I am also preserving the outer world – e.g. the Amazon forest, which is shrinking, isn't shrinking in my poems, it's expanding!

V.M.: In another interview you said: “To this day I still like a poet to have a system of symbols, an image-bank that furnishes his/her world. By far the biggest influence on my work is Amazonian indigenous cultures”. How were you able to assimilate as part of your imagery the Amazonian mythological world. Can you talk about the process from when you discovered this culture until it found such an important place in your poetry such as it has in *The Zoo Father*?

P.P.: In my books I am making an image-bank for myself the way a sculptor makes sculptures or installations. I trained as a sculptor, and that’s had a big influence on my poetry. I like to make a poem the way I once made artifacts – they must be solid to convince and suspend disbelief, and there must be enough of them to make a world.

A few years before I wrote *The Zoo Father* I had twice travelled in the Amazon, initially to see Angel Falls in Venezuela. I visited the falls by canoe river trips led by the Pemón Indians of that sacred Lost World area. I also climbed Mount Roraima, their Tree of Life. My impressions of the rainforest, the table mountains and the fauna were so much better than I’d anticipated. I became quite obsessed and read every book I could get hold of about Pemón mythology. Just before my father made contact, I had a vivid dream that I went back to Angel Falls and saw his face in the veils of falling water.

Later, when I was dealing with the painful material that surfaced during my visits to him, I found numerous books on the Jivaro – People of the Sacred Waterfalls – the headshrinkers of Ecuador. What struck me was how they prepared for war: young warriors sought out the highest waterfall and went on a spirit quest there, fasting, and isolating themselves until they received a visit from a power animal or force (a jaguar, anacondas, or a lightning ball). They had to touch this apparition and not run away, and this is how they

gained what they called “arutam”, which is supernatural personal power used for war and headshrinking. I couldn’t help thinking that my journeys to Angel Falls were a preparation for confronting my father. I went to the highest waterfall in my world (which is global), and that was Angel Falls. When I was there at the foot of the falls I was feverish and unwell, this enhanced their otherworldly impact. In the dream afterwards, my father’s face appeared in them when I had no reason to think about him. A few days later the miraculous letter arrived, saying he wanted me to visit him.

V.M: It seems to me that despite the immense pain that the book reflects it’s written in a tone of final victory or at least that moment where you were able to bury your tormentor (I’m thinking of the poem ‘Trophy’ among others) and it reminds me of that moment when Sylvia Plath wrote: ‘Herr God, Herr Lucifer/ Beware/ Beware.’ Do you think this is possible, that once a victim found a way, a mythology and a way with words that is more a triumphant chant? And also can you talk about what you once said “what I’m after is a kind of chant”?

P.P.: The victory is in turning my father into art. I would not have felt triumphant otherwise. Only by transforming him into a book could I overcome the anger and pain. You’re right to pick ‘Trophy.’ That poem was the turning point. Before I wrote it my parents overwhelmed me. The ritual I enacted with words, shrinking my father’s head, seemed to psychologically shrink him so he could no longer overwhelm. I didn’t have to be violent. I just had to follow the process the Jivaro/Shuar tribe used to overcome their enemies. They shrank their heads to shrink their souls. They believe the soul lingers in the head and hair after death.

Poems can be spells, but to work they have to contain a chant quality in their music.

To achieve this I try to write in a trance state. I’m very interested in altered states, in the

supernatural aspect of poetry, the spirit world, which is another reason why I'm drawn to Amazonian tribes, because they have elaborate rituals for accessing their spirit worlds.

V.M.: Which other Anglo-Saxon poets (male and female) who have explored violence have helped you, inspired you or that you merely like?

P.P.: Not many poets explore violence do they? Not in Britain, it's not polite and the British are rather polite in their poetry. Ted Hughes did though. I admire that about his work. Sylvia Plath did, but she's not British. If anyone helped me it's American poets. Sharon Olds and C K Williams are inspirational. I'm sure I must be missing someone, but other names don't come readily to mind. There are war poets but that's a different kind of violence, official violence, and not the hidden violence of the home. Poets seem to shy away from that. I love many poets' work whatever their subject matter. Dante (now he did violence), Selima Hill (she does explore violence to a certain extent though she disguises it), Ruth Padel, Les Murray. The Hungarian poet Ferenc Juhász's great poem of transformation – 'The Boy Changed Into a Stag Cries Out At the Gate of Secrets' – is one of my favourite poems, but I only discovered it recently and since have written my own version or transformation of it.

V.M.: In the poem 'Motherfather' you transform them in to one single centaur, and you wonder how can you mount this beast. It seems to me that you found a way not to be constricted to one mythology but to be able to use the one that portrays reality in a more real way. Do you feel this kind of freedom that I'm talking about?

P.P.: The image of my mother and father as the 'centaur' of a conquistador on a horse popped into my head. I wrote that poem quickly, though I must have been reading about Aztec

perceptions of the Spanish invaders. My mother had just phoned me and announced she was thinking of visiting my father. She lived in Wales and he was in Paris, and it was a crazy idea because she was both mentally and physically very ill and couldn't even walk out of her house. She hadn't seen him for 35 years and had always been very bitter about him. That's how I pictured them if she did it. He was a sight too, emaciated and attached to his oxygen by tubes. They were both terrible parents, so they became conquistadores storming into my life. There was freedom in turning them into this beast because it expressed how I felt about her mad idea through the images, and I overcame my invaders by writing the poem.

I moved away from the Amazon at that point because the poem was a response to her, not him. And he was the Amazon, not her. The truth is that I hate my mother much more than my father. In fact I don't hate him. I missed having a father all those years but tried not to think about it and forgot the bad he did. When he reappeared to die I was angry with him. So I turned him into a book. Then he died. Now I have the book instead of a father and it's a great substitute. He was a human. She was from another universe. No poem can express how strange she was. But I'm trying! When I finished *The Zoo Father* I moved away from Amazonian imagery to write about my mother in the collection I'm working on now, *The Huntress*, and it's so hard to do her. He was easy.

V.M: It seems to me that you have brought the faculty of memory to a wider spectrum. It seems that you have made of it more than recounting an experience as a witness worried to not miss details to the representation of the true *mise-en-scène*. So if you were to define memory in a book of poetic definitions (with freedom like in the dictionary of surrealism) how would you define it?

P.P.: Memory for me in poetry is the act of remaking the world. Remaking the past and making it more real than it was, more solid, more physical, more here, is the act of transforming it so every moment can be precious. When I live through something in the present I don't see it fully, because I'm too busy being in it. By writing about it in a poem, I'm filling in the parts I was blind to. I'm appreciating it as if I'm seeing it for the first time, but the advantage of hindsight makes me objective enough to see it outside my self. While experiencing something important, I'm too close to see it properly. When it's settled in my imagination, then I can describe it, because the imagination doesn't lie. The imagination tells all kinds of truths about memory that no one might have witnessed. The facts may be remembered as fictions – I might make stories up that feel truer and realer than what seemed to happen, but the poem must feel right. If the feeling is right, then it's true. I think this is the thing about poetry and memory, because as human beings, we use very little of the capacity of our minds, so we need poetry to use more, and therefore perceive more. Remaking the world through art is our way of fully and freshly re-experiencing the world. It's also a wonderful creative cure for distress.