

**‘AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXISTENCE AND UTILITY OF A
QUAKER LITERARY AESTHETIC IN THE POETRY OF PHILIP
GROSS AND SIBYL RUTH’**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS BY RESEARCH**

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October 2020**

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Abstract

Quakers have had an ambivalent historical relationship with creativity, initially placing taboos around its creation and reception but they now actively make and enjoy literature. This thesis explores what might constitute a Liberal Quaker Literary Aesthetic (QLA), and tests a theoretical model through an analysis of the poetry of British Quaker poets Philip Gross and Sybil Ruth. The QLA, it is suggested, consists of seven key features: openness, ambiguity and seeking; dialogical engagement; ethical rather than moral writing; creative attention; Quaker sensibility; an apophatic approach to the Divine; silence as presence and force. I argue that this QLA, whilst partially displayed by other writers of faith or none, is fully demonstrated by these writers, as a development in this context of particular values and the silent, apophatic approach found amongst British Liberal Quakers, brought over into literary writing. I demonstrate that this QLA is a distinctive expression of Liberal Quakerism. I discuss its utility, also suggesting future avenues of research in comparison with other branches of Quakerism and other faith traditions and none.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support that I have received from the Adult Grants Group at Friends House, London, which financed the tuition fees for my course. I also gratefully acknowledge financial assistance from the Barnsley Friends Adult School Trust Fund, which assisted in purchasing books and funding travel and attendance at student conferences during this research. I am greatly indebted to both organisations. Furthermore, many thanks are due to Helen Stanton and Dede Tyndall for their hospitality to me during my visits to Birmingham.

I will be forever indebted to Philip Gross and Sibyl Ruth for being kind enough to allow me to analyse their poetry freely in this thesis. I must also acknowledge a debt of gratitude to all of my interviewees: Philip Gross, Sibyl Ruth, Gillian Allnutt, Stephen Cox and Simon Denison. Without their generosity in terms of time and support, this project would have lacked vital insights.

Finally, this thesis would never have been completed without the support and generosity of my two supervisors, Ben Pink Dandelion and Rebecca Roach, who have brilliantly guided me through many surprises and challenges, and my friend, Angela van den Berg, who has painstakingly read and responded to my thesis as it has developed, making many helpful suggestions on expression and written style. Many thanks are also due to Helen Meads who offered invaluable support and advice during the planning of this project, and who encouraged me to raise the bar admirably high.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Monika and son, Noah, without whose love, patience and support I would not have been able to find the time and space to complete it. They have listened to my musings with great forbearance and cheered me on to the finishing line.

*

‘Along the paths of the imagination the artist and the mystic make contact. The revelations of God are not all of one kind. Always the search in art, as in religion, is for the rhythms of relationships, for the unity, the urge, the mystery, the wonder of life that is presented in great art and true religion.’

- Horace B. Pointing

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter Outline

In this chapter I overview thesis topic and importance, then summarise my chosen poets' lives and work, and define key terms. An initial literature review follows, then a commentary on my interdisciplinary approach to the various academic subjects involved, blending Literature, Theology and Social Sciences, and interviewing as a research tool. I then outline interview conduct and content, ending with a dissertation outline.

Thesis Topic and Importance

As an English graduate, teacher, and writer, I have become increasingly concerned with the process involved in literary writing. As an active Liberal Quaker, I am drawn to consider the process whereby Quakers make literature, in order to identify a useful set of concepts for understanding Liberal Quaker literary writing.

Literary criticism is a lavish landscape, with a wide variety of different schools of thought, approaches, and interconnections between different positions. It has been necessary for me to consider what ideas and criticism exist for two reasons. Firstly, to establish that there is indeed an area that has not been considered up to the present time. Secondly, to discern which literary theories will be particularly relevant to the work that I propose to undertake.

At the present time, there are interesting and exciting currents in criticism, including Ecocriticism,¹ ‘Thing Theory’,² Affect Theory,³ New Formalism⁴ and Ethical Criticism.⁵ Whilst several of these approaches may interconnect with aspects of my work, perhaps most especially the concept of Ethical Criticism, none of them directly addresses the relationship between spirituality, in this case Quaker spirituality, and literary production and reception. Indeed, there appears to be a general paucity of religious literary criticism, as outlined by Dennis Taylor: ‘The need for a religious literary criticism is not only reflective of a present scholarly void, but also comes out of a spiritual hunger, felt by many teachers and students, for a way of discussing the intersections of their own spiritual lives with what they read.’⁶ There is strong scholarship on Quaker writing, although this is generally focused on early Quaker writing.⁷ There is little scholarship on modern Quaker literature that I have been able to detect, barring Diane Reynolds’ ground-breaking work on ethical versus moral Quaker writing,

¹ For instance, outlined in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996 and Greg Gerrard, *Ecocriticism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).

² As applied in Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 2004).

³ Overviewed in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham (NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁴ See, for example, Mark Jarman and David Mason, eds., *Rebel Angels: 25 Poets of the New Formalism* (Oregon: Story Line Press, 1996) and Robert Richman, ed., *The Direction of Poetry: An Anthology of Rhymed and Metred Poetry in the English Language Since 1975* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1990).

⁵ I draw on Arnold Berleant, “Artists and Morality: Towards an Ethics of Art,” *Leonardo*, Vol. 10 (1977): 195-202 in applying this approach in the current thesis. For further extrapolation of the application of Ethical Criticism to a wide range of work, see Zhenzhao Nie and Biwu Shang, “Introduction to Fiction and Ethics in the Twenty-first Century,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2015): 2-4.

⁶ Dennis Taylor, “The Need for a Religious Literary Criticism,” *Religion and the Arts Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1996): 124-50.

⁷ For instance, Hilary Hinds’ *George Fox and Early Quaker Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) and “The Poetry of Mary Mollineux,” George Richardson Lecture, Centre for Research in Quaker Studies, 2019, accessed Jul 25, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTtKD-CcUqo>. Also, Judith Roads, *The Distinctiveness of Quaker Prose, 1650-1699: A Corpus-Based Enquiry*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2015; Michele Lise Tarter, “Reading a Quaker’s Book: Elizabeth Ashbridge’s Testimony of Quaker Literary Theory,” *Quaker Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2005): 176-90; Gill Catie, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650–1700* (London: Routledge, 2005).

discussed below.⁸ I have not located any original work on the relationship between Liberal Quaker spirituality and literary writing.

Considering extant scholarship on the relationship between Quakers and literature, this is still an area of growth and production, with significant recent contributions being made especially on Quaker attitudes towards literature and the consumption of literature.⁹ This thesis explores whether there is indeed a discernible literary aesthetic which can be detected in literary writing by people identified as members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).¹⁰

The starting point for this research is my interest in the nature of the process of creative writing, its inspiration, the resulting texts' source of merit, and the process of textual production. In order to have a relevant and achievable focus, the selected writing dealt with here is poetry. Although Quaker writers have worked successfully across a range of genres for an extended period of time, amongst imaginative literary writing, poetry has been practised the longest, with 1662 seeing some fifteen out of ninety Quaker pamphlets featuring verse.¹¹ I am also clear that I am exploring the possibility of a literary aesthetic as detected within writing produced by members of the British Liberal Quaker tradition. From my interviewing and secondary reading, I have identified seven features which I argue constitute a potential Quaker Literary Aesthetic,¹² as discussed in Chapter 2. The concept of a QLA is important, as it offers an academic means to understand Quaker engagement with literary writing, and a possible frame

⁸ Diane Reynolds, "Quakers and Fiction: Towards Breaking out of the Backward Gaze," in *Quakers and Literature*, ed. James H. Hood (Philadelphia, PA: Friends Association for Higher Education, 2016): 80-89.

⁹ In establishing changing trends in these attitudes, I make particular use of Nancy Jiwon Cho, "Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018): 69-87 and also to an extent James W. Hood, "'Novel Reading and Insanity': Nineteenth-Century Quaker Fiction Reading Practices," *Quaker Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2018): 3-24.

¹⁰ From hereon, for the sake of concision, I employ the term 'Quaker'.

¹¹ Rosemary Moore, "Seventeenth Century Published Quaker Verse", *Quaker Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 1 (2005): 7.

¹² Hereafter for the sake of concision, wherever appropriate, this will be referred to as 'QLA'.

of discourse for academic engagement with Quaker literary output, and to interpret how Quaker values are thus expressed.

In this project I argue that, whilst some QLA features are also demonstrated by other writers of faith or none, all are demonstrated by the Quaker writers that I analyse, as a development in this context of the particular silent, apophatic approach to religious worship found amongst British Liberal Quakers, brought over into literary writing. I contend that Quaker writers, imbued in the values and practice of silent worship as epitomised by British Quakerism, instantiate the seven characteristic features that I have identified in my research.

It could be objected that other poets, practising other faith traditions, such as the Roman Catholic Michael Symmons Roberts,¹³ may well display some or all of the features that I explore in this project. That may very well be so. I argue, however, that the aesthetic which is outlined in this thesis is robust enough to withstand this potential critique. One of the defining characteristics of British Liberal Quakerism is its openness to ‘new light’ from whatever source it may come,¹⁴ including other Christian denominations, religious faiths, scientific enquiry, and so on. It may well be possible that a writer of another, or no, faith, could be judged to employ at least some of these features. It is also important to avoid the trap of ghettoizing writers who identify as Quaker, as being solely defined by their religious affiliation; often in literary criticism, literary performance has been first and foremost the benchmark by which writers are judged. A writer is judged as successful in terms of their ability to relate the truth of the situation that they seek to render in their imaginative writing, a fact acknowledged by other writers of (non-Quaker) faith.¹⁵ This does not necessarily negate the argument that there is a

¹³ Some of this poet’s work is considered in more detail below in Chapter 4.

¹⁴ For example, articulated in Britain Yearly Meeting [hereafter referred to as ‘BYM’] of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) *Quaker Faith & Practice* (BYM, London: The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 1999[1995]: 1.02.7): ‘Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come?’

¹⁵ Roman Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor judged weak examples of Catholic writing with asperity: ‘The sorry religious novel comes about when the writer supposes that because of his belief, he is somehow dispensed from the obligation to penetrate concrete reality.’ She was equally impatient with a ghettoizing tendency

particular set of features which appertain particularly to Quaker culture. I argue here that whilst a non-Quaker writer may demonstrate significant portions of the QLA, that the features are particularly well represented within the writing of the Quakers considered here, and that the key feature, that of Quaker sensibility, is the decisive factor in determining if a writer conforms fully with this QLA.

Selected Writers

Philip Gross¹⁶ is an obvious selection for a project exploring a QLA, if only because he has been a practising Quaker for most of his adult life. Having migrated through Anglicanism and left-wing politics, in Quakerism he found the faith that has accompanied him through many significant experiences.¹⁷ His Quakerism has been identified by others as significant, with Liz Brownlee remarking, ‘He is a Quaker, and that special relationship between words and silence informs much of what he writes.’¹⁸ I have deliberately selected poetry from across a range of each poet’s work, across time, genre and subject matter wherever possible. Thus, I include material from Gross’ first collection for children, *Manifold Manor*,¹⁹ his award-winning more explicitly adult-focused *The Water Table*,²⁰ and his collaborative work with Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*,²¹ as well as an anthologised poem, ‘The Quakers of Pompeii’.²²

towards Catholic writers: ‘Catholic discussion of novels by Catholics are frequently ridiculous because every given circumstance of the writer is ignored except his [sic] Faith.’ (Flannery O’Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald (London: Faber and Faber, 2014 [1972]): 163, 195).

¹⁶ Born 1952.

¹⁷ Jonathan Doering, “Interview: Philip Gross”, *The Friend*, Vol. 175, No. 47 (2017): 12-14.

¹⁸ Liz Brownlee, “Philip Gross: Favourite Poetry Books,” *Poetry Roundabout*, 2019, accessed Oct 27, 2019, <https://poetryroundabout.com/author/poetliz/>, n.p.

¹⁹ Philip Gross, *Manifold Manor* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2009).

²⁰ Philip Gross, *The Water Table* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 1998).

²¹ Philip Gross and Simon Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye* (Gwynedd: Cinnamon Press, 2009).

²² This poem is collected in the excellent anthology, *A Speaking Silence*, (R.V. Bailey, and S. Krayner, eds., *A Speaking Silence: Quaker Poets of Today* (Devon: Indigo Dreams Publishing, 2013). However, in view of the importance of dialogical engagement as a concept in this project, I will refer to the version of this poem available on the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre website (In “Journeys in the Spirit, Children’s work. Additional resources 93.A and B”, Friends House, London: Children & Young People’s Staff Team, Quaker Life,

Sibyl Ruth²³ perhaps occupies a more liminal place within Quakerism. Whilst having produced a smaller body of work, Ruth recommends herself as a suitable inclusion for various reasons. She was born and raised within a Quaker family, and so has had a life-long relationship with Quakerism, punctuated with periods of worshipping within other denominations and religions, remarking in our interview,

*it's a complex inheritance. But at the same time, I think I was brought up very strongly with this idea of...non-conformity, avoiding elaborate kinds of observance, very strong values around certain things, perhaps an avoidance of material excess... [a] kind of scrupulousness.*²⁴

Nevertheless, she accepts a Quaker identity, and has explored the nature of the relationship between Quakerism and creativity, for instance producing a radio documentary on the topic.²⁵ Here, she interviewed various Quakers engaged in literary production, developing a model of Quaker literary engagement which I argue is a useful model to apply both to her own work and general Quaker imaginative writing. Ruth moved away from Quakerism at university, experimenting with other denominations, gradually returning via her involvement with the Quaker 'Some Friends Community' in London,²⁶ and then later her friendship with British Quaker poet Dorothy Nimmo.²⁷

n.d. Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. Accessed Mar 31, 2020.

<https://together.woodbrooke.org.uk/assets/pdf/viewpdf/?assetid=2691>), in view of the fact that it appears on a worksheet alongside photographs of Peri's sculpture, as part of a children's 'Respond' activity, thus amplifying the notion of collaboration further.

²³ Born 1959.

²⁴ All quotes taken from field interviews will be presented in this thesis in italics.

²⁵ Sibyl Ruth, "Listen to them breathing," BBC Radio 4, London, 92-95 FM, August 2011, accessed Jun 3, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b013528r> .

²⁶ 'Some Friends' was a Quaker housing community in Bethnal Green, London, that ran, with varying membership, from 1973 to 2008. For more information see <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/some-friends-community> .

²⁷ 1932-2001. In our interview, Ruth talked of how positive it was 'to find somebody who was a Quaker and to be very in tune with each other'. For further biographical information on Nimmo, see Alchetron, "Dorothy Nimmo," 2018, accessed Aug 18, 2020, <https://alchetron.com/Dorothy-Nimmo> .

Similar to my approach to Gross' work, I have selected as widely as possible from Ruth's work: from her first two collections, *Nothing Personal*²⁸ and *I Could Become That Woman*²⁹ as well as her anthologised, award-winning 'A Song of Jean' plus her translations of poetry by Rose Scooler and Peter Kien.³⁰

I have selected Philip Gross and Sibyl Ruth as suitable poets for analysis in this project for various reasons, both in terms of their biographies and their writing. I have also conducted interviews with three other writers and artists. Gillian Allnutt is an award-winning poet and teacher, who came into contact with Quakerism during social work in Austria, and was a serious Quaker Attender³¹ for five years, remaining in sympathy with Quaker values.³² Quaker poet and novelist Stephen Cox has been included owing to his own writing on Quaker spirituality and creativity.³³ Visual artist and academic Simon Denison collaborated with Gross on *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, of interest here as an instance of the artistic collaboration Gross frequently engages in. Denison identifies as having spiritual, though Agnostic, beliefs. The interviews with Gross, Cox and Ruth offer a Quakerly context for understanding literary production and the role of spirituality within it. The Allnutt interview offers the thoughts of someone familiar with and sympathetic to Quakerism. The Denison interview offers insights into the collaborative process which is so valuable to Gross, from someone who appreciates the importance of spirituality, whilst preserving a sceptical perspective on it.

²⁸ Sibyl Ruth, *Nothing Personal* (Cullercoates: IRON Press, 1995).

²⁹ Sibyl Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman* (Nottingham: Five Leave Press, 2003).

³⁰ Sibyl Ruth, "A Song for Jean", *Towards Wholeness*, No. 137 Autumn/ Winter (2013): 6; "Smugglers", *Ink, Sweat and Tears*, 2016, accessed on 28/01/2020. <http://www.inksweatandtears.co.uk/pages/?p=12998>; and "Four Poems by Peter Kien," *Ink, Sweat and Tears*, 2012, accessed on 28 Jan, 2020 <http://www.inksweatandtears.co.uk/pages/?p=12998>.

³¹ See footnote 35 below for a definition of 'Attender'.

³² See, for instance, Philip Dodd, "'Play' in urban design, Gillian Allnutt," *Free Thinking*, BBC Radio 3, London, 90-93 FM, 23 Feb. 2017, archived at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b08fj508>, accessed 1 Jan, 2019.

³³ For instance, Stephen Cox, "Some broader current?," *The Friend*, Volume 175, No. 50 (2018): 10-11.

Key terms

The key terms for this project are: ‘Quaker’, ‘literary’ and ‘aesthetic’. I employ the term ‘Quaker’ to denote someone self-identifying with the Religious Society of Friends.³⁴ Here, I apply the modern understanding of ‘Quaker’ to denote a Member of the Society or a committed Attender.³⁵ In the absence of any single convenient set of criteria which can be applied in a straightforward manner to the concept of being a Quaker, I did not ‘test’ my chosen authors against any criteria, but rather accepted self-identification as Quaker, including attendance at Quaker Meetings (Cardiff in the case of Philip Gross, Cottesloe for Sibyl Ruth).

‘Literary’ here is: ‘pertaining to...chiefly in books or by writers.... having the characteristics of...qualities of form or emotional effect...engaged in literature as a profession, occupied in writing books.’³⁶ I consider in this thesis poetry as a specific branch of literature. This has historical precedence, for instance from New Criticism focusing on poetry as the ideal form of literature which also offered the potential for a comprehensive critical exploration to be conducted.³⁷ Indeed, this project of considering poetry in particular has found echoes down the years, including in Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s contention that in considering poetry ‘we are not in fact dealing with ordinary meaningful discourse but with poetry, in which language is first of all subject to other forms of organisation.’³⁸ Of course, further fruitful research could be done to consider whether this aesthetic is applicable to other genres, such as prose fiction.

³⁴ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (4th Ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 2438

³⁵ ‘Member’ here denotes someone in formal membership of the Religious Society of Friends, whilst ‘Attender’ denotes someone who regularly attends Meetings for Worship and accepts the values and aims of the Society. In day-to-day terms there is often little distinction between the two positions, although seeking membership implies a greater level of commitment, and is still required in order for someone to fulfil certain roles within the Society, such as Clerk or Elder, although not all roles carry this requirement.

³⁶ *Shorter Oxford*, 1604.

³⁷ Defining texts include: John Crowe Ransom, *The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1941; Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 1956 [1947]); and W.K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

³⁸ Veronica Forrest-Thomson, *Poetic Discourse: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2016 [1978]).

‘Aesthetic’ here, as *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, is: ‘pertaining to the appreciation or criticism of the beautiful or of art....a system of principles for the appreciation of the beautiful.’³⁹ Furthermore, ‘aesthetics’ as a term and concept is not purely a means to consider what might be generally considered beautiful, but also ‘the characteristic value (which few would now call beauty) of aesthetically satisfying objects.’⁴⁰ So aesthetics for my purposes here means both consideration of the process by which a satisfying text might be produced as well as consideration of the resulting text.

Initial Literature Review

Various people have considered creativity, literature, and Quaker engagement with literature. What has not been developed is a connection between them to form a theory of what Quaker literary production might look and feel like. In this thesis I bring this research together in order to formulate this theory.

In the course of this project, I have reviewed a range of texts and sources on related topics. In view of the changing historical Quaker attitudes towards literature I briefly chart below the move from general disapproval towards greater acceptance. Of particular relevance is the dynamic and productive relationship between Quakers and the creative arts, and ethical issues emanating from that relationship, outlined by writer J. Ormerod Greenwood.⁴¹ Ground-breaking material on Quaker literary engagement, which also traces key shifts in British Quaker reading patterns evidencing the gradual thawing of Quaker attitudes towards literature by Hood

³⁹ *Shorter Oxford*, 34.

⁴⁰ Alan Bullock and Oliver Stallybrass, eds, *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1977): 10.

⁴¹ J. Ormerod Greenwood, *Signs of Life: Art and Religious Experience* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1978).

is vital to this historical awareness.⁴² Meanwhile, the macroscopic historical view of Quaker literary engagement across both America and Britain offered by Nancy Jiwon Cho⁴³ is also key.

In view of my particular frame of reference being British Liberal Quakerism, I also consider the nature of Liberal Quakerism, and how this might lead towards a particular sensibility that may be considered to add a distinctive element to any resulting literary aesthetic. I draw on writing from various practising Quakers for this, including the application of the Foucauldian idea of 'heterotopia' to Quaker practice by sociologist of religion Gay Pilgrim,⁴⁴ offering a basis for understanding Quaker religious practice which can then be applied to Quaker literary practice. The work on Quaker history and theology by theologian Doug Gwyn offers valuable insights into the nature of Liberal Quaker attitudes to seeking.⁴⁵ The rational analysis of experiences of the noumenal by clinical psychologist and practising Quaker Ralph Hetherington offers an academic discussion of experiences which could otherwise be considered purely emotional and ineffable.⁴⁶ We also have a systematic Liberal Quaker theology offered by Quaker theologian Janet Scott.⁴⁷

Consideration of how and why Quakers might practise literature is also key, involving various writers, including Greenwood again, as he considers the very nature of how and why Quakers interact with artistic practice, of which literary writing is a subdivision, and ethical issues arising from this interaction. An experiential connection between Quaker beliefs and artistic practice and what might be expressed through creativity is suggested by artists and workshop

⁴² James W. Hood, "Novel Reading and Insanity", 3-24.

⁴³ Nancy Jiwon Cho, "Literature", 69-87.

⁴⁴ Gay Pilgrim, "Taming Anarchy: Quaker Alternate Ordering and 'Otherness'", in *The Creation of Quaker Theory: Insider Perspectives*, ed. Pink Dandelion (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2004): 206-225.

⁴⁵ Doug Gwyn, *Seekers Found: Atonement in Early Quaker Experience* (Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill Publications, 2000) and *The Covenant Crucified: Quakers and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: Quaker Books, 2006 [1995]).

⁴⁶ Ralph Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory: a psychological study of peak-experiences* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1975).

⁴⁷ Janet Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?* (London, Quaker Home Service, 1980).

facilitators Brenda Clifft Heales and Chris Cook.⁴⁸ The nature of creative practice in terms of political and religious beliefs has been pondered by Quaker academic and poet Laurence Lerner,⁴⁹ as well as discussing the relationship between Quakerism and writing with Philip Gross,⁵⁰ who himself has produced material on the writing process invaluable for developing this QLA.⁵¹ Thoughtful and provocative reflections on the creative process, and the role of spirituality within that, are offered by the Diviner poetry group which includes Quaker ethnographer Eleanor Nesbitt.⁵²

A key concept of both Liberal Quakerism and Gross and Ruth's poetry considered in this thesis is the act of engagement, between people on the one hand, and the world, other people, ideas, and the Divine on the other. This has led to my consideration of Dialogical literary theory and criticism. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist's magisterial biography of Bakhtin brilliantly articulates his ideas.⁵³ His key concept is Dialogism, 'characterized or constituted by the interactive, responsive nature of dialogue rather than by the single-mindedness of monologue.'⁵⁴ Bakhtin's own explanation of Dialogism as it applies to selected literature has opened that philosophy further,⁵⁵ allowing me to clarify key ideas which are applicable to the texts discussed. Work on 'ethical' as opposed to 'moral' Quaker writing by Diane Reynolds⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Brenda Clifft Heales and Chris Cook, *Images and Silence* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1992).

⁴⁹ Laurence Lerner, *The Two Cinnas: Quakerism, Revolution and Poetry* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1984).

⁵⁰ Roger Homan, "Talking in All: A Conversation on Poetry and Quakerism Between Philip Gross and Laurence Lerner", *Quaker Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2012): 110-130.

<https://online.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/pdf/10.3828/quaker.17.1.110> .

⁵¹ For instance, Philip Gross, Lydia Fulleylove and Zelig Gross, "'No Artform is an Island': cross-arts weekends at Northcourt, Isle of Wight," *National Association of Writers in Education Journal* (2006): 18-26.

⁵² Gavin D'Costa et al., *Making Nothing Happen* (London, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

⁵³ Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press) 1984; and Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1997 [1990]).

⁵⁴ Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1990]): 65.

⁵⁵ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, transl. C. Emerson (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁵⁶ Diane Reynolds, "Quakers and Fiction: Towards Breaking out of the Backward Gaze," 2016.

presents a model for meaningful Quaker literary engagement. The Chicago School of Literary Critics⁵⁷ have also been helpful in identifying my own notion of what literature is, as well as fashioning a pragmatic and flexible approach to discussing it.⁵⁸

The features of the literary aesthetic which I consider in this thesis have been drawn from secondary reading and interviews, which I then test in close reading of selected poems by Gross and Ruth. I build on Bakhtin's concept of Dialogism, connecting this with Reynolds' model of 'ethical' writing to identify key aspects of Quaker writing. This project's originality lies in its formulation of a set of features which, whilst not all necessarily unique to Quaker writers, argues that all of the features here identified are detectable across work produced by Quaker writers, offering a meaningful discourse for understanding what inspires such writing, what such writing may be about, the manner of literary production involved here, and the mode of being which such writing may indicate. These works are considered more fully in Chapter 2.

Methodology: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Academic Subjects and Interviewing

In seeking to explore the possible existence of a literary aesthetic within work produced by Quakers, I necessarily place myself within an interdisciplinary frame of Theology and Literary Studies, already reflected in the brief overview of reading above. Further, alongside the close

⁵⁷ The Chicago School of Literary Criticism, also known as the Chicago Critics or Neo-Aristotelians, was a group of academics, writers and philosophers, mainly centred around the University of Chicago. Prominent members included Ronald S. Crane, Wayne C. Booth, Elder Olson and Richard McKeon. 'The Chicago Critics were concerned with accounting for the variety of critical approaches to literature in terms of assumptions about the nature of literary works. They also emphasised the larger structures of literary works, following the example of Aristotle, whom they admired for basing his *Poetics* (4th Century BCE) on actual examples rather than on preconceptions.' (Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1990]): 38). They were also distinguished by their avowedly critical approach to literature, and their contextual pragmatism in readings.

⁵⁸ R.S. Crane, ed., *Critics and Criticism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).

reading of primary literary and secondary texts, I have conducted field interviews, with the five writers and artists noted above.

The employment of qualitative interviewing brings in elements of Social Sciences, widening the sense of interdisciplinarity here, necessitating some discussion. Interdisciplinarity, ‘the combining of two or more academic disciplines’⁵⁹ is a significant area of, and issue within, academia, through how it challenges traditional disciplines.⁶⁰ Perceived triumphs of interdisciplinarity, coupled with dwindling resources, have led to sharp competition and in some cases aggressive re-colonisation of academic topics and areas.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it is possible for fresh and useful connections to be made both within and between disciplines.

To employ an interdisciplinary approach also risks charges of convenient flexibility as a camouflage for unfocused thinking,⁶² yet by its nature the term ‘interdisciplinary’ shifts between the mechanistic connections of multidisciplinary, through to the new forms of consciousness offered by transdisciplinarity.⁶³ Joe Moran, himself an academic trained in History, Politics and English, observes that ‘interdisciplinarity’ can stand for a borderline as much as a bridge between disciplines, as in the contrast between the terms ‘international’ and ‘interval’. This ambiguity makes interdisciplinarity an exciting, useful tool: ‘the value of the term, “interdisciplinary”, lies in its flexibility and indeterminacy’.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Derek Songkalayanawat, “Applying Interdisciplinary Approach to the “Lavapura Dance” Performance,” *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, Vol. 6, NRRU special issue (2017): 59.

⁶⁰ Celia Lury et al., *Routledge Handbook of Interdisciplinary Research Methods* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018).

⁶¹ Robert Frodeman, “Interdisciplinary Research and Academic Sustainability: managing knowledge in an age of accountability,” *Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 38, Issue 2 (2011): 105-112; also, Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (2nd Ed.) (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2010).

⁶² Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*.

⁶³ As outlined in J.T. Klein, “Typologies of Interdisciplinarity: The Boundary Work of Definition,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. R. Frodeman, J.T. Klein, and C. Mitcham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017 [2010]): 21-34. I understand the term ‘transdisciplinarity’ as emphasising the notion of moving across different disciplines, carrying knowledge and insights from one to another.

⁶⁴ Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, 14.

In drawing together English Literature, Theology, and the Social Sciences, this project interconnects a selection of features from each to formulate and clarify useful concepts in James Kelly's 'narrow interdisciplinarity',⁶⁵ employing Jan Schmidt's methodological interdisciplinary approach.⁶⁶ The rigour of social science qualitative research supports a 'plaited' application of theological and literary concepts to literary texts, underpinned with supporting material/data from my interview work, itself influenced by the Social Sciences.

Interview as a Form

The act and art of interviewing has attracted growing academic attention, for instance in Rebecca Roach's history of the interview form⁶⁷ as well a recent consideration of interviewing as a creative act.⁶⁸ This explains why there are two major foundation stones in terms of the material/data in this project. Firstly, close textual analysis and application of literary and theological concepts to texts by Gross and Ruth. Secondly, interviews of specially selected creative artists, harvesting critical-contextual insights to inform textual analysis. However, the interview is a multifarious and evolving form as acknowledged by sociologist Jennifer Platt,⁶⁹ requiring further scrutiny. Here is one basic definition of interviews: 'a dyadic form of communication between two distinct parties, at least one of whom has a predetermined and

⁶⁵ 'Narrow interdisciplinary projects, once we have decided to act, are more likely to integrate, to provide a solution to, or new understanding of a common problem in meeting our material needs.' (James S. Kelly, "Wide and Narrow Interdisciplinarity," *Journal of General Education*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (1996): 101).

⁶⁶ Jan Schmidt, "Towards a philosophy of interdisciplinarity," *Poiesis and Praxis*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2007): 53-69.

⁶⁷ Rebecca Roach, *Literature and the Rise of the Interview* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶⁸ Anneleen Masschelein, and Rebecca Roach, "Putting Things Together: Interviewing as Creative Practice," *Biography*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2018): 169-178.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Platt, "The History of the Interview," in *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, ed. Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Arvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001): 9.

serious purpose.... continuing interaction of many variables, between two parties, with often different backgrounds, motives and goals.⁷⁰

The interdisciplinarity of this project is reflected in the interdisciplinarity of the interview form itself, combining relatively ‘hard’, factual social science approaches on the one hand,⁷¹ and ‘softer’, more discursive literary interviews on the other, and relying on the creative, instinctive interplay of interviewer and interviewee.⁷² Thus, the interview is a protean form,

[beginning] as an oral genre but...often converted into a written text...no longer spontaneous talk...[not] quite creative writing.... The interviewer or publisher will most assuredly edit it...The moment the interview is published, however, it involves a third creator, the reader of the dialogue.⁷³

Ted Lyon’s remarks here are based upon experience of academic analysis and interviewing of the notoriously slippery interviewee Jorge Luis Borges. They foreground the sense that these interviews presented within this project aspire to collegial co-productions, reaching towards Bakhtin’s Dialogism as applied to my selected poems. Readers may agree with or challenge those presented here: that is Dialogism’s double-edged possibility.

Interdisciplinary Application of Social Sciences to Literary Interviews

Despite a general perception of social science interviewing being more technical than its arts subject counterpart,⁷⁴ Uwe Flick in his Preface to Kvale’s *Doing Interviews* offers various examples of data-gathering which include ‘analyzing experiences of individuals or

⁷⁰ Charles, T. Stewart, “Interviewing,” in *Twenty-first Century Communication: A Reference Handbook*, ed William F. Eadie, Vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009): 193

⁷¹ J.M. Converse and H. Schuman, *Conversations at Random: Survey Research as Interviewers See It* (New York: John Wiley, 1974): 22.

⁷² Ted Lyon, “Jorge Luis Borges and the Interview as Literary Genre,” *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. 22, No. 44 (1994): 74-89.

⁷³ Lyon, “Jorge Luis Borges and the Interview as Literary Genre”, 77.

⁷⁴ Lucy Suchman and Brigitte Jordan, “Interactional Troubles in Face-to-Face Survey Interviews,” *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, Vol. 85, No. 409 (1990): 232-53.

groups...interactions and communications in...making...documents (texts, images, film or music) or similar traces of experiences or interactions.⁷⁵ This suggests a cultural or literary analytical approach, prompting reflection upon the distinction between what this project is about as literary-theological research, and the business of social scientific research, and how best to interconnect these different areas.

Lyon claims that researchers only glimpse the truth in each particular research situation, which then must be assembled with other 'glimpses' into a more detailed landscape.⁷⁶ This suggests the Postmodern application of 'method talk' to interviewing, 'sensitive to the different ways in which social reality may be created.'⁷⁷ Certainly, the material I have overviewed above suggests that Jean-Marie Seillan's model of the rich variety of different interview practices, including qualitative social science interviewing through to literary interviews of authors, as being 'more like a formal nebula than a strict form'⁷⁸ is apt.

This project's interviews, aimed at an informed, constructive, engaged discussion of a topic of mutual interest, provide both subjects engaging in the interview itself, and other readers, with what Paul Atkinson and David Silverman term the 'authentic gaze into the soul of another.'⁷⁹ Their image, arising from consideration of issues surrounding the 'invention of the self' within literary interviews, relates to the suggestion that there is a 'soul' beyond language to be gazed into. Accepting that Atkinson and Silverman are concerned to critically consider what they consider to be a problematic concept, I offer it here as an illustrative term for the level of honest and revealing engagement sought in my interviews. Despite Atkinson and Silverman's caveats over the Romantic (and arguably misguided) roots of such a project, this level of connection is

⁷⁵ Uwe Flick, Preface in Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2007): x.

⁷⁶ Lyon, "Jorge Luis Borges and the Interview as Literary Genre".

⁷⁷ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 265.

⁷⁸ Anneleen Masschelein et al, "The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 35, Nos. 1-2 (2014): 16.

⁷⁹ Paul Atkinson and David Silverman, "Kundera's *Immortality*: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1997): 305.

what is aimed at. Nevertheless, it needs also to be borne in mind that as at various points in this thesis I consider apophatic theology, conceptualising the Divine as something ultimately beyond human expressive capacities. Accepting that, the interview model was collaboratively employed with subjects to fashion insights which both parties can recognise as authentic.

Social scientists Herbert and Irene Rubin offer the term ‘responsive interviewing’ as a means of achieving this:

The responsive interviewing model recognises the fact that both the interviewer and the interviewee are people, with feelings, personality, interests, and experiences. Interviewers are not expected to be neutral or automatons, and who they are and how they present themselves affect the interview.⁸⁰

We may object that there is the possibility of misinterpretation, or shifting meanings within shifting contexts, but the deliberate involvement of subjects as ‘co-authors’ of the interviews, allowing them access to the transcripts and the editing process thereof, is intended as a guarantee of quality, in terms of accuracy and utility to the analysis which they will support, as well as revealing details of their development and thinking as creative artists. Underlying all of this is the view that all interviews, be they social science research or more ostensibly ‘creative’ activities, should aspire to the generation of deep-level, high-value, relevant and meaningful detail on the topic(s) of interest, or ‘thick description’, as in the sense of rich data that can offer useful material for various avenues of thought, arising from Clifford Geertz’s anthropological research.⁸¹

Rubin and Rubin sum up the hybridity and interdisciplinarity of the interview most succinctly as ‘both art and science. As a science there are some general rules and normative standards that should be followed, but as with all arts, techniques are modified to reflect the individual style

⁸⁰ H.J. Rubin and I.S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (2nd ed.) (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2005): 30.

⁸¹ Clifford Geertz, ed., *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

of the artist.⁸² In developing a contextually sensitive interview approach, this project aims for both depth and breadth in addressing the information and ideas afforded in them ('Tree and branch'), alongside being open to new, unexpected insights which are revealed through the process ('River and channel').⁸³

Clearly, literary and social science interviews do demonstrate key differences, in terms of the focus of the interview conversations, and the uses intended for them. Literary interviews are mainly angled towards opening up a writer and/or their work for audiences, whilst Social Science interviews are aimed more at generating data around a social issue or event, through the experience of individuals. Nevertheless, the underlying act of engagement between interviewer and interviewee is a shared one across these different interview forms, allowing us to marry together the best insights and approaches from both, to improve and focus the conduct of the interview and the material generated.

The interview is a quicksilver form, meaning different things in different situations, leading to potential debate over correct interpretations.⁸⁴ The interviews were conducted primarily in order to generate material and insight for academic rather than commercial purposes, and the interviewees all enjoy some degree of professional success. Nevertheless, Raymond L. Gorden's concept of 'ego-threats',⁸⁵ sounds a useful caution here. The subjects may actually experience (or fear the danger of) misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and other threats to social 'face', possibly affecting interview responses, a view echoed by Platt: 'the responses may not be adequately understood, and there may be problems of deception and distortion'.⁸⁶ Gorden suggests a variety of ways to avert ego-threats, the most convincing being 'the

⁸² Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 15.

⁸³ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 146.

⁸⁴ Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*.

⁸⁵ Raymond L. Gorden, "Dimensions of the Depth Interview," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 62 (1956): 170-9.

⁸⁶ Platt, "The History of the Interview", 14.

interviewer [employing techniques which could be labelled] “permissive”, “reflective”, “non-directive” or the principle of “minimal activity”.⁸⁷ This usefully connects with the ‘responsive interviewing’ model.⁸⁸ Through careful and reflective preparation, empathetic interview conduct and thorough post-interview follow-up, this project aimed to avoid these pitfalls.

Nevertheless, the dialogic nature of the meeting offers the twin possibilities of misinterpretation and fresh discovery: ‘The literary interview became the site of struggle between the interviewer and the writer, with their different goals’.⁸⁹ Through this sometimes fractious process, emphasis remains on identifying fresh knowledge and understanding, amplifying a social science insight: ‘The qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge.’⁹⁰

The author-interviews that I draw upon in this thesis occupy a liminal position in terms of being ‘literary’ interviews: some are published pieces whilst others are far more capacious transcripts of extended interview conversations, which nevertheless have been edited and developed between myself and my interviewees in a creative, reflective and conscious manner. J. Boyd Maunsell, both academic and interviewer, designates all literary interviews as containing duality: ‘as an unedited transcript and...final printed text.’⁹¹ The ‘bespoke’ interviews produced for this project hover between these two stages. They are transcripts, but have also been submitted to a careful, critical-creative editing process involving both interviewer and interviewee in order to bring out particularly beneficial ideas and comments. As Gross commented in our interview:

⁸⁷ Raymond L. Gorden, “Dimensions of the Depth Interview,” 170.

⁸⁸ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*.

⁸⁹ Masschelein et al, “The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre,” 15.

⁹⁰ Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2007): 7.

⁹¹ Jerome Boyd Maunsell, “The Literary Interview as Autobiography,” *The European Journal of Life Writing*, Vol. x (2016): 7.

I appreciate your patience and spaciousness in letting me do in the interview what I think I would do in writing anyway, which is to walk round and round things, throw words at it from various angles and find which ones stick, and do an awful lot of redrafting in mid-sentence.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this crafted aspect to interviews, ‘They provide first-hand information from the author about his [sic] work or literary opinions but also about his life, personal history and experiences, viewpoints, and personality....As sources of information, interviews derive (part of) their credibility from the lingering and renewed belief...that authors can offer unique insights into their work.’⁹²

Interview Locations and Conduct

Whilst acknowledging that inquisitorial interviewing may well generate types of knowledge enlightening of our understanding of authors and their work, my aim in this project has been to co-operate with my subjects in order to discover beneficial material. Remembering Gorden’s caution against ‘ego-threat’, the interviews were conducted in a supportive, collegial, non-threatening manner, wherever possible face-to-face, in negotiated locations (Gross, home in Penarth; Ruth, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham; Allnutt, York University). Where this was impossible, they were telephone interviews (Cox, Denison).

Face-to-face interviews were digitally recorded then transcribed; telephone interviews were contemporaneously hand-written then typed. In both scenarios, resulting transcripts were submitted for interviewee comment and feedback before finalisation. All interviewees declared themselves satisfied. This was central to the collegial approach adopted, linking with Kvale’s

⁹² Masschelein et al, “The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre,” 3.

‘construction site of knowledge’ model. The interview process employed was not something that was done to, but rather done with, my interviewees.⁹³

Interview Content

With all interviews, questions were developed from research on interviewees and their work. This set the stage for Rubin and Rubin’s ‘responsive interviewing’, where ‘the researcher and interviewee develop a relationship’.⁹⁴ The interview relationships naturally differed according to circumstances, but were developed as positively as possible. Having been drafted and developed with supervisor feedback, the questions were sent ahead of time, and addressed interviewees’ biographies, working practices, reflections upon links between spirituality and creativity, and some specific questions relating to particular texts. Some questions remained identical or similar across interviews, where conceptual territory coincided; other questions were exchanged or modified as appropriate. Some question sets were necessarily more topic-focused, whilst others combined textual and topical discussion. Further, some new questions were asked extemporaneously as interviews developed.

Having now introduced my project and some of its underlying logic, and supporting research, I offer a brief overview of the rest of the thesis.

Dissertation Outline

Chapter 2 establishes a clear sense of evolution in Quaker attitudes towards literature before delineating my secondary reading in Quaker theology and artistic endeavour, as well as literary theory and criticism, also drawing on interviews conducted, outlining the key features of a potential Quaker Literary Aesthetic (QLA). Chapter 3 then offers close reading and analysis

⁹³ Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 7; Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*.

⁹⁴ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 79.

of Gross and Ruth's poetry, considering whether my proposed features are applicable to their work. In Chapter 4 I draw conclusions based upon the evidence presented, as well as outlining how research might fruitfully develop beyond this current project.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis and its significance. I have also offered my key research terms, reasoning for inclusion of selected writers, a brief literature review, methodology in terms of my interdisciplinary approach incorporating English Literature, Theology and Social Sciences, and the nature of the interviews that I have conducted for the purposes of this project.

CHAPTER 2: TOWARDS A QUAKER LITERARY AESTHETIC

Chapter outline

In this chapter I develop my literature review further. This begins with a brief overview of material on evolving Quaker attitudes towards literature, moving from general disapproval to general acceptance. I begin with shifting reading tastes, setting the scene for a deeper engagement by Quakers with literary writing, specifically for my purposes in this project, poetry. I then address each of the features identified through secondary reading and interview work, considering evidence and counter-evidence. The chapter concludes with firm grounds for applying the features. I apply them in Chapter 3, through close reading of specially selected poems by Gross and Ruth.

Literature Review

Historical material

As outlined above, whilst there is some impressive research on connections between early Quakerism and creative writing, I have not discovered extensive research into contemporary creative writing by Quakers.¹ The fact that much of the extant scholarship focuses on early Quaker literature suggests that the foundational period of Quakerism has been and is being considered, preparing the ground for investigations of later Quaker literary writing.

¹ Cho, "Literature", Hood, "Novel Reading and Insanity" and Hood, ed., *Quakers and Literature* are the main examples of scholarship relating to Quaker reading and writing of literature that I refer to in this thesis. Reynolds in "Quakers in Fiction" offers the closest to a Quaker literary theory, which I will draw upon in the course of my analysis and argument. There is other impressive research into Quaker writing, generally focused upon the early years of the movement in the latter half of the seventeenth century, for example Hinds, *George Fox and Early Quaker Culture*.

I have researched how early Quaker writers such as George Fox,² Robert Barclay³ and William Penn⁴ inveighed against literature, by which we understand imaginative literature⁵ as opposed to literature focused on conversion, or teaching the converted. In view of the prodigious amounts of effective writing that was being produced by the Quaker movement from its very inception, there is a clear requirement to demonstrate that attitudes have shifted. Of the scant cultural criticism on the subject, David Sox⁶ provides a general overview of Quaker artistic engagement. Stephen Angell and Pink Dandelion⁷ have provided the two standard resources for Quaker history, culture and theological development. Nancy Cho's chapter on developing Quaker attitudes towards literature⁸ and James Hood's article on shifting Quaker reading habits in the nineteenth-century⁹ contain much of the precise historical evidence that there has been a provable evolution in Quaker attitudes towards literary engagement. They have clearly demonstrated that Quaker attitudes towards literature became more nuanced earlier than observers only aware of outspoken early Quaker objections to literature and the arts might suppose.

² 1624-1691. Generally referred to as the founder of the Quaker movement, although it would be more accurate to say that Fox was one of several early leaders of an anarchistic religious movement which grew out of various groups and attitudes swirling around the ferment of the English Civil War. Certainly, he became the *de facto* leader of the movement through his immense integrity and powerful personal charisma. His *Journal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952 [1694]), is one of the founding texts of Quakerism.

³ 1648-1690. Barclay brought his considerable classical, philosophical and theological abilities to bear in the writing of various pamphlets and treatises, the greatest being his *Apology*, 1676, considered by many to be the only work of Quaker systematic theology.

⁴ 1644-1718. A key early Quaker leader alongside George Fox, Barclay and others, Penn produced several well-regarded books, including *No Cross, No Crown*, 1669, and *Some Fruits of Solitude*, 1682. With his high-born background and eclectic university education (in Oxford, Saumur in France, and London), Penn was seen by many as an articulate and persuasive advocate of Quakerism, also contributing to the development of Quaker theology.

⁵ For the purposes of this thesis, I employ an understanding of 'imaginative literature' as being any kind of creative writing which includes some imaginative and fictive elements, which therefore includes poetry, fiction, drama – and certain examples of non-fiction.

⁶ David Sox, *Quakers and the Arts: 'Plain and Fancy'* (York, England: Sessions Book Trust, 2000).

⁷ Stephen W. Angell, and Pink Dandelion, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018) and *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁸ In Angell and Dandelion, *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*.

⁹ James W. Hood, "Novel Reading and Insanity'."

Early Quakerism generally took a dim view of creativity *per se*. For instance, Penn complained that ‘false Christians...fly to sport and company to drown the Reprover’s voice...and blunt his arrows, to...secure themselves out of their pleasures’.¹⁰ However, Quaker attitudes towards Literature then shifted to such an extent that by 1944 Quaker Horace B. Pointing could assert, ‘Along the paths of the imagination the artist and the mystic make contact...Always the search in art, as in religion, is...for the unity, the urge, the mystery, the wonder of life that is presented in great art and true religion.’¹¹

Having briefly touched upon the historical narrative, I now present theoretical material to support consideration of underpinning issues and factors.

Theoretical reading

Liberal Quakerism

Bearing in mind that this thesis addresses the connection of spirituality and literature within British Liberal Quakerism, it has been necessary to inform myself of the nature of Liberal Quakerism, especially within the British context, its theology and writings which consider the nature of Quaker literary engagement. For this, I reviewed the Swarthmore Lecture series, delivered annually to the national gathering of Quakers, known as ‘Britain Yearly Meeting’.¹² Each year, a committee agrees a topic, then identifies an individual Quaker or Quaker group with the experience and insight required to beneficially address British Quakers. Topics covered have been multifarious, including the nature of Quaker worship, the environment, political action, peace work, and so on. The Lectures are inspirational in their application of

¹⁰ William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown* (York: William Sessions Ltd., 1981 [1669]): 1.

¹¹ Horace B. Pointing, *Art, Religion and the Common Life* (London: SCM Press, 1944), quoted in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 21.32.

¹² Woodbrooke Study Centre, “Swarthmore Lecture,” Woodbrooke Study Centre website, accessed Jan 30, 2020, <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/learn/about/swarthmore-lecture/>.

the Quaker notion of continuing revelation, and distil insights from a range of theological perspectives. Various texts from this rich field support my research. I have selected texts dealing with literature and the arts, Quaker spiritual experience, and Quaker engagement with literature, spiritual concerns, and the external world.

A clinical understanding of moments of spiritual transport and insight of which much mystical religious experience and intense literary experiences consist offers us a concrete scientific basis with which to consider literary endeavour. This was provided by Ralph Hetherington,¹³ who brought experience as a clinical psychologist to consider the nature of ‘peak-experiences’. If there is any sort of discernible emotion or experience within literary experience, then his thoughts offer a rational basis for understanding what could otherwise be dismissed as irrational experiences. Academically rigorous insights on artistic activity garnered from work as an actor, teacher and writer offer a path forward from Hetherington’s comments, suggesting how intellectual rigour might be applied to an emotive activity, offered by J. Ormerod Greenwood.¹⁴ A thorough and systematic approach to a modern, apophatic Quaker theology was outlined by Janet Scott¹⁵ which, whilst not accepted by all British Quakers, has set the tone for an open discussion of Quaker belief ever since.¹⁶ The interconnections between religious, political and literary activity were ruminated upon by academic and poet Laurence Lerner,¹⁷ concluding with an open view of what might constitute truth and value. Elements of Quaker experience, apophatic theology (especially from Meister Eckhart), and artistic activity were woven together by Brenda Clift Heales and Chris Cook,¹⁸ speculating about the nature of artistic production,

¹³ Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 1975. I apply some of Hetherington’s ideas here in order to provide scientific underpinning to my consideration of an experience which, by its very nature could potentially be dismissed as personal, subjective and emotional.

¹⁴ Greenwood, *Signs of Life*, 1978.

¹⁵ Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?*, 1981.

¹⁶ See Martin Davie, *British Quaker Theology Since 1895* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 1997).

¹⁷ Lerner, *The Two Cinnas*, 1984.

¹⁸ Clift Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*.

and what might be articulated through it. More recently, the nature of artistic action within the world, and to what extent this might be considered to be activism in itself, and if it can be, the implications of this, were reflected upon by artist-activist Chris Alton.¹⁹

Whilst not having delivered a Swarthmore lecture, Philip Gross has written widely about creative writing, including a co-interview with Lerner²⁰ which offers two Quakers fully engaged in questions of literature and literary production applying their experiences and perspectives to the nature of that creation.

Alongside the Swarthmore Lecture material, work on the nature of Liberal Quakerism by American Quaker theologian Douglas Gwyn²¹ has been of great benefit. Gwyn trained to be a pastor within an American tradition fairly distinct from the British. However, he has spent significant time working and researching in Britain, and his work draws on both British and American material.²² Furthermore, in light of their shared histories, culture and language, it can also be argued that there is no total distinction between these Quaker cultures. In both of his books read for this research, Gwyn applies a liberal pastoral Quaker perspective to early British Quaker experience, developing insights which are offered to all modern Quakers to consider. Gwyn's familiarity with and deployment of scriptural material is perhaps redolent of early British Quakers,²³ rather than modern Liberal British Quakers, some of whom draw heavily on the Bible whilst others refer to a range of holy writings.²⁴

¹⁹ Chris Alton, *Changing Ourselves, Changing the World* (London: Quaker Books, 2018).

²⁰ Roger Homan, "Talking in All: A Conversation on Poetry and Quakerism Between Philip Gross and Laurence Lerner," *Quaker Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (2012): 110-130.

²¹ Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified and Seekers Found*.

²² Gwyn, *Seekers Found*.

²³ Witness, for instance, the employment of Biblical evidence in both Barclay, *The One True Christian Apology*, and Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*.

²⁴ As illustrated by various statements on diversity of belief in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 27.01-27.11.

Gay Pilgrim's work on Quaker heterotopia, or 'sites of Otherness',²⁵ is also key. Originally a medical term referring to 'features which were unexpected, incongruous or unsettling'. Foucault later appropriated the term 'heterotopia' to discuss 'spaces that disturb, shock or unsettle'.²⁶ Pilgrim also understands Quaker heterotopia, a conscious position that is deliberately at odds with the prevailing social context, as growing from the Quaker 'behavioural creed'.²⁷ This 'creed' is an umbrella term for Quaker behavioural-spiritual conventions which act as a 'glue' for the movement in the absence of a theological creed.

Just as early Quakers deliberately set themselves at odds with what they considered to be a corrupt society, so modern-day Quaker writers can be understood to be offering constructive challenges to their readers within their current context. Quaker heterotopia is demonstrably present in much Quaker work, having been fruitfully applied to Quaker worship, protest, and social action.²⁸ Whilst remembering that early Quakers themselves did not have the concept of heterotopia as such, we can draw parallels with how early Quakers 'invaded' parish churches, challenging preachers during their sermons. There are widespread reports of transformed, somewhat disturbing behaviour by 'enchanted' Quakers, such as mimicking animals.²⁹ Even if some of these reports are exaggerations or downright fabrications, early Quakers demonstrably set themselves against the mainstream social grain: Barry Reay has claimed 'the movement was far more radical than some historians would still admit.'³⁰ This kind of heterotopic thinking

²⁵ Gay Pilgrim, "Taming Anarchy: Quaker Alternate Ordering and 'Otherness,'" in *The Creation of Quaker Theory: Insider Perspectives*, ed. Pink Dandelion (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2004): 211.

²⁶ Pink Dandelion and P. Collins, *The Quaker Condition: The Sociology of a Liberal Religion* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009): 53.

²⁷ Pilgrim, "Taming Anarchy".

²⁸ For instance, H.C. Meads, *'Experiment with Light' in Britain: the heterotopian nature of a contemporary Quaker spiritual practice*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011; and Pink Dandelion, *The Cultivation of Conformity: Towards a General Theory of Internal Secularisation* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2019).

²⁹ Michele Lise Tarter, "Quaking in the Light: The Politics of Quaker Women's Corporeal Prophecy in the Seventeenth Century Transatlantic World," in *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*, ed. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 145.

³⁰ Barry Reay, *Quakers and the English Revolution* (Hounslow: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd., 1985): 3.

and action takes multifarious forms, including Conscientious Objection,³¹ also in the overlap between art and activism.³²

Pilgrim's work on this tendency amongst modern Liberal Quakerism suggests that 'the sense of being 'other' and living out an 'alternate ordering' that is one of the key ways in which twenty first-century [Quakers] obtain a sense of identity and unity.'³³

Spirituality and Creativity

All of the Diviner Poets are comfortable with an apophatic, mystical approach to the Divine feeding into their literary production. Their book³⁴ has been a touchstone in terms of offering a coherent articulation of the inter-relationship of literature and spirituality, straddling reading about Quaker identity and literary theory and criticism. D'Costa et al are all members of various faith communities, including Quakerism, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, thus occupying a liminal position in my reading, exploring the relationship between spirituality and creativity. For instance, poet and ethnographer Eleanor Nesbitt is a practising Quaker and married to a Sikh, whilst Catholic theologian Gavin D'Costa is married to a Quaker.

Similar to this, a positive model for future developments in Quaker writing is offered by American Quaker academic Diane Reynolds,³⁵ referred to in my initial literature review above and in the course of my textual analyses. Reynolds belongs to an American branch of

³¹ Hans Eirek Aavek and Julia Hinshaw Ryberg, "Quakers in Europe and the Middle East," in *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018): 216-36.

³² Chris Alton, *Changing Ourselves, Changing the World*.

³³ Pink Dandelion, "Ten Years of Birmingham: An Extended Editorial," *Quaker Studies*, George Fox University, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010): 7.

³⁴ D'Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*.

³⁵ Reynolds, "Quakers and Fiction". A Professor of English at Ohio University Eastern; as well as her mission statement for ethical Quaker writers here, she has also produced a revisionist biography of a charismatic religious figure who embraced a difficult path which led ultimately to torture and death, which yet transformed him: *The Doubled Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Women, Sexuality, and Nazi Germany* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016).

Quakerism which seeks to preserve the tradition of silent worship.³⁶ This, plus her position as an academic working within the British-American cultural landscape, suggests the applicability of her arguments for British Quaker writing, offering a model for how Liberal Quakers might approach literary writing.

Some texts have become touchstones for this project as they offer close reflections through interview or essay format from writers themselves on the nature of the creative process, and the connected roles of the Divine, writers, and their faiths.³⁷ The reflections gleaned from this book echo remarks made by other commentators, my interviewees as well as my observations and conclusions upon the work analysed for this project. One commentator, Anabaptist poet G.C. Waldrep, remarks on how ‘important [Roman Catholic fiction writer Flannery O’Connor was] in imparting to me the courage of moving forward in both faith and art....Anyone who is even halfway serious about faith *or* art should read...*Mystery and Manners*.’³⁸ Despite these spiritual traditions being different from Quakerism, and O’Connor’s primary literary concern being fiction rather than poetry, I argue that we should modify her discussion of fiction to that of imaginative literature, and understand her discussion of spiritual concerns such as grace, human moral conduct and humanity’s relationship with the Divine as belonging within a broader conversation about spiritual activity, granting access to a mine of literary insight. Being ‘hotly in pursuit of the real, no matter what [the author] calls it, or what instrument he [sic] uses to get at it’,³⁹ we immediately respond to O’Connor’s model of a true writer. In her application of an engaged theological approach to literature, O’Connor aligns well with

³⁶ Hood, ed., *Quakers and Literature*: xiv.

³⁷ The first is I. Kaminsky, and K. Towler, eds., *A God in the House: Poets talk about faith* (Massachusetts: Tupelo Press, 2012).

³⁸ Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 190.

³⁹ O’Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 171.

Bakhtinian thought.⁴⁰ Her Roman Catholicism was sincere, having a profound impact on her; she was deeply read in both Aquinas and Augustine.

In order to find my way in terms of my chosen materials, I wished to locate a theoretical approach sufficiently pragmatic to allow for ambiguous material and polysemic readings. This led me to the Chicago School,⁴¹ exploring as it did a rational and open-minded approach to what literature is and how it can be understood. This in turn led me to the key literary theory which I argue is justified by the texts under consideration: dialogical engagement. The notion that literary texts involve this particular form of engagement by both writer and reader is one that is supported by various writers of faith.⁴²

In offering an expression of the vital need for engagement and connection between teacher and student, subject and object, one and other, educational theorist Paulo Freire⁴³ indicates an integrated engagement. Freire calls for a radically engaged approach to education, an integration of subject and object, teacher and student, human and world, to reshape how we live in the here and now. With my English teaching background, I have been much inspired by Freire's arguments, and argue that they set a useful tone for our understanding of the interface between writer, text and reader: 'There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions...to facilitate the integration [oppression] of the younger generation...or it becomes the 'practice of freedom.'⁴⁴ It could be objected that this thesis is considering an interface between theology and literary writing, not education as such. One might also challenge the social revolution explicitly called for, where Freire states that his

⁴⁰ O'Connor, *Mystery & Manners*; O'Connor was a writer from the American Deep South and a devout Roman Catholic, famed for darkly comic short fiction which often dealt in gothic concerns, featuring a wide range of grotesque characters. O'Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 181: 'It takes readers as well as writers to make literature.'

⁴¹ For instance, in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1953]) and Crane, *Critics and Criticism*.

⁴² 'It takes readers as well as writers to make literature.' (O'Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 181).

⁴³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Books, 1996 [1970]).

⁴⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 16.

pedagogy ‘must be forged with, not for, the oppressed’.⁴⁵ Indeed, many of the readers engaged in reading the texts which I consider here may well view themselves as already liberated. Yet, I argue that the process of expression and interpretation within the literary sphere is potentially one of liberation, where consciousness can be raised to a new level, or at least shifted beneficially.

Literary criticism again offers precedent for a concern with the engagement between reader and text, in the form of Reader-Response Theory, as outlined by such theorists as Stanley Fish,⁴⁶ Wolfgang Iser⁴⁷ and Elizabeth Freund.⁴⁸ As with many critical theories, Reader-Response includes a marked variety of ideas about literature, but all are connected by the view that the engagement of the reader with a text is the point at which meaning is created. What that meaning is, and whether there are other factors which may influence the meaning that is made, may differ according to the particular brand of Reader-Response one considers, but as Freund explains, ‘In its variegated forms, reader-response criticism undertakes to narrativize, characterize and personify or otherwise objectify the reading experience and its conditions. It undertakes, in short, to make the implicit features of “reading” explicit.’⁴⁹

From my reading of selected Quaker literature as well as my field interviews, the concept of engagement on a variety of levels has been raised repeatedly, leading me to consider the notion of engagement in terms of how meaning is discovered and created through literary texts. However, although Reader-Response offers a welcome precedent for the importance of reader engagement with texts, the engagement that I wish to explore subsumes that model, including also engagement between the writer and the text, and the writer with the reader via the text.

⁴⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30.

⁴⁶ For instance, in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996 [1980]).

⁴⁷ For example, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

⁴⁸ For instance, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-response criticism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003 [1987]).

⁴⁹ Freund, *The Return of the Reader*, 6.

Writer, reader and text are all vital agents in the literary process. Remove any one of them, and the process becomes pointless or impossible. Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogic model of engagement between the one and the other in order to create meaning more fully encapsulates this notion: 'The word is a two-sided act.'⁵⁰ Bakhtin's arguments are outlined and applied in his own work⁵¹ and that of his interlocutors Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist.⁵² This is an approach which sets the stage for integration within the person engaging with the text, be they writer or reader, and also between people, person and text, person and the world, and humanity and the Divine. In a wider sense of close practical-critical engagement with the written texts in this project, Rita Felski⁵³ provides an invaluable means of tackling the nature of particular texts, and the effects, either intended or unintended, which they work upon readers in different contexts. Whilst this thesis explores large issues and ideas and their relationship with literary texts, ultimately those issues and ideas will be judged in terms of how they actually play out within the texture and reality of literary texts, how they have been written, and why they have been written: 'The techniques or arts are means: the ends are subjects. But it is never safe to dwell upon the ends apart from the means, for it is only through the use of adequate means that the ends can be attained, or even understood'.⁵⁴ This all feeds back into the QLA that I present here, as the *raison d'être* of the QLA is meaningful engagement and connection, between the writer and the text, their readers, the external world, and the Divine.

Summary of Literature Review

There are various insights which I take with me as I consider my selected poets. The historical narrative of evolving Quaker engagement with imaginative literature has bequeathed an ethically aware literary approach to Quakers. It may have taken longer for them to engage with

⁵⁰ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 86.

⁵¹ Especially in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 1986.

⁵² *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 1984 and *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, 1997 [1990].

⁵³ Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

⁵⁴ R.S. Crane, ed., *The Idea of the Humanities, Vol. 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967): 10.

literature compared with other denominations, but owing to the role of discernment as defined above, I argue that their engagement is thoughtful and considered. Quakers, as with many writers and readers, approach the acts of writing and reading as ethical acts in themselves, given a particular flavour by Quakers' diverse lives and spiritual practice. Key aspects of Quaker experience and practice, for instance silence, are relevant here but not prescriptive: Quakers' apophatic approach to all of life is reflected also in their approach to writing, where there is no absolute creed for content or style. Furthermore, Quakers' pan-sacramentalism sets the stage for recurring attempts to render the noumenal in the everyday. Quakers' experiential approach, as well as contributing to their apophatic perspective on the Divine, also contributes powerfully to their emphasis on engagement on every level of life and expression, opening the way to accessing the noumenal, but also, entwined with that, opening the way to apprehension of meaning at every level.

Below I lay out the seven features of a QLA which I have identified through the reading considered above, as well as the field interviews that I have conducted, in preparation for my testing of these features through application to selected poems in Chapter 3.

The features of a possible Quaker Literary Aesthetic

The features that constitute the QLA are:

1. Openness, ambiguity and seeking;
2. Dialogical engagement;
3. 'Ethical' rather than 'moral' writing, incorporating a sense of honesty and hope;
4. Creative attention;
5. Quaker sensibility;
6. An apophatic approach to the Divine;
7. Silence as presence and force.

This list begins with four ‘foundational’ features, arguably common across literary writing; the latter three are more explicitly spiritual and Quakerly.

1. Openness, ambiguity and seeking

This mindset may very well be displayed by writers from a range of religious backgrounds, but is certainly a key characteristic of Quaker theology arising from experience:

There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys. Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?⁵⁵

This call to spiritual open-mindedness would appear to be also a call to inclusivity, even interdisciplinarity in handling different subjects and the insights to be gleaned from them, an approach evidenced by a range of writers of faith.⁵⁶ To be open to ‘new light’ from whatever source demands openness, and an acceptance of the possibility of ambiguity; new light from different sources may reveal different aspects of the truth. It is not a call to unquestioningly accept what is apparently offered as truth. The final question exhorts a healthy scepticism, underlining the fact that a seeking attitude will only reveal meaningful discoveries with thoughtful and informed seeking. Rufus Jones⁵⁷ took this view of ‘beauty’, which can be

⁵⁵ BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.7.

⁵⁶ An award-winning poet, editor, academic and human rights activist, Carolyn Forché (born 1950) remarks of her syncretic approach to different theological traditions: ‘I could experience these different fruits of human experience of God, without feeling there was any contradiction between them’, whilst Marilyn Nelson overviews her development through various Christian denominations (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 7, 151-161).

⁵⁷ (1863-1948). Quaker academic and writer, Jones was a passionate and charismatic spokesperson for burgeoning Liberal Quakerism. For a pithy overview of his career, theology, and legacy within Quakerism, see Stephen W. Angell, “God, Christ, and the Light,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 167-9.

understood as revelation: ‘Perhaps more wonderful still is...[how]...beauty breaks through... not only at a few highly organised points, it breaks through almost everywhere... [the Spirit] floods the world everywhere with it.’⁵⁸

This sense of literature as an activity involving ambiguity and constant searching is most suitable if we are to apprehend the world’s nature in its fullness, experience within that world, and how literature may address this situation: ‘We shall never know all about art or the values of art until all art is at an end; meanwhile, artists will continue to instruct us.’⁵⁹

Quaker silent worship, where worshippers join together in silent ‘waiting upon the Spirit’,⁶⁰ awaiting spiritual insights from quiet reflection, which they may then feel moved to share aloud with fellow worshippers, offers a particular frame for handling new insights and concepts creatively. Hetherington brings a psychological understanding to how Quaker ‘centring down’⁶¹ offers ‘a new “gestalt”, a fresh emphasis, and familiar ideas may be entertained and experienced in a new way.’⁶² I argue that this approach opens a route to ‘creative attention’, the process by which close attention is brought to bear upon a subject with the intention of gaining new insights or a deeper perception, discussed in detail below. This offers further insights: ‘Art extends experience. It begins by operating within the reality normally thought of as familiar, but it is not limited to that reality. Art makes a space for new images and new experiences which our own experience has excluded.’⁶³ There is a sense of openness here, in the sense of an open-minded acceptance of the subject as it is, accepting the positive and

⁵⁸ R. Jones, “Where the beyond breaks through,” *The Friend*, Vol. 60 (1920): 26.

⁵⁹ Olsen, E. *On Value Judgements in the Arts and Other Essays* (USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1976): 326.

⁶⁰ BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.8.

⁶¹ The Quaker process by which external distractions and concerns are quieted in order to create a genuine inner focus: ‘We first gather together in silence to quiet our minds.... In the stillness we open our hearts and lives to new insights and guidance.’ (John Perkin, “Centring Down,” *How Quakers Worship*, accessed Aug 21, 2020, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-faith/how-quakers-worship>, n.p.).

⁶² Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 57.

⁶³ Clift Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 93.

negative aspects of it, and searching for the insights offered by the text-in-itself. This emphasis on openness in the creative process was echoed by Gross:

I think [the creative process] gains a new life of its own and...tells you when, for better or worse, it has worked through its possibilities, it doesn't have unfinished business with itself.... I think you listen to it.... a clear-eyed kind of listening. I can't help using the [Quaker] word 'discernment'...

Thus, there is a sense in which writer and reader are compelled to search the deeper insights offered in a particular image, thought, or event as far as it is possible to seek those insights. This is not to suggest that absolute or ultimate truth will be revealed within a particular text. As remarked above, we will never finish learning about or from the arts. There is also a sense in which ambiguity is not only a possibility within literary creation, but required for a good life. Greenwood suggests that creative arts can offer back to religious faith the power of myth, invoking Cocteau's description 'falsehood becoming truth in the long run'.⁶⁴ Hetherington applies Arthur Koestler's perspective of the necessity of 'new innocence of perception' in order to understand peak-experiences.⁶⁵ Greenwood goes further, suggesting that creative activity ought to be actively embraced in order to access deeper spiritual truths: 'The weapon which was struck from the hands of religion by nineteenth-century scepticism is restored to us by the gracious gesture of the Muses.'⁶⁶

This necessary openness to the message that must be articulated in a particular text, as well as in writers' general approach to writing, has been expressed in several field interviews. Sibyl Ruth remarked:

You have to be a bit bad, really... you've got care about the poetry most, you can't think about being a good Quaker.... Your only duty is to the words or the Spirit or whatever,

⁶⁴ Greenwood, *Signs of Life*, 34.

⁶⁵ Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers* (London: Penguin, 1959) quoted in Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 29.

⁶⁶ Greenwood, *Signs of Life*, 35.

and where it is taking you, ... I think Quaker poets have to be more like Nayler⁶⁷ than Fox...

Stephen Cox similarly views his work as *'experimental. I'm working towards a concept of where...I'm constantly re-thinking where I'm going along the way.... There's something very Quakerly about "groping forward" – willing to listen, willing to discard what becomes extraneous'*. This view is echoed in Cox's own writing about the connection between spirituality and creativity: *'Perhaps writing a novel is more like a concern, in the Quaker sense; a feeling one is under the guidance to pursue a certain path to wherever it leads.'*⁶⁸ This is echoed by Gillian Allnut: *'I made the choice for writing, and that was like the choice for love, the choice for God, as opposed to the worldly, literary career.'*

These observations all indicate the importance of an openness within the literary process, an acceptance of following truth wherever it may lead, which may affect not only the text on the page, but also writers' internal and external relationships.

2. Dialogical engagement

Literary writing worthy of the name must intend to move, inspire and challenge, both the writer in its making as well as the reader in its reception: *'A masterpiece is part of the conscience of mankind [sic].'*⁶⁹ My contention is that this may only be achieved via genuine engagement.

Gross commented on the significance of Freire's dialogical learning process:

I think absolutely teacher and learner are in it with each other. We are not content providers...writers who have worked in education, in the creative arts education, the

⁶⁷ James Nayler (1618-1660) was an early Quaker leader alongside George Fox and others. He later brought opprobrium upon himself and the Quaker movement by entering Bristol upon a donkey at Easter-tide in the manner of Christ, for which he was imprisoned and tortured by the Puritan authorities, and disowned by Fox (and Quakers generally) for a time. Towards the end of his life he was reconciled with Fox, and some modern Quaker writers, such as Gwyn in *The Covenant Crucified*, have come to view Nayler as a seriously misunderstood Quaker visionary, willing to sacrifice himself for Quakerism's radical message.

⁶⁸ Cox, "Some broader current?," 10.

⁶⁹ Greenwood, *Signs of Life*, 7.

ones that do it really well are the ones who are changed by it. Their work is changed by it as well. I hope that's been so with me.

The importance of engagement between writer and reader is emphasised in David Thelen's (admirably Bakhtinian) remark that: 'storyteller and audience are partners in creating the memory to be told.'⁷⁰ The QLA is, I believe, a co-operative endeavour, between writers and their contexts and fellow writers, also between writers and readers, and between readers and the text. Bakhtin's Dialogism offers a reconciliation between centripetal and centrifugal forces in the world, competing to draw things together or spin them outwards: 'Bakhtin is important...because of the specific means that he adduces for [these forces'] study.'⁷¹ In other words, Bakhtin's ideas are important here because of the unending process they outline: 'That is an image of God, a kind of stepping-stone to absolute-God: and anyone who stands still too long on a stepping-stone is liable to fall into the water.'⁷² These observations indicate the feature of an apophatic approach to the Divine, but the emphasis on engagement here is vital. As Bakhtin comments, and as mentioned above, 'The word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant.'⁷³ If a book is only truly completed when it is actually read,⁷⁴ or when it is being read, repeatedly, by different readers in different contexts, to achieve any form of insightful perspective on what is happening the text must at least include an awareness of the writer-reader relationship via the text. Reader-Response argues that the resulting responses will vary, based upon contexts,⁷⁵ and this is part-and-parcel

⁷⁰ D. Thelen, "Memory and American History," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (1989): 1118.

⁷¹ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 8.

⁷² Clift Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 67.

⁷³ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 86.

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Iser characterises a literary text as coming into being from a 'convergence' between text and reader. ("The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (1972): 279).

⁷⁵ Two different readers responding to the same text may be like 'two people gazing at the night sky [who] may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper. The "stars" in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable.' (Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," 287).

of the business of literary production and reception. Yet at the heart of it is this act of engagement between writer, text and reader.

Furthermore, just as the connection between writer and reader is a relationship that in some way must be worked upon and developed, as all beneficial relationships must be, so this relationship of engagement will in turn allow for meaning to be created through individual engagement with the external world: ‘The connection between them is not something that is given but something that must be worked at, shaped, conceptualized. Unity is created by the architectonic activity of the mind. The connection between art and life is made only where a perceiving human being makes it.’⁷⁶ I understand this connection as being worked at by both writer and reader, in both producing and receiving the text, an ongoing process which potentially continues beyond the immediate textual production/reception. It is worth considering Bakhtin’s emphasis on mental perception. The model of his *hic et nunc* (‘here and now’) as applied in this thesis seeks to go beyond the mental: both Gross and Ruth talk about the importance of integration of the mind with body and experience, a view amplified by other writers, including Carolyn Forché.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, mental activity and perception, a combination of mental and physical processes, are vital components: ‘the architectonic activity

⁷⁶ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 56.

⁷⁷ During a question and answer event to promote her memoir *What You Have Heard is True*, Forché was asked about the relationship between political experience and the production of ‘political poetry’. Her response is telling: ‘You cannot sit down and decide that you’re going to write a political poem, because that isn’t how poems are written. If you want to write political poetry, you have to completely internalise the struggle for human rights and social justice and anything you’re politically concerned about. It has to be the air you breathe, it has to enter your soul,...so that whatever you write is going to reflect that, those passions and those concerns, even if you’re writing about the wind in Autumn....You can’t write out of intentional consciousness. Your poem is always ahead of what you know about your poem....I advise [developing poets] to become political if they want to write political poetry, and then just write poetry on the side!...The same thing if you want to write religious poetry or love poetry,...you have to be in love, you have to be religious, this is the problem with it, right?’ (T. Warren, “Carolyn Forché talks about *What You Have Heard is True* at Politics and Prose Bookstore, Washington,” 2019, accessed Mar 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8-F8GmwLdM&t=1822s> .)

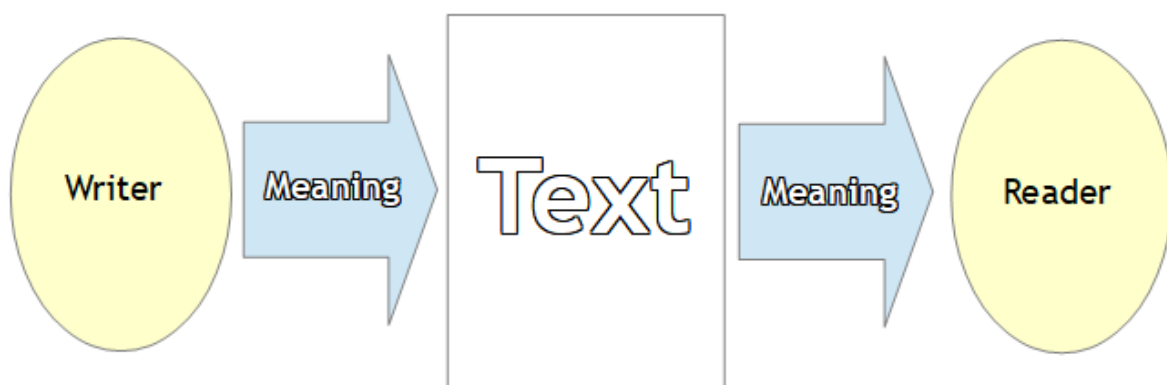
of authorship, which is the building of a text, parallels the activity of human existence, which is the building of the self.⁷⁸ Gross has commented upon the importance of engagement:

in the process of [reading, readers might discover] things that I didn't know about my own text. I'm always pleased when somebody gives something that I've written a reading in good faith with real engagement and discovers some of its possibilities that I've been unaware of. I think, 'Good, okay, that's a relationship between the organism that bit of writing has become and this other person.'

Gross' remarks foreground the unpredictability of this kind of dialogue. The dialogue is not an 'immediate' one occurring contemporaneously between writer and reader, but at one remove via the text, with all of the possibilities of different people reaching their own conclusions in different contexts which is a possibility of this exchange highlighted by Iser above. The Dialogical model offers a sense of unity which incorporates the reality of flux:

Dialogism is not intended to be merely another theory of literature or even another philosophy of language, but is an account of relationships between people and between persons and things...Bakhtin's system never loses sight of the nitty-gritty of everyday life, with all the awkwardness, confusion and pain peculiar to the *hic et nunc*, but also with all the joy that only the immediacy of the here and now can bring.⁷⁹

Thus, a traditional model of meaning-making in literature (as for instance outlined by T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent")⁸⁰ would follow the pattern in Figure 2.1:



⁷⁸ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 64.

⁷⁹ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 348.

⁸⁰ In *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd. 1920): 39-49.

Fig. 2.1: Traditional model of transmission of meaning via written texts

On the other hand, a Dialogical model would take the form illustrated in Figure 2.2:

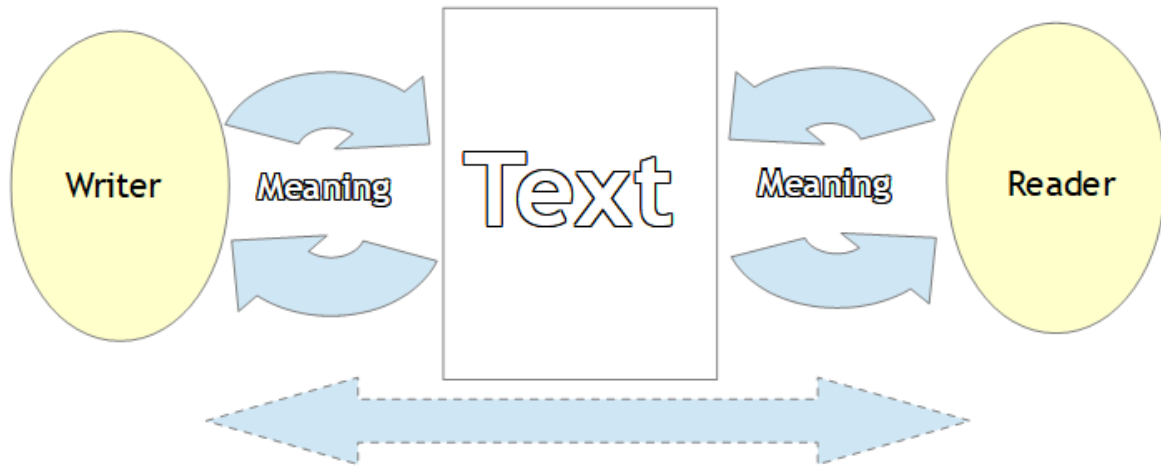


Fig. 2.2: Bakhtinian model of transmission of meaning through more active engagement

Discussing a recent literary collaboration, Gross has written about some of the parallels between religious worship and literary creation:

At best, when a Meeting feels ‘gathered’, there is a tangible sense that we are holding the space between us.... [there is] a calm, alert, attentive listening.... Collaboration between individuals is the same thing *par excellence*. I’m not suggesting that collaboration in the arts and worship are the same thing, but each offers a clue to the other. In either, the space between us can be flat and dull, or it can be a tingling medium through which the slightest live impulse can pass.⁸¹

We set for ourselves a much richer, challenging task if we seek this level of engagement. The notion of the text as an ‘organism’ or ‘medium’ as in the two Gross quotes above, emphasises the quiddity of the text. Of course, it does not have a personality or identity in the sense of a writer or reader, but it is protean material with some character imparted to it through its writing and reading, a character which is at least partly subject to change based upon the contexts and

⁸¹ Philip Gross, “We’re writers; we needed to write,” *The Friend*, Vol. 178, No. 10 (2020): 13.

nature of its writing and reading. The potential rewards of this process are great. On many levels there is the possibility of entering into an ‘immortal community’.⁸² Such a community could take different forms, involving ongoing discussion and modified behaviour in the world, potentially up to and including readers producing writing of their own.⁸³ This again emphasises the extent to which the QLA is characterised by engagement, and engagement always carries with it the twin possibilities of change and action.

3. ‘Ethical’ rather than ‘moral’ writing (incorporating a sense of honesty and hope)

The Chicago School offers a pragmatic approach to the question of value judgements: ‘It seems absurd...to ask whether there are values in art: if there were none, no artist would pursue his art, works would never be evaluated, and people in general would never be attracted or repelled by them.’⁸⁴ Indeed, to live well by implication requires some form of ethical response from everyone, therefore literary writing in no way removes the writer from the ethical realm: ‘By becoming an artist one does not cease being a person....The morality of the artist is before all else, the morality of a person....[Thus] As a basically moral being, an artist stands with the rest of humanity.’⁸⁵ This ethical model for writing embraces the output as well as the process itself, offering

‘a morality of creativity’, one that demands honesty of artists more than truth, that condemns them for acquiescing in formulas and other facile solutions, and that denies them respect when they repeat themselves without pursuing the artistic search for new dimensions of awareness.⁸⁶

⁸² J. Bate et al, eds. *Stressed, Unstressed* (London: William Collins, 2016): 7.

⁸³ For example, Carolyn Forché’s quoting of Franz Rosenzweig: ‘The self...can only be rendered visible acted out, in order to awaken the self in every other man as well.’ Similarly, Li-Young Lee’s comment: ‘People who read poetry but don’t write it are like those who have just heard about the burning bush. They’ve got to write poetry.’ Also, Christian Wiman: ‘the sacredness [in literary engagement] is contingent upon the reader’s engagement and openness, her willingness to listen and be changed.’ (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 13, 131, 248).

⁸⁴ Olsen, *On Value Judgements in the Arts and Other Essays*, 308.

⁸⁵ Berleant, “Artists and Morality,” 196-7.

⁸⁶ Berleant, “Artists and Morality,” 199.

Granted, this ethical drive challenges the view that idealises ‘art for art’s sake’, predicating the text above other factors, one resulting movement being New Formalism, leading to potentially distracting Manichean disputes between poets of different persuasions, as discussed by Patrick Kurp.⁸⁷

This echoes Reynolds’ call for Quaker writers to reject comfortable moralistic writing such as Jessamyn West’s historical Quaker stories,⁸⁸ rather honestly embracing the ambiguity and complexity of life: ‘Rather than try to impose a normalizing morality on us [an ethical Quaker writer] invites us into a world of ugliness and beauty, cruelty and grace, pain and love,...a real world in which God moves among the suffering.’⁸⁹ Granted, Reynolds offers such non-fictional examples as Robert Barclay’s *Apology*⁹⁰ and Thomas Kelly’s⁹¹ *A Testament of Devotion*: ‘In both, we hear the language of challenge and a call to transformation’.⁹² Despite this, there seems no reason to suppose that Reynolds is calling for Quakers to turn their back on imaginative literature *per se*, but rather for a more tough-minded and fearless approach to all writing produced by Quakers: ‘If we gaze into the mirror that celebrates Quakers as a pristine group apart, we may learn something about ourselves and our shrinking numbers’.⁹³

⁸⁷ Patrick Kurp, “A Negative Freedom: Thirteen Poets on Formal Verse,” *LA Review of Books*, Oct 26, 2017, accessed Aug 2, 2020, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-negative-freedom-thirteen-poets-on-formal-verse/> n.p.

⁸⁸ For instance, *The Friendly Persuasion* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1945).

⁸⁹ Reynolds, “Quakers and Fiction,” 86.

⁹⁰ Robert Barclay (1648-1690) was a Quaker theologian and apologist. Having received an exemplary classical education at the Roman Catholic Scots College, Paris, financed by an uncle who hoped to encourage him to join that Church, he followed his father into Quaker membership. His *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (Lenox, MA: HardPress Publishing, 2019 [1676]) is considered by many to be the single coherent work of systematic Quaker theology written thus far, although other writers cited in this thesis, for example Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?*, and Gwyn in *Seekers Found* and *The Covenant Crucified*, have also produced significant works of Quaker theology.

⁹¹ Thomas R. Kelly (1893-1941), Quaker academic, writer and mystic. After a successful early career as university teacher and Quaker pastor, Kelly later failed a Harvard doctorate in Theology owing to an error during his oral examination. He subsequently battled depression before emerging as a far more integrated, insightful individual. His later *Testament of Devotion* is widely regarded as a profound spiritual work.

⁹² Reynolds, “Quakers and Fiction,” 84.

⁹³ Reynolds, “Quakers and Fiction,” 87.

This call to literary production as an ethical activity was reinforced and developed further by Cox in our interview:

For me, with a 'Quaker literary aesthetic', characters – no matter how bad they are – are still coming from a place of integrity.... I think that a 'Quaker literary aesthetic' boils down to an aesthetic of honesty. It's more interesting to write about a man who cuts down trees to feed his family, rather than because he merely thinks that trees are ugly. I think also that I need to include at least the possibility of redemption – that...is so central to my Quakerism.

This ethical feature could perhaps be summarised as being one of 'honesty and hope', calling writers and readers to engage honestly with the world as it is, whilst also seeking honest reasons for hopeful movement forwards. Art is a vital phenomenon, but this line of research and reasoning moves away from 'Art for art's sake'.⁹⁴ Lerner summarises this neatly: 'Quakers should not be fakers.'⁹⁵ Technique may be important, but it lies in relationship with other contextual factors. Again, we can find a plethora of instances of this in the lives of writers of faith.⁹⁶

4. 'Creative attention'

The ex-Congregationalist D.H. Lawrence strove to identify the immanent task and, by extension, ethics, of art, locating it within a duty to accuracy and honesty: 'The business of art is to reveal the relationship between man [sic] and his circumambient universe, at the living

⁹⁴ Christian Wiman: 'Can there even be aesthetic truth without some other, more ultimate truth as precedent? ...This is why a poet's technical decisions are moral decisions, why matters of form and sound have existential meanings and consequences. It's also why poetry is so important in the world.' (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 250-251).

⁹⁵ Lerner, *The Two Cinnas*, 31.

⁹⁶ Carolyn Forché for instance relates her life-changing experiences in El Salvador as a human rights advocate: 'The wonderful experiences I had in El Salvador transformed my thinking and my spiritual life....there were a few occasions, I was terrified....But I didn't want to leave, nevertheless, because I didn't want to leave this community.' (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 10).

moment'.⁹⁷ A particularly mindful attention to the here and now carries a large amount of currency at the moment, resonating with Buddhist and Christian meditative practices, as well as the silent contemplation encouraged amongst Liberal Quakers. Hetherington begins his consideration of the nature of religious 'peak-experiences' with a passage on the power of close attention: 'A sudden concentration of attention on a rainy August morning....A moment of understanding.'⁹⁸ He utilises his clinical background to foreground the importance of sensory input,⁹⁹ later invoking Aldous Huxley's notion of 'cleansed perception', induced by chemical substances.¹⁰⁰ Hetherington is of course considering the possibilities of meditative practices within Quaker worship. I argue that the practice of what we might term 'creative attention' within Quaker worship, when brought to bear upon the creative process, offers a means towards a literary state of 'cleansed perception'.

In his own writing about the creative process Gross urges his writing students to 'Look! Really look!'¹⁰¹ He elsewhere has emphasised the importance of '*engaging with the unremarked thing. I'm not sure if [that is] a motif or whether it's just a strategy, but it matters. That feels quite fundamental, actually.*' This sentiment is echoed by Simon Denison in our interview, who praises in Gross' poetry

...the idea of intensive seeing. The sense that what a photographer does is show us things that we might otherwise overlook, that is to say... [applying a] ... 'sacramentalising level of attention' to reveal the wonder and astonishing qualities in the world to the viewer, to say, 'Don't walk too quickly by.'

⁹⁷ D.H. Lawrence, *Phoenix* (New York: Viking, 1936): 527. Despite his use of the language of 'morality', Lawrence's sharp and practical application of it strikes me as chiming more fully with Reynolds' ethical model of writing.

⁹⁸ Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 1; also collected in British Quakers' work of faith, BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 21.27.

⁹⁹ Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 26.

¹⁰¹ Gross et al, 'No Artform is an Island', (which won the 2006 Liz Cashdan Prize for outstanding contribution to Writing in Education).

Allnutt meanwhile remarked in our interview: *'the words in poems are made of wood not paper'*. This offers a sense of weight being ascribed to every individual element within a poem, equally valued. In our interview, she also invoked Catholic mystic Simone Weil's notion of *'prayer as attention, as one hundred percent attention'*. There is a powerful sense of a spiritual regard for the world around one feeding into the resulting poetry, prompting the comment on Allnutt's work, 'There are phrases here you could take with you into your day, meditate on them like holy scripture'.¹⁰² These images of engagement gesture towards Bakhtin's Dialogism, reflected in Gross and Ruth's writing practices, which is this creative attention, described as "to administer a sacrament", meaning that people join the work of life, giving it the wine and wafer of meaning.¹⁰³ Bakhtin, although a brilliant academic, was engaged in a profoundly democratic project, reacting against notions of a higher order out of reach of 'ordinary people': 'he [offered] *hic et nunc* (here and now)'.¹⁰⁴ This transformative sense of the 'here and now', this sense of access to the noumenal via a close and engaged attention, distinguishes between the 'world of becoming', characterised by separation, objectives, desires, linearity, and the 'world of being', characterised by acceptance, integration, reception, laterality, and solidarity. Moments of transcendence are typified by acceptance and unity, as described in one account of Quaker worship: 'A sense of unity with the world entered into me....I do not suppose that I learnt anything that was new to me....But I believe I was taught something and something happened to me.'¹⁰⁵ This experience may well reach into a divine space beyond language, bringing something back from that space which is then shaped into words to be communicated.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² A. Wilson, "Seven Ways of Reading Gillian Allnutt," *AnthonyWilsonPoetry*, 2013, accessed Jan 30, 2019, <https://anthonywilsonpoetry.com/2013/05/22/seven-ways-of-reading-gillian-allnutt/#comments>, n.p.

¹⁰³ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 38.

¹⁰⁶ This is the central conceit of Clift Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*.

Despite the fact that the process of rendering the noumenal within language will always be contingent and imperfect, creative attention renders a potentially meaningless cosmos meaningful: ‘The acting of human projects turns the desert of space into a garden of time.’¹⁰⁷ This is a Holy Quest, recalling the feature of engagement above: ‘The way in which I create myself is by means of a quest: I go out to the other in order to come back with a self.’¹⁰⁸ Language here is the key tool, at once precise and malleable. Clift Heales and Cook identify how, on a sliding scale of characteristics, one of the most powerful states for language is ‘where [it] finds its creative self, where we create it anew and it creates us.’¹⁰⁹ Creative attention is the lens by which we may identify the beautiful, opening the possibility of transformation: ‘Before the beautiful—no, not really before but within the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only ‘finds’ the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.’¹¹⁰ This is a position further reinforced by other experienced writers.¹¹¹

5. Quaker sensibility

The definition of the term ‘sensibility’ is complicated and multifaceted,¹¹² reflecting the complicated and multifaceted nature of Quakerism, incorporating as it does a multiplicity of different theological viewpoints. Whilst Liberal unprogrammed Quakerism accounts for a relatively small proportion of Quaker religious practice, in contrast to programmed Christo-

¹⁰⁷ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 75.

¹⁰⁸ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 78.

¹⁰⁹ Clift Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 41.

¹¹⁰ H.U. v. Balthasar, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 270.

¹¹¹ For instance, Alicia Ostriker: ‘This Revelation! ... Art with a capital A. At the same time, it was a manifestation of Reality with a capital R.’ Likewise Marilyn Nelson: ‘Surely everyone has a spiritual journey, even if it is never recognised as such. Mine began with wonderment.’ Also, Eleanor Wilner: ‘This is why I write poetry...to pay attention to what otherwise goes unnoticed as we go on default setting.’ (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 137, 153, 223).

¹¹² It ranges from the early ‘Emanations from bodies, supposed to be the cause of sensation’ to the more relevant ‘Power of sensation or perception.... Mental perception’. There is the less helpful ‘The quality of being quickly or easily affected by emotional or artistic influences’ alongside the more helpful ‘Highly developed sense of emotional or artistic awareness....Emotional capacities or feelings.’ (*Shorter Oxford*, 2776).

centric Quakerism, it must also be remembered that Liberal Quakerism itself does not simply fall into a single category, with religious positions within Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends ranging from broadly Christo-centric through Christian-Universalist, to a variety of other faith traditions¹¹³ and on to a syncretic position that seeks to reconcile elements of different faith positions, including spiritual Atheism and Humanism.¹¹⁴

The Quaker sensibility that I have in mind is predicated upon a world view based upon the basic Quaker characteristics identified in Chapter 1, emphasising the view that ‘Christianity is not a notion but a way’,¹¹⁵ focusing on how people live their lives rather than who or what they are, this being a logical result of Quakerism being non-credal. For the purposes of the literary aesthetic that I am exploring here, my understanding is that this sensibility draws upon and feeds back into each of the other features as well, in an integrated and organic system. As was discussed in Chapter 1, as this liberalising tendency has grown with British Quakerism, there has also developed a discussion around what constitutes being a Quaker. Indeed, despite a general agreement to embrace unity through diversity, British Quakerism still evidences at least three major responses to this religious context in the form of Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Syncretism, as analysed by Gay Pilgrim.¹¹⁶ This leads one to ask whether it is possible to usefully define what being a Quaker in a Liberal British sense might mean, and thus what a sensibility arising from such a state might look and feel like.

¹¹³ A representative whilst not total list might include: Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Paganism, Wiccanism, Humanism, and Gnosticism. A discussion of the inter-relationships of Friends of different religious persuasions can be found in Chapter 27, “Unity and diversity”, in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

¹¹⁴ A discussion of variety within the Quaker movement is provided in Chapter 9, “Beyond Britain Yearly Meeting” in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

¹¹⁵ BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.2.

¹¹⁶ Pilgrim identifies the majority of Twenty-first Century British Quakers as being located within the Inclusivist and Syncretist ‘camps’, with a dialogical interplay between these two. The Exclusivists mainly are located within a small splinter group, The Religious Society of Friends in Christ, an exclusively Christo-centric group which considers itself to be the keeper of the ‘true flame’ of Christian Quakerism (Pilgrim, “Taming Anarchy”, 206-225). See also Spencer (149 – 171) and Davie (188- 205), also in Pink Dandelion, ed., *The Creation of Quaker Theory: Insider Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004) for other extremely valuable perspectives on the diverse perspectives and dialogues within the Quaker movement.

This fifth feature is in many ways both a foundation and hinge. The first four features could reasonably be expected to be demonstrated in most literary work, irrespective of their writers having a religious affiliation or not. The two following features, an apophatic approach to the Divine and silence as a presence and force, could be argued to potentially appear in the work of writers who identify as spiritual, whilst not necessarily being Quaker. Thus, we could conceive this feature as sitting at the centre of a web of connection, as depicted in Figure 2.4:

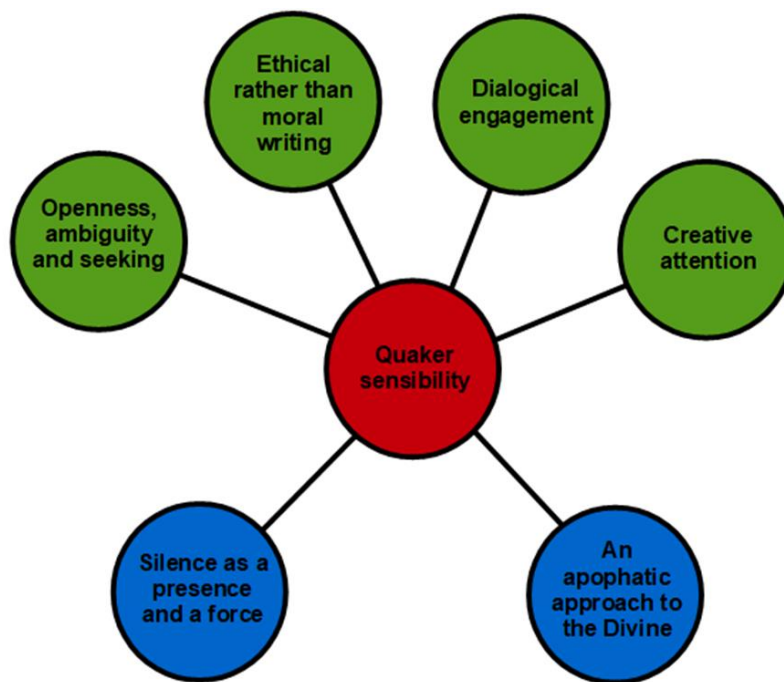


Fig. 2.3: The role of Quaker sensibility in connecting all features together into a Quaker Literary Aesthetic

These features build towards a QLA, beginning with the ‘foundational’ first four features, which can be expected to feature often and widely in literature. If one is particularly concerned with spiritually connected literary writing, the final two features develop this aspect, again appearing often although not necessarily universally, therefore are not included in the following

diagram.¹¹⁷ Quaker sensibility then acts as a ‘capstone’ feature, inflecting all features towards a Quakerly understanding of a writer’s output. Understood thus, this pattern of relationships between the features form a pyramid (see Figure 2.5):

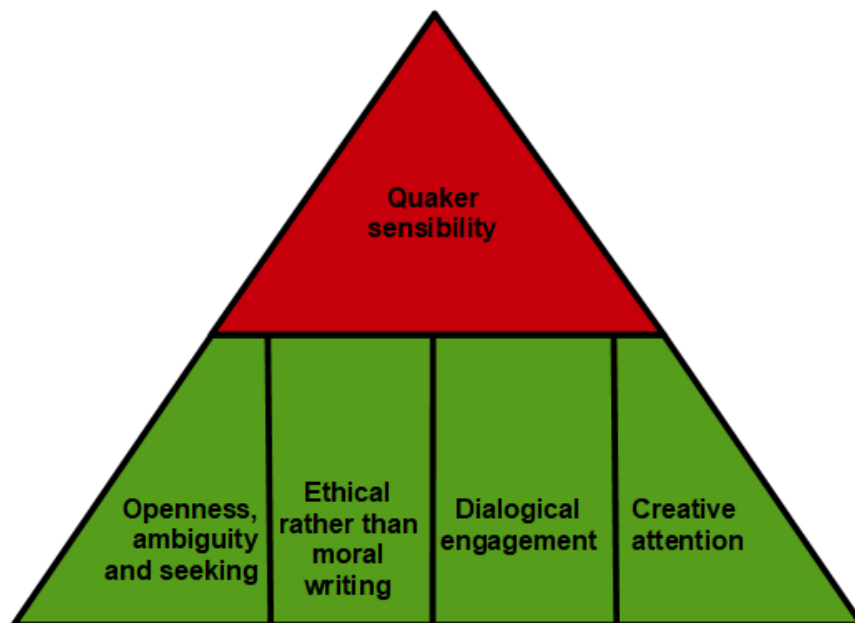


Fig. 2.4: Pyramid demonstrating the incremental relationship between each ‘layer’ of features, and how they build towards a Quaker Literary Aesthetic

It would therefore be a logical supposition that this Quaker ‘capstone’ could be replaced by another type of ‘sensibility’, for instance Methodism, Roman Catholicism, Anabaptism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Humanism, and so on. If a writer had a generally spiritual approach to life, without a specific spiritual affiliation attached to that, then we might imagine this pyramid without a capstone, or indeed with a capstone with no specific spiritual sensibility, but rather a general, though sincere, one.

¹¹⁷ I discuss the differing incidences of these features within Quaker practice further in Chapter 4.

A Quaker sensibility will be a protean, constantly evolving concept, with essential Quaker values and practices at its heart, whilst being open to new insights and experiences from whatever source they may come. One would reasonably expect all of the first four features to be incorporated in work evidencing this aesthetic, and the final two features will feature in many of the works produced by writers working within this aesthetic. A Quaker sensibility is less about someone ‘officially’ identifying as Quaker, but rather *being* a Quaker. In other words, it emphasises the way in which Quakers live and, if relevant, write, so that all of this will be enriched and integrated, and characterised by an attention to deep-level engagement and a focus on moving towards ever more meaningful and positive life and work, with the possibility of positive transformation. Quaker spiritual writings are peppered with reflections on the influence of Quaker spirituality upon attitudes and behaviours, including the giving of service,¹¹⁸ working for positive changes in the world,¹¹⁹ and how one’s life might evidence one’s beliefs and values.¹²⁰

The sense in which imaginative literature can become a force for positive transformation is one that is shared by various writers.¹²¹ This is one answer to the question of why literary writing may be a good and desirable thing to do, bearing in mind the fact that Quakerism is non-credal, laying particular focus on the process of living faithfully rather than any ultimate attainment of a final reality or transformation.¹²² Despite the potential intangibility of the relationship

¹¹⁸ For instance, ‘their help was given unconsciously, but it was because they were sensitive to God’s leadings that they were able to do it. Do we seek to be the channels of God’s love and caring? ‘Caring matters most.’ (Edward H. Milligan, “Membership and pastoral care,” *Friends Quarterly*, Vol. 5 (1951): 156).

¹¹⁹ Evidenced for example by William Penn: ‘True godliness don’t turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it’ (Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, 63).

¹²⁰ Fox urged Quakers to ‘be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them’ (Fox, *Journal*, 263).

¹²¹ Carolyn Forché: ‘It’s a kind of mysterious awakening of the self that would be the true writing of the soul.’ Eleanor Wilner: ‘For me, the poem is never just about experience, it *is* an experience’. Christian Wiman: ‘What might it mean to be drawn into meanings that, in some profound and necessary way, shatter us? This is what it means to love. This is what it *should* mean to write one more poem.’ (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 13, 225, 247).

¹²² For instance, BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.2.

between literature and lived experience, there are clear efforts across contemporary British culture to instantiate a discernible positive link between literature and life with transformative properties, not least the developing field of ‘bibliotherapy’.¹²³

The possibility of positive transformation offered here could, for Quakers, include the possible application of Pilgrim’s¹²⁴ use of the concept of ‘heterotopia’ to Quaker ‘otherness’, whilst invoking that of ‘behavioural creed’ to explain how Quakerism as a religious movement can still cohere. In producing imaginative writing that engages with and at times challenges the mores of the day, writers working within this aesthetic may well be creating a type of Quaker heterotopia. Based upon this, writing influenced by a QLA evidences on the writer’s part and elicits within the reader

...more than a kind of epistemological shift, more than just a different way of seeing something.... if the seeing differently is successful, there is...an ontological shift as well. One actually encourages a new and perhaps different reality because of the shift in insight...¹²⁵

D’Costa hopes that the experience of reading his poetry will effect a transformation of the reader’s perceptions generally, of themselves as well as their circumstances: the transformation is both inward and outward, leading us to ‘a new and perhaps different reality’.¹²⁶ On a variety of levels, I contend that texts demonstrating a Quaker sensibility seek to create a new and

¹²³ Bate et al in *Stressed, Unstressed* offer a selection of inspirational poetry aimed at creating certain moods in order to better deal with life’s difficulties. In a remark reminiscent of reactions to Gross and Denison *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, Bate echoes Gross’ poem ‘Long Exposure’ in his introduction: ‘Most of the time, we fill our minds with words that are the equivalent of fast food. Poetry is slow mind food, nutrition for the soul.’ (4)

¹²⁴ Working as a sociologist of religion, Pilgrim has made varied contributions to books on Quaker theology and theory, often drawing upon her own experiences of being active within the Quaker movement. Whilst defining Quakerism as a heterotopic ‘site of Otherness’, she also employs the concept of ‘behavioural creed’ to comprehend how it is that a radical religious movement with great potential flexibility in its theory and conduct can hold together effectively. Hence, whilst being an avowedly non-credal organisation, Quakers’ practice around how their religious values are expressed and played out acts as the ‘glue’ of the organisation. She has contributed widely, including to Dandelion, *The Creation of Quaker Theory: Insider Perspectives* and Dandelion and Collins, *The Quaker Condition*.

¹²⁵ D’Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 173.

¹²⁶ D’Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 173.

different reality, through the spaces which they create within themselves, their imagery, and readers. Those possibilities, some suggested above, are various; in keeping with the protean nature of Liberal Quakerism they may be subject to debate, but will demonstrate the underpinning of the interconnected features within the QLA, as well as exhibiting the common culture of Quaker shared testimonies and ‘behavioural creed’ discussed above.

6. An apophatic approach to the Divine

Towards the end of his life D.H. Lawrence wrote about the spiritual dimension to creativity: ‘preceding all our knowledge or will or effort is the central creative mystery...the universe is a bush which burns for ever with the Presence, consuming itself and yet never consumed...eternal creation which is always Now’.¹²⁷ Here is a clear sense of a power beyond the writer involved in the creative process, coupled with an acceptance of mystery concerning the exact nature of that power, a situation familiar to various writers.¹²⁸

‘Christianity is not a monolith; it is not a single unchanging system; it never has been.’¹²⁹ If we accept that the overarching religious frame of Quakerism is in fact not a unified and internally coherent set of concepts, that opens the way to accepting the difficulty of a final and full comprehension of Divine nature. Building on this, through their gradual laying of emphasis on the primacy of ‘the Spirit’, silent worship and continuing revelation, Liberal Quakers tend towards an apophatic view of the Divine: ‘God is revealed through models suited to...temperaments and abilities’.¹³⁰ This open view of divine truth is drawn from a variety of

¹²⁷ Lawrence, *Phoenix*, 38-9.

¹²⁸ For example, Carolyn Forché: ‘Compassion is deeply spiritual, regardless of its source’. Likewise, Alicia Ostriker: ‘writing is my spiritual practice. Ultimately, the words come from somewhere beyond myself, though they travel through me in order to reach the page.’ Similarly, G.C. Waldrep: ‘[Writers] draw on the ineffable. In fact, we draw existence from non-existence. We make something out of nothing.’ (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 12, 146, 181).

¹²⁹ Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?*, 27.

¹³⁰ Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?*, 71; also collected in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 26.19.

sources and perspectives and presented by Scott as a potential route forward for Quakerism in the 1980s: ‘truth is a path and not a possession...we are travelling on a living way, but the way itself is our goal and the end of our journey.’¹³¹ This may sound unsurprising from a British Liberal Quaker, but heterodox Anglican priest David Jenkins echoes it: ‘The point...is to live with paradox not to resolve it....We join the heritage of Israel, “he who wrestles with God”; the struggle to explore the meaning of God and God’s relationship with the world.’¹³² Scott concludes by acknowledging the difficulty of concepts and language to ultimately grasp Divine reality, embracing apophatic presence: ‘We must use all these ways to speak of God for none will do of itself....We are called to turn to...the God who meets us, whom we know, in the silence, waiting.’¹³³

This open position of enquiry is, in a different way, explored by Lerner. If apophatic theology offers no easy answers, only ‘wrestling with God’, this is the perfect ground for poetry. In his Swarthmore Lecture, Lerner quotes Yeats: ‘Out of the struggle with others we make rhetoric, out of the struggle with ourselves we make poetry.’¹³⁴ The process of creation may indeed be a struggle, in terms of the thought and effort required, but also, on occasion, in terms of the acceptance which the writer is called upon to offer, both to him or herself, but also to other people or the world, a requirement leading to Keats’ concept of ‘Negative Capability’.¹³⁵ Lerner accepts the underlying fact of complexity in truth, implicitly calling for an ongoing dialogue: ‘by the interaction of contrasting views we may discover not that one is right and another wrong, but that truth is complex.’¹³⁶ In conversation with Gross, Lerner embraced a

¹³¹ Damaris Parker-Rhodes, quoted in Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?*, 23.

¹³² Quoted in Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?*, 23.

¹³³ Scott, *What Canst Thou Say?*, 82.

¹³⁴ Lerner, *The Two Cinnas*, 33.

¹³⁵ Baldick explains it as ‘the quality of selfless receptivity necessary to a true poet.... a poetic capacity to efface one’s own mental identity by immersing it sympathetically and spontaneously within the subject described’ (Baldick, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 167-8).

¹³⁶ Lerner, *The Two Cinnas*, 57.

boundaried understanding of himself: ‘I have a great respect for the Quaker view that one should be a unified person, but I am not....I’m more like a cross-roads or a playing field on which different selves encounter, learn from and quarrel with each other.’¹³⁷ This struggle to apprehend and express the Divine forms a vital part of our struggle with ourselves, and is necessarily continued across a variety of contexts. Gross conceptualises a meaningful space: ‘Imagine the most creative and appropriate living space between us and all the stuff in the universe...and it comes very close to what I mean when I say “God”.’¹³⁸

Modernity has led to a separation of these creative arts, faith, and the Divine, ‘The modern mind divides, specializes, thinks in categories: the Greek instinct was the opposite, to take the widest view, to see things as an organic whole...’.¹³⁹ This is echoed in the gradual separation of elements in the literary process in the course of the Twentieth Century that we have touched on briefly, including ‘Art for art’s sake’ splitting the artist and their work away from the external world, Formalism’s concentration on the text in itself, and Reader-Response Theory’s project to establish the reader as the key element in literature. Greenwood offers a possible reconciliation: ‘Art, religion and magic grew up together. There was no such thing, in the beginning...as dance, or story, or prayer; but there was dance that was music that was story that was incantation that was drama...’.¹⁴⁰ Just as the source of inspiration which all literature is drawn from remains finally indefinable, so the literature that we create to express aspects of this source of inspiration must be broad enough to accept and include various practices and concepts within itself: ‘[Writers] draw on the ineffable. In fact, we draw existence from non-existence. We make something out of nothing.’¹⁴¹ Defining what that ‘something’ is with any accuracy is difficult, perhaps ultimately impossible, but contending with it, wrestling with that

¹³⁷ Homan, “Talking in All,” 112.

¹³⁸ Doering, “Interview: Philip Gross,” 13.

¹³⁹ H.D.F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1957): 173.

¹⁴⁰ Greenwood, *Signs of Life*, 9.

¹⁴¹ G.C. Waldrep in Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 181.

truth and bringing the result of that wrestling into a text is what Gross and Ruth demonstrably do.

7. Silence as presence and force

Gross recently commented, ‘Quakers love and use, but do not worship, silence. Silence has as many tones and dialects as speech.’¹⁴² Silence is a vital ingredient in Quaker experience, the cornerstone of Liberal Quaker worship:

Worship is the response of the human spirit to the presence of the divine and the eternal...The ministry of silence demands the faithful activity of every member of the meeting.... we enter the depths of a living silence, the stillness of God...¹⁴³

The importance of silence is recognised by many other literary practitioners.¹⁴⁴ As such, it must be addressed as a presence and force within the literary process and the texts resulting from that process. In her thoughtful reflection on the relationship between silence and literary creation,¹⁴⁵ Sara Maitland experiences a wide range of different forms of silence, including Quaker worship. Though not a Quaker, she appreciates the experience: ‘the Spirit may speak through anyone and therefore the silence of the Meeting for Worship is a listening silence. This is indeed “a silence that is waiting to be broken.”’¹⁴⁶ Maitland develops a sense of there being two main forms of silence. One, tending to encourage creativity is, for her, egoistic, creating a field protecting the self in order to facilitate literary production. The other is kenotic, an emptying of one’s self into the Divine, where individual literary output becomes irrelevant beside the vast and profound spiritual experience that one may find access to, yet it is a very

¹⁴² Gross, “We’re writers; we needed to write,” 13.

¹⁴³ BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 2.01.

¹⁴⁴ ‘I would say that the real medium of poetry is inner space, the silence of our deepest interior.’ Li-Young Lee in Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 121.

¹⁴⁵ Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence*, (London: Granta Books, 2009 [2008]).

¹⁴⁶ Maitland, *A Book of Silence*, 144.

human response to retain contact with the active process of creation as well as the oceanic state beyond, that creation may act as a door to: ‘I did not see how I could have both....But I still wanted both.’¹⁴⁷ Maitland remarks that much spiritual writing appears to be autobiographical non-fiction,¹⁴⁸ perhaps reinforcing Allnutt’s impressions of Quaker writing noted below. Nevertheless, there also appears to be a preponderance of poetry amongst spiritual writing, as evidenced by poetry being among the first published imaginative literature amongst Quakers. Maitland concludes by embarking upon a kenotic journey into silence, hoping that ‘Whatever there is the other side of the singularity may be watching with excitement the slow transformation...waiting with a fierce joy to welcome the hermit into the infinite.’¹⁴⁹

This is echoed by Allnutt: ‘For years I’ve been walking towards silence.’ Still, she goes on to preserve the possibility of a reconciliation of differing forces within silent worship: ‘the structure of Quaker Meetings is both open and closed...As with writing, it’s about...trying to keep that balance in a communal way.’¹⁵⁰ However, we ought to remember Gross’ remarks on different qualities of silence above. It may well be that silence can be a zone that is alive with thought, feeling and creation. Equally, silence must be handled carefully, and is not always a positive force. Allnutt later remarked: ‘*a voice in my head said, ‘The silence of the Quakers is atonal’*. This sense of parallel forces within Quaker silence was also acknowledged by Ruth: ‘*in some ways there’s something very anti-creative about that, it’s not just about a contemplative, rich silence, there’s something in Quakerism where we’re shutting parts of ourselves out and we’re shutting ourselves up...*’

Whilst recognising much of these reflections on silence, I question if the two states of silence are actually as mutually exclusive as the comments above suggest. There must necessarily be

¹⁴⁷ Maitland, *A Book of Silence*, 258.

¹⁴⁸ She cites, for instance, Julian of Norwich’s *Shewings* as laid out in her *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998) and Thomas Merton’s *The Seven Storey Mountain* (London: SPCK, 2015 [1948]).

¹⁴⁹ Maitland, *A Book of Silence*, 287.

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan Doering, “Interview: Gillian Allnutt,” *The Friend*, Vol. 175, No. 45 (2017): 15.

a continuing dialogue between language and silence, acknowledged in Ruth's remarks. Yet I contend that there is a point of engagement between words and silence, in the Bakhtinian tradition, which may indicate a productive state: 'The energy I spent is now beamed back...something not in my conscious control was also involved.'¹⁵¹ Here, Clifft Heales is articulating the process of creation in painting, but that raw sense of creativity includes literary writing, as she later clarifies: 'I responded also to the sheer magic of words [in the text], the rhythm, the sound and the sense combining to move me into some strange place, into an awareness of something that was not the poem and not me, but both, and another mysterious presence.'¹⁵²

Literary production can indeed form some sort of conduit between humanity and the Divine, where different silences of contemplation might be reconciled: 'the place of burning energy has God in the centre, but the place of stillness, the place of absolute concentration of Moses, is also holy ground, sacred space'.¹⁵³ Silent contemplation allows a way of processing the fact 'that out of the abyss of nothingness, no-thing-ness, God "melts and boils"; as Eckhart has it – erupts in an act of continuous creativity....The going-forth is exactly balanced by a withdrawing-to-within.'¹⁵⁴ Here again we have a Bakhtinian reconciliation of otherness in a dynamic, energising union. I must also question if Quaker silence is, as Maitland puts it, 'a silence that is waiting to be broken.' I suggest that it is perhaps closer to an expectant silence. Silence may include preparation for, and be a prelude to, dialogue. It may also form part of the back and forth of the dialogue as and when it occurs. Therefore, there may well be the hope that the silence will be broken, but no guarantee. Many Meetings for Worship conclude with no vocal ministry at all, and in such cases, this is not considered to be problematic.¹⁵⁵ Further,

¹⁵¹ Clifft Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 5-6.

¹⁵² Clifft Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 32.

¹⁵³ Clifft Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 36.

¹⁵⁴ Clifft Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 84.

¹⁵⁵ For Quaker approaches to silent and vocal ministry, see Chapter 2 of BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

Quakers are encouraged to understand the words as emanating from the silence, not interrupting or breaking it. Further, the need for silence as a necessary state in order to discern material to work with in one's creative work is persuasive: 'If you talk all the time about something, you stop knowing anything about it.'¹⁵⁶

This approach to silence offers a means of navigating around the distinction that Maitland discusses. Through employment of blank spaces, implied silences, textual lacunae, writers' approaches to literary creation, and the multiple aspects of silence (both positive and negative), we find these evidenced in Gross' and Ruth's work.

Chapter summary

This chapter has offered a detailed Literature Review, gathering material from across Quaker History and Theology, literary theory and criticism, and the field interviews for this project, building my overall argument. I have included the historical evolution of Quaker attitudes, establishing that there has been change, also clarifying that these shifting attitudes have contributed to emergent Quaker approaches to imaginative literature, both in content and production. I have outlined seven potential QLA features. In Chapter 3 I apply these features to selected poetry by Gross and Ruth, to consider their presence, nature and utility.

¹⁵⁶ Kazim Ali in Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 37.

CHAPTER 3: APPLYING THE QUAKER LITERARY AESTHETIC TO CLOSE TEXTUAL READING

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, having previously developed a list of potential features of a QLA,¹ I now apply these in order to discern whether they are evidenced in selected texts by Gross and Ruth. I acknowledged in Chapter 2 that the aesthetic features will not be uniform or entirely predictable: one poem might only evidence some, whilst another could illustrate all seven. The features of silence and an apophatic approach to the Divine may lend themselves to a more specific understanding of ‘Quaker’ poetry, and so may not always be evidenced in poetry written by Quakers, who after all do not always explicitly handle ‘Quaker’ experience. Nevertheless, it would be reasonable to expect the majority of the features considered here to be detectable in most poems and, in at least some, one should be able to detect all features. Both Gross and Ruth evidence each of the QLA features to some degree. They may interpret and express each feature differently, but I am confident that they are present as inspiring factors in their poetry. This chapter applies each feature to the poets’ work to establish whether this QLA is indeed significant. I consider each feature in turn, drawing in evidence from different poems as necessary, alongside secondary reading and field interviews.

Introduction to Texts for Analysis

There is a rich range of poetry to choose from for my two chosen writers. Within the relatively narrow range of this dissertation I have selected twelve poems addressing fields of interest

¹ Openness, ambiguity and seeking, outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 35-8; Dialogical engagement, outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 38-43; Ethical rather than moral writing, outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 43-6; Creative attention; outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 46-9; Quaker sensibility, outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 49-54; An apophatic approach to the Divine, outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 55-7; Silence as presence and force, outlined in Chapter 2, pp. 58-61.

which resonate with Quaker concerns. This is not a matter of my having located poems which happen to reflect certain concerns from amongst a mass of work which does not. With each feature, I include references to other illustrative poems which, owing to word limitation, cannot be considered at length here. These twelve poems demonstrate that the QLA features are consistently present across the poems, rather than a different one or two features each time, which would be less evidentially convincing. In actual fact these and other poems by my selected writers include the majority of the seven features in most cases. I introduce each of my main poems here, to establish briefly their content and themes.

Gross' "The Oubliette",² recounts the discovery of a forgotten 'oubliette' dungeon. His playful emphasis on spontaneous interplay of memory, images and language foregrounds in this poem the elusiveness of meaning, suggesting that the route to meaning is a useful message in itself, echoing several writers quoted above.³ Through apparently playful working of malleable language and images, inviting us to engage on different levels with these, Gross draws readers into a closer engagement with the reality of human rights abuse, reminding us that similar abuses occur in the present.

Gross' longstanding fascination with and practice of artistic collaboration demonstrates his relish for the energy released in this process.⁴ This warrants reflection in my selected poems: thus, poems from *I Spy Pinhole Eye* feature. "Long Exposure"⁵ reflects on the necessarily slow process of creating pinhole camera photographs. "Parable"⁶ riffs upon the inherent ambiguity in all art, be it photography or poetry, drawing in religious references and metaphor to the

² Gross, *Manifold Manor*, 32.

³ For instance, Thelen's remark that 'storyteller and audience are partners in creating the memory to be told', quoted above in Chapter 2 ("Memory and American History").

⁴ In our interview Gross spoke of how '*All of it is interesting in the work that might emerge from the space between one and other whether inside yourself, whether it's writer or reader or whether it's two writers working with each other, or two art forms, or whatever...*'

⁵ Philip Gross and Simon Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, (Gwynedd: Cinnamon Press, 2009): 23.

⁶ Gross and Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, 66.

notion of artistic meaning. “Sonnet, interrupted”⁷ offers a narrative of electric blackout that leaves the country immobilised, reflecting upon humanity’s over-reliance on technology. As noted above, this book, born of collaboration, was successful on numerous levels, winning a literary award,⁸ and perhaps more importantly, the approval of Gross’ collaborator. Simon Denison remarked on its development: ‘*I’d really liked [Philip’s] work...the strangeness and suggestiveness of the photographs called for a drawing-out...that would [not] be too prosaic...I was absolutely overwhelmed by the response.*’

Gross’ other poems that I consider all more directly ponder religious and spiritual concerns. “The Quakers of Pompeii” is a literary response to Peter Peri’s sculpture *Quaker Meeting*,⁹ which comprises nine seated figures, forming an inwards-facing circle. “The Presence”¹⁰ also applies the same patient observance, this time to Barbara Hepworth’s *Single Form* sculpture. What begins as a reflection on the persona’s responses to a piece of abstract sculpture segues into a meditation on the slippery yet rewarding nature of spiritual insight.

Ruth’s poems are equally deep and various in their concerns and their handling of them. “Touch and Go”¹¹ also considers the issue of engagement and its relationship with domestic abuse in the female persona’s visit to her emotionally stunted parents. The persona recounts depressing details, before reflecting upon the explosive possibility of her confronting her father over past abuse. Similar to “The Oubliette”, Ruth demonstrates sensitivity to the power of engagement with communication here, whilst speculating how alien the experience of parental acknowledgement would be.

⁷ Gross and Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, 72.

⁸ The 2009 Wales Book of the Year Award.

⁹ Gross, “The Quakers of Pompeii”.

¹⁰ Philip Gross, *The Water Table* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2009): 31.

¹¹ Sibyl Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman* (Nottingham: Five Leave Press, 2003): 27.

Ruth's poems that resonate with the process of collaboration are translations of poetry by Jewish inmates of the Theresienstadt ghetto during World War Two. "Smugglers"¹² is one of a cycle of poems written by Ruth's aunt, Rose Scooler, who survived her ordeal, later emigrating to America.¹³ It narrates in present tense a night-time excursion by Scooler and a friend to steal coal near the ghetto barracks. Peter Kien, a German-speaking Czech Jew, trained as an artist in Prague. He taught briefly before deportation to Theresienstadt where he worked in the Graphics Department, producing many outstanding artistic pieces, visual reportage on the deprivation and abuse in a place the Nazis presented as a 'model Jewish settlement'.¹⁴ Whilst Scooler survived, Kien was less fortunate, ultimately dying in Auschwitz.¹⁵ The first, third and fourth of Kien's "Four Poems"¹⁶ respond to Theresienstadt's hellish conditions. "Poem 1" reflects on the almost sinister independence a piece of artwork recalling pre-war life has beyond Kien himself. "Poem 3" warns against the siren call of the 'shining gates' on a hill. "Poem 4" heartily exhorts the reader to 'kiss the day', whilst never quite settling the question if the subject is running with, or being run down by, hounds. Ruth responds creatively to others' work, albeit at a remove: through her own creative responses, she has accessed a powerful sense of their experiences and messages.¹⁷ Throughout these poems engaging in collaboration, each of the QLA features can be noted.

¹² Sibyl Ruth, "Smugglers," *Ink, Sweat and Tears*, 2016, accessed Jan 28, 2020, <http://www.inkswheatandtears.co.uk/pages/?p=12998>.

¹³ Sibyl Ruth, "Out of silence: poems from the camp," *The Guardian*, 2008, accessed Feb 5, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/jan/19/familyandrelationships.family2>.

¹⁴ See for instance "Theresienstadt," Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, accessed Jun 29, 2020. https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/ghettos/theresienstadt.html#narrative_info, n.p. Also, E. Makarova, "Franz Peter Kien (1919 - 1944)." Elena Marakova Initiatives Group, 2012, accessed Apr 6, 2020, <http://makarovainit.com/kien/index.htm> n.p.

¹⁵ See K. Fischel, "Kien, Peter (1919-1944): Papers," Archivehub, 1995, accessed Apr 6, 2020, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/debed66d-e5ae-3465-8926-1fe3190713c7>, n.p., for an invaluable short account of Kien's life.

¹⁶ Sibyl Ruth, "Four Poems by Peter Kien," *Ink, Sweat and Tears*, 2012., accessed Jan 28 Jan, 2020, <http://www.inkswheatandtears.co.uk/pages/?p=12998>.

¹⁷ Ruth has remarked, 'For hours at a time I forget that I live in Birmingham in 2007.... I am trying my very hardest to take in what Rose Scooler, a woman in her early 60s, is telling me.' (Ruth, "Out of silence: poems from the camp," n.p.)

“A Song of Jean”¹⁸ offers a further acclamation of the gathering momentum towards a full integration of the seven features of the QLA. Like Gross’ “The Quakers of Pompeii” and “The Presence”, it focuses on observations within a Quaker Meeting for Worship, specifically of an elderly woman and her ageing state, as well as her fellow worshippers’ responses.

These final three poems bring more explicitly Quaker concerns into the centre ground; this engagement with both words and silence also appears to be a common characteristic of other ‘spiritual’ poets.¹⁹ Arguably, silence and an apophatic approach to the Divine come more fully to the fore in these poems concerned with Quaker worship and silence.

1. Openness, ambiguity and seeking

“The Oubliette” literally opens up the physical landscape for consideration. Gross lays the poetic terrain for a devastatingly political critique of surroundings which many readers may otherwise take for granted, suggesting a kind of literary activism.²⁰ This poem points the way towards an open perspective which considers any context as the possible grounds for poetic inquiry, being just one example of Gross’ playful openness to poetic opportunities wherever they may occur.²¹

¹⁸ Sibyl Ruth, “A Song for Jean.” This poem won the *Msllexia* Poetry Competition for that year (Helen Mort, “A Lorryload of Laureates,” *Derbyshire Poet Laureate*, Jul 15, 2008, accessed Sep 8, 2020, <http://derbyshirepoetlaureate.blogspot.com/2008/07/>).

¹⁹ For instance, D’Costa states, ‘It is in the spaces between words and without words that something remarkable happens: awe.’ (D’Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 184); also, Lee and Ostriker *passim* in Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*.

²⁰ Gross explicitly made this connection in our interview: ‘I think that there’s an exact analogy between being a writer and activism.... both [are] forms of creative activity in the world.’

²¹ Other examples include: Gross’ handling of class tensions in “The Formal Garden” and “Service” (Gross, *Manifold Manor*, 14-15, 33-4); his inversion of a folk tale in “Petra and the Wolf” (Philip Gross, *Off Road to Everywhere* (London: Salt Publishing, 2010): 24-7); the combining of everyday observations with Buddhist imagery in “Hungry Ghosts in Happy Eater” (Philip Gross, *The Wasting Game* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 1998): 51).

In *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, Gross references this textual openness within the collaborative process in his Endnote.²² This framing of *I Spy Pinhole Eye* as an open-ended aesthetic-poetic inquiry directly sites this openness within Olsen's ethical programme. The interaction of poems and photographs in this text offer Olsen's expanding network of 'ever more general relations', this openness encouraging fuller reader engagement throughout.

This approach of openness, ambiguity and seeking is clearly applied in "Long Exposure", locating what is authentic and valuable in a superficially unprepossessing visual image of a pylon. Gross extends his metaphor into even greater artistic reflection on the process:

slow-
cooked in the black box half the day...distilled, drip
by drip, like the portrait-painter's
brush

which ultimately offers 'true sustenance'. Even the most unpromising of aesthetic objects may be rendered aesthetically nourishing through patient consideration. The alliterative 'distilled, drip/ by drip' tethers together metaphor and then simile to accentuate the power of patient openness, ambiguity and seeking here positively welcoming the splicing together of otherwise jarring imagery.

"Parable" again experiments with a broad sonnet layout, with two quatrains and a sestet, whilst dispensing with iambic pentameter, opening the form to new possibilities. In terms of layout, the number of lines correspond with a sonnet but the lines, though iambic, are not pentameter, so appear lopsided, not quite complete. The reader may well feel that this is one side of a conversation, experiencing the momentum towards contributing the other side. This poem

²² 'Like the Zen koan, which teases the mind into...cracklings of association, sheer rapt pleasure at the variousness of simple things, [the poems] are a question... *'And then? ...also an invitation to the reader/viewer....Keep looking, say the poems. There's more. We are not the last word.'* (Gross and Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, 79; italics in original).

kneads religious language and biblical allusion through the punning first stanza, applying openness, ambiguity and seeking to foreground concerns around the exact nature of religious and spiritual notions in this text:

It is easier
for a pylon to walk
through the eye
of a pinhole

modernising the biblical image of a camel passing through the eye of a needle,²³ yet preserving its spiritual dimension, echoing Laurence Lerner's 'Humility in front of experience'.²⁴ The poem continues:

than for a man
with a camera
to capture the kingdom
of heaven

Once again, Gross playfully ties together different modes of engagement with the world (photography, poetry, theology), openness, ambiguity and seeking instantiated through the way in which the persona considers first this example, then another, deftly finding connection that might elude more superficial consideration.

Ruth's poetry evidences this feature amply.²⁵ "Smugglers" applies the feature of openness, ambiguity and seeking to a far more unpromising situation, the Holocaust, striking a

²³ Matthew, 19:24. All Bible references are made from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1997]).

²⁴ Homan, "Talking in All," 115.

²⁵ For instance demonstrated in her openness to the poetic material contained in: the negative effects of ageing in "Bearing Up"; strained relationships in "Daughter"; sexual maturation and humiliation in "Coming on Nicely" (Sibyl Ruth, *Nothing Personal* (Cullercoates: IRON Press, 1995): 10-11, 13, 18); also, failed romance in "Baxter", and unexpected attraction in "Handsome Tony" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 4-5, 6-7).

surprisingly optimistic tone. It inverts a fraught excursion into one that will hopefully bring material benefits: 'This blanket of dark; perfect conditions/ for our latest trip to the siding together'. Again, a knowingly coy remark adds further irony: 'let's say we just fancied a little saunter' reaches back to pre-war life, when one could choose to go for a 'saunter', when inappropriate behaviour could be explained away. This magic thinking signals an openness to optimism from any possible source: the subjects are clinging to the possibility of talking their way out of trouble. Of course, many people lived or died during the Holocaust purely by chance, as Ruth has pointed out,²⁶ and depending on the soldiers' mood, had they been spotted the women may have been able to evade punishment. The application of this feature illustrates the women's necessary positive thinking if they are going to physically brave danger to complete their mission.

The openness, ambiguity and seeking in "Poem 1" is an openness to experience, coupled with a sense of the ambiguity of what is able to escape the horrors of incarceration, emphasised by the use of end-stopping on each of these lines, as well as the strategic repetition of 'heart'. The central conceit is of the unexpected power and independence of 'Old days squatting at the edge of vision', rendered in artform by the persona. Through this poem there is a baleful acknowledgement of this occurrence but, despite the persona's conflicted feelings concerning this, there is an underlying sense of relief generated by the act of remembrance.

"Poem 3" locates significance wherever the persona's gaze falls: within their life-threatening environment as well as the utopian propaganda used to conceal the crimes of the Nazi regime. It begins with an ironic rush of bonhomie:

Are you dead on your feet?
Look at those shining gates
on the horizon.

²⁶ Ruth, "Smugglers."

They'll give you strength.

The rhetorical question directly addressing the reader immediately invites empathic understanding with the persona and thus an openness to their experience. Either they are fellow inmates, so instinctively understand the context that Kien is responding to, or else later readers finding a route into deeper understanding of this horrific experience. The ironic paradox of 'shining gates' applies openness, ambiguity and seeking to the propaganda that Kien was surrounded by, recalling Auschwitz's infamous 'Arbeit Macht Frei' sign, more generally invoking the utopian gloss that Nazi propaganda sought to place on its barbaric actions.²⁷ Kien satirically inverts all of the hearty Nazi camouflage: 'They'll give you strength.' In other words, to pass through the 'shining gates' was a death sentence: better to struggle and suffer in the marginally less lethal Theresienstadt. Yet Kien applies a sufficiently open mind to the paradoxically beautiful image, and allows himself and his readers to apprehend the opposing forces within it. There is also a further reading possible, whereby the 'shining gates' could be viewed as Heaven's 'pearly gates'. Viewed thus, the persona may be urging courage upon the reader, offering the hope that the peace of the death and the afterlife await those who suffer in this life.

"Poem 4" cautions:

Youngsters look out!
The pen falls from shaky hands
And your hair will turn white quickly.

²⁷ This has been explored by numerous historians, J.Y. Gonen, *The Roots of Nazi Psychology: Hitler's Utopian Barbarism* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) and A. Roberts, *Postcards from Utopia: The Art of Political Propaganda* (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2009) being just two examples.

This imperative addressed to ‘youngsters’ is lent greater poignancy by the fact that Kien himself was only in his early twenties when he wrote this. Kien’s openness to experiences which he may not have personally had at the time of writing allows him to accept that his experiences have left him prematurely aged by comparison to luckier contemporaries. The images of ‘shaky hands’ and prematurely white hair symbolise the effects of Nazi oppression, with victims of the Holocaust ageing unnaturally fast but, significantly, also signifies more general images of the natural and inevitable ageing process. Here again openness, ambiguity and seeking are brought to bear on immediate aspects of lived experience, both normal (ageing process) and abnormal (Nazi abuse).

Openness, ambiguity and seeking is seen to be an active feature in these poems. Indeed, it is a vital feature which necessarily opens the poems, their writers, and their readers, to a multiplicity of alternative interpretations. These take their place within Chicago Critic Elder Olsen’s argument for an integration between aesthetics and ethics, with the best art interacting with context, which ‘becomes ever more excellent as we view it in ever more general relations.’²⁸ Insofar as this first feature is one widely displayed by many writers of imaginative literature, this feature is also unsurprisingly evidenced in the poems selected here. The concept of openness, ambiguity and seeking is applied variously through the following poem extracts, creating both positive and negative tones, but at all times characterised by a sense of questing after the truth in the situation depicted. Various poets view the ongoing path to insight as being spiritual:²⁹ to engage in the quest for truth is to adopt an open, seeking perspective which will accept at least the possibility of ambiguity.

²⁸ Olsen, E. “An Outline of Poetic Theory,” in *Critics and Criticism: Essays in Method by a Group of the Chicago Critics*, ed. R.S. Crane (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957): 23.

²⁹ For instance, Christian Wiman: ‘the sacredness [in literary engagement] is contingent upon the reader’s engagement and openness, her willingness to listen and be changed.’ (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 248).

The poems explicitly addressing Quaker silence and worship, “The Quakers of Pompeii”, “The Presence” and “A Song of Jean”, all further demonstrate the applicability of this feature through their poetic consideration of this central, transformative, Quaker experience.³⁰ By definition, an open approach to poetic material must potentially include everything around and within one, as demonstrated in these poems.

2. Dialogical engagement

“The Oubliette”³¹ handles abuse of power, where Gross actively seeks mature dialogical engagement with all of his readers, irrespective of age. In stanza two, a rhetorical question elicits reader engagement, including an oxymoron indicating corruption of nature by human oppression:

How long had an uneasy memory
of it slept
beneath its grille of ferns?

One reading of this could be that the persona is conducting an internalised dialogue, remarking upon the historical significance of what they have found, independent of any reader’s reactions. Yet, within the poem’s wider context, Gross seeks direct reader interaction, eliciting a dialogical response to an open-ended question. The matter-of-fact rhetorical question about the historical victim demands a response from now-engaged readers. At the end of *Manifold Manor*, Gross glosses the term ‘oubliette’ as ‘a dungeon in which prisoners were simply left to die – one way of forgetting them’, asking, ‘In how many countries are people still “forgotten”

³⁰ For instance, Chapter 1 of *Quaker Faith and Practice* states: ‘Worship is our response to an awareness of God... We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God’s love drawing us together and leading us.’ (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.8).

³¹ Gross, *Manifold Manor*, 32.

like this?’³² This recalls Gross’ statement on activism in our interview.³³ This nudging the reader towards deeper engagement, here achieved through prompt questions, can be seen generally in Gross’ work.

The poem’s layout further amplifies this process, for instance employing enjambement in order to take us, inevitably, to the final infinitive: ‘Someone, somewhere, is dying now. So easy/ to forget’, engaging us with this horror, by suspending the flow across a line break, in the infinitesimal pause before ‘to forget’, inviting us to speculate on what exactly is ‘so easy’. The elliptical syntax of the final sentence generalises the callousness symbolised in the oubliette, an architectural feature that signified a captor’s sin of omission who wilfully neglected to give prisoners any food or water, which would ultimately kill them. Yet the reader is also challenged implicitly through this statement to consider if they will also choose to forget. Historical oubliettes may, certainly in Britain at the current time, no longer be common, but the poem makes it eloquently clear that such abuses continue. The reader is left with the silent yet clear challenge to consider their responses to this fact. Gross addresses readers dialogically, and they, receiving his side of the conversation, are challenged to respond meaningfully.

This engagement, as we have learned in Chapter 2, may take an outer, physical, as well as an inner, spiritual form. Quaker pan-sacramentalism furthers the notion of the Divine being present through all levels of existence, and the interpenetration of these levels. Therefore, dialogical engagement with messy reality offers access to the ‘moments of heightened self-apprehension’ that Rita Felski values so highly,³⁴ standing for what recognition offers, in turn leading to moments of meaningful engagement, where readers are questioned and challenged

³² Gross, *Manifold Manor*, 66.

³³ ‘I think that there’s an exact analogy between being a writer and activism.... both [are] forms of creative activity in the world.’

³⁴ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 48.

by the text, or invited to question and challenge what they find in the text, in turn questioning and challenging the world around them, as occurs in “The Oubliette”.

In presenting an apparently unremarkable feature in the landscape, this poem evidences Gross’ interest in ‘*the extent to which writing unearths complexities and differences, layers within us...*’. This realisation of deep-seated truth is part of what Felski refers to as ‘recognition’, which ‘is not repetition; it denotes...the becoming known...something that exists outside of me inspires a revised or altered sense of who I am.’³⁵

“Touch and Go”³⁶ also explores engagement, albeit in a dysfunctional family setting that positively discourages any engagement, contrasting with Gross’ open-minded offer of dialogue with his young readers in *Manifold Manor*, by narrating a moment in the life of an adult woman, visiting her parents:

The house hasn’t changed.
A meal at quarter past six.
Dad is served first.
My mother thinks I look too thin
And the vegetables taste soggy.

The domestic situation remaining static since the persona’s childhood implies a refusal of dialogical engagement that would have offered at least the possibility of positive change. This is reinforced further by the strict hierarchy in ‘Dad is served first’, further emphasised ironically by the mother’s automatic pretence of engagement with her daughter by pronouncing her ‘thin’ before serving unappetizingly ‘soggy’ food.

³⁵ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 25.

³⁶ Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 27.

The following three stanzas are each an extended rhetorical question, speculating about the possible outcome should the persona challenge her father. The third stanza reveals that he struck her ‘at fourteen, fifteen, sixteen’, the asyndetic triplet of ages again ambiguous. The persona may be unclear about when a single instance of violence occurred, or whether one isolated instance is growing in her memory as if it occurred repeatedly, or if this indeed was a common situation throughout her adolescence. Felski’s ‘self-intensification’³⁷ is powerfully evident here. Certainly, to readers who grew up before changes in legislation severely restricted parental physical chastisement, there was to some degree a greater cultural acceptance of this punishment, allowing for reader identification with the persona at some level. However, the ambiguity then deepens, with the persona wondering, ‘Does he remember shutting my window against the neighbours’, recalling Felski’s ‘sudden collision’,³⁸ this particular literary shock suggesting either that he wished to avoid neighbours discovering his use of corporal punishment, but leaving the darker possibility of sexual as well as physical abuse in the air:

the way nothing was said,
my brothers creeping on tiptoe,
Mum’s attempted kindness...

The persona seems to suggest that she might find it difficult to function in the new environment that would be created should her father acknowledge his previous behaviour:

It would feel like living
in some far-off place
with different weather,
where I don’t know the language,
if he said he was sorry.

³⁷ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 39.

³⁸ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 113.

On the other hand, it may offer a wistful description of the transformation of the speaker's identity and relationship with her father should this unlikely event actually occur. Being in 'some far-off place' may be unfamiliar, but could be welcome, like going on a much-needed holiday, and in time a new and unfamiliar language can be learnt. Ruth offers a down-to-earth response to the faint possibility of a new engagement, communicating the novelty of it, the fear, and its attractions which are unlikely ever to be enjoyed. Yet the indication of such engagement in a sense preserves the flame of that possibility, and certainly reminds us of its importance, whether it is withheld or not. Ruth's quicksilver sense of engagement being desired but often missed is present elsewhere.³⁹

Whatever the perspectives readers develop as a result of *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, there is a clear sense of engagement throughout it between various states, including: poetry and photography; artist, writer and external world; and reader with text and world. 'The sensory, tactile aspect of the poem is the mind extending its fingers to grasp and touch the world through the film of language', forever driven by the sense of 'there always being something else under and beyond the changing name of things.'⁴⁰ This echoes Bakhtin's 'championed present, everyday reality and experience...a radicalisation of *hic et nunc* (here and now)'⁴¹ where things-as-they-are are discovered through engagement, with the possibility of the engaging subject being changed fundamentally.

Thus, creative artists, and by implication, readers and audiences, might enact engagement and collaboration differently, echoing Hetherington's remarks about the effect of context and perspective on our experiences.⁴² Nonetheless, the quality of the literary texts resulting from

³⁹ For instance, in "Old Clothes" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 29) dealing with the burning of a loved one's clothes after death, mourning the desired but now impossible engagement.

⁴⁰ From George Szirtes' Foreword in Gross and Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, 8.

⁴¹ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 25.

⁴² Hetherington, *The Sense of Glory*, 16-17.

engagement with these images met with lavish praise.⁴³ Therefore, I argue there is something valuable occurring within this ‘Quakerly’ literary endeavour, as illustrated in “Long Exposure”:

No fast food for the eye,
this – no flash-in-the-pan, slapped
on the photographic plate
like paparazzi pizza...

This dialogical engagement demands attention and patience, with the concomitant promise of deep-level benefits, illustrated perfectly in the extended culinary metaphor here, the negative statements and onomatopoeia ‘slapped’ neatly touching in the sense of inattention and lack of care that modern social attitudes to attention encourage, building into an artistic metaphor for patient craft:

slow-
cooked in the black box half the day...distilled, drip
by drip, like the portrait-painter’s
brush

which creates genuine art. The resulting sustenance must be earned. Just as home-cooked, wholesome food requires, but repays, greater effort, so engagement in this text’s images and poems repays reflective engagement, drawing us into our own meaningful re-enactment of the ‘processes the artist went through in producing the work’.⁴⁴ Through careful engagement, the watcher enters into meaningful dialogue with the ‘other’ of the image. Here, traditional

⁴³ Including the 2009 Wales Book of the Year Award.

⁴⁴ Dewey, quoted in R. McKeon, “Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity,” in *Critics and Criticism*, ed. R.S. Crane (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957): 252.

distinctions between mirror and lamp notions of literature⁴⁵ appear to converge if the approach is one of truly creative attention. The creative act can be at once mirror and lamp.

“Poem 4” also explores the nature of engagement, accepting the possibility of multiple interpretations, building to a powerful cumulative effect through its deliberate ambiguity, balancing possible connections between its images and the Holocaust which can equally be understood as a lament for the loss of youth and vitality that everyone must face in life. We begin with a binary choice: ‘Kiss the day/ or kiss tomorrow goodbye’, calling for immediate, dialogical engagement with the *hic et nunc*, or else risk losing one’s future. This sounds a clear call for *carpe diem*, to seize the day, echoing Bakhtin’s position on how the self may achieve meaningful definition.⁴⁶ The stakes here are high: the ‘great door shuts with a boom -/ its rusted bolt squealing’, the onomatopoeias emphasising the finality of the loss of connection. The ageing process is inevitable: everyone ages and dies. Genuine dialogical engagement is the only means to truly enjoy the one-way journey of life.

In considering an abstract piece of sculpture, “The Presence” brings a perspective of challenge that elicits an ironic, hapless rhetorical question: ‘What’s with it?’ Several of the images in the poem’s initial lines emphasise the physical externality of the piece: ‘Slim/ slicked naked singularity’. Sibilance here accentuates the physical and conceptual ‘slipperiness’ of the sculpture, the viewer’s difficulty in piercing its apparently impenetrable visual presence, resisting the engagement that the persona is clumsily seeking to practise. Through this initially frustrating engagement, Gross leads us to a similar state of apprehension as in “Long Exposure”: those seeking a dialogical engagement must exercise humility and patience, as the

⁴⁵ Crystallised in Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*.

⁴⁶ As quoted in Chapter 2: ‘The way in which I create myself is by means of a quest: I go out to the other in order to come back with a self.’ (Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 78).

connection may not be instant or convenient. As Bakhtin explained, meaning is never definitively created.⁴⁷

Yet there is an admission here of frustration:

That
assurance, that's what makes me
want to rattle it....

The onomatopoeic 'rattle' suggests an ignorant but questing physical engagement with an object alien to one's current understanding. Gross historically telescopes persona and reader backwards through time to the interaction between 'Visigoth', 'all gawp/ and grievance' and Rome's 'boneyards of stone', and the resulting 'rage of looting' caused by the frustrated question of 'Where did it go? The presence.' This is a different, destructive, form of engagement which frustrates itself through attempting to artificially force an interface which must grow organically.

We therefore have a sense of the multifarious forms of engagement which are possible. Some forms are more comfortable than others. The nature of perspective and apprehension created may differ, but the fruits, though sometimes bitter-sweet, are what disturbed but insightful Christian writer H.A. Williams means by the 'warmth and sweetness and dryness and terror of actual living'.⁴⁸ Both poets create genuine engagement and connection. On the face of that, there is an obvious resonance with the feature of dialogical engagement. This could be between themselves as writers and other writers, between themselves and readers, or modelling connection between people, self and other in a mutually enriching interchange. This stands in the Bakhtinian tradition of the self only truly being itself in relationship with the other.

⁴⁷ 'As Bakhtin never tired of saying, the last word is never said.' (Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 196).

⁴⁸ H.A. Williams, *True to Experience* (London: Continuum, 2000 [1984]): 6.

However, it is also clear that other features are detectable in the poems considered here. Gross' playful emphasis on spontaneous interplay foregrounds the elusiveness of ultimate truth that suggests that the route to meaning is a message in itself, echoing several writers quoted above, and is achieved through the act of dialogical engagement.⁴⁹ In her sensitivity to the power of engagement that is demonstrated in her work, Ruth reinforces this concept.⁵⁰

3. 'Ethical' rather than 'moral' writing⁵¹

Gross' "The Oubliette" practises ethical honesty fully, facing up to the harsh reality represented by an apparently peaceful ruin. The semantic field of concealment reinforces the sense of a desire to evade moral guilt: 'smothered', 'darkness', 'undiscovered', 'uneasy memory', 'forgetting', 'forget'. The perpetrators of these crimes, but also many witnesses on the sidelines of historical abuses, would prefer to deny painful events ever occurred. Yet Gross gently but insistently gathers details and understanding of human oppression. Stanza three states:

it might have been a wishing-well
except

⁴⁹ Such as Gross, "The Quakers of Pompeii", which itself was the result of Gross' engagement with a piece of art, and which is offered on the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre's website as part of an activity to encourage children to engage with the sculpture artistically themselves. Indeed, the structure of *Manifold Manor* and the tone of each of its poems, looks to draw readers in, right from the challenge of 'Trespassers will...', provoking the reader into ignoring the warning, through to the "Tailpiece" which states clearly: '*Manifold Manor* is not my private property. If you feel at home there, it is as much yours as mine.' (Gross, *Manifold Manor*, 1, 65) Also, the sense of the reader being led on a journey through the fictional Latin American country of Mistila, to be directly addressed by the various characters there (Philip Gross and Sylvia Kantaris, *The Air Mines of Mistila*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 1988.). His response to Epstein's sculpture of Adam further suggests an artistic addressing of the concept of human engagement with the very business of existence (Philip Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2015): 38).

⁵⁰ Further examples from her work include: the explicit invitation to empathy in "Punishment", the sexual engagement explored in "Couple" and the importance of emotional-sexual engagement in "The Exercise" (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 17, 20, 35-6). Also, the discomfort of two adulterers shown through their engagement in "Actors" as well as the persona's seeking after a meaningful engagement which does not occur in "The Long Run" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 18, 31-2).

⁵¹ Bearing in mind that the distinction between 'ethical' and 'moral' may seem to be a fine or even invisible one, I refer the reader back to Diane Reynolds' understanding of 'ethical' as open minded, honest consideration of experience and conduct, as opposed to 'moral' in the sense of 'moralistic', reactionary, and potentially facile writing, as outlined in Chapter 2 above, for instance on p. 45 (Reynolds, "Quakers and Fiction").

no wish was granted. This was the forgetting-cell,
the oubliette.

Here we can see the feature of ethical writing coming in, the honesty given a sour twist by the conditional ‘it might have been’ which is not delivered on within the narrative of the poem: ‘no wish was granted’. The formal register of the vocabulary employed here echoes the power and status of the people who directed such torture. Yet even when facing such blunt reality, Stephen Cox’s approach of honesty and hope⁵² remains in the same conditional: ‘it might have been a wishing-well’, where the hope of a wish being granted is present, alongside the fact that in this case it was not granted. This honest facing of conditions as found relates clearly to Reynolds’ ‘language of challenge and the call to transformation’: no trite moral message is offered here. The matter-of-fact rhetorical question about the historical victim slips into the devastating sibilance of ‘Someone, somewhere’, concluding elliptically: ‘So easy to forget’, eliciting an ethical response. Readers are nudged towards a sense of the discordance between their comfortable lives and the pain and suffering of others.

In her unsparing consideration of familial abuse, Ruth demonstrates a clear concern for Reynolds’ ethical perspective, and the tendency of many to try to avoid this, in various poems, including “Touch and Go” and others.⁵³ In “A Song of Jean”, Jean’s body and personality are honestly depicted as being affected by age, yet this teaches us that we are all indeed in flux or, as Bakhtin had it, ‘*Dauer im Wechsel*’.⁵⁴ In calling us to a deeper recognition of Jean’s – and

⁵² Outlined above in Chapter 2, p. 45.

⁵³ “Marrow” (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 26-31) tells of the pain following an acquaintance’s death, and the persona’s rage at others’ incomprehension. “Bearing Up” (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 10-11) deals with an elderly couple’s experience of creeping infirmity and senility. “Afternoon at Arley” (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 1), dealing with dishonesties within marital relationships and the threat these can bring. “Completion” (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 13) deals with the stark sexual fantasies of a woman confronting the start of her marriage.

⁵⁴ Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 8.

our own – humanity through the determined accrual of textual detail and meaning, Ruth’s text accesses the transformation of recognition that Felski posits.⁵⁵

There is a modified version of ethical truth-telling in “Smugglers”, where the persona employs language from her pre-war life to characterise her night-time search for coal: ‘let’s say we just fancied a little saunter’ which manages to simultaneously express the normalising of an evil situation alongside the necessary magical thinking of someone seeking to survive in such a situation.

Ruth’s honesty around difficult aspects of a situation is clear in her Kien translations as well, revealing a clear ethical intent. In the baleful acceptance that even his memories and artistic pieces have an independence from Kien and his current wretched situation, “Poem 1” is clearly practising an ethical honesty which is amplified in later poems. “Poem 3” ironically inspects the positive gloss of propaganda, undercutting it with a knowing awareness of the horrific reality it conceals. In their unflinching presentation of that horror, Kien and Ruth pass Arnold Berleant’s ethical test of aesthetics, considered in Chapter 2, in that the creative artist is presented here as standing with humanity and, by extension, sharing in the horror of human experience in this context. In their contributions to O’Connor’s ‘hot pursuit’ of truth, here being the certain death waiting behind the ‘shining gates’, they follow Berleant’s injunction to ‘[pursue] the artistic search for new dimensions of awareness’,⁵⁶ no matter what the cost and pain involved.

This poem continues: ‘but those far-away towers glitter/ In the sunset, like gold.’ The pre-modified noun phrase ‘far-away towers’ furthers the image of the ‘shining gates’. This city may have dirty roads, but its towers glitter, implying light and value (‘like gold’). This may be

⁵⁵ ‘Bristling with meaning, layered with resonance, [texts] come before us as multi-layered symbols of beliefs and values; they stand for something larger than themselves.’ (Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 32).

⁵⁶ Berleant, “Artists and Morality,” 199.

an ironic reference to the ‘city on a hill’ of the Sermon on the Mount,⁵⁷ a much-invoked utopian image by politicians of various allegiances. Understood in this way, the poem’s conclusion reads as a grim, yet ethically honest, acknowledgement of such images’ seductiveness. The presence of ‘sunset’ here can then be taken as a satirical remark about endings, perhaps of Holocaust victims, or their hope that the Nazi regime will meet its end. However, an alternative interpretation is the persona’s admission that the end (‘sunset’) of their life may under present circumstances appear attractive. Suffering Nazi abuse may lead to a desire to go onto the glittering towers of the afterlife, safe from worldly oppression. However, the simile (‘like gold’) reminds us that the image only appears to be gold, and is not actually that substance. This poem appears to be almost entirely addressed to a projected reader in a form of ironic dialogue, warning of the pitfalls of the regime’s false promises. Therefore, the persona’s message is being urged upon the reader through the adoption of a healthy, ethical scepticism, conveying potentially life-saving advice covertly.

“Poem 4” contains a moment of self-reflection within a threatening context. This kind of inner-space engagement may not transform the immediate context, but it carries the potential to transform one’s experience of and responses to it, an ethical life lesson for readers. In the reconstruction of a fragile transformational self, this poem offers Felski’s ‘improvisational subjectivity’ which grows from an artistic (re)construction of an experience, allowing the reader to apprehend it afresh, therefore prompting Felski’s ‘revised or altered sense’ of self.⁵⁸ The poem is ambiguous as to the nature of running with the hounds depicted towards its end: whether the persona is being pursued by them, or is engaging in pursuit alongside them is left unclear, holding open the possibility of the persona’s moral culpability. This ethical writing is imbued with an almost supernatural power to reify any experience, with all of the ethical

⁵⁷ Matthew 5:14: ‘Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.’

⁵⁸ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 25.

responsibility that that implies, a notion explored by other writers who identify as spiritual.⁵⁹ Irrespective of a reader's religious or ethnic identity, we all have some familiarity with the facts of the Holocaust. In revivifying these creative responses from someone who was compelled to endure it, any preconceptions or pre-learned responses fall away, demanding an ethical response from the reader. In reading of such dreadful events, one becomes, in some sense, a witness of them. Thus, in having witnessed them, if one is to act ethically, one must respond constructively, in this case assisting in whatever way is appropriate to challenge the possibility of such events occurring again.

“Sonnet, interrupted”⁶⁰ offers a different perspective on ethical honesty, positing a scenario where the national power supply breaks down, interrupting by implication, amongst other things, the creative process of writing poetry (on a computer) which relies upon electricity. Bitten off at the seventh line, and in so doing introducing silence with an eldritch quality, it imagines the freeze that would result from a ‘Rolling overload’, consequence piling upon consequence:

Cities fold their lights up zone by zone,
the signals seize, road crunches into road,
fridge freezers shudder and die; soon meat blood
will be leaking....

Ethical honesty presents the incipient disaster to come: the sophistications of technology hold back a simpler state of being. Over-reliance on sophisticated ‘civilisation’, and the over-production this causes, may well only hasten an eruption of chaos through the surface of this ‘civilisation’.

⁵⁹ ‘Literature is an event...it's not trying to recreate what happened, it *is* what happened.’ (Carolyn Forché in Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 16).

⁶⁰ Gross and Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, 72.

Gross delineates gathering social chaos with collocation, sibilance, alliteration, personification, the symbolic meat blood offering multiple signification, standing for the metaphorical ‘death’ of freezers that were preserving meat for human consumption, created through violence done to animals, also hinting at the possible violence unleashed by food shortages, and possible deaths which might result from such shortages and their attendant violence. The scenario imagined is, for the time being at least, fortunately an imaginary one in Britain. Against the introspection that is prompted by the image, Gross asks a muted rhetorical question: ‘(Should we not have known?)’, the parenthesis suggesting a whispered query, yet also giving this admonition the quality of an ever present, unheeded, warning. The final line returns to the pylons, the visual points of inspiration for the collection as a whole, apparently unconcerned by this disruption: ‘The pylons look on, shrug by shrug by shrug...’. This sense of being poised upon the potential for radical social change is clear, as at the end of *Manifold Manor*, where readers are urged to revisit the poems and respond. The ethical honesty that is invoked here by an imaginary scene has the potential to be applied to our current society, with its negative environmental impact, individuals’ roles within that, and its possible future challenges.

I have identified ethical honesty operating in different modes and in relation to various topics in the poems presented here. It feeds into Cox’s model of a QLA being an aesthetics of honesty and hope, and Reynolds’ call for an ‘ethical’ rather than ‘moral’ approach to writing produced by Quakers, not necessarily focused on traditional Quaker concerns. This brings together Quaker values and honesty with Williams’ challenging yet invigorating experience of authentic life,⁶¹ again reflecting Quaker calls for an acknowledgement of suffering.⁶² Tortured by his own messy reality and by the urge to represent it precisely and effectively, D.H. Lawrence offers a sharp articulation of this attitude that feeds into a QLA. Remaining true to what must

⁶¹ Williams, *True to Experience*, 6.

⁶² As in Clift Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 55.

be acknowledged in all of the messy reality that this implies comes close to what he offered as his ‘morality in the novel’⁶³ which he saw as the ‘forever trembling and changing balance between me and my circumambient universe....When the novelist puts his [sic] thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality.’⁶⁴ Lawrence’s tough-minded morality here is a companion-piece for the ethical model that we now have from Reynolds.

In lifting the lid on forgotten or ignored horrors, Gross and Ruth acknowledge them with ethical honesty which sustains Williams’ ‘warmth and sweetness and dryness and terror’. Admittedly, some of the poems considered deal with public tragedies whilst others consider more domestic settings, nevertheless each brings a similar approach to unearthing buried secrets. Ethical honesty, in the sense of Diane Reynolds’ ground-breaking treatment of it, pervades these poems. Being representations of actual life, they are presented with all the flaws and issues of the everyday, related with ethical honesty which still holds out some hope that difficult situations can change for the better. Often this honesty relates to human experience which is not specific in any way to particular religious identification. Gross offers an unsparing ethical literary response to various issues and events.⁶⁵

4. Creative attention

Creative attention is vital to the concept of a QLA, whilst at the same time very likely to feature in the work of many writers of imaginative literature who are not Quaker or indeed hold any religious faith. Nevertheless, it is vital to include it here, I argue, in view of the fact that without

⁶³ As stated above, Lawrence’s notion of ‘morality’ here appears to me to be in accord with Reynolds’ ethical writing model.

⁶⁴ Lawrence, *Phoenix*, 528.

⁶⁵ For instance, “Visiting Persephone”, the “Wasting Game” cycle of poems dealing with his daughter’s anorexia, and “Imago” (Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 9, 10-17, 18-19). Beyond this, Gross’ memory of parental violence in ‘Nineteensevetysomething’ (Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 23), his unsparing acknowledgement of the inhuman consequences of diplomatic deal-making in “Yalta, 1945” (Gross, *The Water Table*, 46), and his courageous handling of his father’s aphasia in *Deep Field* (Tyne and Wear: Bloodaxe Book Ltd., 2012), offer further evidence of this feature.

it no piece of imaginative literature can fully succeed. Furthermore, I contend that Quaker application of this feature may well demonstrate certain characteristic approaches, which create a particularly Quaker model of this feature. In the poems we will consider in this section, we can see that creative attention actually may serve two differing purposes. The first is to reify the details of the events depicted, in order to render them faithfully, drawing readers into the world thus created. The second is to bring to bear a ‘sacramentalising’ level of attention to events, situations and people, transforming them. Thus, in the poems under discussion, the rediscovered oubliette and the family home successfully stand for more than what they literally are, interconnecting with other features. These include silence, in this case, a force which can be applied oppressively, and which both writers consider breaking in different ways. Also, through depicting a transformational response to experience and injustice, other poems gesture towards a Quaker sensibility, perhaps sometimes ironically. Gross displays both aspects of creative attention in his work,⁶⁶ as does Ruth.⁶⁷

Attention to sensual detail is signalled in “The Oubliette” as much through absence as presence, for example through absence of sound in ‘smothered’, here a camouflage upon the historical horrors perpetrated in this place, evidencing creative attention. The poem continues: ‘It glistened inwardly,/ so wet’, applying creative attention to both visual and tactile imagery to reify actual presence in this place. The onomatopoeic verb ‘glistened’ again creates an immediate sense of presence within this environment, the emphasis on the tactility of ‘so wet’ conjures the moisture of the earth that this oubliette is buried within, and also the even more

⁶⁶ For instance, his telling focus on the detail of imperial exploitation and oppression in “The Forest Children” and “The Sage of Kitchnapur” (Gross, *Manifold Manor*, 47, 50-1), the development of possibilities from the small detail of a crack in a wall in “In Every Room There is One” (Gross, *Off Road to Everywhere*, 53), and the sensitivity to metaphoric possibilities in “Fire Balloon Heart” (Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon*, 52).

⁶⁷ Examples of uncomfortable or difficult details being employed to reify memory and experience include “A Very Old T-Shirt” and “Psychic” (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 7, 38). Instances of a sacramentalising attention can be found in such work as “Night Feed”, which converts breast feeding into a magical realist experience, and “The Same Boat”, mining the metaphorical potential of a sexual encounter (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 17, 21).

horrible moisture of blood caused by violence perpetrated there. There is something almost animalistic about the glistening dungeon space, making it appear alive with its atmosphere of evil.

There is no evasion of the horror here, and no effort to transform this place with its unethical history into something positive and unthreatening. The transformative, sacramentalising qualities of creative attention will be seen clearly in other poems. Here, Gross' creative attention necessarily brings back what could otherwise be a forgotten place more tellingly to the horrifying life that it once had, for readers without relevant experience to begin to try to understand.

Similar in its employment of creative attention to sensual detail in order to bring out the realities of a situation otherwise alien to readers, "Smugglers" brings to bear a close creative attention to the detail of Scooler and Frau L's surroundings. It begins with an elliptical sentence: 'This blanket of dark; perfect conditions/ for our latest trip to the siding together'. The reader is immediately immersed in this world with a metaphorical post-modified noun phrase, which almost as immediately comments on the propitious conditions 'for our latest trip...together'. The irony is strong here; on one level, the persona speaks of this 'trip' as if it is almost a holiday, whilst on another, the unusual conditions of 'blanket of dark' indicate that this is no common pleasure excursion, rather an action rendered necessary by the privations forced upon people victimised by the Nazi regime.

This acute focus on the immediate details of the here and now of a threatening situation is demonstrated again later in the poem, when Ruth's creative attention establishes a clear and present danger in the onomatopoeic, alliterative post-modified noun phrase 'thunder/ of great big boots', signalling the extent to which the women are straining their senses in self-protection. Once again, as with Gross, this is powerful and compelling poetic imagery, clearly

unconcerned with any kind of positive transformation of the immediate sensory data that is being presented to the reader. Indeed, in both poems, that would betray the ethical experience presented. Fortunately, the majority of readers of this material may very well not have direct experience of the frightening experience dealt with, so this creative attention reinforces the reader-writer engagement identified by educationalist and philosopher John Dewey.⁶⁸

Other such poems demonstrating this particular employment of creative attention include Gross' "Yalta, 1945",⁶⁹ where refugees from the political upheaval caused by the war-time Yalta negotiations are obliged to 'run, sleep rough, take/ their chance, ford rivers' in an attempt to evade closing borders. On another, more personal, level, Ruth's "A Very Old T-shirt"⁷⁰ relates in affecting detail an unsatisfying sexual relationship, something that there is a greater, though not definite, likelihood of readers having first-hand experience of: 'I fingered the nylon/ over and over till I slept.'

The second understanding of creative attention is clearly part of both poets' working practices and themes. Several of *I Spy Pinhole Eye's* poems deal with the act of observation, as attested in interviews and Gross' own writing about creative writing. However, it is not just a vivid level of observation that is being applied, but a sacramentalising level of attention that transforms that which is observed. This notion of creative attention that draws out the noumenal from the everyday resonates with other spiritual creative artists, including noted Diviner poet and academic Nicola Slee:

Both prayer and poetry are a repeated practice concerned with...attentiveness to my own life, both inner and outer, as well as attentiveness to other people, objects and

⁶⁸ Dewey, quoted by McKeon in Crane, *Critics and Criticism*, 252, quoted above.

⁶⁹ Gross, *The Water Table*, 46.

⁷⁰ Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 7.

events in all their mysterious otherness...attentiveness to the source of all life and creativity, the Word uncreated and incarnate.⁷¹

This emphasis on creative attention is further amplified by Slee's fellow Diviner Gavin D'Costa, speaking of 'seeing the sacred in the norm'.⁷²

"Long Exposure" begins with a brash rejection of superficial art that is only concerned with surface observation. Gross throws together onomatopoeia, simile and alliteration in a passionate plea for creative attention: 'No fast food for the eye,/ this'. As we have already concluded, there is the offer of true aesthetic nourishment here, but also the potential to elevate that which is being depicted through the work of art to another, more spiritual state: 'returns the sitter/ to pure body, to still-life'.

This call to deeper attention is repeated in "The Presence". Having acknowledged the anger of frustration at being locked out from aesthetic insight, the stage is now set for the creative attention which initially played across the sculpture's surface to be re-employed in a more relaxed, receptive state:

...one sunset smoky
from the burning towns behind us
I tether my horse to a stone
and lie back with the sky.
And the boulder leans in
at the edge of my sleep
and quite suddenly Oh I
get it.

⁷¹ D'Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 16.

⁷² D'Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 178.

The ‘burning towns’ here could be a metaphor for the damage inflicted on others or our environment through attempted forcing of insight and transformation; it could also act as a metaphor for the damage that individuals may work upon themselves for the same reason. The persona settles for a rest ‘with the sky’, thus closer to the natural world than has been shown previously. Suddenly, the persona receives a fleeting glimpse of this quicksilver presence. The seeker receives grace, whilst refusing to state definitively what that grace is, or even what it feels like. This implies that transformative grace is a personal experience, one that must be discovered by oneself, and which may very well feel different for each person. It is important to note that the persona’s ability to recognise this grace was already indwelling within them, echoing Felski’s remarks on recognition.⁷³

Likewise, Gross unlocks deeper insights via creative attention in “The Quakers of Pompeii”: different figures in the sculpture are considered, internal states and emotions speculated upon. Again there is the sense, with at least some of these figures, of truths only semi-consciously grasped, or indeed previously not consciously grasped at all, rising into consciousness: a man, ‘is hugging/ something spiky to his heart’, the sibilance here refining the paradoxical action of hugging it to oneself, indicating the fact that to move deeper into one’s self during religious worship, irrespective of one’s faith tradition, may well uncover challenging memories and issues.

Kien and Ruth apply this transformative type of creative attention in “Poem 1”, although in a more ambiguous manner. Significantly, it is not applied here directly to the persona’s ‘Old days’, which we are left to imagine for ourselves. The reader may imagine some or all of these details, or conjure their own. Through applying creative attention to his own responses and feelings towards the memory in question, a powerful lacuna is constructed for the reader to

⁷³ ‘Recognition is not repetition; it denotes not just the previously known, but the becoming known.’ (Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 25).

consider, instead focusing on the nature of the artwork created in response to this memory – and the persona’s response to it:

But it moves off just the same,
Leaving me to linger on in prison,
Like a gap in time ringed by frost,
Like a murky past.

The alliterative ‘Leaving me to linger’ amplifies the sense of imprisonment further, encouraging reader empathy with the fact that Kien and so many like him were unable to do anything but linger in confinement. The two following similes accentuate the sense in which the persona is being forced into the position of a dark memory, an un-person, amplified by the par rhyme of ‘frost/past’. Yet the very nature of it being a simile rather than metaphor signals the fact that the truth is different, and this is only an appearance, not reality. The reader is also faced with the attenuation of the persona’s life and identity, their inexorable demotion from being a full member of the surrounding, oppressive, society. Creative attention here both effectively foregrounds this process and arrests it by demonstrating the persona’s humanity in the face of such oppression.

On a more positive note, “A Song of Jean” locates ‘power’ within Jean, an ‘ordinary’ person who attends a Quaker Meeting. This evidences transformative creative attention, as hitherto overlooked qualities and significance are now discovered within her. Of course, the term ‘power’ employed here has various permutations, some ennobling and others potentially oppressive. Here, Ruth empowers her subject in the face of encroaching old age with its attendant frailty. Whilst accepting the negative aspects of ageing, the poem urges us to see beyond the negative detail:

Lead us to esteem properly the engine that is Jean's body
the darkness of her teeth
the hairs of her head, white and coarse as dune grass
her stertorous breath, her bent back, her slumped chest.

Poetic technique is more in evidence here, with enjambement employed on nearly all of these lines, eliding one feature into another. Modified noun phrases, simile and alliteration all reinforce the reality of her gradually failing body, which become beautiful in their reality.⁷⁴ In calling us to a deeper recognition of Jean's – and our own – humanity through the accrual of textual detail and meaning, Ruth's text once again references Felski's transformation of recognition.⁷⁵

Jean's spiritual significance and power emerges strongly through the alliteration of 'muchness...mind', the metaphor of 'those seas from which we crawled', ending on a hopeful note, signalling a sacramentalising level of creative attention being brought to bear upon the details of her body and life, transforming them. 'May...every day that remains to her be blessed' indeed offers hope, but is also invested with ambiguity and openness: there is no guarantee, of course, that every day remaining to Jean will be blessed; it is quite likely that, if she is asked, Jean will be plaintive about her waning abilities. Yet, there is a shared experience here ('from which we crawled in the beginning') as well as an acceptance that her frustrations may in time become the frustrations of others as they age. Creative attention transforms Jean into a beautiful figure, and engenders empathy and insight in those who see her and/ or read the poem, through their identification with that same ageing process.

I have now considered the role of creative attention within Gross and Ruth's poetics. It can be understood in at least two ways, although both stem from a close and profound consideration

⁷⁴ Again, accepting Bakhtin's 'Dauer im Wechsel' (Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 8).

⁷⁵ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 32, quoted earlier.

of detail which consists either in a realistic acknowledgement of things as they are, or as an exercise in the X-ray effect of deep-level realism as adumbrated by Felski above.

5. Quaker sensibility

I now come to the fifth, and central, QLA feature: Quaker sensibility, the striking of a Quakerly stance to the world and one's experience in it, that will affect one's comprehension of, and engagement with, the world. Necessarily, part of this sensibility is the acceptance of the core Quaker testimonies referred to in Chapter 1: simplicity, truth, equality, peace, and sustainability. The poetry considered in this dissertation reflects these testimonies in a variety of ways.

Simplicity can be detected in both the style and topic of "Long Exposure", expressing Gross' distaste for overly elaborate 'flash-in-the-pan' imagery. The mysterious tribe's disdain for possessions, and their offer of returning all gifts to the supposedly more sophisticated urbanites in "Gifts"⁷⁶ offers further indication. It is likewise detectable in Ruth's "Unnatural History",⁷⁷ in the disapproval of the artificial boyfriend with his 'patent shoes and city jacket' sat 'on a boulder', contrasted with the persona's shedding of her clothes and entering the sea. "Bear",⁷⁸ in its appreciation of the power of childhood toys, also illustrates this testimony.

Truth is also evidenced in the work considered here, including in Gross' "The Oubliette", where the horrifying truth of the dungeon is revealed. "Parable" thoughtfully spins significance out of the difficulty of capturing a situation's entire truth through any kind of art. "The Forest Children"⁷⁹ collides the truth of indigenous jungle inhabitants with the contingent narrative of

⁷⁶ Gross and Kantaris, *The Air Mines of Mistila*, 63-4.

⁷⁷ Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 47.

⁷⁸ Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 16.

⁷⁹ Gross, *Manifold Manor*, 47.

imperial occupiers. Ruth's "Touch and Go" is powered by the energy generated from the unacknowledged truth of parental abuse, whilst "Afternoon at Arley"⁸⁰ presents the unsettling effects of submerged infidelity. Alternatively, "Actors"⁸¹ narrates the coming together in an extra-marital liaison, and the contrasting roles adopted.

Equality is also evident across these poems. For instance, Gross' "The Quakers of Pompeii" urges the reader to value the 'fidgets' and 'aches' in the Meeting for Worship equally, whilst the ethereal power of the Mistilan air miners emphasises repeatedly their undeniable dignity in the face of official oppression.⁸² Ruth's "A Song of Jean" weighs Jean, with all of her frailties and fallibilities, with her fellow worshippers, and urges those potentially frustrated by her frailties to understand that there is still 'muchness' in 'Jean's mind'. Equality can also be seen in the poignancy of the friend's death, not considered significant by most who knew her, who yet leaves a gap in the persona's life in "Marrow".⁸³ Equality in the sexual realm is suggested in the persona's seeking for the most apposite term for sexual fulfilment in "A New Word".⁸⁴

A concern with Peace is reflected, both in the awareness of the 'rage of looting' and 'burning towns' caused by public war in Gross' "The Presence", as much as in the 'inaudible,/ nearly invisible' child cowed by private parental violence in "Nineteenseventysomething".⁸⁵ Ruth attests to the atrocities of public war unceasingly in her translations of Scooler and Kien, as well as drawing back from personal strife in "Marrow", when the persona, disapproving of an acquaintance's insensitive remarks about her dead friend, holds her rejection of his attitude whilst not openly disagreeing with him.

⁸⁰ Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 1.

⁸¹ Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 18.

⁸² Gross and Kantaris, *The Air Mines of Mistila*, *passim*.

⁸³ Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 26-31.

⁸⁴ Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 41.

⁸⁵ Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 23.

The most modern Liberal Quaker Testimony, to Sustainability and the environment, to an extent a logical outworking of Simplicity, can equally be seen being worked out in the implicit limitations of modern industrialised living in “Sonnet, Interrupted” as well as the valuing of the power of apparently modest things such as bacteria in “Mould Music”.⁸⁶ In her reflecting the power of the natural world in “Poem 4” we can also detect it in Ruth’s work, as well as her delighting in food made from foraged fruit in “Jam Today”.⁸⁷

I overview these Testimonies relatively swiftly here, in view of the fact that the Quaker literature that this dissertation is concerned with is literature first and foremost, and not benign propaganda in favour of a particular set of beliefs *per se*. Rather, these values permeate the world view of the writer, vividly expressed through their engagement with experience and the world, like different facets on a cut diamond.

Considering Quaker sensibility as a state of mind, poems such as “The Oubliette” amply illustrate this sensibility. In revealing concealed instances of abuse, there is an implicit challenge to the reader to reflect on this image and to respond meaningfully. In (re)presenting physical evidence of oppression, examples of which can still be found in some of the stately homes, palaces and mansions of Britain to this day,⁸⁸ there is an implicit call not only for response, but a different way of being. Of course, this is the view of one creative artist of the potential political impact of art, resulting from working practices that not all politically engaged activists might recognise as relevant, acknowledged by Gross in our interview: *‘sometimes...[my] form of activity involves...staring at the sky for an hour and a half without even apparently picking up a pen.’* Nevertheless, the very fact that the poet here is engaging in

⁸⁶ Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon*, 13-16.

⁸⁷ Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 32.

⁸⁸ For instance, Pevensey Castle is noted as having two dungeons, one of which is an oubliette (English Heritage, “Castle Dungeons with an English Heritage Pass,” English Heritage website, accessed Apr 14, 2020, <https://www.visitbritainshop.com/world/articles/castle-dungeons-with-an-english-heritage-pass/>).

contemplation in a society with an overriding focus on forward motion demonstrates a distinctive sensibility focused on constructive action.

Similarly, “Touch and Go” operates in such a manner as to stand witness to how abusive behaviour is often concealed. Yet the challenge does not end there. Ruth bravely demonstrates that any idealistic hope of a transformed family in this particular case is, for the moment at least, misplaced: improved relations will be hard-won. In the event of no positive change being achieved, the persona would after all still co-exist with this flawed parent. The dissenting statement of truth demands acknowledgement and, through that, the first steps towards a positive shift in the situation, which may remain possible in the future.

In their commitment to support social justice and change as quoted above in this thesis, I contend that Quakers have often clearly demonstrated resilience, an urge to survive, modelling Quaker sensibility. In this vein, “Smugglers” applies a strikingly jaunty tone to the women’s determination to locate life-giving fuel in the face of real physical dangers:

Should we be content to slope away
with our bags half-empty? Don’t be ridiculous!
We’re getting straight back to work.
A Berlin girl doesn’t admit defeat.
She stands firm, sticks to her guns
and never surrenders. We shall not retreat.

The hypophora of the first two lines is unapologetic, striking a determinedly positive tone. ‘We’re getting straight back to work’ signals that this is important, legitimate activity, as it will prolong their lives. The familiar pre-modified noun phrase ‘A Berlin girl’ emphasises how, even if German national culture at this historical point rejects the persona, she is not rejecting that aspect of her national culture which is a source of resilience to her, segueing into further curious war-related language: ‘stand firm’ demonstrates resolve; ‘sticks to her guns’ neatly

inverts what is normally seen as a male preserve of armed action; ‘never surrenders’ echoes Winston Churchill’s celebrated war speeches;⁸⁹ whilst ‘shall not retreat’ again shows almost militaristic determination to survive. Yet all of this martial language is employed by a Jewish woman incarcerated in a Nazi ghetto: unarmed, victimised, subsisting on her wits. I argue that this language usage evidences Quaker sensibility, repurposing Nazi militaristic language and attitudes for the purposes of peaceful survival, a beating of ‘swords into plowshares’ and ‘spears into pruninghooks’.⁹⁰

Similarly, “Poem 1” re-purposes language and concepts in the light of a Quaker sensibility, ultimately accepting the independent life that the persona’s art takes on.⁹¹ Here, Kien and Ruth consider some of the issues around the self in relation to art, echoing Felski’s comments about a ‘sticky’ self.⁹² The contingent, ambiguous and potentially challenging experience of showing full acceptance of all that rises up in us, whether we feel comfortable with it or not, is one consequence of such a Quaker sensibility, dealt with adroitly by Jack Wallis.⁹³ These two poems, the fruit of Ruth’s translation of two Jewish poets, raises questions around whether the sensibility displayed here can be legitimately labelled ‘Quaker’. Obviously, the original sensibility expressed belongs to the original authors, neither of whom were practising Quakers. Nevertheless, it is also legitimate to remember Liberal Quakers’ openness to new light ‘from

⁸⁹ In his celebrated ‘We shall fight on the beaches’ speech on 4 June, 1940, Churchill concludes, ‘We shall go onto the end...we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender....’ (S. Heffer, *Great British Speeches* (London: Quercus, 2011 [2007]): 242).

⁹⁰ Isaiah 2: 4: ‘And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’ This biblical quotation particularly chimes with the Quaker Peace Testimony.

⁹¹ ‘Kill the thing!’/ That’s what my heart is muttering.// But I just say, ‘Run along!’ (Ruth, “Four Poems by Peter Kien.”).

⁹² ‘Our selves are sticky...caught up in the particularities of time and space, culture and history, body and biography.’ (Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 42).

⁹³ ‘Healing and self-knowing come through experience, not through intellect.... We begin to know people only when we experience them. Then we affect each other.’ (Wallis, *Jung and the Quaker Way*, (3rd Ed.) (London: Quaker Books, 2008 [1988]): 13).

whatever source it might come'.⁹⁴ It is reasonable to ask whether these insights are actually definably Quaker, if their source lies outside of Quakerism. I would argue, however, that Ruth, who identifies as Quaker, has been drawn to the insights in these poems at least partly because of the resonance of their insights with her pre-existing Quaker sensibility. It could be that to an extent the insights of these Jewish writers accord with perspectives already held by Ruth, or that some of their perspectives are sufficiently resonant for her to choose to incorporate them into her creative work. I also invoke here the view of Diviner poet Ruth Shelton that all manner of meaningful encounter will inevitably carry at least the possibility of change, in both directions.⁹⁵

This modelling of an alternative way of being reaches its apotheosis in poems about Quaker worship, especially “The Quakers of Pompeii” and “A Song of Jean”. The fact that there are relatively few poems which fit this specific category only serves to further demonstrate that this is one aspect of the output of Quaker poets who refuse to be finally defined by that label. Writers identifying as Quaker will by definition seek to render the multiplicity of experience in their work, which will include, but not be limited by, their own worship practices. It appears to be significant that both of the poems considered below feature potentially surprising details of the people involved in the worship: internal thoughts are not all necessarily heaven-directed; there are disruptions to silent Quaker worship. Yet, perhaps these apparent distractions are not as disruptive as one might initially consider them to be.

“The Quakers of Pompeii” offers a generous acceptance of a suspended conclusion, where the persona calls on the reader to also exercise acceptance: ‘Until then, listen to them breathing. Love/ the fidgets. Love the aches.’ The triplet of imperatives encourages us to accept the small

⁹⁴ BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.7, quoted in Chapter 2.

⁹⁵ ‘Tourism brings you back home unchanged. In an encounter, you are changed forever and you never quite go back home.’ (D’Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 66).

discomforts and distractions of the everyday. This poem offers a particularly quotidian model of heterotopia, where enjoyment of the present moment, replete with disappointments and difficulties, is the path to true transformation, again re-emphasising the notion of the path to truth as journey, not destination. The Quaker sensibility being offered is one of mutual acceptance in spite of, or even because of, the fallibilities of the various worshippers depicted, from the implied anger in the woman with ‘big hands’ who seems willing to ‘give the world a clip around the earhole’, to the apologetic man ‘(though he’s a big boy now)’. The persona ruefully concedes that ‘we all might’ wish to ‘be excused’ from the Meeting ‘if the final flashbulb/ caught our attitudes’. Yet, each person is indeed attending, trying to move towards transformation. This, it is suggested, is in the effort itself, as indicated by such writers as Christian Wiman, Paul Tillich and Blaise Pascal at various points in this thesis.

Ruth’s poem explicitly featuring Quaker worship, “A Song of Jean”, applies a Quaker sensibility, acknowledging that silent Quaker worship is not necessarily ‘perfect’, in the sense people present may inadvertently disrupt the silence, as with Jean’s ‘black-handled stick’ that ‘likes to slip from her grasp and/ hit the floor with a great clatter.’ This lack of ‘perfection’ is freely admitted by Quakers, and in fact can be viewed as a path to further enlightenment.⁹⁶

The poem subsequently emphasises the sense of there being a shared experience: ‘Her mind...carries those seas from which we crawled in the beginning’, as well as an acceptance that her frustrations may in time become the frustrations of others as they age. Within the frame of this now-shared experience the Quaker community that is implicitly depicted surrounding her can potentially uphold and sustain Jean, nudging us towards a place where everyone is valued. The persona offers loving acceptance in the line, ‘May glory and honour belong to

⁹⁶ *Advices and Queries* 12 advises, ‘When you are preoccupied and distracted in meeting let wayward and disturbing thoughts give way quietly to your awareness of God’s presence among us and in the world.’ (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.12).

Jean, and every day that remains to her be blessed.’ This subjunctive not only suggests an apophatic Divine presence being invoked for Jean’s welfare and happiness, but by implication the reader also understands that at least part of the blessings bestowed upon her will come from those around her, the same Quaker worshippers who the persona calls upon to ‘engage Jean in conversation/ and not run away’, to ‘acknowledge the ageing of Jean’, ‘make time to watch over’ her, and ‘to esteem properly the engine that is Jean’s body’, replete with its ‘stertorous breath’, ‘bent back, and ‘slumped chest’. Ageing can be an inconvenient and challenging process, again a fact acknowledged by Quakers and considered as an opportunity for joy, learning, and service.⁹⁷

These two final poems suggest that this Quaker sensibility is not necessarily a revolutionary perspective in the traditional sense.⁹⁸ It calls for a revolutionary, radical reappraisal of things *as they are*, bearing in mind that the etymology of ‘revolution’ includes the French ‘*revolvere*’, meaning ‘to revolve’.⁹⁹ Whilst to be revolutionary may mean to call for a complete change to a situation, it may also focus on the shifting of what is and always has been there, in other words for a reconfiguration of what is already present rather than a total wholesale change. Similarly, the adjective ‘radical’ has the Latin root of ‘*radix*’ or ‘root’,¹⁰⁰ again suggesting a creative tension between radical change understood as a return to a situation’s roots, and systemic change to those roots. Thus, here we can understand this notion of a transformational perspective as potentially being one which sees the transformed within things as they are right now, reconnecting with Ralph Hetherington’s remarks about ‘sudden concentration of attention’, quoted in Chapter 2. Through this apprehension, one can trace links between

⁹⁷ For instance, ‘Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities.’ (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02. 28). Also, ‘Approach old age with courage and hope.’ (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02. 29).

⁹⁸ ‘Pertaining to, characterized by, or of the nature of revolution; involving or constituting a radical change; pertaining to or advocating a political revolution.’ (*Shorter Oxford*, 2584).

⁹⁹ *Shorter Oxford*, 2583.

¹⁰⁰ *Shorter Oxford*, 2462.

different features, for instance creative attention and ethical writing feeding into a heightened level of comprehension which allows for a Quaker sensibility to be fostered, developed, and lived out.

This realisation of deep-seated truths is certainly part of Felski's 'recognition'.¹⁰¹ The resulting 'altered sense' can in turn be instrumental in inspiring transformed selves and, through the action of these selves in society, a transformed world. This understanding of the sensibility thus connects with the model of Quaker heterotopia, where Quaker perspectives and action call for positive changes in a damaged world. The interaction between writer, reader and text in the light of this sensibility, leaving each awakened and ready to conceive afresh, irrespective of the particular insight developed, is evidence of a genuine Quaker sensibility that sets the scene potentially for new forms of living and behaviour. Whether this sensibility is purely a personal perspective, or inspires more direct action in the world around the reader, is a matter for personal discernment according to context.

The imaginative literature considered in this section offers Quaker sensibility in various ways, including the notion of a transformed and transformational reality through *how* people are, with themselves, each other, the world, and the Divine. It also accepts that there is an equal possibility of the self being affected through an encounter with the other as much as vice-versa. This inevitably leaves its mark on the manner in which texts are written, their style, perspective, structure, and so on.¹⁰² This consequently also includes the notion of 'Quaker heterotopia'.¹⁰³ With this concept, some poems depict the world in a deliberately discordant manner, in order

¹⁰¹ This 'is not repetition; it denotes...the becoming known...something that exists outside of me inspires a revised or altered sense of who I am.' (Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 25).

¹⁰² Instances of this include the magic realist Latin American community depicted throughout *The Air Mines of Mistila* (Gross and Kantaris, *The Air Mines of Mistila*), the embracing of generational legacy in "Bread and Salt" (Gross, *The Water Table*, 45). Also, the emotional identification between friends in "Marrow" (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 26-31) and the ideal emotional bonding between parent and child in "Night Feed" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 17).

¹⁰³ Outlined, according to Gay Pilgrim's work, in Chapter 2 above.

to ‘shock’ the reader into a sharper, more clearly defined sense of how things are and, by implication, how readers might feel moved to act in order to assist in the creation of a healthier situation.¹⁰⁴ Readers can conceivably identify with this sensibility, instantiating a sense of community and, by extension, involvement and responsibility.¹⁰⁵ Gross and Ruth present a heightened sense of reality through convincing details in order to raise readers’ awareness of how situations may require change. This accords with Felski’s ‘shock’ that occurs when the text’s message ‘slips through our frameworks of legitimation and resists our most heartfelt values.’¹⁰⁶ Thus, something of a writer’s own feelings must leave traces on the texts that they produce, yet both are admirably non-directive with readers, allowing each poem to work its effects, encouraging the discernment of one’s responses independently, which of course may differ between readers.

6. An apophatic approach to the Divine

As we saw previously, “Parable” toys with the indeterminacy of communication, firstly through visual art, then poetry, finally considering spiritual expression. Yet there is the underlying assumption that there is indeed a noumenal experience worth communicating. The final stanza extends the satire to Gross himself:

or for a man
with a sonnet
to trust to the light

¹⁰⁴ Examples include Gross’ depiction of eternally dissatisfied physical hunger in “Hungry Ghosts in Happy Eater” (Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 51), the stark effects of political intrigue in “Yalta, 1945” (Gross, *The Water Table*, 46), and the capitalist satire of “Hordes” (Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon*, 45). Other examples from Ruth might include the unsatisfying, stagnating relationship in “Nothing Personal” (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 51) and the rising sense of claustrophobia in the soon-to-be-wed persona of “Completion” (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 13-14).

¹⁰⁵ ‘The experience of reading...cannot help being bound up with our desire to reflect on who and what we are.’ (Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 42)

¹⁰⁶ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 109.

and say unto you

Yea

verily.

The simplification of the poet's status is implicit in 'a man/ with a sonnet', suggesting that perhaps this man has been presented with the sonnet or is merely conveying it. The following line's possible reference 'to trust to the [Quaker] light' develops this sense of the difficulty of accessing the Divine within and also the ability to address others biblically: 'say unto you/ Yea/ verily' in the manner of Jesus warning of the destruction of the Temple.¹⁰⁷ Yet, we can then reverse the message: to say that by implication it is difficult to 'capture the kingdom' or 'trust to the light' is not to say that these things cannot be done successfully. The poem, in this view, leaves us with the fact that the 'man/ with a sonnet' has indeed said 'Yea/ verily', noting that that is all he has said. The actual content that we might expect to follow on from the heralding exclamation is not present, again echoing directly Gross' final words which explicitly call for ongoing dialogue quoted above.¹⁰⁸ Despite his personal agnosticism, Denison remarked to me: *'There is a religiosity in some of Philip's language, and I see the concepts of religion as a metaphor for all that is most valuable to us.'* This poem can therefore be understood as a mediation between the apparent disparity between the two men's spiritual positions: the mystery of an apophatic approach to the Divine still connects them.

Gross' ironic apophatic approach to the Divine is discernible again in "The Presence", in how the persona balefully complains of how the personified Presence

Stepped calmly aside

like one of the gods they

only half believe in, smug

¹⁰⁷ Matthew, 24:2

¹⁰⁸ *'There's more. We are not the last word.'* (Gross and Denison, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, 79; italics in original.)

As a joke they don't want us to get.

The personification here neatly signals the persona's frustration that there is indeed an invisible presence that may be apprehended. The persona's anger at another's assumed sense of superiority boils over: 'Well, we/ *don't get it*', the italicisation and gaps creating a visual sense of threatening pauses and vocal emphasis may also be read as a form of silence bleeding into the persona's reverie. The persona finally apprehends the 'presence' unexpectedly, when he is resting in an open, passive state:

I tether my horse to a stone
and lie back with the sky.
And the boulder leans in
at the edge of my sleep
and quite suddenly Oh I
get it.

The persona settles 'with the sky', surrounded by the natural environment. The personified boulder 'leans in'. Suddenly, the persona receives a sense of this elusive presence. Gross depicts a seeker receiving the gift of grace, whilst refusing to state definitively what that grace constitutes, or even what it might feel like. Transformative grace is subjective, different for each of us. It is important to note the individual's capacity to recognise this grace ('Always had it') but need to undergo life experience in order to understand it: 'to find it, had to come this weary way', once again echoing Felski's remarks on recognition.¹⁰⁹ The teasing out of striking images and insight from apparently unyielding experience points towards that possibility, based upon his own interview comments, plus my textual interpretations considered here, that Gross, as a Quaker and creative artist, is concerned with the white heat of creation, the new-

¹⁰⁹ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 25, as above.

minted, magma-like eruption from ‘the abyss of nothingness...of God [which] melts and boils’¹¹⁰ into being, rather than any concretised, ossified, final creed, reinforcing the sense here of an apophatic approach to the Divine.

Irony is offered in the closing lines: ‘Always had it, but/ to find it, had to come this weary way.’ The ellipsis here creates a relaxed, conversational tone: the sense of hurt and frustration has dissipated, to be replaced, perhaps with a sense of exhaustion and relief, pleasure that in fact the facility for this transformation was always present within the self, along with the rueful further insight, amplified by alliteration, that the persona has taken the longest possible route in order to achieve this realisation. This illustrates Bakhtin’s remarks on the demanding connection between art and life.¹¹¹

An apophatic approach to the Divine is also detected in “A Song of Jean”. Through the subjunctive mood employed at various points throughout the poem, Ruth creates a sense of prayer: ‘Let my tongue and keyboard both proclaim the power of Jean.’ Whether the persona is invoking a higher authority for the ability to ‘proclaim’, or merely preparing to perform the task, some external existence beyond the human is indicated here, without any definitive model of who or what might be being prayed to, we have a glance of an apophatic approach to the Divine. This continues: ‘Help us to worship the Spirit that shaped the hands of Jean,/ hands that once tied knots, hammered tent pegs, peeled thousands of potatoes.’ Again, the nature of ‘the Spirit’ is not dogmatically defined; the quotidian details of Jean’s life show her dignity, and we are in no doubt that some form of Spirit has indeed had a role in shaping this particular woman, as an example of all humanity. This is further amplified towards the end:

May we remember always the muchness of Jean’s mind
Her mind that carries those seas from which we crawled in the beginning

¹¹⁰ Clifft Heales and Cook, *Images and Silence*, 84.

¹¹¹ ‘The connection...is not something that is given but something that must worked at, shaped, conceptualized.... The connection between art and life is made only where a perceiving human being makes it.’ (Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 56).

that holds those caverns which shall open to receive us at our end.

Even as Ruth acknowledges the greatness of humanity, she accepts its limitations: ‘those caverns which shall open to receive us at our end’, again reminding us that there is some force beyond our own control. Once again, the exact nature of that force is purposefully left vague, but that there is such a force is not doubted.

An apophatic approach to the Divine, albeit appearing more sparingly, is clearly detectable in Gross and Ruth’s work. It may be that the incidence of this feature is not present in every poem, but it clearly occurs in a range of work across each poet’s oeuvre, testifying to the apophatic dimension of British Liberal Quaker spirituality.

The poems considered in this section are representations of actual life, presented with all of the flaws and issues of the everyday. Their genuinely questing awareness moves towards an apophatic approach to the Divine. This particular feature is a more clearly spiritual perspective; it must be borne in mind that the poets considered here, like most others, do not seek to ghettoize themselves as solely ‘spiritual’ poets. Consequently, this feature is not as easily detectable as the preceding ones. However, Gross¹¹² and Ruth¹¹³ still evidence it in other poems.

¹¹² “Bread and Salt” (Gross, *The Water Table*, 45) gestures towards this feature through its consideration of a powerfully personified nature, as well as a sense of noumenal legacy between generations. “Mattins” (Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon*, 28-9) locates a sense of connection with the Divine within the physical body, invoking notions of ‘Body Theology’ *qua* S. Coakley, *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 [1997]). “Theses Written on Mud” (Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon*, 35-7) reflects on how various religious priests may seek to fix religious and spiritual truth, when this in fact may not ultimately be possible.

¹¹³ “A Testimony” (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 33) echoes Gross’ “Bread and Salt” in that it depicts the conflicted emotions of a persona seeking to do justice to a deceased friend in a public tribute, and the sense that ultimately some essence of a person might survive death, and that despite the love that one person might feel for another, that ultimate essence may well remain mysterious to others.

7. Silence as presence and force

Silence features in the work of both poets in a variety of ways, including: silence within actions and experiences depicted in the poems, as well as the more specific silence within Quaker worship. The silence worked with by both poets may broadly take one of two forms: a negative, oppressive force or a more positive, creative presence. Gross demonstrates a powerful sense of comfort with silence of a particularly creative kind,¹¹⁴ whilst Ruth, accepting the positive power of silence, is also aware of its pitfalls.¹¹⁵ This engagement with both words and silence also appears to be a common characteristic of other spiritually engaged poets, such as Gavin D'Costa.¹¹⁶ In these poems concerned with worship and silence, these elements can be detected coming clearly and convincingly to the fore. This sense of an ultimately indefinable yet tangible supernatural presence is to be found in a variety of Gross' work¹¹⁷ as well as in his response to the current Covid-19 pandemic,¹¹⁸ alongside consideration of silence by Ruth.¹¹⁹

Taking the more negative implications of silence first, it is significant that both poets can be understood as working positively with this material, even when the silence depicted is being used as a form of social or political camouflage¹²⁰ or a weapon within a harmful relationship,¹²¹

¹¹⁴ In our interview he remarked, '*All of this glorious play of words, even when it's coming down like waterfalls, it's in the context of that deep quietness and the sense of a place beyond words.... a river flowing underneath it. Whatever it is I mean by silence, it need not equate with the absence of sound.*'

¹¹⁵ In our interview, Ruth discussed this as an issue that needed to be borne in mind: '*it's not just about a contemplative, rich silence, there's something in Quakerism, where we're shutting parts of ourselves out and we're shutting ourselves up.*'

¹¹⁶ D'Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 184; also, for instance, Lee and Ostriker in Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*.

¹¹⁷ For instance, the magical insubstantiality described in "The Chief of Police's Tale" and the indefinable resilience of an embattled community in "Hereafter" in Gross and Kantaris, *The Air Mines of Mistila*, 18, 78-80. Also, for example, in the sense of underlying communication beyond literal language in "Tact" (Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 57).

¹¹⁸ During the writing of this chapter, "Silence like Rain" (Philip Gross, *The Friend*, Vol. 178, No. 21, (2020): 18). has appeared in the national British Quaker magazine, *The Friend*.

¹¹⁹ For instance, the subject's telling verbal silence in "Coming on nicely" (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 18), the covert marital infidelity in "Afternoon at Arley" and the strategic silences within a relationship in "True Confessions" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 1, 10).

¹²⁰ For instance, the superficial reactions to a friend's death in "Marrow" (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 26-31) or the political culture of silence in "In the Bar of the Writers' Union" (Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 37).

¹²¹ The marital infidelity in "Afternoon at Arley" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 1) is an example of this.

or a symptom of illness¹²² or ageing.¹²³ It is ironic that silence, prized in certain settings by Quakers, is presented ambiguously here, either as an effort to make a clean beginning or else a force seeking to conceal past abuses.

Negative Silence

Against a backdrop of meaningful silence, Gross' exploration of political silence as a tool of and camouflage for injustice and abuse in "The Oubliette" is part of a wider pattern. The silence does not, however, completely succeed in concealment: the old dungeon is still present, waiting for anyone who might stumble across it: 'I could have stepped/ off into darkness'. The shock of discovery here is inspired at least partly by the continuing danger of injury or even death to the person in the present day who comes across it. This notion not only references the peril of the oubliette when it was in operation, but also stands as a metaphor for the danger attendant on a failure to address injustice, of how failure to communicate abuse may over time fester into a moral black hole, into which other innocent people may be drawn. The historical fact, although not known by many, nevertheless remains an 'uneasy memory', waiting to be rediscovered by later generations. This silence is revealed as an oppressive force to be inspected and challenged later in the poem through the apparently unobtrusive remark 'So easy/ to forget.' The verb 'forget' here is charged with multiple meanings. The reader is reminded both of the moral duty to 'never forget'¹²⁴ historical abuse, but also to become more 'woke'¹²⁵ to the fact that abuse in one form or another continues in the present day, requiring challenge.

¹²² Gross' anorexic daughter's literal silence, with him processing and expressing some of the pain of the situation, can be found in "Visiting Persephone" and "The Wasting Game" (Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 9, 10-17).

¹²³ Witness Gross' moving responses to his father's aphasia in *Deep Field* (2012).

¹²⁴ Perhaps most memorably articulated in Eli Wiesel, *Night* (London: Penguin Books, 2008 [1958]).

¹²⁵ A term popularized by various protest movements in the Twenty-first Century, but at least partly tracing its etymology back to being 'wakeful': 'Habitually keeping awake; alert, vigilant, watchful' (*Shorter Oxford*, 3612).

Ruth continues this sense of silence as oppression in “Touch and Go”:

the way nothing was said,
my brothers creeping on tiptoe,
Mum’s attempted kindness...

Silence is not a healing force here. Family secrets are being kept; they may purely relate to physical abuse, but the onomatopoeic present participle ‘creeping’ implies a fear on the brothers’ part that might constitute a cringing away from abuse caused by a particular horror. Here the mother is referred to as ‘Mum’, suggesting some intimacy, yet the pre-modified noun phrase ‘attempted kindness’ implies failed attempts to support her daughter; perhaps this ‘kindness’ is a tactic to win the daughter’s silence despite unacceptable behaviour on the part of the father. The later statement that ‘twenty years’ silence’ are sealing those events clarifies the notion that silence here becomes a wall between the persona and her own experiences, rendering it increasingly difficult to address. Perhaps the controlled breaking of silence presented here is all that can be safely managed. In remarks to me Ruth speculated that at least some of her poetry might be a ‘*controlled shouting*’.

These opening poems are clearly handling negative situations of silence. Nevertheless, the very fact that the personae in these poems are breaking silence can be seen as a positive development. The act of voicing one’s truth may be cathartic in itself, or at least constitute the first step towards a positive transformation of unhealthy family relations. Trauma theologian Serene Jones speaks of this as ‘the riddle of “trauma and grace”’,¹²⁶ acknowledging that the painful process of processing trauma will draw ‘a map of a human soul, divided, torn, haunted, rageful, terrorized, and yet amazingly made ever hopeful through the enduring presence of

¹²⁶ Jones, 2019: 161 Serene Jones, *Trauma + Grace* (2nd Edition) (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019).

grace awakened by prayer.’¹²⁷ Perhaps the controlled breaking of silence presented here is all that can be safely managed, and Ruth’s presentation of a stagnant, unfulfilling domestic structure can be argued to be a form of dissonant heterotopia. This emotionally desiccated family might enjoy social respectability, yet this poem belies that: a dissenting statement of truth which demands acknowledgement and, through that, the first steps towards a positive shift in the situation. We can understand Ruth here literally expressing the trauma of a culture.

Positive Silence

Moving onto the second aspect of silence that is explored by these writers, we can again find a range of poems which consider silence as a positive quality. Silence can be seen as calm following conflict,¹²⁸ a significant quality springing from an absence,¹²⁹ or a material which itself can be moulded through interaction with language in order to create poetry.¹³⁰

In “Parable” Gross uses the sonnet form, retaining length whilst varying the rhyme scheme, again drawing in an element of creative silence to the poem: the lines appear somewhat unbalanced. The reader may thus feel encouraged to contribute to an ongoing dialogue. Rather than there being a damaging sense of lack in this poem, there is a sense of momentum created through the interplay between text present on the page, and the interlinked absence beside it. Bearing in mind Gross’ remarks about different qualities of silence and Allnutt’s image of ‘walking into silence’ quoted above, we might even consider the possibility of silence being an

¹²⁷ Jones, *Trauma + Grace*, 43.

¹²⁸ For example, “In the Small Town” (Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon*, 39).

¹²⁹ As in “Baby Love” (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 9).

¹³⁰ From a wealth of material, examples can include “I Remember I Remember” (Gross, *Love Songs of Carbon*, 18-19) and “A Thin Blue Line in the Large Window” (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 16).

aspect of form, alongside other techniques to be deployed within the text. Gross' adept deployment of blank space, for example in "The Presence", is a poetic example of this.¹³¹

Likewise, "Sonnet, interrupted" connects with language and the silence of space on the page to powerful poetic effect: 'The pylons look on, shrug by shrug by shrug...'. The ellipsis here introduces silence once more into the work, of a particularly ambiguous nature: there is the silence imposed by the electrical blackout, but also the purposeful silence of the writer-persona, leaving the reader to speculate and imagine what comes next. This is the penultimate poem in *I Spy Pinhole Eye*: the silence that results here can be viewed as an intentional lacuna into which the reader may creatively project their own responses to this scenario.

It strikes one as significant that "The Quakers of Pompeii", a poem inspired by a sculpture depicting Quaker Meeting for Worship, features no vocal ministry¹³² from the worshippers featured; the words belong to Gross' persona. This creates an implicit silence in the poem; the persona's responses to these other worshippers become comparable to potential ministry, an impression lent greater weight by the fact that there are nine figures in the original sculpture, but only seven worshippers described, strengthening the possibility that the speaker is one of the group. There is an indeterminacy in the resulting image: the reader is left uncertain of the final impression until 'the clay we've been moulding/ eventually bakes', recalling other writers' observations¹³³ about the path to discovery being necessarily transient and temporary.

¹³¹ It could also be understood to be used in prose fiction, for instance in the form of cliff-hanger endings where the reader can intuit the likely outcome without being explicitly told. W.F. Harvey's celebrated Gothic story "August Heat" ends with the main character, who the reader understands will be murdered but who expects to return home unharmed, remarking upon the intense summer heat: 'It is after eleven now. I shall be gone in less than an hour. But the heat is stifling. It is enough to send a man mad.' (W.F. Harvey, "August Heat," in *LibriVox*, accessed Aug 22, 2020, https://librivox.org/author/2547?primary_key=2547&search_category=author&search_page=1&search_form=get_results.)

¹³² Vocal ministry is what is offered by anyone attending a Quaker Meeting for Worship who feels appropriately inspired by 'the Spirit'. It may take the form of a prayer, a reading from a religious text, some words of reflection, or a spiritual anecdote of some kind. A description is offered in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.12-13.

¹³³ Including Wiman quoted above, who also references Tillich: 'No truth but the way to truth' and Pascal: 'If you are searching for God, then you have found him.' (In Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 243).

There is a generous acceptance of this suspended conclusion, where the persona calls on the reader to also exercise acceptance: ‘Until then, listen to them breathing. Love/ the fidgets. Love the aches.’ There is a wry acceptance here that many forms of silence are not total, that incidental noises are inevitable and even to be welcomed as part of the experience to be had and art to be created.¹³⁴

“The Presence” neatly works with silence which initially emanates from resentment, but evolves more positively. The personification here signals the persona’s sense that there is indeed a spiritual presence that may be apprehended. The persona’s anger at the assumed sense of superiority around the ability to apprehend it erupts in ‘Well, we/ *don’t get it*’, the layout techniques further heightening the persona’s introspection here. The stage is now set for the creative attention which played across the surface of the sculpture at the start of this poem to be employed again, but in this more acceptant state. Implicitly, the silence of inactivity creates a passive state of mind for the persona to finally appreciate the ‘presence’: ‘Oh I/ *get it*’.

In “A Song of Jean”, we only briefly hear Jean speak (*‘No. No I can do it. I can manage’*), implying a certain level of silence which is otherwise bridged by the persona’s sympathetic narrative of Jean. Silence is also something that is broken by Jean’s walking stick falling to the floor, yet we are not being led to feel that this is a bad thing, but rather further evidence of her quiddity, which must be valued along with everything else. As we read these reflections upon Jean within the frame of Quaker worship, it may also be that these insights arise directly from the silence of Quaker worship, the fruit of meditation and reflection, adding to our deep-level knowledge.¹³⁵ As in “The Quakers of Pompeii”, silence is not merely the absence of activity

¹³⁴ For example, John Cage’s celebrated postmodern musical work *4’ 33”* (Edition Peters 6777, UK, 1959).

¹³⁵ Reinforced by Felski: ‘one motive for reading is the hope of gaining a deeper sense of everyday experiences and shape of social life. Literature’s relationship to worldly knowledge is not only negative or adversarial; it can also expand, enlarge, or reorder our sense of how things are.’ (*Uses of Literature*, 83).

and sound, but a state in which reflection and, at least at times, insight can develop, referring back to previous comments in this thesis around Quaker silence being ‘expectant’.

I have established that silence is a clear presence and force within both Gross’ and Ruth’s poetry. It may be presented either negatively or positively. Indeed, it may be offered to us as initially negative, then developing into a more positive state, as in “The Presence”. It is an often overlooked but undeniable state from which tangible effects, images and creation can arise.

Before concluding this chapter, the possibility that some work produced by my chosen poets does not evidence these features must be addressed. I contend that in the case of the first five features, I have not found any poems by either writer that do not, to one extent or another, instantiate them. This is consonant with the fact that the first four features, to a greater extent, could be expected to occur in imaginative writing generally, irrespective of the writer’s religious affiliations. Combined together, they comprise a lens with which each poet can consider the world, memory, experience, and so on, in what I argue is a distinctively Quaker fashion.

As noted previously, the final two features emerge from the practices and concerns of Liberal Quakers. Not every Liberal Quaker experience is of silence, just as not every experience that they have necessarily has a foregrounded sense of an apophatic approach to the Divine.¹³⁶ Therefore some poems do not explicitly include these features.

Some poems by Gross deal with more literary concerns.¹³⁷ Likewise, other Gross poems address family tragedy and challenge.¹³⁸ Ruth also has poems which do not explicitly evidence

¹³⁶ As reflected in the exhortation to ‘Bring the whole of your life under the ordering of the spirit...Treasure your experience of God, however it comes to you.’ (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.2).

¹³⁷ Such as “Amphora” (Gross, *The Water Table*, 29) and “Dead Letter Box” (Gross, *The Water Table*, 63).

¹³⁸ Such as the cycle of poems reflecting on his daughter’s battle with anorexia, “The Wasting Game” (Gross, *The Wasting Game*, 10-17). In our interview, Gross expanded upon his non-theist position with this anecdote, which might refer to his daughter’s experiences, and his responses to them: ‘One of the first times I ministered in a Quaker Meeting anywhere ever, it was completely heartfelt. A child of mine had just had a terrible, arbitrary setback in her health. I just stood up and said, ‘I don’t pray, but at this moment I can think of nothing

these two features, but which deal with some of the frustrations and challenges of everyday life.¹³⁹ All of these poems address concrete details, entirely concerned with applying the first five QLA features to the material before them. In all cases, the resultant poetry offers deep-level delights to the reader.

Chapter Summary

This chapter is my project's engine. Chapter 1 outlined the grounds upon which I am exploring these issues, whilst Chapter 2 established the conceptual underpinning and foundations of how I conduct this work. Here in Chapter 3 I have applied the concepts and arguments developed in earlier chapters, confirming that all seven QLA features are present in the work of both Gross and Ruth. As anticipated, the evidencing of features is not consistent or uniform. Sometimes only a sample of features are discernible, whilst some poems display all seven. Interestingly, the poems which address noumenal experiences of the Divine and observations during religious worship, "The Quakers of Pompeii" and "A Song of Jean", display all seven features. This now provides us with tangible evidence of there being a detectable QLA along the lines conceptualised in Chapter 2 in the work of these two writers.

Chapter 4 will consider the implications of this, whilst weighing further evidence for and against this proposition, drawing on analysis of Clare Pollard and Michael Symmons Roberts as successful non-Quaker poets, an Atheist/Agnostic and Roman Catholic respectively. I then consider possible next research steps beyond this project, including different potential subjects

but, "God, you bastard, why did you do that?" I just can't help having that gesture in my mind and it was a fairly startling thing...Standing up and addressing a God in whom I don't literally believe in, in terms like that, with such complete heartfelt conviction but I think I actually said at the end of that ministry. 'It just occurred to me that that is a real prayer. I'll just leave it in the air in that spirit.'

¹³⁹ Including "Curriculum Vitae" (Ruth, *Nothing Personal*, 49-50), "Tennis Club Disco, 1974" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 2-3), and "Night Feed" (Ruth, *I Could Become that Woman*, 17).

who could be considered in the light of this QLA, in terms of other literary genres, and ethnic, national, cultural, sexual, political and theological contexts.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Chapter Outline

This chapter builds on my foregoing analysis and discussion. I have established the historical development of Quaker engagement with imaginative writing, considered the conceptual issues around this, then identified possible QLA features in selected texts by Gross and Ruth. As a result, I have demonstrated that there is evidence for there being seven features within the work of two different writers identifying as Liberal Quakers, of different genders and routes into Quakerism. In this chapter, I consider the nature of the QLA further, and whether it is meaningfully distinctive. I consider the work of Clare Pollard and Michael Symmons Roberts, contemporary British poets who, whilst demonstrating the four ‘foundational’ and two ‘optional’ features in different ways, do not exhibit the distinctive QLA. I then offer conclusions around the nature of the QLA and how it can be usefully understood, in terms of the fifth ‘capstone’ sensibility feature which defines it as distinctively Quaker. I then outline implications for both previous scholarship and future research before offering my final remarks and Chapter Summary.

The Nature of the Quaker Literary Aesthetic

I have demonstrated that the seven QLA features are, to a lesser or greater degree, present across the sample of poems selected from the work of Philip Gross and Sibyl Ruth. There are some contrasts between the two writers: one is male, one female; whilst one joined the Society following conviction, the other was born into a Quaker family.¹ There are also similarities: they are both White British graduates and have collaborated with others in producing some of

¹ The term used by Quakers for the process of converting to Quakerism, defined earlier in Chapter 2.

their work (although Gross emphasises this working practice more). Both have one parent who was a war-time refugee from mainland Europe, whilst the other was British-born. In terms of the poetry that they write, Gross is technically more wide-ranging, employing, and modifying, various genres such as the sonnet, generally applying some form of rhyme scheme. Ruth works more in free verse, where rhyme schemes may or may not be employed, and when they are used, they tend to be more idiosyncratic.² Thematically, both address a wide range of concerns, many of them the same, although Ruth could be argued to occupy a Feminist position.³ Despite certain similarities, I contend that there are sufficient differences to justify the view that this QLA is applicable to a range of Quaker writers, and not merely those within one narrow tranche of the Society. In view of my analysis in Chapter 3, there is indeed an identifiable QLA within the work of these two writers.

I have acknowledged throughout this thesis that any dedicated writer of imaginative literature, of any faith or none, may well display some QLA features, although the ‘sensitivity’ feature is an acid test difficult to pass should a writer not subscribe to Quakerism. Indeed, there is the fair question as to why a writer not affiliated to Quakerism would seek to demonstrate such an aesthetic. This nonetheless begs the question of how identification of these seven features within writing produced by Quakers is significant. What I am arguing is that some or all of these features, whilst quite possibly being displayed by other writers of faith or none, are all demonstrated by the Quaker writers that I have analysed, as an outworking in this context of the particular silent, apophatic approach to religious worship found amongst British Liberal

² Ruth talked in interview about how her first ambition was to write a novel, but that post-viral fatigue syndrome made this difficult. Poetry was a form that was still accessible to her, owing to the possibility of writing in short, concentrated bursts.

³ In our interview she identified herself as a ‘*gender-critical Feminist*’, and many of her poems, such as “Touch and Go”, “Unnatural History” and “Coming on Nicely” suggest a Feminist perspective. That said, others, such as those dealing with the problems of old age, e.g. “Bearing Up”, and her translations of Scooler’s and Kien’s war-themed poems are not as explicitly concerned with female-related rights and issues.

Quakers, brought over into imaginative literary writing. This answers my initial question about what happens when Quakers write, posed in Chapter 1.

Therefore, the seven features can be configured, as illustrated in the QLA diagrams first shown in Chapter 2 (now shown here as figures 4.1 and 4.2), as building from the first four ‘foundational’ features which could be expected in many instances of literary writing, through the central feature of sensibility which will be defined within the constraints of this dissertation by the faith position of the writer, then embracing the final two ‘optional’ features as appropriate, depending upon the particular themes, contexts, concepts, and messages that the writer is working on at any particular time.

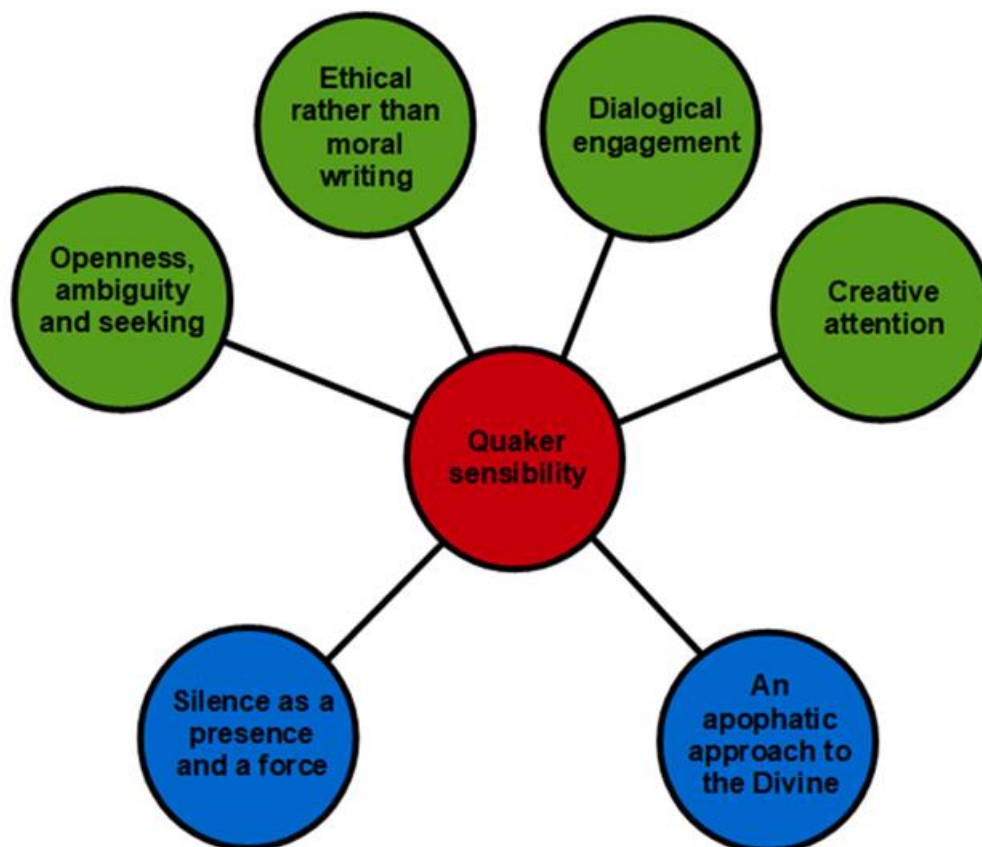


Fig. 4.1: The role of Quaker sensibility in connecting all features together into a Quaker Literary Aesthetic

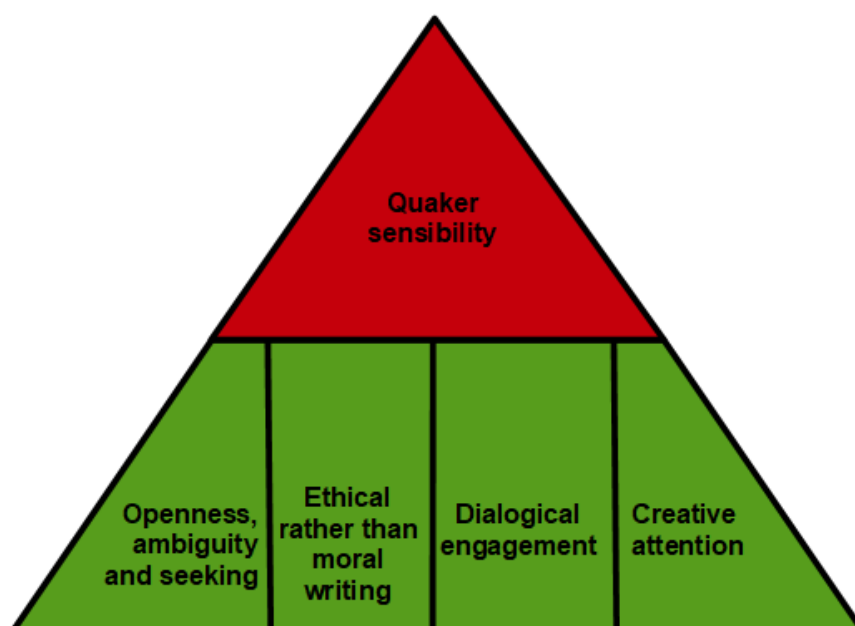


Fig. 4.2: Pyramid demonstrating the incremental relationship between each ‘layer’ of features, and how they build towards a Quaker Literary Aesthetic

The initial four features are vital components of literary writing, and the fifth ‘Quaker sensibility’ adds the requisite ingredient that in this case makes the text distinctively Quaker. Taken together, these five features constitute a ‘way of being’ for the Quaker writer, with the final two features being important but not as ubiquitous. It must be acknowledged that the two optional features of silence and an apophatic approach to the Divine, whilst being distinctive aspects of British Liberal Quakerism, are not necessarily prerequisites for all forms of legitimate spirituality, and indeed are not necessarily demonstrated in other branches of Quakerism, for instance as expressed by Friends Mission, a branch of Evangelical Friends Church International.⁴

⁴ The website of this organisation espouses a traditional Trinitarian theology and understanding of the Bible, establishing the centrality of the Bible and the three persons of the Trinity. There are also explicit references to evangelism and other church work which suggests a more cataphatic approach to the Divine and an acceptance of explicit liturgical worship, although silence may feature to an extent. (Evangelical Friends Church International, “Statement of Faith,” *friendsworldmission.com*, accessed 2 Aug, 2020, <https://friendsmission.com/statement-of-faith/>.)

Quaker sensibility is the defining feature. If this is not present, or if it is a different type of sensibility, the entire literary aesthetic will change, perhaps only slightly depending upon the characteristics of the sensibility it is exchanged for, but nevertheless significantly in terms of the resultant literature produced. This sensibility gathers up Quaker values, Quaker silent worship, a yearning for a positive, Quaker-inflected response to experience and the world, and is not applied uniformly or predictably. Experience, circumstances and Divine ‘light’ call it forth, in whatever particular form may be required in each particular set of circumstances. This is well captured in remarks by Quakers on an emerging attitude towards imaginative writing and its position within Quakerism:

Only such writings as spring from a living experience will reach the life in others, only those which embody genuine thought in clear and effective form will minister to the needs of the human mind. A faith like Quakerism should find expression in creative writing born of imagination and spirit, and speaking in universal tones.... It is no disrespect to truth to present it in forms that will be readily understood.⁵

Flannery O’Connor, quoted throughout this thesis, offers an articulate exploration of the relationship between writers of faith and the nature of their writing.⁶ There are some stark differences between the positions of Roman Catholicism and Quakerism, for instance in theology⁷ and liturgy.⁸ That said, I argue that the term ‘Catholic’ as employed by O’Connor can be taken for our purposes here to refer to anyone embracing a religious pattern of life that includes ethical engagement and responsibility, echoing G.C. Waldrep’s acceptance of

⁵ 1925 Revision Committee, quoted in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 28.11.

⁶ O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners*.

⁷ See BYM *Quaker Faith and Practice*, Chapters 1 and 2, and Chapters 18 – 29 for an overview of Quaker theology. For Roman Catholic theological introduction, see Vatican, “Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church,” Vatican Archive, accessed Jun 12, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html.

⁸ For a description of Quaker liturgical practice, see “Chapter 2: Approaches to God – worship and prayer” in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, especially the section on “Silent Waiting,” 2.12-17. For a description of Roman Catholic liturgy, see Vatican, “Catechism of the Catholic Church: Part Two – Celebration of the Catholic Liturgy,” Vatican Archive, accessed Jun 12, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2.htm#1070.

O'Connor's argumentation as valuable, despite his own Anabaptism.⁹ Her view that the writer of faith is forever working towards essential truth should inspire Quaker writers.

This also raises a timely challenge to Doris Dalglish's somewhat complacent remark, on contrasting attitudes towards creativity in different denominations: '(Quakerism) neither produces poets nor attracts them...Only the Church of Rome and the Church of England can minister sacramentally to an artist's needs and be willing to leave him [sic] alone when he is not in church....'¹⁰ We need to bear in mind when Dalglish was writing; the particular pressures around World War Two may have led many commentators to feel there were compelling ethical demands on all people beyond their own professional concerns – including creative artists. This suggests that Quakerism lays a burden of personal responsibility inimical to creativity in a way that Catholicism and Anglicanism do not. This does a disservice to both eucharistic and non-eucharistic religious traditions. If any writer sincerely identifies as having a spiritual approach to life, then that involves clear ethical obligations and engagement.¹¹ By the same token, O'Connor's programme strikes one as applicable to all writers of faith: should they wish to practise their literary vocations to the very best of their abilities, they must exert themselves to express their values honestly and articulately through their writing, which is not to suggest that they ought to be writing religious propaganda, but, as O'Connor argues, the truly engaged writer writes in such a way that 'there always has to be left over that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula.'¹²

⁹ 'I had to make allowances for [O'Connor's] Roman Catholicism, but [she is] extremely important in imparting to me the courage of moving forward in both faith and art.' (Kaminsky and Towler, eds., *A God in the House*, 190).

¹⁰ Doris Dalglish, *People Called Quakers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941 [1938]): 33.

¹¹ See, for instance Chapter 20 "Living Faithfully Today" in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*. Also, R.V. Bailey's remark in interview with Sibyl Ruth that U.A. Fanthorpe's Quakerism and her writing were 'all of the same cloth'. (Sibyl Ruth, "Listen to them breathing").

¹² O'Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 153.

O'Connor speaks stingingly of people who write artificial examples of faith: 'when...pertinent actions have been fraudulently manipulated or overlooked or smothered, whatever purposes the writer started out with have already been defeated.'¹³ This is in keeping with Arnold Berleant's Ethical Criticism, and D.H. Lawrence's injunction against a writer placing their 'thumb in the scale'.¹⁴

In his meditation upon a possible ethical programme for the creative arts, Berleant notes the ability of artists to refine a kind of 'hyper-reality' for the enlightenment and enrichment of audiences.¹⁵ By implication, that intensified awareness may occur when writing or reading a text, and by extension can be applied to the wider experience and conduct of those engaging with the text, setting the scene for a truly transformative engagement with literature and, in turn, ourselves and the world around us. This, in a literary sense, is Ralph Hetherington's 'sudden concentration of attention', which is modulated, clarified, lent efficacy by the 'fitness of sound and beat and measure',¹⁶ achieved by the writer.

A central aspect of a 'Quakerly approach' towards creativity as we find it in literary writing echoes Gross' model of truth being an ongoing verb rather than a finalised noun,¹⁷ reinforcing the notion that 'We shall never know all about art or the values of art until all art is at an end; meanwhile, artists will continue to instruct us.'¹⁸ We therefore move towards a workable understanding of the QLA. It is a mode of being rather than a set of beliefs, for both writer and reader. It is an imperative to engage, in a sensitive and constructive manner, with ourselves, our own contexts, other people, and the wider world. Full honesty demands acknowledgement

¹³ O'Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 145.

¹⁴ Lawrence, *Phoenix*, 528.

¹⁵ 'What [artists] are doing is intensely serious, offering others not only...heightened sensibility, expression, communication or imaginative representation, but...[also] exposure, discovery, and an intensified awareness of the world for human beings.' (Berleant, "Artists and Morality," 198.)

¹⁶ C. Graveson, *Religion and Culture* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1937): 24.

¹⁷ See Doering, "Interview: Philip Gross," 14.

¹⁸ Olsen, *On Value Judgements in the Arts and Other Essays*, 326.

of negative as well as positive conditions, also hope regarding the possibility of redemption and positive future developments. This is not an aesthetic which demarcates itself from other aesthetics of good faith, but rather actively works out Quaker values and ‘behavioural creed’. It is a positive, respectful, constructive manner of conducting one’s self in writing and engaging with the world which is not exclusive or judgmental, but rather inclusive and accepting. Quaker writers apply this more reflective approach, based upon the approach that Quakers attempt to apply in their Business Method, as defined in Chapter 1. There is a certain level of acceptance of what-is, combined with an attitude of seeking positive change wherever possible.¹⁹ I contend that this can also be detected in the manner of QLA writing, where there is no trite, unquestioning acceptance of circumstances but a tough-minded ethical acknowledgement of how things are.

The Distinctive Nature of the Quaker Literary Aesthetic

The extract above on ‘writings as spring from a living experience’²⁰ captures the open mindedness of the Quaker approach to imaginative literature identified here. The ‘truth’ referred to by O’Connor can be understood both as spiritual truth arising from Quakers’ experience that they may feel led to communicate to others, also expressing back to themselves the truth that experience has to offer them.

Quakerism generally, and Liberal Quakerism specifically, occupies a particularly liminal position in terms of spiritual faith. Quakers hold that there is a Divine presence of some form,

¹⁹ The guidance contained in Chapter 3 “General counsel on church affairs” includes the statement, ‘In our meetings for worship we seek through the stillness to know God’s will for ourselves and for the gathered group. Our meetings for church affairs, in which we conduct our business, are also meetings for worship based on silence, and they carry the same expectation that God’s guidance can be discerned if we are truly listening together and to each other, and are not blinkered by preconceived opinions.’ (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 3.02).

²⁰ 1925 Revision Committee, quoted in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 28.11.

which humanity can have direct relationship with, but only through their lived experience and understanding. Furthermore, just as lived experience and understanding may well vary from person to person, so their understanding of whatever Divine presence there might be may also vary, yet this does not negate the fact that Quakers accept something beyond, which surrounds and imbues the immediate world as it is. This is a potential Quaker version of the biblical notion of God imbuing every detail of life: ‘For in him we live, and move, and have our being’²¹

This then leads us to wonder if all Quaker writers exhibit these features. I have thus far only considered the work of Gross and Ruth in any depth, and even in these two cases have been constrained to focus on relatively small samples in order to generate meaningful insight. One of the next steps from this research would be to consider the possibility of a QLA in the work of a range of Quaker writers. That said, I would argue that it is manifestly the case that not all writers identifying as Quaker would be found to exhibit all of these features. One only needs to return to Diane Reynold’s essay calling for a paradigm shift from ‘moral’ to ‘ethical’ writing amongst Quakers,²² based upon readings of Jessamyn West²³ and Elfrida Vipont Foulds’²⁴ fiction, to establish that, historically at least, some Quakers have produced writing that others may consider to offer overly simplistic views of morality, the world, and Quakers’ roles within it. If we only consider the ethical versus moral writing feature, it is immediately clear that some Quakers do indeed demonstrate this feature whilst other, perhaps earlier, writers do not. There is also the possibility of Quakers writing for entertainment, rather than literary, purposes. This suggests that this QLA is partly a set of observations of currently available data, as well as a

²¹ Acts, 17:28.

²² Reynolds, “Quakers and Fiction,” 80-9.

²³ For biographical information see Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Jessamyn West: American Writer,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica online*, accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jessamyn-West>.

²⁴ For biographical information see M.S. Milligan and Edward H. Milligan, “Obituary of Elfrida Vipont,” *The Friend*, Vol. 150, No. 22 (1992): 621–22 and J. Robins and S. Tredrea, “Elfrida Vipont,” *Collecting Books and Magazines*, 2010, accessed May 30, 2020, <http://www.collectingbooksandmagazines.com/vipont.html>.

model offered of what Quaker literary writing might look like moving forward. Thus, a writer identifying as a Quaker might not produce work demonstrating this QLA. West and Foulds accepted the Testimonies²⁵ as understood by their Quaker Meetings and produced their writing sincerely. I do not challenge the grounds for this objection, but would refer back to the Quaker emphasis on ‘new light’.²⁶ In view of that, it is entirely in order to argue that ‘new light’ has now revealed fresh pathways that perhaps were not so obvious to writers such as West and Foulds. Just as everyone may absorb ambient values from their lived context, so it may well be that West and Foulds, and other Quaker writers from similar contexts, absorbed prevailing attitudes consistent with their particular Quaker groups, as well as from their broader social communities. Further, whilst Foulds was an unprogrammed British Quaker, she was raised in a more traditional context, predating British Quakerism’s incorporation of the concept of new light.²⁷ We must also bear in mind that West was an Evangelical Quaker, and so theologically aligned with a different branch of Quakerism to the one considered in this project.²⁸ That is one question among several that could be pursued through further academic research of a wider range of Quaker writers, considered in more detail below. Nevertheless, it is clear from the material considered in this dissertation that my two chosen writers do evidence this QLA.

We must also consider whether writers of other religious affiliations would produce work substantively different to that produced within the QLA that I am proposing. Working through

²⁵ To simplicity, truth, equality, peace, and sustainability, as referred to in Chapter 1 of this dissertation and outlined in *Quaker Faith and Practice* (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 19.41 – 19.44, 19.34 – 19.38, 19.39 – 19.40, 19.45 – 19.48, and Chapter 25 “Unity of creation”. Also in Britain Yearly Meeting, “Our work@ Sustainability,” *Quakers in Britain*, accessed May 16, 2020, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/sustainability>.

²⁶ BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.7.

²⁷ Evidenced, for example, in Chapter 26 “Reflections” in BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

²⁸ West was raised within Indiana Yearly Meeting, now aligned with Friends United Meeting, a broadly but clearly Christo-centric Quaker organisation which currently identifies its roots thus: ‘Emerging within a wider Christian renewal movement in the 1600’s, the first generation of Quakers were among many spiritual seekers yearning to be part of a fresh work of God....This discovery [of ‘Christ the Inward Teacher] caused Friends to understand themselves as participants in God’s work to restore “original Christianity.”’ (Friends United Meeting, “About Friends,” Friends United Meeting homepage, accessed Jun 4, 2020. <https://www.friendsunitedmeeting.org/about-friends/about-friends> .)

the features, I would expect that the first four ‘foundational’ features would very likely appear in their work, as I would expect them to appear in any work exhibiting literary quality. Coming to the fifth ‘sensitivity’ feature, we would expect this sensitivity to be formulated by the faith practised by the writer. Hence a Roman Catholic writer, based upon the writing of Flannery O’Connor for instance, may display a particular interest in such issues as eucharist, grace, sacrifice, and redemption. A Jewish writer might demonstrate concerns around an understanding of God’s relationship with humanity, social justice, and empathy with oppressed groups. A Buddhist writer could possibly evidence an interest in reincarnation, self-reflection, and insights garnered from silent meditation. Writers of other religious affiliations may well include material dealing with the liturgy and worship within their religion, or not concern themselves with that at all, but apply the values of their religious faith to the world in general. Insofar as a Quaker sensitivity is the linchpin of a text exhibiting QLA, so this question of sensitivity will be the deciding factor in a text produced by a writer of another religion, exhibiting a literary aesthetic derived from that faith position. There may well be close similarities between texts demonstrating religiously inspired literary aesthetics but also key differences.

If there is a distinctive QLA, this may raise questions around the utility of that aesthetic, either to writers working within such an aesthetic or readers experiencing it. In answer, I turn again to O’Connor’s comment upon the impact of religious dogma on imaginative writing:

A belief in fixed dogma cannot fix what goes on in life or blind the believer to it. It will, of course, add a dimension to the writer’s observation which many, in conscience, acknowledge exists, but as long as they *can* acknowledge is present in the work, they cannot claim that any freedom has been denied the artist.’²⁹

²⁹ O’Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 150.

Chris Alton makes an explicit connection between his identities as a Quaker and as an artist: ‘I approach art making as an act of witness, attempting to make contributions to culture that are deeply connected to my Quaker values’,³⁰ a position emphasised by Gross in his remarks connecting his Quakerism with his writing, and in turn with activism, quoted above in Chapter 3. Whilst Liberal Quakerism prides itself on being one of the least dogmatic of religious paths,³¹ it is still a religious path, with a particular direction and manner of egress. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘dogma’ as ‘An opinion, a belief...an arrogant declaration of opinion.... Doctrines or opinions, esp. on religious matters, laid down authoritatively or assertively’.³² The term has been subject to historical pejoration, but buried within this definition is the basic interpretation of it being a belief, applicable here. In terms of holding a belief which may be held persistently in the face of broader societal trends in favour of secularisation, Quakers may hold their beliefs ‘assertively’, to the extent that they will not discard them in response to external pressure, but will consider discarding or modifying them if this is felt to be called for by the ‘inner Light’.³³ In that sense, bearing in mind that Liberal Quakers are at pains not to proselytise to others, there is a belief within Quakerism which makes it distinctive, and that remains within the attendant sensibility, both making it clearly a QLA, but also allowing the writer a free hand to produce ethically honest and aesthetically effective imaginative writing.

³⁰ Alton, *Changing Ourselves, Changing the World*, 6.

³¹ For instance, see BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1.02.5 and also the “Perceptions of Truth” sub-section of Chapter 26 “Reflections” of *Quaker Faith and Practice* (26.30 – 26.41).

³² *Shorter Oxford*, 722.

³³ For discussion and description of the Quaker concept of ‘the Light’ in various forms see for instance BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 2.12, 2.66, 11.48, 13.09, and 19.25-32.

Possible objections to this Quaker Literary Aesthetic

There are further challenges that can be made to this QLA. It is possible that someone broadly in sympathy with Quaker values but avowedly not a Quaker might demonstrate QLA features to an extent. In response to this, again we must accept that the four ‘foundational’ features would be expected to be displayed to one extent or another in any case. Insofar as such a writer might personally, or through other religious affiliation, come to embrace the features of silence and an apophatic approach to the Divine, then it would be possible for these to be displayed. When we come to the central feature of Quaker sensibility, however, the landscape becomes more complex. To what extent an individual has, or displays, a particular sensibility may, at least to a certain point, be debatable. It may be that a writer might display a sensibility highly similar to that of a Liberal Quaker, without fully accepting the values of Liberal Quakerism.

However, as part of the development of this project, I began with the intention of pairing the work of Philip Gross with that of Gillian Allnutt, a poet who was a committed Quaker attender for five years³⁴ and who still declares herself in sympathy with Quaker values. On the face of things, Allnutt was a very promising inclusion in the project, with many instances of QLA features in her work. However, I ultimately came to feel that it would be more consistent and effective to exchange her poetry for that of Ruth’s, as Allnutt was less strongly affiliated with Quakerism. For instance, she acknowledged freely in interview that despite being open to the possibility of writing a ‘Quaker-themed’ poem during her time as a Quaker, she never in fact wrote one. She also remarked that an initial visit to a Quaker Meeting led to an internal response of, *‘The silence of the Quakers is atonal’*, which led to her not attending for a significant period, before finding a more congenial Quaker Meeting.

³⁴ In interview Allnutt informed me that she served in a pastoral oversight capacity during this time.

In conversation, Allnutt also commented to me that as far as she was concerned, the spiritual journal remained the most ‘Quakerly’ of literary genres: for her, poetry was a pursuit that could very well be engaged with by Quakers, but in her view was something beyond the purview of the Quaker spiritual experience. It was something written almost in spite of, rather than because of, one’s Quakerism. Based upon this, I felt it increasingly difficult to justify including her work, excellent though it is, in this current project. I accept that discussing a ‘sensibility’ does involve attempting to grapple with certain intangible concepts, something accentuated by the fact that Quakerism is a diverse movement, with members holding widely diverse interests and working styles, as displayed in the examples considered in this thesis. Nonetheless, the very fact that Allnutt does not personally consider that Quakerism is especially conducive for the production of poetry sets her at odds with such writers as Gross and Ruth who do not feel this. Furthermore, whilst it is clearly the case that much poetry produced by Quakers will not feature the lives and experiences of Quakers *per se*, it feels significant that Allnutt felt such a clear demarcation between her Quaker experience and her writing during her involvement. We must logically expect that a poet identifying as Quaker could possibly produce poetry about Quakers or Quakerism, in view of the fact that all writers must stand ready to produce work on any aspect of their own lives and experiences. Allnutt herself still practises regular meditation and is clearly a person with spiritual experience and perspective; she referred to the importance of meditation to her spiritual life journey several times during our field interview. However, she does not identify as a Quaker writer. It feels, even if the distinctions are relatively small, that they are significant. For this reason, I maintain that, irrespective of whether distinctions between work produced by Quaker writers and non-Quaker writers in sympathy with Quakerism may be fine, they nevertheless exist.

It could be suggested that writers who are mystics in their spiritual beliefs and practices yet are not Quakers could demonstrate something like the QLA. Whilst accepting that non-Quaker

mystics exist and produce imaginative writing just as effective as that produced by Quakers, my model of Quaker sensibility still acts as an acid test in this regard. Quaker sensibility as I have described it does include a mystical, apophatic apprehension of the Divine,³⁵ but it also requires several other defining characteristics, including acceptance of Quaker Testimonies, silent worship, and Quaker Business Method. Around all of this is also Quakers' location of themselves in one way or another within the ongoing story of Quaker life and history. It could be that a non-Quaker mystic is mystical without accepting all of the elements listed here, or alternatively may worship or meditate silently, take an apophatic approach to the Divine, discern right action through reflection and a surrendering of personal will, and embrace the values of simplicity, truth, equality, peace and sustainability. However, there will be some difference in flavour if someone espousing these views is a Jew, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, or something else, as the particular character of these views and practices will arise from a different set of experiences, a different narrative, in each case.

There is also the objection that there may be non-Quaker mystics who are more 'mystical' or charismatic³⁶ than Atheist or Non-Theist Quakers. Yet, this does not in itself invalidate the view that Quaker writers may draw upon a spiritual source in the course of their work. Further, even Non-theist Quakers are worshipping *something* even if some of them would reject the notion that they are worshipping *someone*.³⁷

It could also be objected that, perhaps as an exercise, someone not subscribing to Quakerism might seek to manufacture a text exhibiting the QLA features. In response to this, I would counter that the resulting work might very well look and feel like work produced by a Quaker,

³⁵ '...having direct spiritual significance, transcending human understanding' (*Shorter Oxford*, 1874).

³⁶ I am using the term 'charismatic' in its theological sense as meaning one who is seeking an immediate relationship with God or the Divine, from the Greek 'Charism' for 'gift'.

³⁷ The Constitution of the British Non-Theist Friends Network states 'We seek to explore theological and spiritual diversity and their practical implications, in respectful acceptance of different views, experiences, and journeys.' (Non-Theist Friends Network, "NFN Constitution," Non-Theist Friends Network, accessed Jun 21, 2020, <https://nontheistquakers.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/nfn-constitution-2016.pdf> .)

but would be something more in the order of parody or pastiche. Whilst certain of these features are shared by many different writers, and certain others may be displayed by writers who are not Quaker, the particular spiritual perspective offered by Quaker writers is, at some level, as ineluctable as that demonstrated by writers who are Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Atheist or of any distinctive position on spirituality. The final question of sensibility is around what position, what perspective, the writer is adopting, what their genuine, heartfelt values are, and how these values influence their writing. I would argue that parody or pastiche, whilst potentially interesting and worthwhile, operate specifically as parody or pastiche. In the event that for whatever reason a writer sought to give the reader the impression that they were a Quaker when they were not, then that would constitute a deliberate deception, certainly qualifying for censure under Lawrence's warning against placing one's 'thumb in the scale'.³⁸ Laurence Lerner cautioned that 'Quakers can't be fakers' in his Swarthmore Lecture: 'no poet must be allowed to impose an interpretation on his poem that it does not bear, for the poem is greater than the poet.'³⁹ This is true; any genuine creative artist, ultimately, cannot fake their work, or the spiritual, intellectual, cultural soil out of which it grows. It might be that a writer might successfully deceive readers, but it would essentially be a case of forgery and thus in some way invalid. I also direct our attention back to O'Connor, who makes a convincing case in favour of unvarnished engagement on the writer's part: 'No serious novelist "explores possibilities inherent in factors."' Conrad wrote that the artist "descends within himself, and in that region of streets and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal."⁴⁰ In other words, sincerity cannot be manufactured. Chicago Critic M.H. Abrams identifies how the concept of sincerity 'began in the early nineteenth century its career as the primary criterion, if not the *sine qua non*, of excellence in

³⁸ Lawrence, *Phoenix*, 528; quoted previously in Chapter 3.

³⁹ Lerner, *The Two Cinnas*, 48.

⁴⁰ O'Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 196.

poetry.⁴¹ This sincerity, for our purposes here, must be both internal and external, guaranteeing honest expression of spontaneous emotions from within as well as an honest attention to detail without. Writers must be nakedly and fully engaged in the creative process to have the opportunity to convince others – otherwise they are behaving insincerely and do not convince the reader or themselves. Of course, sincerity can come in many forms, including other religious as well as atheist perspectives. Further, there have been strong challenges to the centrality of the concept of sincerity.⁴² Bearing this in mind, I will now consider the work of a poet writing from an Atheist position, Clare Pollard, and a Roman Catholic poet, Michael Symmons Roberts, in order to consider a little further whether this QLA is distinctive, and what poetry created from other spiritual perspectives may be like.

Clare Pollard: Analysis

Pollard is a contemporary, award-winning writer⁴³ with the same publisher as Gross.⁴⁴ *Look, Clare! Look!*⁴⁵ concerns a world trip, reflecting on globalisation, the disparity between developed and developing worlds, and the trip's tragic aftermath: arriving home, Pollard learnt that her father was terminally ill with cancer. His funeral was on New Year's Eve.

Pollard is avowedly concerned with engagement: 'poetry is the opposite of propaganda...writing about the world we live in – good and evil, fear and

⁴¹ Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 318.

⁴² For instance, Patricia Meyer Spack, "In Search of Sincerity," *College English*, Vol. 29, No. 8 (1968): 591-602; also, Jacques Derrida's questioning of the accepted sincerity of a speech act in *Limited Inc* (4th ed.) (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

⁴³ Her first collection, *The Heavy-Petting Zoo* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 1998) won an Eric Gregory Award and her fourth collection, *Changeling* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2011) received a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. (Clare Pollard, "Clare's Official Site," accessed May 15, 2020, <https://clarepollard.wordpress.com/about-clare/>.)

⁴⁴ The noted poetry publisher Bloodaxe Books Ltd.

⁴⁵ Pollard, Clare. *Look, Clare! Look!* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books Ltd., 2005).

freedom,...relationships with [others] – is really interesting.’⁴⁶ Nevertheless, these poems have a different texture to Gross’ and Ruth’s, at least partly because they do not incorporate the full QLA. Pollard agrees with this reading, remarking that since writing it, her position has become more Agnostic.⁴⁷ I argue strongly that the four ‘foundational’ QLA features (openness, ambiguity and seeking; dialogical engagement; ethical not moral writing; and creative attention) are all present. There is certainly a sensibility, but avowedly Atheist. With regards to the final two, ‘optional’, features: silence features intermittently, with no evidence of an apophatic approach to the Divine, consonant with Pollard’s Atheist sensibility when writing it.

World trip

Pollard draws in the full range of her observations and encounters. “Vietnam”⁴⁸ knits together her visit there, the Vietnam War, and global economic exploitation. Openness, ambiguity and seeking are clearly applied in observed details. A family rides a motorbike: ‘child at the front...dad behind...mum clutching on’, conveying physical closeness between relatives, onomatopoeic present participle ‘clutching’ signalling the effort such closeness requires. The image’s authenticity creates enchantment,⁴⁹ not the only effect. The same feature seamlessly shifts to a tour guide’s war memories: ‘*we didn’t hate the GIs./...just kids, how could we hate them?*’. Creative attention is demonstrated in deft detail reifying Vietnamese life, the evocative collocations of ‘narrow peach and workwear blue’, ‘mint leaves and boiled beef bone’. Also, the jarring litany of guerrilla booby traps: sibilant metaphor ‘sea-urchins of steel’; alliterative

⁴⁶ C. Griffin, “Poetry Interview: Clare Pollard,” *Wales Arts Review*, 2013, accessed Jun 1, 2020, <https://www.walesartsreview.org/poetry-interview-clare-pollard/>.

⁴⁷ ‘I would definitely have considered myself atheist when I wrote *Look, Clare! Look! yes - although as I get older, I distrust more and more anyone at all who claims knowledge of how the universe works, atheists included, and have erred towards agnostic....*’ (Private email to me, 22nd May, 2020.)

⁴⁸ Pollard, *Look, Clare! Look!*, 17.

⁴⁹ ‘close reading is about intoxication rather than detachment’; ‘Enchantment is characterised by a state of intense involvement’ (Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 51, 54).

and sibilant ‘bamboo beast-pits/ spiked with cobra poison for a slow death’, evidencing ethical writing in unflinching honesty around war’s relentless horror. In this precision Pollard offers meaningful knowledge: these guerrilla weapons are novel in their detail, but we knew such weapons were used by both sides. These details carry a genuine degree of shock, which works most effectively when it ‘resists our most heartfelt values.’⁵⁰ This poem neatly opens up violence, military and economic, that was and is wreaked. The closing line, ‘We are the same age as those GIs’ works on multiple levels, reflecting the persona’s vulnerability but also moral complicity in Vietnam’s ongoing exploitation. This is amplified in the dialogical engagement with a local man ‘who earned \$17 dollars a week’: with their relative wealth, Pollard and her partner felt ‘obscene,/ were obscene’. Pollard strikes a fine balance between different perspectives, evidencing that ‘it is possible for shock...to blur the distinction between self and other, to unravel the uncertainty of one’s own convictions rather than sustaining them.’⁵¹

This is counterpointed by “America”,⁵² relating the grimy reality of a vast capitalist state combining material, emotional and cultural plenitude and poverty:

Burgers were sold on every SUV-choked corner –
sat greasy and obese in processed buns –
that cost \$1, all we could afford.

The collocation ‘greasy and obese’ ties together unhealthy food with the damage wreaked on consumers, amplified in later personification as ‘heart-muting and salivating all over themselves’. The unsparing details offer openness, ambiguity and seeking, ethical writing and

⁵⁰ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 110.

⁵¹ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 110.

⁵² Pollard, *Look, Clare! Look!*, 26-27.

creative attention reifying an unpleasant situation: these burgers ‘appear to us...both utterly familiar yet newly mysterious in their rediscovered proximity and presence.’⁵³

However, sacramentalising creative attention is also present. Pollard remembers the roadside view from a bus: ‘condors cutting through a canyon so huge, so red/ that your heart has to expand to meet it’, the alliteration, repetition, direct address and metaphor capturing a moment of natural enchantment. Yet the persona continues to report on a litany of consumerist items (‘steak, pizza, pasta, prime rib... Vegas caps and cups, the tat with tits’), ending with a sandwich of ‘2 inches of pastrami’, the rhetorical question inviting dialogical engagement: ‘Who needs that much pastrami?’ This is both recognition of and shock at capitalistic extremes for us to reflect on, personally and generally.

Bereavement

“My Father and the Snow”⁵⁴ interconnects Pollard’s world trip with a childhood New Year’s Eve and recent tragedy. We again have the openness, ambiguity and seeking of seemingly random details:

...heading to the Summer Palace with Rich,
pausing to purchase jiaozi in their glass skins,
crinkled like new kittens.

Her partner’s nickname, the alliterative ‘pausing...purchase’, and the affectionate, tactile onomatopoeia and simile of ‘crinkled like new kittens’ project comfort and confidence.

Alongside this, capitalist incursions into Chinese society are noted:

(although around us new China is weakening the surface with

⁵³ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 102.

⁵⁴ Pollard, *Look, Clare! Look!*, 60-2.

high-heels,
skating in its Sunday best, swigging *Sprites*).

Personification, metaphor and sibilance amplify the creative attention here to develop a convincing portrait of the situation being related. This authentic sense then evolves into childhood memories: ‘curried eggs and vol-au-vents...my sister and me carried across the road/ from strange beds to our own’. Next day, Pollard, her sister, and father went sledging, this memory reified through onomatopoeia: ‘My cheeks ring with coldness. My nose/ babbles with snot...’ This writing offers another version of ‘improvisational subjectivity’,⁵⁵ allowing readers to self-project into an authentic moment of experience.

The sledging continues happily, but with foreshadowing:

Another go we chant,
until lamps ping on along the horizon,
and snow starts to twinkle with dark blue eyes.

Sibilance, onomatopoeia and personification here beautifully recall treasured memory, whilst suggesting a growing sinister sense of a watching, impersonal, indifferent force.

The final section applies ethical honesty to Pollard’s grief, again implying an Atheist sensibility: ‘the church bell/ throbs like ice against a bad tooth.’ Onomatopoeia and simile here suggest that religious symbology offers little comfort. The precarious consolation continues:

At the wake there are so many stories –
how my dad liked the horses and banana milkshakes,
or made them watch the fight scenes from *Zulu* –
and he endures, I guess, in that, but not enough,
and so I drink too much.

⁵⁵ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 25.

The triplet is again deliberately quotidian, universalising the details. What consolation it offers is minimal, the informal hedge ‘I guess’ signalling uncertainty, immediately reduced by the bald statement ‘not enough’. Again, the grief is searing, again suggesting an Atheist view that immediate actuality is all there is. Nevertheless, Pollard continues seeking consolation and meaning, returning to the final epiphany of herself as a young girl being lifted from where she had fallen:

... I think it was my father
wiped my eyes and said: ‘Don’t cry, Clare.

Look, Clare! Look! The snow!’

Pollard ‘ties a loop in nothing’,⁵⁶ reconnecting to this beautiful memory, emphasising the born writer’s overriding urge to observe and render telling detail, echoing Gross’ exhortation to ‘Look! Really *look!*’,⁵⁷ leaving the reader with an epiphany, offering partial solace in the face of tragedy.

Concluding remarks

The first four features are clearly present in these poems with their Atheist sensibility ‘capstone’. Silence is evidenced in passing, for instance in the elliptical expression of pain ‘we’ve burnt him (that coffin so small, I can’t.)’⁵⁸ There is no apophatic approach to the Divine in these poems. Briefly reviewing the presence of the Quaker Testimonies, I would argue that Simplicity is not especially present, given the fact that the persona accepts relatively privileged Western status. There is no explicit call for a radical shift, rather tangible discomfort, for

⁵⁶ D’Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 133.

⁵⁷ Gross, Fulleylove and Gross, “No Artform is an Island.”

⁵⁸ In “My Father and the Snow” (Pollard, *Look, Clare! Look!*, 60-2).

instance in the rhetorical question, ‘Who needs that much pastrami?’. Truth-telling is detectable in the unvarnished record of Pollard’s journey, presented without commentary, for readers’ consideration. Equality is present in the presentation of the people Pollard engages with. Peace is demonstrated in the shock at the war horrors recounted. Sustainability is flagged in the disgust at conspicuous consumption. There is no extended concern with the natural environment, although it appears in glimmers, such as ‘the Grand Canyon shimmering sometimes in a haze of filth’.⁵⁹ This poetry is powerful, but particular Quaker Testimonies, netted around by silent worship and an apophatic approach to the Divine, are not present, altering its impact.

The poetry here is aesthetically satisfying and intellectually effective. Yet I still distinguish between Pollard’s poetry and Gross’ and Ruth’s. All three are concerned with concrete reality. All three convincingly reify concrete reality in their search for poetic transcendence. I argue, however, that Pollard’s transcendence remains purely within the world-as-it-is. As she has stated, this collection was written from a firmly Atheist perspective (amplified by deliberate undercapitalisation in ‘Oh god is there never enough time’).⁶⁰ However, the persona’s reaching out does suggest a spiritual search, albeit qualitatively different to when there is a clearer sense of the Divine. Pollard’s position has since evolved to Agnosticism. That does not alter the fact that these poems vary discernibly in certain particulars from those written by Gross and Ruth.

I would argue that Pollard’s work here is powerful, and expresses Nicola Slee’s ‘symbolic force’, but does so through technical ability and total attention to immediate reality, rendering it excellent poetry, but texturally different to that of Quaker poets. Slee’s manifesto for poetry considers that ‘it needs to speak for those for whom religious vocabulary and speech are not

⁵⁹ In “America” (Pollard, *Look, Clare! Look!*, 26-7).

⁶⁰ In “My Father and the Snow” (Pollard, *Look, Clare! Look!*, 62).

only foreign but also empty and redundant, devoid of symbolic force'.⁶¹ Bearing in mind that this would be a notion only applicable to religiously affiliated writers, that is a process that is worked out in Gross' and Ruth's work considered in Chapter 3, with each of the QLA features woven into their poetry's fabric, speaking with 'symbolic force'. This dimension is acknowledged explicitly through some form of spiritual faith. Quakerism's particularly open and apophatic spiritual approach lends a certain character to this dimension within Quaker poetry.

Michael Symmons Roberts: Analysis

Having considered the work of an Atheist poet, I now turn to a poet of faith, Michael Symmons Roberts. I consider poems from Roberts' *Selected Poems*⁶² plus one Internet publication here.⁶³ Raised a non-believer, he became militantly Atheist in adolescence, choosing to study Philosophy and Theology at (Christian) Regent's Park College, Oxford, in order to 'convert' Christians to Atheism. However, Philosophy gradually wore away the foundations of his Atheism: 'I realised that atheism was just as culturally conditioned as being a Catholic....no framework of thought...can be completely objective. I have exactly the same problem with unquestioning religious dogmatism.'⁶⁴ Indeed, Roberts draws creative strength from 'the constant dialogue between faith and doubt' in his poetry.⁶⁵ This sceptical, open-minded

⁶¹ D'Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 14.

⁶² Michael Symmons Roberts, *Selected Poems* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016).

⁶³ Michael Symmons Roberts, "Nativity Scene in Bullet-Time," *Poetry*, 2016, accessed Jun 1 2020, poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/90667/nativity-scene-in-bullet-time .

⁶⁴ M. Cullen, "Philosophy undermined my atheism," *The Catholic Herald Online*, 2010, accessed Jun 1, 2020, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/philosophy-undermined-my-atheism/> , n.p.

⁶⁵ Quoted in A. Dautch, "The Edge of Thought: On Michael Symmons Roberts," *The Wildcourt*, 2016, accessed Jun 4, 2020, <https://wildcourt.co.uk/poetryand/the-edge-of-thought-on-michael-symmons-roberts/> . Dautch goes on to praise 'the resulting creative tension' as being a 'rich source for his poetry.'

approach has led Jeanette Winterson to dub him ‘a religious poet in a secular age’,⁶⁶ but Roberts himself focusses more upon the craft of writing than any particular message:

I don’t include consciously inserted spiritual ideas.... If you start a poem with an idea the poem either risks falling flat, or just becoming instrumental as a way of illustrating it through fancy language. Poems aren’t that: you discover what it is you’re trying to say through trying to say it. In that sense poetry is a volatile art.⁶⁷

This attitude echoes Gross’ view of poetry as self-discovery,⁶⁸ an understanding also embraced by the Diviners, where Slee invokes Adrienne Rich: ‘poems are like dreams, in them you put what you don’t know you know.’⁶⁹ Roberts’ approach has been successful.⁷⁰ It also releases him from the pitfalls of being a religious propagandist, warned against by O’Connor:

...for many writers it is easier to assume universal responsibility for souls than it is to produce a work of art...to save the world...[not]...the work. This view probably owes as much to romanticism as to piety, but the writer will not be liable to entertain it unless it has been foisted on him by a sorry education or unless writing is not his vocation in the first place.’⁷¹

O’Connor repeatedly calls upon spiritually committed writers to attend to immediate reality, to make contact with the ultimate reality interpenetrating it. This is certainly the path followed by Roberts, leading to work as transformative as more consciously spiritual work. O’Connor’s conception of literary vocation is, simply, ‘what...an artist...is bound to do’: if writers obey

⁶⁶ Cullen, “Philosophy undermined my atheism,” n.p.

⁶⁷ Cullen, “Philosophy undermined my atheism,” n.p.

⁶⁸ In our interview, Gross remarked, ‘I’ve got very little interest in the stance that sees writing as simply self-expression, because I hear that as meaning it’s just telling people what you already think you know about yourself, but I think by and large what we think we know about ourselves is the least interesting part of us, especially our opinions. I think the extent to which writing unearths complexities and differences, layers within us... You know, that is its value, that brings out things we didn’t know were within the orbit of what I regard as myself. I didn’t know that I had access to that, I didn’t know that that is part of what constitutes me.’

⁶⁹ D’Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 11.

⁷⁰ He has won, amongst others, the Eric Gregory Award, the Whitbread Poetry Award, and the Forward Prize. (Roberts, Michael Symmons, “About,” Michael Symmons Roberts: Homepage, accessed Jun 1, 2020, <https://symmonsroberts.com/about/>.)

⁷¹ O’Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 149-150.

this, they ‘will inevitably suggest that image of ultimate reality as it can be glimpsed in some aspect of the human situation’,⁷² and clearly evidenced in Roberts’ work.

Science

In “Nativity Scene in Bullet-Time”,⁷³ Roberts applies microscopic attention to a frozen moment, applying openness, ambiguity and seeking, and creative attention applied in the sense of a sacramentalising attention. The persona asks why the frozen moment should not ‘let/ fireworks burst, then hold their sculpted light?’ before wandering ‘this liberated city’, spying ‘A couple caught mid-kiss’, their waiter ‘balanced on one foot/ with eyes of steel and arms of plates’. The post-modified noun phrase ‘eyes of steel’, understood in terms of ethical writing, unlocks further our understanding of difficult lives.

The only explicitly religious references are ‘Nativity’, and ‘A self-appointed prophet... caught halfway through a lie’. The ‘prophet’ and ‘lie’ are unidentified, conscious ambiguity leaving the possibility open that they may be a political, not a religious, prophet. The exploration continues, of ‘punters and the pole dancer’, automatic familiarity with lurid reality telegraphed through alliterative collocation. Silence is implicit in ‘this city-wide hiatus,/ the cost per minute is prohibitive’, the moral impact of deep consideration indelible. Thus, persona and implied reader ‘barely linger in this midnight space/ before words rush back, before kiss meets kiss’, releasing us with a changed perspective allowing for the noumenal whilst attending to immediate detail, invoking both O’Connor and Felski’s recognition of things as they are.

⁷² O’Connor, *Mystery & Manners*, 158.

⁷³ Michael Symmons Roberts, “Nativity Scene in Bullet-Time,” *Poetry*, 2016, accessed Jun 1 2020, poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/90667/nativity-scene-in-bullet-time .

The Spiritual

“The Wounds”⁷⁴ is more explicitly spiritual, applying openness, ambiguity and seeking to war, recounting details with ethical honesty, developing them through creative attention. During a war, a nameless fugitive tends a crashed pilot, ‘his skin// dried out by wind and sun...blood-lines// stripe his brow’. The weather collocation invokes the natural world, concatenated with imagery of Christ’s torture. Roberts creates a tangible environment with universal significance: the pilot is discovered ‘amid the yellow blooms, the thorns’. Swiftly, a sense of pursuit is adumbrated: ‘Somebody is after me,/...they never stop to sleep.’ The indefinite pronoun universalises the pursuit, the sibilant ‘stop to sleep’ amplifying its relentlessness. This ambiguity probes the pursuers’ identity: they could be the pilot’s enemies, police seeking the persona, or perhaps God. Thus, the ‘gorse cell’ where the persona tends the pilot could represent imprisonment or monastic observance. The persona vainly seeks clarity through a question presented in an asyndetic triplet: ‘which war,// which world, which side,/ but he says nothing’, strengthening the sense of sacrifice, further heightened by the stigmatic ‘bullet-hole/ in his left hand’.

The persona discovers a ‘deeper wound’ on the pilot’s right hand. The lacuna around the persona’s interest in this man is entirely appropriate, one fugitive empathising with another. Out of this scene the eucharist erupts: the pilot’s hands contain ‘a catch of blood and rain’; the ‘parched’ fugitive drinks: ‘for a moment all the ersatz/ world, its coincidence and chaos,// feels inevitable, utter’. Winterson’s words are recalled here, with one of the central Catholic sacraments brought into an external, devastated world, evidencing human kindness and divine salvation.

⁷⁴ Roberts, *Selected Poems*, 127, 135, 141, 147, 152.

The pilot's quiddity is intimately connected with nature. The persona wonders 'if he crashed...or...broke from some aberrant seed', rendered insubstantial, ready to be 'picked off/ by starving winter birds,' before rooting him as an immovable detail: 'instead he grew twisted,// too heavy to move.' O'Connor's concrete detail returns, immutable. The cycle concludes with growing desperation:

I wince at the sound
of an engine, slam of a door.

I cannot save this pilot,
not with such a loss of blood.

So I rip his shirt to bare
the largest wound,

beneath his ribs. I tear
the wound lips wider still,

climb inside and hide.

Desperate fear lies in the dynamic verb 'wince', the swift judgment to abandon the pilot, after days of nursing. The violent onomatopoeic verbs 'rip' and 'tear' follow, the second of these reinforced by the rhyme with 'bare': the fearful nurse now attacks their patient; the poem descends into wider, deeper metaphor, amplified by alliteration in 'wound lips wider' and the final, childish collocation 'climb inside and hide', reinforced by internal rhyme. Throughout the cycle, the persona has engaged physically with the pilot, delineating dialogical engagement, discovering a role through this connection. The closing image may represent an ultimate betrayal or an inevitable extension of this.

The compression of sacrifice, communion and salvation, is at once both immediate and noumenal. Roberts adroitly stitches Felski's recognition, in this case of the Divine within both quotidian and war-damaged, into our shock at the final, unsentimental cruelty. Yet, on at least one level, this is eucharistic Christianity. Whether the persona is concealed or discovered, what discovery will bring (we recall that the pursuer could be enemy or God) is left suspended.

Concluding remarks

We have again established that the first four features of the QLA are located in the poems considered. Silence is intermittently detectable, for instance in the lack of dialogue in "The Wounds"; an apophatic approach to the Divine is also powerfully present.

I now turn to sensibility, and whether this is discernibly Roman Catholic rather than Quaker. Again, considering the Quaker Testimonies, the picture is mixed. Through attention to microscopic details, for example in "Nativity Scene in Bullet-Time", the poems here display Simplicity, albeit a specific understanding of it. In their unremitting focus on epiphany, all poems illustrate Truth. Where different figures are accorded equivalent status, where the waiter is considered alongside the couple, where persona tends nameless pilot, Equality is evidenced. Peace is not explicitly explored in every poem. The unflinching depiction of violence presents it in "The Wounds", although there is a certain acceptance of violence: without it, sacrifice and resulting grace would perhaps be impossible. In his valuing of the underpinning basis of the natural world in "Nativity Scene in Bullet-Time", and tactile reality in "The Wounds", Roberts illustrates Sustainability. Dedication to Catholic eucharistic sacraments is evidenced through imagery in "The Wounds". I am neither a practising Roman Catholic or an expert on Catholic theology, yet I submit that a case can be made for Roberts' work containing a Roman Catholic sensibility, intensely informed by its liturgy and symbolism. Whilst there are clear points of

convergence between Quaker and Roman Catholic sensibilities, there is also divergence, one key example being Quakers' silent worship liturgy⁷⁵ as opposed to the employment of music, song, Bible readings, sermons, prayers and other ritual in Roman Catholic services.⁷⁶

As a writer of faith, Roberts more obviously fulfils Slee's call for religious poetry to 'speak for those for whom religious vocabulary and speech are not only foreign but also empty and redundant'.⁷⁷ The QLA's 'foundational' features are perceptible in his work, as are silence and an apophatic approach to the Divine. It is his Roman Catholic sensibility that renders his work to a certain extent different to Gross' and Ruth's.

I now consider what original contribution this research offers, and implications for extant and future research.

Original Contribution and Research Implications

Original Contribution

My main argument is that these QLA features, whilst possibly displayed by other writers of faith or none (excepting Quaker sensibility), are all demonstrated by the Quaker writers analysed here, as an outworking in this context of particular values and the silent, apophatic approach to religious worship and discernment found amongst British Liberal Quakers, brought over into imaginative literary writing. The field that has been considered here is necessarily limited by dissertation length, and the need for a manageable sample of work within one genre. Should this research be taken forward, it would be beneficial to explore the presence of these

⁷⁵ For example, see "Chapter 2: Approaches to God – worship and prayer" (BYM, *Quaker Faith and Practice*) especially the section on "Silent Waiting", 2.12-17, as noted above.

⁷⁶ For a description of Roman Catholic liturgy, see Vatican, "Catechism of the Catholic Church: Part Two," as noted above.

⁷⁷ D'Costa et al, *Making Nothing Happen*, 14.

features within other genres as well as poetry: fictional and non-fictional prose and drama. It is also important to consider writers identifying as Quaker from a more diverse range of ethnic, national, cultural and theological backgrounds. My own preliminary research suggests that there are indeed both historical and contemporary writers occupying all these categories.⁷⁸

Implications for Extant Scholarship

This dissertation has drawn on, and benefitted from, previous scholarship in the area of Quaker writing and Quaker engagement with literature and the arts. In particular, Diane Reynolds' model of ethical writing is invaluable, as well as Nancy Jiwon Cho's work on Quaker engagement with literature and James Hood's article on changing Quaker reading tastes, referenced above.

I suggest that the model of a QLA in this dissertation offers an application of Reynolds' ethical writing model within Liberal Quakerism, indicating one way in which readers can understand Quaker writing, and a possible roadmap for Quaker writers who wish to conceptualise their writing within the frame of Quakerism. Moreover, this project offers some further evidence and analysis with which to contextualise Cho's wider-ranging consideration of Quaker literary engagement, as well as Hood's reflections on the impact of reading on evolving Quaker literary tastes, suggesting ways in which Quakers have fashioned their responses to literature in their own literary output.

⁷⁸ For the sake of concision and clarity, I will footnote the following example names. I limit myself here to three or four examples in each case, although often there are far more names that could be included, with certain writers often straddling more than one category of interest.

Implications for Future Research

There are several notable examples of other successful Quaker poets of British,⁷⁹ American,⁸⁰ and other nationalities.⁸¹ There are also several British⁸² and American⁸³ novelists. Genre fiction, such as crime, science fiction and horror feature Quaker practitioners.⁸⁴ Related to this is a strong showing of children's writers.⁸⁵ Drama offers perhaps slightly fewer practitioners, but still of great interest.⁸⁶ Writers of various types of journalism, humour and polemic have been found,⁸⁷ as well as several BAME writers.⁸⁸ Writers with LGBTQ concerns are also active.⁸⁹

Next steps will include testing this QLA against the work of these, and other writers, to ascertain if they do indeed display it. Alongside this, there will also be the necessity to consider whether this QLA is solely an appropriate and helpful lens within a Liberal Quaker context, or if it is suitable for analysing literature within other contexts, or forms the basis of an expanded QLA that can be meaningfully applied. This QLA is a contribution to my original question around what is happening when people of faith make literature.

⁷⁹ Including: Lamb's friend and associate Bernard Barton, Welsh-language poet Waldo Williams, and colleagues (and partners) U.A. Fanthorpe and R.V. Bailey.

⁸⁰ For instance, Abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, Afro-American Helen Morgan Brooks, and Anglo-American economist and poet Kenneth E. Boulding.

⁸¹ For example, Kenyan academic and poet Everett Standa, Nitobe Inazo (Japanese), Gerard Hoffnung (German), and Glen Retief (South African).

⁸² For instance, Amelia Opie, Elfrida Vipont Foulds, and Garry Kilworth.

⁸³ Including: Jessamyn West, Jean Toomer, and Tracey Chevalier.

⁸⁴ Witness W.F. Harvey (crime and horror), Chuck Fager (horror) and Joan Slonczewski (science-fiction).

⁸⁵ For example, Ian Serraillier, Elizabeth Gray Vining, and Sally Nichols.

⁸⁶ For instance, Christopher Fry, Jan de Hartog, and Charlotte Jones.

⁸⁷ Including Milton Mayer, Sandra Boyton, and Declan Hill.

⁸⁸ For example, George Sawyer and Mahala Ashley Dickerson were Afro-American writers, in addition to Toomer and Brooks.

⁸⁹ Including Stephen Donaldson and Peterson Toscano, amongst others.

Final Remarks

Throughout this thesis, I have emphasised that for Liberal Quakers truth is not a single, final destination, but rather an unfolding path that never ends, although that does not mean that there is no truth that can be profitably sought. Consideration of the efficacy and honesty of literary writing is as old as writing itself; Aristotle offered stern rebuke to any work ‘impossible, irrational, immoral, inconsistent or technically at fault’,⁹⁰ remarking that such a writer deserved audiences to misunderstand their work and to ‘censure him [sic] as though he had actually said what they ascribe to him.’⁹¹

The QLA presented here is an attempt to clarify the type of work a writer identifying as being a Quaker might produce from within their religious sensibility. This QLA offers a taste of what it is like to be a Liberal Quaker. A reader from outside of the Quaker community with little or no experience of Quakerism will gain from reading a text demonstrating this QLA some sense of how a Liberal Quaker views the world.

The QLA offers a clear flavour of what Quaker writers may be writing now, *qua* Gross and Ruth. It also offers a model for Quaker writers to proceed in terms of imaginative writing, supporting Reynolds. Writing resulting from that does not have to be about Quaker lives or behaviour; the majority of the poems considered here do not explicitly handle Quaker behaviour or experience, although some do address that material. It is some time since most Quakers decided to do away with their ‘hedge’⁹² and engage fully in the wider world. Yet, the nature of that Quaker engagement, and the question as to whether the Quaker hedge has been completely removed or to what extent it remains, are questions contingent upon the varied

⁹⁰ In T.S. Dorsch, T.S., ed, *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965): 74.

⁹¹ In T.S. Dorsch, T.S., ed, *Classical Literary Criticism*, 73.

⁹² As described in Angell and Dandelion, *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, 132-5.

contexts within Quakerism and still subject to investigation.⁹³ This QLA contributes to its clearer configuration.

As I have acknowledged, the QLA explored in this dissertation is not necessarily the only or final one. Quaker writers adhering to more evangelical theology may hold different Quaker sensibilities. The features explored in this project could be reinterpreted within changing contexts. Further features could be included within this model. This QLA is a snapshot of how Quaker writing works within these texts. This is not intended as a definitive statement, but rather contributing to ongoing discussion.

We conclude where we began, with Pointing's sense that 'Along the paths of the imagination the artist and the mystic make contact'. The nature of that truth is a trembling, liminal, evolving thing. Truth, as I have sought to demonstrate in this dissertation, is multi-faceted and protean, pursuing it a beguiling, rewarding adventure.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have considered some key questions and potential objections arising from my argument for a QLA. I have considered the work of two other contemporary British poets, one avowedly Atheist, the other Catholic. I have considered how certain QLA features are at times demonstrated, but that the vital feature of Quaker sensibility is not. I have discussed to what extent a QLA might be distinctive, and briefly considered the possible characteristics of literary aesthetics shaped by other perspectives. I have argued that there is indeed a discernible QLA in the work of Philip Gross and Sybil Ruth, and have offered terms upon which this QLA can be applied to other Quaker imaginative writing. I have outlined possible implications for

⁹³ For instance, see Angell and Dandelion, *Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, 558-60.

approaching extant scholarship, and next steps for further research, in terms of different categories of Quaker writers, including specific examples of writers, that might be profitable avenues of research, building upon my work here. I have finally discussed why a QLA is useful, and set it within a meaningful context, so that it can operate in dialogue with other concepts and theories.

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