

**“Never Towing a Line”:
Les Murray, Autism, and Australian Literature**

Amanda Tink

Doctor of Philosophy

Western Sydney University

2022

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to:

Grandpa Doug Green (1929-2014)

Grandma Daphne Green (1930-2019)

Uncle Ken Green (1958-2020)

Knowing them was a blessing, and their support of me and this thesis was energising and sustaining.

Acknowledgements

To Adrian Rak, Professor David Walker and Associate Professor Karen Walker, Dr Edwina Light and Associate Professor Michael Robertson, Dr Gaelle Sobott, Dr Kate Fagan, Professor Suresh Canagarajah, and Yvonne Edgren, you have enriched my thesis researching and writing. Thank you for your thoughtful kindnesses, and for your support for this thesis in particular, and my writing in general.

To Daniel Tammet, Jason Parker-Burlingham, Dr Jessica White, and Dr Warwick Abrahams, thank you for reading and responding to my thesis with such generosity and enthusiasm, and for sharing your expertise with me. Your insights, suggestions, and encouragement were invaluable.

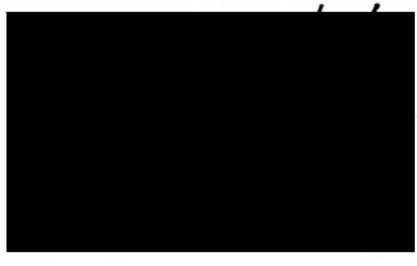
My thanks to my Practical Assistant Lynn McDonald, who did all of the describing, scanning, and formatting necessary to ensure I had access to every inaccessible document I wanted to read, and always with care and dedication. In very real and fundamental ways, this thesis would not have been possible without you.

To my supervisor Professor Ivor Indyk, thank you for wandering through this unexplored terrain with me, and for sharing my curiosity while balancing it with canniness. Thanks too for strong coffee (in pre-pandemic times), thought-provoking conversation, and your consistently considerate suggestions for strengthening my work.

To my partner Bruce Maguire, thank you for thinking and talking Les Murray with me, every day, for all these years, for your humour and practicality, for so many helpful comments on so many drafts of this thesis, and for organising good coffee, chocolate, and all of the other essentials so that I could make it through to the end.

Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



Abstract

Australian poet Les Murray regularly identified as autistic, and stated that his autism was a primary source of his poetry. However, Australian critics rarely consider his autism when discussing his work and, when they do, usually treat it negatively. By contrast, this thesis adopts a nuanced conception of autism, and examines its creative impact on Murray's writing.

Through close analysis of a range of Murray's poems and his second verse novel *Fredy Neptune*, I demonstrate the centrality to Murray's writing of a number of poetic techniques which have been associated with autistic experience, and with the experience of disablement more generally. In particular, I utilise the characteristics of Jim Ferris's "crip poetics" and posit two others – "enhanced audience awareness" and "resisting erasure". I also make use of the autistic poetic techniques defined by Julia Rodas and suggest Murray's "line scan" and "cross resonance" as possible additions.

Similarly, Murray's poetic topics resonate with common autistic and disabled considerations. Throughout his six-decade career he wrote of his own and his son Alexander's experiences of autism, as the cultural awareness of autism was transformed from negligible to ubiquitous. He also regularly referred to the Nazi genocide of disabled people, seeking to comprehend its implications and reverberations for his own kind. Surrounding and infusing his treatment of these concerns is a delight in disabled kinship, a simultaneously awkward and wondrous engagement with the world, and a life-long devotion to language.

Murray's writing affirms the centrality of disabled authors to Australian literature, and exemplifies the importance of recognising disability as a critical category. Furthermore, since it is currently understood that the first autistic author was published in 1985, Murray's collections, beginning in 1965, extend autistic writing history by twenty years.

Contents

Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One – Background	29
Chapter Two – Poems on Autism	73
“Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver”	74
“It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen”	88
Chapter Three – Poems of Autism	107
“Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands”	108
“Interest” Poems.....	120
Chapter Four – <i>Fredy Neptune</i> Books I and II.....	132
Book I – The Middle Sea	139
Book II – Barking at the Thunder	169
Chapter Five – <i>Fredy Neptune</i> Books III and IV	201
Book III – Prop Sabres	201
Book IV – The Police Revolution	227
Chapter Six – <i>Fredy Neptune</i> Book V	260
Book V – Lazarus Unstuck	260
Conclusion.....	296
Bibliography.....	302

Introduction

DANIEL TAMMET: You feel like you don't belong, you can't ever belong.

And...

LES MURRAY: I know that feeling.

DANIEL TAMMET: You know that feeling.

LES MURRAY: Avoiding human company and various...

DANIEL TAMMET: Yes.

LES MURRAY: Wonderful!!!!!! Yes! He knows!!! He knows!!!!

This rich expression of autistic kinship occurred on the evening of Thursday 24 September 2015 at a bistro in Paris. After three years of contact by mail, the Australian poet Les Murray and his French translator Daniel Tammet were meeting in person for the first time.²

The next evening, at Maison de la Poésie (The House of Poetry), Murray and Tammet co-presented a session of conversation and poetry in the Festival des Écrivains du Monde (World Writers' Festival). The book central to their session was *C'est une chose sérieuse que d'être parmi les hommes* (*It is serious to be with humans*), a collection of forty of Murray's poems, chosen and translated into French by Tammet. Following their session, when Murray began signing copies of the book and discovered that Tammet had gone backstage, Murray asked that Tammet return and sign the books with him. "It's only fair", Murray said, "we're co-authors".³

Murray and Tammet's relationship began in 2012 when Tammet mailed Murray a copy of his third book, *Thinking in Numbers*. This was in acknowledgement and appreciation of the transformative effect of Murray's poetry on Tammet's life. His first encounter with Murray's

¹ Martin Johnson, "Two Poets," *Seriously... from BBC Radio 4*, podcast, February 16, 2017, 23:32-23:47, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08dr5r4.

² Tammet was born in England, and emigrated to France in 2008 when he was twenty-nine.

³ Daniel Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird We Teach to Sing: Encounters with the Mysteries and Meanings of Language* (New York: Little, Brown, 2017), 75.

writing was with the 2002 collection *Poems the Size of Photographs*. Tammet recognised Murray's "hard-won ease" with words. From this he intuited that Murray was also autistic, which then ignited his confidence in his own ability to write. As Tammet noted of Murray's poems: "their oddness reassured. I could see myself in them."⁴ Four years later, Tammet's *Born on a Blue Day: A Memoir of Asperger's and an Extraordinary Mind* (2006) was published, and three years subsequently, a survey of popular science titled *Embracing the Wide Sky: A Tour Across the Horizons of the Mind* (2009). With the release of his third book in 2012, Tammet had amassed the courage to write to Murray.

Several weeks later Murray replied with a long letter, including a request that Tammet continue to write to him. They did indeed have autism in common, as well as an intense interest in words in more than ten languages, from which a regular correspondence and profound relationship developed. Upon Murray's death in 2019 Tammet described him as "the wonderful Australian poet", and "my friend and mentor".⁵

Other than their co-presented festival event, their conversation quoted in part above was the only occasion when Murray and Tammet met in person. In this exchange of few words they impart lifetimes of loneliness, longing, and bewilderment. By doing so they demonstrate that, unlike stereotyped autistic characters such as Christopher Boone in Mark Haddon's best-selling novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, they have constant and complex emotional experiences.⁶ Similarly, far from a disinterest in the emotions of other people, "feeling" resonates between them.

Furthermore, the exhilaration of knowing that each understood the other's experience of the world with a familiarity that neither had seldom felt from another human was, for Murray, nothing less than "wonderful!!!!!" The intensity of Murray's exclamation may not fully translate from the radio program to the transcript of it. However, from my position as

⁴ Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird*, 57.

⁵ Daniel Tammet, "The wonderful Australian poet Les Murray died today," Facebook, April 29, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/DanielTammetAuthor/posts/the-wonderful-australian-poet-les-murray-died-today-i-had-the-great-honour-of-sh/2594034054000161/>; Daniel Tammet, "Les, My Friend and Mentor," *Australian Financial Review*, May 4, 2019, 1.

⁶ Haddon has created confusion regarding Boone's autism status. In 2004 Haddon described Boone as "a teenage boy with Asperger's syndrome". Mark Haddon, "B is for bestseller," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/apr/11/booksforchildrenandteenagers.features3>. However, five years and seventeen prizes later, Haddon wrote that "curious incident is not a book about Asperger's", and that he "slightly regret that [*sic*] fact that the word 'Asperger's' was used on the cover." Mark Haddon, "Asperger's & Autism," *Mark Haddon* (blog), July 16, 2009, <http://www.markhaddon.com/blog/aspergers-autism>.

someone who has listened to hundreds of hours of Murray speaking, this is the only time I have heard him express anything approaching this degree of both revitalisation and relief. It indicates how highly Murray valued the few relationships he had with other autistic people, and how much he longed to be understood as an autistic person by others.⁷

Audio producer Martin Johnson, who had been assembling a documentary on Tammet for two years, anticipated the profundity of Murray's and Tammet's conversation and recorded it. Ultimately it became the nucleus of the documentary, accordingly titled "Two Poets". The completed program first featured on BBC Radio 4 in February 2017.

In Australia, however, the silence surrounding Murray's autism continued. Murray had a six-decade poetry career, during which he regularly discussed his autism. That discussion began with his 1974 poem "Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver". This means Murray is the earliest currently known published autistic poet writing in English, not only in Australia but throughout the world. Yet Australian critics rarely mention his autism, and almost never engage with it. Murray is regularly noted as a poet of "blunt statements", "abundant word-play", and "technical adroitness",⁸ who has an "encyclopaedic love of esoteric detail", a "fierce sense of egalitarianism and hatred of snobbery or relegation", and "deep curiosity and learning".⁹ However nobody has, as I hope to do in this thesis, demonstrated that each of these qualities, as well as the kinship, loneliness, and joy that he expressed while meeting with Tammet, coalesce into a portrait of an autistic poet.

⁷ Though Murray labelled his condition in a number of ways, I refer to it throughout this thesis as "autism" for three reasons: First, this is the word Murray most often used, sometimes with qualifiers such as "semi" or "half". Second, the other word he sometimes used, "Asperger's" existed as a medical diagnosis for a comparatively short time. Third, and most importantly, many in the autistic community who had previously identified as Asperger's stopped doing so in 2018 when it was confirmed that Hans Asperger actively cooperated with the Nazis to have thousands of disabled children murdered. And I believe that, given Murray's efforts to draw attention to the Nazi genocide of disabled people (discussed throughout this thesis) he would have supported this autistic community practice.

⁸ Dennis Haskell, "Memories, Jokes and Inexhaustible Patterns: Waiting For the Past," in *The West Verandah: The Life and Work of Les Murray*, ed. Sonia Mycak (Seven Hills: Boraga Academic, 2016), 48; Oliver Dennis, "Asperg Is Me," *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 11, 2006; Robert Crawford, "Les Murray: Life, Work, and Life's Work," in *The West Verandah: The Life and Work of Les Murray*, ed. Sonia Mycak (Seven Hills: Boraga Academic, 2016), 137.

⁹ Penelope Nelson, "Irony, Identity and Les Murray's Poetic Voices," in *Counterbalancing Light: Essays on the Poetry of Les Murray*, ed. Carmel Gaffney (Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 1997), 171; Lawrence Bourke, *A Vivid Steady State: Les Murray and Australian Poetry* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992), 7; David Mason, "Ariel and Co," in *Voices, Places: Essays* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2018), 144.

Recognising Murray as an autistic poet is essential to an accurate and nuanced understanding of Australian literature. That this is not Australian literature's standard practice with disabled authors signifies its current common conception of disability, as observed by Nicholas Birns. In his book *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead*, Birns states that "the role of disability" is as "characters who are deprived of conventional communication", who are then "used to testify for those generally objectified by conventional, dominant modes of representation".¹⁰ Though Birns' analysis is of two Australian novels, he accurately encapsulates a prominent tendency in Australian literature as a whole. Too often, disabled people are not conceptualised as living, breathing, loving, hurting humans, let alone authors. We are symbols conscripted to represent other people's pain.

Even though the contributions of disabled authors to Australian literature stretch at least as far back as Henry Lawson (1867-1922), who was deaf, they have rarely been acknowledged or analysed as such by critics. For example, Jessica White notes of deaf poet Judith Wright that: "out of some 540 items of criticism about Wright's writing listed in Austlit, the Australian Literature database, only three relate to her deafness".¹¹

This erasure of disabled authors was the motivation for my Master of Research thesis, "Uncovering the History of Australian Disability Literature". In it I sought to begin "a conversation about disability literature's place in, and contribution to, Australian literature, in the same way that other marginalised groups such as women and indigenous people have".¹² I answered foundational questions about who some of Australia's disabled authors were, and the genres in which they wrote. Through two case studies – Henry Lawson and Gillian Mears – I then illustrated how impairment influences style and content. Lawson, as a deaf author, focused almost exclusively on visual detail, and used his thorough knowledge of visual signs to indicate to both his characters and his readers how his stories would progress. Mears, having experienced both multiple sclerosis and addiction, created nuanced characters with similar impairments to her own.

¹⁰ Nicholas Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2015), 138.

¹¹ Jessica White, "'Silence Is My Habitat': Judith Wright, Writing, and Deafness," in *The Routledge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Jessica Gildersleeve (New York: Routledge, 2021), 243.

¹² Amanda Tink, "Uncovering the History of Australian Disability literature" (master's thesis, Western Sydney University, 2016), 1.

Continuing that conversation, this thesis will provide a comprehensive, evidence-based account of the relationships between Murray, autism, and writing. Through close analysis of a number of Murray's poems, and his verse novel *Fredy Neptune*, I will demonstrate the richness that autistic subjectivities, experiences, and writing techniques contribute to composition. I will also examine how Murray's understanding of poetry as an intricate interplay of words and embodiment, at both individual and societal levels, permeates his writing and, consequently, his significant contribution to Australian literature.

An Embodied Methodology

Whatever other materials we may use, our own actual body goes into the process [of creation]. When, to pluralize Shakespeare's phrase, we 'give to airy nothings a local habitation and a name', the first local habitation they have is our own flesh and blood, and we do not exteriorize them without lending them some of our own intimate bodily nature, our gesture and breathing, our hurrying and hesitations, our very temperament and sexiness and weight.¹³

This is from Murray's essay "Poemes and the Mystery of Embodiment" (1988), articulating his theorisation of the centrality of embodiment to writing, which he developed throughout the first thirty years of his poetry career. Murray was introduced to poetry in his final year of high school, and wrote his first poems on Christmas day 1956, when he was eighteen. However, it was not until 1958, when he met and was mentored by the Australian disabled poet Lex Banning,¹⁴ that Murray resolved to create a career in poetry: "He gave me the encouragement I needed, and to a degree the model I needed", Murray said of Banning, "to gather up my courage and choose the course my life has taken".¹⁵ In April 1959, "Property" became Murray's first published poem. He and Geoffrey Lehmann published a book of their poetry in 1965 (*The Ilex Tree*), and Murray's first solo book of poetry was published in 1969 (*The Weatherboard Cathedral*). He went on to publish fourteen books of new poetry, five collections of prose, two verse novels, and a memoir. These have won numerous awards and precipitated many collections and translations. For much of his career he was also an editor, including of two poetry anthologies, the literary journal *Poetry Australia*, the literary section of *Quadrant Magazine*, and at Angus and Robertson.

¹³ Les Murray, "Poemes and the Mystery of Embodiment," in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 394.

¹⁴ Lex Banning had cerebral palsy.

¹⁵ Peter F. Alexander, *Les Murray: A Life in Progress* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 74.

Once Murray began explicating his theory of embodied creativity, as he did in several essays, poems, and interviews, he advanced it for the rest of his life. He believed that creating art involves the entire body, and that timeless art results from the physical body, the conscious mind, and the unconscious mind working in equal synchrony. For Murray, art was materially personal because, whether one intended it or not, it exhibited the body of its creator.

Murray's theory accords seamlessly with the foundational disability studies principle, with which the literary analysis of this thesis is infused, that embodiment is integral to writing. This does not simply mean that being a body enables a human to write, but that one's body is a determining factor in how and what one writes. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues: "body is crucial, not incidental, to story".¹⁶ Expounding on this concept Jay Dolmage states: "The body has traditionally been rhetorical equipment and a rhetorical instrument, but it has also always been a rhetorical engine."¹⁷ In summary, the body, through its form and experiences, has an indispensable and generative role in the writing process.

Moreover, and contrary to the popular belief that perception is objective and involves only the mind, the embodied methodology of literary disability studies posits that perception is subjective, and derives from a body's entirety of experience.¹⁸ Take, for example, a person who perceives a room as silent because none of the objects or people it contains are actively making noise. If this person then chooses to reflect on their perception of the room as silent, they will most likely experience that perception as so thoroughly commonplace that they will assume it to be objective and complete, and therefore the only possible perception of the room. However, other people, such as those of us who are blind, are likely to perceive that same room as occupied by sound, due to our awareness of each surface reflecting the others. From these reflections we can infer the height, width, and depth of the room (from the walls, floor, and ceiling), the construction of the room (such as surface materials and doorway position), and the general contents of the room (such as how full it is, and how close together

¹⁶ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Shape Structures Story: Fresh and Feisty Stories About Disability," *Narrative* 15, no. 1 (January 2007): 113-4, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2007.0005>.

¹⁷ Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 289.

¹⁸ In disability studies, a popular term to resist the Cartesian separation of body and mind is "bodymind". Margaret Price first employed it "to emphasize that although 'body' and 'mind' usually occupy separate conceptual and linguistic territories, they are deeply intertwined." Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 11. I prefer to reclaim a wholistic conception of "body" as one entity, rather than two separate but connected entities.

its objects are). This is called echolocation.¹⁹ The point of this example is not to initiate a hierarchy of perception but, rather, to demonstrate that each individual will tell a different story of the room, due to their embodiment. And, in turn, each of those stories will display the body of the human who composed it.

This experiential understanding of perception explains the compatibility between Murray and literary disability studies on embodiment. It is likely that neither encountered the other since, so far as I can find, there is no acknowledgement of disability studies in Murray's writing, nor Murray's writing in disability studies. Yet, there is a commonality of knowledge arising from being an impaired person in a disabling world, or what US author Nancy Mairs called "radical materiality". As an example, she cites her experience as a wheelchair user among a large group of attendees mingling at an event led by the Dalai Lama. She was forced to press against the wall for an extended period of time to avoid being smothered because, as she wryly observed, "no matter how persuaded they were of the beauty and sacredness of all life, not one of them seemed to think that any life was going on below the level of her or his own gaze".²⁰ Such experiences produce a visceral understanding of the terms that nondisabled people employ figuratively. As Mairs elaborates on "marginality":

Marginality thus means something altogether different to me from what it means to social theorists. It is no metaphor for the power relations between one group of human beings and another but a literal description of where I stand (figuratively speaking): over here, on the edge, out of bounds, beneath your notice. I embody the metaphors.²¹

Recognition of the primacy of embodied experience by literary disability studies originated from disability culture. One significant initiation point was the work of a collective of disabled advocates called the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), whose philosophy is foundational to this thesis. The collective formed in the United Kingdom in 1972 and instigated a method now known as "the social model of disability" (shortened to "social model"), which upended the "medical model" that had dominated Western conceptions of disability for more than a century. To understand UPIAS's transformative

¹⁹ For an explanation and demonstration of echolocation by a blind person access Daniel Kish, *How I Use Sonar to Navigate the World*, TED, April 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH0aihGWB8U>.

²⁰ Nancy Mairs, "Body in trouble," in *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 59; 60.

²¹ Mairs, "Body in Trouble," 59.

impact on the lives of disabled people, a brief history of the modern concepts of disability and normal that underpin the medical model is useful.

Our Intertwined Histories: Normal Disability

Lots of planets have a North
Normal is somewhere I have never been,
you need a home to be an alien,
sometimes averages are just Mean.²²

This is from “Lots of Planets have a North” by United Kingdom autistic poet Kate Fox. The poem continually returns to this four-line refrain in between lists of personal facts – about her life (“I read Jane Eyre when I was seven”), her thoughts (“I think it’s cruel/ that the word ‘lisp’ has an ‘s’ in it”), her body (“I have two webbed toes”), and her aspirations (“I’m learning to play the ukulele”) – all of which a reader will interpret in conjunction with the fact that she “score[s] high on the autistic spectrum”.

This refrain, then, presents her particular life-long experiences of the universalised theory of “normal”, through four simple statements of striking juxtapositions. Indicating each statement’s uniqueness, their quantities change from “lots of”, to “never”, to an implied “always”, to “sometimes”, as do their subjects from “planets”, to “I”, to “you”, to “averages”. Concurrently, the statements are grouped into two pairs of contrasts, the first on having, and the second on being.

The first pair presents a vast contrast. “Lots of planets have a North” has a universal perspective, and is spoken by a doctor of sorts (Doctor Who). Meanwhile Fox, as an autistic person, does not “have” “Normal” in common with other people. It is a “somewhere” for which she does not even have a compass point. As such, a comparison is established between the infinite scale of what “lots of” planets “have” in common, and what Fox, who is isolated from “normal” humans, does not have. Moreover, Fox’s vast solitude has been imposed on her by a “normal” human, who is a doctor.

The “to be” lines each contain the contrast within them. In the first, being isolated, or labelled “alien” by the people from “Normal”, paradoxically also implies that “you” are indeed from,

²² Kate Fox, “Lots of Planets have a North,” in *Fox Populi* (Middlesbrough: Smokestack Books, 2013), Kindle. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

not just a place, but a “home”, with its resonances of comfort, acceptance, and heritage. The last line is a pun on “Mean”. The mean, as used to calculate what “normal” is for any human characteristic, is only one type of average. It is not the middle number (median), or the most common number (mode). Thus comparing a person with the mean, or average, will not mean, or demonstrate, much. Therefore, it is “sometimes” “just Mean”, or purposefully hostile, to make decisions regarding a person using “just Mean” (a single number), particularly when those decisions are made by someone from “Normal” about someone who has “never been” there. Fox might also be using “averages” to refer to nondisabled people in a similar way to disabled poets Les Murray (“the humans”),²³ Andy Jackson (“the regulars”),²⁴ and Jim Ferris (“the normies”).²⁵

Defining Normal

As Fox’s poem suggests, the modern concept of normal continually and profoundly affects humans, especially those evaluated as being beyond its range. Yet, as a concept, it is fewer than two-hundred years old. At the beginning of the 1800s normal was a geometric term, but by the 1900s it was a term that governed all aspects of the Western human body.

In the first third of the nineteenth century, differences in human bodies were not prioritised as a Western societal concern. There was a body comparison system in operation, as evidenced by the fact that “natural, monstrous, perfect, defective, deformed: all of these premodern concepts exacted some kind of norming effect”.²⁶ However this effect was moderated by the belief that bodily difference had a providential purpose.²⁷ I would add that the absence of a point named “normal” might have dissuaded people from presuming they had the ability to definitively judge their own or another’s bodily status.

²³ J. Mark Smith, “A Conversation with Les Murray,” *Image* 64, www.imagejournal.org/article/conversation-les-murray/.

²⁴ Andy Jackson, “Marfan lives,” *Among the Regulars* (blog), August 31, 2011, <https://amongtheregulars.com/2011/08/31/marfan-lives/>.

²⁵ Jennifer Bartlett et al., “Disability and Poetry,” *Poetry* 205, no. 3 (December 2014): 273, jstor.org/stable/43591831.

²⁶ Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, “Early Modern Literature and Disability Studies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, ed. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 34.

²⁷ Douglas C. Baynton, “‘These Pushful Days’: Time and Disability in the Age of Eugenics,” *Health and History* 13, no. 2 (2011): 45, jstor.org/stable/10.5401/healthhist.13.2.0043.

From the 1830s, however, the word “normal”, meaning “constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard” became established as a medical standard. Belgian scientist Adolphe Quetelet postulated “the average man” in his book *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés, ou Essai de physique sociale (Treatise on Man and the Development of his Faculties)*. Throughout the world, he asserted, human traits are distributed in accordance with the error curve, a statistical tool for measuring and displaying the effects of randomness on any element. He then collected individual measurements of human traits, such as height, and from them calculated their mean value. Henceforth that value was designated as the natural perfection to which all humans should aspire.²⁸

Thus he established the presupposition that human bodies should benefit statistics rather than the reverse, and, consequently, that there will always be a proportion of the population defined as impaired, regardless of their embodied configuration. On an error curve, or bell curve, the mean value sits at the peak of the bell, and the smaller and larger values follow the slope of its curved sides down, decreasing and increasing respectively as they descend. And though, during the next four decades, focus broadened from the single point of a mean to the range of standard deviation, the fixation with the idea that some humans are normal and some humans are abnormal remained. On a bell curve it is not possible to have, for example, 100% of the population measuring as average, or even 70%; it must be 68% (one standard deviation). If more than 68% of the population measure as average then what is deemed as average will change to encompass only 68% of the population. This means that it is possible for a person to be defined as normal one day and abnormal the next, not because their body has changed, but because the average has changed. It also means that the system is dependent on maintaining 32% abnormality.

This system became central to eugenics in 1883. Drawing on Quetelet’s work, and combining it with that of his cousin Charles Darwin, English scientist Francis Galton published his book *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*. In it Galton coined the term eugenics as “a brief word to express the science of improving stock”, and advocated incentivising marriage and procreation between “normal” people.²⁹ Galton and other eugenicists insisted that there was now statistical proof that white people were superior to other races, that men

²⁸ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), 24; 26.

²⁹ Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its development* (Macmillan, 1883; Online Galton Archives, 2018), <https://galton.org/books/human-faculty/SecondEdition/text/web/human-faculty4.htm>.

were superior to women, that wealthy people were superior to poor people, and that nondisabled people were superior to disabled people. Furthermore, they claimed that these differences were inherited and immutable.³⁰ As Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell elaborate:

Galton had to dismiss social advantage as a byproduct of class, culture, and education in order to correlate biology with destiny – particularly in the case of race and feeble-mindedness, as the two classifications that he used most consistently to cross-reference each other. It was not an accident that no women or people of color populated his list of ‘geniuses’ in history”.³¹

Concomitant with the ascendancy of eugenics and normality throughout the nineteenth century, there was an increase in the representation of disability in literature. Literature had always employed disability as what Mitchell and Snyder term “narrative prosthesis”, that is “a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight”.³² In other words, disability is employed as a shortcut that both signifies and creates narrative intrigue. However, Michael Davidson argues that, in the nineteenth century the presence of impairment in literature multiplied so that “it is hard to think of any major modernist work that does not, in some way, feature disease or disability as a figure for social upheavals and cultural malaise”. In a century of profound social change, disabled characters were the means by which nondisabled people demonstrated their belief in the supremacy of “normal” bodies. Davidson names “Charlotte Perkins Gilman, W. B. Yeats, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Margaret Sanger, Jane Addams, F. T. Marinetti, and Thomas Mann” as authors who advocated eugenic practices.³³ He further explains:

When a poet like Ezra Pound speaks of a need for poetic ‘hygiene’ or when W. B. Yeats despairs of ‘Base-born products of base beds,’ or when D. H. Lawrence calls for a ‘lethal chamber’ in which to euthanize the ‘sick, the halt, and the maimed,’ we see the close connection between vanguard aesthetic formations and ideas of bodily health and ability.³⁴

³⁰ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 4-6.

³¹ Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 207.

³² David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 49.

³³ Michael Davidson, “Paralyzed Modernities and Biofutures: Bodies and Minds in Modern Literature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, ed. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 74; 77.

³⁴ Davidson, “Paralyzed Modernities and Biofutures,” 77.

Consequently, normality became the framework that justified the dehumanisation of disabled people, and by 1900 eradicating the “feeble-minded” was a staple of Western public conversation, policy, and practice. “Feeble-minded” is often misunderstood as being a synonym for the current concept of intellectual impairment. However, though this was true in theory, in practice the application of “feeble-minded” was broad and nebulous in order to capture anyone who could not adequately fulfil the needs of industrialisation, or who was simply deemed “unfit” or “defective”. Thus these terms accommodated local prejudices – such as those against Mexicans in America, Jews in Germany, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia – while enabling international prejudices, such as that against disabled people.³⁵

Work soon began on international coordination of eugenic methods. The first International Congress of Eugenics was held in 1912 in London, and included delegates from a number of European countries, America, and Australia. The second was held in New York in 1921 and was promoted by an image of a tree growing from many academic disciplines, with the slogan “Eugenics is the self direction of human evolution”. Papers presented included “Racial Differences in Musical Ability”, “Distribution and Increase of Negroes in the United States”, “Inheritance of Mental Diseases”, and “Some Notes on the Jewish Problem”.³⁶ At the third eugenics congress, held in New York City in 1932, German psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin was unanimously elected as president of the International Federation of Eugenics Organisations. He also became one of the key architects of the Nazi genocide of disabled people, beginning with forced sterilisation. However, by sterilising disabled people Germany was not a trail-blazer. The US was the first to enact sterilisation laws in 1907, and many other countries had enacted similar laws before Germany did so in 1933. Moreover, a lack of sterilisation laws did not equate to a lack of sterilisations. Australia is sadly an exemplar of this, having endorsed sterilisation in 1933, and having continued to sterilise disabled people ever since. Australia was most recently condemned by the United Nations for the forced sterilisation of disabled women and girls in 2018.³⁷ And, in 2019, evidence was presented to the “Royal

³⁵ Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, 74; 110.

³⁶ Steve Silberman, *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2015), 109-10; 110.

³⁷ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of Australia* (July, 2018), https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/AUS/CO/8&Lang=En.

Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability” that institutionalised disabled people continue to be chemically castrated.³⁸

The Nazi genocide of disabled people (which I outline in Chapter One) quickly expanded from sterilisation to an array of laws and practices, including euthanasia. In the aftermath of World War II, the association of eugenics with the Nazi regime provoked quiet embarrassment from other countries at their complicity. Yet many nevertheless continued with their policies and practices of segregating, sterilising, neglecting, and incarcerating disabled people.

Redefining Disability

A quarter of a century after World War II ended, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) resisted eugenic practices by reconceptualising the word “disability” and, thereby, how disabled people understood themselves and each other. UPIAS’s paradigm-shifting legacy can be attributed to their uncompromising commitment to proclaiming disabled people as the experts in the circumstances of disabled people, and their meticulous attention to their embodied experience of language. UPIAS was initiated in the United Kingdom in 1972 by Judy and Paul Hunt,³⁹ and Vic and Elizabeth Finkelstein.⁴⁰ Before taking action, however, they facilitated discussions of their ideas among disabled people, including those who were institutionalised, using confidential circulars that were mailed from one person to another.⁴¹ Over eighteen months they developed their guiding

³⁸ “Australian law allows disabled people to be ‘chemically castrated’, inquiry hears,” *The Guardian*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/03/australian-law-allows-disabled-people-to-be-chemically-castrated-inquiry-hears>.

³⁹ The Hunts were motivated by Paul having escaped institutional living after seventeen years, during which he continuously campaigned for improved resident living conditions.

⁴⁰ The Finkelstein’s were motivated by Vic’s experiences after being arrested in Johannesburg for anti-apartheid activity. Vic found that, in jail, he was finally given the assistance he needed as a wheelchair user.

⁴¹ Vic Finkelstein, "Are we Oppressed?: Collected Contributions from Early UPIAS Circulars" (Manchester, 1974; TBR Imprint, 2018), <https://tonybaldwinson.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/are-we-oppressed-vic-finkelstein-upias-1974-2018-isbn-9780993526749.pdf>.

philosophy,⁴² which they called the “Fundamental Principles of Disability”;⁴³ and the three key strategies behind those principles became the collective’s name.

The three key strategies, though they owe much to other liberation movements, originated from experiences specific to disabled people. The word “disability” had been determinedly confined to the medical domain for more than one hundred years, and was narrated as a tragedy that had befallen a healthy body. This story, now known as the medical model, cast disabled people as helpless, unhealthy victims, and medical professionals as their saviours, and insisted that the only appropriate conclusions were for the disabled person to be cured or killed. The effect of this story on disabled people was isolation from society, and medical dominance of all aspects of their lives, even if they had avoided institutionalisation.

Not only were disabled people segregated from society, but they were also segregated from each other. Since the medical establishment carved up human bodies and only treated the relevant chunk, it followed that paraplegics, epileptics, blind people, etc, had nothing in common, and they were discouraged from communicating. They were also often isolated from others with the same condition, as Allan Sutherland explains:

For twenty years my disability was something I lived with on my own, with no knowledge of other people’s experience of that disability. All my attitudes to my disability, all my feelings about how to respond to other people’s reactions to my disability had to be worked out from scratch. Cut off from other epileptics, even though I must have been meeting them all the time, I had no opportunity to learn how they went about the business of living with fits, to draw upon their strength, or to come to appreciate and take pride in my own strength through the process of sharing it with other people who shared my disability.⁴⁴

⁴² Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, “The Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation and the Disability Alliance Discuss Fundamental Principles of Disability” (London, 1976; Disabled People’s Archive, 1997), <https://disabledpeoplesarchive.com/fundamental-principles-of-disability-union-of-the-physically-impaired-against-segregation/>.

⁴³ They are: “disability is a situation, caused by social conditions, which requires for its elimination, (a) that no one aspect such as incomes, mobility or institutions is treated in isolation, (b) that disabled people should, with the advice and help of others, assume control over their own lives, and (c) that professionals, experts and others who seek to help must be committed to promoting such control by disabled people.” UPIAS, “Fundamental Principles,” 3.

⁴⁴ Allan Sutherland, “Coming out Disabled” (presentation, *Approaches to Disability Conference*, University of Durham Department of Sociology and Social Policy, March 19, 1982), <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/library/author/sutherland.allan/>. This quote exemplifies experiences of that time, however, Alan Sutherland was not a member of UPIAS. He was a key figure in the Liberation Network of People with Disabilities. The two organisations employed different approaches to advocacy but worked cooperatively.

UPIAS's first key strategy, then, was to understand that even though the details of how medical professionals labelled and treated each disabled person varied, the subservient role that every disabled person had been assigned in the medical system, and society in general, was the same. Thus it was essential that disabled people unite, and become the experts on their own lives.

UPIAS's second key strategy was to wrest control of the story of their bodies from medical professionals. What if, like women who had previously been framed as weak, and Black people who had been previously framed as unintelligent, disabled people, too, were an oppressed group? They understood oppression as relational, and as deriving from the reality of how society treated all disabled people, rather than any individual's feelings regarding their own circumstances. Their point was not that feelings are unimportant, but that they can easily be exploited to justify ignoring ongoing oppression.⁴⁵

Thus UPIAS reclaimed the story of disability, discarding the individual tragedy narrative and establishing the social relationship narrative. Instead of continuing with the medical use of the word "disability" in connection with their bodies, they chose the term "impairment" to refer to medical conditions such as paraplegia or epilepsy. They understood that the only difference between a characteristic designated as an impairment and a characteristic not designated as impairment is in the meaning each has been attributed within society.⁴⁶ For example, if I am asked what my impairments are, I might choose to disclose blindness and autism. I do not, however, consider adding left-handedness, because Western society no longer defines it as an impairment. If I had been born a century earlier, though, left-handedness was an impairment I might have disclosed. At that time sinistrality was classified as an impairment because it was believed to indicate criminality, perversity, and intellectual impairment.⁴⁷ Though evidence of this belief remains in words such as "sinister", Western society now rarely discriminates against left-handed people, even though our biology has not changed. Similarly, if I had been born a century earlier, I would not have considered disclosing autism, since it had not yet been designated as a medical diagnosis. The defining of autism in 1938 did not change the

⁴⁵ Finkelstein, "Are we Oppressed?," 31.

⁴⁶ Vic Finkelstein, "A Personal Journey into Disability Politics" (presentation, Leeds University Centre for Disability Studies, Leeds, 2001), 8, <http://www.independentliving.org/docs3/finkelstein01a.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Sanja Milenković et al., "Historical Aspects of Left-Handedness," *Srpski Arhiv Za Celokupno Lekarstvo (Serbian Medical Society)* 147, no. 11-12 (2019): 783-4, <https://doi.org/10.2298/SARH190522095M>.

biology of 1.5% of the population, it medicalised our experience, and thus how society understood us.⁴⁸

Being aware of the social construction of impairment and disability, UPIAS drew attention to them through language. Disability, they declared, is the social conditions, such as isolation and exclusion, which are imposed on impaired people, preventing their full participation in society – therefore disabling them. In this story the appropriate conclusion is eradication of the social conditions that engender disablement. This would be accomplished by impaired people controlling their own lives, and by society recognising that “participation is a practical problem in the real world with real solutions”.⁴⁹ As such, rather than disabled people being continually assessed by medical professionals and bureaucrats, they argued that disabled people, together with other oppressed groups, should assess how society is organised, and restructure it to enable full inclusion.⁵⁰

Their third key strategy was to speak directly of the oppression to which disabled people were subjected, rather than to state what the ideal situation should be. Even though the group believed in integration, they had learned from experience that focusing on this ideal allowed discussions to be side-tracked into a hypothetical future, rather than confronting the current reality of disabled people’s lives. As Vic Finkelstein explained: “It is no great difficulty to say, ‘I am for integration’ because no practice is obviously required. But to say, ‘I’m against segregation’ involves looking the real world honestly in the face, by already admitting that it is oppressive”.⁵¹

With their principles, and a resolute commitment to them, in place, UPIAS began what became fifteen years of advocacy. In the United Kingdom this resulted in the creation of a coalition of disabled-led advocacy organisations, and a flourishing disability arts movement. Worldwide this resulted in Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI) adopting a social rather than medical conception of disability.⁵²

⁴⁸ Debra Costley et al., *Shining a Light on the Autism Spectrum: Experiences and Aspirations of Adults* (New York: Routledge, 2016), xi.

⁴⁹ Finkelstein, “Are We Oppressed?,” 29.

⁵⁰ UPIAS, “Fundamental Principles,” 19.

⁵¹ Finkelstein, “Are We Oppressed?,” 27-8.

⁵² Judy Hunt, “A Revolutionary group with a Revolutionary Message,” *Coalition* (2001): 27-8.

UPIAS's advocacy also resulted in initial and ongoing work in disability studies. As mentioned earlier, UPIAS's guiding document was "Fundamental Principles of Disability". However, the conception underpinning those principles, that disability is a set of social conditions rather than personal medical problems, did not have a name.⁵³ It was named "the social model" in 1983 by sociologist Michael Oliver and, thereafter, academified. I use academified to describe when an idea, created by a community to address their specific situation, is distorted by academic discourse; and those distortions are not owned by the community but are attributed to them. Some academics advance an altered version of the idea and link it to the community, while others criticise the community's idea as if it were an academic theory. Consequently, as Shelley Tremain observes, the term "social model" is now often employed "broadly and loosely, to refer to just about any counterhegemonic (i.e., nonmedical model) understanding of disability",⁵⁴ some of which use the word "disability" to also refer to "impairment". To prevent the subjugation of UPIAS's ideas, Finkelstein has since named them "the radical social model".⁵⁵

Since the social model is foundational to disability studies, models have remained a common method by which disability studies scholars present their conceptions of embodiment and disablement. Recent examples from literary disability studies include: Siebers' "complex embodiment", Garland-Thomson's "misfits", Koppers' "rhizomatic model of disability", Bolt's "tripartite model of disability", and Johnson and McRuer's "cripistemology".⁵⁶

Having considered these possibilities, I continue to frame my thinking, and hence this thesis, in terms of the radical social model, with two additions. My version is not limited to physical impairment. As I have previously written, "if your body is sufficiently different from the standard to enable a nonstandard perspective; and if your condition either means you are

⁵³ Mike Oliver, "The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On," *Disability & Society* 28, no. 7 (2013): 1024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.818773>.

⁵⁴ Shelley L. Tremain, *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 9.

⁵⁵ Vic Finkelstein, "The Social Model of Disability Repossessed," *Coalition* (December 1, 2001): 3-4, <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/finkelstein-soc-mod-repossessed.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 22-24; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept," *Hypatia* 26, no. 3 (2011): 592, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-1270000>; Petra Koppers, "Toward a Rhizomatic Model of Disability: Poetry, Performance, and Touch," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jlc.0.0022>; David Bolt, "Not Forgetting Happiness: The Tripartite Model of Disability and Its Application in Literary Criticism," *Disability & Society* 30, no. 7 (2015): 1113, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2015.1071240>; Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, "Cripistemologies," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 133, <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlclds.2014.12>.

discriminated against, or you conceal it to avoid discrimination”, then you are impaired.⁵⁷ Second, my version emphasises that societal constructions of impairment are a component of disablement, and thus require theorisation. Since UPIAS theorised directly from their embodied experience, and since they did not claim to theorise impairment, I do not agree with assertions, such as those catalogued by Carol Thomas, that UPIAS neglected embodiment.⁵⁸ Nevertheless I do agree that theorisations of the social construction of impairment are crucial for positive social change. My version of the radical social model also operates in conjunction with “crip” (discussed in the next section), and “neurodiversity” (discussed in Chapter One).

My affinity with the radical social model arises from my own embodied experience as a disabled person. It is in part the result of growing up in Australia where many people upheld the medical model, “spastic” was the nickname for every disabled person, and “integration” of disabled students into “mainstream” schools was new. The radical social model equipped me with an understanding of what I regularly experienced, but had never heard articulated. Also, though, I deeply respect its methods. Unlike most subsequent models of disability that were created in academia and have not ventured outside it, the radical social model was formulated by and for disabled people with a range of levels of education. Moreover, those who facilitated its eighteen-month development involved institutionalised disabled people in their discussions. This is a feat that, even with fifty years technological progress, is rarely even attempted today.

However, I emphasise that my relationship with the radical social model also results from the lack of an Australian equivalent. Australian disabled authors have been afforded so little attention that much of what they have written remains to be uncovered. Of the few disabled authors whose impairments are recognised by Australian literature, their advocacy for anything other than the medical model is rarely acknowledged. Here, for example, is well-known Australian disabled author Alan Marshall, presenting an opinion in accord with the radical social model twenty years before that model was formulated:

The crippled child is not conscious of the handicap implied by his useless legs. They are often inconvenient or annoying but he is confident that they will never prevent him doing

⁵⁷ Amanda Tink, “Where are all the Disabled Writers?,” review of *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, ed. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, *Sydney Review of Books*, May 8, 2018, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/cambridge-companion-to-literature-and-disability/>.

⁵⁸ Carol Thomas, “Rescuing a Social Relational Understanding of Disability,” *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 6, no. 1 (2004): 25-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15017410409512637>.

what he wants to do or being whatever he wishes to be. If he considers them a handicap it is because he has been told they are.⁵⁹

Furthermore, this erasure is compounded for Australians who are disabled and also Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. As Scott Avery, a proud Worimi man who is proudly profoundly deaf,⁶⁰ states: “The first stop in the narrative journey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability is Lake Mungo in Far West New South Wales, where footprints of a one-legged man on a hunt with his tribe were discovered”. These are more than twenty thousand years old, and suggest a rich lineage that colonisation has suppressed.⁶¹

One enduring legacy of the radical social model is UPIAS’s reframing of disability from individual pathology to social category. By doing so they created a common language through which disabled people have continued to work collectively for social justice. Today, the use of radical social model phrases such as “disabled person” is called “community first” or “identity first” language, while using medical model phrases such as “person with disability” is called “person first language”. While it is common in Australian public discourse to use person first language, I use community first language throughout this thesis. Community first language is a common preference of the disabled community in general, and the autistic community in particular.⁶² The phrase “disabled person”, rather than “person with disability”, emphasises the radical social model position that impaired people are disabled by societal conditions. Community first language also emphasises a disabled person’s connection with other disabled people, and our acceptance of ourselves, and wish for acceptance by everyone, as a person whose impairment is integral to their body, rather than something that should be dismissed or ignored.

This is not to suggest that impairment is irrelevant. Indeed, this thesis is predicated on the criticality of impairment. Nor is this to suggest that there are no negative aspects of

⁵⁹ Alan Marshall, *I Can Jump Puddles* (Camberwell: Puffin Books, 2004), 80.

⁶⁰ This phrasing is Avery’s preference in order to indicate that he is proud of both identities. Scott Avery, email message to author, January 22, 2022.

⁶¹ Scott Avery, *Culture is Inclusion: A Narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with Disability* (Sydney: First Peoples Disability Network, 2018), iv.

⁶² Monique Botha, Jacqueline Hanlon, and Gemma Louise Williams, “Does Language Matter? Identity-First Versus Person-First Language Use in Autism Research: A Response to Vivanti,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04858-w>.

impairment, termed “impairment effects”.⁶³ It is to note that none of these negate our acceptance of ourselves and our community.

Crip Poetics

you're six and your mom has polio, but she won't talk about it
and you know you're a freak, but you don't talk about it either.
and you don't read in history class about crips
who locked down a building that says it wants to help us and we say it's saying fuck you
to us.
no one tells you about a communist Mexican femme artist who paints her back brace and
makes out with chavela vargas
you don't read about the freak show, the ugly laws,
the million indigenous words for disability that have nothing bad in them.
you just know your brain is weird and you can't ride a bike and you fall down in the shower
and get sick all the time and see visions. you're lucky to have bad HMO health insurance.
cripstory.⁶⁴

This is the first stanza of “Cripstory” by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. She identifies as a queer disabled femme writer and performer of Burgher/Tamil Sri Lankan and Irish/Roma ascent, who grew up in the United States. This poem is her narrative of being unaware of, and then thriving because of, a crip community. It weaves events from her life between events from the lives of other disabled people, demonstrating the necessity for, and irreplaceability of, crip knowledge and culture. From her disabled mother who was “surviving the best she can, by faking it”, she learned to pass as nondisabled when it was necessary. From disabled performers she learned that “the d-word can mean joy”, which motivated her to become a writer and performer.

The stanza focuses on the erasure of disabled cultural presence throughout her childhood – disabled history that was excluded from textbooks, public protests by disabled people that received little media attention, and famous disabled people whose impairments were ignored. The “communist Mexican femme artist who paints her back brace and makes out with chavela vargas” is Frida Kahlo. Though Kahlo had polio as a child, and was also impaired by a bus accident at eighteen, standard narratives do not present her as a disabled artist who could inspire six-year-old disabled girls. The word “Cripstory” completes every stanza, implying that Kahlo’s and Piepzna-Samarasinha’s stories resemble those of many other

⁶³ Thomas, “Rescuing a Social Relational,” 29.

⁶⁴ Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “Cripstory,” in *Tonguebreaker: Poems and Performance Texts* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019), Kindle. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

disabled people throughout the world. Indeed, both separately and combined, their stories share similarities with those of Murray and Tammet.

The word “crip” is an abbreviated form of cripple, and both have been reclaimed by disabled people, with any impairment, as terms of in-group pride and solidarity.⁶⁵ It is unclear when this reclamation began, but those who use these terms often refer to Nancy Mairs’s seminal 1986 essay “On Being a Cripple”. In this essay she discusses her continual adjustment to multiple sclerosis, and her choice of the word “cripple”, over other options such as “handicapped” or “differently abled”, to identify herself. “Cripple” attracted her for many reasons, including that it “has an honorable history, having made its first appearance in the Lindisfarne Gospel in the tenth century”, and that:

People – crippled or not – wince at the word cripple, as they do not at handicapped or disabled. Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger.⁶⁶

Those who instigated literary disability studies, such as Garland-Thomson, Davis, and Mitchell and Snyder, developed their theories around “normal”, and how it structured the lives of disabled and nondisabled people. Yet normal, fundamental though it is to conceptualisations of embodied experience, is only one cause of literary disablism. The problem is not only the presence of “normal”, but the absence of “crip”. Within the framework of normal, the only options for living as a disabled person are passing as nondisabled, or being pitied. Crip offers the option of pride.

Carrie Sandahl, recognising the need for “crip” in discourses of disability, established its place within academia. Crip, she argued, changes the parameters for discussion about disabled people. Instead of impairment being a difference that society should accommodate, impairment is a source of individual and collective creativity, joy, and flourishing that does not depend on societal acceptance. As examples she describes the performances of four queer crips who “take center stage under the harsh spotlight of the stare, display their bodies, and speak unapologetically about impairment”. These performers enacted personal experiences including being objectified by medical professionals, meeting crip kin, enjoying sex, and

⁶⁵ Victoria Ann Lewis, “Crip,” in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, ed. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 46.

⁶⁶ Nancy Mairs, “On Being a Cripple,” in *Plaintext: Essays* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 9.

navigating the intersections of impairment with race, gender, and sexuality. Sandahl also posited crip as not only a noun and an adjective, but a verb. To crip something is to investigate it from the position of identifying as crip, and valuing Crip culture, experiences, and strategies. This is similar to, and often in conjunction with, queer.⁶⁷

Adding nuance to discussions of both normality and crip, Robert McRuer created the concept of “compulsory able-bodiedness”. He explains: “A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, ‘Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?’”⁶⁸ These continual implicit demands on disabled people to diminish their own embodiment and desire normality occur at individual and societal levels. They reveal the tenuousness of the concept of normality, and its dependence on impairment for definition and value – “wouldn't you rather be more like me?” Every disabled person, regardless of impairment, experiences the burden of the accumulation of these demands. “Wouldn't you rather be more like me?”

A crip responds with an expression of “no, I would rather be more like me”. The focus of the moment is thereby transferred from normality to crip knowledge, invoking a future where crip knowledge is centred by society. This, McRuer argues, is yet another benefit of crip for all people, impaired or not. By valuing impaired people equally with unimpaired people, crip offers all humans freedom from compulsory able-bodiedness.⁶⁹

Sandahl and McRuer's work was representative of a shift within literary disability studies in the mid-2000s. Literary disability studies had emerged approximately ten years earlier and, like disability studies in general, which originated in sociology, was preoccupied with how nondisabled people represented disabled people. This focus was crucial because these representations continually influence the lives, and deaths, of disabled people. What had been neglected, however, was research that explored how disabled people represent themselves.

⁶⁷ Carrie Sandahl, “Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9, no. 1-2 (2003): 42; 28, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-9-1-2-25>.

⁶⁸ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 9.

⁶⁹ McRuer, *Crip Theory*, 31-2.

Significantly, this change of focus from our confinement to our potential drew attention to poetics. Perhaps this should have been expected, since “iamb” is a descendant of a Greek word meaning “a cripple”.⁷⁰ Davidson began asking questions regarding the influence of embodiment on poetics that had not been previously academically examined. He reflected that French composer Maurice Ravel’s D major Concerto for the Left Hand “could be linked to the work of artists whose disability, far from limiting possibilities of design or performance, liberates and changes the terms for composition”.⁷¹ He then asked: “What would happen if we subjected a poetics of embodiment to the actual bodies and mental conditions of its authors?” He offers as examples:

Robert Creeley's lines in ‘The Immoral Proposition’, ‘to look at it is more/ than it was,’ means something very particular when we know that their author has only one eye. To what extent are Elizabeth Bishop’s numerous references to suffocation and claustrophobia in her poems an outgrowth of a life with severe asthma? Robert Duncan’s phrase ‘I see always the underside turning’ may refer to his interest in theosophy and the occult, but it also derives from the poet’s visual disorder, in which one eye sees the near and the other far. Was William Carlos Williams’s development of the triadic stepped foot in his later career a dimension of his prosody or a typographical response to speech disorders resulting from a series of strokes? It is worth remembering that the signature poem of the era [the 1960s] was not only a poem about the madness of the best minds of the poet’s generation, but about the carceral and therapeutic controls that defined those minds as mad, written by someone who was himself ‘expelled from the academies for crazy.’⁷²

At the same time that Davidson was asking these questions, Jim Ferris articulated “crip poetics”. Echoing McRuer, he defines its role as: “to make more space in the imagination, and so in the culture, for the wide and startling variety of rich and fulfilling ways that real people live and love, work and play in this world”. He characterises crip poetry as writing by a disabled person that presents: “a challenge to stereotypes and an insistence on self-definition; foregrounding of the perspective of people with disabilities; an emphasis on embodiment, especially atypical embodiment; and alternative techniques and poetics”.⁷³ Though Ferris’s categorisations are broad, he is nevertheless distinguishing between a few different types of poets and poetry: all crip poets are disabled, but not all disabled poets are crip. All crip poetry is grounded in the experience of being disabled, but it does not always

⁷⁰ Robert Beum and Karl Shapiro, *A Prosody Handbook: A Guide to Poetic Form*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 2006), Kindle.

⁷¹ Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 3.

⁷² Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand*, 119.

⁷³ Jim Ferris, “Crip Poetry, or How I Learned to Love the Limp,” *Wordgathering: A Journal of Disability Poetry and Literature* 1, no. 2 (June 2007): http://www.wordgathering.com/past_issues/issue2/essay/ferris.

explicitly address that experience. All crip poetry understands impairment as socially constructed, but it does not deny the complex reality of nonstandard embodiment.

Adding to Ferris's list, in the spirit of "cripping" and "crip theory" I propose two characteristics of crip poetics that are demonstrated in Murray's writing. One characteristic of crip poetics is that it resists our erasure. When disabled people write, we counter those narratives that insist we are a prosthesis without a past, present, or future, by employing techniques such as writing about other disabled people, and claiming space and time. We write about our crip community, famous crips, and recognising each other from signs of which only other crips are aware; we contextualise disabled lives in national and international history; we travel to other continents and other worlds; we inhabit unrestricted space.

I also propose enhanced audience awareness as a crip poetics characteristic. Nondisabled people often assume a closed loop of nondisabledness within poetry – the audience assumes that the poet is nondisabled, and the poet assumes that the audience is nondisabled. As Sandra Alland explains: "most non-disabled and hearing people don't even think about reading, watching or listening to disabled and D/deaf writers. They don't imagine our existence at all, except perhaps as bad metaphors for their own work".⁷⁴ Presenting one's work as a disabled poet entails, not simply contending with the audience's conceptions of your work, but the intersection of their conceptions of your work and their conceptions of you as a disabled person. Often they will either engage with your work minus any reference to your impairments, or with your impairments but not your work. Similarly, being a disabled audience member frequently means engaging with work that has been written with consideration for nondisabled audience members only. When a nondisabled poet uses the word "shadow", they assume their audience knows what that looks like, even though some people do not. When a nondisabled poet mentions the sound of grass rustling, they assume their audience experiences it as a soft sound, rather than painfully loud, or as a vibration, as some people do. The cumulative impact of being a disabled poet, then, is a visceral awareness of the diversity of the audience and its experiences.

To demonstrate the influence of crip poetics, and the autistic poetic techniques that I introduce in Chapter One, my close readings of Murray's writing will include examples of

⁷⁴ Sandra Alland, Introduction to *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back*, ed. Sandra Alland, Khairani Barokka, and Daniel Sluman (Rugby: Nine Arches Press, 2017), Kindle.

what Harry Collins and Robert Evans term “interactional expertise”. Collins and Evans are science and technology researchers who have studied the extent to which a person from one social group can fluently interact with another social group through language. To investigate this they used an “Imitation Game” where a “judge” asked questions of two other participants, one of whom was from their social group and one of whom was not. The participant not from their social group was asked to respond as if they were, and the judge was asked to determine which of the participants was in fact from their social group and which was not, and to provide reasons for their determinations. The interactions took place via computer, thus each person was separate from the others, and the exchanges were exclusively in written text.⁷⁵

When comparing blind and sighted people, Collins and Evans found that blind people had interactional expertise with sighted people, but sighted people did not have interactional expertise with blind people. For example, when blind people were asked to answer the question, “Around how many millimetres must a tennis ball drop from the line to be considered out?” as if they were sighted, they provided plausible answers because they had discussed playing tennis with their sighted friends, and had heard commentary of tennis matches. However, when sighted people were asked to answer the question, “How old were you when you went blind?” as if they were blind, the blind judge immediately knew they were not.⁷⁶ This was because sighted people, having had no or minimal interaction with blind people, relied on stereotypes and provided “black and white” answers.⁷⁷ For example, sighted people provided answers such as “I lost my sight when I was three”, whereas blind people provided answers such as “It began when I was two, and I was registered blind at three and a half”.⁷⁸ In other words, sighted people conceived of going blind as a singular event and diagnosis as instantaneous. However, blind people knew that both going blind and receiving a diagnosis are usually gradual processes and thus either described them as such, or provided a reason as to why they occurred so quickly.⁷⁹ Sighted people’s lack of interactional expertise is the reason that so few fictional blind characters authentically represent blind people. As I

⁷⁵ Harry Collins and Robert Evans, “Quantifying the Tacit: The Imitation Game and Social Fluency,” *Sociology* 48, no. 1 (2014): 4; 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512455735>.

⁷⁶ Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird*, 252.

⁷⁷ Collins and Evans, “Quantifying the Tacit,” 13.

⁷⁸ Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird*, 252.

⁷⁹ An Australian judge provided with the answer “It began when I was two, and I was registered blind at three and a half”, would be aware that the person was blind and also English, as there is not a blindness register in Australia.

have noted previously: “sighted people didn’t write blind characters, they wrote sighted characters who couldn’t see”.⁸⁰

Extending the concept of “interactional expertise” I propose “embodied expertise” to refer to non-linguistic methods by which members of the same social group interact with and recognise each other. I use “embodied expertise” rather than the term “embodied knowledge”, used in embodied cognition and related disciplines, because that usually refers to specific skills and does not refer to social group knowledge. Since interactional expertise refers only to language, I use embodied expertise to encompass all other elements of social group communication such as tone of voice, movements, and silence. As an example of embodied expertise, here is an autistic person, who also has an autistic parent and an autistic child, describing when they saw Les Murray on television. They recognised him, not as Les Murray, but as a fellow autistic person:

Recently I turned on the TV and channel-surfed, coming across an interview underway on the ABC which was part of a show called ‘Talking Heads’. I was captivated as an overweight, bald, elderly man (whose appearance, speech patterns and mannerisms reminded me very much of my father) spoke of his childhood in a country town in Australia... This man spoke of how, as a boy, he lived in his own little world of imagination and of preferring the company of animals (two things I had in common with him as a child) over what he called ‘The Humans’. ... Everything that I had seen and heard of the interview so far led me to think that this man must be on the autism spectrum and probably had Asperger’s Syndrome.⁸¹

Being autistic enabled this person to develop autistic interactional expertise and embodied expertise, and thus to recognise Murray’s autism before it was disclosed. Similarly, here is Tammet describing his experience of reading Murray’s writing for the first time, articulating not only interactional and embodied expertise, but also their powerful interpersonal effects:

Just the openness, the sprawl as he calls it. This idea that English just opened worlds, opened vistas, that words are passports to other worlds which are like this one but just slightly different. And that’s how I felt always – part of this world but slightly different, slightly at a distance. ... Just the sensation of reading something that completely resembled how I felt and what I thought and how I saw the world and how I expressed the world in words. It was like an electric shock. I felt finally that I had my own passport! I could say that I belonged. I just completely recognised myself in him, which I had never done before for anyone else.⁸²

⁸⁰ Tink, “All the Disabled Writers?”

⁸¹ JT, “Kindred Spirits?,” *The Other side* (blog), December 6, 2010, <https://theotherside.wordpress.com/2010/12/06/kindred-spirits/>.

⁸² Johnson, “Two Poets,” 15:18-17:11.

Thesis Structure

While this Introduction has provided a brief overview of disability studies and its application to literature, and the concepts that shape this thesis, Chapter One is specific to autism. With embodiment, impairment, disablement, and crip poetics as a framework, I discuss autism's profound effects on Murray's poetry. I describe what autism meant to Murray, the prominent meanings of autism since it was first designated as a diagnosis in Nazi Germany, and the various meanings that critics of Murray's work have ascribed to it. In the course of doing so, I also outline the Nazi genocide of disabled people, and discuss autistic subjectivity and poetic techniques, since they are central to Murray's writing.

Chapters Two and Three explore and analyse how autism and disablement influence the style and content of Murray's poetry. Chapter Two continues to examine Murray's poems that explicitly address autistic experience, with a concentrated focus on "Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver", in which Murray in his thirties identifies with and celebrates autistic culture, and "It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen", which presents snapshots from the first fifteen years of Murray's autistic son Alexander's life, written when Murray was in his forties and fifties. Through these snapshots Murray illustrates his and Alexander's relationship, and each of their relationships with autism.

In Chapter Three I analyse Murray poems that explicitly address topics other than autism. The poems analysed are "Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands", "First Essay on Interest", and "Second Essay on Interest: The Emu". These three poems examine nature with precision, while addressing universal themes of loneliness, love, and death – and they do so implicitly inflected by autistic and crip techniques, histories, and hopes for the future.

The second half of this thesis, comprising three chapters, is a close analysis of Murray's second verse novel *Fredy Neptune*, which is divided into five books. *Fredy Neptune* is the story of an autistic, German-Australian man, who acquires a physical impairment while witnessing a mass murder at the beginning of World War I. Over the thirty-six years of his life that he narrates throughout the novel, he travels to most continents of the world, and marries and raises a family at home in Australia, all the while navigating society's prejudices

against his race and impairments. During this time he also finds crip kin who assist him to develop a crip consciousness, through which he arrives at an understanding of how to be publicly and proudly autistic, and how to navigate what most troubles him about human behaviour.

Chapter One – Background

Asperges me hyssopo
the snatch of plainsong went,
Thou sprinklest me with hyssop
was the clerical intent,
not Asparagus with hiccups
and never autistic savant.
Asperger, mais. Asperg is me.
The coin took years to drop:

Lectures instead of chat. The want
of people skills. The need for Rules.
Never towing a line from the Ship of Fools.
The avoided eyes. Great memory.
Horror not seeming to perturb –
Hyssop can be a bitter herb.¹

This sonnet, “The Tune on Your Mind” (2006), is Murray’s public announcement of being autistic, published when he was sixty-seven. Before I describe the history of autism, autistic poetic techniques, and critical engagement with Murray’s autism, I will analyse this poem, which introduces all three. Equally important, it illustrates autism as Murray experienced it.

“The Tune on Your Mind” expresses that, though there were always associations between Murray and autism, his process of awareness and identification was gradual and nonlinear. For example in 1981, when Murray and his wife Valerie’s fourth child, Alexander, was medically diagnosed as autistic, Murray realised that Alexander was “an exaggerated form of me”.² However, when an astute interviewer pointed out that Murray had already linked himself with autism in his 1974 poem “Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver”, Murray responded: “I probably dimly intuited that it was coming. I never looked into it much until Alexander came along, but the word hung in the air somehow. ... So even if I didn’t quite

¹ Les Murray, “The Tune on Your Mind,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 561-2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

² Candida Baker, “Les A. Murray,” in *Yacker 2: Australian Writers Talk About Their Work* (Sydney: Pan Books, 1987), 234.

know how to apply the word autistic, the intuition was there”.³ It is this experience of a word hanging in the air, like a perpetual, sometimes painful and sometimes pleasurable earworm, which is conveyed by “The Tune on Your Mind”.

As such, and even as the poem presents Murray’s unease, it also displays his delight which springs from his autistic intense interest in words. Valerie Murray describes his relationship with words as follows:

I have had the good fortune to spend most of my life with one of the best masters of words anywhere. He treats words with the greatest respect, as his toys, his tools, his life. He has never laid claim to words he did not know and understand intimately. He has stretched words to transparency, and kneaded and shaped and polished them to reveal new and dazzling facets. Whatever the word, whatever the language, he has given it its honest due, researching if necessary, and pronouncing a foreign one like a native, taking every care with accuracy, and never presuming without checking.⁴

This is the level of investment and care that autistic people bestow upon their intense interests, and it is this dedication that differentiates autistic intense interests from nonautistic interests.⁵ Typically a nonautistic has interests that are pleasant or welcome distractions, which can easily be ignored for months or years, while autistic people have intense interests that are continually captivating and revitalising.⁶ (This difference is explored in the “Interest” poems, analysed in Chapter Three.) Murray evokes the sensations of intense interests in his description of what he refers to as a groove:

A groove is a body of objects or images which take up the loving energy and fascination of a human soul. It may be Second World War aircraft, or Egyptian antiquities of the Old Kingdom, or 1950s costume, or systems of formal logic. ... To the groover in his or her groove, though, the beloved subject matter is the poem of their life, ceaselessly summoning up profound intimations and the quivering pleasure of ever-unfolding significance. ... The groove is one of the great shelters of the individual soul, precisely because individual cases are so often dismissed as eccentric and trivial.⁷

³ J. Mark Smith, “A Conversation with Les Murray,” *Image* 64, www.imagejournal.org/article/conversation-les-murray/.

⁴ Valerie Murray, *Flight From the Brothers Grimm: A European-Australian Memoir* (self-pub., Books Unleashed, 2016), 171.

⁵ “intense interests” are also called “special interests” or “circumscribed interests”. I use “intense” because I believe it is an accurate descriptor, while “special” and “circumscribed” are less precise and carry more negative implications.

⁶ Mary Ann Winter-Messiers, “From Tarantulas to Toilet Brushes: Understanding the Special Interest Areas of Children and Youth with Asperger Syndrome,” *Remedial and Special Education* 28, no. 3 (2007): 146, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325070280030301>.

⁷ Les Murray, “Poems and Poesies,” in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 382.

Drawn from and demonstrating Murray's words groove, the first stanza of "The Tune on Your Mind" revels in the autistic poetic techniques of echoing and punning. It primarily moves between English, Latin, French, and German, joyfully intermingling words related to two fundamental elements of Murray's character that profoundly influenced his poetry. One of those elements, as explicit in "Asperges me hyssopo" from Psalm 51, is Catholicism. For Murray, poetry was a vehicle for both extolling and examining Catholicism: "Although my thinking is guided by authentic Catholic doctrine, it's not much use trying to shove that vocabulary and that material down people's throats. To rework it into art is essential, to explore the implications".⁸ The strength of the connection between Catholicism and his poetry was such that, in 1982, in a limited edition collection titled *Equanimities*, he began his tradition of dedicating his poetry "to the glory of God".⁹ By then he had been Catholic for eighteen years, converting from Calvinism when he was twenty-six. Catholicism felt to Murray like "home",¹⁰ where calcified feelings could soften: "I knew my grandfather and father had done each other no end of harm by being unable to forgive. No one I knew was much good at forgiving. In Catholicism, here was a world in which you could forgive, and it looked like a wonderful relief".¹¹

The other fundamental element of Murray's character featured in the first stanza of "The Tune on Your Mind" is autism, as explicit in "autistic savant". For Murray, autism did not just influence his poetry, it created his poetry. He articulated this when an interviewer asked if he had "glimpses" into Alexander's world. Murray replied: "You get glimpses from time to time, but you often can't put words to it. It feels exactly like the part of my brain which I can barely put words to, which is mostly the part my poetry comes from".¹²

In "The Tune on Your Mind", the connections between Murray's Catholicism, autism, and poetry are present from the first word – "Asperges". As well as being from Psalm 51, it sounds similar to "Asperger". Hans Asperger was the Austrian paediatrician who designated the medical diagnosis that is now known as autism.

⁸ Jim Davidson, "Les A. Murray," *Meanjin* 41, no. 1 (April 1982): 128.

⁹ Les Murray, *Equanimities* (Copenhagen: Razorback Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Davidson, "Les A. Murray," 127.

¹¹ Nicholas Wrope, "A Life in Writing: Les Murray," *The Guardian*, November 22, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/nov/22/les-murray-poet-life-profile>.

¹² Baker, "Les A. Murray," 244.

“Asperges” is then rekindled a few lines later. After alternating between Psalm 51 and standard English for four lines, the poem flows into a multilingual combination of puns and echoes, initiated by “Thou sprinklest me with hyssop” (line four). Line five, “Asparagus with hiccups”, is obviously an English pun. However, it also echoes back to “Asperges”, as that is the word for “asparagus” in French and Dutch.

Line six contains another language assemblage, “autistic savant”. The English word autism is a combination of two Greek affixes, and savant is a French word originating from Latin. “autistic savant” is predated by “idiot savant”, which was first employed in 1870 to label people who were extremely talented, and had also been assessed as having an intellectual impairment.¹³ It was the medical diagnosis some autistic people were given before the medical diagnosis of “autism” existed.¹⁴ Denoting the significance of the words “autistic savant”, they are followed by the first full stop in this poem. They also add another layer to the accumulation of echoes. “Autism”, through its connection with “Asperges” (line one), then also reinvigorates “Asperges” resonance with “Asparagus” (line five). Meanwhile “savant” is one component of a rhyme that also includes “intent” (line four), and “went” (line two).

This stanza’s references to autism implicitly evoke both the development of autism as a medical diagnosis, and Murray’s process of identifying as autistic. Though Asperger first defined “autistic psychopathy” in 1938, he did so in German. Thus his diagnosis remained unknown to most English speakers until 1981, when British child psychiatrist Lorna Wing promoted it. Wing renamed the condition “Asperger’s syndrome”, and positioned it as a similar but less complex form of “infantile autism”, a medical diagnosis known to English-speakers since 1943. At that time it was defined by Austrian-born, US-based Leo Kanner, but was not listed in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 1980 (DSM-III). Asperger’s Syndrome and infantile autism (renamed “autism disorder”) were two of several autism-related conditions listed in the DSM-IV in 1994. When “The Tune on Your Mind” was published in 2006, discussions were underway to

¹³ Joseph Straus, “Idiots Savants, Retarded Savants, Talented Aments, Mono-Savants, Autistic Savants, Just Plain Savants, People with Savant Syndrome, and Autistic People Who Are Good at Things: A View from Disability Studies,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2014): <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3407/3640>.

¹⁴ Currently this diagnosis is called “savant syndrome” to indicate that it can be congenital or acquired and that, even when it is congenital, it has a range of possible causes and associations, of which autism is just one.

incorporate these diagnoses into one “autistic spectrum disorder”. This occurred in the DSM-V released in 2013.

Murray’s search for a name for his condition was equally complex. The complicating factors included: the difficult process of finding and accepting a label that matched his experience; the ever-changing meaning of autism; the time an autistic person needs to understand a situation, due to how they process information; the time required for a hearing impaired person (as Murray was by this time) to be sure they have heard what was spoken; the common incorrect assumptions that nonautistic people make when communicating with autistic people; and critics not acknowledging Murray’s autism despite him repeatedly mentioning it.

By implicitly juxtaposing autism’s and Murray’s stories, Murray demonstrates that there are parallels between them, even though they occurred on different continents. One parallel is that Asperger publicly introduced autism in October 1938 in Austria, the same month and year that Murray was born in Australia. Another is that, since then their journeys have been similarly convoluted, even though Murray remained in Australia, while the medical rendering of autism became a conglomeration of Austrian, French, American, and British concepts. A third parallel, incorporating the other significant element of this poem, is that Asperger, like Murray, was Catholic.

In the final two lines of the first stanza the themes converge (“*Asperger, mais. Asperg is me./* The coin took years to drop”). Line seven begins with “Asperger” which, as well as being the only time his name is explicitly mentioned in this poem, further intensifies the echoes throughout this stanza. One of these echoes is the now well-established group – autism (line six), “Asparagus” (line five), and “Asperges” (line one). “Asperger” also initiates another echo of meaning, since “Asperger” is the French word for sprinkle, which first occurred on line two as “sprinklest”. After “Asperger”, line seven continues with “mais” meaning “but” in French, the German town Asperg, and the English word me. However, because “mais” is pronounced “meh”, the two phrases sonically echo each other (“*Asperger, mais. Asperg is me*”). Moreover, since this echo is preceded by “autistic savant”, the three phrases offer a crescendo of autistic recognition, culminating in Murray’s declaration of identification: “Asperg is me”. Emphasising the “years” over which both autism’s and Murray’s stories occurred, the “coin” does not “drop” until after this pronouncement, which is halfway through

the poem. “Drop” adds the final layer of echoes in this stanza, that ripple back through “hiccups” (line five), “hyssop” (line three), to the first line (“hyssopo”).

The break between the sonnet’s two stanzas heralds a shift from playfulness to tension, and from Murray’s consideration of autism to his experience of nonautistic people’s interpretations of his autistic characteristics. This shift is signalled by Murray’s language in the second stanza, which changes from poetic to plain. The second stanza also presents a series of statements that, depending on one’s position with regard to autism, might seem either relatable or contradictory, and with each the tension increases:

Lectures instead of chat. The want
of people skills. The need for Rules.
Never towing a line from the Ship of Fools.
The avoided eyes. Great memory.
Horror not seeming to perturb –
Hyssop can be a bitter herb.

These statements focus on communication between Murray and nonautistic people. While Murray believes, or has been told to believe, that he converses in “lectures instead of chat” (line nine), and others have assumed that this is his preference, in fact he has a “want/ of people skills” (line 9-10). “Want” might be the verb “to desire” or the noun “to lack”; either way it positions Murray’s communication as a biological characteristic and not a choice. Similarly he has “the need for Rules” (line ten), but does not proceed with an action simply because others have done so (“Never towing a line from the Ship of Fools” Line eleven).

As the misunderstandings multiply the poem contracts. The sentences shorten. The enjambment disappears. The echoes simplify, and there are fewer of them. Murray’s focus turns inward, as if he is overwhelmed. His memory is “Great”, perhaps because of his “avoided eyes”. Yet this is likely to sound impossible to Western, white, nonautistic people, who believe that eye contact is the most important, if not the only, demonstration of the attention requisite for remembering. Sighted autistic people, because of their greater awareness of detail, often find that the intensity of eye contact occupies a significant amount of their attention, rendering them unable to focus on the rest of the interaction.¹⁵ Thus eye

¹⁵ Nick (Nicholas) Walker, “Transformative Somatic Practices and Autistic Potentials: An Autoethnographic Exploration” (PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 2019), 65-6, https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Nick_Walker_Dissertation.pdf.

contact is not an indicator of their attention or engagement, as autistic rhetorician M. Remi Yergeau illustrates:

I might not know or recognize your face, but I know your scent, what you wore last Thursday, the exact date on which we first met, the rhythm of your pace, the resting cut of your hair against your shoulder, the pulsing force field of the space between our bodies. There are intimacies and knowledges that exceed the eye-to-eye, that exceed the I-to-I.¹⁶

Containing the weight of the accumulated tension, the final two lines of the sonnet are understated summations of it. “Horror not seeming to perturb” indicates that when Murray was in deep distress, he did not appear so to nonautistic people. This might mean that Murray did not receive the support he needed at those times and, in fact, may have been further distressed if others took offence at what they perceived as his lack of feeling. Finally, encapsulating both Murray’s internal process of accepting and understanding his own autism, and his negotiating the reactions of others, he states that “hyssop can be a bitter herb”. In other words, it is simultaneously cleansing and harsh.

There are also paradoxes that persist throughout the poem as a result of Murray “Never towing a line from the Ship of Fools”. If it is a “lecture”, it is simultaneously tuneful and, in the context of Murray’s other poems, short. In a number of lines it utilises a conventional Petrarchan sonnet structure, with an octet followed by a sestet, yet most of the lines stop short of iambic pentameter. And though it begins from a “snatch of plainsong”, it presents an expansive history of Murray’s life as impacted by autism and Catholicism.

“The Tune on Your Mind” was one of a number of poems in which Murray explored autism throughout his career. Thus part of the work of this thesis is to posit that, though all of Murray’s writing exhibits his autism, autism is also one of the significant themes of his poetry. Moreover autism, like Murray’s other themes, was a topic to which he continually returned with the hope of improving on his poetic expression of it. He describes this process in a 1985 interview, when asked how his poetry has changed: “It spirals in a way, it keeps going back on itself, finding things from the past and doing them again, or not doing them again exactly, but looking at them afresh, from another level of confidence”.¹⁷ In 2017 he elaborated:

¹⁶ M. Remi Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 211.

¹⁷ Baker, “Les A. Murray,” 240.

Occasionally ... any poet'll tell you, about 8% of the time you get a poem that's a real beauty. And you think I wrote all those ... that other bullshit to get that one. (laughs) And I wrote all the next bit of bullshit to get the next one. You keep on going and you look in your book and you say there's about four or five really good poems in this book. At the end of my life there'll be perhaps twenty-five or thirty poems.¹⁸

Perhaps a guide to what those thirty poems might be is *The Best 100 Poems of Les Murray* (2012). If so it suggests that Murray felt the most accomplished of his autism-themed poems were: “The Averted” (discussed later in this chapter) and “The Shield-Scales of Heraldry” (discussed in Chapter Two), both exploring his experience of autism; and “It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen” and “To One Outside the Culture” (both discussed in Chapter Two), both addressing Alexander’s autism. Nevertheless each of Murray’s autism poems, including “Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver” (also discussed in Chapter Two), “Self-Portrait from a Photograph”, “Like the Joy at his First Lie”, “The Tune on Your Mind”, and the book-length poem *Fredy Neptune* (discussed in chapters Four, Five, and Six), offer insight into Murray’s and Alexander’s complex relationships with autism.

Later in this chapter I will return to how autism shapes Murray’s poetry, the autistic poetic techniques he utilises, and how critics react to his autism. To contextualise these, however, I will first outline the history of autism which, as “The Tune on Your Mind” suggests, is complex. The construction of autism is inextricably linked with the Nazi genocide of disabled people. For this reason, and also because it is a primary concern to which Murray refers in his poetry, the following history explores that period in more depth.

Asperger’s Autism – A Nazi Invention

In October 1938, Austrian child psychiatrist Hans Asperger presented a lecture titled “The Mentally Abnormal Child” in which he defined the medical diagnosis that we now know as autism. This lecture took place at the Vienna Children’s Hospital, where Asperger had been Director of the Curative Education Clinic for three years.¹⁹ After the Nazi annexation of Austria on 12 March, it was the only one of three such clinics permitted to continue operating, due to being assessed by the Nazis as aligning with their values. Since then

¹⁸ Rob Norton, *I'm the Autistic One but I'm not the Weeper*, Vimeo, February 9, 2018, 17:52-18:39, <https://vimeo.com/254992802>.

¹⁹ This lecture was subsequently published in the *Viennese Clinical Weekly*.

Asperger had continued to prove his loyalty to the Nazi party by joining a number of Nazi organisations.²⁰ As such, in this lecture he sought to assure the Nazis that they could entrust him with more powerful roles in their regime.²¹ For example, according to Edith Sheffer, Asperger began his presentation with “a tribute to Nazi ideals, using overtly pro-regime rhetoric that was neither obligatory nor even customary in Austrian scientific papers in 1938”.²²

Asperger’s diagnosis, too, addressed the Nazi’s preoccupation with the sociability of children. He described: “this well-characterized group of children who we name ‘autistic psychopaths’ – because the confinement of the self (autos) has led to a narrowing of relations to their environment”.²³ Asperger supported the Nazi theory that antisocial traits were inherited, yet emphasised the vital role of medical professionals such as himself in determining who was educable and who was incurable.²⁴ He stated that autistic children have a “lack of respect for authority”, “failure of the instinct functions”, “astonishingly mature special interests”, and “originality of thought”. He elaborated that autistic “originality of thought” in some patients resulted in “high performance” and “outstanding achievements”, but in others was “nonsensical, eccentric, and useless”. Either way, Asperger pronounced, “nobody really likes these people”, “the community rejects them”, and thus medical professionals should “prevent the burdens of their antisocial and criminal acts on the national community”.²⁵

Though Asperger’s lecture was imbued with a dramatic definitiveness which suggested that autism was his discovery, a conception of autism had been emerging throughout the previous three decades. In 1911, Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler referred to “autistic thinking”, which he believed was one of “the four schizophrenias”.²⁶ A number of other medical professionals soon reported having similar patients. One example is Russian child psychiatrist Gruna Sukhareva. In 1926 she used the term “schizoid personality disorder” to describe a group of patients she had observed who, with sensitive support, were able to live a productive, if

²⁰ Edith Sheffer, *Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), 80-1.

²¹ Herwig Czech, “Hans Asperger, National Socialism, and ‘Race Hygiene’ in Nazi-Era Vienna,” *Molecular Autism* 9, no. 29 (2018): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13229-018-0208-6>.

²² Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, 83.

²³ Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, 82.

²⁴ Czech, “Hans Asperger, National Socialism,” 14.

²⁵ Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, 84-5.

²⁶ Adam Feinstein, *A History of Autism: Conversations with the Pioneers* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 6, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444325461>.

unconventional, life.²⁷ Additionally, two of Asperger's staff had already published on autistic psychopathy – Georg Frankl in 1934 and Annie Weiss in 1935. However they were not present for Asperger's 1938 lecture since, being Jewish, they had immigrated to America for their own safety.²⁸

In the context of the Third Reich, with its emphasis on sublimating the individual to the collective, Asperger's version of autism was a convenient invention. Since it had no specific physical attributes, it was the exclusive domain of medical professional interpretation. As discussed in the Introduction, "feble-mindedness" had been fulfilling this role for some time, but it had a flaw – it enveloped anyone who could be classified as intellectually impaired, but sometimes a patient displayed undeniable indications of what medical professionals classified as intelligence. What was one to do if one were Director of a Curative Education Clinic and wanted to label a child as incurably feble-minded in order to "prevent the burdens of their antisocial and criminal acts on the national community", but one knew their staff would not agree that the child was intellectually impaired?²⁹ Thus autism functioned as a loophole by which patients could still be classified as feble-minded, even if one, or indeed all, of the medical professionals involved in assessing them believed otherwise.³⁰

"Burden" and "prevention" were of course eugenic keywords throughout the world at that time, but the instigation of Germany's version of it is attributed to the 1920 book *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung Lebensunwerten Lebens (Authorization for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life)*. It was written by legal scholar Karl Binding and psychiatrist Alfred Hoche, who are described by Henry Friedlander as "right-wing nationalists who rejected individual rights and championed the rights of the national community". Recognising the utility of making people with terminal cancer the thin end of their euthanasia wedge, Binding and Hoche briefly discussed them before asserting that all institutionalised disabled people were "useless eaters", "human ballast", and "empty human shells". They further asserted that disabled people did not deserve food, medical care, or other national resources because they contributed nothing to society. They claimed that ending the life of a disabled person was an act of compassion for the person which would benefit society as a whole, not only because

²⁷ Steve Silberman, *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2015), 97.

²⁸ Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, 55-8.

²⁹ Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, 85.

³⁰ Czech, "Hans Asperger, National Socialism," 17.

they would no longer be a drain on state resources, but because their bodies could be used for medical research.³¹

This characterisation might suggest that the majority of disabled people in Germany at that time lived in institutions, and would remain there until they died, but this was not the case. “Die Gebrechlichen im Deutschen Reich nach der Zählung von 1925–26” (“Infirm in the German Reich According to the Survey of 1925–26”), the only such survey from that period, found that most physically or sensorially impaired people lived in the community, as did a third of “mentally infirm” people.³² Furthermore, disabled people argued that they, rather than medical or educational professionals, were the experts in their own lives. One example is Irma Dresdner, a Jewish disabled woman who worked as a teacher at the Philanthropin, an elementary Jewish school in Frankfurt. In April 1933 she published an article “Über Körperbehinderung und seelische Entwicklung” (“On Physical Handicap and Emotional Development”), in which she criticised medical and educational professionals for not seeking input into their theories of disabled people from disabled people themselves. Of particular concern to her was their theory that impaired people had a “cripple soul”, and thus displayed “oversensitivity, irritability, resentment, vengefulness, envy, distrust, rigidity, arrogance, self-centeredness, and delusions of grandeur”. To counter this portrayal she conducted her own survey of disabled people and found that: “Some made a point of saying that they only felt hostile, sad, or frightened when healthy people stared or laughed at them, thus turning the tables and showing that these negative feelings were caused by the behavior of the nondisabled rather than the supposedly inherent inadequacies of the disabled”. Furthermore, disabled people were not only living in the community, but were active, contributing community members.³³

Nothing is known of Dresdner’s life after this point. Being both disabled and Jewish it is likely that she was murdered. It is sobering to reflect that, had German disabled people not been targeted by the Nazis, they might have invented a social model of disability decades earlier than UPIAS.

³¹ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 14; 16.

³² Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 45-7.

³³ Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German*, 61-2.

Eliminating disabled people from the German population was central to Adolf Hitler's conception of racial purity. Using Binding's and Hoche's book to justify his views he argued in *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)* that the state: "must declare unfit for propagation all who are in any way visibly sick or who have inherited a disease and can therefore pass it on, and put this into actual practice... Those who are physically and mentally unhealthy and unworthy must not perpetuate their suffering in the body of their children".³⁴

One of Hitler's first acts when he came to power, then, was to introduce legislation, mandating the compulsory sterilisation of people who were labelled as congenitally impaired. This law targeted people who were classified as having blindness, deafness, epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, schizophrenia, bipolar, feeble-mindedness, severe physical impairment, and severe alcoholism. Hitler ranked it as the first of the "laws about blood and soil". The pervasiveness of this threat cannot be overstated:

all health care professionals in Germany, including doctors, dentists, nurses, masseurs, midwives, and practitioners of alternative medicine (Heilpraktiker), were required to report individuals whose conditions might fall under the provisions of the Sterilization Law. This meant that whenever a person visited one of these professionals for any cause – no matter how trivial – a sterilization investigation might be initiated.³⁵

In 1935 Hitler stated his determination to murder disabled people as soon as war began, and thus the campaign against them was intensified. Disabled people were not permitted to attend school beyond elementary level. They were denied access to welfare payments,³⁶ forbidden to obtain marriage licences and, if any pregnant woman, or a father of an unborn child, were labelled as disabled the child was aborted.³⁷ Additionally, records on the health of children were established and maintained in order to identify those who were impaired.³⁸

In May 1939 the Nazi regime began formulating their plan for the euthanasia of disabled people, which was in operation before World War II began.³⁹ This was the T4 program, which is often said to have ended in 4 August 1941. In fact, at that time the murder systems were simply restructured. In what is referred to as "decentralised euthanasia", disabled people

³⁴ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 118.

³⁵ Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German*, 77-8.

³⁶ Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German*, 86; 83; 80.

³⁷ Friedlander, *Origins of Nazi Genocide*, 30; 31.

³⁸ Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, 97.

³⁹ Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German*, 86.

were murdered in hospitals throughout Germany, while the T4 killing centres became central to The Final Solution.

Under the T4 program at least three hundred thousand disabled adults were murdered.⁴⁰ One of them, who might have been autistic, was Heisel Rein, who was murdered in 1940. His book *The Life and Opinions of a Swabian Eulenspiegel* was discovered some years later. The book was a collection of playful short stories that Susanne Knittel describes as follows:

Almost all of his jests are based on the discrepancy between his own and the other people's use of language: he insists on taking common figures of speech literally, which results in misunderstandings and comic situations. By ridiculing their misleading and dishonest use of language, Rein exposes the seemingly decent and reputable villagers as hypocrites.⁴¹

As soon as the Nazis took control of Germany, Rein recognised the threat that they posed to disabled people. This motivated him to begin writing in the hope of being remembered. As he explained:

Since I might not be around much longer, I am writing down what I know. This is my legacy to the village... Maybe later people will remember me more fondly. If there had been more jokers like me and fewer goose-steppers and soldiers, a lot of things wouldn't have turned out so badly.⁴²

Though T4 is the most well-known of the Nazi programs to murder disabled people, there were four others.⁴³ One of them did not have a name, but was specific to disabled children throughout Nazi-occupied territory. In Austria, Asperger was central to its operation. By October 1940, in addition to his role as director of the Curative Education Clinic, he was advisor to the city of Vienna regarding children and youth who had come to the attention of the state.⁴⁴ There is currently no definitive information on the number of children that Asperger recommended for death, however:

his recommendations are scattered through case histories. And his opinions mattered. When Asperger deemed two boys, Friedrich K. and Karl Sp., 'incapable of education,'

⁴⁰ Susanne C. Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 39.

⁴¹ Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny*, 123.

⁴² Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny*, 123.

⁴³ Suzanne E. Evans, *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 93-4.

⁴⁴ Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, 93.

their reform school ordered them to Spiegelgrund [one of the ‘Children’s wards’ where disabled children were murdered] on the ‘earliest possible transfer.’⁴⁵

The German medical profession also enacted Binding’s and Hoche’s suggestion to exploit the victims of euthanasia for experimentation. Indeed, research is uncovering that at least some of the murders occurred for that purpose. For example, Robertson, Ley, and Light state that there were: “at least 340 children and adolescents from the Brandenburg-Görden State Hospital who were murdered at the Brandenburg killing centre, so that their brains could be harvested for research at the KWI [Kaiser Wilhelm Institute] laboratories.”⁴⁶ Again, Asperger’s precise role in medical experimentation on children is currently unclear, but Sheffer notes that he “worked down the hall” from a number of experiments. These experiments included infants being subjected to extreme temperature changes, premature babies being left untreated so that they developed rickets, and babies being injected with tuberculosis.⁴⁷

In 1943 Asperger presented his postdoctoral thesis, “The ‘Autistic Psychopaths’ in Childhood”, the document for which he is now well-known. He continued to practice for another three decades, and died in 1980.

Though Asperger’s substantial role in the Holocaust was not confirmed until 2018, Murray might have suspected it earlier.⁴⁸ Or he might have been aware of it if he had read Asperger’s writing in German, rather than Uta Frith’s decontextualised English translation.⁴⁹ Either way, this is one of many possible reasons that the Nazi genocide of disabled people haunts his poetry.

The other reasons that the Nazi genocide of disabled people haunts Murray’s poetry are personal to Murray and his son Alexander. Since Murray was born just two weeks after Asperger’s 1938 lecture, he may have felt that it was only geography that saved him from

⁴⁵ Sheffer, *Asperger’s Children*, 142.

⁴⁶ Michael Robertson, Astrid Ley, and Edwina Light, *The First into the Dark: The Nazi Persecution of the Disabled* (Sydney: UTS ePRESS, 2019), 94, <https://doi.org/10.5130/aae>.

⁴⁷ Sheffer, *Asperger’s Children*, 134; 134-6.

⁴⁸ Czech, “Hans Asperger, National Socialism”.

⁴⁹ The translation is: Hans Asperger, “‘Autistic psychopathy’ in childhood,” trans. Uta Frith, in *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, ed. Uta Frith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37-92. Information on Frith’s omission of the relationship between Asperger’s syndrome and the Third Reich is in: Sheffer, *Asperger’s Children*, 242.

death. as a “very difficult, hyperactive and badly behaved” child, had he been in Germany he is likely to have been captured by the disabled child murder system; and there is no doubt that, had he been alive at the time, Alexander would have been.⁵⁰ Also, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, Murray and Valerie were blamed for Alexander’s autism which, for Murray, may have been akin to being labelled a “Nazi”.

Unsurprisingly, then, Murray drew attention to the Nazi genocide of disabled people throughout his career. It features in his 1990 book where the title poem, “Dog Fox Field”, imagines some of the victims of the disabled child murder program, and describes how they were killed:

Irma who looked Chinese, and Hans
who knew his world as a fox knows a field.

Hunted with needles, exposed, unfed,
this time in their thousands they bore sad cuts

for having gaped, and shuffled, and failed
to field the lore of prey and hound

they then had to thump and cry in the vans
that ran while stopped in Dog Fox Field.⁵¹

The poem emphasises that, while the word “euthanasia” suggests a quick and painless death, that is not what occurred. The children who survived being experimented upon were injected with medications, or starved, or left in freezing temperatures. Thus their deaths were gradual, over days or weeks.⁵² And though, as far as I am aware, the mobile gas chambers were not specifically linked to the children’s program, they certainly were in use, and are likely to have murdered disabled people of any age.⁵³

A later poem “Rock Music” (from *Subhuman Redneck Poems*), shifts from considering what occurred, to why. Murray’s anguish regarding this question is comprehensively explored in *Fredy Neptune*, however “Rock Music” plainly articulates the question:

⁵⁰ Amanda Tink, ““If You’re Different Are You the Same?”: The Nazi Genocide of Disabled People and Les Murray’s *Fredy Neptune*,” in *Genocide Perspectives VI: The Process and the Personal Cost of Genocide*, edited by Nikki Marczak and Kirril Shields (Sydney, UTS ePRESS, 2020), 70, <https://doi.org/10.5130/aaf.e>.

⁵¹ Les Murray, “Dog Fox Field,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 325. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

⁵² Evans, *Forgotten Crimes*, 33-4.

⁵³ Friedlander, *Origins of Nazi Genocide*, 139.

The beautiful Nazis, why are they so cruel?
Why, to castrate the aberrant, the original, the wounded⁵⁴

Murray's answer is fear. He suggests that the Nazis were afraid of "aberrant" people:

who might change our species and make obsolete
the true race. Which is those who never leave school.

In other words, Murray believed that the eugenicist's argument that disabled people were weakening the human race was an intellectual justification for their fear. Their fear was that, far from being weaker, disabled people in fact possessed skills that eugenicists did not. Therefore disabled people had to be murdered before they proved how limited eugenicists were. Murray's belief has evolved in *Fredy Neptune*, but still contains its component parts – resistance to theories such as eugenics that are founded on prejudice; and crip pride and strength that flourish in spite of eugenics' murderous doctrines.

Kanner's Autism – Blaming Parents

In 1943, the same year that Asperger presented his postdoctoral thesis, Leo Kanner published his paper "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact", in which autism was designated as a medical diagnosis, again. Kanner was certainly aware of Asperger's work, though it is unclear to what degree. He was born in Austria, and attended university and worked as a doctor in Berlin before migrating to America in 1923. Thus he was fluent in German, and familiar with the medical journals in which Asperger and his colleagues were publishing. Moreover, he assisted Georg Frankl, who worked with Asperger at the Curative Education Clinic, to migrate to America in 1937.⁵⁵ He then employed Frankl just in time for the arrival of Donald Triplett, who was one of the eleven case studies featured in Kanner's paper.⁵⁶

While Asperger assessed children of all ages, Kanner assessed children seven years and under. Thus he named the condition "infantile autism". He characterised autistic children as

⁵⁴ Les Murray, "Rock Music," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 393. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

⁵⁵ John E. Robison, "Kanner, Asperger, and Frankl: A Third Man at the Genesis of the Autism Diagnosis," *Autism* 21, no. 7 (October 2017): 865, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316654283>.

⁵⁶ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 164.

having an “inability to relate themselves in the ordinary way to people and situations”, an “an anxiously obsessive desire for the maintenance of sameness”, and speech that was “semantically and conversationally valueless”.⁵⁷

Like Asperger, Kanner was preoccupied with playing a leading role in the medical fashions of the time. From 1943 when he first wrote of autism, he maintained that it was a unique syndrome. However, in 1948 he listed it under schizophrenia in the latest edition of his textbook, *Child Psychiatry*. When a colleague attacked mothers as failing their children Kanner wrote a book titled *In Defense of Mothers*.⁵⁸ Yet, in his infantile autism paper he blamed parents for their child’s autism, stating that “in the whole group, there are very few really warmhearted fathers and mothers”.⁵⁹ Over the next decade he expanded this comment into the “refrigerator parent” theory – referenced in Murray’s poem “It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen” –which asserted that autism was caused by parents, especially mothers, who prioritised their careers over their children. This theory was espoused by a number of other medical professionals, most famously Bruno Bettelheim in his 1967 book *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self*. Two years later Kanner retracted his theory, however Bettelheim’s sensationalised adaption of it had already become more popular than Kanner’s writing.⁶⁰ Bettelheim had been imprisoned for ten and a half months in Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps and, both before that time and after, had contact with children whom he labelled as autistic.⁶¹ From these experiences he believed he recognised similarities between a set of concentration camp prisoners and all autistic children:

The moslem [concentration camp prisoner who did not react to Nazi cruelty] who let the SS get hold of him, not just physically but emotionally too, went on to internalize the SS attitude that he was less than a man, that he was not to act on his own, that he had no personal will. But having transformed his inner experience to accord with his outer reality he ended up, though for entirely different reasons, with a view of himself and the world very similar to that of the autistic child.⁶²

⁵⁷ Leo Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact,” *Nervous Child* (1943): 242; 245; 242.

⁵⁸ Silberman, *Neurotribes*, 193-4; 197; 160.

⁵⁹ Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances,” 250.

⁶⁰ James McGrath, *Naming Adult Autism: Culture, Science, Identity* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 92.

⁶¹ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 199-201.

⁶² Bruno Bettelheim, *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 65-6.

Sacks's Autism – Literature's Objects

Arguably the first writer to introduce autism to an audience broader than autistic people and their parents was Oliver Sacks, a neurologist who wrote numerous best-selling books of his observations about his patients. Tom Shakespeare observed this in 1996 when, playing on the title of Sacks's first book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, he referred to Sacks as “the man who mistook his patients for a literary career”. Sacks, Shakespeare continued, “violates every existing principle of disability equality”, and “resembles nothing so much as a Victorian ethnographer, charting the bizarre world of mentally and physically impaired people for the voyeuristic cognoscenti”.⁶³

Shakespeare was reviewing Sacks's sixth book, *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales*, a title which grants its readers permission to dehumanise the subjects of Sacks's essays before the book is open: “Don't worry”, this title suggests to an assumed audience of nondisabled people “they are not human, they are from another planet, which makes it acceptable for me to treat them as objects, and for you to watch me do so”.

One of the people Sacks profiles in this book is Temple Grandin, who is among the earliest publicly identifying autistic people, beginning with her 1986 co-authored autobiography *Emergence: Labelled Autistic*. By that time she had already obtained her PhD in animal science and authored over a hundred academic articles on either the humane handling of livestock, or autism. Sacks completely disregards her academic history, and even though he refers to the many other academics he quotes by their last name, never grants her that collegial respect, referring to her throughout the essay by her first name, Temple.

Sacks introduces Grandin by questioning whether she was truly capable of writing her book: “How could an autistic person write an autobiography? It seemed a contradiction in terms”. He hypothesises that its “fine and unexpected qualities” are due to her co-author, but then continues that reading her academic papers convinced him that she in fact is able to write. However, he then adds that, according to an autism researcher, Grandin has a “failure” to realise that someone reading her writing may not possess her knowledge of background facts”. It did not matter to him that Grandin was far from the first person to co-author their

⁶³ Tom Shakespeare, review of *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales*, by Oliver Sacks, *Disability & Society* 11, no. 1 (1996): 137.

autobiography and, though there does not appear to be any research on this, is unlikely to be unique among academics for not providing sufficient background information for their readers. The only matter of importance is that Sacks maintains his authority to possess and negatively narrate Grandin.⁶⁴

Consequently, the pattern where Sacks presents information about Grandin, raises the possibility of her capability, and then undermines it with his own opinion, recurs frequently throughout the fifty-two pages of his essay. According to Sacks, Grandin walks in a way that is “slightly clumsy or uncouth” and her explanation for this is “ataxia”. However, even though he only performed a “brief” neurological examination, and did indeed observe ataxia, it was “insufficient, I thought, to explain her odd gait”.⁶⁵ At an unspecified earlier time, she had some difficulty understanding *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, which she attributes to “sequencing difficulties”, yet to him they “seem”, on the basis of no provided evidence, to “arise from her failure to empathize with the characters, to follow the intricate play of motive and intention”.⁶⁶ He describes the downstairs floor of her house as having “usual amenities”, and then adds, “but I had the sense that it was rarely used”.⁶⁷ No detail of her life is too minor for his relentless grandstanding.

There are, however, two topics – autistic pride, and nondisabled people’s cruelty towards disabled people – on which Sacks has no interest in commenting. Both Grandin and a family that Sacks visited where all three members were autistic mentioned having pride in their strengths as a result of their autism.⁶⁸ These were opportunities for Sacks to use his authority with his audience to encourage both disabled pride and nondisabled allyship, but Sacks simply reports their comments without elaboration. Similarly, when Grandin is “passionately angry” about the abuse of disabled people in institutions, and details how her colleagues sabotaged her work,⁶⁹ Sacks could name these practices as unacceptable, but he chooses silence. He cannot even credit her with humanity when, during their discussion as she drives him to the airport, she contemplates what her legacy will be:

⁶⁴ Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 253.

⁶⁵ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 256.

⁶⁶ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 259.

⁶⁷ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 262.

⁶⁸ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 276-7.

⁶⁹ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 280, 260.

‘This is what I get very upset at.’... Temple, who was driving, suddenly faltered and wept. ‘I’ve read that libraries are where immortality lies... I don’t want my thoughts to die with me... I want to have done something... I’m not interested in power, or piles of money. I want to leave something behind. I want to make a positive contribution – know that my life has meaning. Right now, I’m talking about things at the very core of my existence.’⁷⁰

Sacks does not respond to her.

As they say goodbye he does not thank her for two full days of her time, for displaying for him every aspect of her life including her bedroom, for answering all of his questions (including whether she had ever had sex), or even for saving his life by stopping him from diving into a hydroelectric dam in which he would have drowned. Instead, taking his last opportunity to possess her, despite knowing that her experience of hugs is “terror and engulfment”, without asking her for permission, he hugs her.⁷¹

Sacks’s writing is sadly exemplary of authors who deflect attention from their negative contribution to the construction of an impairment, while claiming that said impairment is purely biological. In the context of blindness, this construct is called the “hypothetical blind man”.⁷² Georgina Kleege has explored how, when philosophers needed evidence for their sight-related postulations, or authors chose a metaphor for ignorance, they created this construct. And each time it was invoked, another author was reminded of its usefulness, and it was invoked again. Catherine Prendergast has described the same phenomenon with regard to schizophrenia in postmodern literature. She names this construct “the exceptional schizophrenic” because they are continually situated as both vividly aware and perpetually disordered, a figure that others should study, but should not emulate.⁷³ Autism, Stuart Murray suggests, has been similarly objectified throughout the last thirty years. The autistic construct reminds others of their humanity, by simultaneously displaying the autistic’s lack of humanity and complete vulnerability.⁷⁴ Indeed, as Mitchell and Snyder detail, throughout literature “the disabled body is sedimented within an ongoing narrative of breakdown and abnormality”, while nondisabled people are transformed.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 296.

⁷¹ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 263.

⁷² Georgina Kleege, “Blindness and Visual Culture: An Eyewitness Account,” in *The Disability Studies Reader* 5th ed., ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2017), 441.

⁷³ Catherine Prendergast, “The Unexceptional Schizophrenic: A Post-Postmodern Introduction,” in *The Disability Studies Reader* 5th ed., ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2017), 235.

⁷⁴ Stuart Murray, *Autism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 68.

⁷⁵ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 58.

With Grandin, Sacks's method for constructing her as incapable of understanding literature was to simply assume it was true. Furthermore, the same method was utilised by everyone who interviewed her since then, until Ralph Savarese twenty years later. Savarese included Grandin in his project to read and analyse literary texts individually with six autistic people. During his discussion with Grandin he learned that her favourite undergraduate subject was a literature course that included discussion of Keats and Dante. In surprise he asked, "With all of the things that have been written about you, how is it possible that we don't know this fact?" She responded "Well, no one has ever asked me about literature".⁷⁶ It is worth underscoring this point, that this persistent stereotype about Grandin was constructed and strengthened by each interviewer's failure to imagine that she might enjoy poetry. Moreover, each interviewer either did not read, or disregarded, Grandin's own writing.

Autistic Autism – A Very Literary Condition

While medical professionals continued to develop their careers by insisting that they should authoritatively define autism, the first generation of children they had labelled became adults. Like the members of UPIAS, autistic people found that the medical model framing of autism consigned them to a tragedy narrative. Consequently, like UPIAS, they began to rewrite the narrative of autism. This section briefly introduces four of the early texts in this process, which occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The nuance within and between each document is a stark contrast to the monolithic understanding of autism maintained over the previous four decades. Nevertheless, it is important to note that all four authors completed university degrees. Thus these texts are also a reminder of the many autistic people who were denied that opportunity.

The first well-known text written by an author who was acknowledged as autistic was Grandin's autobiography, *Emergence: Labeled Autistic* (1986). It specifically addresses nonautistic parents and professionals, and is framed as a recovery narrative, yet it contains her story of learning to take pride in her autistic strengths despite societal prejudice. Grandin was diagnosed as autistic when she was three, and her parents were told that it was likely she

⁷⁶ Ralph James Savarese, *See It Feelingly: Classic Novels, Autistic Readers, and the Schooling of a No-Good English Professor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 163.

would be institutionalised for life. Instead she attended school and university, and became a world authority on both livestock handling and autism. Prior to her final chapter of practical recommendations for parents of autistic children, she summarises her work, and how her autism enables it:

Today I am successful in my business. I travel all over the United States, Europe, Canada, and Australia designing livestock handling facilities for ranches, feedlots and meatpacking plants. My experiences have given me empathy for the animals going through the facilities and help me to design better equipment. For instance, the chutes and pens that I design are round. The reason for this design is because cattle will follow a curved path more easily...The principle is to work with the animal's behavior instead of against it. I think the same principle applies to autistic children – work with them instead of against them. Discover their hidden talents and develop them.⁷⁷

The next well-known autistic author was Australian Donna Williams. Her book, *Nobody Nowhere: The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic Girl*, was first published in 1991, shortlisted for the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for nonfiction in 1992, and spent fifteen weeks on the New York Times Best-Seller list in 1993. Williams' book is also a recovery narrative. However it is addressed to both autistic and nonautistic people and, as well as autistic pride, discusses autistic embodied expertise and culture. Unlike Grandin, Williams did not have the advantage of a stable home or school. However, she completed a final high school year equivalent when she was eighteen, followed by a sociology degree, and an honours thesis. Then, while on holiday in Wales, she met someone whom she immediately knew was different from most people in the same ways that she had always experienced herself to be: "There was something about this man's manner. He was making me terribly nervous by his obvious shyness and embarrassment at sitting opposite me. I could relate to his behaviour too well. I had recognized it as my own language and began to feel nervous and exposed at someone else being privy to it".⁷⁸ This motivated Williams to begin writing her book, which led to her autism diagnosis. Her story ends with her joy at working with autistic children:

She took my hand, and in unison we broke into a skip, swinging our hands as we went away from the others, across the park to the swings.

We both got on the swings. As we swung higher and higher, I remembered another park a long long time ago and wondered if one day there would be a little autistic girl who would

⁷⁷ Temple Grandin and Margaret M. Scariano, *Emergence: Labelled Autistic* (New York: Warner Books, 1986), 138.

⁷⁸ Donna Williams, *Nobody Nowhere* (London: Doubleday, 1992), 149.

remember a person called Donna in ‘the world’ whose hand she had taken to skip across the park.⁷⁹

The third well-known autistic-authored text, certainly among autistic people, is Jim Sinclair’s “Don’t Mourn for Us” (1993). It is not a book but a speech that was motivated by, and promotion for, Autism Network International (ANI). Sinclair, with Williams and autistic advocate Kathy Grant, had formed ANI the previous year, after they had spent two joyful days together. Williams describes their connection during this time in her second book:

Despite thousands of miles, ‘our world’ concepts, strategies, and experiences even came down to having created the same made-up words to describe them. Together we felt like a lost tribe. ‘Normal’ is to be in the company of one like one’s self... We all had a sense of belonging, of being understood, of being normal...all the things we could not get from others in general. It was so sad to have to leave.⁸⁰

They wanted other autistic people to have the opportunity to experience the same joy from connecting with each other directly, rather than through a nonautistic person, and from meeting in autistic-led spaces. This led to a newsletter which soon became an internet mailing list, and to Autreat, an autistic-led space for autistic people and allies, which was held annually from 1996 to 2013. Also, whereas autism conferences had previously only allowed autistic people to present themselves as a standard medical model story, or what Sinclair called a “self-narrating zoo exhibit”, ANI, and the Autreat annual conference, became a rallying point for change.⁸¹ It allowed autistic people and their allies to support autistic presenters to choose their own topics.

“Don’t Mourn for Us” was the first such presentation. In it Sinclair implores parents to stop investing in medical stories of autism as an “appendage”, an “impenetrable wall”, and a “death”.⁸² Sinclair then asks parents to let go of their grief for the child they had been expecting, and to relate to the child they have:

Your autistic child may learn to talk, may attend regular classes in school, may go to college, drive a car, live independently, have a career – but will never relate to you as other children relate to their parents. Or your autistic child may never speak, may graduate from a self-contained special education classroom to a sheltered activity program or a residential facility, may need lifelong full-time care and supervision – but is not completely beyond your reach. The ways we relate are different. Push for the things your

⁷⁹ Williams, *Nobody Nowhere*, 178.

⁸⁰ Donna Williams, *Somebody Somewhere: Breaking Free from the World of Autism* (London: Doubleday, 1994), 182-3.

⁸¹ Jim Sinclair, “History of Ani,” January, 2005, https://www.autreat.com/History_of_ANI.html.

⁸² Jim Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us,” 1993, http://www.autreat.com/dont_mourn.html.

expectations tell you are normal, and you'll find frustration, disappointment, resentment, maybe even rage and hatred. Approach respectfully, without preconceptions, and with openness to learning new things, and you'll find a world you could never have imagined.

Yes, that takes more work than relating to a non-autistic person. But it can be done – unless non-autistic people are far more limited than we are in their capacity to relate. We spend our entire lives doing it. Each of us who does learn to talk to you, each of us who manages to function at all in your society, each of us who manages to reach out and make a connection with you, is operating in alien territory, making contact with alien beings. We spend our entire lives doing this. And then you tell us that we can't relate.⁸³

The fourth well-known autistic text is “Odd People In: The Birth of Community Amongst People on the Autistic Spectrum” (1998). If the title does not sound familiar, the text’s key concept, “neurodiversity”, will. It was coined by Australian Judy Singer, and the text is her sociology honours thesis. In it she first discusses her experiences in the middle of three generations of autistic women, and in the growing online movement of autistic people. Then, expanding on the social model, she posits “neurodiversity” as a movement that values all neurologies.⁸⁴ She asks:

Why not propose that just as biodiversity is essential to ecosystem stability, so neurodiversity may be essential for cultural stability? Why not strategically argue that the nurturing of neurodiversity gives society a repository of types who may come into their own under unforeseeable circumstances[.]⁸⁵

If these texts are evidence that autistic people can be accomplished authors, they might also incorrectly suggest that autistic authorial ability is limited to autobiography and academia. In fact these texts are only evidence of what autistic-identifying authors were able to have published. And, like disabled authors generally, autobiography was often the only nonacademic publishing avenue made available to them.⁸⁶ As a result, autistic-identifying poets are indeed difficult to locate. Currently, it is often said that the first published autistic poet is Canadian David Eastham, whose book *Understand: 50 Memowriter Poems*, was published in 1985.⁸⁷ As such, Murray’s contribution to *The Ilex Tree* extends autistic literary history by twenty years.

⁸³ Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us”.

⁸⁴ In other words “neurodiversity” refers to a group. An individual with a condition such as autism, dyslexia, Tourette syndrome, brain injury, etc, is “neurodivergent”. And a person without any such conditions is “neurotypical”.

⁸⁵ Judy Singer, *Neurodiversity: The Birth of an Idea* (self-pub., Amazon Digital Services, 2017), Kindle.

⁸⁶ G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 33, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.915367>.

⁸⁷ Shane Neilson, "A New Materialisms Poetics of Touch: David Eastham's *Understand: 50 Memowriter Poems*," *The Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 10, no. 1 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v10i1.733>.

Autistic Subjectivity

Today, out walking, I considered stones.
It used to be said that I must know each one
on the road by its first name, I was such a dawdler,
such a head-down starrer.
I picked up
a chunk of milk-seamed quartz, thumbed off the clay,
let the dry light pervade it and collect,
eliciting shifting gleams, revealing how
the specific strength of a stone fits utterly
into its form and yet reflects the grain
and tendency of the mother-lode, the mass
of a vanished rock-sill tipping one small stone⁸⁸

This is from Murray's poem "Evening Alone at Bunyah", first published in *The Weatherboard Cathedral* (1969), his first solo book of poetry. The poem explores the intricacies of the relationships between Murray and his father, and between both of them and Murray's deceased mother, their home, their country town, and the city. In these lines Murray articulates his autistic subjectivity – his intensely detailed awareness of the sights surrounding him. He deliberately slows the pace of perception, exhibiting, and inviting nonautistic readers to experience, the many connections that he as an autistic person notices, and their non-hierarchical nature.

This is wonder, a state that any human might experience intermittently, but is commonly a constant disposition for autistic people. Ivor Indyk, one of the few critics who notes autism as integral to Murray's writing, defines wonder as: "not just an attentive state, but one which is absorbed by the immensity of the perspective, or the implications, opened by the detail which has captured its attention".⁸⁹ This quote emphasises wonder's capacity for accentuating the dynamic and connected nature of details and their potential, as well as wonder's enthralling nature. It also highlights the differences in autistic and nonautistic attunement to detail. While nonautistic people typically attend to a scene as a static whole containing a few prominent details, autistic people typically attend to each detail of a scene, gradually combining them with a continuous, active curiosity for possibility. Murray describes the experience of this process in his poem "Equanimity":

⁸⁸ Les Murray, "Evening Alone at Bunyah," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 12-6. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

⁸⁹ Ivor Indyk, "Provincialism and Encyclopedism," *Island* 127 (2011): 80.

a field all foreground, and equally all background,
like a painting of equality. Of infinite detailed extent
like God's attention. Where nothing is diminished by perspective.⁹⁰

The reason that autistic and nonautistic people typically perceive information differently is that they utilise different methods for processing information. Star Ford refers to nonautistic perception as “forest-first learning”, and autistic perception as “trees-first learning”.⁹¹ Both groups progress through the stimulation, organisation, and interpretation stages of perception, but do so from different positions. In the terms of Ford’s forest-trees first metaphor, nonautistic people, after observing a scene as a whole forest, then process it by organising and interpreting it in accordance with how it conforms to their culturally-obtained knowledge of the world. Conversely autistic people, after observing the same scene tree by tree by tree, process it by prioritising the scene as it is, rather than the cultural symbols with which it conforms.⁹²

Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages to both types of processing. Trees-first processing means that the person has an independently-created, readily accessible, and accurate image of the scene, increasing the likelihood of accurate and detailed conclusions about it, and memories of it. However, compared to nonautistic people, autistic people move through each of the stimulation, organisation, and interpretation stages of perception at a slower pace, which also means their response is slower. Additionally, since they do not prioritise conforming with cultural symbols in the organisation and interpretation stages of perception, their conclusions about the scene may not be readily understood by nonautistic people. Forest-first processing means that the person is able to quickly and easily obtain a general image of the whole scene, draw conclusions about it that are readily understood by others who rely on the same cultural symbols, respond quickly, and move to the next scene. However, the nonautistic person’s organisation and interpretation of a scene, as well as their

⁹⁰Les Murray, “Equanimity,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 178-80. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

⁹¹Star (Ian) Ford, *A Field Guide to Earthlings: An Autistic/Asperger View of Neurotypical Behavior* (self-pub., Ian Ford Software Corporation, 2010), Kindle.

⁹²Ford's forest-trees first model has many similarities to Murray's (Dinah, not Les), Lesser's, and Lawsons's monotropism-polytropism model. Dinah Murray, Mike Lesser, and Wendy Lawson, “Attention, Monotropism and the Diagnostic Criteria for Autism,” *Autism* 9, no. 2 (May 2005): 139–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361305051398>. However, they frame perception as a matter of motivation and interest, whereas Ford frames it as a matter of information processing, which I believe is crucial to understanding autism.

conclusions about it, are more likely to be constrained by cultural symbols. Additionally, the person may mistake their resulting filtered version of the scene for the scene itself, increasing the likelihood of incorrect organisation, interpretations, conclusions, and memories of it.

This difference in processing, and the consequent differences in perceptions and experiences, is the thread that links common nonautistic misinterpretations of autistic peoples' actions. Those misinterpretations then frequently result in a range of inaccurate mischaracterisations of autistic people, including that they are incapable of reading or writing literature. As Yergeau elaborates:

Many scholars have argued, for instance, that autism precludes the ability to both compose and enjoy stories. Over the past decade, numerous articles in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, one of the flagship autism journals, have characterized autistic autobiography as lacking narrative structure and coherence, as lacking rhetorical facility and audience awareness, and as lacking self-reflection...In all things discursive, autism represents decided lack. These are the stories through which we know autism, even as these same stories claim that autism remains unknowable, unnarratable.⁹³

These stories, that autistic people lack “rhetorical facility”, “self-reflection”, and everything else requisite for composing literature, are commonly underpinned by four justifications. They are that autistic people also lack theory of mind, sociality, intentionality, and creativity. And while it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address each of these in detail, I will briefly outline why each is a misinterpretation of autistic subjectivity, before exploring autistic poetics.

The first claim is that autistic people lack theory of mind, which is the ability to understand and respond to another's mental state. In other words, it is the knowledge that each person has their own desires, beliefs, and intentions, and the ability to use that knowledge to attribute mental states to oneself and others.⁹⁴ For a writer, theory of mind is obviously a prerequisite for understanding that one has an audience, or even that one has ideas. Theory of mind is said to have developed in nonautistic humans by age four.⁹⁵ Proponents of theory of mind assert that autistic people are not aware that they, or anyone else, have minds. One would assume

⁹³ Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 7.

⁹⁴ David Premack and Guy Woodruff, “Does the Chimpanzee Have a Theory of Mind?,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 1, no. 4 (1978): 515, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00076512>.

⁹⁵ Simon Baron-Cohen, Alan M. Leslie, and Uta Frith, “Does the Autistic Child Have a ‘Theory of Mind’?,” *Cognition* 21, no. 1 (October 1985): 39, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277\(85\)90022-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(85)90022-8).

that such claims would not be made until theory of mind was well-established as a concept, but this is not the case. Premack and Woodruff defined “theory of mind” in 1978 in their paper “Does the Chimpanzee have a Theory of Mind?” Just seven years later Simon Baron-Cohen and his colleagues published “Does the Autistic Child have a Theory of Mind?”, purporting to prove that, unlike chimpanzees, autistic people do not have theory of mind. This is despite the fact that they only studied children, and that they concluded that one fifth of the autistic children studied did in fact have theory of mind.⁹⁶

One type of evidence employed to support the assertion of autistic people’s lack of theory of mind is that they do not always provide the response that the nonautistic person expects. However, as Yergeau notes, this is a type of compulsory able-bodiedness that disabled people frequently encounter when communicating with nondisabled people: “the disabled person becomes marked as and with deficit, while the nondisabled interlocutor is marked as able, conversant, intelligent, and well, the goal to which the disabled person should aspire”.⁹⁷ In an exchange between a disabled person and a nondisabled person, the nondisabled person often has “a resistance to hearing and an insistence on prefigured forms and expressions that function to further dis-empower already marginalized subjects”.⁹⁸ In other words, the nondisabled person shifts the entire responsibility for mutual meaning-making to the disabled person. If the disabled person responds as the nondisabled person expects, then the disabled person has communicated appropriately. When the disabled person responds in a way that the nondisabled person does not expect, then the disabled person has failed. As such they will be framed as communicating inappropriately, not communicating or, if they are autistic, lacking the ability to communicate.

In the context of autism, Damian Milton calls this the “double empathy problem”. Milton argues that, while autistic people do sometimes misunderstand nonautistic people, nonautistic people also sometimes misunderstand autistic people. He further argues that this is not a lack on the part of either person, it is a cultural difference that both people need to accommodate.⁹⁹ Supporting Milton’s argument, research has since demonstrated that autistic people

⁹⁶ Baron-Cohen, Leslie, and Frith, “Does the Autistic Child Have a ‘Theory of Mind’?,” 42.

⁹⁷ Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 143-4.

⁹⁸ Julia Miele Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances: Theorizing Autism Poetics from the DSM to Robinson Crusoe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 31.

⁹⁹ Damien E. M. Milton, *A Mismatch of Salience: Explorations of the Nature of Autism from Theory to Practice* (East Sussex: Pavilion, 2017), 47; 6.

communicate effectively with each other, as do nonautistic people, and communication is more likely to be less effective between different neurotypes.¹⁰⁰

The second claim, that autistic people lack sociality, implies that that they are not oriented to social norms. It sounds like a rephrasing of the first claim, and sometimes it is. However, it is often employed in reference to communication within a group, rather than between individuals. In other words, while the first claim suggests that an autistic writer does not know that they have an audience, this claim suggests that, even if they were aware of having an audience, they could not respond appropriately to that audience as a group. This is not objective, factual information, this is a nonautistic interpretation of different orientations to social morality. Just as nonautistic people prioritise cultural symbols when processing information while autistic people prioritise material detail, nonautistic people prioritise agreement within a group while autistic people prioritise truth.¹⁰¹ Autistic rhetorician Melanie Yergeau describes this tendency in herself while relating an instance of being bullied by her classmates as a teenager. Her classmates cornered her and then, “one boy gazed deeply into my eyes, and asked in seeming seriousness, out of nowhere, ‘Do you experience genital itchiness?’” After she responded, “Of course I have experienced genital itchiness”, they continued to bully her for days.¹⁰² However, what distressed her about this situation as much as her classmates bullying was their lying:

The bullying struck me as repugnant not because bullying is repugnant, but because I was the only person to make a truthful admission. The whole gambit seemed to me a trick question. To say anything other than yes would be to lie. Lying was the graver moral error, far graver than a social faux pas. Asociality had ironically fomented within me a kind of moral imperative, a kind of moral outrage. How dare they not admit to genital itching. How dare they pretend they’d never crotch scratched.¹⁰³

A nonautistic medical professional assessing this situation might conclude that Yergeau spoke the truth because, as an autistic person, she was incapable of registering that the socially correct response was to lie. However, Yergeau notes that she was aware of the socially

¹⁰⁰ Catherine J. Crompton et al., “Autistic Peer-to-Peer Information Transfer Is Highly Effective,” *Autism* 24, no. 7 (2020): 1710, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286>.

¹⁰¹ Pier Jaarsma, Petra Gelhaus, and Stellan Welin, “Living the Categorical Imperative: Autistic Perspectives on Lying and Truth Telling – between Kant and Care Ethics,” *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 15 (2012): 273-4, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-011-9363-7>.

¹⁰² Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 61-2.

¹⁰³ Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 62.

correct response, and that being truthful was more important to her than it was to her nonautistic peers.

For autistic people, this mismatch between their neurology and the nonautistic cultural expectations to which they are responding are an example of what Indyk refers to as “awkwardness”. Indyk describes this as: “The way one responds to those intractable elements in reality which offer, not an assurance of value or importance, but the threat of their negation” Awkwardness, Indyk further explains, “is a style, a kind of grace, an expression of integrity”.¹⁰⁴

The third claim, that autistic people lack intentionality, or the ability to consciously take motivated action, such as writing, is often justified by what medical professionals call “self-stimulatory behaviour”. Autistic people have since reclaimed this phrase and shortened it to “stimming”. Stims include repetitive actions such as fingernail biting, throat clearing, hair chewing, or tapping or clicking pens. These are, of course, also actions commonly performed by nonautistic people and, for that reason, are not listed as stims nearly as often as actions such as flapping, rocking, spinning, or repetition of sounds. The important point here is not that there is no difference between nonautistic people and autistic people – there is a greater variety and higher frequency of these actions among autistic people. The point is that when nonautistic people perform these actions they are not usually asked to account for them. If they are asked to explain why they are performing these actions and are unable to do so no judgement about their abilities or essential humanity is made. By contrast, autistic people are not often asked why they perform these actions, medical professionals simply assume that there is no purpose for them because autistic people lack the essential human quality of intentionality.¹⁰⁵

However, autistic people report that stims have a variety of purposes. Stims are sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious rhythmic and repetitive embodied movements. Sometimes they are a response to overwhelm from processing information. The overwhelm might be caused by sensory overload, the need to concentrate, or intense emotion, either

¹⁰⁴ Ivor Indyk, “The Awkward Grace of John Forbes,” *HEAT* 8 (1998): 139; 150.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, “Transformative Somatic Practices,” 62-3.

separately or in combination. Sometimes stimming is concentrated engagement in the service of communication, play, spirituality, or creating autistic community.¹⁰⁶

Additionally, what nonautistic people interpret as repetition may be experienced completely differently with autistic awareness of detail. As McGrath describes:

I might visit the same cafe daily for months and have the same drink at the same early opening time at the same quiet table. If ever someone else is at my table, I cannot stay. I just walk off to work too early, feeling distractingly unright. That is distress at small change. But what I also need to emphasize here is that every single visit to that cafe is distinct for me. The daylight is different. The moods are unique. Some mornings, combinations of light and shade might remind me of a previous visit, and there is a pleasing feeling not of repetition, but continuity. But no two of my morning visits are ever entirely the same. Some routines can make the everyday feel new, every day.¹⁰⁷

The fourth claim, that autistic people lack creativity and are therefore incapable of writing, results from the stereotype that all autistic people are solely skilled in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) domains. In response, McGrath argues that this stereotype latches on to an effect rather than considering its cause, which is that autistic people are skilled in systemising. Science and numbers are systems, however language, and therefore poetry, are also systems:

poetry is a system of tradition and experiment: two qualities it shares with science. But poetry is also more intimately conducive and gratifying to autistic senses and sensibilities than tends to be recognized. Reading, speaking and writing it can create a kind of verbal stimming – a sort of dance between the mouth and mind. Not unlike autism itself, poetry can flourish outside of the norms of linguistic expression.¹⁰⁸

Autistic Poetics

Affirming the affinity between autistic people and poetry, a range of poetic techniques have been demonstrated as features of autistic expression. Julia Rodas has detailed these techniques in her book *Autistic Disturbances: Theorizing Autism Poetics from the DSM to Robinson Crusoe*. Her title refers, with irony, to Kanner's seminal 1943 journal article,

¹⁰⁶ Mel (Amanda) Baggs, *In My Language*, YouTube, January 15, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1h12jc>; Jason Nolan and Melanie McBride, "Embodied Semiosis: Autistic 'Stimming' as Sensory Praxis," in *International Handbook of Semiotics*, ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas (New York: Springer, 2015), 1075, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9404-6>; Walker, "Transformative Somatic Practices," 68; Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ McGrath, *Naming Adult Autism*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ McGrath, *Naming Adult Autism*, 59.

“Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact”, and to the capacity of autistic language to unsettle conventional writing and, thereby, conventional thinking.¹⁰⁹

Rodas delineates six categories of autistic poetic techniques, labelled by using “terminology intended to worry the easy, invisible authority of omniscient clinical language”. To determine these techniques she surveyed writing by autistic authors, analyses of autistic language by both autistic and nonautistic academics, and medical professionals’ accounts of their autistic patients. The six categories of techniques she then developed are those that both autistic people and nonautistic people attribute to autism.¹¹⁰

While these poetic techniques are common to autistic people, Rodas does not argue that they are unique to autistic people. This is because autistic people have always composed literature, and thus nonautistic writers have utilised autistic poetic techniques in the same way that, for example, one race incorporates techniques from another. Thus she chose example texts in order to demonstrate the centrality of autistic expression to literature, and the significant difference that context makes to the reception of language. As I will outline, with one exception, the same techniques that medical professionals take to be proof of pathology and inability, authors and critics take as demonstrating literary quality.¹¹¹

As the title of Rodas’s book indicates, two of the example texts she analyses are by the American Psychiatric Association, and Daniel Defoe. She also discusses texts by Raymond Carver, Georges Perec, Andy Warhol, Charlotte Brontë, and Mary Shelley.¹¹² She does not discuss Murray’s writing. Nevertheless, just as Murray’s theorisation of the centrality of embodiment to creativity corresponds with literary disability studies, Murray’s writing exhibits techniques from all six of Rodas’ categories. Therefore, I will illustrate each of Rodas’ categories with Murray’s poems and, in the following chapters, utilises Rodas’ categories in my detailed analyses of Murray’s poems.

¹⁰⁹ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 3.

¹¹⁰ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 6; 4-5.

¹¹¹ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 5.

¹¹² There is an obvious underrepresentation in this list of authors who write in languages other than English. Rodas explains that she chose texts “familiar from my own scholarly life”, and acknowledges their narrow scope. I acknowledge my own even narrower scope in focusing on Murray alone. I also note the value that discussing an Australian autistic author adds to knowledge of autistic poetics, while echoing Rodas’s hope that her and my work will “spark recognition of autistic voice in other familiar texts”, and that “other scholars will correct and expand the limits of my individual vision” (25).

The first of Rodas' categories is creating and using words in atypical ways, which she names "invention".¹¹³ Autistic people are noted, by both autistic authors and medical professionals, for their prolific use of puns, neologisms, obscure words, and unusual metaphors. However, while for autistic people invention is both a solitary and shared pleasure, medical professionals believe it is a deliberate method of thwarting communication. For example, from Rodas:

Kanner notes the 'metaphorical' language of Donald T., who, 'When asked to subtract 4 from 10...answered: "I'll draw a hexagon"' There is no actual communicative failure here –Kanner understands Donald T.'s hexagon, a six-sided figure, as both responsive and correct –but the privatization of public language is nevertheless put forward as an antagonistic departure from authentic communication.¹¹⁴

There are numerous possible explanations for seven-year-old Donald T's choice of expression. Perhaps it was simply the first description that came to his mind, or he wanted to share with Kanner that he had a more creative way of answering the question rather than saying "six", or he wanted to demonstrate to Kanner how he represented the number six in his head, or he thought it would be useful to explain to Kanner that he would rather draw the answer than say it. Regardless, even though Donald T engaged with Kanner's question, his answer was correct and his communication was clear, Kanner assessed him as failing because he spoke metaphorically rather than numerically.

In a literary context, the ability to express ordinary ideas in metaphorical language is fundamental to poetry, and even to language itself. As Murray writes, while admiring a fellow author's ability to avoid metaphor in order to also avoid its dangers: "Of course, he can't resign from metaphor altogether, because language itself, the very paint in which we work, consists of layer upon layer of the stuff, and perhaps of little or nothing else".¹¹⁵ If one can not only negotiate and connect those layers, but also create surprising associations and interactions between those layers, they have, according to literary scholars, attained literary quality.

¹¹³ The numbers I have given these categories are only a convenient way to write about them. The order does not indicate anything, and this is not the order in which Rodas describes them.

¹¹⁴ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 66-7.

¹¹⁵ Les Murray, "The Best of Our Man in Bunyah," in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997): 74.

One example of invention in Murray's poetry is the puns in "The Tune on Your Mind" (discussed at the beginning of this chapter). A Murray poem containing some of the other invention techniques is "Shower". It describes how showers operate, where to have them, what occurs while having them, and compares them with baths. Its focus, however, is on their intimacies and delights. Murray begins by coining the neologism "metal poppy" for what also might be called a shower head.¹¹⁶ He then describes showers through metaphors including as an otherworldly presence ("sleek vertical coruscating ghost of your inner river"), as clothing ("that toga/ worn on either or both shoulders, fluted drapery, silk whispering/ to the tiles"), and as slang ("nicest yard of the jogging track").

The second of Rodas's categories of autistic poetics, named by reclaiming a term employed by Kanner to describe the speech of his five to seven year old autistic patients, is "ejaculation". As Rodas points out, Kanner "establishes a model in which the abruptness of autistic speaking, its seemingly uncontrolled spurting, creates discomfort, embarrassment, and an underlying association with erotic and forbidden language".¹¹⁷ Autistic expression is frequently conceived of as disjointed, impertinent, and uninhibited. Kanner's labelling of it as ejaculatory carries the implication that, while expressing themselves, an autistic person is not only experiencing pleasure, but specifically sexual pleasure, and Kanner steers the listener to fear what autistic ejaculating might produce. While the word "ejaculation" is not commonly used in medical descriptions of autism today, Kanner's association between autistic people and indecent sexual pleasure is maintained by the phrase "self-stimulatory behaviour", which is often framed as masturbatory.¹¹⁸

Since the word "ejaculation" was used to mark autistic people as suspicious, Rodas reclaims it to suggest that their language is richly potent. Venturing beyond stereotypes and initial impressions, Rodas argues, "what if...there is an aesthetic informing and infusing autistic ejaculation; rather than indecency and rudeness, there is instead the possibility of poetry".¹¹⁹ Autistic expression is abrupt, urgent, abundant, dynamic, and energetic. It might be plain or elaborate, and often cycles between these. In poetry it might also present as a style that, instead of being linear, is staccato, fragmentary, or digressionary.

¹¹⁶ Les Murray, "Shower," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 181-2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

¹¹⁷ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 52.

¹¹⁸ Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 184.

¹¹⁹ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 55.

There are a number of ejaculations in “Homage to the Launching-Place”, Murray’s poem about beds. It begins with a pun for poets – “Pleasure-craft of the sprung rhythms, bed”.¹²⁰ This is a reference to the means by which beds are bouncy, as well as the poetic technique developed by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Exhibiting both, this line utilises ejaculation, as five of its nine syllables are stressed.

The poem also has an ejaculatory stanza. The first four of its eight stanzas describe human’s experiences of beds, not only collectively, but connected as a “unobtrusive discontinuous platform”, for which Murray coins the neologism “the mattressphere”. They refer to “you” (the bed), and its positive effects on “our” (human) lives. Stanzas six to eight are focused on Murray’s individual experience of a bed – its responses to him (“you accept my warm absence”), and his feelings towards it (“I loved you from the first, bed”). Between them, stanza five is ejaculatory. Beds, “us”, and Murray are absent. Instead this stanza explores time and space:

Solitude. Approaching rest
Time reveals her oscillation
and narrows into space;
there is time in that dilation:
Mansions. Defiles. Continents.
The living and the greatly living,
objects that take sides,
that aren't morally neutral –

The third category of autistic poetic techniques Rodas names “apostrophe”, which is an extended monologue on one topic. This, of course, does not sound unusual in the context of poetry, which demonstrates both how well autistic people are suited to poetry, and how society generally has confined poetry to specific times and places. Convention says that one is meant to speak at length on one topic on a stage or in a book, not, say, at a medical appointment, even if you have been invited to do so by the medical professional. Medical professionals, habituated to dominating and controlling conversations, do not, according to their writing, attempt to interrupt, but simply frame autistic people’s lengthy speeches as disregard for the audience. Here, for example, is Oliver Sacks, describing what occurred when he met Temple Grandin at her university office to learn about her and her work:

¹²⁰ Les Murray, “Homage to the Launching-place,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 164-5. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

I was feeling somewhat exhausted, hungry, and thirsty –I had been traveling all day and had missed lunch – and I kept hoping Temple would notice and offer me some coffee. She did not; so, after an hour, almost fainting under the barrage of her overexplicit and relentless sentences, and the need to attend to several things at once (not only what she was saying, which was often complex and unfamiliar, but also her mental processes, the sort of person she was), I finally asked for some coffee.¹²¹

Note that it was Sacks’s choice not to eat or drink previously, and not to mention to Grandin that he wanted coffee. Yet he writes as if she is responsible for his choices. He then frames her provision of the information he had asked her for as a “barrage” and “overexplicit and relentless sentences” (in a sentence to us that could itself be described by those terms). Meanwhile, Grandin has apostrophised for an hour because she believes that was what Sacks asked of her. In other words, this is an example of the “double empathy problem”, where the nonautistic person does not contribute to the communication process and then, if their expectations are not met, blames the autistic person.

Rodas’s use of apostrophe to name this category is a direct naming of a literary characteristic indicating that, just as in apostrophic speech, the audience is always being considered, even if the speech is not explicitly directed to them. In turn, audiences in these contexts know to value both the speaker, and their own role as audience members. Rodas notes monologue and soliloquy as other valued literary practices that take the same form.¹²² To these I add stream-of-consciousness, letter, poem, essay, novel, presentation, and indeed thesis.

Initially it might seem that every poem could be classified as apostrophe, however apostrophic poems have specific features. They rarely contain words that explicitly address the audience, such as referring to “you”, or ask rhetorical questions. They often contain private thought processes in action, such as indecision or curiosity. And they often share an intense interest. Examples from Murray’s poetry include the sequences, “Presence: Translations From the Natural World”, where each poem is written from the position of a different animal, “Machine Portraits with Pendant Spaceman”, where each poem describes a machine, And “The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle”, which combines Murray’s fascination with poetic form and with the land on which he lived.

¹²¹ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 257.

¹²² Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 50-1.

The fourth of Rodas's categories is "ricochet", which is the poetic expression or representation of stimming. Stimming, or repetitive action, was described in the preceding section disputing the claim that autists lack intention. Regularly noted language-related stims are echolalia, which is the repetition of words from another source (eg. The words just spoken by someone else), and stereotypy, which is the repetition of words from the person's own vocabulary.¹²³ Just as with invention, ejaculation, and apostrophe, autistic people and medical professionals agree that stimming is a common autistic behaviour, but disagree on its purpose. As discussed in the previous section, medical professionals claim that stimming has no purpose, while autistic people experience stimming as having a variety of purposes

Moreover, autistic people are not the only group who take pleasure in linguistic stimming. Literary scholars, as Rodas points out, are so fascinated by ricochet that we: "play like autists with echoes of sound and meaning, expressing ourselves in a language so ridden with stereotypy, so metaphorical, and so idiosyncratically and internally referential that professional speaking might well be considered indistinguishable from other forms of autistic language".¹²⁴

Rodas names autistic repetition "ricochet" because of its constant rebounding motion. As she explains: "ricochet is a reminder of potentially complex relationships between the purposeful and the accidental, between the 'method of firing a projectile' and the playful skipping of stones on water".¹²⁵ In poetry ricochet appears as repetition of rhythm, form, words, meanings, or sounds, as well as recursiveness, or movements within, say, the boundaries of a circle or a square, rather than forward.

"The Tune on Your Mind", featured at the beginning of this chapter, is an example of Murray's more complex compositions of sound and meaning ricochet. A straightforward example is Murray's description of inciting the neighbourhood dogs to bark in "The Mouthless Image of God in the Hunter-Colo Mountains":

¹²³ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 41.

¹²⁴ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 43.

¹²⁵ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 45.

Starting a dog, in the past-midnight suburbs, for a laugh,
barking for a lark, or to nark and miff, being tough
or dumbly meditative, starting gruff, sparking one dog off
almost companionably, you work him up, playing the rough riff
of punkish mischief, get funky as a poultry-farm diff
and vary with the Prussian note: Achtung! Schar, Gewehr' auf!
starting all the dogs off, for the tinny chain reaction and stiff
far-spreading music, the backyard territorial guff¹²⁶

Though the sounds themselves are a motivating factor in this type of writing, they also create other poetic effects. An accumulation of echo creates intrigue that engenders deeper engagement with the poem. And the interweaving of words draws attention to each word and its counterparts, and how they jointly enact meaning that they could not in isolation. As Murray summarises later in the poem: “Laughter-and-weeping. It’s the great term the small terms qualify/ as a whale is qualified by all the near glitters of the sea”. Thus, when reading “The Mouthless Image of God in the Hunter-Colo Mountains”, perhaps one first notices Murray’s amusement that a multitude of “f” sounds are sparked by the “gh” in “laugh”. That then draws attention to Murray’s uncertainty over whether he is doing this for amusement, annoyance, or absorption. That then leads to his realisation that, regardless of the reason, the sound has travelled and changed between dogs, between animals, and returns to him as a contemplation of the range of feelings it has evoked.

The fifth of Rodas’s categories is the systemising instinct that I described when refuting the claim that autistic people lack creativity. Rodas names this impulse “discretion”, since the core of it is to establish the discrete properties of each item. Medical professionals describe it as perseverative and, again, claim that it is purposeless. Literary scholars tend to be equally dismissive of it and label it, in both writers and characters, as soothing an obsession or anxiety. As literary and then autistic examples of this disparagement, Rodas provides the following: “Peter Roget’s verbal collecting and ordering is rendered as pathetic defence mechanism; the collections of autistic children [according to Asperger] are ‘soulless possessions’”¹²⁷ And yet, those who make these critiques do not explain why, even if soothing obsession or anxiety motivates these collections, it should follow that quality art cannot result.

¹²⁶ Les Murray, “The Mouthless Image of God in the Hunter-Colo Mountains,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 208-10. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

¹²⁷ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 60.

Rodas notes discretion as an attribute that autistic writers identify as “central to autistic cognition, aesthetic, and culture, and as key to autistic communicative practice”.¹²⁸ For example, autistic economist Tyler Cohen argues that:

One strong feature of autism is the tendency of autistics to impose additional structure on information by the acts of arranging, organizing, classifying, collecting, memorizing, categorizing, and listing. Autistics are information lovers to an extreme degree and they are the people who engage with information most passionately. When it comes to their areas of interest, autistics are the true infovores, as I will call them. Autistics are sometimes portrayed as soulless zombies, but in fact they are the ones with the strongest interest in human codes of meaning. ‘Joy,’ ‘passion,’ and ‘autism’ are probably not three words you are used to finding together but they are often a close fit.¹²⁹

Autistic people collect information and catalogue it. But the point of this is not, or not only, organisation, but delineation. It follows from a passion for facts, and the minute details that establish both their uniqueness and their associations. Thus it is predicated on autistic perception. As Murray states about his writing process: “I don’t need an imagination. It all comes from the factual world”. In poetry discretion might exhibit as lists, facts, clarifications, or abundant punctuation (especially brackets).

“The Quality of Sprawl” is an example of Murray’s discretion poems. Using quality to mean both a standard and an attribute, this poem defines “sprawl”, not through synonyms but through examples and counterexamples. It begins:

Sprawl is the quality
of the man who cut down his Rolls-Royce
into a farm utility truck, and sprawl
is what the company lacked when it made repeated efforts
to buy the vehicle back and repair its image.¹³⁰

This poem could be said to consist simply of examples of what sprawl is and is not. However, those examples develop complexity and are interrupted by other ejaculatory examples as the poem progresses. Stanzas one and two are straightforward descriptions of sprawl. Then, in stanza three, the definitions become simultaneously more granular and provisional. Sprawl is now “almost never” and “more like”:

¹²⁸ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 58.

¹²⁹ Tyler Cowen, *Create Your Own Economy: The Path to Prosperity in a Disordered World* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 2.

¹³⁰ Les Murray, “The Quality of Sprawl,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 182-3. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

Sprawl lengthens the legs; it trains greyhounds on liver and beer.
Sprawl almost never says Why not? with palms comically raised
nor can it be dressed for, not even in running shoes worn
with mink and a nose ring. That is Society. That's Style.
Sprawl is more like the thirteenth banana in a dozen
or anyway the fourteenth.

Though the poem has thus far remained in farming territory, the final two lines of the third stanza hint at the change in direction ahead. That is, “the thirteenth banana in a dozen” can be understood as both generosity and oddity, again asserting a definition of sprawl that is both more detailed and universal. Sprawl is both awareness of obscure facts (“Kill them all! God will know his own./ Knowing the man’s name this was said to might be sprawl”) and forgetting obscure facts (“I have sprawl enough to have forgotten which paintings”), as it both “leans on things”, and “is loose-limbed in its mind”. All of which is to say that sprawl is a quality that is simultaneously contextual and timeless.

The sixth and final category is “silence”, which Rodas notes as “the single most remarked upon characteristic of autistic expression”.¹³¹ When medical professionals are not complaining that autistic people talk at the wrong times, for too long, in strange ways, on obscure topics, they complain about autistic people not talking. And certainly there are nonspeaking autistic people, as well as autistic people who did not speak for periods of their lives, and others who cannot speak in situations such as when their senses are overloaded. However, nonspeaking does not equate to lack of communication, as the writing of nonspeaking autistic authors Tito Mukhopadhyay (*Beyond the Silence: My Life, the World and Autism*), DJ Savarese (*A Doorknob for the Eye*), Amy Sequenzia (*My Voice: Autism, Life and Dreams*), Naoki Higashida (*The Reason I Jump*), and Tim Chan (*Back from the Brink: Stories of Resilience, Reconciliation, and Reconnection*) attests.

Moreover, as demonstrated by the other five categories, the ways in which autistic people speak are so determinedly devalued, not just by medical professionals, but society in general, that autistic people often describe feeling forced to make a conscious choice between speaking or silence as a method of navigating prejudice. One place where the silencing of disabled expression in general, and autistic expression in particular, often begins is the

¹³¹ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 6.

writing classroom. Schools frequently insist that all students write and speak using the same vocabulary, style, and topics, engendering ridicule of difference. As Daniel Tammet exemplifies: “In London, my English had never been the English of my parents, siblings, or schoolmates; my sentences – oblique, wordy, allusive – had led to mockery, and the mockery had caused my voice to shrink”. And Tammet notes similar experiences in Murray’s biography: “Class toughs and teases regularly turned on him, harassed him, pelted him with taunts. He could hardly open his mouth without being laughed at; he spoke like a walking encyclopaedia, pedantic. He used – sometimes, misused – long, obscure words: once threatening to ‘transubstantiate’ a taunter through a wall”.¹³²

Tammet credits Murray’s writing with restoring his voice and laments that Murray’s autism had not been common public knowledge earlier: “If I had known then what I finally confirmed years later, that this poet’s voice, so beautiful and so skilful, was autistic, and that Murray was an autistic savant, I might have seen myself differently. I might have written my essays and my first novel and my own poetry years before they finally made their way into print”.¹³³ This, too, is an important point, since the silencing of autistic people not only damages autistic people individually, but collectively as well.

Critical Discussion of Murray’s Autism

The one whose eyes
do not meet yours
is alone at heart
and looks where the dead look
for a comrade in his cause.¹³⁴

While “The Tune on Your Mind” unequivocally identifies Murray as autistic a fifth into the poetry collection *The Biplane Houses* (2006), this poem, “The Averted”, begins the collection with the same information, though it might initially only be understood by other autistic people. Murray explained its meaning during an interview in the year of its publication: “The old legend goes that the fellow who doesn’t look you in the eye is dishonest – you can’t trust him. But more likely he’s shy, or is an Asperger, or something”.¹³⁵ And: “It’s as if he can’t

¹³² Daniel Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird we Teach to Sing: Encounters with the Mysteries and Meanings of Language* (New York: Little, Brown, 2017), 57; 64.

¹³³ Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird*, 57.

¹³⁴ Les Murray, “The Averted,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 553. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

¹³⁵ Ramona Koval, “Les Murray,” *The Book Show*, podcast, May 10, 2006, 21:09-21:20, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/bookshow/les-murray/3333986>.

quite believe that anybody in the world will understand him or sympathise. And he is looking for an ally”.¹³⁶ This explains how and why this poem captured Tammet’s attention, and why Murray, having tried to have his autism acknowledged by Australians for three decades, had begun to fear he might not find an ally beyond his family.

The absence of Murray’s autism from his critical reception was understandable to a degree in the first two to three decades of his career. The description in “Self-Portrait from a Photograph” (1983) is of autism, but Murray does not name it. It is more difficult to rationalise how “Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver” (1974), a title directly naming autism, went unnoticed, but perhaps this was because there was little societal awareness of autism in the 1970s and early to mid-1980s. That changed with the international success of the movie *Rain Man* in 1988, so that when “It Allows A Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen”, depicting Murray’s autistic son Alexander, was first published in 1994, it became one of Murray’s most well-known poems.

This was the point at which critics’ lack of acknowledgement of Murray’s autism as an influence on his writing became a matter of will rather than ignorance, for three reasons. First, in *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, the book that contains “It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen”, there is also the poem “The Shield-Scales of Heraldry”, in which Murray describes himself as “half-autistic”.¹³⁷ Second, in the many interviews with Murray in which “It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen” was discussed, Murray frequently also mentioned his own autism. Third, if critics had delayed asking Murray about his autism, or reviewing his work with autism in mind, until they had developed knowledge of autistic people from a literary context, by 1996 there was a range of writing by autistic people available: Donna Williams and David Miedzianik each had four books published, and Temple Grandin had two. Other autistic authors with books published by this time included David Eastham, Thomas A. McKean, Desmond Meldrum, and Gunilla Gerland. Even by 2006, by which time the number of published autistic authors had quadrupled, few critics engaged with Murray’s autism and its role in his writing.

¹³⁶ Koval, “Les Murray,” 21:43-21:49.

¹³⁷ Les Murray, “The Shield-Scales of Heraldry,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 420-2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

One of the critics who did engage with Murray's autism was Paul Mitchell, who centrally positioned "The Tune on Your Mind" in his review of *The Biplane Houses*. The review begins promisingly: "it's interesting to reflect on what the poem can tell us about Murray the poet, as well as Murray the person (not that Murray or anyone else can be divided up in this way)".¹³⁸ Yet Mitchell then ignores most of what Murray said in "The Tune on Your Mind" (explored at the beginning of this chapter), and fixates on the line "Lectures instead of chat". He states that this is indeed a quality of Murray's writing, seven times, before asserting that: "When he doesn't lecture and instead dialogues with the reader (and the universe, God, nature, etc) Murray is outstanding".

Mitchell also includes a number of other less detailed criticisms of Murray's poetry. Here I have added in brackets after each of them the corresponding category from Rodas's categories of autistic poetic techniques. He claims that Murray's poems "feel like you're reading end-on-end cryptic crossword clues" (*ricochet*), because of their "difficult syntax" (discretion), "meandering" (ejaculation), "obscure subject matter" and "punning" (*invention*).

Mitchell does not discuss any positive influences that autism had on Murray's writing. Or rather, he does discuss some of the positive influences of autism on Murray's writing, such as "fascinating juxtapositions", and "an alien's view of earth that can produce some astonishing imagery", but he does not attribute them to autism. Additionally, even though he earlier quoted the related line from "The Tune on Your Mind" ("The avoided eyes"), he misses altogether autism's centrality to "The Averted", describing it as a poem of "religious concerns".

The critic who gets to the heart of other critics' lack of engagement with Murray's autism is Daniel Tammet. As mentioned in the introduction, he first encountered Murray's writing while browsing in a book shop. For Tammet, the unassuming name of "Les Murray" stood out in the poetry section, and so he picked up, and read from cover to cover on the spot, *Poems the Size of Photographs*. Tammet was medically diagnosed with autism a few months later, and suspected that Murray was also autistic. His suspicion was confirmed when he read "The Tune on Your Mind" in *The Biplane Houses*, and began researching Murray's life:

¹³⁸ Paul Mitchell, "Paul Mitchell Reviews Les Murray", review of *The Biplane Houses*, by Les Murray, *Cordite Poetry Review*, July 11, 2006, <http://cordite.org.au/reviews/mitchell-murray/>. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this review are from this version of it.

The information [that Murray is autistic] had been there all along. But the reporters had pushed it to the margins. Each had written about Murray's autism only briefly, sketchily, as something that didn't fit. They had not thought to look any further, to look at the poet's oeuvre or his life in another light. To learn this side of Murray's story I had to piece it together by myself, click by click and link by link, following up every byte of every source that I could verify. Slowly, scattered facts took on the vivid colours of anecdote; interview digressions lost their blur. The developed picture of the poet's early life – the many years his mind took to adjust to language – was as revealing as it was compelling.¹³⁹

Tammet identifies the failure of most critics to engage with Murray's autism as having two causes: The first is the belief that autistic people are not creative, discussed earlier in this chapter. The second, closely related, and most likely the parent, of the first, is nondisabled people's choice to discount the abilities of disabled writers, even as they praise them.¹⁴⁰ As Rodas explains:

Like magicians, autists are commonly read as enacting a kind of trick, but the wonderful feat after all is likewise understood as a shallow performance, a kind of autistic sleight-of-hand; the concerts of Blind Tom Wiggins, the extraordinary insights of Sherlock Holmes, the autistic codebreaking depicted in films like *Mercury Rising* – all help construct the banal superficiality of the autistic person. He (and it is almost always he) is a kind of conduit, channeling the humanly impossible, and autistic figuring is thus “reduced...almost to nothing.”¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, despite the constant negation and the ensuing loneliness, autistic people persist, and persist in writing, as Yergeau both argues and demonstrates:

Autistic narrative persists. It persists in the face of discourses that would render us arhetorical and tragically inhuman. It persists across genre and mode, much of it ephemeral and embodied in form. Autistic people persist and insist in the narrativity of their tics, their stims, their echoed words and phrases, their relations with objects and environs. We persist in involuting, in politicizing the supposedly involuntary. We can't help it, after all.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird*, 60.

¹⁴⁰ Tammet, *Every Word is a Bird*, 54-5.

¹⁴¹ Rodas, *Autistic Disturbances*, 60.

¹⁴² Yergeau, *Authoring Autism*, 23-4.

Chapter Two – Poems on Autism

In this chapter I analyse in depth two of Murray's autism-themed poems, "Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver" (hereafter referred to as "Portrait of the Autist"), and "It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen" (hereafter referred to as "It Allows"). Both are pioneering poems that exhibit significant points in Murray's evolving relationship with autism. "Portrait of the Autist" was first published in 1974, making it the earliest currently known autistic pride poem in English. Even though Murray has stated that, at that time, he had not explicitly recognised that he was autistic, in this poem he created a nuanced and celebratory portrait of himself as an "Autist". It presents his intuitive understanding of his autism, and autists as a group, which is framed by self-definition rather than medical discourse.

By contrast, "It Allows" is framed by, though not beholden to, a medical conception of autism, as it introduces Murray's son Alexander, who was medically diagnosed as autistic when he was three. While "Portrait of the Autist" was written four years before Alexander was born, "It Allows" was written when Alexander was fifteen. Both because "It Allows" is Murray's portrait of his son, and because it was Alexander's autism diagnosis that prompted Murray's full recognition of his own autism, this poem is also inevitably as much about Murray as it is about Alexander. Murray's autism also means "It Allows" is unusual since most poems about autistic children are written by nonautistic parents. It explores not only Murray and Alexander's relationship as parent and child, but each of their relationships with autism, and how their shared autistic intense interests deepen these relationships. Throughout the poem they take control of the words by which medical professionals defined them, and forge their own autistic definitions of themselves.

“Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver”

“Portrait of the Autist” was first published in 1974, in Murray’s third solo book *Lunch and Counter Lunch*. Though Murray did not select it as one of his Best 100 Poems, the same slightly modified version of the original is in all of his Australian collections, from the first in 1976 through to the last in 2018.

“Portrait of the Autist” is the earliest known poetic declaration of autistic pride in English. It presents Murray’s conclusions on autism when very little was publicly known about it, therefore his embodied experience is not constrained by medical model discourse. As a reminder, Murray’s response (quoted in Chapter One) to a question on when he first became aware of his autism was: “I probably dimly intuited that it was coming. I never looked into it much until Alexander came along, but the word hung in the air somehow...So even if I didn’t quite know how to apply the word autistic, the intuition was there”.¹

This analysis of “Portrait of the Autist” demonstrates that, whether Murray explicitly recognised it or not, by 1974 he already had autistic interactional and embodied expertise, and relished autistic culture. Indeed, in 1986, Murray stated that this is a poem of “self-pride and confidence”.²

This poem might also have been Murray’s first act of radical autistic sharing with his audience. Certainly his previously published poetry does not exhibit this depth of simultaneously carefree and intricate linguistic inventiveness. Sadly, however, of the few critics who have analysed this poem, most have dismissed it, and Murray, as lacking intent to communicate. As Lawrence Bourke elaborates: “Murray delights in the comic possibilities of verbal play, a practice which some critics have taken him to task for, claiming that it is often used more as a matter of self-display, as indulging a private delight, than in communicating with the reader”.³

¹ J. Mark Smith, “A Conversation with Les Murray,” *Image* 64, www.imagejournal.org/article/conversation-les-murray/.

² Erica Foster, “‘The Mouthless Image of God’: Philosophical Threads in Les Murray’s Poetry and Prose” (master’s thesis, Queensland University, 1986), 61.

³ Lawrence Bourke, *A Vivid Steady State: Les Murray and Australian Poetry* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992), 149.

Such claims are an example of the double empathy problem, where nonautists frame autistic communication as an absence of communication. Whether the critic is explicitly aware of the poet's impairment or not is irrelevant; atypical bodies create atypical poetry, and it is this unfamiliarity of style and content to which the critic is reacting. In fact, Murray is not only communicating in "Portrait of the Autist", he demonstrates the crip poetics technique of enhanced audience awareness by ensuring that he addresses both autists and nonautists throughout the poem.

The message that Murray communicates in "Portrait of the Autist" is unapologetic and unequivocal autistic worth and group solidarity. Steven Matthews, in his analysis of Murray's poetry from 1965 through 1998, describes the poem as "on-the-road autism", and observes that the narrator is an early version of the character Fredy, from Murray's verse novel *Fredy Neptune*.⁴ Indeed, the autist in the poem also exhibits the crip pride and kinship with other autistics that Fredy develops over the course of the verse novel. The one significant difference between the autist and Fredy, which is central to understanding both characters, is that because *Fredy Neptune* takes place before 1943 when autism was designated as a medical diagnosis in English, Fredy does not have a label for his embodied experience and his community, whereas the autist does.

As a pride poem which resists the relegation of autists, the content of "Portrait of the Autist" is inherently awkward, and this is amplified by its structure. It plays with a pattern of becoming increasingly enthralled by its autistic subject matter to the point of ecstasy, and then suddenly decreasing to a state of mediocrity. This occurs in the first stanza and then the second stanza, while both stanzas are also the beginning of a larger version of this pattern that unfolds in the first half of the poem. The pattern of the first half of the poem is then repeated in the last third of the poem, with two sombre stanzas between them. This creates an atmosphere of intensity, stillness, and then intensity throughout the poem as a whole. The interweaving of these contrasting patterns emphasises the tensions that autists experience from continually negotiating dissimilar cultures, while insisting on their relationships with both.

⁴ Steven Matthews, *Les Murray* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 16.

The title – “Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver” - is Murray’s promise to create a poem that meticulously embodies his autistic experience. Thus he ensures that the poem not only speaks of autism, but feels autistic, by utilising all of Rodas’s categories of autistic poetics, and Murray’s intense interest in words. The invention begins in the title itself. The first half of the title (“Portrait of the Autist”) is a pun on the title of James Joyce’s book *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It situates this poem as similarly semi-autobiographical, and suggests that Murray may have suspected that James Joyce was also autistic. If so, he was not alone – this has been posited by both autistic and nonautistic people.⁵ The second half of the title “as a New World Driver” is another pun, signalling the poem’s conceptions of autists as both drivers of cars, and drivers of world change.

The title does not, however, indicate the complexity of the relationships that Murray creates with his audience. “Portrait of the Autist” is not only an illustration of an individual, but of a group. And, since Murray also frequently describes autists via their relationships with nonautists, both groups feature in the completed portrait. The poem’s purpose, though, is simply to create a picture for the audience, not to force them into declarations of allegiance. Thus, while Murray identifies himself as an autist, throughout the poem he assiduously refrains from positioning his audience with either group. Instead he describes his experience of the circumstances of both autistics (“you can let out language”) and nonautistics (“They simplify”), and allows readers to determine how they utilise this information.⁶

This is achieved in part through pronoun reversal, a common, and comprehensively documented characteristic of autistic expression. Inadvertently demonstrating it while describing it, since Murray is autistic and is therefore describing himself, he explains: “They live in a world where it is very hard to speak in the first person. They often talk in facts. Getting through to “I” is damn hard”.⁷ As such, in this poem Murray does not mention “I” until the final third of the poem, after having discussed “they” and “we” in the middle third. In the first third of the poem pronoun reversal provides the audience, regardless of the group with which they might identify, with an immersive experience of the wondrousness of driving

⁵ Mykola, “James Joyce #wasNotNeurotypical,” Twitter, January 4, 2020, <https://mobile.twitter.com/mykola/status/1213203846169858050>; Michael Fitzgerald and Antoinette Walker, *Unstoppable Brilliance: Irish Geniuses and Asperger’s syndrome* (Dublin: Liberties Press, 2008).

⁶ Les Murray, “Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 101-2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

⁷ Smith, “A Conversation with Les Murray”.

and language. Murray sometimes enacts this through attributing actions and emotions to “you” (“you can let out language”) and, at other times, by leaving actions unattributed (“Delight of a stick-shift”).

The first third of the poem also establishes it as both a monologue and a list (or, in Rodas’s terms, apostrophe and discretion). As a poem of enjambment and multi-line propositions, it does not structurally declare either of these. However, the first line, “A car is also”, implies yet another addition to a list that stretches back through an unknown, and therefore potentially unlimited, number of items:

A car is also
a high-speed hermitage. Here
only the souls of policemen can get at you.
Who would put in a telephone,
that merciless foot-in-the-door
of realities, realities?

Delight of a stick-shift -
farms were abandoned for these pleasures. Second
to third in this Mazda is a stepped inflection
third back to first at the lights
a concessive
V of junction.

Under the overcoming
undiminishing sky you are scarcely supervised:
you can let out language
to exercise, to romp in the grass beyond Greek.
You can rejoice in tongues,
orotate parafundities.

Proceeding with this list of a car’s functions, the first third of the poem describes those that Murray most values. The first is that of a car as a sanctuary (“a high-speed hermitage”), because, if one is driving a car at speed, the only interruptions to one’s time alone might be policemen (“Here/ only the souls of policemen can get at you”). This is in contrast to being at home where, in the mid-1970s when this poem was written, one was subject to the telephone which, whenever it rang, could be the beginning of endless intrusions (“Who would put in a telephone,/ that merciless foot-in-the-door”). At that time, car phones were fashionable, but not ubiquitous, while most Australians, even in country towns, had a home phone that rang loudly, without the option of displaying the caller’s name and number, or diverting to voicemail; and it could not be ignored because it was the only commonly available method

for anyone not in the immediate vicinity to communicate with the household in real time (“that merciless foot-in-the-door/ of realities, realties?”). Driving, then, provides Murray with respite from his home telephone, and solitude and solace at a swift pace.

The ricocheting rhythm and sound of stanza one suggests “high-speed”, the steady soothing of driving, and the emergence of the excitement that these facilitate for Murray. There is an absence of complex combinations of consonants, and an abundance of alliteration and assonance, increasing in iteration and intensity: On the first two lines – “A car is also/ a high-speed hermitage. Here” – “a” begins words three times (“A” “also”, “a”), and “h” begins words three times (“high-speed hermitage. Here”). Then the next two lines utilise assonance four times – “only the souls of policemen can get at you./ Who would put in a telephone”. On line three there is a “o” sound four times (“only” “souls of policemen”). Then, on lines three and four, a “u” sound four times (“you./ Who would put”). Then the last two lines each contain one repeat – “that merciless foot-in-the-door/ of realities, realties?” The second last line has one set of assonance using “oo” (“that merciless foot-in-the-door”), and the last line has one set of alliteration (“of realities, realties”). To summarise, stanza one contains rhyme based on two sets of a sound repeated three times, then two sets of a sound repeated four times, then two sets of a sound repeated once. This pattern of a gradual increase, followed by a sudden decrease, prefigures the structure and feel of the second stanza, and recurs throughout the poem.

The second stanza explores how, in addition to a car being a solitary space, and fast driving being revitalising, Murray finds pleasure in the tactility of driving itself. As such this stanza evokes the “Delight of a stick-shift”. Through its structure we experience the “stepped inflection” of increasing from second to third gear, and then the “concessive/ V of junction” of quickly decreasing from third gear to first when the car stops at a red light: The word “Second” on the second line indicates second gear; the word “third” on the third line indicates third gear; then, on line four (“third back to first at the lights”), “third” echoes back to “third” on the third line, and “lights” echoes back to “Delight” on the first line. The fourth line also interrupts the consistent pattern of two assonant words at the ends of the previous three lines (“stick-shift”, “pleasures. Second”, and “stepped inflection”) with “the lights”. This emphasises the absence of increasing speed that Murray experiences from the rapid deceleration required by arrival at a red light.

Murray's experience of absence continues to be expressed in the stanza's final two lines. A "concessive/ V of junction", with the "v" sound at the end of the first and the beginning of the second lines making them meet, and their uniformity, which is created by both lines containing four syllables of two trochees, is the sound equivalent of a print "V". And writing a print "V" in reverse ("a concessive/ V") is essentially the shape created by moving a gearstick in a manual car from third gear to first gear – backward, then left, then forward. Having just made the "stepped inflection" of moving the gearstick from second gear forward, then right, then forward again for third gear, returning from third gear to first gear is a concession, as is slowing down "at the lights". Simultaneously though, "Junction" is assonant with the first word of the next stanza, "under", and this echo continues some of this stanza's momentum, making the stop at the lights temporary.

Unlike the previous two stanzas, the third stanza does not follow an internal pattern of gradual increase and then sudden decrease. However, as a whole, it is part of the larger version of this pattern, which is enacted in the first half of the poem: Stanza one was paced at first gear, stanza two at second gear, and this stanza is paced at third gear by beginning with the accumulated joy of the previous two stanzas and increasing it.

The third stanza also luxuriates even more expansively in the pure pleasure of language. Similar to Murray's joy in driving, he is exhilarated by language's practical purposes, and its wondrous physicality. Not only is a car a place where he can escape from the unpredictable intrusions of the world and their attendant tensions, while experiencing invigorating tactile sensations, it is a place where he can say anything ("you can let out language/ to exercise, to romp in the grass beyond Greek./ You can rejoice in tongues"), and not have to consider how a nonautistic listener might respond ("Under the overcoming/ undiminishing sky you are scarcely supervised"). The demand that autistics conform to nonautistic expectations of communication, as discussed in Chapter One and exemplified by the criticisms of this poem, is a type of surveillance that forces one to constantly police one's speech. Thus the relief of being without this burden cannot be understated.

The pleasure of language is expressed in stanza three by the immense amount of work undertaken by the words. For example, the word "Under" at the beginning of line one is assonant with "junction" from the end of the previous stanza, alliterate with "undiminishing" on line two, and assonant with "overcoming" (line one), "tongues" (line five), and

“parafundities” (line six). While “supervised” at the end of line two, since it begins and ends with an “s” sound, functions as a closed and locked gate. Before it, on the same line, are the only other two words in this stanza that begin with “s” (“sky” and “scarcely”). After it are the only other words in this stanza that end in an “s” sound, “exercise” and “grass” (line four), “rejoice” and “tongues” (line five), and “parafundities” (line six). Both “under” and “supervised” are also elements of the position theme within this stanza. There is hierarchy in “Under”, “overcoming”, “undiminishing”, and “supervised” which has been evaded by the end of the stanza, as indicated by the repetition of meaning in “beyond” and “para” (from “parafundities”).

Additionally, in this stanza Murray relates his delight in the physical sensations of vocalising the words themselves – such as the movement and vibration of lips for “r” sounds, and tongue and palate for “n” sounds. This pleasure is expressed in the tactility of “grass” and “tongues”, and the activities of “let[ting] out”, “exercise[ing]”, “romp[ing]”, and “rejoice[ing]”. The increasing energy required for each of these activities creates intensifying excitement which climaxes on “orotate parafundities”. Whereas the rest of the words in this stanza are familiar, and depend on connections with other words for their power, the two neologisms on this line have their power playfully concentrated within them. “Orotate” is a portmanteau of orate and rotate, further emphasising that the joy of speaking is not only in the content of the words, but the physical resonances they create inside and around the person who is pronouncing them. “Parafundities” is a humorous play on the word profundities, using both of the meanings of the prefix “para”. One of those meanings is “beside or beyond”, as in the words parallel or paralegal, which, combined with the next syllable “fun”, suggest that the words Murray will speak will not be profound. The other meaning of para is nontypical or impairment, as in the words paranoia or paraplegia, which is the first indication within the poem itself of the type of group with which Murray will soon explicitly identify.

As prefigured by the gradual increase and then sudden decrease pattern internal to stanzas one and two, and the incremental increases in energy from stanza one to stanza two, and stanza two to stanza three, stanza four marks an abrupt shift from the joyous tone of the first third of the poem, to the reservation and seriousness of the second third of the poem. It is an example of a simple form of ejaculation that Murray utilises – though the transition is sudden, it is clearly indicated by a switch from six-line stanzas to five-line stanzas. With it comes a shift in

focus from immediate embodied enjoyment to long-term concerns, and from individual experience to collective identity:

They simplify
who say the Artist's a child
they miss the point closely: an artist
even if he has brothers, sisters, spouse
is an only child.

Among the self-taught
the loners, chart-freaks, bush encyclopedists
there are protocols, too: we meet
gravely as stiff princes, and swap fact:
Did you know some bats can climb side on?

Mind you, Hitler was one of us.
He had a theory. We also count stern scholars
in whose disputes you almost hear the teenage
hobbyist still disputing proof and mint
and wheelmen who murmur Suffering is bourgeois.

The fourth stanza focuses on artist's experiences of "they", who "simplify", and "miss the point closely". Their simplification that misses the point closely is that "the Artist's a child". Although "they" miss the point closely rather than completely, the one word they do miss, "only", fundamentally alters the characterisation of "the Artist". Adults who are "a child" have not grown up; adults who are an "only child" grow up alone. Due to being alone they feel either joy or loneliness, and sometimes both simultaneously. Their joy is that illustrated in the previous three stanzas; while their loneliness is explained in this stanza by the statement "an artist/ even if he has brothers, sisters, spouse/ is an only child". This implies that "an Artist" experiences a profound loneliness that is never assuaged, even by other family members, or by the person whom they have chosen as a life partner. This is the loneliness discussed by Murray and Tammet at the beginning of this thesis, and by Murray in his poem "The Averted".

The language of this fourth stanza matches its subdued mood. Relative to the poem thus far, there is little invention, and the ricochet is plain. There are repeated "s" sounds ("they miss the point closely: an artist/ even if he has brothers, sisters, spouse"). There is beginning rhyme in "They" (line one), "say" (line two), and "they" (line three), and end rhyme in "simplify" (line one), "child" (line two), and "child" (line five). Focus is placed on the significant words by repetition ("they" on lines one and three, "Artist" on lines two and three,

and “child” on lines two and five). In other words, emulating the effect that “they” have on “the Artist” in particular, and “autists” in general, the uninhibited autistic expression exhibited previously in this poem has been silenced in this stanza. A similar pattern occurs in “The Tune on Your Mind”, analysed at the beginning of Chapter One. The first stanza on autism energetically plays with language; the second stanza on nonautistic reactions to Murray’s autism is plain and reserved. Since “The Tune on Your Mind” was written three decades after “Portrait of the Autist”, together they suggest that being silenced was a common experience for Murray.

The next two stanzas shift focus from “they”, the supervisors, to “we”, the autists. “We” are the “self-taught”, the “loners”, “chart-freaks”, and “bush encyclopedists”. “We” were the “only” children who “they” supervised and misunderstood in stanza four, and who consequently desire the escape and resulting multiple joys elaborated in stanzas one to three. Stanza five discusses another joy autists experience in meeting with other autists to “swap fact”. By describing these meetings as having “protocols”, Murray implies they have a sacredness similar to that of driving a “high-speed hermitage” and “rejoice[ing] in tongues”.

It is important to note that both the delight and the solemnity are not in any way exaggerated. As discussed in Chapter One, swapping facts is integral to autistic culture. Since the facts often spring from an autist’s intense interest, and an intense interest is fundamental to an autist, sharing it is an act of connection. Other autists have the embodied expertise to recognise this desire to connect, to value thoroughly researched and considered information, and to understand this type of exchange as an honour.⁸ Furthermore, to autists facts such as “Did you know some bats can climb side on?” are not dry details, they enliven the world.

The significance of this autistic cultural practice transforms the silence initiated in the fourth stanza to reverence in the fifth. This is highlighted in the slow march-like assonance pattern in lines two and three: two “e” sounds (“we meet”), then two “a” sounds (“gravely as”), then two “i” sounds (“stiff princes”). The last two would be “a” sounds (and fact), if Murray had not swapped “fact” with “swap”. This is a humorous wordplay, which also allows the accent to fall on “fact”. Additionally, the sacredness is represented throughout the stanza by its slow pace. Though there is assonance, the combinations of letters at the beginnings and ends of

⁸ Anthony Easton, “Autism: An Anecdotal Abecedarium,” Special issue, “Dystranslation,” *Kadar Koli* 8 (Summer 2013): 103.

words, particularly following the ease of the many “s” sounds in the previous stanza, require attentive pronunciation – “the loners, chart-freaks, bush encyclopedists”. This awkwardness is a direct assertion of pride in a similar way to someone of non-English heritage deciding not to anglicise their name. It is a refusal to compromise identity: “These are our names. Say them!”

Stanza six complicates any perception a reader might have that intense interests are always an inconsequential pastime. Murray’s first example of the possible consequences of intense interests is Hitler (“Mind you, Hitler was one of us”), with his fixation on his version of eugenics (“He had a theory”). In other words, at that time, Murray believed that Hitler was autistic. This is unlikely to be correct.⁹ Nevertheless, the underlying proposition, which is also true of “wheelmen who murmur Suffering is bourgeois”, that intense interests, if they become obsessions, have the potential to precipitate devastating consequences, is correct. Murray then contrasts these examples with coin collectors (“stern scholars/ in whose disputes you almost hear the teenage/ hobbyist still disputing proof and mint”). The differences in appearance, and thereby value, between proof and mint coins, are in fact substantial, though this is often not obvious to a casual observer. Both are produced for coin collectors rather than for circulation. However proof coins are meticulously produced and have by far the highest value of any type of coin a mint produces, whereas mint coins are the uncirculated version of coins in general circulation, and have the lowest value of coins that are produced for collectors. To summarise this stanza, there are occasions when a person with an obsession is dangerous, and there are occasions when a person with an intense interest appears annoying but is in fact demonstrating a rare comprehensive knowledge; and neither are insignificant.

To a nonautistic person, admitting that you believe that Hitler was “one of us” might seem incomprehensible. And since nonautistic people are more likely to prioritise gaining approval from others over the truth, it might even seem that Murray is comfortable with this belief. However, as discussed in Chapter One, autistic people are more likely than nonautistic people to prioritise truth-telling over social positioning, and to believe that not telling the whole truth is disrespectful. Having revelled in autistic “self-pride and confidence”, Murray felt

⁹ In 1924 Hitler was reportedly diagnosed as “a hysteric and pathological psychopath.” Robert M. Kaplan, “Alois Maria Ott: I Was Hitler’s Psychologist,” *Psychiatric Times*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.psychiatristimes.com/view/alouis-maria-ott-i-was-hitler-s-psychologist>. So far as I can find, comprehensive research on this topic concluded that Hitler had a serious drug addiction. Norman Ohler, *Blitzed: Drugs in Nazi Germany*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.) Neither of these negate the possibility of autism. Yet, though the diagnosis did not exist for much of Hitler's life, when it did exist it was created under his regime and available to him.

compelled to provide his audience with a complete picture of how he understood autism. As he explains of this poem: “It means brooding on your own measured contents, like an Adolf Hitler. I have to point out the dark side – Adolf Hitler was an only child, a hobbyist, like all the harmless versions of the ‘only child’”.¹⁰

The last third of the poem is a return to the gradual increase and then sudden decrease pattern, to six-line stanzas, and to the topic of driving:

But swapping cogs to pass a
mountainous rig and its prime mover, I
reflect that driving’s a mastery the mastered
are holding on to.
It has gone down among the ancient crafts
to hide in our muscles.

Indeed, if you asked
where the New World is, I’d have to answer
he is in his car
he is booming down the highways
in that funnel of blue-green-gold, tree-flecked and streaming
light that a car is always breaking out of –

We didn’t come of
the New World, but we’ve owned it.
From a steady bang, ever more globes, flying outward;
strange tunings are between us.
Of course we love our shells: they make the anthill
bearable. Of course the price is blood.

Accentuated by the slower pace of the middle third of this poem, the last third is a complex echo of the first third. They have the same structure and speed, however, the content of the first third is tactile and intimate, while the content of the final third is ethereal and expansive.

In stanza seven Murray identifies as “I” for the first time in this poem (“I/ reflect that driving’s a mastery the mastered/ are holding on to”). Previously he has identified as “The Autist” (in the title), “you” (stanzas one and three), “the Artist” (stanza four), “we” (stanzas five and six), and “us” (stanza six). In other words, having first been an unidentified individual, then explicitly identifying himself as part of the autist group, Murray is now able to identify as an individual autist.

¹⁰ Foster, “‘The Mouthless Image of God’,” 61.

Stanza seven is also a shift from the slow pace of “swap[ping] fact”, to the faster pace of “swapping cogs to pass a/ mountainous rig and its prime mover”. “Reflect that”, on the next line, emphasises this pace since it is an echo of the “stepped inflection” of changing from second gear to third gear in stanza two. The group “the mastered” are “we” autists, the group discussed in the previous two stanzas who have mastered knowledge, and the group discussed in the third stanza who were being supervised (mastered) before their escape. Maintaining the skill (“mastery”) of driving is important to this group because it facilitates access to a variety of benefits – revitalising solitude (stanza one), the tactility of driving (stanza two), evading supervision (stanza three), speaking without surveillance (stanza three), and meeting with other autists (stanza five). The last two lines of this stanza – “It has gone down among the ancient crafts/ to hide in our muscles” – introduce the idea of an autistic lineage, which is the topic of the rest of the poem.

Stanza eight is significant because it is the only time in the poem that Murray (“I”) addresses the audience (“you”) directly. As I noted at the beginning of this analysis, Murray does not slot his audience into either the autistic or nonautistic group. “If you asked” is a way of leaving open both the possibility that “you” might be a nonautistic, who does not know where the “New World” is, and the possibility that “you” might be an autistic who already knows where the “New World” is, and thus would not ask. Consequently, Murray’s answer is straightforward – “he is in his car”.

On the topic of Murray’s use of the pronoun “he” to refer to the “New World”, as well as “the Artist” (stanza four), Matthews asserts his and others’ claims of Murray’s “contentious gendering”.¹¹ However Murray’s point, that those who make these claims have missed, is not gender-related, it is autism-related. In 1974, and in fact since autism was first defined in 1938, medical professionals classified autism as a condition exclusive to males. Indeed, it is recognised that autistic females are still underdiagnosed.¹²

The final stanza, continuing the address of the previous stanza, intensifies its ideas, and then ends with a “concession”:

¹¹ Matthews, *Les Murray*, 73.

¹² Dori Zener, “Journey to Diagnosis for Women with Autism,” *Advances in Autism* 5, no. 1 (2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AIA-10-2018-0041>.

We didn't come of
the New World, but we've owned it.
From a steady bang, ever more globes, flying outward;
strange tunings are between us.
Of course we love our shells: they make the anthill
bearable. Of course the price is blood.

Whereas, in the previous stanza, “the New World” were in their cars, “booming down the highway”, they are now no longer contained by their cars, or the New World. This is not a move of disappearance but expansion, and an assertion of autistic’s grit, history, and future. The declaration that “We didn't come of/ the New World, but we've owned it” asserts that autists were on earth before the New World, and have not only survived, but flourished. Thus “From a steady bang” is an invention that takes the first of these ideas and elaborates on it to argue that autists were present from the beginning of the universe. “Steady bang” is a combination of steady state theory and the big bang theory, which are competing hypotheses on the origins of the universe. Both have many complexities that are not relevant to this analysis. The important point, however, is that steady state theory maintains that the universe is continuous, and therefore does not have a beginning, whereas the big bang theory maintains that there was a specific moment when the universe came into being. The point of combining the two is to declare that, regardless of how far back the beginning of the universe stretches, autists were there. The supporting proposition from stanza seven for Murray’s “steady bang” theory is a pun on “prime mover” (“But swapping cogs to pass a/ mountainous rig and its prime mover”). The concept of the prime mover is Aristotelian, and similar to Murray’s “steady bang” suggestion, in arguing that all of the motion in the universe which is continuous must have a fixed starting point.

Murray then extends this claim to assert that, as well as a history, autists have a future. They are “ever more globes, flying outward”, which implies that they are proliferating, and not bound by time or space. Moreover, the embodied expertise (“strange tunings”) they share enable them to communicate with each other as they do so.

By claiming that autists have a history and a future, Murray is participating in the proud crip poetics tradition of resisting erasure. One of the most famous of these poems is “I Am Not One of The” by Cheryl Marie Wade. This is the second half of the poem:

I am not one of the able disabled –

I'm a black panther with green eyes and scars like a picket fence
I'm pink lace panties teasing a stub of milk white thigh
I'm the Evil Eye

I'm the first cell divided
I'm mud that talks
I'm Eve I'm Kali
I'm the Mountain That Never Moves
I've been forever I'll be here forever
I'm the Gimp
I'm the Cripple
I'm the Crazy Lady

I'm the Woman With Juice¹³

Wade, a US disabled poet, wrote this poem in 1987, when it seemed that nondisabled people were increasing their efforts to devise labels for disabled people without consulting with us. Despite different perspectives and objectives “I Am Not One of The” and “Portrait of the Autist” have many similarities. They both have a love of language, and refuse to be mislabelled, either as “the able disabled”, or as “a child”. They both value impairment and identify society as disabling them. And Wade is as keen to escape being confined by so many inappropriate labels as Murray is to escape being “supervised”. To identify with their group Murray speaks of “I” as part of “we”, “the self-taught/ the loners, chart-freaks, bush encyclopedists”, and Wade identifies as “the Gimp”, “the Cripple”, “the Crazy Lady”, and “the Woman With Juice”. In solidarity with their group they also insist on that group’s history and future – Wade is “the first cell divided”, in the same way that autists came “from a steady bang”, and Wade declares “I’ll be here forever”, just as Murray pronounces autists drivers of the “New World”.

The final two lines of “Portrait of the Autist” feature a sudden decrease in pace and mood. This *ejaculation* denotes the jarring shift from the joy of the “strange tunings” between autistic people to the effort required by them to communicate with nonautistic people, of transitioning from the “shell” to the “anthill”. Similarly, the creative language from earlier in this stanza is reduced to a conventional metaphor. This is a deliberate effort to communicate with nonautists, especially those who are not interested in autists’ embodied experiences, as described in most of this poem, and simply want to be told why autists enjoy driving. The reason autists enjoy driving, “Of course we love our shells: they make the anthill/ bearable”,

¹³ Cheryl Marie Wade, “I Am Not One of The,” *The Radical Teacher* 47 (Fall 1995): 30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20709854>.

metaphorises nonautists as ants, and autists as a species with shells, such as snails. Ants confine themselves together in one small living space. Snails sometimes live close together, but they always live solitarily in their shells. It is extremely difficult, then, for a snail to live with ants and, for these snails, it is only possible if they can periodically return to their shells to be alone, and with each other.

However, true to Murray's compulsion to "point out the dark side" he adds a caveat in the final sentence – "Of course the price is blood". This has a literal meaning in that road accidents are an inevitable consequence of driving. However, the primary point is that regardless of whether autists spend time in the anthill or their shells they are deserting a group with which they have blood ties. Being with their autistic kin often means being without their nonautistic family, and being with their nonautistic family often means being without their autistic kin. And while autistic people, or snails, value diversity and therefore often understand why snails spend time with ants, ants often do not display reciprocal understanding. Ants value uniformity. They insist that inside the shell is a snail who is desperate to be an ant, and refuse to acknowledge the impacts of their demands on other creatures who love them, but cannot be them. For too many autistic people the cumulative impact of those demands is suicide ("the price is blood").¹⁴

"It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen"

"It Allows" was written in 1993, first published in 1994, and then featured in Murray's 1996 book *Subhuman Redneck Poems*. It has since appeared in a number of Murray's poetry collections, including *The Best 100 Poems of Les Murray*. At forty-two lines, it was the last of Murray's long-form single-stanza poems, which had been an element of his poetry books for twenty-four years (these are further discussed in Chapter Three).

"It Allows" profiles, but does not name, Murray's and Valerie's second son (fourth child) Alexander, who was medically diagnosed as autistic at age three. Since Alexander's autism diagnosis was a key event in both his and Murray's life, the concept of autism in this poem is inevitably influenced by medical discourse. However, part of the work of this poem is to

¹⁴ Sarah Cassidy et al., "Is Camouflaging Autistic Traits Associated with Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours? Expanding the Interpersonal Psychological Theory of Suicide in an Undergraduate Student Sample," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 50, no. 10 (2019): 3644, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04323-3>.

determine the role that medical definitions should have in one's understanding of one's own condition. As such, within and through this poem, Alexander and Murray assume authority over the words by which medical professionals define them, and autistically determine their role.

"It Allows" is also one of many poems on the topic of disabled children. However, it is remarkable within this genre for two reasons. One reason is its subversion of the typically reductive and negative representation of disabled children in poetry. While disabled people of all ages are routinely dehumanised in poetry, the dehumanisation of disabled children in poetry is particularly blatant and cruel.¹⁵ Take, for example, the poem "Deaf School" by the celebrated English nondisabled poet Ted Hughes. This is the first third:

The deaf children were monkey-nimble, fish-tremulous and sudden.
Their faces were alert and simple
Like faces of little animals, small night lemurs caught in the flash-light.
They lacked a dimension,
They lacked a subtle wavering aura of sound and responses to sound.
The whole body was removed
From the vibration of air, they lived through the eyes,
The clear simple look, the instant full attention.
Their selves were not woven into a voice¹⁶

In nine lines Hughes strips D/deaf people of personhood, complexity, sufficiency, embodiment, and voice. As the D/deaf poet Raymond Antrobus says of this poem: "It's such a way to use your power as a poet, to frame, or in a way to assault, people you don't understand".¹⁷ In the same way that medical professionals frequently define autistic children in terms of lack, according to Hughes the D/deaf children lack "a dimension", "sound and responses to sound", and "voice". Further, reminiscent of Baron-Cohen's equating autistic children with chimpanzees in his article title "Does the Autistic Child have a Theory of Mind?", these children are similarly dehumanised as monkeys and lemurs. Does Ted Hughes have a theory of mind?

¹⁵ Michael Davidson, *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 1.

¹⁶ Ted Hughes, "Deaf School," in *Ted Hughes: Collected Poems*, ed. Paul Keegan (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 548. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

¹⁷ Emily Berry, "Raymond Antrobus Talks to Emily Berry," *The Poetry Society/The Poetry Review*, podcast, August 28, 2018, 06:06-06:21, soundcloud.com/poetrysociety/raymond-antrobus-talks-to-emily-berry.

The cruelty is not only in the poem's words themselves but where, and by whom, these words will be read and analysed. Since they describe children, they are more likely to be presented to, and discussed by, classes of school children. The promise to a D/deaf child in the title "Deaf School" is the rare experience of being represented in literature, to read of someone who resembles you. Imagine, then, how it would feel to read this poem and be repeatedly told how "lack[ing]" and "simple" Hughes believes you are, and the entitlement with which he likens you to animals. Then imagine experiencing this as the only D/deaf child in the class, or the school.

As a disabled person, Murray is well-acquainted with the humiliation of being dehumanised within a peer group at school, especially when it is enacted through figurative language. He explains the potential for dishonesty and slipperiness when referring to humans as anything other than humans as follows:

I know a poet who is careful to flag his every image with 'like' or 'resembles' or some such. The surf doesn't fold its long green notes and cash them in foam-change on the beach, with him; rather, the waves of the surf are like long green folded notes cashed in foam on the beach. By the same strict token, no prime minister was ever a drover's dog. My colleague doesn't go beyond simile into the farther ranges of metaphor because to telescope statements overmuch is to lie. He is scrupulous not to let metaphor collapse into identity. This is very Protestant of him, though he is not Christian. It is also very responsible, because metaphor is dangerous stuff, the more so, perhaps, as it becomes worn and baggy with overuse and we forget it is metaphor.¹⁸

The dangers of the metaphorisation of disabled people cannot be overstated since they include murder. One form of this is genocide, such as the Nazi genocide of disabled people outlined in Chapter One. Another form of this is filicide. Its frequency is difficult to quantify since the relevant information is often not collected or disaggregated. However, the authors of *The Ruderman White Paper on Media Coverage of the Murder of People with Disabilities by their Caregivers* calculated that, during the four years of their study of news reports, a disabled person was murdered by their parent or caregiver "approximately every week". They also noted that autistic people are "among the most victimised".¹⁹ In "It Allows" Murray implicitly contrasts the background of these grim facts with Alexander's question "Is stealing

¹⁸ Les Murray, "The Best of Our Man in Bunyah," in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997): 74.

¹⁹ David Perry, "The Ruderman White Paper on Media Coverage of the Murder of People with Disabilities by Their Caregivers" (The Ruderman Family Foundation, 2017), 6; 10, rudermanfoundation.org/the-ruderman-white-paper-media-coverage-of-the-murder-of-people-with-disabilities-by-their-caregivers/.

very playing up, as bad as murder?”²⁰ This emphasises that, while some nonautistic adults do not understand how “bad” murder is, this fifteen-year-old autistic young person does.²¹

As a result of Murray’s understanding of the dangers of metaphor, and even though Murray has a well-recognised talent for metaphor, it is absent in “It Allows”. In fact, it seems that Murray has tried to abstain from autistic invention techniques altogether in this poem. However, he could not resist one of his favourites – a pun, “Eye contact, Mum! means he truly wants attention. It dislikes I-contact”. This is a reference to the intensity of eye contact for sighted autistic people (discussed in Chapter One).

However, the poem demonstrates the rest of Rodas’s categories of autistic poetics. As one forty-two line stanza written, but not addressed, to an audience it is a monologue, which is apostrophe; as a list of sixty-three empirical statements, presented as one, two, three, and in one case, four, statements per endstopped line, it is “discretion”; that those statements present fragmented narratives, and are each unable to be predicted from the preceding text, is ejaculation; and the repeating themes, such as speaking, drawing, running, movies, and fruit, with their attendant repeating words, is ricochet.

The other reason “It Allows” is notable as a poem on the topic of disabled children is specific to those poems written by a parent about their child. Most in this genre are written by nondisabled parents, whereas Murray is not only disabled, but has the same impairment as his son. Consequently, the unnamed comparator to Alexander is not a child without autism, but Murray’s own experience with autism; and their relationship is characterised by equality rather than a parent-dominated hierarchy.

This poem also exhibits the *crip poetics* characteristic of enhanced audience awareness. To ensure that “It Allows” is accessible to nonautistic people, the invention and ricochet are minimal and simple, similar to those at the end of “Portrait of the Autist”. And, although Murray does not explicitly address the audience, he has considered their varying levels of autism-awareness. In 1993, when Murray wrote “It Allows”, he knew that his audience

²⁰ Les Murray, “It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 412-4. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

²¹ The disability day of mourning for the victims of filicide is held annually on March 1. The victims are remembered at: <https://disability-memorial.org/>.

consisted of two groups. A small proportion were autistic people, or lived with autistic people. Those in these groups intimately understood the context from which Murray was writing and, especially because the opportunity to read a poem about an autistic person, by an autistic person, had thus far rarely occurred, were hungry for the details. The majority of the audience, however, had most likely only encountered representations of autism in either Oliver Sacks's essay on Temple Grandin (discussed in Chapter One), or the internationally successful movie *Rain Man*. Murray uses mystery to draw these people into the poem, but still asks that they engage with the complexity of who Alexander is, rather than simplifying Alexander's life for them, and ignoring the portion of the audience who have knowledge of autism. Often writers in Murray's position prioritise one group or the other. It is rare that someone genuinely attempts to write to both.

Of course, the success of Murray's attempt to write to both people with knowledge of autism and people without knowledge of autism depends on the criteria one uses to measure success. Certainly a number of autistic people feel that "It Allows" resonates with their own childhoods. For example, autistic poet Joanne Limburg wrote the poem "Alice's It", illustrating her own experiences as an autistic young adult, "in appreciative response" to "It Allows".²² Also, when Tammet and Murray agreed that Tammet would translate forty of Murray's poems into French, the choice of which poems to translate was Tammet's, and he deliberately chose to avoid "It Allows" because Alexander's experiences were too overwhelmingly similar to his own:

It's a very powerful poem, and precisely for that reason I didn't translate it. It was just too powerful for me...The autism is not the one that I had, but at the same time there were points of similarity of course...I was in my twenties when I read this poem for the first time. I found it very intense. I think the first time I read it it was so intense, it was a little bit like when I would go to the cinema and feel overwhelmed by the film's images and emotions, conveyed by the images.²³

²² Joanne Limburg, *The Autistic Alice* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2017), Kindle.

²³ Martin Johnson, "Two Poets," *Seriously...from BBC Radio 4*, podcast, February 16, 2017, 19:42-20:21, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08dr5r4. At Murray's request, Tammet translated "It Allows" into French for their 2015 festival session in Paris (mentioned at the beginning of this thesis). "Les Murray with Daniel Tammet." YouTube, September 28, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHQX3E71eYI>.

Critics who have not identified as autistic employ emotive adjectives when referring to “It Allows”. However, it is difficult to gauge their understanding or experience of the poem. They comment on it with words such as “remarkable” and “moving”, but rarely elaborate.²⁴

The poem’s title “It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen” is unusual and intriguing. There are no indications as to what “Line Scan” is, what “Fifteen” is a measure of, or even what type of thing the “It” that has given permission for this portrait to occur might be. The first twelve lines of the poem delay clarification, instead opting to gradually introduce the portrait’s subject:

He retains a slight ‘Martian’ accent, from the years of single phrases.
He no longer hugs to disarm. It is gradually allowing him affection.
It does not allow proportion. Distress is absolute, shrieking, and runs him at frantic speed
through crashing doors.
He likes cyborgs. Their taciturn power, with his intonation.
It still runs him around the house, alone in the dark, cooing and laughing.
He can read about soils, populations and New Zealand. On neutral topics he’s illiterate.
Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn’t a cyborg really, is he, Dad?
He lives on forty acres, with animals and trees, and used to draw it continually.
He knows the map of Earth’s fertile soils, and can draw it freehand.
He can only lie in a panicked shout SorrySorryIdidn’tdoit! warding off conflict with others
and himself.
When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship stacked fruit.
His favourite country was the Ukraine: it is nearly all deep fertile soil.

It is not until line thirteen of the poem (“Giggling, he climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist who told us how autism resulted from ‘refrigerator’ parents”) that Murray provides the framework that situates the title’s contextless pieces of information. Its significance is exhibited through ejaculation. “Giggling” is the first verb, and one of only two verbs, that begins any line in this poem. It is also the shortest fragment that begins any line in this poem, while the rest of the line (“he climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist who told us how autism resulted from ‘refrigerator’ parents”) is the longest of the poem’s fragments, having twice as many syllables or feet without punctuation breaks than any others. From this line we understand that Murray is one of the “us” who are the parents of the child with “autism”; and that “he” who is “Giggling” and who “climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist” is the child with “autism”, Alexander. It would seem, then, that throughout the

²⁴ Penelope Nelson, “Irony, Identity and Les Murray’s Poetic Voices,” in *Counterbalancing Light: Essays on the Poetry of Les Murray*, ed. Carmel Gaffney (Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 1997), 181; Matthews, *Les Murray*, 131.

poem “he” refers to Alexander, and “it” refers to autism. Having made these assumptions we can return to the title and infer that “Fifteen” is Alexander’s age, and “Line Scan” is the method by which this poetic portrait was created.

As a method “Line scan” invokes and creates a number of dimensions. McGrath, in his discussion of this poem, identifies three implications of “line scan”: It refers to the interpretation of poetry, and the centrality of lines to that process; it makes explicit that this poem is Murray’s subjective representation of Alexander, which might or might not have anything in common with Alexander’s picture of himself, or the method Alexander would utilise to create that picture; and “line scan [in comparison to area scan] is also the most effective [camera] technology for creating still images of rapid movement”.²⁵ In addition to McGrath’s third point, line scan cameras provide a higher resolution, and therefore a more detailed picture, than area scan cameras.

Furthermore, these differences between line scan and area scan correspond to the differences in how autistic and nonautistic people typically process new information, as described in Chapter One. Autistic people utilise a line scan method, referred to by Ford as “trees-first” processing, where each detail is examined, and then added to a dynamic whole. Nonautistic people, by contrast, utilise an area scan method, where they begin with a static whole, from which they then scrutinise prominent details, referred to by Ford as “forest-first” processing.²⁶

Jamie Grant argues that Murray coined the term line scan to “describe the radical, unprecedented, yet entirely successful experiment which this poem comprises”.²⁷ However, while Murray may have brought “line scan” into a poetic context it is, as noted above, a term from photography. And since Murray had an interest in photography, he is likely to have acquired the term, rather than created it. Similarly, it is unclear to what degree “line scan” as a poetic method is “unprecedented”. Grant does not provide evidence for either of his claims, and I have not been able to locate Murray discussing line scan. Nevertheless, since line scan creates a trees-first portrait, we may take it as an autistic poetic technique. It is a type of

²⁵ James McGrath, *Naming Adult Autism: Culture, Science, Identity* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 105.

²⁶ Star (Ian) Ford, *A Field Guide to Earthlings: An Autistic/Asperger View of Neurotypical Behavior* (self-pub., Ian Ford Software Corporation, 2010), Kindle.

²⁷ Jamie Grant, “Subhuman Redneck Politics,” in *Counterbalancing Light: Essays on the Poetry of Les Murray*, ed. Carmel Gaffney (Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 1997), 130.

discretion that focuses on one topic, and describes it exclusively through detail rather than overview.

Another autistic feature of this poem is its subject positions. It might initially seem that Murray has presented Alexander from only two subject positions – “he” as Alexander (“He sometimes drew the farm amid Chinese or Balinese rice terraces”), and “it” as autism (“It long forbade all naturalistic films. They were Adult movies”). However, there are a further two subject positions: the other “it’s” that do not directly substitute for the subject autism (“His favourite country was the Ukraine: it is nearly all deep fertile soil”); and those lines where the subject is not given a pronoun (“Only animated films were proper. Who Framed Roger Rabbit then authorised the rest”).

This technique of employing multiple subject positions foregrounds Alexander’s tendency to use a variety of pronouns, rather than just “I”, to identify himself. Sometimes Alexander refers to himself as “I” (“I gotta get smart!”), and sometimes Alexander refers to himself as “they” (“If they [that is, he] are bad the police will put them in hospital”). As discussed earlier in this chapter, this is pronoun reversal which “dislikes I-contact”. Yergeau explains its purpose as: “a deeply embodied placeholder that can signify multiple meanings and relationships”.²⁸

The multiple meanings and relationships in this poem are enacted through the four subject positions, and each present a different set of information. From the “he” as Alexander position, which occurs more frequently throughout the poem than the other three positions combined, we know three fundamental elements of Alexander’s character. First, he is extremely active. He swims (“He swam in the midwinter dam at night”), “surfs”, “bowls”, “walks for miles”, and often runs (“For many years he hasn’t trailed his left arm while running”). Second, he is highly skilled in a number of areas including playing video games (“When a runaway, he made uproar in the police station, playing at three times adult speed”), remembering (“He has forgotten nothing, and remembers the precise quality of experiences”), and counting (“He counts at a glance”). Third, he is captivated by his intense interests. He engages with some of these, such as fruit and their configurations, individually (“When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship stacked fruit”); and some interests,

²⁸ M. Remi Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 213.

such as drawing, soil, and countries, he combines (“He knows the map of Earth’s fertile soils, and can draw it freehand”, “His favourite country was the Ukraine: it is nearly all deep fertile soil”, “He sometimes drew the farm amid Chinese or Balinese rice terraces”). His favourite intense interest, however, is words. This, as I will regularly identify throughout this section, is a significant reason for his and Murray’s deep connection, since they have this intense interest in common.

The second subject position is autism, signified by “it”. It “allows a portrait”, “is gradually allowing him affection”, “does not allow proportion”, “runs him around the house, alone in the dark, cooing and laughing”, “forbade all naturalistic films”, “requires rulings”, “withdrew speech for years”, “won’t allow him fresh fruit, or orange juice with bits in it”, “had no rules about cold”, and “dislikes I-contact”. These are all manifestations of the medical and most well-known characterisation of autism as restraining and rigid.

And yet, surrounding “he” as Alexander and “it” as autism, are other “it’s” – the third subject position – that only becomes obvious when you think neurodivergently, as Alexander and Murray do. From this position autism, “it” could be either the reason Alexander draws, or what he draws, or both (“draw[s] it continually”), the reason he is skilled at drawing (“can draw it freehand”), and the reason he is creative and curious (“it is nearly all deep fertile soil”, “it, as a multi-purpose tool”). These “it’s” offer potential points of creative connection, conceptualising autism as a human condition rather than a problem to be solved.

The fourth position is represented by those lines describing emotions or activities that are not attributed to their subject. There are only four of these, but they are important because they directly address Alexander and Murray’s relationship. Two of these lines involve movies (“*Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn’t a cyborg really, is he, Dad?*”, “Only animated films were proper. Who Framed Roger Rabbit then authorised the rest”). Movies are a common method by which autistic people develop knowledge about the world. And since Murray, too, enjoys movies, and movies are referenced in four lines in this poem, it can be inferred that movies are another interest that Alexander and Murray have in common, and one of the ways in which they spend time together. (The other two lines are “He likes cyborgs. Their taciturn power, with his intonation”, and “It long forbade all naturalistic films. They were Adult movies”). Another of the unattributed lines describes Alexander beginning to speak, either with his father or mother or both (“A one-word first conversation: Blane. - Yes!

Plane, that's right, baby! – Blane"). Together with the only unattributed half line, "Exchanges of soil-knowledge are called landtalking", it alludes to the autistic love of playing with words that Alexander and Murray share.

The other line without attribution focuses our attention on Alexander's future, and the things that terrify him – "Bantering questions about girlfriends cause a terrified look and blocked ears". This statement, and "I gotta get smart! looking terrified into the years. I gotta get smart!", provide insight into the conflicting thoughts Alexander has on the relationships between himself and people beyond his family; he has no current wish to have a partner. Simultaneously, however, he recognises how different he is compared with other young people, that other people use that difference to separate him from other young people, and that this separation, and the loneliness he feels as a result of it, are likely to continue. As Murray wrote in a letter to a friend: "Our Alec is ashamed he's not in real secondary school, just in the Support Unit class. Bitter, to be just bright enough to sense your deep relegation, eh?"²⁹

Alexander being in the "Support Unit class", the pressure that he feels to "get smart", and Murray's reference to him being "just bright enough", suggest that Alexander, like an estimated 30% of autistic people, has been medically diagnosed as intellectually impaired.³⁰ It follows then that, as Alexander is "looking terrified into the years", Murray is also, since he knows how difficult it was for him, as an autistic person without an intellectual impairment, to manage societal prejudice against autistic people.

Together the four subject positions demonstrate that, while one of them might seem to be distinct from the others, they are all in fact Alexander. This concept, that Alexander is not one-dimensional, is of course a point that could and should be made about every person, but it is a crucial point to make about disabled people. A persistent medical model myth is that impairment is not part of the person, but something else from somewhere else that possesses the person, confining them and forcing them into being an inferior version of themselves. Moreover, the myth maintains that the impaired person will continue to be an inferior version of themselves until the impairment is removed via treatment or cure, then they will finally be

²⁹ Peter F. Alexander, *Les Murray: A Life in Progress* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 253.

³⁰ Emily L. Casanova and Manuel F. Casanova, *Defining Autism: A Guide to Brain, Biology and Behavior* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2019), 173.

a real person. This poem demonstrates that, even if one labels autism as “it” and catalogues what “it” does, “it” cannot be cleanly cut out of Alexander. And, even if that were possible, what would be removed would be, for example, both his deep distress and his talent for drawing. And whom would the person without those be? Certainly not Alexander. As autistic advocate Jim Sinclair states in “Don’t Mourn for Us”:

Autism isn’t something a person *has*, or a ‘shell’ that a person is trapped inside. There’s no normal child hidden behind the autism. Autism is a way of being. It is *pervasive*; it colors every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter, every aspect of existence.³¹

“It Allows” further explicates this point by involving both “he” and “it” in each of Alexander’s preferences. It is therefore impossible to ascribe those preferences exclusively to either Alexander or autism. For example, in the line “It still runs him around the house, alone in the dark, cooing and laughing”, “it” chooses to run. However, in the line “When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship stacked fruit”, “he” chooses to run. And in the line “When he worshipped fruit, he screamed as if poisoned when it was fed to him”, “he” objects to consuming fruit. However, in the line “It still won’t allow him fresh fruit, or orange juice with bits in it”, “it” objects to consuming fruit.

The other central theme that becomes evident from combining the four positions is progress, and how it is not synonymous with linearity. Thus this poem contradicts the prevailing myth that every delay an autistic child has will be permanent. Despite the fact that the development of any child is not linear, if an autistic child’s development slows, pauses, or reverses, it is often assumed that they will never be capable of any more than they are at that time. Though Alexander’s progress might be assessed as slow compared to other people his age, his skills and confidence are continually developing. For example, previously “he’d begun to talk, then returned to babble, then silence”, but now he asks complex questions such as “*Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn’t a cyborg really, is he, Dad?*” And he creates words (“Exchanges of soil-knowledge are called landtalking.”).

Furthermore, Alexander’s progress did not finish at fifteen. As Murray pointed out in 2002, in response to a question on this poem, “It’s the only poem Alexander knows and approves, or

³¹ Jim Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us,” 1993, http://www.autreat.com/dont_mourn.html.

used to. He's now 24 and it's behind him".³² Even as Murray composed this poem, he wrote two thirds of its statements in the past tense, indicating that they described Alexander at earlier points in his life.

The only line that mentions Alexander's age is when he was eight ("Don't say word! when he was eight forbade the word 'autistic' in his presence"). This implies that something had changed, enabling Alexander to say that some words made him uncomfortable. Indeed, in Peter Alexander's biography of Murray there is evidence that Alexander's slowed progression as a child was not because of autism alone, or perhaps not because of autism at all. The only factor that can be definitively correlated with Alexander's slowed progress is the Sydney city environment in which the Murray family were living. When they made their long-awaited move from Sydney to the northern New South Wales town of Bunyah in 1985, Alexander was seven. And though Murray and Valerie were concerned that he would be negatively affected by the move, he flourished:

Above all was the relief of finding that Alexander fitted into his new school without problems and in fact seemed to improve rapidly at Bunyah. He adopted Murray's own childhood practice of going for immensely long walks through the friendly countryside, and his parents could follow his progress through phone calls from farmers many kilometres away: 'Your boy's just gone by here'.³³

Twenty-five years later, this progress had not slowed, as evidenced by the epilogue to Murray's biography, written "as the end of the millennium approached": "Alexander was about to start working in a local nursery, where his love of fertile soils and natural growth would find full expression".³⁴

Emphasising the falseness of the myth of fixity, the poem frequently switches from one tense to another. The first half of the poem has three blocks of one tense (one present, and two past). However, surrounding those, and throughout the second half of the poem, each line is a different tense to the previous line. A quarter of the lines contain more than one tense, most often switching from present to past ("He lives on forty acres, with animals and trees, and

³² Daphne Guinness, "A Word or Two to the Contrary," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 24, 2002, www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/08/23/1030052964792.

³³ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 218.

³⁴ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 295.

used to draw it continually”), and sometimes past to present (“He grilled an egg he’d broken into bread. Exchanges of soil-knowledge are called landtalking”).

The sustained shifting from one tense to another also contributes to the sensation of continuous movement within the poem. This denotes the awkwardness that Alexander experiences from being out of synchronisation with societal expectations. When most people, including his family, are asleep, he runs around the house (“It still runs him around the house, alone in the dark, cooing and laughing”); at the greengrocers, where nonautistic convention says that visitors should only look at the fruit for long enough to decide whether to buy it, he worships fruit (“When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship stacked fruit”); when other children his age are talking, he is in silence (“He’d begun to talk, then returned to babble, then silence”). The degree of some of this asynchrony is immense: while living in a northern New South Wales town, he has an accent which is not just from another country, but from another planet (“He retains a slight ‘Martian’ accent, from the years of single phrases”); as a child he was very fast and played video games not only at adult speed, but three times faster than adults (“When a runaway, he made uproar in the police station, playing at three times adult speed”); he swam in the dam, not just in midwinter, but also at night, whereas most people, if they swam in winter at all, would swim during the day. Consequently, many of his actions are attempts to mediate between his preferences, and what nonautistic culture expects of him: his “Martian” accent sits between silence and standard speech; his “rictus-smile” is a compromise between his lack of interest in smiling and the request that he do so; his eating dried fruit means he satisfies others’ wishes that he eats something fruit-like, while avoiding eating the fruit he “worship[s]”.

The negative consequences for Alexander of not conforming to nonautistic demands are demonstrated, as McGrath notes, by a story midway through the poem.³⁵ Representing the story’s traumatic nature, it is told in separated fragments. Together they are: “When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocer’s to worship stacked fruit”, then “If they (that is, he) are bad the police will put them in hospital”, then “When a runaway, he made uproar in the police station, playing at three times adult speed”. They imply a story of misinterpretations as follows: From Alexander’s position he was simply enthralled by wonder, enjoying his intense interest in fruit. From a nonautistic position, however, a young

³⁵ McGrath, *Naming Adult Autism*, 112.

person standing in a shop looking at the fruit in awe is suspicious. They may have asked Alexander to leave but, since his attention was completely focused on the fruit, he would not have heard them. They would have interpreted this as him wilfully ignoring them and called the police, who would have taken Alexander by force to the police station. It is only here that a full understanding of the situation is attempted and, presumably with the involvement of Alexander's parents, achieved.

While this poem is a depiction of Alexander, when compared with information about Murray, it is also a record of the many characteristics they have in common. Three of these can be found in "The Tune on Your Mind", which I analysed at the beginning of Chapter One. Murray has "The need for Rules" and, Alexander "requires rulings"; Murray maintains "The avoided eyes", and Alexander "dislikes I-contact"; Murray has a "Great memory", and Alexander "has forgotten nothing". Additionally, as I noted earlier, both Murray and Alexander regularly walked for extended distances as children. Also, just as Alexander "no longer hugs to disarm", Murray feels similarly: "I used to be a bit afraid of people who went in for hugging and kissing and all the manifestations. It's still a highly artificial exercise for me".³⁶ As well, in his memoir *Killing the Black Dog*, and in the poem "Panic Attack", Murray discusses experiencing distress that, like Alexander's, "does not allow proportion". Finally, in the same way that Alexander "worship[s] stacked fruit", Murray was mesmerised by heraldic shields, especially when they involved the colour green. He states this in his poem "The Shield-Scales of Heraldry", also contained in *Subhuman Redneck Poems*:

And when as a half-autistic
kid in scrub paddocks vert and or
I grooved on the cloisons of pedigree
it was a vivid writing of system
that hypnotised me[.]³⁷

When asked about this poem Murray elaborated: "It's truly one of my autisms. I can stare at pages of heraldic manuals until they bring on a trance, and I seem to need...that quality of intense limited absorption".³⁸

³⁶ Peter Thompson, "Wisdom Interviews: Les Murray," *Big Ideas*, ABC Radio National, March 27, 2005, www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/wisdom-interviews-les-murray/3446558.

³⁷ Les Murray, "The Shield-Scales of Heraldry," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 420. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

³⁸ Michael Baron, "Autism – a Creative Process? Poetry, Poets, Imagination," *Popular Narrative Media* 1, no. 1 (2008): 108, <https://doi.org/10.3828/pnm.1.1.11>.

Also documented in “It Allows” are some of the joys that Murray and Alexander share. One of these is the land on which they live in Bunyah. Alexander “lives on forty acres, with animals and trees, and used to draw it continually”, just as Murray wrote of the forty acres frequently. As mentioned earlier Alexander and Murray also share a love of, and belief in, the power of words. For example, they both enjoy creating words. In “It Allows” Murray states that Alexander has labelled “Exchanges of soil-knowledge”, “landtalking”. In the same compound word style Murray writes: “I call properly integrated poetic discourse Whole-speak, while discourses based on the supposed primacy or indeed exclusive sovereignty of daylight reason I call Narrowspeak”.³⁹

Concomitantly, words have the potential to inflict pain, carrying their histories with them as they do. This poem presents Murray and Alexander’s mutual discomfort with the word “autism”. Alexander’s discomfort with this word increased to the point that, when he was eight, he would not allow it to be spoken in his presence (“Don’t say word!”) For Murray, the word autism has additional painful resonances because, when the “dim Freudian psychiatrist” labelled Alexander autistic, he also labelled Murray and Murray’s wife as “refrigerator” parent[s]”. As discussed in Chapter One, the long discredited “refrigerator” parent theory originated with Kanner and was popularised by Bettelheim, who equated autistic children with Nazi concentration camp victims.

To be called a “refrigerator” parent” then, in addition to being branded responsible for your child developing autism, is to be called a Nazi. And, in addition to the general understanding of a Nazi as someone who tortured and murdered Jewish people, Murray knows that they also tortured and murdered disabled people. This may be part of the reason the word “Nazi” holds such an intense charge in Murray’s poetry, from this time in 1981 when this encounter with the psychiatrist occurred onwards. In “Immigrant Voyage”, for example, from Murray’s 1977 book *Ethnic Radio*, the word Nazi is inconsequential, since its impact will soon fade: “ahead of them, epithets:/ wog, reffo, Commo Nazi, things which can be forgotten”⁴⁰. However, in “Rock Music”, from *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, the book which also contains “It Allows”,

³⁹ Les Murray, “Embodiment and Incarnation,” in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 319.

⁴⁰ Les Murray, “Immigrant Voyage,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 159. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

the word Nazi is destructive: “Sex is a Nazi. The students all knew/ this at your school. To it, everyone’s subhuman/ for parts of their lives. Some are all their lives”.⁴¹

Alexander’s and Murray’s discomfort with autism, then, is not from the condition itself. They have in common a complex relationship with the condition of autism, including immense joy. Their discomfort is with the word “autism” as a result of the contexts in which that word has been used against them. Therefore, out of respect for both of their feelings, Murray substitutes “it” for all but two mentions of autism in this poem, including in the title. As McGrath observes, between the four versions of this poem that have been published, the only differences are in the word autism – when and how often it is included – which suggests that this was the most important and difficult detail for Murray to finalise.⁴²

In the version of the poem that I have been analysing, which has been the final version since 2003, the word “autism” appears twice, drawing attention to its most significant points. One of those, (“Don’t say word! when he was eight forbade the word ‘autistic’ in his presence”), as mentioned earlier, is the only time the poem notes Alexander’s age, since this was when Alexander began to thrive. The other, “Giggling, he climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist who told us how autism resulted from ‘refrigerator’ parents”, in addition to its “refrigerator” parent” accusation, forms half of the centre of the poem. The other half is “I gotta get smart! looking terrified into the years. I gotta get smart!” Together these lines highlight the injustice in the contradictions in the cultural conceptions of, and consequent reality for, a psychiatrist and an autistic young person, on which this entire poem rests. The “Freudian psychiatrist” is university educated, and an expert in human communication and relationships, and yet he displays none of this when meeting with Murray, Murray’s wife, and Alexander. He employs a long out-of-date theory as evidence for his conclusion that Murray and Murray’s wife are completely insensitive, and caused their child to be completely insensitive. The psychiatrist does this with no acknowledgement that his words and implications, even if they were true, are completely insensitive. Further, he does not acknowledge any disparity between how he defines autism, and the autistic boy who is “giggling” and “climb[ing] all over” him. In contrast, Alexander, the young person who attends a “support Unit class”, and is assumed to have less intelligence, and no sensitivity

⁴¹ Les Murray, “Rock Music,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 393. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

⁴² McGrath, *Naming Adult Autism*, 106.

towards other people, is deeply aware of the differences and distances between him and other people, and feels responsible for reducing them.⁴³

Even though there were many possible negative and enduring affects that the psychiatrist's pronouncements might have had on Murray and Alexander's relationship, and even though a common stereotype of autistic people insists that neither Murray nor Alexander are capable of relationships with other humans, the poem attests to a relationship between them of strength and vitality. This is evidenced by each trusting the other to sensitively answer questions that are difficult to ask: "Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn't a cyborg really, is he, Dad?" This question reveals that Alexander is unsure of a piece of information that he knows others might consider obvious. Consequently he chooses to ask this of his father, someone he knows will answer his question without ridiculing him for his lack of basic knowledge. The answer is important to Alexander because he relates to cyborgs ("He likes cyborgs. Their taciturn power, with his intonation"), and because he needs this information to construct his understanding of the world. Equally, "I was sure Bell's palsy would leave my face only when he said it had begun to" demonstrates that Alexander is the only person Murray trusts to tell him the truth about a condition he found "depressing".⁴⁴

The trust between them is also indicated by the title ("It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen") which suggests that Alexander has previously refused, but now allows, Murray to write this poem. Allowing Murray to talk publicly about his autism is for Alexander a significant act of trust, especially given his previous discomfort with people saying the word "autistic". The title also suggests how deeply Murray both respects and values that trust and their relationship, by not writing this poem until Alexander gave him permission.

Murray has always thought a great deal of Alexander. In his biography of Murray, Peter Alexander says that Alexander was "a beautiful child whom Murray found it a joy to be with".⁴⁵ In 2004 Murray said, "Alexander is a terribly interesting human being, he comes out with wonderful things, but the price he pays for it is hard".⁴⁶ In 2018 Murray said of

⁴³ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 253.

⁴⁴ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 252.

⁴⁵ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 215.

⁴⁶ Robert Potts, "Voice of the Outback," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2004, www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/15/featuresreviews.guardianreview15.

Alexander: “He makes you rethink your mind and how minds work. And how you are the person you are rather than some other person”.⁴⁷

It is easy to imagine, then, how much Murray might have wanted to explore, and could have explored, his and Alexander’s relationship in poetry. However, before “It Allows”, Murray published little about Alexander. Poems such as “Exile Prolonged by Real Reasons”, from *The People’s Otherworld*, and “Like the Joy at His First Lie”, from *Dog Fox Field*, only refer to Alexander covertly. And I have located only one line that mentions Alexander directly, from the poem “Extract From a Verse Letter to Dennis Haskell”, in the book *The Daylight Moon*: “She’s on leave from teaching. Alec goes to special school by bus”⁴⁸.

Having taken up the opportunity to write “It Allows” when Alexander gave it to him, Murray uses it to describe his and his wife’s “learning on the job” of being the parents of an autistic child.⁴⁹ Judging from this poem then, what Murray learned was not just awareness, but acceptance, of Alexander’s, and his own, autism. Accompanying this acceptance came a deeper understanding of their autistic perception which is, as Indyk observes, “marked by an acute and unhurried attentiveness to the details which define one’s place in the natural landscape”.⁵⁰ This acceptance motivated Murray to later write another Alexander-related poem – “To one Outside the Culture”. It was first contained in the 2002 book *Poems the Size of Photographs*, and Murray chose it as one of *The Best 100 Poems of Les Murray*. This is the entire poem:

Still ask me about adult stuff
when you want. But remember that day
in Madame Tussaud's basement
when all the grownups looked careful
and some young ones had to smirk?

You were right to cry out in horror
at the cut-off heads there
and the rusty dried trickles
shocked out of their eyes and ears.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Rob Norton, *I'm the Autistic One But I'm not the Weeper*, Vimeo, February 9, 2018, 13:12-13:24, <https://vimeo.com/254992802>.

⁴⁸ Les Murray, “Extract from a Verse Letter to Dennis Haskell,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 274. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

⁴⁹ Johnson, “Two Poets,” 25:33-25:35.

⁵⁰ Ivor Indyk, “Provincialism and Encyclopedism,” *Island*, 127 (2011): 78.

⁵¹ Les Murray, “To One Outside the Culture,” *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 544. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

Here Murray addresses Alexander both exclusively and publicly. He encourages Alexander to ask him anything, and affirms his reactions to distressing scenes even, or especially, when his reaction is unique within a group. As such he assures Alexander of his right to his own reactions, and the strength and reliability of their relationship.

The poems analysed in this chapter demonstrate that autism was a profound influence on both the content and the style of Murray's poetry. They exhibit a range of techniques that enable Murray's poems to both embody their subject matter and to communicate it to Murray's diverse audience. The poems in the next chapter expand on Murray's style and topics, locating autistic subjectivity where it has not previously been recognised in Murray's writing.

Chapter Three – Poems of Autism

In this chapter I analyse three of Murray's poems which, although they inherently demonstrate autistic subjectivity and poetic techniques, explicitly address topics other than autism. "Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands" (hereafter referred to as "Bent Water") contemplates the flow of water in nature, and the nature of contemplation itself. The "interest" sequence, comprising "First Essay on Interest" (hereafter referred to as "First Essay") and "Second Essay on Interest: The Emu" (hereafter referred to as "Second Essay"), consider the effects of both casual curiosity and concentrated absorption on humans and other animals.

These poems were written between 1974's "Portrait of the Autist", and 1994's "It Allows". They appear in the 1983 book *The People's Otherworld*, a book that Murray has stated explores "absorption – fascination, interest, contemplation".¹ Since then, though Murray did not select them for *The Best 100 Poems of Les Murray*, they remained staples in his other collections.

In contrast to "Portrait of the Autist" and "It Allows", these poems display fewer autistic poetic techniques, but employ the complexities of those techniques to elucidate the influence of embodiment on perception. Utilising awkwardness, wonder, and an intricate interplay of bodies, "Bent Water" follows the trajectory of water flowing speedily down the mountains of the Tasmanian highlands to the ocean. It then reflects, not only on the human observation of nature, but the motivations behind human observation. The "Interest" sequence poems utilise ricochet and invention within and between them to explore the positive and negative qualities of interest as an aesthetic. In "First Essay" the momentary, otherworldly presence of interest is a revitalising individual experience. However, in "Second Essay" interest is exploited by

¹ Jim Davidson, "Les A. Murray," *Meanjin* 41, no. 1 (1982): 116.

humans and becomes coercive and potentially life-threatening to those categorised as interesting. Yet, since disabled people and creatures such as the emu are categorised this way, “interest” simultaneously becomes a site of crip kinship and culture.

“Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands”

“Bent Water” was written in 1981, and then appeared in 1983’s *The People’s Otherworld*. At forty-five lines, it was that book’s single-stanza long-form poem, and the third such poem from Murray after “The Boeotian Count” in *Poems Against Economics* (1972), and “The Powerline Incarnation” in *Ethnic Radio* (1977). This type of poem continued as an element of most of Murray’s books until the mid 1990s. “It Allows” in *Subhuman Redneck Poems* (1996) was the final one.

“Bent Water” is a Murray poem that critics regularly recommend, but rarely analyse, perhaps due to its perceived difficulty. The few analyses of it I have located are no longer than a paragraph and light on detail. Nils Eskestad states that this poem “essentially reads as an onomatopoeic celebration of water in motion”.² Whereas Peter Porter argues that “far beyond onomatopoeia, it celebrates the divinity of force in Nature in long lines about streams in the Tasmanian bush”.³ Both of these points are correct; however they are only a beginning.

The poem is divided into five sections delineated by dashes. The first three sections, which constitute the first half of the poem, narrate the water’s journey down a Tasmanian mountain-side. From its swampy beginning, it gathers momentum, and increases in speed, while constantly negotiating its unaccommodating environment. In the second half of the poem the focus gradually expands. Section four considers the reciprocal impact of the water on the environment as it joins the ocean. The fifth section, which is by far the longest, broadens to the impact of the water and its environment on Murray in particular, and humans generally.

Integral to this poem’s structure is the figure of an impaired human body, which metaphorically represents the water. While a range of other metaphors ripple throughout the

² Nils Eskestad, “Dancing ‘On Bits of Paper’: Les Murray’s Soundscapes,” in *The Poetry of Les Murray: Critical Essays*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan and Bruce Clunies Ross (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 67.

³ Peter Porter, “Les Murray: An Appreciation,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 17, no. 1 (1982): 52.

poem, the human body, like the water itself, is continuously present. The focus periodically shifts from one to the other, gradually constructing an image of them both individually and collectively.

Demonstrating the constant difficulties of the water's journey, Murray imbues this poem with awkwardness. This begins with the title "Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands". It unambiguously signifies that this is a poem describing a body of water in the Tasmanian highlands, but the description of the water as "Bent" confounds conventional interpretation. It is not a place name, as one might expect by its capitalisation in the poem. One option for the reader is to allow "Bent" to be the first of many images in this poem to be dismissed as difficult or nonsensical, just as autistic language generally is regularly dismissed as difficult or nonsensical. An alternative is to experience the potential awkwardness of allowing "Bent" to hold multiple, and perhaps shifting, meanings. These might include any or all of: an adjective meaning angled or irregular, an adjective meaning determined or obsessed, and a noun meaning inclination or disposition.

Awkwardness is also evident in the unsteadiness and unpredictability of this poem's ejaculatory rhythm. Half of the forty-five lines contain two phrases, while the rest contain either one phrase or three phrases. When a line has either two or three phrases, those phrases are dissimilar in both type of feet and number of feet, which, in turn, means the number and position of caesurae changes with every line. Cumulatively these create constant change both within and between lines, such that even immediate repetition is a surprise. For example, the sixth line, "it forms at many points and creases outwards, pleated water", is one phrase of six feet, a caesura, and one phrase of two feet.⁴ The first phrase is six iambs and an unaccented syllable, and the second phrase is two trochees. Then the seventh line, "shaking out its bedding soil, increasing its scale, beginning the headlong", is one phrase of four feet, a caesura, one phrase of three feet, then another caesura, then another phrase of three feet. The first phrase is four trochees, and the second phrase consists of an unaccented syllable, a dactyl, and a trochee. The third phrase is also an unaccented syllable, a dactyl, and a trochee, but the unpredictability of the previous phrases means this repetition is unexpected.

⁴ Les Murray, "Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 177-8. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

“Bent Water” is also an apostrophic poem, utilising some of the techniques that are present in “Portrait of the Autist” and “It Allows”, and others that are not present in either. Like “It Allows”, “Bent Water” is a single stanza of forty-five lines. And like “Portrait of the Autist” “Bent Water” implies that it is one section of a much longer, and possibly infinite, monologue. Though, rather than communicating this in words at the beginning of the poem as “Portrait of the Autist” does, “Bent Water” communicates this at the end by finishing with a dash rather than a concluding punctuation mark, such as a full stop. In “Bent Water”, however, Murray does not write in a way that ensures the information is easily accessible to a range of readers, as he does in “It Allows”, or address us directly, as he does in “Portrait of the Autist”. In “Bent Water” he allows us to witness his internal experience of water in the Tasmanian highlands, and his private thoughts about that experience, as they form and influence each other.

The poem’s focus on Murray’s experiences and observations as they arise, and before they are assigned to discrete categories, is the reason that this is not a poem of autistic discretion, despite each section being delimited by dashes. This is also the reason that this poem does not utilise “line scan”, even though it, like “It Allows”, focuses on “trees-first” processing. As a representation “It Allows” presents the results of that process, the detailed portrait. “Bent Water” demonstrates the wondrousness of trees-first processing as it occurs. It is driven by thoroughly engaged curiosity rather than a desire for certainty. One element is explored, then another, then another, until understanding of the elements, both separately and combined, emerges. This understanding accumulates incrementally and provisionally, guided by fluidity and possibility. From this position “Bent” is not awkward, it ignites possibility.

Section one (lines 1-7) establishes both awkwardness and wonder as integral to the poem:

Flashy wrists out of buttoned grass cuffs, feral whisky burning gravels,
jazzy knuckles ajitter on soakages, peaty cupfuls, soft pots overflowing,
setting out along the great curve, migrating mouse-quivering water,
mountain-driven winter water, in the high tweed, stripping off its
mountains
to run faster in its skin, it swallows the above, it feeds where it is fed on,
it forms at many points and creases outwards, pleated water
shaking out its bedding soil, increasing its scale, beginning the headlong

Guiding our conception of the flowing water, Murray introduces it and the impaired human body as metaphorical equivalents that blend with and reflect each other as they are “setting

out along the great curve”. The human body is present from the beginning of the poem with “Flashy wrists”, that then emerge from “buttoned grass cuffs”. Similarly, on line two, the water’s “jazzy knuckles” are “ajitter” because they are “on soakages”. The rest of this section continues interweaving water and human, by repeating “water” three times, while focusing on its human-like characteristics of “skin”, “swallow[ing]”, and “feed[ing]”.

The first section also exhibits the “Bent”, meaning irregular, nature of the water’s journey. It must negotiate a number of extreme contrasts such as between “Flashy” and “feral”, “burning” and “mouse-quivering”, “gravels” and “soft”, and “Buttoned grass” and “stripping off”. Additionally, “Buttoned grass” is a pun on button grass which, because it is only present in summer, evokes a contrast with “winter”, when this poem is set.

Within this unpredictability we are nevertheless reassured of the water’s ability to endure frequent obstacles by a repeating rhythmical phrase. It recurs nine times throughout the poem, and each occurrence is precisely four trochees. Due to the exact rhythmic resemblance between every occurrence, regardless of its words or surrounding rhythm, and the fact that the last of them is “laws of falling and persistence”, I call this the “persistence phrase”. The importance of the persistence phrase in section one is established by its location on line one (“feral whisky burning gravels”), then maintained throughout this section by its even spread – “mountain-driven winter water” on line four, and “shaking out its bedding soil” on line seven. Thus, although the persistence phrase is ejaculatory, its repetition provides stability. In other words, its regular appearance is symbolic of the water being “Bent”, meaning determined, which is also its “Bent”, meaning talent.

As a result of the water’s “Bent” for being “Bent”, its awkward movement, and its “quivering” and “shaking”, it is able to proliferate throughout section one. Before it is “setting out” in the third line, it has already advanced in gradations from emerging from the button grass and gravel, to soaking, to overflowing. Then the varieties of its increasing increase: There is the increase in speed (“to run faster in its skin”), there is the increase in space (“it forms at many points and creases outwards”), and there is the increase in size (“increasing its scale”).

Beginning in Section one and evident throughout the poem is Murray’s pure delight in his autistic perception, in listening openly to this water’s story without trying to foreclose any of

its possibilities. He represents this experience of wonder through deep engagement with language. This is demonstrated by rhythm and sound, and specifically through a type of ricochet that, borrowing from Murray, I call “*cross resonance*”. Murray describes this as “a kind of ever-growing crystal lattice of sound and sense at once”.⁵ A crystal lattice is the organisation of atoms within a crystal, such as those that compose salt or diamonds. Most relevant to this poem, crystal lattices are three-dimensional, symmetrical, and depend on repetition for their continual expansion. As such this ricochet is a particular sound or letter circulating between the beginnings, middles, and ends of a group of words in close proximity. These become more frequent and complex as the poem progresses. In section one there is only one of these on the second line – “jazzy knuckles ajitter on soakages” – where the “j” sound is at the beginning of “jazzy”, the middle of “ajitter”, and the end of “soakages”.

The reason cross resonance expresses delight is that it is a mental stim. It is common for autistic people to conceive of the letters of a text as dynamic rather than static, and to rearrange them, searching for patterns, just for fun. It is perhaps a type of synaesthesia, since the letters and sounds have associated sensations, thus by playing with them one can create a kind of thoroughly absorbing theatre. Here I am writing from personal experience. The awareness of cross resonance seems natural to me, and I emphasise it here because nonautistic people often do not engage with language this way, or experience sounds as sensation, and thus do not experience the delicious wonder that Murray is sharing. For me, even when, as in the case of the “j” sound in “jazzy knuckles ajitter on soakages”, the featured sound is irritating, I still experience joy from its repetition and symmetry across the three words, and from the anticipation of an unfolding multi-sensory image.

Section two (lines 8-13) is primarily concerned with how the body of water travels, and why it travels as it does:

– Bent Water, you could call this level
between droplet and planetary, not as steered by twisting beds laterally
but as upped and swayed on its swelling and outstanding own curvatures,
its floating top that sweeps impacts sidelong, its event-horizon,
a harelip round a pebble, mouthless cheeks globed over a boulder, a
finger’s far-stretched holograph, skinned flow athwart a snag

⁵ Les Murray, “A Tribute to Old Delight,” in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 356.

Section two begins by quantifying the effect that the various increases in section one have had on the current volume of the water. However, because this is autistic perception, and we are still relatively early in that process, this quantification is not a point but a range “between droplet and planetary”. This phrase, like the “et” cross resonance it contains, carries the implication of multidimensional continuous change.

As such, no longer is the water “mountain-driven” as it was in the first section. Nor is it “steered by twisting beds”. The various types of increasing it enacted in section one, combined with its persistence, have become the source of its own power. From “setting out along the great curve”, it has since created its “swelling and outstanding own curvatures”.

While section one generically defined the direction of the water’s travel as “out”, in section two it is specifically framed as unconventional, and as a deliberate method by which the water advances. It strategically moves sideways, as is stated three times – “laterally”, “sidelong”, and “athwart”. Murray is one of a number of people who define sideways as a distinctively disabled method of advancement. For example, Jay Dolmage identifies *Metis* (pronounced may-tiss) as a disabled “cunning and adaptive intelligence” resulting from embodied experience.⁶ It resists the normative insistence on forward and straight orderly movement in favour of sideways, and sometimes even backwards, approaches to knowledge generation and problem solving. In this poem the spectacular results of the water’s sideways movement are demonstrated by the water’s actions. In addition to its “sway[ing]”, it has a “floating top”, which is the means by which it “sweeps impacts sidelong”. It also has an “event-horizon”, which means that any obstacle that begins in its path will ultimately be subject to its forces.

This is further emphasised by another ejaculatory line-length phrase that also recurs throughout the poem, beginning in section two. There are six of these and, unlike the identical persistence phrases, each is unique. The one feature they all share is the absence of a caesura. Due to its role of drawing attention to the moment by its rhythmical contrast to the rest of the poem, I call it the “*presence* phrase”. Thus, “but as upped and swayed on its swelling and outstanding own curvatures” (line ten), combines the water’s sideways movement with its achievements.

⁶ Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 5.

The final two lines of this section increase tension by again highlighting the reason that the water has developed these methods of travel, which is having to negotiate an environment that does not accommodate its impairments. The human body, metaphorising the body of water, features here. Murray first affirms that this body is impaired by specifically naming “harelip” (now referred to as cleft lip), and “mouthless cheeks” among its features. Then he reiterates that this body is the creator of its methods (“a/ finger’s far-stretched holograph”). He then finishes the section by reiterating that the water’s unconventional methods are an effective response to this difficult environment (“skinned flow athwart a snag”).

Mirroring the water’s creative adaptability, and extending the crystal lattice in a number of directions, the cross resonance in this section expands to more than one group of letters, the first of which occurs over more than one line, and includes words with more than one occurrence of the featured letter. The first featured letter is “l”, silently first on the eighth line in the middle of the word “could”, then doubled at the end of the word “call”, then at the beginning, and end of “level”. Similarly, on the ninth line “l” occurs in the middle of “droplet”, near the beginning of “planetary”, and at the beginning and doubled near the end of “laterally”.

The other cross resonance groups occur over a single line, increasing the intricacy of this effect throughout this section. Overlapping the first half of the “l” cross resonance group on line eight is a group of “t” echoes at the end of “bent”, the middle of “water” and the beginning of “this”. Then, overlapping the second half of the “l” group on line nine is the first cross resonance featuring a pair of letters – “et” occurs at the beginning of “between”, the end of “droplet”, and the middle of “planetary”.

Then there is a short, playful experiment to discover how many words per line one letter can circulate among. Line ten contains the largest number of circulated letters per line. The letter “u” features five times, in the middle of “but”, the beginning of “upped”, the middle of “outstanding”, and near the beginning and near the end of “curvatures”. Overlapping this group is a six-time “s” echo at the end of “as”, the beginning of “swayed”, the end of “its”, the beginning of “swelling”, the middle of “outstanding”, and the end of “curvatures”. However, line eleven has the largest number of the same letter, squeezing eight “t”s into

seven of its ten words – at the beginning of “top”, the middle of “floating”, and the middle of both “its”; then the end of “impacts” and “event”, and the beginning and end of “that”.

With the water’s persistent and awkward progress well-established, section three (lines 14-21) interweaves persistence and awkwardness, as the water’s journey becomes yet more difficult:

– these flexures are all reflections, motion-glyphs, pitches of impediment,
say a log commemorated in a log-long hump of wave,
a buried rock continually noted, a squeeze-play
through a cracked basalt bar, maintaining a foam-roofed two-sided
overhang of breakneck riesling; uplifted hoseless hosings, fully circular water,
flattened water off rock sills, sandwiched between an upper
and a lower whizzing surface, trapped in there with airy scatter
and mingled high-speed mirrorings; water groined, produced and spiralled

First Murray reiterates that travel (“motion-glyphs”) and impairment (“pitches of impediment”) are central to the water (“these flexures are all reflections”). Reflection refers to the water and the metaphorical human each mirroring the other (“a log commemorated in a log-long hump of wave”), and also to observing and considering what is mirrored (“a buried rock continually noted”).

We then follow the water through two situations of awkwardness where, because of its experience of adapting to being disabled by the environment, it can continue to persist despite the environment. The first is “a squeeze-play/ through a cracked basalt bar, maintaining a foam-roofed two-sided/ overhang of breakneck riesling;/ uplifted hoseless hosings, fully circular water”. Then the second is “flattened water off rock sills, sandwiched between an upper/ and a lower whizzing surface, trapped in there with airy scatter/ and mingled high-speed mirrorings”. Both involve actions that sound impossible for water, such as “uplifted hoseless hosings”, “fully circular water”, and “flattened water”. Nevertheless, the water negotiates both in its sideways style, while further increasing its speed (“water groined, produced and spiralled”).

Further emphasising the water’s virtuosity is a cluster of four persistence phrases that crescendo to the end of section three. This begins with “overhang of breakneck riesling” on line eighteen, intensifies with “and a lower whizzing surface”, and “trapped in there with airy

scatter” on line twenty, and culminates with “water groined, produced and spiralled” finishing the section.

Further extending the range and invention of the “crystal lattice”, and reflecting the water’s reach, the cross resonance expands to occupy this entire section. The first line contains two echo groups that both spring from the word “glyphs”. “Glyphs” is at the end of a group involving the “f” sound, including “flexures” and “reflections”. And it is at the beginning of a group of words involving the letter “p”, with “pitches”, and “impediments”. After a break for two lines there is a two-line echo group of “r” words. The first (line seventeen) has “r” in the middle of “through” and “cracked”, the end of “bar”, and the beginning of “roofed”. The next line (line eighteen) has “r” in the middle of “overhang”, the beginning of “Riesling” and “breakneck”, and the end of “water”, and the middle and the end of “circular”. Then there is another two-line break and finally, on the last line of section three, are two unlinked echo groups. The first is the return of “r” three times in the middle of “mirrorings”, and once at the end of “water”, the beginning of “groined” and “produced”, and the middle of “spiralled”. The other group is yet another variation of cross resonance, where two letters circulate separately within the same group of words. In this case “l” and “g” both circulate in the words “mingled”, “high”, “mirrorings”, and “groined”.

The fourth section (lines 22-30) broadens its, and therefore our, attention to include the environment surrounding the water:

– Crowded scrollwork from events, at steepening white velocities
as if the whole outline of the high country were being pulled out
along these joining channels, and proving infinite, anchored deeply as it
is in the groundwater scale, in the silence around racy breccia
yet it is spooling out; the great curve, drawing and driving,
of which these are the animal-sized swells and embodiments
won’t always describe this upland; and after the jut falls, the inverse
towering on gorges, these peaks will be hidden beneath
rivers and tree-bark, in electricity, in cattle, on the ocean.

Though the final words of the previous section, “water groined, produced and spiralled”, may have suggested that the water had peaked at that point, in fact the peak occurs two thirds into this section. Until then the words focus on the final moments of the water’s ascent, implying its “steepening white velocities” by considering all that precipitated it. This includes a review of the water’s narrative thus far. Through this review persistence is revealed as a

characteristic that has become fundamental to, not just this particular journey on which the water is engaged, but the water itself. In section one the water was being “driven” by the “great curve”, in section two it had its own “curvatures”, and now the water itself has become “the great curve”. Similarly, in section two the water was “swelling”, but now it “swells”. In other words, the water now embodies the environment through which it travelled.

As Murray reviews the water’s current story, he also begins to consider its story prior to emerging from the “buttoned grass” (section one). Before the water outlined the “high country”, it was “anchored” in “groundwater”, which is water contained in the earth, underground, in spaces between rocks and soil. This fact does not invalidate the story of the water developing persistence in response to the high country, it simply enriches this story with possibility. It seems likely that persistence was a characteristic of the water before it negotiated the high country. It also seems likely that, before the water emerged, it shaped the high country from below. Further, it seems likely that the water and the high country have always been entangled and continually impacting each other.

Indeed, as the water peaks and then descends, these possibilities are confirmed. The water integrates with its former and ongoing story underground (“proving infinite, anchored deeply as it/ is in the groundwater scale”). And it has the persistence to not only affect the land, but the sea and animals, and to literally become power as a driver of electricity (“rivers and tree-bark, in electricity, in cattle, on the ocean”).

Naturally, then, the cross resonance echoes the theme of separate but entangled elements. There are three distinct groups, each featuring letters that circulate, sometimes joined and sometimes separated. On line twenty-three “o”, “t” and “u” are at the beginning of “outline”, the middle of “country”, and the entirety of “out”. On line twenty-five “a” and “r” are both separately a part of “groundwater”, connected in “around” and “racy”, then separated in “breccia”. Then, on line twenty-seven “e” and “s” circulate in “these”, “sized”, “swells”, and “embodiments”.

The final section of the poem (lines 31-45) which, at fifteen lines, is by far the longest, further broadens the poem’s focus to how Murray, and humans generally, are impacted by the bent water, and the Tasmanian highlands. Therefore, this also represents a shift from what Murray observes to Murray’s contemplation of observation. Since there is a specific point at which its

focus changes I will analyse it in two parts. The first (lines 31-6) is a transition between section four and five:

– Meditation is a standing wave, though, on the black-green inclines
of pouring and cascading, slate-dark rush and timber-worker’s tea
bullying the pebble-fans; if we were sketched first at this speed,
sheaths, buttocks, wings, it is mother and history and swank here
till our wave is drained of water. And as such it includes the writhing
down in a trench, knees, bellies, the struggling, the slack bleeding.

These lines centre on two of the three appearances of “wave” in this poem in order to transition from observing to the consideration of observation itself. A “standing wave” (line thirty-one) is the resonances created within a bounded space, such as a lake, by the collision of the particles contained within it, such as water, with their reflections. They are called standing waves because, from an observer’s position, these waves appear to be stationary, as opposed to most waves that have a visible trajectory. “Our wave” (line thirty-five) refers to the entirety of human history. For Murray this standing wave establishes a reflection between the water’s history and human history, and the elements of our history that catch our attention when, like the water, it is “sketched” at a “rush”. Murray’s attention is, unsurprisingly, caught by war (“writhing/ down in a trench, knees, bellies, the struggling, the slack bleeding”). Reflecting the poem’s narrative of the water, the cross resonance has completely integrated with the section. It features “s” sounds. However, they also feature through the entire stanza such that the cross resonance appears inseparable from it.

The final lines (37-45) of this poem reflect on the purpose of observation:

remote enough perhaps, within its close clean film,
to make the observer a god; do we come here to be gods?
or to watch an alien pouring down the slants of our anomaly
and be hypnotized to rest by it? So much detail’s unlikely, for hypnosis;
it looks like brotherhood sought at a dreamer’s remove
and, in either view, laws of falling and persistence:
the continuous ocean round a planetary stone, braiding uptilts
after swoops, echo-forms, arches built from above and standing
on flourish, clear storeys, translucent honey-glazed clerestories –

Having autistically explored the bent water in the Tasmanian Highlands one element at a time, and in various combinations, in these final nine lines Murray considers if any conclusions can be drawn. These conclusions are in part regarding the course of the water, but

mostly regarding what a human is trying to accomplish by observing this water. In particular, Murray's reflections centre on how distance ("remote[ness]") influences a human's approach to observation. For Murray, one possible approach is being thoroughly absorbed in every detail of the water itself ("do we come here to be gods?") And the other possible approach is to consider the water, not for what it is, but for what it suggests about humans ("or to watch an alien pouring down the slants of our anomaly/ and be hypnotized to rest by it?")

Then Murray dismisses the "hypnotized to rest" option, leaving just the "god" option. This has an irony to it because, in the context of this poem, Murray is the god, or the creator, and in this role he has chosen to include all the detail he then decides discounts hypnosis as an option. Additionally, throughout this poem, he has utilised both approaches. This joke is preparation for the intense emotion in the next line, which is a presence phrase: "it looks like brotherhood sought at a dreamer's remove". This is now not an observer, but the observer (Murray) forthrightly stating that remoteness from what he is observing here is an impossibility for him; and also that he nevertheless feels extremely isolated. Something "sought at a dreamer's remove" is something desperately wanted, and simultaneously unattainable. This is a similar sentiment to that expressed in "Portrait of the Autist" seven years earlier, and "The Averted" twenty-five years later.

Needing to pause on what, when this poem was written in 1981, was a confronting point for Murray, he returns to considering possible conclusions about the water itself. The water is a demonstration of physics ("laws of falling and persistence"), part of an earth-encompassing story ("the continuous ocean round a planetary stone"), and part of God-created wondrousness ("translucent honey-glazed clerestories"). The dash at the end denotes that these are only three of many possibilities Murray had in mind. Simultaneously, following the recursiveness of Murray's narrative, the dash allows the water, or us, to return to the beginning of the poem.

Consequently, this is the only section where, rather than reflecting the current content, the cross resonance instead provides a summary of itself throughout the poem. The first two lines, reflecting section one, feature one letter: On line thirty-nine "n" is at the end of each of "an alien pouring down", then the middle of "slants", and the beginning of "anomaly". And on line forty "t" is in the middle of "hypnotized" and "details", the beginning of "to", and the end of "rest" and "it". The next line, reflecting sections two and three, features two letters, "i"

and “e”, together in both “either” and “view”, and then separately in “persistence”. The final line, reflecting section four, also features two letters, “l” and “r”, that circulate separately in four words – “flourish”, “clear”, “translucent”, and “clerestories”.

“Interest” Poems

The “Interest” poems are unique in the context of Murray’s poem sequences. Though Murray usually conceived the idea for a sequence and then wrote its poems continuously, the “Interest” poems were not initially conceived of as a sequence and were written four years apart. “First Essay” was written in 1979, and “Second Essay” in 1983, and they both featured in *The People’s Otherworld* (1983). In 1984 Murray suggested that he might one day write a “third and final” interest poem that would synthesise the ideas from the previous two.⁷ However, if this poem was written, it was not published.

Compared with the poems previously analysed in this thesis, “First Essay” and “Second Essay” use fewer autistic poetic techniques. Neither are ejaculation, since they are not fragmentary or unpredictable, and do not shift between language registers. Most of their ricochet and invention occurs between, rather than within, the poems, and thus “First Essay” on its own demonstrates little of either. And while “Second Essay” is apostrophic, “First Essay” is not. They do, however, both demonstrate discretion, by enumerating the characteristics of interest as an aesthetic.

The inclusion of the word “essay” in the titles of these poems further establishes them as unusual in the context of Murray’s poetry. Much of his writing details what Murray believes to be the facts of the situation; and those facts are definitive, not necessarily for all time, but at the point in time when he wrote them. In other words, it could be claimed that much of Murray’s poetry is already essay-like in intent. The point of foregrounding “essay”, then, in the same way as foregrounding “Bent” in the previous poem, is to simultaneously hold multiple definitions of the word essay as you read them: as well as being compositions of exposition, these are compositions of exploration. Each poem analyses the effects of a particular expression of interest, while utilising other meanings of the word interest, as well as multiple, and often unusual, meanings of other key words. Through these Murray outlines

⁷ Paul Kavanagh and Peter Kuch, “An Interview with Les Murray,” *Southerly* 44, no. 4 (1984): 372.

the different relationships that humans who engage in these expressions of interest generate with other humans, animals, the past, and the future.

Murray's first priority in "First Essay" is to quell any association in the reader's mind between "interest" and money charged in addition to a principal amount borrowed when repaying a debt – "Not usury, but interest".⁸ From then on that meaning of "interest", and in fact anything money-related, is not mentioned again in this or the "Second Essay".

The interest that Murray discusses in these poems can be summarised as momentarily absorbed attention, and can be understood in comparison with Murray's concept of a "groove". A groove, as described in Chapter One, and explored in "Portrait of the Autist" and "It Allows", is an autistic intense interest. Both an interest and a groove are types of curiosity or fascination, the difference between them is the person's degree of investment. Interest is distraction; groove is absorption. "First Essay" and "Second Essay", then, have a similar role to that of "Portrait of the Autist" in poetically presenting Murray's conception of how interest operates. "Portrait of the Autist" outlined both the positive and negative qualities of grooving while, with interest, Murray has allocated its positive and negative qualities to separate poems.

"First Essay" is focused on interest's positive qualities. Another word for this expression of interest – especially since Murray describes it in terms of "breath" and "inhalation" – is inspiration. The first nine of the twelve stanzas outline how interest creates moments of revitalisation throughout a human's lifetime. Then the final quarter of the poem describes how interest might become permanently available to a person once they are aware they are dying, and considers the relationship between interest and death. While the short stanzas might initially suggest that every item of this catalogue of interest is distinct, each stanza is enjambed to at least one other, indicating that they also have points of integration.

Similar to "Portrait of the Autist" Murray begins "first Essay" with a description of the embodied sensations of interest:

⁸ Les Murray, "First Essay on Interest," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 166-7. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

Not usury, but interest. The cup slowed in mid-raise,
the short whistle, hum, the little forwards shift
mark our intake of that non-physical breath

which the lungs mimic sharply, to cancel the gap in pressure
left by our self vanishing into its own alert –
A blink returns us to self, that intimate demeanour

This description implicitly points out that while a sudden, audible intake of breath is often depicted as the first sign of interest, this gesture actually indicates that interest's brief visit has almost concluded. The person's physical intake of breath occurs after, rather than during or before, they have experienced the "non-material breath" of interest. Similarly, their blink is in response to interest "blink[ing]" their "interests" out. ("Interests" in this instance refers to the day-to-day concerns that occupy that person's mind and, unlike the "interest" which is the topic of this poem, Murray takes a dispassionate position on them.) In other words, interest has induced, rather than invited, the person to synchronise with it.

Interest also assumes control of the person's experience of time:

self-repairing as a bow-wave. What we have received
is the ordinary mail of the otherworld, wholly common,
not postmarked divine; no one refuses delivery,

not even the eagle, her face fixed at heavy Menace:
I have juices to sort the relevant from the irrelevant;
even her gaze may tilt left, askance, aloof, right,
fixing a still unknown. Delaying huge flight.

Though interest is "non-rhythmical", "sporadic", and "not fixed in the calendar cycle", when it does appear it is experienced by the person as "timeless", and its effects linger. The metaphor Murray invokes to describe this effect on humans is a "bow-wave". This is, using a boat as an example, a wave of water that accumulates at the front of a boat as it travels. Most relevant to Murray's metaphor is that a bow-wave, through turbulence, enforces a maximum speed on a boat. In turn, this draws the attention of the boat's crew to the need for improvement in their current sailing strategy.

Similarly, a human's experience of a "timeless moment" with interest is a cosmic jolt:

Interest. Mild and inherent with fire as oxygen,
it is a sporadic inhalation. We can live long days
under its surface, breathing material air

then something catches, is itself. Intent and special silence.
This is interest, that blinks our interests out
and alone permits their survival, by relieving

us of their gravity, for a timeless moment;
that centres where it points, and points to centring,
that centres us where it points, and reflects our centre.

It is a form of love. The everyday shines through it
and patches of time. But it does not mingle with these;
it wakens only for each trace in them of the Beloved.

And this breath of interest is non-rhythmical;
it is human to obey, humane to be wary of rhythm
as tainted by the rallies, as marching with the snare drum.
The season of interest is not fixed in the calendar cycle;

The otherworldly mail the person receives addresses and reflects the core of who the person is, and who they desire to be (“that centres where it points, and points to centring,/ that centres us where it points, and reflects our centre”). And, as a result, their relationships with their everyday interests are reinvigorated (“This is interest, that blinks our interests out/ and alone permits their survival, by relieving// us of their gravity, for a timeless moment”).

Thus, while interests and grooves are both captivating and restorative, there are a number of differences between them. Most significantly for Murray, in the context of his theory that a balance of dreaming, thinking, and embodied engagement are necessary for healthy interaction or creation, grooves contain this balance while interests do not. As “the ordinary mail of the otherworld”, interests momentarily occupy a body, but they do not engage it. They are also unlikely to contain intellectual or dream aspects. Consequently, even though interests are “a form of love” and “special”, they are “mild” and, unlike grooves, do not spark intense pleasure or rejoicing. Interests occur briefly and sporadically, and are only present when they choose to be, whereas a groove can be cultivated throughout a lifetime, and is always available. Interests are an entirely solitary experience, as emphasised by “self” being repeated three times, while grooves are a community, as well as an individual, activity.

The point of this comparison is not to demonstrate that grooves are beneficial while interests are not. Indeed, interests are captivating, require no effort, and enable humans to return renewed to their usual pre-occupations (“interest, that/ blinks our interests out/ and alone

permits their survival”). Nevertheless, for most of a human’s life, interests are inherently limited and unstable.

However, this changes once a human is aware that their death is imminent:

it pulls towards acute dimensions. Death is its intimate.
When that Holland of cycles, the body, veers steeply downhill
interest retreats from the face; it ceases to instill
and fade, like breath; it becomes a vivid steady state

that registers every grass-blade seen on the way,
the long combed grain in the steps, free insects flying;
it stands aside from your panic, the wracked disarray;
it behaves as if it were the part of you not dying.

Affinity of interest with extremity
seems to distil to this polar disaffinity
that suggests the beloved is not death, but rather
what our death has hidden. Which may be this world.

When a human is close to dying interest becomes, if not more stable, then at least more available (“it ceases to instil/ and fade, like breath; it becomes a vivid steady state”). In this state a human experiences the world around them in its magical transformative ordinariness, simultaneously with their everyday concerns, rather than as a neutral backdrop to those concerns as they did previously (“that registers every grass-blade seen on the way,/ the long combed grain in the steps, free insects flying;/ it stands aside from your panic, the wracked disarray”).

Yet interest’s remit is broader than humans, and part of Murray’s purpose in this poem is to hypothesise its ultimate concern. He begins by observing that, though interest is revealed to humans when it alters our experience of time and the everyday, these do not retain its attention (“The everyday shines through it/ and patches of time. But it does not mingle with these; it wakens only for each trace in them of the Beloved”). His first proposal is that interest’s interest might be death (“it pulls towards acute dimensions. Death is its intimate”). Ultimately, however, Murray concludes that interest is drawn to death as a facilitator of what most fascinates it, which is the detail of our world as it is (“the beloved is not death, but rather/ what our death has hidden. Which may be this world.’) In other words, interest has a groove, and that groove is this world.

Reflecting Murray's construction of interest thus far, the construction of "First essay" is uncomplicated. Unlike the other poems analysed in this thesis it reads as a straightforward prose-like text. Each stanza consists of three or four lines, with one idea per line. Its clauses are sequential, with few digressions. It contains transition words such as "which", "then", "but", and "and". The only rhymes are of whole words such as "self", until the final quarter which is in traditional couplets. Most of the metaphors are simple, and Murray explains key words ("self" is "that intimate demeanour"), and puns ("that Holland of cycles" is "the body"). Similar to interest itself, this poem requires minimal engagement from the reader to provide them with a brief enthrallment.

By contrast, "Second Essay" is dense, and necessitates deep, patient, self-directed effort from the reader. It consists of five eleven-line stanzas. Murray does not explain its key words or puns, and the reader will not be aware of a number of the puns, or other crucial contexts for this poem, unless they have also read "First Essay". Thus "Second Essay" does not simply mean this poem was written second, it is a reading prescription. Furthermore, while "First Essay" explicitly addresses "you", a general audience, most of "Second Essay" is specifically directed only to "you", its subject, the emu. However, if you are willing to engage with all of these, you will have the privilege of witnessing a tender cripp relationship.⁹

In the first stanza, in a similar unhurried manner to the introduction of Alexander in "It Allows", Murray describes the emu:

Weathered blond as a grass tree, a huge Beatles haircut
raises an alert periscope and stares out
over scrub. Her large olivine eggs click
oilily together; her lips of noble plastic
clamped in their expression, her head-fluff a stripe
worn mohawk style, she bubbles her pale-blue windpipe:
the emu, *Dromaius novaehollandiae*,
whose stand-in on most continents is an antelope,
looks us in both eyes with her one eye
and her other eye, dignified courageous hump,
feather-swaying condensed camel, Swift Courser of New Holland.

Even though the title states that the subject of this poem is "The Emu", Murray still introduces her gradually. She is composed of the kind of fashion most closely associated with

⁹ Les Murray, "Second Essay on Interest: The Emu," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 201-3. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

“fashion” – ways of presenting the body. She is blond, has a “huge Beatles haircut”, a “head-fluff a stripe/ worn mohawk style”, feathers, boots, and a “sleeveless cloak”. Without having desired it or designed it she and her ancestors have lived for thousands of years embodying elements of fashion that were each fashionable at some time in the previous twenty years - relative to when this poem was written in 1983 – of human history. However, because she embodies them all simultaneously, she appears weird.

Murray’s introduction of the emu also notes the characteristics she possesses regardless of fashion. In fact the first word he uses to describe her, before mentioning anything fashion-related, is “weathered”. This means both that she has been corroded by the atmosphere, and that she has survived the many difficulties that have beset her. Continuing on the topic of her endurance, Murray mentions her “large olivine eggs”. We are therefore aware that she is fertile.

Murray then broadens his description of her to the longevity of emus as a species. After naming them colloquially and scientifically, he states that the emus “stand-in on most continents is an antelope”, which indicates that emus are noteworthy both because they are unique to Australia, and because similar animals on other continents deputise to them. “Swift Courser of New Holland” acknowledges that emus have held domain over the entirety of mainland Australia from the beginning.

Most significantly, this emu intrigues Murray because she does not passively wait for interest to momentarily capture her attention, she is an active, concentrated, and thorough observer. To demonstrate this, he describes her gaze such that it encompasses most of the eleven lines of the first stanza. This begins on the first line and stretches to the third – “a huge Beatles haircut/ raises an alert periscope and stares out/ over scrub”. Then, similarly, beginning on line nine, the emu “looks us in both eyes with her one eye/ and her other eye”. Thus her scrutiny is slow, rigorous, and deliberative.

In the second stanza Murray addresses the emu:

Knees backward in toothed three-way boots, you stand,
Dinewan, proud emu, common as the dust
in your sleeveless cloak, returning our interest.
Your shield of fashion’s wobbly: You’re Quaint, you’re Native,

even somewhat Bygone. You may be let live –
but beware: the blank zones of Serious disdain
are often carte blanche to the darkly human.
Europe’s boats on their first strange shore looked humble
but, Mass over, men started renaming the creatures.
Worship turned to interest and had new features.
Now only life survives, if it’s made remarkable.

The topic of Murray’s exchange with the emu is the negative qualities of interest. As a result of interest’s capacity to infuse any being, object, or idea with intrigue, it can be co-opted by humans as a method of control. The eagle in “First Essay” was fascinated by interest, while this emu is at risk of being a victim of it. This is because, unlike grooving which is investment, and interest from the otherworld which is a gift, human-created interest is consumption. In the context of race, Murray outlines the first stage of how consumption operates as follows:

Westerners frequently conquered native peoples as it were in silence and behind their own backs, dismissing them as savages and nobodies. They would then often turn right round and encourage the conquered to go on being colourfully and interestingly primitive...Be interesting, it says by implication; be a poetry for us. Work in the factory, but do beat your little tomtoms after work.¹⁰

In the context of impairment this is known as “inspiration porn”.¹¹ Australian disabled activist Stella Young coined this term for the exploitation of disabled peoples’ life stories by nondisabled people. For example, when the story of a person running using prosthetic legs becomes inspiration porn the identity of that person is irrelevant. Their story is reduced to reminding nondisabled people that “things could be worse”. In Young’s TED talk, “I’m not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much”, she outlines how nondisabled people approve of disabled people being motivational speakers, but not their friends, colleagues, or teachers. In summary, disabled people, like the emu, are given the role of being interesting.

To be interesting is to be commodified for entertainment or use. And once a being, object, or idea, has been commodified, it is under a timeless tyranny. When it is no longer entertaining, either because those who were being entertained notice something about it of which they do

¹⁰ Les Murray, “Poems and Poesies,” in *A Working Forest: Selected Prose* (Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997), 382.

¹¹ Stella Young, *I’m not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much*, TED, April, 2014, https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much.

not approve, or they became entertained by something else, it is scorned, and subject to the kinds of harmful consequences that Murray outlines in this poem.

Recognising the emu as cripp kin, Murray wants to warn her of the danger he believes she is in from the “darkly human”. As she continues to observe him, he begins by using an Aboriginal and then a settler label for her – “Dinewan, proud emu”). He then explains to her that she is unfashionable (“Your shield of fashion’s wobbly: You’re Quaint, you’re Native,/ even somewhat Bygone”). This is both because she is a collection of out-of-date and mismatched fashions and because, in a country where being exotic is an essential criterion for being fashionable, she is not only Australian, but unequivocally provincial.

Murray then explains that another advantage of using fashion as a system, for the people who enforce that system, is the opportunity fashion provides to assess the willingness and capacity of a being to change themselves, at any time, into whatever the “darkly human” dictate they should be. There are many words for this quality – malleable, impressionable, interesting or, as Murray calls it in this stanza, “remarkable”, meaning the ability to be marked again, to have your previous identity discarded and replaced with another, as happened to the creatures in Australia when white people arrived. Murray points out that, in Australia, the “darkly human” implemented fashion by “renaming the creatures”, and this practice has expanded into a creature’s survival becoming dependent on their ability to be “remarkable”.

In the third stanza Murray explicitly identifies as the emu’s kin, and expresses his concern for both of their safety:

Heraldic bird, our protection is a fable
made of space and neglect. We're remarkable and not;
we're the ordinary discovered on a strange planet.
Are you Early or Late, in the history of birds
which doesn't exist, and is deeply ancient?
My kinships, too, are immemorial and recent,
like my country, which abstracts yours in words.
This distillate of mountains is finely branched, this plain
expanse of dour delicate lives, where the rain,
shrouded slab on the west horizon, is a corrugated revenant
settling its long clay-tipped plumage in a hatching descent.

Despite society’s pretension of ongoing protection of the lives of emus and disabled people this is in fact provisional (“Heraldic bird, our protection is a fable/ made of space and

neglect”). The emu and Murray have only survived until now because, being provincial, they happen to live where the “darkly human” do not, and thus are currently not an object of “interest”.

In Murray’s third statement in this stanza he groups himself and the emu together – “we’re the ordinary discovered on a strange planet” – he also identifies them both as autistic through the alien metaphor. Though there are a range of opinions on its use, the alien metaphor is common in descriptions of autism, and this might be one of the earliest autistic examples of it. A later example in Murray’s writing is Alexander’s “Martian” accent. An example from another autistic person is in Sinclair’s “Don’t Mourn for Us”. In it Sinclair suggests that parents of autistic children should say to themselves: “This is an alien child who landed in my life by accident. I don’t know who this child is or what it will become. But I know it’s a child, stranded in an alien world, without parents of its own kind to care for it”. For Murray and the emu, they are made “remarkable and not”, by being the only two ordinary beings on an unusual planet, arriving in a similar way to the positive qualities of interest as “the ordinary mail of the otherworld”. This raises the possibility that, when Murray describes the emu as “heraldic” he is indicating that instead of, or as well as, her being heraldic of Australia, she is also heraldic of autism.

In the fourth stanza, as the emu gazes at their “jeep’s load” Murray guesses her motive:

Rubberneck, stepped sister, I see your eye on our jeep’s load.
I think your story is, when you were offered
the hand of evolution, you gulped it. Forefinger and thumb
project from your face, but the weighing palm is inside you
collecting the bottle-tops, nails, wet cement that you famously swallow,
your passing muffled show, your serially private museum.
Some truths are now called trivial, though. Only God approves them.
Some humans who disdain them make a kind of weather
which, when it grows overt and widespread, we call war.
There we make death trivial and awesome, by rapid turns about,
we conscript it to bless us, force-feed it to squeeze the drama out;

After reiterating what Murray regards as their familiar relationship (“sister”), he returns to her story from the beginning of the poem. The emu, like many autistics, is a collector. She has already collected the hand of evolution (“when you were offered/ the hand of evolution, you gulped it. Forefinger and thumb/ project from your face”) and uses it to continue collecting

(“but the weighing palm is inside you/ collecting the bottle-tops, nails, wet cement that you famously swallow”).

However, the topic of evolution is a difficult one for Murray; always, but particularly at this moment. He is delighted by his and the emu’s kinship as autistics, as evidenced by his many references to it. However, as a human, and specifically as a Catholic, he has to contend with also being a member of two groups who kill emus. Even though he, in contrast to most people, believes that all lives are valuable (“Some truths are now called trivial, though. Only God approves them”), and even though it is other humans who murder (“Some humans who disdain them make a kind of weather”), as a human he cannot avoid having to identify with other humans as “we” (“we offer it murder like mendicants, begging for significance”). Murray experiences these consequences of fashion as overwhelming or, as he labels it “vivid arrest”. This is in contrast to the “vivid steady state” of interest experienced by someone who is dying in “First Essay”.

Yet the emu, like interest in “First Essay” for humans, is an interruption to, and reorientation of, Murray’s understanding of his position in the world:

indeed we imprison and torture death – this part is called peace –
we offer it murder like mendicants, begging for significance.
You rustle dreams of pardon, not fleeing in your hovercraft style,
not gliding fast with zinc-flaked legs dangling, feet making high-tensile
seesawing impacts. Wasteland parent, barely edible dignitary,
the disinterested spotlight of the lords of interest
and gowned nobles of ennui is a torch of vivid arrest
and blinding after-darkness. But you hint it’s a brigand sovereignty
after the steady extents of God’s common immortality
whose image is daylight detail, aggregate, in process yet plumb
to the everywhere focus of one devoid of boredom.

For Murray, reacting in opposition to fashion has been a way of life. As he describes himself in his poem “Self-Portrait from a Photograph”, also from *The People’s Otherworld*: “in reflex defiance/ of claimant Good Taste and display”/ such moods were one edge of his loyalty”.¹² For the emu, though, Murray observes that she does not run from humans, even though they might not value her life (“You rustle dreams of pardon, not fleeing in your hovercraft style”), nor does she dignify interest with her time (“the disinterested spotlight of the lords of

¹² Les Murray, “Self-Portrait from a Photograph,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 198-9. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

interest”), and when humans stare at her she stares back (“looks us in both eyes with her one eye/ and her other eye”). And this suggests to Murray that, like the emu, the elements of his embodiment that render him unfashionable, such as autism, are also the source of his creativity.

Furthermore, from observing the emu’s pride in her autistic perception, Murray learns that he can also be proud. As discussed in Chapter One, since Murray was a child it was inculcated in him that perceiving the world autistically was negative. As he wrote in “Evening Alone at Bunya”: “Today, out walking, I considered stones.// It used to be said that I must know each one/ on the road by its first name”). In other words, from other people’s perspectives, at best Murray’s attention to detail was collecting useless information, and at worst it was wasting time. However, since the emu also has “the everywhere focus of one devoid of boredom”, Murray learns through her that their unusual way of observing the world has its own strength and power (“you hint it’s a brigand sovereignty”).

The concept of “brigand sovereignty” is a similar philosophy to crip. It suggests that while one, for whatever reason, has been forced to live as an outlaw from society, one soon discovers that they are one of many others. As a result they can develop both individual strengths and group solidarity. By describing the emu’s communication of brigand sovereignty as a “hint”, Murray suggests that it was covert, and that he had the embodied expertise to recognise it.

As the audience we are aware that “Second Essay” was not the first time that the “brigand sovereignty” message was contained in Murray’s poetry. The first was in “Portrait of the Autist” (1974), when Murray himself asserted that autists’ unusual knowledge and kinship enabled them to endure and create throughout history. “Bent Water” broadens this claim for innovation, persistence, and presence to all disabled people, and was written two years before “Second Essay). As these demonstrate, the experience of crip pride – the ability to not only claim it but embody it – was for Murray a difficult process that required practice. He was only able to maintain it accompanied by his son Alexander, with whom he could thoroughly understand and accept the nuances of autistic subjectivity (as described in “It Allows”). *Fredy Neptune* further explores this story, but transports it to the first half of the twentieth century, before the medical diagnosis of autism existed.

Chapter Four – *Fredy Neptune* Books I and II

This and the next two chapters analyse Murray's second and final verse novel, *Fredy Neptune*, from autistic and disabled positionalities. These positions have remained absent from the topics discussed in the previous twenty-three years of critical attention to this verse novel. Yet they are not only relevant, but crucial to understanding Fredy (and Murray), his story, and his narrative techniques.

Fredy Neptune is comprised of 250 pages, divided into five books, which were written from 1993 to 1997. Each book was published in *The Adelaide Review* and *PN Review* as it was completed, then the entire novel was published in 1998.

Throughout the four years in which Murray wrote *Fredy Neptune*, his career and personal life were arduous. In 1993, as well as being the literary editor for *Quadrant Magazine*, Murray began his "Our Man in Bunyah" column for *The Independent Monthly*, which ran for three years. In 1995 his father died, and in 1996 he almost died from kidney failure. During this time he also wrote *Subhuman Redneck Poems* (1996), *Killing the Black Dog* (1997), and some of the poems in *Conscious and Verbal* (1999). Amid these *Fredy Neptune* "remained a kind of standing trance which I could leave and re-enter".¹

Fredy Neptune is the circus name of Friedrich Adolf Boettcher, a German-Australian sailor, born in 1895. The verse novel is his retrospective narration of his life from when he acquires a physical impairment in 1914, until he cures that impairment in 1947. During this time he has a role in some of the most important events of the period: as a witness to the Armenian genocide, as a soldier in World War I, as a performer in the travelling circus era, as an actor

¹ Les Murray, "How Fred and I Wrote *Fredy Neptune*," in *The Best Australian Essays 1999*, ed. Peter Craven (Melbourne: Bookman Press, 1999), 367.

in the transition from silent to sound movies, as a resister of the Nazi regime, and as a soldier in World War II.

Murray felt that Fredy arrived in his mind as a complete character, whose story unfolded as Murray wrote it. Like the weeping man in Martin Place featured in “An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow”, Murray has stated that Fredy “stood up in the centre of my imagination” fully aware of his story, while Murray was not.² Indeed, on 18 July 1996, when Murray was rushed to hospital by ambulance due to kidney failure, his only regret, if he died, was not knowing how Fredy’s story ended.³

Yet, to write Fredy’s story, Murray both consciously and unconsciously drew on his personal experience. Signifying this, Peter Alexander named the final chapter of his biography of Murray “Fredy Murray”, and quoted Murray describing *Fredy Neptune* as “my secret autobiography”.⁴ Murray has since written that he made this statement “jokingly”, but then added that “there are slivers of truth in it that feel poignant to me”.⁵

Since *Fredy Neptune* is, to one degree or another, a Murray memoir, the crucial implication of this for understanding the character of Fredy is that he, too, is autistic. As I will argue throughout the next three chapters, Fredy has autistic characteristics, has an autistic position on the world, and utilises autistic narrative techniques. However, since the majority of the verse novel occurs before autism was designated as a medical diagnosis in English, it is a consideration of the experience of being autistic without a word with which to identify.

Critical Classifications

In the quarter of a century since the publication of *Fredy Neptune*, critics have been keen to confine it to one or another of the traditional novel genres. One of the most common categories to which it is linked or, as Murray labels it, “hogtie[d]” is the epic tradition. However, this classification “foregrounds Fredy’s travels, and diminishes the importance of

² Murray, “How Fred and I,” 365.

³ Peter F. Alexander, *Les Murray: A Life in Progress* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

⁴ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 286.

⁵ Murray, “How Fred and I,” 364.

his embodied experience.”⁶ As Murray says: “There is quite simply no other story that could be called *The Man Who Lost His Sense of Touch. Or The Man Who Gave Up His Body Out of Shame*”.⁷

Fredy gives up his body early in the verse novel in reaction to a horrific event that he later learns was part of the Armenian genocide. He is on shore leave in Trabzon, Turkey, with some shipmates, when they witness a group of men tormenting a group of women, pouring kerosene over them and setting them alight to burn to death. Fredy’s inability to mentally assimilate the experience of witnessing this mass murder, the knowledge that he was unable to intervene, and the concept that one group of humans could be so cruel to another group of humans, traumatises him.⁸ As a result, he acquires an impairment, the characteristics of which include fluctuating proprioception (awareness of where the body is in space), the inability to experience physical sensation, and the ability to heal his wounds. Because Fredy’s condition has more than one characteristic, and because he often calls it “the nothing”, I refer to it as “the nothing” throughout this analysis.

A number of critics reduce “the nothing” to physical numbness and have suggested that Murray created it solely for metaphorical purposes. Charles Lock, for example, emphatically states that it “is a poetic device, not a medical condition”.⁹ However, in “How Fred and I wrote *Fredy Neptune*”, Murray explains that it is an embodied impairment that was based, in part, on discussions with psychiatrists but mostly on his personal experience: “For most of the dissociative dimension, I could draw on things I knew from within myself. And because dissociation goes back in me to times before my conscious memory, I could put it into Fred’s mouth in stumbling baby-talk free from all analysis, the semi-articulate speech of innermost things”.¹⁰

⁶ Amanda Tink, “‘If You’re Different Are You the Same?’: The Nazi Genocide of Disabled People and Les Murray’s *Fredy Neptune*,” in *Genocide Perspectives VI: The Process and the Personal Cost of Genocide*, edited by Nikki Marczak and Kirril Shields (Sydney, UTS ePRESS, 2020), 75, <https://doi.org/10.5130/aaf.e>.

⁷ Murray, “How Fred and I,” 365.

⁸ Tink, “Les Murray’s *Fredy Neptune*,” 75.

⁹ Charles Lock, “*Fredy Neptune*: Metonymy and the Incarnate Preposition,” in *The Poetry of Les Murray: Critical Essays*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan and Bruce Clunies Ross (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 126.

¹⁰ Murray, “How Fred and I,” 369-70.

Critics also classify *Fredy Neptune* as picaresque, however this claim ignores key features of the novel, and of Fredy.¹¹ Unlike the episodic structure of picaresque novels, the events of *Fredy Neptune* proceed in chronological order, with each event connecting with those previous to and following it. Fredy might be a hero, but he is not a picaro for two reasons: first because, as is common of autistic people (as discussed in Chapter One), he places significant value on the truth and behaving ethically, and feels ashamed when he behaves otherwise, even when it is justified. For example, after Fredy succeeds in his revenge on a work colleague who had continually bullied him he reflects: “I’ve done some low acts and bastardries. You remember them/ with a better class of shame, though, when they come off right” (116).¹² Second, as is also common of autistic people, he is interested in, and capable of, learning and thus undergoes significant development throughout the novel. In Book I alone he explicitly mentions learning three times, and also describes to the audience one of his methods for learning: “My trick was always: learn by shutting your mouth;/ people will tell you what you’re at, and then all about it” (44).

The reason *Fredy Neptune* is incompatible with traditional novel and character classification schemes is that it is unequivocally crip. As outlined in Chapter One, crip writing must be written by a disabled person using disabled-writing techniques. Equally important, however, is its ability to demonstrate that embodiment is the medium by which all humans understand the world, and that impairment is socially constructed and disablement is socially enforced. Central to the concept of crip is its insistence that disabled people are human not because we can, or might one day be able to, simulate being nondisabled, but because we have our own culture, and interactional and embodied expertise.

Fredy Neptune, then, is the story of Fredy becoming crip. He begins the verse novel as an autistic man who acquires “the nothing” at a time before either condition had a diagnostic label. After initially feeling negatively self-conscious of his impairments, as the result of nondisabled people’s prejudice against them, he learns through his involvement with crip communities, and the generosity of other disabled people, to develop a positive self-consciousness of his impairments. Ultimately, he cures “the nothing”, not because he desires

¹¹ For example: Steven Matthews, *Les Murray* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 134; Locke, “Metonymy and the Incarnate Preposition,” 128.

¹² Les Murray, *Fredy Neptune* (Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1998). All quotations from this verse novel are from this version of it. All page references are in parentheses in-text.

to be nondisabled, but because he heals the trauma that caused it. And he finishes the novel as a man who is proud to be autistic, regardless of others' prejudice.

Through writing Fredy's story, Murray contributes to reversing the erasure of disabled people from history. Some of this is in the form of Fredy's encounters with famous people whose disabled status has been ignored such as Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes, and German-American actress Marlene Dietrich. Some of this reversal is in the form of highlighting government policies that impacted disabled people, such as America's "ugly" laws, the Nazi genocide of disabled people, institutionalisation, and war. And some is in the form of everyday disabled people living their lives, including Fredy, and the dozens of people with various impairments whom he encounters.

How, then, to explain the critics' quarter of a century silence on impairment and disablement in *Fredy Neptune*, when there is clearly a wealth of material to discuss? One reason is that, as Murray says, "Fred is the whole rage and horror turned into art".¹³ The rage of disabled people is rarely acknowledged by nondisabled people, especially when that rage is a response to nondisabled prejudice. *Fredy Neptune* is the story of a disabled man who is forced, by most of the nondisabled people around him, to conceal his impairments. When nondisabled people become aware of his impairments, usually because he risks disclosing them in order to use them to save someone's life, they immediately ostracise him, often threaten him with violence, and evict him from his job or his home.

The other reason for the critics' silence on impairment and disablement in *Fredy Neptune* is that if there's anything more forcefully forbidden by nondisabled people than disabled peoples' rage, it is disabled people experiencing joy and kinship, not despite their impairments, but due to their impairments. And while *Fredy Neptune* certainly includes a number of newly impaired people, including Fredy, who struggle to come to terms with loss, these characters are simultaneously advantaged by their impairment, and their crip community. The strongest example of this is Fredy himself, who refuses to relinquish "the nothing" until the end of the verse novel. As Murray states:

he's told earlier on how to get rid of his condition, told that if he could ever pray with a whole heart to be rid of it, it would leave him that same day. What he can't bear to admit,

¹³ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 293.

he doesn't even admit to himself, is it's too good to give up. It might be a dreadful limitation, but it's also what makes him special and different, and it has many advantages.¹⁴

Relationship with Audience

Murray has structured *Fredy Neptune* to impart an immersive experience of Fredy's life. While, as a text, it is a verse novel divided into five books of between thirty-six and sixty-six pages of eight-line verses, Murray, and therefore Fredy, conceives of it as a self-narrated film.¹⁵ This conception is established from the first line – “That was sausage day/ on our farm outside Dungog./ There's my father Reinhard Boettcher” – where Fredy is both telling the audience about his home and his father, and showing us pictures of them. When Fredy identifies himself as one of the people in an image he displays – “There I am” – and then, in the next stanza, identifies himself in another image – “Here's me” – the element of scene changes is added, denoting film (13).

To sustain this immersiveness throughout the verse novel Fredy maintains, but also modulates, openness with us as his audience. He discloses deeply personal details such as his embarrassment at not knowing what to do while having sex for the first time – “This part is awful to admit./ She had to tell me everything. Oh yes, you're ready, yes” (20). And he invites us to not just view photos of him, but to examine his body, such as his scars from a severe burn – “here, all up my calf, you can see it” (20). However, he also chooses to withhold some details from us, such as when he and Laura, the woman he marries, have sex for the first time (“there were laughing and tears/ and things felt, and sensations had and given –/ and things not told, too. It's not just the privacy of one”) (69); and times when he challenges our beliefs, such as when, during the Depression of 1930s Australia, his neighbours cooked and ate dogs (“Torsteins two doors up from us ate dogs. Ate every dog/ they could catch within miles. Try the Depression yourself/ before you blame them”) (218).

The foundation of Fredy's ability to present comprehensively to us is his autism, since it would not be possible without his prodigious, detailed memory. This verse novel is not a description of present events, it is a recollection of the past. As such, there is a designated

¹⁴ Peter Thompson, “Wisdom Interviews: Les Murray,” *Big Ideas*, ABC Radio National, March 27, 2005, www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/wisdom-interviews-les-murray/3446558.

¹⁵ Alexander, *Les Murray*, 291.

“now” when Fredy narrates his story to us, and an earlier “then” when it occurred, “All servicemen are like officers now, but the empires/ could be pretty approximate, then, with the lower deck” (14). He does not provide a definitive answer as to when “now” is. Nevertheless, the entire contents of the novel, which occurs over thirty-six years, is situated as the past, and he regularly references his memory as the means by which he can narrate it. He does not claim complete recall. In fact he readily admits when a memory is incomplete – “One day a cameraman I forget the name of told the yarn of Eisenstein’s/ Ten Days That Shook The World”) (163). However, he notes that his recall ability is strong, especially for words (“They say if you don’t read your memory for the words is better/ and I always could remember words”) (221).

It is of course true that Fredy’s memory may be aided by the images that he displays, however, there are times when he exhibits recall beyond the image. For example, when displaying a picture of himself and a group of friends in Argentina, “This is me, and Rosie, and Corbeau, down the Boca/ in Buenos Aires”, he informs us of detail that cannot be seen, “If you could see inside/ that new peajacket on Rosie, he’d be every bit as blue” (19).

Structure of Close Analysis

I have divided my analysis of each book into subsections that explore the text’s key autistic or crip points and their implications. The subsections that are headed according to a topic, scene, or character are written from a forest-first position. They discuss a scene as a whole, highlighting key details. The subsections headed by “Neurodivergence”, then a word or other specific detail, are written from a trees-first position. They begin with a short quotation from the verse novel, contextualising the word or detail. They are then followed by an explanation of its significance.

This structure enables me to demonstrate Fredy’s trees-first experience of the world, which is crucial for understanding Fredy’s character, and Murray’s writing. Together the analysis presented conventionally and the analysis presented autistically provide a practical experience of the different types of information apprehended by both vantage points. The contrast between these vantage points highlights the constant flood of information that Fredy experiences, and the effort required of him to process it. This contrast also emphasises the

details that shape his perceptions, decisions, and the depths and range of his emotions. Furthermore, the trees-first sections allow me to point out the many subtleties, previously neglected by critics, that Murray has utilised to create autistic characters who inhabit a crip verse novel.

Book I – The Middle Sea

Book I establishes Fredy as a person with autistic characteristics, and then presents the trauma that shapes him, and thereby the rest of the novel. As a result of the trauma, he acquires “the nothing”. However, though the relationship between them is immediately apparent to us, it is not to Fredy. As he begins to adjust to “the nothing”, he explores differences between impairments with and without labels, in hospital, at work, and in public.

In the context of this verse novel, Book I covers a relatively short period of time, from 1914 to 1918. At nineteen, Fredy is new to war, and learns about it as it progresses. However, Fredy’s attention is generally turned inward in order to learn the many intricacies of his changed embodiment, and to survive a variety of hostile responses to “the nothing”. Through his responses he demonstrates his well-established awareness of disablement, and kinship with disabled people.

Fredy Pre-Trauma

The two pages of *Fredy Neptune* before the mass murder that precipitates “the nothing” are a prelude in which Fredy outlines some events that introduce the verse novel’s important themes. The first event is “sausage day on our farm outside Dungog” (Australia), where Fredy, his brother Frank who died as an infant (“brother Frank/ who died of the brain-burn, meningitis”), and their German parents (“my father Reinhard Boettcher,/ my mother Agnes”), make weisswurst together (13). However, with the beginning of the second stanza (“Here’s me riding bareback in the sweater/ I wore to sea first” (13) he shifts to describing his role on ships, and it thus becomes apparent that, for this seventeen-year-old who is beginning his working life (21), “sausage day” is already the distant past (13). He presents it to us as representative of his entire childhood because it aggregates the elements of it that he values most – when his brother Frank was alive, and the whole family could comfortably enjoy a German tradition together on their Australian farm.

Fredy's brother Frank is also Murray's in-text dedication of this novel to a disabled friend. As such it establishes the themes of cripple kinship and adaptability, and devotion to living life.

Murray articulates these in his poem "Aspects of Language and War on the Gloucester Road" from *Subhuman Redneck Poems*:

Peace or war, all die for our freedom.
The innocent, the guilty, the beasts, all die for our freedom.
I was taught the irreparable knowledge
by a baby of thirty next door in his wheelchair
who'd thrash and grimace with happiness when I went there.
I see the road, and many roads before,
through a fawn snap of him as a solemn little boy
before meningitis. And it is first for him
that I insist on a state where lives resume.¹⁶

The rest of the introductory events begin two years later in August 1914, and for Fredy are "The first I heard that the War had really come". Fredy is working on a German freighter that has just travelled from New York (America) to Messina (Italy). There the crew are unexpectedly directed to transfer the coal their ship is carrying to another German ship which is involved in the war, and is being pursued by the British ("We're coaling that battlecruiser./ There! The English are after her!") Fredy is sent to assist on the battlecruiser, where he and his crew work shovelling coal until they fall asleep exhausted (13).

When Fredy wakes he finds the battlecruiser has left Messina. This means he is no longer able to return to the freighter, and that he is potentially in life-threatening danger. The freighter was German, but could be crewed by sailors from anywhere. Thus, although he was advantaged by his ability to speak German, it did not matter that he is Australian. Now, however, he is on a German warship, and Germany is at war with Australia, therefore, as an Australian Fredy is afraid of "being shot for a spy". However, Fredy's presence is convenient for the Germans, and consequently he is told by the chief to simply join the crew – "You're German, said the Chief. I'm short two that dropped dead./ Wear this rig. Come to attention, so! to any officer/ and enjoy the Kaiser's dumplings." Fredy is not challenged by any officers, and his nationality soon becomes irrelevant when the warship arrives in Constantinople. There the entire crew are told they now belong to the Turkish navy, presented with women to

¹⁶ Les Murray, "Aspects of Language and War on the Gloucester Road," in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 275-80. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

have sex with, and sent to Odessa (Ukraine) to block Russia from having access to any ports (14).

Fredy also exhibits four of his autistic characteristics in these pages, establishing them as fundamental to him. However, because autism did not exist as a medical diagnosis in 1914, they are not identified as autistic. One of these is his immersive sensory experience of the world, which he evokes in a number of ways. Sometimes he utilises multisensory metaphors. For example, when the crew of the cargo ship are directed to quickly transfer their ship's coal to the warship, Fredy explains the sound, sight, smell, taste, and temperature of the scene by describing it as "one great bushfire of work". At other times he demonstrates his sensorially rich perspective by recounting his experience through senses that are often neglected in literature. For example, when he has been directed to assist with shovelling coal on the warship, and a man beside him collapses and dies, while many narrators might report the sight of this, Fredy reports the sound of it – "A man dropped dead beside me. His face hit the bulkhead bong as he fell" (13).

The second of Fredy's autistic characteristics is his intense interests. One of these is the sea. Throughout the verse novel he lists a number of reasons why it is a source of joy and fascination for him. In the second stanza he lists the first, which is that it offers a vantage point from which to learn about each country:

Here's me riding bareback in the sweater
I wore to sea first.
I never learned the old top ropes,
I was always in steam. Less capstan, less climbing,
more re-stowing cargo. Which could be hard and slow
as farming – but to say Why this is Valparaiso!
Or: I'm in Singapore and know my way about
takes a long time to get stale. (13)

Another of Fredy's intense interests is words. And while he does not mention this intense interest in the same direct way as he does the sea, it is regularly in evidence. Not only has he stayed fluent in both English and German, despite being at sea for two years, the ways in which people use words always attract his attention and comment. For example, when he begins working on the warship, after commenting that this work is easier ("A warship is a lot less/ hard to graft than a freighter"), he notes the words the other crew use to describe him

and others of his rank – “I got used, like the rest,/ to being called a sow-lump, a carrion, a waxer” (14).

The third of Fredy’s autistic characteristics is his trees-first processing. As such, though he ultimately obtains a comprehensive understanding of a situation, he regularly does not have that understanding until after the situation has occurred. For example, Fredy notes that the warship travelled to Odessa (“our admiral took us to Odessa”), that they were ordered to take actions he did not understand (“and I found myself passing up big silk bags to the gun crews/ to make thunderclaps that rang the iron ball the earth’s around”), and that subsequently, Turkey took control of the area, and Russia was prevented from using Odessa as a port (“Now Turkey was in, and Russia’s last trade lifeline blocked/ so she would rot”). While he initially understands this to be the sequence of events, it takes some time before he understands that the blockade was caused by the warship, which had gone to Odessa for that purpose (“It was all we’d come to do, I worked out later”) (14).

The fourth of Fredy’s autistic characteristics is the lower priority that conforming to group behaviour is for him compared with the people with whom he interacts. This is in evidence when the German officers on the warship have been told they are now Turkish and are presented with women to have sex with. The text literally contains the groups of women and men on some lines and Fredy, as an individual alone, on others, and alternates between them. The groups are introduced first (“All the women we Turk matlows met we were led to by the touts”), while Fredy is separate from them on the next line (“I was ashamed and shy. I was always, round all that”). Note too that by saying “I was always, round all that”, Fredy indicates that he has been in this type of situation a number of times before, which means that his refusal to participate is a deliberate decision, and not due to his trees-first processing (14). Then, to emphasise their separation, the pattern is repeated with the groups contained on two lines (“the tired anger in it, behind the sticky smiles, the contempt/ as they stooped over to give you eyefuls”), and Fredy alone on the next line (“All I wanted was a girlfriend”) (14).

These pages also illustrate the issue of what Fredy refers to as “sides”, which is a significant theme throughout the verse novel. “Sides” are the socially constructed divisions between one group and another, and are often consistent with popular societal prejudices such as those regarding impairment, race, or gender. In a gathering of people, the “side” with the most power defines and enforces the border between it and the other “side”. As a disabled German-

Australian, Fredy constantly negotiates the consequences of the arbitrary nature of “sides”. Thus, when Fredy became aware that he was the only Australian on the German warship, he knew from experience that his life was dependent on which “side” the ship’s captain classified him on. If the warship had not been “short two that dropped dead”, Fredy’s Germanness might have been considered irrelevant and he would have been classified as an Australian and “shot for a spy”. However, since the warship required more crew members, Fredy’s German heritage is recognised and his being Australian is ignored. Later though, while the warship travels from Constantinople, to Odessa, and then to Gallipoli, Fredy realises that, having saved himself from being shot by agreeing to be German, he will soon be forced to decide whether he will shoot Australian soldiers. He decides that “I will desert/ if I have to fight Australians”, but the mass murder results in him not having to enact this decision (14).

The Mass Murder

Fredy and some colleagues are on shore leave in Trabzon (Turkey) from their work on the warship when they witness the event that traumatises Fredy. They see, but are not seen by, a group of men who torment a group of women, and then pour kerosene over them and set them alight. Fredy is desperate to intervene but believes that they could only defeat the men with guns (“If we’d had rifles there/ we’d have massacred those bastards. We had only fists and boots”) (15).

Fredy’s experience of perceiving this event autistically is demonstrated by the structure of the text. Until now the text has been composed of flowing sentences – “But instead/ my mates and I, on shore leave up by Trabzon/ at last saw women with their faces unwrapped in the open” (14). However, when describing the event, the text changes to fragmented sentences:

They were huddling, terrified, crying,
crossing themselves, in the middle of men all yelling.
Their big loose dresses were sopping. Kerosene, you could smell it.
The men were prancing, feeling them, poking at them to dance –
then pouf! they were alight, the women, dark wicks to great orange flames,
whooping and shrieking. (15)

This stanza also demonstrates how the combination of intensified sensorial experience and trees-first processing can traumatise autistic people. Each of these fragments is a tree that has not yet been organised and consolidated into a forest. Thus each detail has its own unfiltered

intensity. The women's "terrified crying", the men "yelling", the stench of enough kerosene to cover the women, the reverberations through the ground of the men "prancing" and the women "dancing". Any one of these sensations alone could overwhelm an autistic person. Combined they are a level of overwhelm that Fredy has not previously experienced.

Of course witnessing an event of this kind would be likely to traumatise any human, however trauma is more likely to be intensified for autistic people. The writing of autistic people describing their experiences, and the few surveys that have been conducted on this topic, demonstrate this intensity – events that nonautistic people classify as minor, due to their forest-first processing, impact autistic people much more viscerally, due to their trees-first processing. Further, while nonautistic people often can and do filter out sensations, autistic people often cannot, which multiplies the experience of trauma.¹⁷ Consequently, none of Fredy's shipmates are affected by the mass murder while, for Fredy, it induces "the nothing". Fredy, however, is not aware of the connection between this trauma and the onset of "the nothing", and believes he has caught leprosy (now known as Hansen's disease).

The Categorical Properties of Labels

Though Fredy is not consciously aware of the cause of "the nothing", he has a deep connection with his embodied experiences, and intuitively knows how best to respond to them. Nevertheless, each nondisabled person he meets discards his knowledge in favour of their own pronouncement on his body, and subsequent determination of where he belongs.

This pattern begins when Fredy returns to the ship after the mass murder. He knows that he will be diagnosed as having leprosy ("Back on board, within days I found out I had leprosy"), and he knows that he needs complete rest ("I just curled up in my hammock, like a burnt thing myself"), but his knowledge is ignored by his superiors. At first, when Fredy does not exhibit any culturally-acknowledged signs of impairment, he is accused of being a lazy nondisabled person ("Sow-fellow, all you've got's Infaulenza! Acute lazyitis"). Then, when Fredy develops "white numb places", he is recategorized as disabled, and therefore disposable. And suddenly his nationality, which was ignored when the warship was short two

¹⁷ R. Fulton et al., *Sensory Trauma: Autism, Sensory Difference and the Daily Experience of Fear*, Autism Wellbeing CIC, 2020, <https://www.autismwellbeing.org.uk/publications/sensory-trauma%3A-autism%2C-sensory-difference-and-the-daily-experience-of-fear>.

officers, is used as an excuse to abandon him on shore in Constantinople (“When the watch officer saw my white numb places, he/ got very serious. And discovered I was a stray./ The Chief lost his rank over it. I was put ashore quick”). In other words, when Fredy is classified as disabled his superiors treat him as if he has infiltrated their “side” of nondisabled people. Defining this discrimination as a matter of race rather than impairment, especially during a war, makes their actions appear appropriate, and denies Fredy an avenue for argument (15).

This situation is another indication that Fredy has been disabled for a significant period of his life. Newly disabled people react to their first experience of discrimination on the basis of their impairment, and often many subsequent experiences of discrimination, with shock at how they are treated by nondisabled people. Fredy, however, demonstrating that this kind of discrimination is thoroughly familiar to him, does not react at all.

Once ashore this pattern repeats. Fredy knows that he needs rest and a supportive community. Further demonstrating that he is not new to disablement, he also knows he will not receive these in a hospital but in the begging community (“I drifted into begging, among the wrestlers and porters/ and Dardanelles soldiers”), a high proportion of whom are likely to be disabled people. And while he rests, processes his experiences, and decides what to do next (“I’d wake up/ and sit around, half there,/ with the carts and dogs and arguments criss-crossing/ as if not around but through me”), the other beggars take care of him. They ensure that he can sleep for as long as he needs (“And I slept/ sometimes for whole days”), that he can stay warm at night (“It was chilly at night, about like home/ but there were always trash fires to sleep near”) (15), and one of them teaches him the appropriate Turkish words for begging:

he taught me the begging words
cüzzamliyim, dokunmayiniz – I’m a leper, don’t touch

sadaka, alms. *Allah rizasi için bir sadaka.*
Tesekkür ederim. That’s thank you. (15-6)

Given Fredy’s intense interest in words, learning these words not only enables him to survive as a beggar, it also reduces his anxiety, preventing him from being overwhelmed.

Nevertheless, some of the warship crew decide that, since Fredy is a disabled person, he should be in hospital (“Come on, shipmate: you’re for the Berlin nurses./ they’ll warm your carcass. The name on this rail pass, that’s you!”) This may seem like the correct decision to

have made on Fredy's behalf especially since, he realised later, he was dying. And it may have been the correct decision if Fredy was in fact an ill nondisabled person, a group for whom hospitals are a safe place. Instead, once he is in the Berlin hospital, the doctors simply diagnose him with "Tuberculoid leprosy" as he expected. And, even though there is no treatment for his condition, they confine him there (16).

Neurodivergence – "buttoned and straight/ as bayonets"

The doctors were buttoned and straight
as bayonets, with their guard moustaches, the nurses tight and pink
and all of us Wounded tucked up so trim and square
we couldn't see what shapes each other were. (16)

This is Fredy's description of the people in the hospital to which he is taken. It displays the hierarchy of roles within the hospital system, and how, similar to the military, that hierarchy is perpetuated by uniforms. At the top of the hierarchy are "buttoned and straight" male doctors, who have an authoritarian role as "guard[s]", including the option to be threatening as "bayonets", and thus to maintain their role at the top of the hierarchy. Below them are "tight and pink" female nurses who have a subordinate role. And below them are the patients who, having been rendered identical, are stripped of being male, female, or any other type of identity ("all of us Wounded tucked up so trim and square/ we couldn't see what shapes each other were"). As such the patients are simultaneously homogenised, but precluded from identifying with each other, and thereby discouraged from supporting each other.

Two Hospitals

The pattern of Fredy knowing his needs, and nondisabled people ignoring his choices in favour of their own determinations, repeats in hospital. Realising that he has been detained indefinitely, and hoping he will be cured at home in Australia, Fredy escapes. However, it is only a few hours before he is captured. He is on a tram when "The police came on it, checking papers", and he notices that "every man not crippled looked haunted and alone/ and showed his bits." Having no paperwork to show, he exits the tram, falls, and a crowd, including police, notice his hospital pyjamas. To defend himself against them Fredy displays his diseased skin, compelling most of the crowd to retreat, and the police to imprison him in a net and return him to the hospital (16).

Since Fredy has demonstrated his disregard for the hospital's hierarchy, the staff punish him by transferring him to "the Kaiserly Leprosarium.") He describes it as "a walled-in hole on the flats of the Weser River", and "a yellow indoor cemetery"). Whereas, in the previous hospital, disabled people were at least kept comfortable, here they are left to die ("we were there to stay, and things went on there, very slow,/ that happen in the grave. From just like a scratchy photo") (17).

Fortunately, just as occurred when Fredy stayed with the begging community, the disabled people in this hospital take care of him. Another patient suggests to Fredy that, particularly since Fredy can pass as a local, he should escape while he is still able to do so ("he was a wake-up, and soon tipped me a grin:/ You're German enough, Sailor, wherever you're really from,/ and you won't spy much in here.") This is a patient who is most likely unable to escape the hospital himself; perhaps because he has never had the physical strength to do so, or perhaps because he has delayed leaving for too long and his strength has deteriorated. Either way he recognises that Fredy does have the ability to escape, and he does not want Fredy to forego that opportunity and, as Fredy says, "That woke me up, it saved me". Consequently, in the second quarter of 1916, after approximately a year in one or the other of the hospitals, Fredy successfully escapes to regular life in Berlin, and begins hitchhiking to Holland where he hopes he can obtain work on a ship bound for Australia (17).

Being a "Public Cripple"

Fredy imagines that being what he calls a "public cripple" will engender public understanding and responsiveness, but he quickly learns that reality is more complicated (19). He formulates a theory of being a "public cripple" during his time on the tram during his escape from the first hospital. His observation that, when the police checked the passengers' papers, "every man not crippled looked haunted and alone/ and showed his bits", leads him to conclude that "being crippled was as good as papers,// or old age; nearly as good as uniform" (17). In other words, he assumes that if he has an obvious physical impairment he will not be questioned by police, and will be respected by the rest of the public. Therefore, he covers his skin so that his leprosy cannot be seen and conceals one of his arms so that he appears to only have one arm ("And this time I'd keep the disease wrapped up. No touching people,/ but I'd look as if I could. And I'd keep one arm inside/ my clothes") (17). As a "public cripple" he does achieve his objective not to be questioned by officials. However, instead of being respected by the

public as he had expected, they pity him (“*Poor love*”). Nevertheless, he uses this to his advantage to obtain lifts from people towards Holland.

In Holland Fredy has an interaction with someone who in fact does only have one arm, but uses a prosthetic. She therefore appears to have two arms until she is attacked by two men who steal her briefcase and, by doing so, collect her prosthetic arm as well:

One of the drifters suddenly jumped and tore
the briefcase off her. Really. Because her arm came off too.
I blinked. It was real. She screamed. The veins and muscles
attaching the arm were leather straps. (18)

The woman turns to Fredy for assistance. However, his trees-first processing, the unexpectedness of the situation, and his nervousness in the presence of women overwhelm him and he cannot respond in a way both of them want him to. As Fredy explains:

I was the one nearest. I was so stupid-shy,
she was stretching out her hand, her live real hand –
and what do I do but put her wooden arm in it?
If I had got that right, everything would have been different.

The woman is deeply hurt by Fredy’s response to her, and reacts sadly rather than angrily (“She gave me the queerest look, quietly”) (18). She had hoped for assistance from Fredy because he appears to also have one arm, and she knows that someone with the same impairment as hers is most likely to relate to what she is feeling. Additionally, he appears to have the confidence to publicly disclose his impairment which, as she knows, and as he will soon learn, is a state to which the public often respond with discrimination and violence. Thus she admires what seems to be Fredy’s conscious decision to risk those reactions. Her outstretched hand is both an offer of, and request for, shared experience. When he does not hold her hand, and instead gives her the prosthetic arm, he literally puts a barrier between them.

Fredy is also deeply hurt by his response to the woman because it misrepresents how he feels towards her. He feels comfortable with her because, although he does not actually have one arm, his autistic characteristics mean he does have a lifetime of experience with disablement. Therefore, unlike a nondisabled person who would no longer think of the woman as “pretty” once they have discovered she has an impairment, he would have welcomed a romantic

relationship, or any kind of relationship, with her. Also, since they are both disabled, and other disabled people have previously taken care of him, he wants, in turn, to take care of her. When he is not able to do so, and then sees that she is deeply hurt by this, and also knows that he has deceived her by appearing to have the same impairment as she does when he does not, he is ashamed. Thus he describes himself as not just shy but “so stupid-shy”). (18)

His shame at this event continues to influence his behaviour. He soon obtains work on a ship travelling from Holland to Rio and, during this trip, his condition stabilises. At first his skin sheds (“I was burning in my clothes, sticking to them and ripping free again/ shedding like a gum tree, and having to hide it and work”). This resolves but leaves him with no experience of physical sensation, and reduces his awareness of his body’s position in space:

What I never expected, when I did stop hurting
I wouldn’t feel at all. But that’s what happened.

No pain, nor pleasure. Only a ghost of that sense
that tells where the parts of you are, and of needs from inside
so I wouldn’t disgrace myself. It seemed I was not to be
a public cripple. (18-19)

And since he believes he is not a “public cripple”, and he knows the pain it causes other disabled people when he pretends to be a “public cripple”, he does not pretend this again.

Masking to Survive

Yet, Fredy soon discovers that “the nothing” results in him being a part-time “public cripple”. Thus he learns that managing what others witness of “the nothing” is not just a matter of convenience but survival. As he says: “somehow I knew I wouldn't die,/ that the leprosy, or whatever it had been, was lifted./ On the other hand...” (19). A reader might imagine that Fredy is about to discuss a characteristic of “the nothing” which is beginning to threaten his life. Instead, while he does discuss something that threatens his life, it is the reactions of nondisabled people to “the nothing”. This occurs when he is working on the ship travelling from Holland to Rio:

a hatch-coaming dropped on my boot
was supposed to hurt. The blokes were looking at me.
Good, these steel toecaps, I thought to say, feeling nothing.

but hearing bones. (19)

When Fredy says, “The blokes were looking at me”, the intensity and intent of their looking can be inferred from the other details of this scene. Ship coamings are usually constructed from steel, and they border a sometimes-open space, such as a hatch, to prevent potential water leaks when the space is closed. Therefore, a hatch-coaming is heavy, and would be an extremely painful experience if it landed on your foot, even if you are wearing boots. However, Fredy’s colleagues are not looking at him out of concern, or even amazement. They are looking at him with an intensity of threat that forces Fredy to ignore the broken bones in his foot (“feeling nothing.// but hearing bones”), and provide an explanation to avert their violence (“*Good, these steel toecaps*”).

This situation reminds Fredy of the woman with one arm. The threat from his work colleagues demonstrates to him that she masks to protect herself. Thus he follows her lead.

Neurodivergence – “Cracking Normal”

I would have to learn quick, and practice
cracking normal, as I call it. It isn’t hard to do from memory:
curse when burnt, hunch when you see it’s cold, don’t hammer fingers
or let your leg bend to the pop! stage. Remember to get tired:
once I worked twenty hours re-stowing a shifted cargo
and then just stopped. Nothing would go. Arms
wouldn’t lift, nor tongue lick lips, nor swallow
swallow. I stood there dying. This was later that same year. (19)

Fredy’s fear of the threat from his colleagues causes him to focus on “cracking normal” to the increasing detriment of his health. He has perfected a surface display of normal, thereby demonstrating that the concept of normal that normal people hold is surface only. He has learned to “curse when burnt, hunch when you see/ it’s cold, don’t hammer fingers/ or let your leg bend to the pop! stage” as acts of memory rather than reflex. These moves protect him from the violence of others from moment to moment, but simultaneously induce serious long-term health consequences for him. None of his colleagues have noticed that re-stowing cargo continuously for twenty hours is not “normal”. Nor have they noticed that as a result of this work, and the effort of “cracking normal” for twenty continuous hours, Fredy cannot move or swallow. Thus Fredy’s injunction – “Remember to get tired” – is to himself.

Fredy’s phrase, “cracking normal”, has captured the attention of critics, and a number of them mention it in passing. Bruce Clunies-Ross employs it to title an essay in which he argues that

Fredy is “compelled by the loss of sensation to pretend that he is not different”¹⁸. In fact, Fredy is clearly compelled by the threats of others to pretend he is not different. “Cracking normal” in the presence of nondisabled people is a common practice by disabled people. In the context of autistic people it is known as masking. Fredy’s point is that the prejudice of nondisabled people causes health problems for disabled people. Furthermore, when masking does affect the disabled person’s health to the point that their survival is at risk, nondisabled people do not notice. Thus Fredy uses “cracking” not only in the sense of pretending, but also in the sense of rupturing or breaking. In other words, while it takes effort and endurance to continually mask an impairment, the performance of normal at any moment does not need to have any depth to it to be convincing to normal people. This proves that normal is a flimsy, easily cracked concept.

Clunies-Ross further argues that “the thrust of the narrative is towards a resolution where he can stop ‘cracking normal’ and simply be normal”. However, as I described earlier, Fredy has no interest in being normal, he only wants to be himself without the ensuing danger from nondisabled people.

The Consequences of Forgetting to Mask

Fredy soon experiences the dangerous consequences of forgetting to mask when he saves the life of a colleague. He is working on another ship, travelling from Galveston (America) to Buenos Aires (Argentina) when, as he phrases it, blaming himself, he “slip[s] up badly” (20). A boy is lighting the galley fire with kerosene when his clothes catch fire. Fredy rushes to assist the boy, catching fire as well, and forgets to “curse when burnt” for some time, as he describes:

He was screaming blind when I reached him, half the galley alight too
and when I got him put out I didn't notice
I had caught, here, all up my calf, you can see it.
They took the boy out, and there I'm tidying up, still burning.

The cook started screaming, I didn't know what at.
One of his blue dragons had come real. I went on burning –
see how deep it goes in? The little silver walls?
The supercargo whopped me out with a soaking jumper
and everybody near was looking. *He devil!* screams the cook
he walk in fire, not hurt. You stay away, you devil! (20)

¹⁸ Bruce Clunies Ross, “The Art of ‘Cracking Normal,’” in *The Poetry of Les Murray: Critical Essays*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan and Bruce Clunies Ross (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 118.

This is a different group of colleagues than when the hatch-coaming dropped on Fredy's foot, but their reaction is the same. They are "looking" at him, but they are not concerned for his welfare, or acknowledging that he is the only one of them who assisted the boy, or grateful that he saved the boy's life. They are looking at him because they had assumed he was on their "normal" "side", but now they know he is impaired. Consequently, the skipper sacks him because otherwise "I might have had a midnight flotation test" (20). In other words, his colleagues might have thrown him overboard at midnight, when they were less likely to be seen, and he would have been left to die as the ship kept sailing. Note that the skipper has a number of options in this situation, including sacking whomever he thought might have thrown Fredy overboard, but he chooses to protect the potential murderer, and sack Fredy instead.

Yet, this event also unconsciously alerts Fredy to the fact that "the nothing" is a strength. Though his colleagues will not acknowledge it, "the nothing", the impairment that they have a prejudice against, enables Fredy to save a person from burning to death. This is an ability that most people would appreciate having, but it is particularly significant to Fredy for two reasons. First, as he will continue to demonstrate, he has the willingness and the courage to rescue people in life-threatening situations. Therefore, his strength now matches his willingness and courage. Second, being able to rescue someone from burning to death is the ability he longed to have while witnessing the mass murder in Trabzon.

Experiencing Sex

Though Fredy is abandoned ashore again, this also means he is relieved of the threat of violence. He continues to mask "the nothing" from the public, but he no longer has the continual stress of masking from his colleagues within the confines of a ship. This allows him time to relax, and for his leg to heal ("By the time it healed up, as much as it ever would, I'd lost/ my leprosy-thinking. I was young again, becalmed in port, curious") (20).

He decides he is interested in trying sex for the first time and meets a woman who recognises his interest ("A café waitress there noticed/ and helped me out.") However, he discovers that without sensation, or previous experience of sex, he is dependent on the woman to know what to do ("She had to tell me everything. *Oh yes, you're ready, yes,/ and Stop, hey, you're finished. I'm flooded. Didn't you feel that?*") In other words, Fredy did not sense having an

erection, ejaculation, or any other sensations related to sex. He does not know how to explain this to the woman and, even relating this experience to us decades later, he is embarrassed (“This part is awful to admit”) (20).

Fredy then changes the topic of his narrative to his search for work. It is approximately a year (“late in ’17”) before he finds work on “a freighter out of New Orleans bound for Cape Town”, which he hopes will bring him closer to home (20). However, that ship, though it was not involved in the war, was sunk by a German submarine.

Neurodivergence – “The Huns”

When the Alcazar de Toledo,
our ship, had cracked open, the bos’un ran on deck
screaming *The Huns! The Huns have scuppered us!*

and I had thought the word was simply Hans.
That was the first time I heard it. (20-1)

Due to Fredy’s intense interest in words, this event is memorable for him because it is the first time he hears the word “Huns” which, at the time, he hears as “Hans”. These words are also a hint to us that Fredy’s trees-first processing is integral to his mind, and integral to this verse novel as a narrative technique. First-time readers of this verse novel might not be aware that “Hun” will soon continually be used to insult Fredy and his family. However, if they have read reviews of the verse novel, they might be aware that “Hans” is the disabled young man that Fredy rescues from the Nazi regime. If so, and if they begin to tune into the first mention of a word as Fredy does, they will become aware that details of Fredy’s experience often surface to inform his actions after he has had some time to process them.

Fredy reinforces these ideas later in the same stanza. The ship’s crew escape to a lifeboat but, after a few days, only Fredy and one other are still alive. Fredy states “He spoke, again in English, but I didn’t follow. A pity/ not to make what could be your last words simple/ for a simple hearer. But some can’t get off stage” (21). By referring to himself as a “simple hearer”, he is alluding to his trees-first processing, and how it often results in him collating information slower than others.

Working in Cairo

After having been in the company of Germans for the first half of World War I, Fredy spends the rest of the war in the company of Australians, though not in Australia. From the lifeboat he is rescued by a British ship and taken to Malta, where he obtains work on another British ship bound for Fremantle. When that ship cannot continue past Alexandria (Egypt) due to mechanical failure, he happens to meet a group of men he grew up with in Australia, who are serving in Cairo at a Remount Centre, managed by Banjo Paterson. (While this list of events might sound increasingly unlikely, the detail about Banjo Paterson is true at least in part. I cannot locate anything that states he managed this Remount Centre, but he was serving at a Remount Centre in Cairo at this time).

As Fredy converses with the other Australians, we are alerted to an issue regarding his parents in Australia. (This is also the first time in the novel that we witness Fredy contributing more than one line of speech to a conversation). He knows the men as “The Rumbels’ boy from home, two of the Mudfords from Gloucester,/ some of the Relfs”, which suggests that they all knew each other throughout their childhoods (21). When he asks general questions – “*How are you? Where have you been? What's the news from home?*” – they do not hesitate to answer. Yet when he asks “*How are my people?*” he notices “There was just a little hitch there”, before they answer, “*Oh, they're good. Or were when we left. Back three year ago*”. The men steer their conversation towards the war, but Fredy returns to his parents: “*Last letter I had from home was Easter '14*” (21). They continue to distract him – “They were dragging me away. *Come down to Cairo with us!! Beer by the bucketful! Heliopolis! Geebung Polo Club!*” And Fredy soon becomes lost by their conversation (“I didn't follow any of it”) (22).

The next day, after visiting the bazaar, Fredy discovers that his money belt has been stolen. It is possible that many people would not notice this as it occurs, but with no sensation, Fredy is completely unaware of it. His mates suggest that, since he now does not have any money, he will need to enlist. Fredy first insists “*I'm a sailor, not a soldier*” (23). The men do not know of Fredy's involvement in Turkey because he has avoided telling them (“I couldn't really say I'd waited for them in Constantinople,/ that I'd got there, as they hadn't, and seen the battle's results”). However, we know that Fredy is uncomfortable with thinking of himself as having participated in the war, and therefore avoids admitting that he did so on the technicality that it happened by accident and he was not formally enlisted in anyone's army. Now, though, he

has to confront the question of enlisting, and insists that *“I can’t enlist”*). When he is challenged as to why, with the assumption that he is more loyal to Germans than Australians (*“You mean, you won’t shoot Germans?”*) he reveals that he is not comfortable with the idea that he could kill anyone (*“No. And nor Australians”*). And his honesty forces the others to be similarly honest (*“Each man was looking at the ground. Like some of youse, in that. One of them finally said”*) (23). Nevertheless the next line – *“You get up early and wake up late, in the Army”* – reveals that Fredy feels he has no choice, and enlists (23).

Forgetting to Mask with Friends

Working with friends at the Remount Centre might seem more pleasant than some of the environments in which Fredy has previously worked. However, it also presents him with some new difficulties. Since Fredy has an intense interest in the sea, which is now unavailable to him as he works on land, his anxiety begins to increase. Also, while he enjoys working with familiar people, he still needs to mask “the nothing” from them. Additionally, as his exhaustion from the effort of masking continually increases, he then finds that he also needs to mask his exhaustion. Ultimately, at the close of 1917, he collapses under the weight of this combination, which exposes him to the danger from which he’s been trying to protect himself. As Fredy summarises: *“To show your metal –// I knew not to show mine. Neither show nor tell –/ and yet, that Christmas, I did let on, and near died of it”* (24).

It begins when he forgets to mask while seeing Jerusalem for the first time on Christmas Eve (*“But there was Jerusalem, its towers husked and unhusked on the cob/ in its high stone box. That first time, I forgot the mob/ and sat my horse and stared.”*) Unfortunately this is noticed by his colleagues (*“A freezing rain half snow/ had sagged my hat, when Bill Hines our sergeant called me back/ to feeling neither cold nor wet, a heavy soul on a droving track.”*) Since they are his mates they do not react as previous work colleagues have, but this incident arouses suspicion towards Fredy that continues to grow (24).

The Reality of Cure

In Jerusalem Fredy encounters the opportunity to be cured that he thought he had been searching for. However, this occasion reveals that Fredy unconsciously objects to the idea that an impairment is worthless. Fredy has not mentioned cure since his confinement in the Berlin hospital in 1916, but seeing Jerusalem for the first time rekindles his interest in it (*“Jerusalem. There’d be help for me. I was keyed tight with hope.”*) The next day he visits

Jerusalem alone, and locates, “where I hadn't known I was going: the Holy Sepulchre) (24). There he is told that “the nothing” is a reaction to trauma, and that he is the only one who can cure it:

Black clergy all over, with their hands out. Then one in a hood
*said clearly: Your response to the death of our sisters is good,
best of all outsiders. If ever you can pray*

with a single heart to be free of it, it will leave you that day. (24)

Having been told what he needs to do to be cured, Fredy becomes drunk instead (“there’s no heed/ to prayer against itself. Laugh, that still feels. But God!/ Christmas? I bought a bottle of it. Soon I was on my bum, singing”) (25). This is when it becomes obvious to us, though not to Fredy, that he is not as keen to be cured as he consciously believes he is. “The nothing” means he experiences no physical awareness or enjoyment, which thus far has resulted in an unfulfilling sexual experience and his money belt being stolen. However, he also did not experience any pain from the hatch-coaming landing on his foot, and he was able to rescue the boy from burning to death which, as discussed earlier, he is unconsciously aware is a strength that he has always wanted to possess. Therefore, he knows from experience that, contrary to the stereotype of acquiring an impairment, “the nothing” is not entirely negative. It is a mixture of advantages and disadvantages.

Public Crying

A couple of hours later, Fredy’s private preoccupation with his embodiment becomes a public spectacle. This is because he suddenly experiences sensation for the first time in more than two years (“and the stars were like clean spikes – because I was cold!/ Cold. And not rubber when I pinched my shoulders. Stung!/ Pinched when I pinched. And the bent wrinkly fellow, I could feel him!”) His excitement attracts the attention of people nearby and then, as quickly as sensation arrived, it disappears. One of the people who witnesses Fredy’s excitement drop to disappointment is one of the colleagues who is suspicious of him, and he asks Fredy what caused the change. In response Fredy cannot prevent himself from yelling and crying, and the crowd, aware of his extreme vulnerability, act as hunters who have found their prey: “*I’m dead, I screamed. I was alive. I’m dead again,!* and I bust out crying, in that body,/
gulping up up, tears swamping my sight, tasting salty/ and a crowd collecting round, at a trot” (25).

As the crowd converge on Fredy, he freezes in fear. His first thought is “The last, the very/ last thing you allow ever: to be caught out both different and helpless./ Humans kill you for less.” This indicates that he knows that he is being targeted because of his impairments and his extreme exhaustion, which further indicates that he has experienced this type of situation many times previously. It also indicates that he is terrified at the thought of what the crowd will do to him next and that fear, combined with his exhaustion, overwhelms him. Before the crowd can attack him, however, he is again rescued by a disabled person who shares the same embodied expertise. She knows from her own experience that he is in Danger and acts on his behalf to protect him: “A woman in bonnet and black came swimming the racing crawl/ through the mob *What do you mean you mean/ wretches a person weeping is not a spectacle stand away!*” Consequently the crowd disperses (25).

There is an obvious comparison here – especially since Fredy has said both characters stood up in his mind and demanded to be written – between Fredy and the crying man in Martin Place from “An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow”. That poem describes a crowd who approach a crying man with gentle curiosity rather than hatred, and in return many of them receive “the gift of weeping”.¹⁹ Nevertheless, both poems describe a scene where a crowd treat a man crying as a freak show by surrounding him and staring, and neither they nor critics suggest that this is inappropriate. I cannot locate anyone discussing “An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow” who comments on this aspect of it; and I cannot locate anyone discussing *Fredy Neptune* who comments on any aspect of this scene. These scenes also have in common a person acting alone who has the ability to control a crowd. In “An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow” the weeping man controls the crowd himself. He ensures, even as he walks through the crowd after he has finished weeping, that they remain at a distance from him. Whereas, in this scene, because Fredy feels “helpless”, and the woman has the embodied expertise to understand his position, and that the crowd will take advantage of it, she compels them to leave (“What do you mean you mean/ wretches a person weeping is not a spectacle stand away!”)

Her intervention saves Fredy in public, but not from his colleagues the next day. One of them begins a fight with him, and when some of the spectators notice that Fredy is not reacting to

¹⁹ Les Murray, “An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 28-30.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

being punched they call for the other man to kill him (“Sharp eyes must have caught me not grimacing enough,/ not bothering enough. Voices started yelling *Kill him!*”) Since the man now knows that Fredy is not on their nondisabled “side”, but also knows that he will not be strong enough to kill Fredy he, like the cook when Fredy rescued the boy from burning to death, alerts everyone watching that Fredy is not on their “side” (“*Ye’re no natural, yejenny-wullock!*”) And as “My Cairo mates were staring”, Fredy then knows he needs to find a way to leave the Remount Centre for his own safety (26).

Torture and Triumph

The opportunity to leave presents itself the next day, in the midst of a battle. It is unclear whether the rest of Fredy’s colleagues knew that they would be in a battle during their usual morning work. However, it is a shock to Fredy (“So this was battle. Going on, I kept turning round:/ battle was strings of riders hell-for-leather in a smoky wall of sound.”) Being directly confronted with the war pressures Fredy to decide on a philosophy towards it (“My life, keeping out of the human race to stay in it –/ I’d have to think back, to separate thoughts that were all one/ poem, like, at the brink of what was to happen.”) And though he understands that he is part of both “sides” of the war (“There were no sides for me: both were mine. I’d seen them both”), he concludes that he must continue to abstain from joining either (“Better to lie than pick one”). And having decided this he leaves (“I spurred to a bolt, gravel scattering, back north on my waler”) (27).

Then he is reminded that, regardless of his choices, others will decide which “side” he is on. When his horse is hit by a bullet, he jumps off it and runs behind a wall, where an Australian soldier is stationed (“I spilled off him, left him dying, ran/ in behind a stacked wall that was spitting and crying. A man,/ a young officer, was kneeling there. Politely he put down his telephone”). At first the soldier believes he is Australian and draws him a map of how to escape. The soldier then checks with his superiors and learns that Fredy had a gun that he abandoned, which makes him suspicious of Fredy (“*You’re not a soldier. Yet you had a rifle. And abandoned it./ Just what are you? A tourist? A spy?*”) (27) Fredy explains that he is Australian but, on the basis of Fredy’s last name, the soldier assumes he is German (“I showed him my paybook. *Boytcher? Isn’t that German?/ A nun-boytchering Hun?*”). Fredy is captured as a spy and tortured (“Foot soldiers were mobbing past. *You! Help me take this spy in*”) (28).

Torture is traditionally a reliable method for dominating a person, but it is rendered ineffective when, as with Fredy, that person does not experience sensation. First the torturers begin attacking Fredy, but he does not react (“They drew their truncheons, they started chopping a new me/ out of my trunk, not knowing it was dead timber.”) Not provoking the reaction they expected, they increase their efforts, which makes Fredy laugh at his ability to thwart authority (“They rolled me, for full coverage, cut cunningly at every limb,/ or knob bone or joint. And I laughed, without even falsity” (28).

Then, however, it occurs to him that, since the torturers cannot dominate him, they might instead keep him for entertainment (“God, though, they could stop killing me, and keep me for proof in a cell,/ and make a book with other lunatics on who could hurt the unhurt”) (28) And though this thought frightens him, knowing they cannot hurt him emboldens him to challenge them and escape:

I surged, at this thought, and bowled them aside easily, they
were so astonished. Their truncheons hung down slack
with skin and hair on them. I walked straight out of there
past a sergeant blinded by his cap-peak who screamed HEY!
I sat him flat on his bum, so fierce did I scream back!
I was the wilder ape, and tottered like one out the door
because this horse I rode inside of had started
to float, and yaw. (28)

Fredy metaphorising himself as a trojan horse is an important evolution in his understanding of himself. He became aware of not carelessly metaphorising others early in the novel when he described his and his shipmates’ experience in midsummer Messina (Italy) as “cooking alive” (13), and then witnessed the embodied horror of this phrase in Trabzon. Since then he has not used metaphors with reference to other people, but he regularly still speaks of his own body metaphorically. Until now he has referred to his numb body as a tree – something that is alive but without human agency. While he is being tortured, however, he becomes aware that his body is not a series of static and ineffective metaphors, but a dynamic, precious, and unique story (“I had shared with them what I owned most: a story”) (28). Now, as a trojan horse, he is not anymore a helpless victim of discrimination. He knows he will still be a target, but now he also knows that normal people only have normal moves, and he has a much larger range of reactions (“this horse I rode inside of had started/ to float, and yaw”) (28).

Still, his inability to experience physical damage does not prevent it from occurring. And once outside he collapses in the snow. Fortunately, a woman sees him and carries him to her house.

Neurodivergence – “Ugly”

Why come here from Chicago? I was ugly. In the West sex is the great Calvinist: it prisses, flirts, moralises a lot but predestination's the reality: you are what you've got. (29)

Fredy asks this question – “*Why come here from Chicago?*” – as he gradually becomes aware of his surroundings. The woman he asks is taking care of him. Her answer – “*I was ugly. In the West*” – refers to laws enacted and enforced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These laws targeted disabled people who were deemed ugly and not permitted to be out in public, and transgressors were fined or incarcerated. These laws existed in many American cities, the most famous of which was Chicago.²⁰ This further emphasises that prohibition of disabled people appearing in public was widespread, and those disabled people who masked their impairment had solid reasons for doing so.

It also emphasises that, again, Fredy was rescued by a disabled person, though not this time due to recognition of kin. This woman is rescuing victims of the Armenian genocide, which Fredy had witnessed the beginning of in Trabzon, and she thought “*if the soldier cops got you again, you'd be dead*” (29).

The Third Hospital

When Fredy is able to walk he travels to Palestine, but there he is captured by police. They return him to the Remount Centre, and thus to the joys of familiar people, the stress of having to mask, and the loneliness of having nobody to talk with about “the nothing” (“Some nights I tossed awake/ all night on my cot: was my null numb nothing forever?”) (32)

Towards the end of 1918 his fears for his family increase. He dreams that his father has died, and then a letter from his mother, written in October, arrives. Fredy describes it as a “heavy dead letter”, and he does not understand why she has written it in English when that is difficult for her compared to German (“But strange. Mother, writing in English.// I mean, she

²⁰ This is detailed in: Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York, New York University Press, 2009.)

barely could.”) He notices “No mention of, what? Forty letters/ that I’d sent from Rio and Rotterdam, Miami, Valletta, Bahia”, “There wasn’t a trace of Mother’s eye for a story”, and “No response, either, to my tales of Turkey or numb flesh.”) He feels unsettled by these details and he “walked out towards the moon, upside down to me still, of our ancestors.” He feels that “something wrong. Something wrong. Mama was signalling it”), and that it is related to the word “huns” (“What was loose in Australia? What did that word ‘Huns’ mean for us?”), however he cannot locate enough evidence to draw any conclusions (33).

His concern over this situation causes him to unthinkingly pick up a hot branding iron and place it against his skin, which then causes a severe burn (“Smoke, stench and a shrivelled bubbly palm”). Again his colleagues look at him (“the blokes’ eyes, out on stalks”), and he remembers to mask just in time to avert reawakening their suspicions about him (“I pretended shock, cuddling it, and Yall took me to hospital”) (33).

Unlike the doctors of the previous two hospitals, the doctor who takes charge of him (Doctor Cox) takes interest in his condition. This is not, however, a commitment to Fredy’s wellbeing, it is because Fredy is an ideal medical research subject:

*Nothing hurts you, does it? Not anywhere.
And you don’t enjoy much either, do you? It’s a marvel you’re alive:
but you dissemble it so well! You couldn’t be more of a find.
I’m going to examine your peripheral nervous system, spinal afferents –
If only you’d been shot in the head; I could look at central ganglia.
You’re rarissima avis. You couldn’t be rarer pregnant –
I bristled at that. Don’t flinch, it’d make the fortune of both of us! (34)*

Neurodivergence – “(see? read it)”

*Meantime I was tapped and prodded and written up: Profound neuropath
proprioception intact (see? read it) no gross motor deficit:
agnosia frequent in darkness: slight allaeesthesia: grossly flattened
cutaneous percept ubiquitous. (34)*

This medical language is simply a formal version of Fredy’s embodied understanding of himself from when he first became numb two years earlier: “No pain, nor pleasure. Only a ghost of that sense/ that tells where the parts of you are, and of needs from inside” (19). Yet, Fredy provides the doctor’s confirmation in full, and emphatically draws our attention to it – “(see? read it)”. This is because, at this stage in his narrative, he is desperate for us as his

audience to believe him, and he hopes that the doctor's formal translation will lend credibility to his embodied knowledge.

Healing and Escaping

The next strength resulting from "the nothing" that develops is Fredy's ability to heal his wounds without medical intervention. As Cox subjects him to endless tests, while not providing treatment for his painless but severely burnt palm, Fredy becomes increasingly frustrated. Then, his hand suddenly heals without treatment. This allows Fredy to confront Cox regarding his neglect:

*When are you going to fix my hand? I asked him.
Soon, he lied, soon. So I spread it wide open, not a mark
on it. Like that? I asked him.
He fairly hissed O very clever! There's a lot of the malingerer
In you, Herr Boettcher. He eased a tight collar. You have
not nearly enough scars for the injuries you'd have suffered
if you were fully genuine, in three years. Remember, I
can have you strait-jacketed. You're already down as a nerves case. (35)*

This is a warning to Fredy that this hospital is no different to the others in which he was previously confined. Though he currently has more freedom of movement within this hospital ("In between Cox's tests I hung around the cookhouse/ spud-barbering and yarning") (34), Cox can restrict him, indefinitely, and anytime he chooses, by invalidating Fredy's story of "the nothing" (34). And if he chooses to invalidate Fredy's story, Fredy insisting that it is true then becomes more proof that Fredy is a "nerves case".

This is in fact the second time that Cox has suggested that "the nothing" is psychological and not physical. Fredy asked if Cox could cure him and Cox responded: "*If I find physical damage to the nervous system, and I haven't, we probably can't cure you. If there's none, the alienists may.*") At that time, an alienist might have been referred to as a psychiatrist, and currently would be referred to as a psychoanalyst. They worked by talking with, but not medicating, people who have physical impairments for which doctors cannot locate a physical cause. This is predicated on the incorrect assumptions that impairments can be neatly separated into physical and psychological, and that physical impairments are genuine, while psychological impairments are not. The inaccuracy of this is evidenced by Fredy's condition, which we know has a psychological cause, and also has material effects that Fredy cannot consciously generate. Fredy's inability to consciously control "the nothing" means he is

outraged by Cox's suggestion. Simultaneously, though, he suspects there might be some truth to it ("Me, an alien! I fumed at that. And then admitted to myself/ that it was true. I had become an alien") (35).

As such, when Fredy's hand spontaneously heals, this adds weight to his suspicion, and perplexes him ("It had puzzled me too, how I healed now, when I hadn't/ back like when I caught fire. Scars from that first part stayed.") He does not have any conclusions yet, but this episode makes him wonder about aspects of himself beyond his conscious mind or, as he phrases it, "What life was living itself/ Inside my life?" (35)

In order to consider this question, Fredy does not follow Cox's order to return to the ward. Instead he has a drink of tea with Sam, whom he has befriended in hospital ("Sam Mundine the Jewish Aboriginal/ bait-layer from backblocks Queensland promised me expeditions") (34). ("Bait-layer" is Australian slang from that time for a cook, but Fredy does not indicate whether Sam is a patient who can cook, or a staff member). In the middle of their discussion, Cox carries out his threat to have Fredy strait-jacketed ("In burst two big wardsmen and pulled like a mailbag with sleeves/ down over me and buckled it. *Cap'n Cox's orders, feller*"), and Fredy consequently discovers yet another advantage to his condition:

Well that was the day I discovered I was real strong.
When effort doesn't reach pain you can take it much further.
I swelled
the straps from their stitching, got my hands in those tears and ripped
the thing into rag, with a big dry busting noise.
They just stood, Sam, the wardsmen, eyes like boys watching Les Darcy.
I gave the wreckage back. *Tell Cox his guinea pig has left!* (35)

There is a particular kind of satisfaction that Fredy experiences from this episode, that increases his gradually developing positive conception of "the nothing". Not sensing when his skin is burning, and his wounds healing themselves, are processes that he does not know how to control. Even the strength he displayed when escaping from the torturers could be minimised by the fact that it happened in a life-threatening situation. Escaping from a strait-jacket, however, is a more reliable and controllable skill in which he can take pride.

Changing Classes

Fredy leaves the hospital intending to return to the Remount Centre. However Sam, already demonstrating how thoroughly he understands Fredy, guesses his plans, knows those plans will endanger him, and organises alternative arrangements for him. He has a friend locate Fredy (“*Sam Mundine say tell you/ not go Banjo. Bad trouble. Bad German trouble you there*”) and, because Fredy also understands Sam, he believes Sam’s friend (“*German trouble. That took my mind off being/ amazed at my marvellous strong self*”), and the man leads him to accommodation that Sam has organised for him (“*Sam say you go his friends.// I take*”). Sam’s friend, Mr Hanafy, not only provides Fredy with a room, but teaches him to pass as someone of a higher class:

he, Mr Hanafy,
taught me what I’d been too Australian and damn-all-swells to think of:
invisibility. Through clothes. It’s harder now. Those days you just shifted
two classes up or down. (36)

Fredy is nervous to attempt passing as upper class in public, and asks Sam and then Mr Hanafy to accompany him, but they are both aware that the local people will be prejudiced against their races (“*Will you come to Shephard’s for support, when I try the water? –/ No. I’m a coon. You’re a rare bird and hardly notice. But they do. –/ Mr Hanafy? – Alas, I am a Native. Of much too low a grade.*”) Yet, going to a bar alone, Fredy is surprised to find he can perform this type of passing (“*but it went as if on rails. I was soon that Australian who’s in oil./ They confused me with someone, Rothschild’s priest. I just smiled*”) (36).

As Fredy becomes known in the local bars, he and Sam also continue to meet alone (“*Have you ever seen the Nile?* he asked then, and we walked/ to the Gezira bridge, through quivers of open pleading carriages.”) And they begin a conversation on “sides”: “*How do you know so much, Sam? – We are studious people. –/ We Jews, or we blackfellows? – Both. – First you’re one, then the other. –/ And I always will be. Surely you would know about division?*” Yet, even though Fredy instinctively understands “sides” he continues to claim, as he did in the conversation with his colleagues at the Remount Centre, that it is possible for him to not choose a “side” (“*No. The world’s divided. Not me. I won’t shoot my left hand, nor my right.*”) Sam points out that Fredy’s position is only possible because he is also white: “*True: both are white. Is a Jew white? Tell me, Fred.*”) Fredy does not say anything in response, and dismisses Sam’s point while relating it to us (“*He’d get bitter like that, then brighten, like*

Hobart weather”), and Sam then feels compelled to agree with him (“*You’re right to stand aside, Fred. The British stole Australia;/ now their grandsons are paying for it. Not paying the owners though./ We’d have charged far less.*”) Fredy then changes the topic to why Sam enlisted. He answers: “*To get out of Queensland. To die./ You have to, sometimes. Did I tell you I’m staying on, after?/ I’m marrying here. Then off to France to learn real cooking*” (37).

This time of what Fredy calls “no story” continues until “the nothing” is revealed due to a car accident (38). Fredy is invited on a picnic (“*Beecher, come for a spin! Two young officers in a Bentley/ and a couple of French Greek girls*”), which occurs without incident, but as they are returning the car crashes (“*But as it was, they drove too quick/ on loose corners. The car yawed, climbed a brick-stack/ and turned turtle*”) (39). Fredy is thrown free of the car but, when he notices that the others are trapped under it, he does not hesitate to use his strength to move the car (“*I staggered up. I reefed, I/ wrenched the car, up, off them. Held it up,/ walked it to the side*”). And, similar to when Fredy rescued the boy from the fire, even though Fredy’s assistance enabled three of the four others to survive, this event only results in threats against Fredy, with the additional complication that Dr Cox might try to capture him and return him to the hospital (“*The word about me got around,/ curse it! I was terrified. Cox was bound to hear./ Fellows and girls gave me looks. Challenges were brewing*”) (39).

Safe at Mr Hanafy’s house, but surrounded by threats, Fredy eventually decides his only option is to risk everything (“*A big bet – it would come as a bet –/ might save me, if I won it. Might be a passage home,// or a ticket to the gallows, if Cox came to see any circus*”) (39). He guesses that most people will assume that he was only able to move the car because it was an emergency, and that if a number of local people bet that he cannot do it again then he will win enough money to buy a ticket home. At the event Fredy is surprised by the weight they give him to lift (“*Very nearly a Bentley’s worth, Beecher. Think you can shift it?/ I grinned to myself. I’d been expecting worse*”) (40). Motivated by seeing Dr Cox in the crowd (“*Then I saw Doctor Cox. He was smiling a little bad smile./ I knew which way he’d bet. And how much I could lose*”), he lifts the weight easily (“*just like in the car party’s, but with better holds, I joined it/ to my chest. Stood, tinkling. And jacked it overhead, fully up*”) (40). And, since the crowd are present with the expectation that he will entertain them, the same skill that they previously threatened him about, they now admire (“*And they were all talking and feeling at my muscles. Olympic/ no man has lifted. A marvel Beecher. Damn me. I never credited –/ Three or four women were shining, so near, yet on the moon*”). Even as it occurs,

however, Fredy is aware it will not last because the crowd are currently only engaging with one aspect of him as a person (“I’d have to run. In hiding, and I’d exposed way too much,/ though it was the half of my truth that humans could just stand”) (40). In short, in the language of “Second Essay”, Fredy has become “interesting”.

A Few Proposals

Nevertheless, Fredy now has the money for a ticket to Australia (“next morning I was out after tickets like a guilty thing”). He arrives back at the Hanafy’s house with the trip booked (“I went back to Hanafy’s on a cloud. Home! On the seventeenth”), but when he arrives he is asked to leave immediately (“And that had to be the day the Hanafys gently-urgently/ moved me out, to a decent small hotel a cousin owned”) (41). He does not know the reason until Mr Hanafy’s son tells Fredy that his sister wants to marry him:

*my sister Shahira she has seen you and wishes you.
My father refuses. You are Christian, she is Muslimah
but she is stubborn like Mother. You are of a book, same one God.
She has looked at you from her window when you don’t see. (41)*

Fredy and Shahira’s brother agree that Fredy will consider this for a day (“I need to think. Don’t rush. It’s not real yet. Think./ We agreed I would think. Till the day after next”) (42).

Two days later Shahira and her brother meet with Fredy together (“The oldest Hanafy boy didn’t come alone,/ the next day. The girl was with him. All modest, but her veil was mist,/ breathed to one side. And Lord, so beautiful”) (42). Fredy is still unsure of whether they should marry, but he feels certain that he must tell her about “the nothing” (“I thought:/ If I told her how I was, fully, the moment I told her, I’d be healed”) (43). However, because Fredy does not have the words to describe “the nothing”, he begins with basic facts on himself and then, without having thought about the consequences, gives her his ticket:

*I’m a sailor, I haven’t been
home for seven years, I must see my parents, things aren’t
right with them. I have a steamer ticket – first time I ever
paid to sail! but I’d be caught if I went near the ship.
The ticket’s worth money, pity to waste it, here, it’s yours! –
How will you go to your country then? she asked.
God knows. – They bobbed their heads. If you will have me,
she said, I will sail to your country with this. I nodded. (43)*

They both have different interpretations of Fredy's nod. Shahira believes Fredy has agreed to marry her, and she is delighted ("it was sunrise, from her face out. It lit up the whole room!") Though in fact Fredy nodded while he was deciding what to say next ("I went to speak again. That nod of mine had just meant 'I see'"). Nevertheless, he is also delighted at the prospect of marrying her and decides to proceed ("but then I left it nodded. And stood, as if on air/ with wonder at what I'd agreed to, had been led into, gained.") And, after considering it further once Shahira and her brother leave, he decides his decision was correct: "God knows I'm no thinker, but I/ stared, for an hour or more, at this best most frightening thing/ I had come in for. I seemed to have blundered right/ this time" (43).

Fredy is then even more delighted by being able to engage in his developing intense interest in planes. He had organised this a few days earlier when, because of his clothes, an Australian pilot mistook him for a journalist ("*I heard you were with Banjo, but you've come up in the world/ by that tog!*") (42) As they take off, Fredy is fascinated by the plane's construction ("*What's it built of? I screamed. Doped canvas on a timber frame!*") (43) And as they travel through the air Fredy can hardly believe that both of these joys have occurred on one day: "I was flying, and engaged, and twenty-three years old!" (44)

The pilot is a member of the "first Australian squadron", and, as a journalist, Fredy is granted permission to stay with them (42). With the practice Fredy has had masking his impairments and his class, pretending to be a journalist poses no difficulties for him:

My trick was always: learn by shutting your mouth;
people will tell you what you're at, and then all about it.
The air officers knew newspaper talk: coverage, deadlines, scoops –
so, in one day, I did too. Only a journalist would have picked me. (44)

However, witnessing the war reminds him of the mass murder, and he finds it difficult to report to us ("God, I'm putting off remembering/ or telling this part. Farah Gorge. The Nine Miles of Dead") (46). Soon being in a plane, watching the bombing and shooting as it occurs, is too intense for him, and he decides to hijack a plane and escape ("I went once, and came back to a sick shamed squadron mess./ I didn't eat. I packed a bag. I'd made up my mind/ my next pilot would be flying a passenger north, not butchering") (46). Consequently, when Fredy is next in a plane, he threatens to blow it up with a bomb, and forces the pilot to land at Janin (the captured German airfield) (47).

Beyond that, however, Fredy's only plan is to steal a car and drive north. The pilot accompanies him for as short a time as possible, but Fredy continues driving until he is stopped by German soldiers. When they question him, he pretends to also be a German soldier and orders them to join him ("*Oberspionagerat Böttcher*, I snapped. *And I order you, dismount this position!*") (48)

Neurodivergence – “Every fact was a rule”

long Heimann took no notice. All he cared about
was not to be bewildered. To know the Rules got you that.
Every fact was a rule, or felt like one to him. When he was
happy they poured out of him: Sir Ernest Jones discovered
the Aryan languages helped by Rask and Bopp and Grimm. (49)

Heimann was a man that the German soldiers had kept as a prisoner, thus Fredy inadvertently rescues him. In the context of the verse novel he functions as an indication to readers that Fredy will continue to meet people with autistic characteristics. As such Heimann possesses some autistic characteristics that Murray has frequently identified as his own. First, Fredy introduces Heimann discussing the meaning of words ("*The word kang has two meanings, this said to me, cold sober: / a board fixed around a prisoner's neck in China, // and a Chinese sleeping-stove*") (48). And also a word on which Fredy will reflect in Book III: "*Dietrich, the tall man said, is a wire hook for picking locks. A skeleton key*" (48). In this quotation Heimann is identified as a lover of facts and rules. And then, as they continue to drive north, collecting more passengers, Heimann's fascination with facts is noted for a third time, along with its effect of keeping the peace:

Heimann kept them amazed
and maybe us alive reciting his encyclopedias. We'd come
in sight of some place, and he'd reel off facts about it:
Tarsus, birthplace of Saint Paul; here Antony first met Cleopatra,
and all the dates and figures. The German-speaking Turk would translate
some'd groan, some cry Allah! (50)

Returning Home

In Turkey Fredy obtains work on a ship travelling to Australia. Once aboard he begins to think that agreeing to marry Shahira was an incorrect decision after all. As they pass Egypt he considers sending a message to her, and then hesitates for too long. He then convinces himself that disclosing “the nothing” will negatively affect Shahira (“She'd just been

mistaken. What use was it? Worse than useless./ If I told her how I was, I'd be cured – and she would be cursed”), and concludes that he should not marry anyone (“this awful blank secret me, no good to Shahira, to anyone”) (55).

Yet the sea calms him, and Australia becomes full of possibility (“I was going home./ Everything might change there. Past Aden, and I was going home!”) (55) And there is nothing to suggest that he is incorrect about this. Since World War I has recently ended, the difficulties that his parents were experiencing might have ended also; after not seeing him for seven years, they will be pleased he is home. And perhaps being at home will reduce the negative effects of “the nothing”, which became part of his embodiment five years earlier.

Book II – Barking at the Thunder

The entirety of Book II takes place in Australia between 1919 and 1929. Whereas Book I focused on Fredy’s adjustment to “the nothing”, Book II focuses on his autistic characteristics, particularly the differences in communication between autistic and nonautistic people.

Fredy’s relief at returning to Australia is soon eclipsed by the prejudice against Germans that is now active everywhere he goes. He discovers this when he travels to his home, where he is confronted by the absence of his family, and a man who threatens him because he is German. He then learns that, as a result of World War I, this prejudice is now common, even in his hometown of Dungog.

Fredy’s shock at the prejudice against Germans compounds the continual prejudice he was already experiencing as a disabled person. These entanglements become increasingly complicated as he tries to locate his parents, to work, and to develop a romantic relationship. And though he encounters situations that inspire him to consciously develop pride in “the nothing”, with few disabled companions he cannot maintain it. Nevertheless, perhaps as a result of beginning to understand “the nothing” as a strength, Fredy begins to implicitly develop a nuanced understanding of his autistic characteristics. With his intense interests in words and the sea curtailed, Fredy becomes increasingly anxious and stims in public. He has increased fears related to having sex, having children, and disclosure of “the nothing”. Yet,

without minimising the many difficult effects of these experiences, as a narrator he begins to experiment with autistic characteristics as story-telling techniques.

Losing home

In January 1919, after seven years at sea, Fredy returns to Australia, landing at Newcastle. World War I has recently concluded, and the Influenza pandemic has just begun. Anticipating a joyous reunion with his parents, Fredy travels by train from Newcastle to Dungog, then walks to his family's farm out of town, only to discover that the farm does not belong to his family anymore. Moreover, the man who now owns the farm is hostile to Fredy because of Fredy's German heritage, and will not answer Fredy's questions about the whereabouts of his parents ("*I live here. Or my family do. Where are they?/ Gone, he spits out. Where all you Hun bastards belong*") (59). Fredy describes his experience of this moment as being "King-hit from inside" and, in shock, he is unable to respond ("I stood with my mouth open there") (60).

Fredy's shock results from not only the man's aggressively hateful response, but the cascade of confronting possibilities that it prompts. Since early 1918, when Fredy was in Cairo and received a confusing letter from his mother he had wondered, "What was loose in Australia? What did that word 'Huns' mean for us?" (33) Now he realises that the word "huns" is indicative of a widespread Australian prejudice against Germans. This raises the possibility that the place that he had thought of for the last seven years as his family's home was, at some point during that time, acquired by a man who hates them for being German. This leads to the thought that this man might be just one of many people in Dungog who have begun to hate German people, and that Fredy's parents might have been trying to negotiate this prejudice for a significant period of time. Fredy then realises that his parents might not have received his telegram or earlier letters, and that it might be difficult for him to locate them now. In fact his parents might not even know that he is alive, and indeed, he cannot assume that they are alive either. Then Fredy's pain from so many devastating realisations in quick succession turns to shame at having not realised them earlier. Suddenly pieces of information from when he first arrived in Australia, that he had previously interpreted as neutral to this situation, are full of significance.

Decades later, when Fredy relates this story to us, he is no longer ashamed. However, knowing that many of his audience will still believe that impairment renders a person

incompetent, he tries to protect his younger self from the possibility of their ridicule, while simultaneously displaying some of the crip pride that he gains later in the verse novel. To mitigate negative reactions, then, Fredy structures this story to engender our empathy and, in case he is unsuccessful at that, also forecloses the possibility of our criticism.

Therefore, he recounts this story such that each piece of information is as ambiguous as it was when he encountered it. Thus he reports arriving at Newcastle as “walk[ing] into a masquerade.” Then he describes everybody at Newcastle, and on the train from Newcastle to Dungog, wearing masks due to the pandemic (“All the people in Newcastle, all on the train wore these face-masks/ of white cotton gauze, some dirtied with tobacco and words”) (59), and continues to discuss mask-wearing as they arrive in Dungog:

all white-whiskered women, muzzled kids
and handkerchief desperadoes. Scared the Black Flu might strike them,
some confused even their families: people singing out Mum?
Here I um – (59)

Following these signals one might assume that Fredy has used “masquerade” humourously to indicate that this is a story about public mask-wearing. When one ultimately understands that this is a story of Fredy’s pain and loss, and that the indications of this were present, but not obvious, in the story – they might then feel empathy for Fredy’s misinterpretations.

The pieces of information that Fredy misinterpreted appear regularly throughout this scene. The first is his parents’ absence at Dungog Train Station, which he attributes to his telegram having not arrived rather than them not being there to receive it:

But my family, they aren’t there. I’d have known them masked head to foot.
But, maybe it was nothing. The muscular cleared hills looked right.
Smaller, but still home. I’d just hoof it out to the farm
and arrive before my telegram. (59)

His second misinterpretation is when he meets his friend Arthur at Dungog Train Station (“*You back? How are you?* I shook hands. It made him nervous./ He kept his voice down like that and I didn’t know why.”) Fredy notices Arthur speaking quietly, but he does not understand the cause. Similarly, when Arthur warns him: “*Watch out. The Pages, they lost two boys in the war.*” Fredy understands that Arthur has told him to expect that the Pages will be angry at him, but he does not understand why (“The Pages from Main Creek. They never

said a cross word to me/ in all the years. But I realise, now, that I've been braced for one") (59).

Then, to guard himself against the ridicule that Fredy expects from some of his audience if he is unable to evoke our empathy, he pre-emptively ridicules himself before his misinterpretation of the details of this scene is obvious. He describes his excitement at the reunion he is certain will soon occur ("Going home! I'd/ be there for dinner. Dad would grin his *Na ja./* Mama might wipe a tear with her apron. Handshakes, hugs, kisses, that"), and then he becomes directly self-critical through us ("You see what a flat I was") (59). By attributing his self-criticism to us, he hopes to minimise anything critical we might be thinking of him, especially since, like his younger self, we may not have yet realised what will occur at the farm.

Nevertheless, the crip pride that Fredy has developed by the end of the novel is exhibited in the climax of this story, since it depends as much on his trees-first processing as it does on the farm owner's hatred of Fredy. When Fredy arrives at the farm he misinterprets yet another piece of information – "there were kids there. Oh well, visitors, I thought.") However, when he greets the children and they run and hide he cannot find a plausible explanation for this. Then he notices that the farm is not in the condition in which he knows his parents would maintain it if they were living there – "I started seeing changes around, and untidiness.") The expectation is building that, if one more piece of information were to emerge, or if Fredy has time during which he does not need to respond to another human, allowing him to consider and consolidate these pieces of information, then he will deduce that his parents no longer own this farm. Instead, Fredy's processing is interrupted by the man who now owns the farm. By increasing the tension in his retelling of this story through his trees-first processing, Fredy has reminded us that, if we are critical of his trees-first processing in this situation, then we also have to credit his trees-first processing for providing intrigue in the narrative (59).

Ultimately, Fredy comprehends the situation, but the facts of it are delivered with such force that he begins to dissociate. The man who owns the property answers Fredy's question about where his family are with "*Gone*, he spits out. *Where all you Hun bastards belong*" (59). In shock Fredy cannot determine how to react, until he is forced to respond to the man threatening him – "*You got it through your head?* he snapped. *You're out./ Get off the place before I sool the dogs on you*" (60). As the man chases Fredy off the property and Fredy

dissociates, he represents these events by recording them in the same fragmented manner as he did the mass murder at Trabzon in Book I: “The pole barn, the pepper tree,/ the trenched tracks down to the cattle crossing. His belt” (60). This represents a sequence, presumably in chronological order where, in contrast to the rest of this story, significant details are absent. And, unusually for this verse novel, Fredy does not tell us whether those details are absent because he is unable to remember them, or is unwilling to disclose them.

Mental Distress

Since, like Book I, Book II begins with Fredy experiencing a traumatic event, the consequences of which propel Fredy through the rest of the book, a contrast is created between the two. When Fredy witnessed the mass murder at Trabzon, he was a nineteen-year-old autistic man, whose only knowledge of the world came from seventeen years on a Dungog farm and two years at sea. Then, on unfamiliar land, he was traumatised by witnessing the mass murder of unfamiliar people. Five years later, having travelled most of the world, and survived World War I, he returns to the place where he lived for most of his life, and is then traumatised by his family’s dislocation from that place by the community’s prejudice against German people.

The point of this comparison is not to determine which trauma is worse than the other, especially since Fredy is experiencing the second on top of the first. The point is simply that both sets of circumstances are traumatic and, for a number of reasons, each affect Fredy differently. The first trauma, though Fredy is not yet consciously aware of the connection, has caused “the nothing”. The second trauma causes extreme mental distress, of which he is very much aware. Mental distress is one of the terms favoured by the “Mad Pride” movement over terms such as mental disorder. While mental distress encompasses trauma, anxiety, and depression, it is also used to denote significantly difficult mental states, regardless of whether they have been defined or diagnosed by psychiatrists.

Fredy’s mental distress begins when the man threatens him and continues after he is chased from the farm. He says that “I must have wandered round for hours. I can’t remember./ I was soaking wet. I woke. The stars were out” (60). His trauma further increases the next day, when he returns to Dungog and learns that his father is dead, and he is unable to locate his mother. And it continues to increase in response to frequent encounters with those who know him and refuse to speak to him, or who blame him for Australians killed or injured in the war.

Neurodivergence – “Half a Man”

This woman was pushing half a man in a wheelchair
and he smelt noxious. *You haven't pooped yourself again?*
Dear Mother of Jesus!, and he had this awful apology look
on his face forever, as she wheeled him, in his uniform. (60)

Fredy witnesses this scene as he is walking around Dungog. His phrase “half a man” draws attention to the cascade of negative assumptions that society utilises to smother disabled people generally, and men injured by war in particular. In part he intends it literally to indicate that this man does not have legs, and is therefore physically half of a man. However, since Fredy is also a physically impaired man with a growing awareness of the dangers of carelessly metaphorised embodied experience, he also uses this phrase because of its connotation of a man who is permanently and irreparably inferior to other men.

Fredy implicitly asks us to consider our reaction to this scene, and the conscious and unconscious framing which leads to that reaction. Medical model framing, which asserts the superiority of a nondisabled body, construes the association of “half a man” with a man in a wheelchair as acceptable, or even natural. It raises no questions about this scene; it only invites us to pity the man for being impaired. Social model framing, which understands the profound influence of social conditions on all bodies, considers what has contributed to this scene: Since this man is “in his uniform” it is likely that the war is the cause of his physical impairment. This raises the question, is it ethical for a country to send its citizens to war knowing that they might be permanently injured or killed? The presence of the woman with a prosthetic arm earlier in this novel suggests the question: why hasn't this man been provided with prosthetic legs? Since the woman pushing the man's wheelchair publicly chastises him due to his faecal incontinence, which is also likely to be a result of the war (“*You haven't pooped yourself again?/ Dear Mother of Jesus!*”), another question arises: what permits and sustains her selfishness and entitlement? Finally, and most importantly, what cultural forces insist that even though a person is sent to war, permanently impaired by it, and chastised in public due to those impairments, he should have “this awful apology look/ on his face forever”?

Trees-first Processing in Dungog

After the prominence of Fredy's trees-first processing in the introductory scene to Book II, it continues to dominate his retelling of his time in Dungog. He explains to us that, while at the post office searching for his mother's address, he does not understand for a while afterwards why a woman needs post office staff to read her telegram for her ("A woman, I knew her, got/ a telegram while I was there. And wouldn't open it./ Had to have it opened. I only understood a while after" (60). Then he describes how, despite knowing that Australians are now prejudiced against Germans, he speaks in German, in public, to another German he meets ("*Wie geht's denn, Theo?* I asked/ and he went green. *Not much of that Deutsch left in me, // Fred*, he muttered. *You got sense, you'll drop it too*") (60-1). He then reveals that it was not until another incident in the town where someone assumed he'd fought for Germany in the war ("*Yeah, but which merchant's navy?* asked somebody out loud, and laughed") that he consolidates the facts of his experiences since arriving in Australia and concludes that it was other people's prejudice that killed his father ("Slow as I am, I was sure now what had killed Dad") (61).

Each of these moments conveys experiences that result from trees-first processing which are common for autistic people. The first and the third demonstrate the time it can take for an autistic person to consolidate the elements of a scene. Fredy describes the time between when the first scene in the post office occurred and when he understood why the woman needed someone else to open her telegram for her as "a while" (60), and the third scene where Fredy understands what killed his father is at least a couple of days after a friend told him that his father had died. This longer than typical processing time can result in what occurs in the second scene where, though Fredy has the knowledge that Australians are prejudiced against Germans, he has not yet processed how this knowledge might influence how he behaves in public. Therefore, when he sees a German friend, he greets him in German as he always has. His friend, having known him for many years, is worried that they might have been overheard, but is not surprised by Fredy's behaviour, and considerate enough to tell Fredy the safest way to behave – "*Not much of that Deutsch left in me, // Fred*, he muttered. *You got sense, you'll drop it too*" (60-1).

Meeting Laura

In order to reduce his distress levels, Fredy leaves Dungog: ("Slow as I am, I was sure now what had killed Dad. / So goodbye Coorei Bridge, and poor Mrs Khan's waterhole. / I didn't

go back or look back for twenty years.” Then, to further reduce his distress levels, he initially plans to return to sea. However, he then recalls that he needs to locate his mother (“I was mad to get to sea/ but then the thought slowed me: I had a mother to find.”) Since engaging in intense interests has a calming effect on Fredy, not being able to engage in this one further increases his anxiety, and this, combined with the trauma he experienced at the beginning of the book, magnifies future problems (61).

After staying with cousins, Fredy decides to try living in Newcastle. There, at a war memorial, he meets a woman called Laura. Naturally, he notices her because of the words she uses (“I heard a woman next to me swear/ half to herself, half to me”). He then elaborates for our benefit, “few womenfolk swore much back then”, before quoting her: “*My poor bugger went because his mates called him a slacker.*”) His aside to us regarding swearing primes us to be alert for the swear word “bugger” because, when he narrates this story, “bugger” was no longer a common swear word in Australia (64).

As they begin to talk, Fredy does not disclose “the nothing” to Laura, but he does disclose an autistic characteristic to her (“I told her about facing clerks/ in insurance offices, how often I did it all wrong”). Laura accepts this disclosure, and offers to assist him (“*Oh I can handle them, says Laura,/ I know the tune. She volunteered to enquire for me*”), and this provides them with a reason to continue meeting regularly (“Laura's enquiries got nowhere; week after week// we'd meet and she'd tell me. I'd wear the suit and yarn/ with her in parks, or we'd take scones and tea”) (65).

Neurodivergence – “Klinge”

I hadn't flashed the *Klinge*, the blade: I like our word *Klinge*
for how something really razor-sharp clings as it cuts. (66)

This scene is the beginning of a fight on a tram between another man and Fredy, which is quickly resolved when Fredy recognises the other man as a previous shipmate. However, these lines are significant because they register that Fredy's intense interest in words is currently German-focused.

This is also exhibited two stanzas earlier when Laura asks Fredy about the death of his brother Frank. He first outlines how Frank's meningitis developed – “*He got a cold. Then he*

started crying with a headache: Mama my head's noisy! He started screaming, and strained/ tighter and tighter.../ He was rigid like steel, the baby. Only loosened when he died.") Then when Laura asks, "*What did your mother do*", Fredy responds "*She was cried – I mean; she cried.*" In summary, though, while Fredy is speaking in English, it is a translation of how he is currently thinking, which is in German (66).

These examples, and Fredy sharing them with us, are in part a result of his intense interest in words. However, they also demonstrate that the absence of his family, and his friend's suggestion that he not speak German in public, currently occupy his mind. Also, they illustrate that different languages are composed of different knowledge. In this case German conveys in one word, "Klinge", knowledge that is not immediately available in English ("how something really razor-sharp clings as it cuts").

Fredy soon uses this difference between German and English to indicate to us that a woman he sees will turn out to be his mother. This occurs when Fredy and Laura go to the movies together for the first time in late 1919, to see the silent movie *The Sentimental Bloke*. As much as Fredy enjoys Laura enjoying the movie ("She laughed, she glowed") (67), his attention is also captured by the movie's piano accompaniment:

What struck me was the music playing all through.
A woman in pink at one of those big flat pianos
with a rudder propped up on it played right to God Save The King.
I watched her as much as the story. (67)

He did not recognise the playing as his mother's, yet he did recognise the songs she played as German ("she put in lines of songs, gone before you could place them", especially "One I kept humming after, in between talk,/ something about the moon. German. Going 'from western cradle/ to eastern grave'. Which is wrong, our side the Equator" (67).

The Patterns of Prejudice

Meanwhile, the prejudice that Fredy encountered at work abroad also occurs in Australia. One can speculate that, before Fredy left Australia, his usual encounters with prejudice were in response to his autistic characteristics rather than his Germanness. However, that is no longer the case. At his first job at the markets where he is now living in Newcastle, his Germanness quickly becomes an issue and he resigns ("I lumped beef carcasses/ at the markets till the foreman called me a black squarehead bastard") (62).

Similar problems soon begin at his second job at the BHP Steelworks. He avoids working near the smelters because “If I burned, it mightn’t hurt – but I mightn’t grow back either” (64). And this need to be cautious with regard to work tasks might be what triggers his boss’s impression of him as strange because, as Fredy says: “suddenly he got dubious about me” (67). The boss, Conk, soon makes his prejudices known to Fredy, though not to himself, through a number of accusing questions: “*Why did you tell me you was from Dungog, you squarehead fucker?*” And “*What did you do at fucking sea? You aren’t just a sailor*”, which both relate to Fredy being German. And then also “*Why do you leave your tog at work? Don’t you live somewhere?*” (67) This is another way of saying “there is something weird about you, but I have not figured out what it is yet”.

Fredy is aware that Conk’s questioning will soon escalate. He predicts that “There was a bust-up coming. I knew the signs./ ...On land it’s a fight sometimes. And always the sack, when he’s boss”, and decides that, “It would come suddenly. So. I’d worry only when it did” (67). Yet it does not. Fredy continues working, while the boss continues to randomly and passive-aggressively question him:

Conk had a down on me, it was bursting to come out.
We were packing coal in the ovens. *Can’t you shovel?*
he snarled at me. I looked at him.
He’d been shifting less than I had. (68)

However, on this occasion, Conk persists for longer than usual (“*You bastard you wouldn’t know/ if your arse was on fire!*”) Consequently, Fredy understands that Conk’s bullying reflects a prejudice against him that Conk will not admit (“No, I thought. I of all men wouldn’t,/ and you’ve noticed something that has scared you”) (68). Fredy now also understands that Conk will not act on this prejudice either. Instead he will continue to bully Fredy until he responds in a way that will give Conk an excuse to sack him. Thus, Fredy decides there is no point in delaying their inevitable confrontation:

Conk, I said
sometimes you’re a dog – What? he raved –
without a leg to piss on. – He snatched his false teeth out
Geth your thime! he frothed. *Go andh hollect your wageth!* (68-9)

Their exchange also highlights a socially constructed line between what impairment is and is not. Fredy has to mask “the nothing” in order to avoid being a victim of peoples’ prejudices. However, Conk can reveal that he has no teeth without fear of prejudice, because that is a bodily difference that society has constructed as typical.

Sensational Sex

For Fredy, his burgeoning relationship with Laura is simultaneously a source of delight (“I didn’t dare say what pleasure I got just seeing/ Laura walk quick with her arms folded, woman-fashion”), and reluctance (“I knew I should stop. This would crash hard when it crashed”) (65). For example, in a conversation that he only partly shares with us, after an evening out with Laura, he declines to meet her mother (“*It’s late, but if you’re game/ I’ll take you inside. To meet Mar./ I hesitated.../ I won’t tell you all we said*” (67-8). However, when Laura is pleased at his excitement in leaving BHP, this encourages him to no longer hesitate to have sex with her (“What tipped me over into daring with Laura, at the last,/ was how she was glad that I was happy to be/ shot of my stuck job, aground there in the steelworks”) (69).

Fredy had been hesitant to have sex with Laura for two reasons. One reason is that he has not told her that he has nowhere to live, and sleeps in the bush. Laura has already asked where he lives (“When we parted she asked me *Where do you flutter, you queer bird?/ Do you live anywhere?*”). And his answer was both truthful and confusing – “*My landlady’s not respectable. She approves of lady visitors*” (68). The other reason Fredy is hesitant to have sex with Laura is that it will reveal “the nothing” to her. The first time Fredy had sex after acquiring “the nothing”, which is also the first time he had sex, he did not experience any sensation and, afterwards, did not recall the sex with pleasure, only embarrassment (“This part is awful to admit./ She had to tell me everything”) (20). Since Fredy did not experience any sex-related sensations then, he knows that he will not be able to conceal “the nothing” from Laura during sex now and, since he has not yet disclosed “the nothing” to her, he is concerned at how she will react.

Nevertheless, when they have sex, neither of these potential problems occur. Laura has no objection to where he lives, or having sex there (“But finally/ we went to my landlady with the useless roof”) (69). And, as far as Fredy is aware, Laura does not notice “the nothing”. Since the first woman Fredy had sex with had to “tell me everything”, including “*Stop*” (20),

Fredy lies on the ground when he and Laura have sex (“and the little twigs under you”), so that Laura can choose when they stop. And, probably because orgasm has such a strong mental component, the sex is pleasurable for both of them, though again Fredy does not share the details with us. (“And there were laughing and tears/ and things felt, and sensations had and given –/ and things not told, too. It’s not just the privacy of one”) (69).

Having Children?

Fredy soon begins another job as a drogher hand, transporting timber between local towns. Due to his relationship with Laura, and his search for his mother, he wants to stay close to Newcastle, and this work allows him to do so, while also going to sea (“I soon/ fell in love with that tea-coloured two-way river/ that flowed to the sea and from it twice each day”) (71). This work fulfils Fredy’s intense interest to such an extent that he becomes more relaxed than he has been in this verse novel thus far (“it seemed to be the mixture I needed, not to be cured,/ but to be real, enough of a living person” (71-2).

The only current annoyance in Fredy’s life is his living arrangements. Matt, his boss, permits him to sleep on the ship when they stay in other towns, but insists that he stay at the boarding house when they are in Newcastle. Fredy dislikes this because: “I had to mix, and use rooms./ *You coming to the dance, Fred? You want a game of tennis, Fred?*” Motivated by this he asks Laura to live with him (“*Laura Love,/ chuck your job at Winns, and kowtowing at home. Live at Hawks Nest –/ Roost on a branch with you?*”) She reminds him that “*There’s another proposal comes just before that one, usually*”, and thus he replies “*Eh? Oh. Er. I’m sorry. Will you marry me?*” (72)

For Laura, Fredy’s proposal raises the question of whether they will have children. She is concerned that he does not want to be a father (“*I can’t place why I’m mad on you./ But – I don’t think you’re the father sort. You don’t see children*” (72), and she has noticed that Fredy is frightened (“*It’s not love, she said, is it, that you feel for me? Not love:/ terror. Of me, but not just me. You’re buying me off,// paying and paying. You don’t know when to stop*”) (73). For these reasons she worries that if she does become pregnant Fredy will leave her (“*You’re not a family man, sailor. You may never be*”) (72).

For Fredy, who did not associate his proposal with the possibility of having children, this is a conversation for which he is completely unprepared. Laura’s pronouncement that he is “*not a*

family man” gives him the impression that she does not want to have children with him because he is impaired (“I wasn’t ready for kids – but wasn’t I fit to breed from?”) Then he wonders whether that is in fact her concern, or a concern of his that he is projecting on to her (“Was she saying that? Or did I suspect it of myself?”) Fredy’s concern here is not his autistic characteristics, it is “the nothing”, which he knows is not genetic. Yet, because there is a societal prejudice against any disabled person passing on their genes by having children, he nevertheless carries that fear (73).

Since he was already acutely anxious regarding “the nothing”, and its potential effects, this conversation is overwhelming. He concludes that Laura is aware of “the nothing” (“what she was saying was excuses,/ because she had guessed”) (73), and he feels that, by not disclosing “the nothing” he has deceived her:

I had been a fool
to hope that because I smelt and weighed and looked like flesh,
...I could kid a woman, bamboozle her with flesh-tricks
that I judged by guess and yarns. I had never felt experience. (73)

These thoughts are so anxiety-inducing and painful for Fredy that when he sees a tram arrive he runs to it and leaves Laura (“When a tram came, I ran to it. *Love!* Laura sang out behind me./ I waved, I ducked, like a fighter, and rode it the whole way”) (73).

Publicly Stimming and Prejudice

The next day Fredy overtly stims in front of another person for the first time in this verse novel. As a reminder from Chapter One, *stimming* (self-stimulatory behaviour) is a repeated physical action, such as pen clicking or hand flapping. These actions might appear to have no purpose, but can also help to focus attention or manage emotion. All people stim, but it is only pathologised when autistic people do it, because, compared to nonautistic people, they tend to have a wider range of stims, and a need to stim more frequently.

Fredy begins to stim when he is at work on the drogher. Since it is before sunrise, and he’s at the wheel of the boat, it’s likely he believes everyone’s attention is elsewhere, or he forgets he’s not alone. Either way he is “quietly bumping my forehead against the wheel/ just to hear the echoey bone” (75).

The person whom Fredy stims in front of is his boss Matt, and Matt's reaction damages their relationship. Matt is not at all concerned that Fredy might be distressed or injuring himself; his only concern is that he is in the presence of someone who might have an intellectual impairment: "Matt snapped/ *What are you at? Stop banging your forehead like an idiot!*") Fredy immediately senses the anger and threat of violence in Matt's voice – "and there was soft fire all round his edges, in the dark./ I'd only ever seen that twice before, far at sea" (75).

Disclosing Impairment, and the Double Empathy Problem

Further deepening Fredy's anxiety is his discovery throughout Book II that prejudice against "the nothing" is not confined to medical professionals and work colleagues. The first person he explicitly talks with about "the nothing" is his mother when, after eight years, they are reunited. He is in Newcastle, mourning the end of his relationship with Laura, when he sees his mother exit the movie theatre ("I drifted, and drank, and kicked myself about with misery/ and then in Hunter Street I saw a woman, my mother!/ come out of a picture-house, cross half the street – it was my mother!") (78) She boards a tram, and he runs after it but cannot catch up, so returns to the movie theatre and obtains her address.

Their reunion is simultaneously sad and joyful ("We met and hugged and cried,/ and laughed, and I got scolded, and then we cried for Dad.") She tells him of hers and Fredy's father's experience of increasing prejudice in Australia ("*No one would deal with us. We couldn't buy seed, or wire/ or even groceries*"), and of the guilt that she feels because his father spoke German ("*He hardly spoke German/ when we first met. It came back to him as I talked to him./ I made him German, for me. And they killed him for it.*") He asks when it began, she explains that there was an abrupt midwar change ("*After the heavy battles, in nineteen sixteen, it got bad suddenly./ Perhaps I forgot and spoke German in public, in the town*"), and he unsuccessfully tries to convince her that it was not her fault ("*You can't blame yourself, Mama. – Doch. I brought it on us./ Reinhardt couldn't bear that his home-place had turned on him./ He grieved himself to death*") (79).

The progression of their conversation then demonstrates a common communication misunderstanding between autistic and nonautistic people, and the difficulties that ensue. Fredy begins guiding the conversation towards "the nothing" by trying to establish whether his mother had received his letter detailing its onset ("After we sat for a while, I asked when my letters stopped coming.") His mother, who has correctly guessed that he is about to ask if

she received his letter about “the nothing”, hopes to obstruct him by evasively responding: “*They stopped bringing our post.*” Fredy, not suspecting that she is trying to obstruct him, asks her what she knows he will ask – “*Did you get the one where I told you about my disease,/ this having no touch?*” Since her obstruction was unsuccessful, she now responds in a way that she believes will indicate her unwillingness to discuss “the nothing” (“Her head nodded. It was only eight in the evening/ but she was suddenly going to sleep. *Don’t talk of that.*”) Fredy, whose attention is captured by her body language, believes that his mother’s head nodding means she is falling asleep. Therefore, he tries to regain her attention by continuing with his question (“*I wrote you how it started. The Armenian women/ being burnt. And we couldn’t stop it. And my leprosy*”). Fredy’s mother, believing that he is ignoring her, intensifies her response (“My mother looked away, anywhere but at me, and drowsed./ *These are evil things*, she said. *Do not tell this story*”) (79). In doing so, she believes she has moved from an indication that she does not want to continue with this topic to a direct display of unwillingness. However, Fredy believes he has not yet regained her attention, and thus increases his efforts:

I felt desperate. I drank tea. From her cup, by mistake.
She was fast asleep. I paced around the room
in her little flat there. The turned-wood stands from home,
the screens, fretwork photo-frames, the padded sewing baskets,

I bumped into half them. But she would not notice.
Never before had I bumped into things in the house
and my mother not chipped me, even from rooms away: Fredy! (79)

The situation concludes in mutual misunderstanding, though neither of them are currently aware of it. Much to Fredy’s relief, because he believes it means he has regained her attention, his mother changes the topic (“Then she woke up and smiled, and asked me about my life now.”) And, much to Fredy’s mother’s relief, because she believes she has now communicated her desire to not discuss “the nothing”, he answers her question (“I told her. When I came to Laura, her lips tightened”) (79).

This scene is an example of what medical professionals would describe as an autistic person’s lack of theory of mind, and what autistic people call the double empathy problem (as discussed in Chapter One). Medical professionals would say that Fredy’s mother continually communicates that she does not want to talk about “the nothing”. After all, she says three times to not talk about it, and acts sleepy, and looks away from him. However, they would

say, due to Fredy's lack of theory of mind, these messages do not register with him. They would say he is only interested in discussing "the nothing", and so he belligerently continues with this topic, demonstrating his complete lack of interest in what his mother feels or wants. They would say the topic change only occurs because she has somehow managed to distract him, and he only agrees to the topic change because it is still about him. They would say Fredy needs to learn to interpret social cues, and to care about other humans.

Autistic people would say that yes, Fredy has not understood how his mother communicates and what she wants, but nor has she understood how Fredy communicates and what he wants. Of course he wants to talk about "the nothing", because he has not been able to discuss it with anyone, other than a couple of medical professionals, for five years. Yet, what he wants more than anything is to continue communicating with his mother for as long as possible, because they lost touch for so long. His understanding of the situation is that, even though they are talking, his mother cannot help falling asleep at 8:00 in the evening. Far from not caring about her, he is alarmed by her apparent inability to stay awake, and he continues to worry about her after she has woken up, and their conversation has continued and finished ("What I couldn't understand, she'd dozed off like an old woman/ but she wasn't yet fifty") (79). In other words, the only reason he has thought of for why she fell asleep is that she is unwell. Due to Fredy's trees-first processing, his mother apparently falling asleep and staying asleep has his attention completely. This means that he either has not processed her words yet, or has processed them as the words of someone who is falling asleep, and therefore not to be taken seriously. He would have understood her if she had just said "don't talk of that", and had not gone to sleep at all, thereby providing one message for Fredy to decode, rather than several. When she begins talking to him again he is simply glad they are communicating. And thus he welcomes the topic change, not because it is related to himself, but because they are communicating.

Furthermore, Fredy's mother, as a nonautistic person, is assumed to be empathetic while Fredy, as an autistic person, is assumed to lack empathy. However, Fredy has listened to his mother talk all evening, has asked questions about her ("*But when, how did it start?*"), and has empathised with her ("*You can't blame yourself, Mama.*") Yet when he moves the conversation from her to himself for the first time that evening, and talks about something which is deeply concerning to him, she refuses to listen or care. Nevertheless, despite her refusal to discuss "the nothing", he is heartened by contact with her and, despite his

continuing despair over Laura, he begins to relax again (“I leaped up, healthy again, and gravity hung my boots downwards”) (80).

Significant Stories

Fredy continues to relax when he spends an evening with the Mitchells, who are suppliers for his boss Matt’s business. In the conversation after dinner Fredy feels that he must listen but not contribute to the conversation because: “I felt lamed for stories/ that night, being barred from my best ones by the Secret” (80). In other words, “the nothing” results in his best stories but, since he has just learned that even his mother will not accept it, this has reinforced the idea that he should not risk sharing it with anyone.

Instead Doris Mitchell shares a story that Fredy finds instructive. Her boss’s wife’s younger brother, a white man, was responsible for Sally, a young Aboriginal woman, becoming pregnant (“*Her young brother that lived with them was after all he could get,/ rubbing up against you, showing you his bulge in the rooms,/ foggy hands all over you. He liked the young black girls*”) (80). Since Sally was “*being/ sent home up the coast, to have his baby*”, she asked Doris to “*don't let any of them but Buggerlugs take me to the wharf*” (81). On that Journey Sally refused to be intimidated or ashamed: “*Sally never said a word. Let him curse at her and talk./ When he strained away the hardest, she smoozed up to him/ right down Scott Street, past the Customs House. Everybody saw it*”. Doris’s story ends there but Fredy, who likes “the story that comes after the story”, finds out that:

*The flash white girls sent him burnt corks. And the boss hunted him.
I hear in the end he got a job. And Sally lived with a rabbitier,*

*later on, that shot her in the hand when he was drunk.
The quacks set her hand-bones best they could, like a kind of hook. (81)*

The whole evening, and Sally’s story in particular, motivate Fredy to feel pride in his own story, even when he feels unable to share it. Later that evening, when he is alone, he concludes that, regardless of how much of his story he discloses, he will not allow others’ prejudice to prevent him from participating in public life (“if magic had turned me to mettwurst, damn me if I’d run/ away from the slicer. If I couldn’t drown it, I’d not hide with it”) (82). “The slicer” is an apt metaphor for peoples’ prejudice when you consider that it has so far led to Fredy being abandoned ashore twice, physically threatened a number of times, and ignored by his mother, who is the only family he has.

Alternatives to Being Sacked

Fredy returns to work the next day determined to no longer conceal “the nothing”. However, he is then confronted with a pattern of prejudice that he has not experienced before. It begins as usual when his colleagues witness “the nothing” because he prevents a telegraph pole, slick from wet weather, from seriously injuring another work colleague. Fredy tells us that “After, all the hands were staring at me like Mitchell’s girls” (83). This refers to a story that Reg Mitchell had told Fredy and his daughters that morning. The story is that their friend Cos advertised for a housekeeper and received a reply from a woman who “*had fur on her head. Not human hair; real tough fur/ like a Kelpie dog. Her eyes were glassy, a dog’s eyes, // with slits for pupils. And the fur came right down her forehead*” (82). Fredy says of Mitchell’s daughters’ reactions to this story that “The girls were pop-eyed. This was better than school. This was their school” (82). The implication, then, of Fredy’s work colleagues staring at Fredy in the same way, is that they are also witnessing a type of impairment that, measured against their previous experience, seems both impossible and not human.

Again, even though “the nothing” has saved a work colleague from injury, his colleagues’ prejudice against impaired people changes their relationship with Fredy. As Fredy says: “I knew I’d put my pot on. Nothing was going to be the same.” Matt’s reaction to him, “Matt was stepping round me: *You dumb Fritzie bastard!*”, includes references to the intellectual impairment he believes Fredy has from seeing him stim (“dumb”), and Fredy’s Germanness (“*Fritzie*”) (83).

Yet, contrary to Fredy’s expectations (“I felt the sack coming”), Matt does not sack him. Instead, his colleagues ostracize him:

Sailing back through the bush, I had only the wheel
and the usual sea-eagles that worked the river to talk to.
Matt tinkered with the engine, which didn’t need it, the boy
forgot to make tea. (83)

Under this significant and continuous pressure, Fredy’s aspiration to be proudly disabled in public begins to crumble. Having no local disabled friends means that he has no support or example for how to convert the motivation he experienced from Sally’s story into a frame of mind that can sustain him in the world.

Fredy continues expecting to be sacked but is not. That day, “The hours went by. It would come when we got in/ but it didn’t”, and then that week, and month, “Days passed. We went on more trips” (83). Eventually Matt implicitly broaches the topic with Fredy by asking about his knowledge of the local area (“Matt, not looking at me, asked: *You know the Double Island shallows?// Yes, I said. – And the bad bit near Dee’s Mill, don’t you? –/ Like I know my waistcoat pocket?*”) and, by degrees, Fredy infers that Matt would like to sack him but cannot manage without him (“*Hm. It gradually/ made sense. He was telling me I was too valuable to sack/ but his manner had already told me he was frightened of me?*”) (83-4).

A New Tribe

Then, distracting Fredy from his difficulties with Laura, his mother, and work, he is given a letter from his friend Sam. Fredy regards the letter as a “miracle”, and is thrilled to read that Sam is now “happily married”, and “*apprenti saucier/ in the grandest place in Vichy that would take a Jew*” (84). However, Sam then asks Fredy why he deserted Shahira, the woman that he agreed to marry when he was in Cairo:

I wouldn’t have thought you

*afraid of colour. You know she tried to sail out and find you
but the captain refused her, because Australia would refuse her
entry? Even though she’s quite wheatish, as the Hindus say.
She was heartbroken. She went into a decline, but is married now
under family orders. (84)*

This, in addition to the other difficulties in Fredy’s life, devastates him, and he regresses to blaming himself. His first thought is “no more women friends”, because he believes there is no way he can avoid hurting them: “my running away to spare them/ hurt them undeserving. But knowing me would kill them.” (84) It is important to note that Fredy is thinking literally rather than metaphorically here. His mind has returned to Laura, and transferred his fears regarding any children he has inheriting “the nothing” to women (“I wasn’t ready for kids — but wasn’t I fit to breed from?”) (73) He reveals this fear when he begins to cry: “It, my body, walked me/ to the engine room, to sit and bawl for myself/ and Shahira, and Laura, and Dad, and God knows who all” (84).

As he cries, it reminds him that crying is something he does physically experience – “Crying still had a taste, and jerked the breath, and flooded seeing” – whereas he does not experience most physical activity:

Nothing I'd done for the first time since Trabzon
felt like anything. No feel or quality to it.
Things I'd learned before could work by memory:
Being tired, that slows and gets heavy. Being on fire though
only smells, and frightens onlookers, if you're in my tribe,
and what you call love, that comes to a laundry-smelling salt point –
with kindness before and also after, if it's real love.” (84)

At this point he becomes aware of his unconscious fears regarding transmitting “the nothing” to others. Yet, this time he approaches this fear with curiosity rather than inevitability: “With babies after, too, love or not. Would they be numb like me?” And his inquiry broadens his mind first to human heredity in general (“Was I the start of a new race, without its own females yet?”), then to the origin of humans (“Like the first human, having only apes to sleep with,/ if religion was wrong”), to the progress implied in evolution (“That one must have felt queer, all warm and muzzy with its relatives/ but upright in secret, not satisfied with gibber, and too bare.”) (85) Soon this idea that, even if his child was born with “the nothing”, it could be a different or improved human rather than a lesser human, prompts him to re-establish a relationship with Laura.

Another Disclosure

Fredy decides that he must disclose “the nothing” to Laura in order to honestly explain why he ran from her. He visits her at work and, after making him wait for some time, she suggests they have lunch. When she asks him why he left her (“She brusqued in, sat down, ordered. *All right bugger you,/ tell me why you ran off on me that night*”), he describes “the nothing”, and how it began after he witnessed the mass murder in Trabzon (“So I told her. The lot. Second person I ever told.”) He has by this time realised that his mother appearing to fall asleep was in response to this topic, and thus notes of Laura that “She didn't go to sleep”, The experience with his mother has prepared him for the possibility of another uncaring reaction but, not sensing one (“She looked fascinated”), he relaxes into Laura’s questions (“*You feel nothing? —/ Only where things are.*”) This leaves him vulnerable to her reaction, which is harsher than his mother’s: “She stood up and said *No use/ slapping you. Eh? It's the best get-out I ever heard./...And she was gone. I would have chewed off my hand/ to show it didn't hurt, but she was gone*” (86).

After Laura rejects Fredy, for the first time since he was in Jerusalem, sensation returns to his skin. However, though he wanted this, or thought he did, most of his immediate experience is negative: “No more loveless, freak, nor strong/ no more numb, or light, or never tired, or safe./ I tell you, gravity was driving my legs into my trunk” (86). He partly enjoys the opportunity to masturbate (“welcome back, welcome back to a sixteen-year-old’s bad habit,/ and the sad fun it would be, like the razor-scraped boys/ who made bedspring music and fo’c’stle smells late at night/ in the boarding house”) (87). However, he then becomes anxious. His first concern is not knowing when his experience of sensation will change again (“But who knew how long I was back for? It was back for?”) (87) His other concern is whether his actions cause the changes in sensation (“I didn’t get punished. I was still there next morning”) (87), which creates further anxiety about the possible consequences of every subsequent action he takes.

Changing Sensations

Assuming that Laura has gone forever, Fredy decides to develop a relationship with someone else (“It was no use looking back”). His trees-first processing means he does not often immediately grasp the unspoken subtext of nonautistic conversation. However, this time when he is eating prawns with friends and one of them, Jess Palmer, asks him “*You going to the dance up Bungwahl?*”, he observes to us “for once I caught on”, and responds to her “*I am if you’ll teach me fancy steps*”. And he is pleased to discover that he guessed correctly though, as demonstrated by the fragmented text, he is also unconsciously stressed: “She grinned. I was right. So simple, when you learn./ And a perfectly nice girl. Rough-talking, straight, no fool” (87).

Fredy is nervous about experiencing the dance, and its associated fighting, with sensation rather than without it (“I slapped mosquitoes and wondered how I’d go now/ that fighting would hurt.”) It begins well (“and the accordion was like weatherboards loosened, singing and dancing/ and the fiddle sketched its beautiful creak”) (88), then Fredy stops a group of the dancers from attacking a policeman. The policeman presumably arrives to arrest everyone because dancing is illegal at that time due to another outbreak of the Spanish influenza. However, since the policeman is alone, he is quickly overpowered by the group:

You officious bastard!

Let's ride the canary cunt! and we dancers stayed shrunk back
out of it as they threw the man heavily, and hauled him
to his hands and knees, and I saw the one who straddled him,
mounting on his back had his spurs on *Gee up Copper!* (88)

Fredy, already concerned by a group attacking one person, feels compelled to intervene when he witnesses the cruelty of the man straddling the policeman. Despite knowing fighting will be painful, Fredy “found myself breaking in on it,/ tossing the rider by one leg, stouthing his brother/ out through the side door with the strength I used to have.” And he then carries the policemen outside while the group criticise him (“I went the dead-man's carry, the police trooper over my shoulder,/ under yells of *Kiss his ring!* and *The Prussians love a policeman.*”) He returns to the dance, and finds that Jess is comfortable with his actions, but some of the other dancers continue to question him (“but the man-ride was still there. It was a story. It would never go./ *Why did yer spoil the fun?* a boy yelled at me”). Fredy is able to ignore the comments until someone says, “*Well it was fuckin funny,/ him on the floor with his arse up like a hen*”, and Fredy responds: “*Nothing a mob does to one person's funny*, I told him,/ *Nothing a mob does*” (88).

While the repetition of “*Nothing a mob does*” is Fredy’s usual indicator of significance, this incident provokes enough emotion to overwhelm him. For a few seconds he has fuzzy awareness of the dance (“all seemed as it does now, tiny, very long ago/ with a queer dead line around it all”), and he is gripped by what he calls “sad distance” (89). He does not reveal to us the memories that occupy him. However, they are likely to be associated with his experiences of a mob. The only one he has shared with us previously is when he was crying in public in Jerusalem: “tears swamping my sight, tasting salty,/ and a crowd collecting round, at a trot. The last, the very/ last thing you allow ever: to be caught out both different and helpless” (25). Together these again suggest that Fredy was the victim of similar situations that occurred before he was nineteen.

At the dance he stops moving, and Jess is concerned (“I stood, was bumped/ and got Jess Palmer bumped. *What's wrong, Fred?* she asked kindly.”) And he then recovers (“Then colours were back, all too stamping and musical and real/ for any more sad distance. And Jess had warm freckles on her bosom.”) Jess asks: “*Were you off sailing again?/ I do wish you'd take me: I'd love to see them other countries*”. And Fredy, drawing on Shakespeare’s much debated “country matters” sexual pun in *Hamlet*, thinks: “I had some such in mind for when

we were sailing home/ down the lakes later”.²¹ Unfortunately his boss Matt’s boat, on which they were all returning home, ran aground, and it took until the next morning to free it (“We arsed about and swore and rove wire rope/ to join with chain, and warped her free just on sunup”), which thwarts their plans (“Too late for romance. *Ar well you're a working man,* says Jess/ and kissed my cheek, going ashore”) (89).

Fredy then notices that Matt’s son is still bruised from being beaten by Matt. Fredy challenges Matt about this (“I called Matt up from the engine room and other, choice things/ like a scab-arsed dingo who didn't deserve kids) (89), which provides Matt with the excuse he has been waiting for to sack Fredy:

He charged me
with a stilson wrench and froth blaring from his mouth. I sidestepped
and he flew overboard *Whae!* just off Cherry Tree
and dragged himself sopping out onto the green native-violet

floor of the palm scrub there. He still had the stilson, and shied it
at me, screaming *Sack!* So ended me on the drogher *Mafeking*. (89-90)

In reaction to his confrontation with Matt, the numbness returns to the lower half of Fredy’s legs (“And that afternoon, I was rubber again to the knees”). Even as he believes he has caused it, and, consequently, that he must no longer have relationships with women (“Now, to keep the dumb zone from rising any higher, I chucked/ all thoughts of Jess Palmer. Of women altogether, in fact./ I was cursed for women”), he simultaneously finds enjoyment in it (“At times I also felt like the kid who’s got away with something/ truly bad, and loves the frightening aloneness it brings him”) (90).

Finding having some sensation more difficult than having no sensation at all, Fredy lives isolated in the bush for a couple of years, until he visits Newcastle again and sees Laura, walking with a young boy (“and I see Laura, coming with a kiddie beside her,/ a toddler in his overcoat, with combed hair and my Dad’s face.”) Realising that the boy is his son, Fredy asks to talk with Laura, and then her parents, but she refuses (“*Are you sure you could be the father?!* she says bitterly. *Like with your affliction and all?*”), which causes both father and son to cry (“The little boy starts to cry, and-my face is running like his”) (93).

²¹ Neil Taylor and Ann Thompson, "Obscenity in *Hamlet* III.Ii: "Country Matters", " *Textus* 9, (1996): 485-500.

Neurodivergence – “the bastard”

I got just inside the front gate of Laura’s people
and the door bursts wide: *Are you the bastard?* screams her father.

Er no, I’m the father, I answered him. He stamped the porch *Christ Jesus!* (93)

Fredy visits Laura’s parents to request to marry her, but his trees-first processing, combined with his anxiety, results in him unintentionally angering Laura’s father. Laura’s father screams “*Are you the bastard?*”, meaning “are you the man who is responsible for my daughter becoming pregnant”. However, Fredy interprets the word bastard literally as meaning the child of unmarried parents. He is genuinely confused about why Laura’s father has asked if he is the child of unmarried parents, which is why he responds, “*Er no, I’m the father*”.

This is another example of Fredy utilising his trees-first processing to enhance his narrative. In fact it invites comparison with a previous example, which occurred at the beginning of this book, when Fredy returned to the place he had thought of as his family’s to discover that it was now owned by a family who are prejudiced against Germans. Both examples feature Fredy approaching a house and being confronted by an angry man who calls him a bastard (“*Well I live here. Or my family do. Where are they?/ Gone, he spits out. Where all you Hun bastards belong*”) (59). We know from Fredy being called a bastard then, as well as the half a dozen times he has been called a bastard since, that he is aware this word has multiple meanings. It is the combination of this situation actually involving a child of unmarried parents, his trees-first processing, and his anxiety, that focuses his understanding on the literal meaning of bastard. As he recounts this to us, however, he is well aware of the humour in it. Thus, in this situation, as in the previous one, if we are tempted to disparage Fredy for his understanding of the world, then we also have to credit his understanding of the world for enhancing the narrative.

Fredy similarly utilises this technique when narrating his first meeting with Laura’s mother. Accusingly commenting on his Germanness Laura’s mother says to him: “*I’ve no patience with these Rosenberg-Finkelstein names,/ not when they killed her husband, and two of my nephews,/ and neighbours of ours’ husbands, and boys galore*” (94). When he responds “*I was born at Dungog, I said. I only ever killed a bear,/ apart from pests round the farm. I’m a virgin in that way*, she objects to his use of the word virgin (“*No need to be vulgar!* she

snapped” (95). However, Fredy genuinely assumes that she has objected to him discussing killing, rather than to the sexual connotation of virgin, and he therefore continues his story to prove to her that the bear’s death was accidental (“*I fell on him, I said. It’s true*”) (95).

Masking at Home

Laura ultimately agrees to marry Fredy. Sadly though, she still does not accept “the nothing”. In fact she reveals, to Fredy’s shock, that she thinks his disclosure was a lie. When she asks, “*What made you tell me such a horrible lie?*”, and adds, “*Surely you knew it was an insult?*”, since Fredy values truth-telling, he initially does not know how to respond. While he learned soon after he acquired the numbness that he needed to mask it from others for his own safety, it had not occurred to him to deliberately lie to Laura about it. Now, however, he guesses that, unless he admits to lying, Laura will prevent him from having any more contact with her and their son. Thus he decides he has no choice but to lie to her (“So I lied. *Queer, what shock can make a man believe*”). And having lied, he then cannot explain to her that he was truly unaware that she would construe his truth as an insult (94).

Having to conceal his impairment from his wife proves to be even more difficult than concealing it from his work colleagues. Currently he is numb from his knees down as he has been since he was sacked by Matt a few years earlier, and he remains terrified that something he does will trigger it to increase (“The numb nothing didn’t get me and didn’t get me,/ night after night. I walked insulated from the ground/ each day, but it came no higher”) (95). And that anxiety is magnified by the additional terror of concealing it from everyone, and knowing he will lose everything if they do happen to discover it (“It was like living with a tigersnake no one can see/ attached to you. They’ll call you mad if you mention it/ but you know it can bite. And you’ll die, and be in Hell”) (96).

Despite Fredy’s constant effort, his son Joe is wary of him. And Fredy feels that Joe’s uneasiness with him is a catalyst for the numbness to return:

I reached down and lifted him up in something he always
squirmed out of, from me, a cuddle. I spose I took advantage
of his tiredness. Well he flew up, light in my arms
and let a scream like a whistle splitting the pea.
He hadn’t seen me. He had been looking down,
but something in me turned over, and I knew it was considering me. (100)

Then “the nothing” does return completely in two stages, both related to prejudice that people have against an Aboriginal woman and her son who are temporarily staying with Fredy and Laura. The first is Fredy’s mother’s new partner Sietz (“I was cheering up, I was thinking it had stopped considering me/ when I had this big bad sudden row with Sietz/ over the savages he said we were harbouring, their threat to Joe”) (102). The next morning, in addition to the lower half of his legs, his arms also become numb (“No hands, nothing, to the shoulders”), which he knows he must conceal from everyone (“I felt this in the dark. I crept out of bed. You tell no one:/ I’d proved that”) (102). And while “the nothing” returning upsets him (“I cried, I shook. I swayed side to side”), it also now feels like “home” to him:

I was coming home, to where I hated, to the book I hated
but which educated me. Coming home where was no ‘us’,
no ‘we’, no sharing. Or none that wasn’t careful where to stop
and so was all stops. I was coming home to my suspicion
that the null had more strength in it, greatly more than I’d get
just by not hurting. That it was the disguise of huge strength. (102)

Somewhere, undocumented in the verse novel, the top half of his legs seems to have also become numb recently. Therefore: “I touched the world for now with just my head and middle limb, // and that was a frenzy, before it would be gone./ Laura was dazed, dazzled: *Who am I to argue? Holy sailor!*) (102)

The second stage of the increase in Fredy’s numbness is caused by an argument with his neighbour, also related to their houseguests (“But the woman in the flat under ours came out on their landing/ to meet me this day: *Listen we don’t want a blacks’ camp/ in the house you keep your nigger slut in the bush!*”) (102) Afterwards, Fredy becomes completely numb (“and that night I woke and wasn’t there. Touch blind,/ head and trunk and all, again. I crept up and cried/ in the galley kitchen again. Then I shut my mouth”) (103).

Disabled Colleagues

Fredy’s next job, obtained through his friend Norm, is his first job working with a disabled colleague. The job is moving furniture, where the work is performed in pairs, and Fredy’s partner is Ronnie Robilliard the Contortionist (“He’d reach in his pocket with one hand and bring out two,/ scratch his ear with his shoe.”) Being a disabled person, and therefore alert to impairment in other people through embodied expertise, Ron does not require a rescue, or other such dramatic situation, to notice Fredy’s impairment. After a fortnight of everyday

interactions with Fredy as a colleague, Ron feels sure enough that Fredy is impaired to casually mention it (“*Norm has a friend who can't feel. This after just two weeks*”) (103).

Ron is keen for a connection with Fredy where their impairments are something to be open about, proud of, and compare notes on (“he'd look rightways up between his knees, he'd lie flat in the air/ stemming up on just one hand. *You could do that one, Fred*”). However Fredy, while he respects Ron's impairment, and enjoys their kinship, currently feels particularly uncomfortable with “the nothing” (“I could hardly bear myself, or stand to be strong”), and refuses to answer Ron's questions on that topic (“Ron asked me one day, *How long have you been like it?* but I snarled him quiet) (104).

In response, Ron decides to force Fredy into a public disclosure of “the nothing”. Therefore, when they are at a crowded pub for the 1926 Melbourne Cup, Ron pulls a chair out from behind Fredy just as Fredy sits down. All of the patrons witness this and begin talking to each other about it (“*He's squatting He's leaning back though You try it You'd swear he was sitting./ they all talked at once*”), and even when they ask Fredy about what he is doing he does not understand that he is the focus of their attention (“*hey mate how do you keep doing that? I didn't drop down that they were talking to me.*”) One of them finally phrases their question explicitly (“*What are you sitting on?* snapped this authority-voiced fellow”), and even when he answers (“*My arse, I snapped back, and touched it in my irritation*”), he is still unaware of what has happened (“and even then for seconds I didn't wake up that/ there was no chair under me. I wasn't squatting, but sitting/ perfectly easy on the lock of my hips, knees and ankles”). Fredy, angry and embarrassed, leaves the pub, and determines to not speak with Ron again (“I punched the swing doors open, out, spoke to the horses// and never looked back. I was clear of there, and him, for good!”) (105). However, Ron runs after him and tries to convince him to work in the circus with him:

*Get away from me, I said. But Fred, I knew you'd do it.
I'd seen you do nearly as much, sit not on the chair
that was there, but the one you believed was.
You don't belong in donkey-work. Show business is your place
with the rest of us freaks and misfits. – Get away from me! –
I know your secret, Fred. I know what can be made of it. (105)*

As a result of this Fredy demands, and is permitted, to work with another partner. However he soon has to leave furniture moving, and his current life altogether, when he defends a woman

from a policeman by punching him in the face so hard that the policeman is knocked unconscious. As Fredy is leaving town he meets Ron who says Fredy has no choice now but to join the circus (“*There’s no more Freddy Bo’sher! Freddy Bo’sher’s for the clink now!*”), and Fredy reluctantly agrees (“*I’ll take you to old Lule Golightly. – Tonight?* I asked. – *No, now*”) (107). Fredy is given a job with the Golightly Family Circus, which will be leaving for Queensland in a month. And in the meantime, Laura and Joe move to Mayfield to avoid any police who might be searching for Fredy’s family.

Neurodivergence – “Fredy Neptune”

As the time came closer for off, she made me learn to drive
and gave me a working name: How about *Freddy Neptune?*
You work below the line. (110)

Here Fredy outlines an interaction with Lula Golightly, who owns and manages the circus where Fredy now works. Neptune refers to King Neptune, the Roman God of the Sea who is known as both difficult and talented. “*You work below the line*”, refers to Fredy’s talent having such a strong unconscious component to it, which Lula finds unusual. When Ron brought Fredy to meet her she asked him about his desire to join the circus, expecting that he craved performing – “*You want to be an artiste, eh?*” When he responded “*I’m prepared to try it*”, she was surprised – “*You haven’t dreamt of it day and night, though? Burned for it?*” Yet, as she watched him perform she saw that he had talent but, unlike the performers she had previously employed, he had no idea how to utilise it: “*This firm?* I asked, and drew myself up one-handed./ Hung. She watched. *Slow, for an act*, she said. *Do something!* I lifted myself, chin to fist. *More. Think now. They’ve stopped gasping*” (108).

The Circus

The circus is a controversial topic among disabled people and within disability studies due to the complex relationship between the circus and disabled people. In the early twentieth century, circuses were more likely than most companies to employ disabled people, and they were often the highest paying job available to a disabled person. For example, as a socialist, Helen Keller refused many offers of money from the American government for much of her life. And she was only able to afford to do so by performing at Vaudeville. At the same time, circuses often exploited disabled people – some disabled people were not paid at all, or kept captive, or abused, and there is no doubt that circuses contributed to a culture of objectifying

disabled people. Thus, for a verse novel that is in part a history of where Western disabled people were to be found throughout the twentieth century, the circus is significant.

While working in the circus, however, Fredy is bullied by another disabled person. It might seem logical that the kinship that exists between two disabled people in public (such as Fredy and the woman with a prosthetic arm from Book I), or two disabled people alone together (such as Fredy and Ron moving furniture) would extend to the workplace, but sometimes it does not. This is because the majority of the staff are nondisabled, and each disabled person is trying to protect themselves from the kind of threats and violence to which Fredy has been subjected at previous workplaces. Consequently, Mandore the magician, whose impairment is never clearly defined (“*He got this loathsome disease, she told me,/ and it drove him out of Europe. Maybe. It looked like bottle poisoning/ to this sailor*”) (111), notices that Fredy has an impairment of some kind, but cannot establish what it is (“Mandore, I had him frightened for some reason. He sniffed/ something rum about me, but couldn’t get it right.”) (112). Mandor’s bullying begins verbally (“*Men who leave their wives can’t satisfy them generally, he said*”) (110), and soon increases to physical harm (“One day, rehearsing, I was braced upside down and Mandore, passing,/ reached in and did something, and I crashed to the ground”) (112).

Neurodivergence – “Gympie”

Cos sent me on a letter from Sam. They had three daughters now
*and I’m finally a qualified chef de cuisine, which is
the platinum grade of slushy. I cook at the Pyramide in Paris.
Loads of bigwigs stay here.* He named a few, and one of them
was my father’s cousin Hjalmar Schacht, who Mama
used to skite about. *Come and let me feed you.* And then:
*I do get homesick, and wish I had the right face
to show in Gympie.* He told me what that name meant, gympie. (111)

Fredy receives this letter from Sam while he is travelling with the circus, demonstrating the strength of their relationship. This is evident not only in Sam’s invitation to Fredy, “*Come and let me feed you*”, but in the fact that Fredy’s friend Cos knew that Sam’s letter was important enough to send on to Fredy while he was travelling.

Also, by repeating the word “gympie” Fredy alerts us that this word will soon become relevant to his story. He specifically directs us to its meaning – a stinging tree.

The Toowoomba Bank

As soon as Fredy has enough money saved he takes leave from the circus to convince Laura to join him on the road. He is surprised to find that, as well as being willing to join him, she now believes him about “the nothing” (“*And, well, I’ve got over that other./ You poor man. I don’t at all mind*”) (112). He explains to her that: “*It’s thirteen years, I said, with three off for no behaviour./ That leaves ten years I’ve been in this celluloid dummy./ How I earned him, God knows. It’s like as if I dream him, and dream him*” (113). Laura does not respond. However, since Book II has few time markers, Fredy stating that he has now had “the nothing” for thirteen years locates the narrative in 1928 for us.

Unfortunately, since Laura does not understand that Fredy is negatively self-conscious of his trees-first processing, and because Fredy does not yet trust her, Fredy is tricked into causing two deaths. While the circus is in Toowoomba, some men who saw how much he could lift ask him to jack up a car for them (“*Would you be a sport, Fred?/ Lift the rear end of his car up? Ease that block in under the diff?/ We were gonna jack her. But you’re a jack in a million, Fred!*”). Afterwards Laura attacks Fredy for not immediately understanding the danger in this situation: “*You aren’t usually a complete fool:/ they buttered you up and rushed you. You only had to cry halt*”. Fredy tries to explain it to her (“*I tried; they talked all over me*”), but she refuses to listen (“*You were mesmerised by their flap*”) (113). In response, he then also refuses to listen to her: “*She begged me to go back and pull the block from under that car, // but I was ashamed, and stubborn because of it*”) (113-4). Consequently two people are killed:

We didn’t hear till later what happened. How the holdup men
ran out of the bank to drive off, couldn’t, and the manager
ran out with his rusty Colt: *Hoy! Stop!* and they shot him
BOOM! with the engine howling, and the charge nearly chopped him in two,
across the belly, the police yelling *Stand away!* fired running,
hit the one robber, a horse, the bank door, the other squealing *Not me!* (114)

Laura and Fredy are surprised that the police do not search for Fredy. Still, this incident changes Fredy’s conception of “the nothing”: “*but I’d caused two deaths.// That was new. I wasn’t any more who I’d been,/ no more harmless Fred who didn’t deserve his punishment*”) (115).

Stinging

Fredy is then sacked from the circus when he takes revenge on Mandore for bullying him. Fredy is stung by a swarm of bees and nearly dies (“the stings didn’t hurt, but I blew up like the Michelin man./ My heart lurched; I breathed hard, and damn nearly drowned”), and Mandore finds this amusing (“and afterwards, when everyone was joking and sorry, he,/ my friend the magician, only sniggered about my Achilles/ heel or tendon or something like, and his laugh wasn’t friendly”) (115).

Sparked by Sam’s letter, Fredy decides to take revenge on Mandore when he sees a stinging tree: “All right, squire, I thought. You’ll bloody keep, my long cocky./ And when we were playing Beerburrum, in the Glasshouse Mountains,/ I saw a stinging tree. And picked a leaf. They’re fire”). Since Fredy will not feel the sting, he pretends to play tunes on the leaf, tricking Mandore into claiming he can do better (“and Mandore bit. Mentioned how skill was more reliable,/ civilized and even human than simply being a freak.”) When Mandore puts the leaf to his lips he is painfully burned, and Fredy is sacked: “Everyone, Ron too, rounded on me for a cruel unnatural/ Hun bastard, except Doddum left ‘Hun’ out. And ‘unnatural’, when I think on it./ I was for the sack. Lule just paid me and said *Out!*” (115)

America

Fredy, Laura, and Joe leave Toowoomba and drive south, but the police soon find them and force them to travel to Brisbane. There Fredy is introduced to “Queensland’s head sniper, //...Sir Peter”. When Fredy cannot describe the men who tricked him into jacking the car he is threatened with jail time (“*I didn’t really study them. – That’s a pity. You’ll have the opportunity/ when you’re tried with them. Accessory before the fact of murder*” (118). However, Sir Peter is also interested in Fredy’s strength: “*They say you’re very strong, Fred. He opened the French windows/ and showed me out onto a porch. Can you bend this crowbar?*” (119) When Fredy succeeds at that (“It was good steel, but I felt showing off might help me./ I had to wrestle, and use my foot, but I tied it/ in a knot. A loose open bowline, but it stumped them”) (119), Sir Peter explains his interest in him:

I’ve got this associate

*living in America. He’s mad on freaks and strongmen.
I want him to come home, but he won’t, and he owes me money.
Will you fetch him for me? (119)*

And Fredy realises that he has no choice (“Dear God, I’d been right to hide my cursed gift. I should never// have rescued anyone, or let anyone bet on me. I should/ never have survived my first bashing, by the provosts”) (120).

Chapter Five – Fredy Neptune Books III and IV

Book III – Prop Sabres

Book III takes place between 1928 and 1932, in America, where eugenics is gaining popularity, the depression begins, and the movie industry transitions from silent to sound movies. Various combinations of these factors mean that, in contrast to this verse novel so far, where Fredy was usually the outsider, in Book III he is usually an insider, most often as a disabled person. From this position, his connections and conversations with other disabled people throughout Book III facilitate the beginning of his transformation from dependence on approval from nondisabled people, to being a proud disabled person, regardless of nondisabled approval.

The first disabled-majority environment Fredy experiences is at the Saint John Asylum. He is sent there by Sir Peter to collect Basil Thoroblood, who owes Sir Peter money. However, after Fredy's attempt to remove Basil from Saint John is thwarted by the other residents, Fredy decides to stay. Living in an environment that is designed for disabled people, with a group of disabled people, run by people who acknowledge their prejudices but do not act on them, gives Fredy his first ongoing experience of genuine acceptance as a disabled person. From this he develops confidence and the feeling of being among kin, rather than the anxiety and isolation he experienced until this point.

When Saint John blows up and Fredy has to return to the world, he experiences another disabled-majority environment with homeless people. He recognises them as kin and, like many of them, has no money, and thus they operate as a community, assisting each other to survive.

He soon obtains work, and returns to nondisabled-majority environments, however his year in the company of so many disabled people has revolutionised his position on and in the world. He works in the circus, and then the movies, until he has the opportunity to board an airship travelling to Germany. Throughout these three years, though Fredy finds he needs to return to masking “the nothing” and not telling his stories in public, and he experiences some prejudice, he also carries a sense of a community with him. As a result of acting in movies he is noticed by Marlene Dietrich who, through poetry and relating to him as a fellow disabled person, reminds him that he is unique, and his condition is human rather than unnatural.

While the focus of Book II was on differences in autistic and nonautistic communication, Book III focuses on how group insiders and outsiders identify each other. Fredy develops a strong case for the hallmark of disablement as embodied knowledge rather than exhibited bodily atypicality.

Mixed Emotions

Book III begins in 1928 with Fredy travelling by ship, train, and horse, to the Saint John asylum in Kentucky, America. He has been forced to do this to collect Basil Thoroblood, who established and operates Saint John, in order to return with him to Sir Peter in Brisbane. Sir Peter claimed that Basil owes him money, and gave Fredy the choice of bringing Basil back to Brisbane, or going to jail for the Toowoomba bank robbery deaths for which he was partly responsible. Though Fredy is initially angry at being separated from his wife Laura, his son Joe, his mother, and Newcastle (“And I was wild that government and like criminals/ could run me out of where I’d settled back to living”), he is soon calmed by returning to the sea (“After a bit, too, I enjoyed the deep sea work again.”) Additionally, his intense interest in planes is broadening, and captured by observing a zeppelin for the first time. While the entire crew are interested (“we sighted this swollen skyscraper lying down in the sky,/ shining like foil, getting huge, coming on over us./ The crew ran to look”), only Fredy “stared after this one a long time as it shrank/ among the landward cloudbanks.” And he asks the skipper of the boat on which he is working one question (“*Is the hull made of tin?*”), after another (“*Did they make the gas they rode on?*”), until “The skipper explained it all, laughed, said I should sign on one/ and never knew he was a prophet” (125).

Fredy’s journey from Australia to Kentucky, though not free from anxiety, is free from prejudice. Having now had “the nothing” for thirteen years, he is well-practiced at masking.

This continues to be stressful and exhausting for him, but also means that he no longer accidentally reveals “the nothing”. And since there are no serious accidents on the ship from Newcastle to New Orleans, he is not compelled to reveal it in order to rescue someone. Thus he is not subject to the often difficult and dangerous consequences of other peoples’ impairment prejudices. Nor is his Australianness or Germanness an issue for any of his workmates.

His initial experiences in America – where “Hotels were called a House./ They had separate cafés for white and Coloured people,/ as they sometimes called them” – are similar. While working on the ships that transport him towards Kentucky, his new colleagues remain friendly and helpful, including teaching him to identify venues that sell alcohol despite prohibition laws that have been in force for eight years (“and the fellows taught me how to spot a speakeasy/ or a honky tonk and get let in, when we tied up in the towns.”) Then, a mailman in “Versayles” – the town named after Versailles in France, which Fredy spells according to American pronunciation, takes Fredy by horse directly to Saint John (126).

Neurodivergence – “you don’t look like a crazy”

I left the boats and took a train
for Versayles Kentucky, as the dead-looking trees put on leaves,
then rode with a mailman past black and white horse fences
and farms with big red sheds, till we came to the mansion
called Saint John. This here’s the main gate. You won’t get in.
That’s a crazy house, and you don’t look like a crazy. (126)

The mailman’s comment is a jarring reminder to Fredy of the pervasiveness of disablism in society. He indicates his sudden shock by using the word “crazy” jarringly in the narrative. The line – “*That’s a crazy house, and you don’t look like a crazy*” – contains two of only three times when the word “crazy” is used throughout the novel. The third time occurs later in Book III, and is also in reference to one of the people living at Saint John. The word Fredy usually uses in this novel rather than “crazy” (American) is “mad” (Australian).

The mailman’s words are jarring to Fredy, both because such disablist attitudes have been absent from his life for approximately a month, and because of their threatening implications. Disabled people recognise the “you don’t look” construction – “you don’t look like a crazy”, “you don’t look autistic”, “you don’t look blind” – as heralding disablist entrapment. Nondisabled people often assume that they are able, and entitled, to definitively adjudicate on

what impairment is and is not and, thereby, on whether a person does or does not have an impairment. The “you don’t look” construction is a declaration that their snap judgements are legitimate while our lifetime of embodied knowledge is worthless, a preemptive accusation of our dishonesty in claiming impairment, and a threat of difficult consequences if we continue to claim impairment.

This threat has specific denotations in 1928 Kentucky. While Kentucky did not have a compulsory sterilisation law, one had recently narrowly failed to pass in the Senate and, in the previous year, the US federal Supreme Court had upheld state rights to enact and implement these laws. This was via the now famous *Buck V. Bell* case, the judgement on which was delivered by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who stated: “Instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind... Three generations of imbeciles are enough”.¹ Thus, identifying oneself as crazy carried not only the threat of violence and incarceration, but of sterilisation.

The accusation of dishonesty secreted in the “you don’t look” construction is particularly insulting to Fredy who, as an autistic person, places significant value on interpersonal honesty. Even though Fredy is not entering Saint John as a patient he believes, much to his discomfort, that he is “a crazy”. He was categorised this way by Dr Cox, the doctor at the Cairo hospital who was excited by the research possibilities of “the nothing” (Book I): “*If I find physical damage to the nervous system, and I haven’t, we probably can’t cure you. If there’s none, the alienists may*”). Though Fredy did not like or respect Cox he believed that, in this instance, Cox was correct (“Me, an alien! I fumed at that. And then admitted to myself that it was true. I had become an alien”) (35). Consequently, Fredy will not lie in response to the mailman, and since he knows that anything other than agreement with the mailman’s statement will result in arguments and possibly violence, he responds with a deliberate silence, punctuated in the text as not only a full stop, but also a stanza break.

This scene, so early in book III, signals that this book will explore both how nondisabled characters expect impaired characters to present, and how readers expect impaired characters to present. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder describe the physical elaborateness that authors

¹ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 8-9.

often utilise to imply impairment as follows: “For disability entails a kind of immediate prefashioned notoriety – that of the one who overencumbers the visual scene. The one with the ‘slurred’ voice, the thick glasses, the wheelchair, the pale skin, the unsightly protuberance, the birthmark, or the blemish”.² Rejecting these disablist representations of disabled people in literature, *Fredy Neptune* posits that disabled people know themselves and each other, and should be known by readers, as having embodied knowledge of being disabled. This scene is a reminder, then, that this is a crip novel, and standard disablist rules of representation are not applicable.

A First Not-Rejection

Contrary to the mailman’s declaration, Fredy’s quandary at Saint John will be exiting rather than entering it. Due to “the nothing”, and regardless of whether he is crazy, he easily negotiates his way past four people, who he will soon learn are Basil’s wife and three of his strongmen, through the gate and garden, up the front stairs, into the mansion, and up to the second floor where Basil is. Fredy subdues Basil and chains him up. However, as they descend the stairs they are surrounded by the rest of the mansion’s residents who intend to prevent them from leaving (“*Let our boss go We love it here We love him!*”) (128) They physically attack Fredy, and of course he does not register any pain, however, for reasons he does not understand at the time, or for some time after, he loses consciousness:

all the women were yelling. The Ming vase one slapped me
with a whipcrack noise, and again, and stepped back puzzled.
I started to be hit with dusters and umbrella handles
and then, just as a mob of musclemen raced in,
I felt deadly sick. I let the chain go, and sat down. (128)

When Fredy regains consciousness, and discovers Basil has no plans to have him arrested, deported, or killed, he finds he is inclined to return the favour. It might seem logical to attribute this to stress or exhaustion from all that he has experienced in trying to capture Basil, but in fact, as I described in the previous section, Fredy’s journey to Basil was less stressful than his life in Australia. Though he retrospectively suggests that he might still have been angry when he arrived at Saint John (“I had no plan:/ too wild, I suppose I was, to waste cunning or devious on a man/ who was keeping me from my family”) (127), this assessment

² David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), xii.

can be questioned since, though he states that he did not have a plan, he in fact did have a plan, as he reveals a short time later: “My plan, if you call it that, was to get us driven/ to the nearest port, take him aboard a British ship/ and get the captain to arrest him, outside the three mile” (128).

Even after having lost consciousness, Fredy is not significantly stressed. He has some concern since he deduces that he is underground, and because he does not understand why he became unconscious (“I could tell by the damp coal smell and brown-paper light// that I was underground. I checked myself over./ Whatever it was had passed. But queer. I’d never been fainty”), but the only effect of the unconsciousness is hunger (“*Are you going to starve me down here?* I snapped at him./ *No. Ah no. I’ll have a meal sent down*”) (129).

Since he now has Fredy captive, Basil ponders how to proceed with him. He briefly considers removing Fredy from the premises (“*What are we to do with you?/ Chuck you out? Send you back to Sir Peter?*”) However, when Fredy explains that Sir Peter will not allow him to return to Australia without Basil, and is monitoring Laura and Joe until then, Basil empathises with Fredy’s position (“*Yes, he said, that tedious cruel scheming of theirs bored me.// Tiresome as satire, their mean victories. I’m a romantic/ to their eighteenth century. That’s why I came over here*”) (129).

Fredy, likewise, does not consider resuming his quest to return with Basil to Brisbane. This is not, however, due to him relating to Basil’s position, it is due to Basil’s reaction to “the nothing”. Basil had suggested, before Fredy attempted to remove him from Saint John, that he thought Fredy’s impairment seemed similar to those of the other strongmen (“*This could be your paradise: it is to the other fellows*”) (128). However, beginning their first conversation after Fredy regains consciousness, Basil indicates that he has given this further consideration, and has concluded that Fredy’s impairment is more complex than those of the other strongmen (“*Can you sit up? – Of course. You think I’m crippled? –/ He stared at me. Well, you widen the definition, he said*”) (129).

Basil’s reaction is meaningful to Fredy because Basil is the first nondisabled person who has continued to treat him as human after discovering “the nothing”. Medical professionals who knew of “the nothing” either left him to die, or tried to detain him in order to exploit him. Colleagues who discovered “the nothing” responded by refusing to speak or interact with

him, or by sacking him. And the people to whom Fredy has explicitly disclosed “the nothing” refused to believe him. This includes his mother, who refused even to listen to him, and his wife Laura, who agreed to marry him only after she coerced him into lying to her by saying he did not have “the nothing” after all. These cumulative rejections have made Fredy profoundly lonely. It is hard, then, to overstate the significance and relief Fredy experiences when he finally meets someone who, even though they are clearly uncomfortable with “the nothing” (“*You’re a different species of strongman, if you’re genuine./ And I think you are. He shuddered*”) (129), does not reject him, and treats him as human.

Pause to consider how little Fredy asks for, and has never previously received, from nondisabled people. He does not even expect nondisabled people who become aware of “the nothing” to accept him, he has simply wanted them not to immediately reject him.

Later, Fredy will discover that Basil’s wife Azores, whom he referred to as “The Ming vase one” when describing being surrounded by the Saint John residents, also believes in not reacting from prejudice (at least towards disabled people). This is despite her also being frightened of Fredy due to his impairment, for more substantial reasons than those of most people, as Basil explains to Fredy at the end of his stay at Saint John:

*Azores
was troubled by you. She stabbed you to the heart,
with a skewer, in the right spot and deep enough, from behind
do you recall? The day you tried to abduct me.
You swooned, but didn’t die. Or ever mention feeling the pain.
You were her murder victim, and seemingly declined to notice. (144)*

Azores could easily have chosen to use her fear as justification to act with prejudice against Fredy. As is demonstrated when Fredy first arrived at Saint John and she wanted to have him removed, the strongmen are under her command:

I knocked, the door swung open, a woman was on the stairs.

This blue-black strongman came hurrying with a stiff whip,
got the nod from this lady and told me *You leaving, boy,
or you gonna be whapped.* (127)

Thus she had the option of commanding the strongmen to attack Fredy, yet she chose not to. When she did try to kill Fredy herself she did so in defence of Basil, not due to prejudice.

Choosing to Stay

Basil's and Azore's choice not to react in prejudice against disabled people is not the reason, or not the only reason, that Fredy continues to stay at Saint John. Another significant factor is that Fredy feels comfortable among Basil's strongmen, who are all also disabled people. This is demonstrated in four ways: One is that nondisabled people outside Saint John describe the strongmen using disparaging terms for disabled people. For example, Sir Peter described them as "freaks" (119), the mailman who brought Fredy to Saint John described them as "crazy" (126), and the cousin of one of the strongmen, Emily, with whom Fredy becomes friends, describes one of the group members as "crazy", and the whole group as "hoodlums" and "gangsters" (140). Another reason is that Basil describes the strongmen as "super-human" which, by definition, are humans who are evaluated as being beyond what is designated as normal for humans, and hence impaired (143).

The strongmen being disabled is also demonstrated by the fact that none of them want to leave Saint John. This is not for want of money, because they all have either a family with whom they can live, or skills that would enable them to obtain employment elsewhere, or both. They do not leave because being in this environment, with this group of people, is more comfortable for them than they have been anywhere else. Even when Basil announces, approximately six months after Fredy arrives, that he does not have the money to continue the "experiment" and that it will finish at the end of that week (*"our revels here are ended. I regret I can no longer/ provide hospitality, when present supplies are exhausted./ That's when, Ocelle? The end of this week? Thank you"*) (143), the strongmen do not leave. They continue to stay at Saint John until the Wednesday of the following week. And then, after one of the group hangs himself, most of the group blow the house up while they are inside. In short, they chose to kill themselves rather than return to managing a life alone among nondisabled people.

The reason that trying to manage a life alone among nondisabled people is so frightening, and that living with other disabled people is so appealing, is compulsory able-bodiedness. As quoted in the Introduction: "A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken

question, ‘Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?’”³ Freedom from compulsory able-bodiedness means that disabled people can be themselves without having to negotiate nondisabled prejudice. More than that, though, it means we do not assent to a system that says that only one version of the human body is capable, and every other version is lesser than. We know that human bodies are adaptable and enduring and full of possibility. When compulsory able-bodiedness is absent the limits it places on everything and everyone are gone and the wondrousness of the world blossoms.

Freedom from compulsory able-bodiedness is also the fourth, and most important, indication that the strongmen are disabled – because creating an environment without it, and the importance of creating an environment without it, is embodied expertise that the strongmen share. Much of this is demonstrated in typical group dynamics that are absent during their time together. For example, while group members sometimes criticise each other, they never do so in response to a demonstration of skill. This is, of course, in contrast to most of the groups of which Fredy has been part, where he was ostracised in one way or another as soon as the strengths of “the nothing” became apparent. Similarly, while nondisabled people tend to be prescriptive about the method by which a task should be performed, and criticise others who achieve similar results via different methods, this does not occur at Saint John. Aspects of daily life, such as how each man maintains his strength, or what his hobbies are, or whether he eats meals with the group or alone, all reasons for which nondisabled people have criticised Fredy previously, are not remarked upon at Saint John.

One of the Group

One demonstration of the embodied expertise shared by the strongmen occurs soon after Fredy and Basil implicitly decide that Fredy will stay at Saint John. Basil rarely assembles the strongmen aside from meals, but he does so to facilitate Fredy’s introduction to the group. There are nine strongmen, two of whom are Black and seven of whom are white. They each have a female partner of the same race because, as Basil explains: “*I’m allowed most freedoms in our paradise here/ but...if I allowed race mixing, we’d be finished,/ driven out with a fiery sword*” (130). Most of the men are American, but the strongest of them is Bulba Domeyko from Ukraine:

³ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 9.

When the rest
did their stack-up, nine men in a diamond pattern,
one on two on three on two, he was
the one at the bottom, supporting them all, and saying
Buh! at odd times, well apart and thoughtful. (130)

When the strongmen are alone with Fredy their priority, similar to Ron the contortionist in Book II, is to compare embodiment with him. They first investigate how many of them he can lift simultaneously and discover that he ranks midway in the group with regard to strength (“I could support three of them in a stack-up: that put me/ about their middle rank, counting points for not showing effort”) (130).

They then have follow-up questions for him. In response to their first question – “*Are you a natural? Or did you work out?*” – he reveals himself to be odd, though not this time due to an autistic characteristic, but due to being Australian. He responds, “*I must have worked out without noticing, I said/ humping cargo on ships*” (131). This is odd to them because of the Australian use (his) of “humping” as moving, and the American use (theirs) of “humping” as having sex.

Then they ask the question, the answer of which most interests them – “*Hey that true you can't be wounded?*” – even though they already know the answer. They know the answer because they were present when he tried to capture Basil, and witnessed him being stabbed by Azores and fainting but not dying. The group have asked Fredy if it is true that he cannot be wounded, then, because they want to know what he will and will not disclose to them about his impairment or impairments. Fredy's answer – “*Course I can, I answered./ My flesh is exactly like other people's*” – is only half of the truth, as he reminds us (“I didn't say ‘even to me’, or that strength wasn't/ the point, with me.”) However, his evasiveness reveals that there are some aspects of his impairment that he is not yet ready to disclose to them (131).

Fredy's reluctance to provide a complete disclosure will feel familiar to many disabled people for two reasons. One reason many disabled people do not immediately discuss the details of their impairment with people they do not know, even if those people are disabled, has been continually demonstrated throughout this verse novel – many people are prejudiced against disabled people, and therefore discussing impairment in detail carries inherent risks. Many disabled people disclose aspects of their impairment over time, as the other person or people demonstrate the ways in which they are or are not prejudiced. The other reason is that in

detailing impairment, one is likely to be describing a bodily vulnerability at some point, and that is Fredy's immediate concern in this situation ("I shivered/ at the danger in that one.") Thus Fredy's response reassures the group that they all have impairment in common, which dispels the tension in their conversation (131).

As Fredy contemplates other information that he has not told the group he notices "They were still laughing at something", but he does not know what. As a reader I am also unsure of the reason for their continued laughter, but there are three possibilities: It could be the different interpretations of "humping", or that they are laughing in recognition that they all, like Fredy, disclose the details of their impairment over time, or both. It is important to note that, whichever their reason for laughing is, it is not malicious. They indicated this by asking if his strength is "natural". This is in contrast to many people in this novel who have described Fredy as "unnatural" (131).

The rest of the group have been together long enough to know those details of each of their impairments that are only disclosed over time. Therefore, Fredy is set to learn those details over time also. Saint John is blown up before this can occur with most of the strongmen. However, he is there for long enough to learn about one of them, named Sibling, when he tries to provoke Fredy into a fight, but then has an epileptic seizure:

He swelled up like a turkey-cock
to go for me, I thought, but then he fell over sideways,
kicking and gargling. *Put a stick in his mouth!*

Don't let him bite his tongue! his lady screamed out, running.
I sat with her and him, through it. He hated like poison to admit
his condition. You don't show helpless. He knew too. (144)

The theme of "you don't show helpless" echoes back to when Fredy cried in public in Book I. He was then in Jerusalem, devastated that the numbness had returned after briefly disappearing and, after more than a year of masking, this was the last straw, and he began to cry ("and I bust out crying, in that body,/ gulping up up up, tears swamping my sight, tasting salty"). And sensing his fear and inability to defend himself, a crowd encircled him ("and a crowd collecting round, at a trot. The last, the very/ last thing you allow ever: to be caught out both different and helpless./ Humans kill you for less") (25).

Undisabled Environments

Basil organises Saint John to prioritise the needs of the strongmen. There is a fully equipped gym “which had all the rings and bars and exercise gadgets/ you could imagine; more red leather than a flu patient’s throat” (130), and each family has the choice of eating with the group or alone (“Meals were in a posh panelled hall/ at tables for each family, or in their quarters if they liked”) (132). And he is committed to maintaining Saint John as a space free from compulsory able-bodiedness. So much so, that when he notices that he has been insisting on compulsory able-bodiedness by pressuring Fredy to read books from his library (“*Read, he urged me. This is the gymnasium of mind*”) (131), he apologises to Fredy:

*I'm truly sorry. I beg your pardon. I'm ashamed.
I looked at him. You are a genius, in a sphere
the arrogance of mind has disdained and tyrannised. Even I
have been urging that Renaissance snobbery, pushing at you
its paper vaulting-horses. Corrupting a somatic master.
You were right to resist. Sitting Bull versus the missionary. (131)*

At this point the information available does not indicate the intent of Basil’s comment. He might truly be apologetic for insisting that Fredy should read and, therefore, that mental abilities are superior to physical abilities. He might also be subtly suggesting that Fredy’s physical strength means he is not capable of learning. Either way he is enforcing a separation between mental and physical skills

Neurodivergence – “La-di-da wording”

The house had this great library, walled and lagged with books...
It was a headache to look at whole, so I would lever
out one book at a time, and read news of grandfather’s day
in la-di-da wording, sometimes with drawings called figs,
and fome went back to the days of fcrapping with fwords,
books packed with reading, but most of it was courting or principles. (131)

In the library at St John, Fredy feels both confused and condescended to by the books that employ literary language and writing style. Thus, he narrates this scene in the library to us with embedded disrespect to the authors who disdain him. At the time, Fredy is genuinely perplexed as to why the drawings are labelled “figs”, because he thinks of figs as a fruit. And he recognises the pattern of “s” as the first letter of a word written as “f”, as occurred in printing until the 1800s. Thus he is aware that “and fome went back to the days of fcrapping with fwords”, translates as “and some went back to the days of scrapping with swords”, but he does not understand the reason for this writing practice.

When he narrates this scene to us, he utilises autistic invention to reclaim his agency through crip humour and knowledge. “scrapping with swords” becomes “fcrapping with fwords”, where the “f” is superfluous to “crapping with words”.

Interestingly, translating in reverse “figs” becomes “sigs”. When William Stokoe developed the first system for notating American Sign Language, he described signs according to their tab (location), dez (handshape), and sig (motion).⁴ I am uncertain if Murray (through Fredy) intended to refer to sigs. However, there is evidence for this in Murray’s critically documented awareness of signs and his reference, two stanzas later, to what Fredy believes is the reliable authorship of another impairment group, blind people:

I held a big green book
a blind man had written about conquering Mexico.
You can trust a green book, Cos Morrison had told me,
never the black or red ones. (131)

This refers to William Hickling Prescott’s 1843 book *History of the Conquest of Mexico*.

Confidence and Uncertainty

At Saint John, Fredy is free for the first time from the burden of constantly having to mask “the nothing”. When imagining how much of a relief this is, consider the drain on memory, cognitive capacity, and energy it is to spend every moment of every interaction with every other human trying to react to them in ways that do not disclose the atypicality of your entire body.

Consequently, Fredy is also freed for the first time from the burden of constantly searching for those secret spots where compulsory able-bodiedness is a little less encompassing. This is in part because he has joined an established community where the environment is designed for disabled people. It is also because their time is their own. They “played poker all day, and drank what they called white mule/ out of preserving jars” (132), or they “drive to Lexington or Louisville/ and mooch around, go dancing, or a few of us would crowd a car/ and go to the

⁴ Diane Brentari, “Phonological Representation in American Sign Language,” Review of *Phonological Representation of the Sign: Linearity and Nonlinearity in American Sign Language*, by Wendy Sandler, *Language* 68, no. 2 (June 1992): 359-74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/416945>.

Cumberland Mountains” (132). In other words, the strongmen have been a group for so long that they have established places in the community where they can visit and know that they will be welcome. It is clear that Fredy feels comfortable in these environments and begins to develop confidence because, in complete contrast to Book II, he begins telling stories in public again as one of the group, not even worrying about which he should tell and which he should not (“we’d play cards with them and tell yarns”) (133).

Other ways in which Fredy is enriched by his stay at Saint John are demonstrated in the absences. In contrast to Book II, at Saint John Fredy does not stim, or cry, or become distressed about his lack of sensual interaction with the world. And his descriptions of his trees-first processing occur less often, and have lost the self-critical tone of Book II. For example, when he does not understand Basil’s explications of his theories Fredy, rather than criticising himself (“You see what a flat I was”) (59), simply states that the conversation is “All beyond me” (132). And, by the time Fredy leaves Saint John, his focus has shifted from the information that he has not processed to the information he has processed. Thus, rather than describing himself as “slow” (61), he describes himself as having “half understood” (144). Even when living at Saint John begins to affect Fredy’s proprioception, he is not anxious about it, he only notes it (“I was losing the sense of where/ the parts of me were. My nights were overflowing into day/ that insecty late summer going into their Fall season”) (134).

And yet, there is another side to this always fitting in coin. Because, even as Fredy becomes thoroughly relieved and relaxed, and makes significant gains in confidence while staying at Saint John, he simultaneously becomes increasingly restless and uncertain. In part this is because being one of the group also means he is no longer unique – “Thoroblood didn’t seem to mind when we were off gallivanting/ and it started to nark me. I was a bird in a collection” (134). In this novel “bird” has a particular significance in reference to Fredy. This begins in Book I when Dr Cox says to Fredy “*You’re rarissima avis. You couldn’t be rarer pregnant*”. At the time Fredy is annoyed (“I bristled at that”) (34), and justifiably so because Cox intends to exploit him. Simultaneously, however, this exchange also initiates in Fredy’s mind the idea that “the nothing” makes him unique. Also in Book I, his best friend Sam reinforces this idea when he says to Fredy “*You’re a rare bird and hardly notice*” (36). Then Laura further reinforces it in Book II, at the end of one of their early meetings (“When we parted she asked me *Where do you flutter, you queer bird?*”) (68) Until now, even as Fredy has had to deal

with continual prejudice, and other difficulties related to “the nothing”, he has at least also experienced some delight in being the only one of his kind. Therefore, the removal of those difficulties also removes his uniqueness, and the delight he experiences due to being unique.

Fredy also has increasing concerns related to why Basil is hosting a group of strongmen at Saint John. From when he first decided to stay there, he wondered about the purpose of the strongmen in relation to Basil (“I wasn’t sure whether we were all Thoroblood’s guests,/ servants or bodyguards”), nor was he sure why Basil is keeping him specifically (“and I wondered if he was keeping me where he could watch me”) (132).

Nevertheless, these concerns never outweigh the benefits Fredy experiences by staying at Saint John. Thus, even when he has an offer of somewhere safe to stay from Sam (“*If you can’t take your quarry home – to be murdered, remember –/ move your household to Paris. Talk Australia to me and be regaled!*”), he does not accept it. Fredy’s first thought in response to Sam’s offer is, “It was tempting, but: no money to move anybody”, though he knows, from when Sam made sure that Fredy was taken care of when he left Cox’s hospital in Egypt, that Sam has the money to take care of him and his family now also. Fredy’s second thought, “I was a child at Saint John. All my needs were met/ that needed meeting”, is the truth. This is why, while Fredy regularly considers, and sometimes decides, to leave Saint John, he ultimately only leaves when he has no other option. (133)

During one of the times when Fredy decides to leave Saint John, he identifies the downside of communities built around a single characteristic, regardless of what that characteristic is. Their strength is their weakness – they are a refuge from the world. To a certain degree this empowers you to deal with the world; beyond that your ability to manage living in the world begins to diminish (“I decided to get out of Saint John.// Money would find itself. I’d got too far inland/ and yet, in my head, I was still just come on shore/ and staring about”) (136). In other words, at Saint John, as a result of living with other disabled people, Fredy has learned a lot about himself internally and developed his confidence, but he has not learned much about America, or how he will manage there alone.

Basil’s Theory

Despite Fredy's and Basil's mutual unease, they begin to develop a relationship. Perhaps this results from each intriguing the other. As Fredy is still perplexed by how he lost

consciousness, and how he healed, he finds Basil's conviction that "a true poem could arise/ from the body, as well as from consciousness or dream,/ and might well be the wisest of them" (132), refreshing and guiding. While, for Basil, who is fascinated by somatic possibilities, Fredy presents more than he imagined was possible: "*You don't dress for heat or cold. You jump and land stiff-legged/ as if you had tubular shock absorbers. You're strong/ but you're stranger than a strongman*" (138).

Unfortunately for Basil, his being ultimately more interested in his ideas rather than the humans on whom he is experimenting means he disregards truth, which insures that Fredy will not trust him. This mistrust begins when Basil offers Fredy money for the rights to his story ("*When you're ready to tell me your story, I'll be happy/ to put you beyond all financial care, for a long time.*") Basil senses Fredy's discomfort but, rather than apologising, he attempts to increase that discomfort. Employing a strategy that might be effective with someone whose sense of self depends on group opinion, Basil begins with – "*Do you know they call you the Phantom?/ And the Spook?*" Fredy, beginning to recognise Basil's strategy, reports to us "I knew the mob were wary of me", but does not respond to Basil. Then Basil's next step definitively limits Fredy's trust in him – "Then he moved to a lie, but a good guess too: *Do you know/ they call you the Leper?*" It is not anything specific about Basil's question, but the fact that Basil lies to him that motivates Fredy to then end the conversation – "I looked at the panelling walls/ and considered. *I thought that for a little while years ago./ But if it was true, I'd have all dropped off by now, wouldn't I?*" (138)

Iowa's Practicality

While Fredy enjoys being in the vicinity of the strongmen, he also enjoys being alone, and thus he does not develop a close relationship with most of them. The exception is Iowa, who also enjoys being alone, and they each recognise and appreciate this in each other, suggesting that both have autistic characteristics. Iowa was the second man Fredy met when he was planning to capture Basil but, whereas the first man swore at Fredy and charged him, Iowa simply handed his gardening fork to Fredy. When Fredy, who was still angry, responded "*You'd be a dopey mug*", Iowa replied "*I follow the Lord Jesus and I never do violence*" (135). And Fredy observed to us "and I found he spoke the truth, in the time I was there and after", an attribute which always engenders Fredy's respect (127).

Iowa's influence on Fredy is profound. Fredy notes Iowa was "the only calm man on the place, and calmed me" (138), and his gently resolute belief in God prompts Fredy to attend a Catholic church and confession for the first time ("One thing I did decide. I dodged aside in Louisville/ one Saturday, and joined the confession queue in church") (136). In turn, confession instigates a reconfiguration of Fredy's understanding of "the nothing". Whereas he believed that his involvement in the bank robbery in Toowoomba (Book II) was the first time he was responsible for the death of another person ("but I'd caused two deaths.// That was new. I wasn't any more who I'd been") (114), the priest informs him that being distant from the killing, as Fredy was during World War I, does not make him any less responsible ("I got pulled up on believing I'd killed no one, in the War. *You helped to fire/ guns at cities? You sent horses for fighting men to ride?/ It's important not to fool ourselves, my son*") (137). And whereas he believed that "the nothing" was a "punishment" or a "curse", the priest does not ("On my numbness, I got nothing. *See a doctor*"). Church becomes one place that Fredy can go, without the company of the strongmen, and be treated as human ("We don't see all of blessing and absolution,/ I know – but where I felt them was in being treated/ as just another person, among the Saturday confessors") (137).

Out in the World

In the safe environment of Saint John Fredy cannot decide when to leave, and where to go, but approximately six months into his stay both are decided for him. He had walked out of his room intending to leave, again, and was interrupted ("I was coming out of my room, with my duffel slung/ over my shoulder, and heard this man-roar below.") One of the strongmen, Bulba Domeyko, had hanged himself, an event which triggers the rest of the men to fight each other at first, and then shift to destroying Saint John. Basil is delighted ("Basil Thoroblood tore up from the cellars shouting *Please!!* but no one bothered with him. He started to grin, and shake with joy") while Iowa, guessing what will occur next, shepherds the women and children out of the building ("Iowa was smiling,/ leading the wives and children outside, from their quarters:/ *Don't cry, sisters. They're just taking this old tent down.*" Fredy then understands from Iowa's actions that the strongmen will soon blow up the mansion ("Rees carried up a keg, I smelt it was mountain whisky,/ real oily bust-head. He smashed it open"), and he leaves, bringing Basil with him ("I pulled Basil out of there// with one valise in his hand"), just in time ("As we got to the garage/ and backed the Duesenberg out, a long blue flash/ showed in every window") (145).

Thus, Fredy's only option is to manage living in America. Iowa, who escaped with Fredy and Basil, returns to his parents' house, and Basil is soon captured by one of the many groups of men who want to kill him. Fredy feels "alive again, just being away from Saint John", but he has returned with no money, to a world where few people have money to spare, because of the Depression. This means that, though he wants to work on a ship ("Manhattan/ with ships moored in hundreds to her, like boots along a floor/ with their names on their heels. Which one would I draw") (146), but only a few of them were going anywhere, let alone Australia, and they already had their crew ("None, as it turned out. The ships were either idle/ or had no jobs left. The docks and streets were crowded/ with men fear had started rotting") (147).

This causes Fredy to begin searching for anywhere to go, to eat, and to sleep. In turn, this leads him to the community of homeless people – a community which includes a high percentage of disabled people. This is a community that is not in a position to adapt the environment to their needs, and is often under threat: "I saw dogs walk the roofs of railway boxcars/ pulling well-fed men who'd jump with them car to car/ and handcuff hoboes, or shoot them running across tracks (149). The homeless community, like the begging community in Turkey (Book I), nevertheless do what they can to support each other:

If you saw a fire down a scrub ravine, chances were
it'd be a hobo jungle, as we called our camps.
Bring some meat, not too green, or potatoes you'd bandicooted,
or a twist of salt, and you might score a black tin can
of mulligan stew. And when I crept off to sleep
without blankets, as I did, sometimes I'd find a blanket on me
before the morning. (149)

Becoming Superman

During this time Fredy is focused on managing his day-to-day survival. However, he also has a dream which is in part fantasy, and in part a consolidation of his understanding of himself as a disabled person. The dream begins with the type of situation that Fredy has regularly encountered since he acquired "the nothing". An accident occurs ("*Oh, please Mister come help him! A woman was crying/ at my side. This engine's tipped back on him!*"), and as a result a person is in life-threatening trouble ("Men were collecting/ round a ship's diesel engine, half off a flatcar, with snapped chains/ and awful agonised yells under it. I could hear the man would die"). As usual Fredy does not hesitate to assist, even though assisting will reveal "the nothing" ("no time for holding in"), and as usual he succeeds in rescuing the

person (“And then he moved! I didn’t feel but could see it./ A gap. Getting. Higher. Between his. Bolt-flange and the dirt./ The crushed. V-trench. The flange had made. Up. They slid the man out”), and as usual he is accusingly questioned regarding his strength (“two young fellows took me by the sleeves:/ *Jerry Siegel, sir, and this is Joe, Joe Schuster./ We heard you lifted a flatcar off of a man?*”) Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster were the creators of Superman, and the first Superman comic was published in June 1938 which, in the context of this novel, is in nine years’ time. 1938 is also the year Murray was born (148).

In the dream, however, rather than Fredy being powerless to prevent what happens to him next, he manages to convince the two men that his condition is not a cause for alarm, and that they should buy him breakfast. He does this by combining elements from two groups where he was not the only disabled person that have shaped his understanding of impairment and disablement thus far. He explains to the two men that, rather than being alone, as he thought of himself earlier in the verse novel, he is one of a planet of people (“Yes, I’d lifted the flatcar. I was from Dungog. Which was a planet”), who are strongmen (“We were all strong there. I was under average, if anything”), and circus performers (“We Goggans dressed like so: I showed them a photo from my wallet/ of me from the Golightlys’ show, trunks outside my tights”) (148). In other words, from the feeling of strangeness and isolation that Fredy felt in Book II (“Was I the start of a new race, without its own females yet?/ Like the first human, having only apes to sleep with”) (85), he now feels he has found his community.

Re-joining the world with his community in his head has made Fredy more enduring. Consequently, he continues throughout Book III with a portion of the calm he experienced at Saint John. He has some depression on the train (“I was lost in thoughts that might still thicken my voice/ to tell about. My father’s poor death, my distance/ from being able to help my family. The insult called ‘rights’”) (157), and also while in Los Angeles (“I sat on the Post Office steps and felt despair/ till a cop moved me on. *Let’s get the ass in gear, buddy!*”) (160) However, he still does not stim, or cry, or experience anxiety.

The world he re-joins has not changed with regard to prejudice against disabled people. Fredy finds that, unlike the places where the strongmen visited, where impaired people were accepted, he now needs to return to masking. While others create a public story of who they are (“Most folk preen and watch themselves sidelong,/ playing themselves, the Farmer, the

sacrificing Mother”), Fredy has to maintain a public story of who he is not (“It’s just I was jealous. I had to live mum, with my story,/ and never let it show”) (164).

Logan

Fredy begins travelling on trains throughout America, and while he is unsure how to proceed in his own life, he does not hesitate to intervene when he witnesses prejudice. He is in a train carriage with two other men, one black and one white, when they are joined by two more white men. The two white men indicate from the outset that they will bully the black man:

then two more fellows dirty-faced with stubble like us
slipped into the boxcar. Looked round, and at the Negro.
Hey, it’s like that, says one. *It does seem it’s like that,* Nathan

says the other one. (153)

And the idea that eugenics has a scientific basis allows them to justify their prejudice (“*Them old Bolsheviks say Darwin made the world,/ don’t they, Cole? – And they’re the new preacher men./ Scientific*”).

Logan, the black man, of course immediately understands that a physical altercation will ensue (“The Negro man was tense/ as over-strained wire, and had been since it started.”) However, because of his trees-first processing, it takes another stanza of the harassment from the two white men for Fredy to process some of the dynamics of the situation (“I was starting to understand.”) Logan, similar to Fredy in a number of work situations in Book II, is coerced by the white men into initiating the fight (“The black man’s voice came out like rope hauled through a sheave,/ tight and furry: *Four to one be about your weight,/ you white-sheet mother fuckers.*”) And then Fredy, after noting a new word (“First time I ever heard/ that high blue prince of swearwords”) (153), does not hesitate to assist Logan:

I knelt up and squeezed
the knife out of Cole’s hand. *Two onto one isn’t fair,*
I told him, and let his arm know he wasn’t to fight me.
I kept it bent while the Negro bamboozled the other one (154)

Logan and Fredy throw first one of the white men and then, an hour later, the other one, out of the train. They continue to converse until Logan invites Fredy to stay with him (“*I’m going to visit with my old lady./ You should come too.*”) Unfortunately, also due to his trees-first

processing, Fredy understands the words, but not the unspoken associated gesture of gratitude and friendship, and in fact does not understand until he narrates this story to us – “It was thanks for saving him, I see now”. When Fredy declines Logan’s offer, it sounds to Logan as if Fredy is saying, “I will defend you in private, but I will not be seen in public with you or your family, because you are Black”, and consequently that is the end of their conversation (“When I cried off, his face went distant again”). However, Logan is nevertheless grateful for the assistance Fredy did provide, and so finds a way to thank him (“he gave me a sweater. *You must be freezing, man*”) (154).

Dreaming of Living

As Fredy continues to travel, and food becomes less available, he begins to lose energy and awareness. In this state he believes he is dying and that Iowa is with him (“*you’ve come to lead me to the blessed world/ well I’m glad that it’s you*”), but Iowa gently corrects him (“*No, that angel will be according to your soul;/ I ain’t an angel nohow. I came to keep you company/ because there’s worse company round, when you don’t eat regular.*”) In Fredy’s dream it is important for Iowa to assist him to consolidate ideas, and the first relates to Basil – “*You’re the one Thoroblood was waiting for: the body’s word.// Did he tell you?*” This refers back to how a poem can arise from the body as well as from the unconscious or a dream. Basil felt that Fredy embodied this theory, both because of “the nothing” and because he was the only one of the strongmen who contemplated Basil’s theory and believed it (157).

In the dream, when Fredy then explains “the nothing” to Iowa, Iowa articulates the depths of the existential dilemma Fredy is confronting – “*You’re stuck in the door, maybe, that poor Domeyko [the man who hanged himself] dived through*”). In other words, Fredy is trying to understand whether, and how, to live with and in a world that is continually cruel to his people. Fredy does not know how to engage Iowa’s question, and instead returns to his story of “the nothing” (“*Among men, it’s not so bad; there’s no touch to keeping in touch./ Women’s company, though, reminds me I can’t reach anything./ I can get life and not touch it.*”) Nevertheless, Iowa reminds him of the importance of telling his own story even if, and perhaps even because, others have been killed (“*But your word is keeping you alive:/ without it, you’d be plumb dead, riding outside through these mountains*”) (157).

Then Iowa guides Fredy towards understanding what it was about the burning women that traumatised him. He asks questions to clarify which aspects of that situation most upset

Fredy: “*Those burning women weren’t your own fellow people?*” asked Iowa./ *But women, I said, horrified. Men would have been okay?/ They were burning then anyway, everywhere, as they always done?*” Considering this Fredy answers that: “*Germans and Australians. I guess and then every tribe./ I wouldn’t kill any. A working man doesn’t get much choice.*” But then he adds “*beggars sometimes/ have to be choosers.*” Iowa continues his line of questioning, “*And the women burned to test that?*” Fredy considers this for a while (“I sheered and whistled on through fast rock cuttings and sky”), and decides then “*Yes. I’d have killed for them. And it made no difference.*” This is important because it initiates Fredy into considering the untenability of his claim that he can avoid taking “sides”. Needing time to contemplate this, Fredy instead asks Iowa – “*What about it? God saving us?*” (157) Iowa responds:

*It’s a promise, he grinned, sitting up with his hair not blowing.
Buy it, and nobody’s a failure. No one’s book is closed.
Refuse it, and there’s high mucks and drudges forever, even dead.
And the death gets shared round just as much, or more. It’s kind of the compass. (158)*

Work and Prejudice

Fredy does not experience any prejudice on the basis of his impairments while working in America. However, due to his previous experiences, he continues expecting it. His first job is as a strongman in a circus.

He is hired because he captures, but does not kill, the circus’s escaped panther. Even though the police then fatally shoot the panther in the head as he is holding it, the circus owner, Madame Maria Rasputina (real person), appreciates what she perceives as Fredy’s commitment to capturing the panther without killing it (“*You would have saved poor Oleg:/ the rest can only think Kill the Wild Beast! Kill!*”) (160) However, while Fredy does not state that he had in fact decided to kill the panther, he does say that the thought that he could kill it, and the method for doing so, crossed his mind (“*If I was to kill the thing, break its neck, I’d have to/ change my grip*”) (159). And, when Maria says to him that he would have saved the panther he thinks:

I shivered,
remembering the black muscles in its stubby arms, the great talons
on that shock-haired butcher lizard writhing under me.
But: for ten dollars a week all found I tore phone books and chain,
heaved donkeys up with people on. And General Delivery had letters

from Laura and Joe. (160)

In other words, he had considered killing the panther, and might have if the police had not. However, since Madame Rasputina's perception will lead to him being paid and being able to have regular contact with his family, he is not going to tell her the truth. Instead, he tells her about his family in Australia and she becomes angry with him ("she flared at me: *You have family there?/ And you are in America? Why?*") He worries that she is using this as an excuse to sack him because of "the nothing" ("I explained fast, hearing/ the echo of the sack in her tone"), but in fact she is reacting from her own history ("It seemed runaway fathers/ weren't her favourite men. *When you save fare, go home!*") (160)

When she does sack Fredy, her reason is unfair, but it is not related to any prejudice against his impairments. It is due to one of his autistic characteristics, however she is not aware of this. At her urging he had been carrying lions on a plank, spinning them around inside a cage as part of the show. Maria wanted Fredy to slow down before he put the lions on the ground and stated this, but Fredy was trying to manage overwhelm from the noise of the audience, and thus could only focus on putting the lions on the ground as they had originally planned. They lost control of the lions for a short time. Nobody was hurt but afterwards Fredy was "fired" (161), not "sacked", which suggests he knows the reason for it was not "the nothing".

Fredy's only, but completely predictable, experience of prejudice on the basis of "the nothing" in Book III occurs when he saves a child from electrocution, and probably death. However, unlike the previous occurrences of this type of scene in the verse novel, this takes place where Fredy is living, rather than where he is working. Due to an injury from his movie work he is at home at the boarding-house, where he is living, when he sees the wire from an electricity pole fall to the ground where a young child is playing in water. He saves the child from electrocution, and knows from experience how events will unfold ("I knew how it would spread:/ the whole house walking on eggs round me, the landlady/ starting to find my story too big for the peace of her place") (167). And he is correct, the other men in the house provoke a fight with Fredy that night, and then he is given a week to leave.

As an actor, however, Fredy experiences prejudice against people working in movies when he and a friend meet a family consisting of a wife, husband, and two young children. Their long-term difficulty is that they have no money, however their immediate concern is that the man, Ira, has lockjaw. Fredy and his friend Steve (who also works in movies) try to organise for

the family to stay first at the boarding house where Fredy is staying, and then at the boarding house where Steve is staying, but both refuse the family because they are “Okies” (165). In the 1920s in America okies meant people, usually farmers, from Oklahoma and surrounding states, who lost everything due to the Depression, and so came to California to find work. With no other option, Fredy and Steve find an abandoned movie studio in which the family can stay.

As Fredy begins softly to convince the muscles of Ira’s jaw to unlock, he says to him, “*You’ll die like this, shipmate*” (165). This might sound to some people like an insensitive comment, especially because Ira cannot attend to the lockjaw independently. However, Fredy intends for it to display the same concern that a woman gave to him earlier in this book, when the weather was dangerously cold but Fredy could not sense it (“*You gone die like that! a woman roused on me./ She was right. I was silver, but I started to rock/ like an ornament, and then dropped, as if I’d snapped off at the knees*”) (150).

Ira’s lockjaw is also a reminder to Fredy of “the nothing”, and of the similarities between their conditions: “yet it was just nerves telling his muscles to stay tight./ It struck me, hard, how it was just nerves telling me/ to be a live rubber man” (165). In other words, Ira is also the embodiment of Basil’s theory in the sense that his physical body has an important role in his state of being. Nerves have a power that can override human agency, and they simultaneously enable humans to have agency. For Fredy, as “live rubber” his nerves keep him insensate, but they also keep him alive.

As soon as Ira recovers, the family leaves because Ira “couldn’t tolerate to stay/ among Godless lying movie abominations.” Fredy notes that “He was drinking buttermilk from a gilt bowl knotty with gods// as he told me this, and Bethelle looking at the ground”, meaning that, even as Ira is rejecting them, he is still using their property, and also that his wife is embarrassed by his words, either because she is agreeing to follow Ira’s beliefs, or because she used to believe them as well. However, Fredy also points out that “when you’ve got nothing, your principles/ are your only place and home,/ for as long as they last.” In other words, it is perhaps more important to Ira to act on his principles since he and his family have lost all their money due to the depression (167).

Marlene

And then, finally, Fredy tells someone his story, and they believe him, not out of self-interest, but genuine interest in him. This is the only person from the movies who noticed Fredy's physical impairment, and the reason she noticed is that she, too, is disabled. The real Marlene Dietrich was on track to be a concert violinist. However, she severely and permanently injured her wrist, and thereafter could not play at concert standard. She was searching for another profession when she discovered acting. Fredy saw her while he was playing a minor role in *All Quiet on the Western Front*:

One lunchtime we came out
to eat and stood nailed to the ground. The most beautiful woman

we had ever seen stood in a white sharkskin man's suit
talking to Freund the boss cameraman. (162)

However, at the time, Fredy was unaware that she also noticed him:

*I noticed you last year, on All Quiet. Sitting as if
the world ended before it reached you.
You bewildered and brave, not agreeing to this, though it
had been so a long time. One alone in the bathhouse not sweating. (171)*

Marlene is curious about Fredy's story and has him brought to her table to have coffee with her. She does not begin directly with questions about "the nothing", but by quoting "The Panther" by Rilke:

*'Bars pacing by have so worn out his sight
that nothing's left to which it will respond.
To him it seems steel bars are infinite,
a thousand bars, and no more world beyond.
His gentle tread, each muscular strong joint
circling in the very narrowest space
is like a dance of force around a point
where a mighty will stands hypnotized in place.*

*At times his pupil, after a long recess
will lift its curtain. There will enter a scene
that traverses the body's silent readiness,
reaches the heart, and fades from having been.'* (170)

The point of "The Panther" is that the panther was put behind bars by humans, because of its difference to humans, at a vulnerable moment in its life – perhaps when it was young, or sedated. But it stays behind those bars, not because it is physically incapable of escaping, but

because the bars that humans put in place are convincing, or “hypnotizing”, as Murray translates it. In other words, the panther has not in fact lost any of its power or agency, its problem is that humans have convinced it that it has lost power and agency. Until recently this had been the case for Fredy too. Most of the time, when nondisabled people have become aware of either or both of his impairments, they have metaphorically put him behind bars by sacking him, or throwing him out of a house, or refusing to listen to him, or refusing to believe him, or refusing to speak to him. Their actions then carry the message that he should not feel proud or strong, and so add to his trauma. When Marlene recites this poem to Fredy, he is at a point where he knows he could be a proud disabled person with other disabled people, but he does not know if he could continue this among nondisabled people. Through the poem, Marlene effectively tells him that he can, and should. It is similar to Murray’s moment of realisation about the emu’s internal strength in *Second Essay on Interest*: “But you hint it’s a brigand sovereignty”.⁵

As a poem that focuses on embodiment rather than doctrine “The Panther” captures Fredy’s attention. Marlene’s recitation will have brought to mind Iowa’s advice to him “*your word is keeping you alive*” (157). Simultaneously he will remember the panther, the “yowling twisty python, furry pressure cooker of joints” (159) that he captured for the circus. Additionally, Marlene’s last name, Dietrich, will have brought to mind its definition, “*Dietrich, ...is a wire hook for picking locks. A skeleton key*” (48). (This was told to Fredy by Heimann, the man with autistic characteristics that he met in Germany.) All of these introduce a lived practicality to Basil’s theory: “It sat me up. This wasn’t the Turk’s or Thoroblood’s ‘poems’,/ big, dangerous, baggy. This was the grain distilled./ This was the sort that might not get men killed” (170).

When Marlene does ask about his condition she asks directly (“*Why are you different?*”) (171), and he trusts her enough to break his rule from book II (“you tell no one:/ I’d proved that”) (102). When he tells her his story, she first returns his unique status to him (“*Sie sind aber einmalig. You are but once. You’re unique*”) (171). Then, when he says what he now believes, which is that “the nothing” has a psychological rather than physical cause (“*I think it’s the Inner Man/ keeps me from some strife. Maybe he feels, and just won’t tell me*”), she is the first person who agrees out of thoughtfulness rather than an interest in exploiting him

⁵ Les Murray, “Second Essay on Interest: The Emu,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 201-3. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

(“*Your Unconscious*, said Marlene. *The Dreamer. That’s high fashion now./ Your It. That’s how they now call Your Inner Man*”) (171). This is significant because everyone who has discovered Fredy’s impairment until this point has either not believed him, or labelled him “unnatural” or something similar, or both. Marlene’s response effectively says, “your condition is very human”. And this is the point at which Fredy’s story starts to turn away from confusion towards purposefulness, and away from seeking acceptance from nondisabled people, all of which makes Fredy more comfortable with himself.

Book IV – The Police Revolution

Book IV takes place between 1932 and 1937. The first half of the book focuses on Fredy’s time in early Nazi Germany between 1932 and 1934. The second half of the book recounts his long return to Australia and, briefly, his next three years there.

The many positive effects that Fredy experienced in Book III from having found his kin continue into Book IV. He now no longer seeks approval and acceptance from nondisabled people, which shapes his consciousness in Book IV and, consequently, other peoples’ responses to him.

From this basis Fredy now has the cognitive space to turn his attention both inward and outward. Observing inwardly, even though his trees-first processing means his conscious understanding of an event as it occurs is gradual, he begins to experience intuitive understanding of the character of an event as it occurs. Observing outwardly, he begins to relate to the position of people who hold conflicting views to his on how humans should interact with humans that they believe are lesser than them. This reduces the trauma he previously experienced in such circumstances, enabling him to understand more of how “the nothing”, and societal disablement of impaired people, operate.

The other result of Fredy turning his attention outward is that, rather than reflexively rescuing people from life-threatening accidents, as he has numerous times in the previous books, he finds himself in a number of situations where he needs to decide whether, or how, to defend a person under attack by other people. All six of these situations relate to the Nazi regime of early 1930s Germany. Each situation creates different short-term and long-term consequences

for both Fredy and the person under attack. A number of these situations also bring Fredy's physical strength to the attention of the Nazis, who are ironically the first government to welcome him as a fellow human. When the Nazis release him from their custody, in order to force him into joining them, he meets Hans, a fellow disabled person who has been classified as subhuman, and therefore will be forcibly sterilised. Fredy is determined to defend Hans against both the sterilisation, and a country of people who believe Hans's sterilisation is acceptable, and they escape Germany and return to Australia, where Hans lives with Fredy's family.

Conscious Choice

Fredy turning his attention outward means that Book IV focuses on community and social interactions, their short term and long-term consequences, and how perceptions of these vary according to one's personal position. As a result, Fredy finds himself in situations where he has to choose whether, or how, to defend a human under attack by other humans. In Book IV Fredy finds himself in six such situations, each of which has vastly different consequences for both him and the person being attacked.

The first of these situations occurs in New York in 1932, when Fredy decides not to defend a man who is "smashed up" by three other men. The man who was soon to be beaten up, Peter Salomon, had said that "German fighter ace// Joseph Jacobs was as good or better a pilot/ than Hermann Goering". If the measure of "good" and "better" is number of victories, then Salomon was correct since Goering had twenty-two and Jacobs had forty-eight. Therefore, it is likely that the real issue was that Jacobs was anti-Nazi while Goering was pro-Nazi, having joined the Nazi party early, in 1922 (183).

This is the first time, after Fredy witnessed the mass murder in Trabzon, that he has not defended someone who is being physically attacked by a group of people. The difference between Fredy's reaction on this occasion and his reaction at Trabzon is that his reaction at Trabzon was at least in part an unconscious choice resulting from shock and fear, whereas now Fredy is not shocked or frightened, and makes a conscious choice not to intervene.

Fredy does not explicitly state his reason for not defending Salomon, and only provides us with a couple of pieces of information about the circumstances of the attack. One of these is that the four men were all crew members of *Das Rheingold*. This is an airship that Fredy and

his friend Phyllis visited, and then became guests on after Phyllis was injured by its propeller (“*She walked through the propeller! Just goddam didn’t look*”) (179). They were brought on to the airship (“the Germans swept us up a carpeted gangway and safe/ from the Yank reporters, inside the ship in a saloon/ with stylish fittings and big polished windows set aslant/ as a glass keel, nearly, and a strip of more window underfoot”), and Fredy subtly indicated to the crew that he hoped to join them before the airship left New York to return to Germany (“*Boettcher, Friedrich, I gave him with just the shadow of a snap/ so he would know. You are German? – Colonial. Kriegsmarine. -/ ...If I wanted things from these folk, I had to look square from the off*”) (179). The only other pieces of information Fredy provides are that he “didn’t stand up” for Salomon, that he does become a crew member of *Das Rheingold*, and that he is “not proud how the vacancy/ I filled got vacant” (183).

There are a number of possible interpretations of these pieces of information in relation to Fredy’s decision not to defend Salomon. One interpretation is that Fredy, as a *Das Rheingold* passenger, decided not to involve himself in any *Das Rheingold* crew disputes, in case he happened to side against someone who could employ him on the airship. Another interpretation is that Fredy calculated that he might have the opportunity to be employed on *Das Rheingold* if he did not become involved in this particular crew dispute. If he defended Salomon in this dispute against the other three men, Fredy’s and Salomon’s chances of winning were high, and the three men might have had Fredy removed from *Das Rheingold* in retaliation. Whereas, if Fredy did not defend Salomon, Salomon’s chances of defending himself alone against three men were low, and his injuries would mean he could not continue working on *Das Rheingold*, thereby creating a vacancy that Fredy could fill.

Fredy concludes that his actions “saved his [Salomon’s] life, maybe. He stayed on in America” (183). This suggests that Salomon was Jewish, and that his staying in America prevented him from returning to what was soon to be a Nazi regime in Germany, where there was a high likelihood that he would have been murdered. However, it is likely that Fredy has drawn this conclusion to minimise his shame, rather than based it on facts. We know this because usually, when Fredy provides information about someone after his final interaction with them, he includes concrete rather than speculative information about what happened to them, and when. For example, later in this book, at the conclusion of Fredy’s visit to his mother in Dresden, he comments: “She was fifty-eight then. It was thirteen years till she burned” (192). With Salomon, Fredy does not report to us how long his stay in America was,

or even if he ultimately survived being “smashed up” by the other three Das Rheingold crew members (183). More importantly, Fredy does not report Salomon’s wishes. They might have included a preference for returning to Germany, perhaps either to be with his family, regardless of whether they ultimately survived the Nazi regime or not, or because he knew that he had a reliable path out of Germany when escape became necessary.

Despite Fredy’s shame, he takes the opportunity of this vacancy to join the Das Rheingold crew. This enables him to leave America as the beginning of a journey that he hopes will end with his return to Australia. The airship first travels from New York to Friedrichshafen, Germany.

Neurodivergence – “Hundred”

Friedrichshafen, with its lake and church
and its hangars hundreds of yards long that we would tow
our switched-off ships into, a hundred marching men to a side. (183)

This is a striking image that draws from Fredy’s love of facts for information that, in conjunction with repetition, creates a sticky, descriptive, and reflection-provoking picture. “Hangars hundreds of yards long” alone would not attract reader attention because it sounds like a clichéd way of expressing that they were big. However, to then follow that with “a hundred marching men to a side”, thereby repeating the word “hundred” and adding the alliteration of “marching men” indicates that this is not thoughtless hyperbole, it is a deliberate description of what occurred.

This description also signals, through the word “side” and the image as a whole, that another featured topic in Book IV is “sides” – how understanding a side depends on context, and how committing to a side has long-term consequences. Out of context this image of Friedrichshafen is idyllic, with a lake and a church in the background, and two-hundred men who, though they are divided into two sides, are working in unison to move the airship into the building that will protect it while it is not flying. It could be part of an advertising campaign for a thriving yet restorative 1930s modern city. Fredy is also captivated by this image. However, having only recently joined the Das Rheingold crew, and just landed in Germany, he has no knowledge of the ship’s mission, or Germany’s current political and societal circumstances.

Retrospective knowledge of 1932 Germany changes how this image is understood. From our position as readers decades later, even a cursory knowledge of history makes it obvious that the purpose of this ship is to assist the Nazis to murder people throughout Europe.

Friedrichshafen was a hub of Nazi activity while the Nazis were in power. It was where party officials took holidays, and it was home to a number of transport and technology companies who were vital to Nazi government infrastructure, and who exploited forced labour from concentration camps. From the position of the rest of the *Das Rheingold* crew, even though they know that the purpose of this airship is to assist the Nazis, at this point, which is before the Nazis have officially even come to power, they have no idea that they are on the side of a regime that will murder upwards of eleven million people.

The Last Rescue

In Book IV, Fredy's previous desperation to have a nondisabled person accept "the nothing", along with his panic about being sacked because of nondisabled colleagues' reactions to "the nothing", are completely gone. This is demonstrated early when Fredy performs his only work-related rescue in this book. While the *Das Rheingold* crew wait in Friedrichshafen for their next project, which they have been told will be in Singapore, they conduct short training flights. During one of these, one of the crew is outside the airship, tethered by a rope, while he patches a gas leak. The rope is secured by only one man inside the ship, until he slips, loses hold of the rope, and is unable to catch it. Fredy, however, is able to catch the rope just in time before the man outside the airship falls to his death:

I was near
and came at the gallop and grabbed it. Barn! It jerked me
half out of the hatch, but I kept my holt on it
and started to haul it in, hand over elbow,
hand over elbow, till Zugbauer appeared and rose (184)

When Zugbauer is safe, he becomes curious as to how Fredy was able to rescue him ("*But wait on Fred: I don't see anything./ you could have got a hitch around*"). Fredy, trying to provide a plausible answer that will distract from the real answer suggests he was able to use his weight ("*There's me, I said*"), but Zugbauer knows this explanation is inadequate ("*You're lighter than me, Fred./ We'd have gone together. Something smells Spanish here.*") Note however that, while most of Fredy's colleagues react with prejudice after becoming aware of "the nothing", Zugbauer does not. He is curious, and aware that Fredy is not telling him the truth. This difference becomes important later in Book IV (184).

Whereas, at this point in previous similar circumstances, Fredy would worry that he will be sacked, he does not now. Nor does he panic when the “watch Leutnant” demands to see his hands and under his shirt and, when he sees no rope burn, becomes accusatory: “*I see, but I don’t believe./ No one could do what you’ve done. Who are you, Boettcher?*” (184). Now, as in his dream in Book III about being detained after rescuing someone, instead of trying to distance himself from “the nothing”, Fredy comfortably relies on it (“I blessed the Golightlys as they pranced on stage in my head:/ *I was in a circus. Doing strongman work and trapeze*”) (184). His response is so effective that even though this matter is brought to the attention of the captain he does not sack Fredy (“that was the Captain, with his Adam’s apple at play/ in and out of his wing collar. Tasting the sack he couldn’t give me”) (185).

Neurodivergence – “Here’s me”

Here’s me, the hero, Munich papers August ’32,
here’s me in Munich; the bandages were put on by the paper
to hide my healed palms. I’d been in the German Museum

studying the first Diesel engine and cetera. (185)

This stanza contains this novel’s third and final use of the phrase “Here’s me”. This phrase is a direct address to us as the audience, and signals that this is a significant transition point in the narrative, and the beginning of a chain of events that will take some time to unfold. The one previous to this was “Here’s me around then in the hat that Laura gave me” (69), from Book II, which was the night that Fredy and Laura had sex for the first time. From this Laura became pregnant with Joe, and Laura and Fredy married. The first occasion was “Here’s me riding bareback in the sweater/ I wore to sea first” (13) at the beginning of Book I, which is the beginning of Fredy’s travels around the world. This “here’s me” marks the beginning of the events that lead to the relationship between Fredy and Hans, which continues to the end of the verse novel.

This event is also the first time Fredy witnesses what he will learn is Nazi public violence: “and the Communists were crossing the Isar bridge, red flags up without swastika, and the khaki troops’ red flags up with it,/ yelling *Juda verrecke! Bolschewisten raus!* The mobs met/ with this awful leap at each other, chains and iron bars swinging” (185).

To be present at this event, however, Fredy needs to move from the airship to Munich, and this is another role that the echoes of “here’s me”, combined with the echoes of “Munich”, achieve. The repetition, combined with enjambment, enacts a kind of awkwardness that makes it possible for Fredy to bounce the narrative between the story of his picture in the Munich paper and the story of his presence in Munich. As such, in the first line Fredy is moved from Das Rheingold to the Munich paper; in the second he is moved from the Munich paper to the city of Munich.

Both stories are fragmented in ways that make it clear which events belong to which story, while simultaneously highlighting the contrasts between them. The first story is Fredy’s interaction with the Munich Paper. It consists of the first line, then the second half of the second line and the first half of the third: “Here’s me, the hero, Munich papers August ‘32...the bandages were put on by the paper/ to hide my healed palms”. Fredy was labelled a hero and his picture was in the Munich newspaper because he saved Zugbauer from falling to his death from Das Rheingold. However, one element of Fredy’s impairment is that his wounds heal quickly, and thus his impairment was clearly visible to the newspaper photographer. He is now proudly unashamed of “the nothing” and would have had his hands photographed as they were, but the newspaper insists that the heroes of the stories they tell must be nondisabled. Therefore, Fredy is forced to bandage his hands in order to appear to be an injured nondisabled person. In short, even though Fredy does not want to mask anymore, others insist that he do so.

The second story, in response to the first, is an embodied reproach autistic-style, to the newspaper, and anyone else who thinks this kind of erasure is acceptable. It consists of the first half of the second line, then the second half of the third line and most of the fourth: “here’s me in Munich...I’d been in the German Museum/ studying the first Diesel engine and cetera”. Now that Fredy is free of the newspaper’s compulsory able-bodiedness, he goes straight to the German Museum where he can engage in his autistic intense interest in machines. This intense interest is emphasised by the phrase “and cetera” which draws attention to itself, being half in English and half the original Latin. This is a reminder of Fredy’s intense interest in words, which in turn highlights that his interest in machines is also intense. “And cetera” also carries the literal implication of an extensive list which, as part of the rest of this line, emphasises that Fredy will begin with “the first diesel engine”, and then

continue viewing many more machines, in public, with all the autistic absorption, and wonder, and the attendant pleasure, that entails.

Fredy's account of the violent event that he witnessed after his time in the museum is an example of his trees-first processing. While the main event on which most are likely to focus is the SA men's singing ("The side that stayed were singing *Make way, make way/ for our Brownshirt battalions/ Clear every street for the/ marching SA men!* to a wonderful tune") (185), Fredy is focused on one SA man who is crying from his injuries:

but I
was watching a Brownshirt with a stove-in collarbone
cough blood and cry till one of his mates leant down
and slapped his face. (185)

And, as often happens, the detail that Fredy notices soon becomes relevant because it initiates activity in the main event, where the group as a whole drag the man away ("*Millions look up with hope to the swastika, the boys sang/ and skuldragged him off*") (185).

Translating Prejudice

In the second situation where Fredy has to decide whether to defend someone, it is his best friend Sam who is being attacked. The ways in which this situation unfold are all predictable to Fredy in the sense that they align with his previous experiences of defending someone. However, this situation also has long-term consequences that Fredy has not considered or experienced before.

Fredy and Sam have not met in-person for fourteen years and arrange to do so while Fredy is staying in Munich, waiting for the next Das Rheingold flight to Singapore. Sam travels to Munich from Paris by train specifically for this purpose. When he arrives, they send his suitcase "to his hotel in its own taxi" and go to a beer hall in the English Gardens. There they discuss Fredy's separation from Laura and Joe ("We talked about being far from home/ and how I supported my family that way, whereas/ if I had their company, we'd starve together, with police insults/ for our chorus music") (185), and "Stuff he [Sam] couldn't tell/ to anyone in Europe, and only just to me", that Fredy "quarter understood" (186). During their conversation they are interrupted by a man and his mother. First the man insists that "*In Germany one speaks German*", and Fredy answers him in English. Then the man's mother

labels them “*Blackamoors and riff-raff*”, “and before I [Fredy] thought I’d called her a hag and a witch”, though he does not state whether he said this in English or German (186).

Either way the argument draws the attention of men nearby (“and great big boys in khaki with collar tabs were coming// over to take an interest.”) “*Where did you buy this nigger?*” the men ask Fredy, for the purpose of harassing Sam rather than interest in the answer. In response Fredy switches to talking in German in order to directly inform them that he is on Sam’s side rather than theirs (“*He’s an Australian like me*”). The men, hoping to spark any unconscious prejudice Fredy might have against Black people, respond: “*Do you always dress your niggers better than yourselves?/ Or are you his white nigger?*” (186)

However, before Fredy can reply, Sam turns the exchange into a translation game that he controls. Knowing that Fredy will translate for him he speaks to the men in English – “I noticed Sam was about/ to speak. He did, and I translated it to them:/ *My friend asks what army are you?*” The men recognise that Sam has control of the conversation and try to intimidate him to regain it – “*Tell him the White army/ that’ll keep little schwartzers like him in their place./ Tell him take off his shoes. No need for shoes on Sambo.*” Sensing their diminishing confidence with words, and knowing Fredy will defend him when the men become violent Sam “asked// mildly *Is he out to restore the self-respect of Germany?*” One of them responds predictably, “*What’s with this arsewipe anyway?* shouts the SA man,/ questioning me! Being puzzled sent him wild/ and he leapt at Sam”, and Fredy immediately defends Sam (“I tripped him and head-kicked him,/ took a broken liter-glass off his mate and floored him/ and the third one who’d snatched out his dagger, I broke his arm”) (186).

The group’s attention then shifts from Sam to Fredy. Sam is gleeful that he and Fredy have won against the men and says so – “*Why did they think,* Sam grinned// at the teacher and his mother, *that the Superman would be// one of their kind? Or on their side in anything?*” (186-7) Wanting only to emphasise his victory to those who began the fight, and not realising that he will give the men the idea that Fredy could indeed be their “superman”, Sam urges Fredy to translate – “He had to nudge me to translate this, and I did” (187). Sam and Fredy leave the English Gardens just as a group to capture them assemble (“The first truckload of Brownshirts pulled up outside the beer hall/ as we watched”), and they spend the rest of their evening together hiding in a church while the search for them continues (“So we talked in a porcelain church// Boots hammered past, searching for us”) (187).

Though Sam understands the men will continue to search for both of them after this evening, he worries that Fredy does not understand this. They decide that rather than following his suitcase to the hotel, Sam will abandon his suitcase and return to Paris that night. To do this, rather than use the central train station where Sam arrived in Munich, Sam and Fredy “shared a taxi out to the first village railway station” (187). However, Sam suspects that Fredy has done this only to protect Sam’s safety, and that he is not aware that he is also in danger.

A related issue is that Sam has previously warned Fredy of possible danger and offered him assistance to escape, but Fredy will not accept Sam’s assistance. This occurred when Fredy wrote to Sam about Basil allowing him to stay at Saint John (in Book III). Sam replied to say “*It sounds like a feudal retinue that you’re in*”, to warn of the danger that “*When your robber baron/ asks you to rob for him, or kill for him, will be decision day*”, and to offer “*If you can’t take your quarry home – to be murdered, remember –/ move your household to Paris. Talk Australia to me and be regaled!*” (133) In response Fredy thought “It was tempting, but: no money to move anybody”, even though he knew that Sam was offering to finance the move (133). Then, due to the stock market crash, Saint John was destroyed before the danger or otherwise of Basil’s plans became apparent to Fredy.

Nevertheless, Sam tries to assist Fredy again. He offers to pay for Fredy to return to Australia (“*I’ll shout you a steamer ticket home to Sydney, Fred./ You know I mean it, and can afford it. Why not?*”, and again Fredy does not accept (“*Ah, Sam thanks a million, but I’m on wages to Singapore,/ and I still believed it*”). However, even though Fredy does not accept Sam’s offer, Sam’s concern registers with him (“*Something he wasn’t telling me/ and I felt it*”) (187).

The next morning a representative of the men whom Fredy defended Sam from the previous evening, now identified as a Nazi, arrives where Fredy is staying (“there was this fellow in suit and tie and Nazi badge/ sitting in the best room”). The Nazi apologises for the previous evening (“*I came to apologise for the rude mistake/ one of our patrols made, annoying you yesterday in Munich./ A German hero one does not annoy!*”), compliments him on his handling of the situation (“*You dealt with them in appropriate warrior fashion*”), and coercively suggests that he join the Nazis (“*You’re invited to the Brown House, to our German minorities office.// Welcome, folk-comrade! And he pumped my hand*”) (187).

Neurodivergence – “Bewildered”

How did you know I lived here? I asked, bewildered,
then dropped down that this was Europe: every dog
and every man was registered. And the registration books
weren't barred to his lot. *When we start to turn
this debt-slave republic back into a people*, he crowed,
we will prove to know where everyone lives, you'll see that!
Your mother lives in Dresden. Frau Sietz. Have you visited her? (187)

It is important to trace the specific role of “bewildered” throughout this novel because, for Fredy, it is a word linked to disablement, (i.e. the disabling effects of nondisabled people and environments on impaired people). In this situation it emphasises the terror that Fredy currently feels. As a disabled person he has always avoided government registration because he knows that governments often target disabled people, and it is particularly important for him to do so during this visit to Germany. This is because he knows that, if he can be linked to his medical records from his visit to Germany eighteen years before, when “the nothing” first developed and he was hospitalised (Book I), then they will have proof of his disabled status and he will be hospitalised again and might never escape. It does not occur to him that the German government may already be monitoring him through methods of which he was unaware. He is “bewildered” due to his trees-first processing, which makes this information particularly difficult to comprehend quickly. This further compounds his fear, because he knows he needs to be aware of the implications of this information to respond to the Nazi effectively.

“Bewildered” has been used in this verse novel three times previously in reference to disabled people. During Fredy’s conversation with Marlene Dietrich (Book III), she raised the subject of her curiosity, as a fellow disabled person, about “the nothing”, describing him as “*bewildered and brave*” (171). Previous to this, “bewildered” was used, also in Book III, when Fredy stayed with the homeless men. He described one of them as “one who opened his crib tin up at noon and stared into it for a long time with such bewildered sorrow” (151). In a group where the percentage of disabled people is high, this is an indication that Fredy recognised this man as disabled. The previous, and first, use of bewildered is in Fredy’s description of Heimann, a man with autistic characteristics, whom Fredy met in Germany at the end of Book I (“long Heimann took no notice. All he cared about/ was not to be bewildered. To know the Rules got you that”) (49). The final two occurrences of bewildered are in reference to Hans, the autistic and intellectually impaired young man that Fredy meets later in this book.

Truth and Intuition

Soon after this visit Das Rheingold begins its next voyage, which the boss maintains will be to Singapore (“*Get your duffel,/ Fredy my son. We’re bound for the East and slit-eye mama*”). However, a short time into the journey Fredy realises that the ground below them does not look as it should (“*I looked out for drier hills and the edge of deserts/ but we never came to them. The land stayed green and green/ and goose-ponds and beet-fields.*”) Confused, Fredy seeks clarification, not from his boss, but the man he rescued during the training flight, whom he knows will tell him the truth (“*Don’t we strike Turkey soon? I asked Balz Zugbauer that I’d hauled/ up on the safety line.*”) And Zugbauer does not hesitate to answer him directly – “*We’re over Russia, Fred,/ that’s where we’re going. East into the Workers’ Paradise./ Don’t you know our government keeps an air force under wraps on airfields out there? We’re carting supplies to them*” (188).

On their third day in Russia a lorry, being pursued by two others, crashes through the barrier in front of their headquarters. Fredy observes that “*The rear flap of his truck was down, and all the length// of the steel tray was smeared with blood which big slack things/ had been dragged through*”. At first Fredy assumes it is “*a butcher’s truck/ for carrying carcasses*” (189), but it does not take long for him to intuit the danger in this situation:

I looked over the plains we were on, the slight swell and the odd
clump of whitewashed birch trees. A shiver came off it,

and I didn’t know why. Something I felt through my null
like a louse ran over my liver.

Again Zugbauer provides Fredy with the details of the situation:

*he’s been carting dead people from NKVD posts in some
of the towns around, to a big grave-trench in the woods,*

*thousands of them each week, all shot in the back of the head.
Enemies of the people, they’re called. The police have a quota,
a production norm to meet, so they pull in anyone,* (189)

German Childhoods

From his basis of security and confidence, drawn from impairment and cripp community, Fredy also begins to turn his attention outward. One of the results of this is that he is able to

relate to people and situations that he did not or could not have related to previously. The reason that he could not relate previously is not the lack of empathy imputed to autistics – he has continued to express and act on empathy throughout this verse novel – the reason is the cognitive load of masking and compulsory able-bodiedness.

One of these situations involves his mother’s partner Sietz. After Das Rheingold leaves Russia they travel to Nuremberg, and then Dresden where Fredy’s mother now lives with Sietz, and Fredy takes leave to visit them. When he arrives only his mother is there, but after dinner Sietz arrives and begins an hours-long lecture quoting from a “Jew-hating manual” (191) translated into German from Russian (this is the 1903 fake *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*). Afterwards Fredy reflects on this experience:

But also I thought,
in my bed at last, of a young fellow brought up on
a world he didn’t live in. Germany in Paraguay.
At least I was raised unfussy and bush-casual
to fit where I was. I wondered if he spoke Paraguayan. (192)

Here Fredy compares his childhood in Australia with what he imagines Sietz’s childhood in Paraguay was. Fredy was raised “to fit where I was”, as evidenced by the beginning of this novel with Fredy describing “sausage day”, where he, his parents, and his brother, each take their turn making “weisswurst” on their “farm outside Dungog” (13). In other words, as well as being taught German language and culture, Fredy was also taught Australian language and culture, and consequently was not alienated from the country in which he grew up. Sietz, Fredy suspects, was taught German language and culture, but not Paraguayan language and culture. Thus he did not fit where he lived as a child, and developed an intense longing for the Germany that he had continually learned about but had not experienced.

To be clear, Fredy is not suddenly agreeing with or justifying Sietz’s politics. Fredy thinks of Sietz’s lecture that: “it all started to sound like a half-smart man’s excuse/ for failure in life” (192). At the same time that Fredy believes Sietz is using Nazi rhetoric as a convenient excuse for his own lack of success, he recognises the similarities of their childhoods, and the possible differences that may have advantaged Fredy and disadvantaged Sietz.

It is important to note here too that Fredy’s security and confidence as a disabled person, which has led to this transformation in his understanding of Sietz, also demonstrates a

transformation in Fredy's response to trauma. In Book II engaging with Sietz's views had a detrimental effect on "the nothing". At that time Sietz argued that Fredy should not have allowed an Aboriginal woman and her son to stay at Fredy's house ("I had this big bad sudden row with Sietz/ over the savages he said we were harbouring, their threat to Joe"). Consequently Fredy awoke the next morning to find that his arms, which had regained sensation a few years earlier, had returned to being numb ("Next morning my arms were gone. No hands, nothing, to the shoulders") (102). Now, while he still disagrees to the same degree with Sietz's political views, he is not traumatised by them and the degree of his numbness does not change.

Considering Sides – Residence

The next day Fredy and his mother, without Sietz, have coffee on Bruhl terrace. During their conversation Fredy inadvertently raises the topic of choosing sides, by asking his mother does she "miss home" (192). Unlike their conversation in Book II, when Fredy asked if his mother had read his letters detailing how he acquired "the nothing" and she continually responded with multiple and therefore confusing messages, this time her communication is direct. Consequently, they both understand the conversation, but this does not mean they understand each other's position.

Part of the reason for this is that neither knows the other's previous experiences of prejudice and acceptance. Fredy, as a disabled person, has never experienced, and therefore expected, acceptance anywhere, and has never had a "fatherland". Even though he was born in Australia and had German parents which, in theory, gave him two potential "fatherlands", he was also born impaired which, because of compulsory able-bodiedness, meant that, until he lived at Saint John, he had not experienced unconditional acceptance anywhere. And of course, even though disabled people are all over the world, we do not have a "fatherland" and, to one degree or another, every country rejects disabled people who apply for citizenship.

By contrast, Fredy's mother, as a nondisabled person, expects acceptance, and does have a fatherland. She grew up knowing that she was welcome in every country in the world and travelled from Germany to Australia when she was fourteen. When Australians discriminated against her because of her Germanness, she knew she could return to her fatherland and be

accepted without question. Even after World War I, she still would have been welcomed in a number of European countries.

Coming from these vastly different origins, Fredy and his mother find it difficult to register each other's meaning. When Fredy asks "did she miss home", he is referring to the farm in Australia where they lived and, thereby, trying to invoke shared memories of their family. With his mother's response, "and she asked where that was. Not surely in that country/ where she wasted thirty years going from foreign to the enemy", she is referring to the larger space of Australia as a whole, and a broader set of relationships than their family. To try to connect with her, Fredy then broadens his definition of home to encompass the district surrounding their farm – "*But we had German friends,/ German relations*". However, they are each still focused on different types of relationships (192).

The obstacle continually preventing them from understanding each other is compulsory able-bodiedness. As someone who had to travel halfway around the world to find people that unconditionally accepted him, Fredy thinks of having some people in your local district who accept you as an incredible luxury, even if it is only a small group. And he assumes that being in that position would make other prejudices insignificant. This is the fake promise of compulsory able-bodiedness – that each impaired person just needs to normalise their body, and then they will be unconditionally accepted by others. The other side of this coin is that many nondisabled people, including Fredy's mother, believe that compulsory able-bodiedness is not a prejudice at all in the same way that, say, racism is. They believe that compulsory able-bodiedness is natural because having a body that is anything other than normal means there is something wrong with the person, whereas there is nothing wrong with someone of a different race. Thus, she has not even contemplated the prejudice Fredy has experienced. In short, though Fredy and his mother have both experienced being a targeted group, the nature of prejudice in general, and compulsory able-bodiedness in particular, obstructs each from recognising that the other has been a victim of discrimination.

This is complicated by two more differences in their positions. One is that, as Fredy's mother then points out to him, "*You were not there for the worst.*" In other words, she has not detailed to him the amount of prejudice that she experienced in Australia while he was overseas, and that she is clearly traumatised by. And Fredy, like many offspring, has only focused on his experience of his father's death, and has not thought about the circumstances

surrounding it from his mother's position. She now explains to him that "*We were alone, the relations were alone, each family./ The wives with British husbands were alone*".

Unfortunately, she finishes with "*One should live among own people and own ways*", which triggers Fredy's belief that his mother's words are "Sietz talking" rather than a reflection of her own thoughts. Fredy's response, "*My father did think that, and it gave way under him*", contradicts his last statement about the benefits of having friends and relations of the same nationality nearby, and demonstrates that he is now arguing from unconscious emotion rather than trying to understand his mother's position (192).

Though Fredy has recently understood Sietz's position on the world, he still resents his mother marrying Sietz, especially since Sietz has described Fredy's father as a "peasant" (102), and this is the other difference in their positions. Having only thought about his mother's situation in theory, he believes that by marrying Sietz his mother has betrayed his father and, thereby, him. However, his mother was not living in theory, but managing the practicalities of her life as a German woman in 1920s Australia. It can reasonably be assumed that if she had had the choice between Fredy's father or Sietz as a partner she would have chosen Fredy's father. Instead her choice was between being alone in a country that had killed her husband and rejected her, or marrying someone who loved her fatherland with the fervour that she did.

Also, marrying Sietz provided her with the opportunity to leave Australia where she felt threatened, and return to Germany where she felt safe. She hints at this when she succinctly summarises Fredy's father's circumstances: "*He thought he belonged there. And he did belong to the hills/ but not to the neighbours. That is what killed him.*" What she does not say is "I was frightened that would kill me too". This is why, when Fredy then responds "*will it kill me if I don't give up speaking German?*", he then thinks "cold ran over my innards as I said it/ at how much in me was already killed. For that reason?" Again, Fredy has some intuitive understanding of the deeper implications of their conversation, and the unconscious aspect of "the nothing", but he is not yet able to grasp the connections between these and the trauma he experienced (192).

To turn away from the intensity of these implications, Fredy reverts to the idea that it is possible to not choose a side: "*Split belonging's killed war, in me./ Being on any two sides spoils you for all sides.*" When Fredy's mother disagrees with his assertion that one should

never choose a “side” (“*For right against wrong?* snapped my mother. *For decent against low?*”), he changes the topic (192).

Neurodivergence – “Angler-Saxons”

I looked over at
the towering Prot church with all its tiers of handholds,

and the cutwaters of the big stone bridge to fellows fishing
on the other side. *Are those the angler-Saxons?* (192)

This “angler-Saxons” pun is an autistic technique which has a purpose for both Fredy as a character and as a narrator. As a character Fredy uses this pun to direct the conversation away from the topic of choosing a side because he is overwhelmed by it. For him as a narrator this pun is an autistic way to allude to the point that both he and his mother had not realised, which is that even “fatherland” is a much more unstable concept than it seems. They are having coffee on Bruhl terrace, which is in Anglo-Saxon territory, but even though it is considered to be a landmark it is not stable. It has been demolished and rebuilt a number of times. In 1932, when Fredy and his mother meet there, it had only been open to the public for a century, which was half of its modern life. The current configuration of Germany had only existed for sixty years, and who had owned that land in the previous centuries, and whether they were German or not, is a matter of perspective.

Inattention and Attention

It is not long before Fredy witnesses another Nazi attack, which is the third situation where he has to decide whether, or how, to defend someone. After visiting his mother, Fredy is sacked from his job on Das Rheingold because they discover he has an Australian rather than a German passport. Thus, to earn money, he returns to performing his strongman act in village pubs (“billiard tables, farm rollers, stone-boats, big draught horses,/ it seemed I had everything floating off the ground”) (193). One evening, when he is performing in a cabaret, the act after his begins – “*On the heath with girl or boy/ I lose all my strength through joy*” – when a group of Nazis “bounced up/ at a shout of command and went for him” (194).

The performer’s lines are very clever. Strength Through Joy, though it in fact did not exist until late 1933, was one of the largest Nazi organisations. It subsidised leisure activities such as movies, hikes, and cruises. In effect its role was as a Hitler Youth for adults, occupying their leisure time while monitoring and moulding their behaviour. I presume that the

performer's lines are Murray's adaption of – "In the fields and on the heath/ I lose Strength through Joy" – which was a common satirical line about the many young women from Hitler Youth who went to the country to perform a year's worth of service on a farm, and returned home pregnant.⁶ And by referring to being "On the heath with girl or boy", Murray suggests that the singer did not have a gender preference, which meant the he was queer, and thus a member of another group targeted by the Nazis.

As Fredy observes that "no one opposed them. Everybody sat tight", he decides to defend the performer. However, he is unsure of being able to match the strength of a "block" of men, until he realises that he is now under threat as well ("The boys with the Nazi badges looked me over") and needs to act. Having nothing else in mind he tries a new strategy: "I had/ a crumpled poker still in my hand, and I cracked it/ straight like a whip. I never knew that could be done". The Nazis do not know how to respond, as Fredy relates to us through his intense interest in words – "and their mouths gaped like shop windows offering apes/ for sale, as the German saying goes." It saves Fredy from being taken, or visited later, but does not save the performer ("They took poor Bruno away, head-kicked and kidney-punched") (194).

Fredy soon witnesses another violent attack by the Nazis in public ("In Kassel I saw a man/ tear down the street whimpering with SA at his heels") (195-6). This is the fourth situation in which Fredy has to decide whether to defend someone, and he involves himself without hesitation. However, the Nazis shoot the man so fast that there is not time for Fredy to intervene ("he plunged into an alley. There was a shot") (196). In order not to be as passive as the cabaret audience were, Fredy continues to observe the situation as a method of disapproval of the Nazis' actions. However, he then realises that the purpose of this murder was to attract public attention: "they came out/ glowering at me. *Go and look!* they snapped,/ *See how we treat trash*" (196). Doing so Fredy realises that the man was disabled ("There was a cardboard placard/ hung round his neck, as he sat there dead in his blood:/ *Congenital Criminal*, it read", and that the man's murder was planned ("They must have been carrying it/ from where they'd meant to shoot him. They'd had no time/ to letter it there in the alley") (196).

⁶ William L. Shirer, *20th Century Journey: The Nightmare Years 1930-1940* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), cxci.

Complicating Defence

The fifth situation has consequences that Fredy has not faced before, and that cause him to reconsider the idea that successfully defending someone is always as straightforward as physically intervening on their behalf and winning the fight. Fredy is out walking one afternoon, soon after the previous Nazi attack, and he witnesses “a disturbance”, and people literally choosing which side they are on (“people crossing/ over to the other side to dodge it”) (199). This, like the murder of the “congenital criminal”, is a planned attack to demonstrate Nazi control:

SA men
had an old fellow down on the footpath, making him dip
his beard in a billy of milk and scrub the concrete.
Come on Isidore, put the rabbinical back into it!

Fredy’s friend notices he is about to intervene and suggests he does not for his own safety (“*Don’t interfere, Fred. You’re mad. They’ll flay you alive./ You’ll never see Laura or Joe again.*”) However, perhaps due to his shame at not defending Peter Salomon, and believing, from when he defended Sam against Nazis, that he will win and that will end the situation (“But a man, he can’t/ resist himself sometimes”), he ignores the warning and intervenes. And of course he does win (“I smashed them, one two three/ and the fourth drew a gun on me, squealing as he did/ and I crushed his hand over it. Where it would stay crushed”) (199).

However, Fredy’s win does not resolve the situation, it only defers its consequences. Fredy had not considered this possibility, and does not become aware of it until the man explains it to him:

They [the Nazis] crawled on the pavement, and the poor Jew [the man Fredy defended] said
You have killed me, young man.
It took till they staggered off for what he’d said to reach me.

You have got me my death. Run now or you will die too. (199)

This is the first time that Fredy has been forced to consider when violence is involved in government targeting of minoritised groups. Fredy is in Germany because he has been exiled from Australia as a consequence of retaliation by government-affiliated gangsters. And Fredy knows, in theory at least, that violence against minoritised groups by government does occur. However, he has not yet considered how this occurs in practice. In fact he has refused to

consider how this occurs in practice, which returns us again to his trauma from Trabzon – he is still struggling to acknowledge that humans will comfortably inflict violence on other humans, just because they have labelled those humans “other”. Additionally, until now he has tried to maintain that if he had intervened in the mass murder he would have improved the situation. Whereas the situation he is currently in confronts him with the evidence that reality is much more complicated; that perhaps, even with a gun, he might not have been able to help the women murdered in Trabzon.

Fredy then learns another layer of how such situations can occur in practice. Imagining it is still possible for the Jewish man to escape the future consequences of this situation, Fredy continues:

Where do you live? I asked, as he put his little hat on and his big hat over it. *Here, in number thirty*, he said. *Cut your hair and beard and make a bolt for the train*, I suggested to him. *Now.* (199)

And then the Jewish man explains to him the future consequences that his suggestion would create: “But he looked an old man’s look/ like up through deep water. *That would expose my family/ and students to my punishment*, he said” (199).

As genuinely community-minded as Fredy is he has not considered the community-wide consequences of these situations until now, and he realises that they are obvious and, unlike many of the situations he has encountered so far, cannot be resolved by his physical strength (“and I stood there dumbstruck, holding my useless hands”) (199).

Deciding Where to Belong

The long-term consequences of this situation take some time to become apparent to Fredy. This is because Fredy is hidden by Franz, a man who saw him intervene in the Nazi attack on the Jewish man. Franz is part of a group who try to assist people under threat to escape from Germany. After a while they have not yet found a shipping job for Fredy, but cannot continue to conceal him, so he returns to the circus, where he was previously working, to wait.

Since he is again working the Nazis soon find him. They ask, for the second time, for him to join them (“Muscle-boys in uniform came to me. *Join us! What have you/ got against joining*

us? Come home into the Reich!") (201) This time, when Fredy refuses, they capture him at night and bring him to the Columbia-Haus. There he is questioned by Artur Gunst, who Fredy had shared a house with in Hollywood (Book III). He reviews their file on Fredy ("*You've been spying, you've been a hero,/ you've twice bashed Party-comrades, you've rescued a dirty Jew/ and got him a trot round the boot-testing track at Sachsenhausen*"). He then asks again for Fredy to join them ("*I'd say the only thing that might save you from the same/ might be to join us. Be the NS-superman/ at the Berlin Olympics in three years*") (202). This is half historically accurate: Sachsenhausen was not open for another three years, but testing military footwear was one of the tasks that prisoners there were forced to perform.

Again, though Fredy cannot respond he intuitively understands the complexity and danger of this situation. He has an immediate physical response – "A rat crawled inside me and I tasted it" – and is unable to answer ("I was too clogged to answer. I thought my heart/ was going to choke me, in fact"), and so he is thrown into a prison cell while he considers "this rotten rope I was tempted to grab" (202).

It might seem logical that Fredy should have no difficulty making this decision since he has been resolutely opposed to Nazi-type ethics. However, his decision, like his mother's about whether to marry Sietz, is not between theories but practicalities. On one side is the promise that he will be completely accepted by a country, for the first time in his life. Here, in Germany, he feels as at home in the physicality of the country as he does in Australia. However, in Australia, as a German, he was made to feel unwelcome by other Australians. Also, both in Australia and while travelling, he has never been truly welcomed into a nation by its people anywhere, until now. In short, to borrow Fredy's mother's words about his father, Fredy has always belonged to the land, or to the sea surrounding it, but never to the neighbours. A regular reminder of this throughout the novel has been the mispronunciations of his last name. In Book I he was called "Butcher" (21), "Boytcher" (28), "Buttiker" (36), "Beecher" (38), "Beeching" (44), and "Boettischer" (47); in Book II he was called "Beitcher" (59), "Butcher" (60), "Beotisher" (63), "Belcher" (94), "Blucher" (94), "Bo'sher" (107), "Boaticher" (117), "Beecher" (121), and "Booche" (121); in Book III he was called "Boucher" (167), and "Bircher" (170). In this book, while Fredy is in Germany, others have spoken his last name five times, and it is always pronounced correctly as "Boettcher" (183, 184, 193).

Additionally, Germany under the Nazis is the first country that has welcomed Fredy as a disabled person. With the exception of the communities of disabled people in America, Fredy has had to mask his impairments everywhere he goes and is always rejected whenever they are witnessed. Now, under the Nazi regime, he is not only welcomed, but specifically wanted, to such an extent that “the nothing” is not considered an impairment anymore. We know that the Nazis have decided that “the nothing” is not an impairment because their goal was to breed what they believed to be the ideal human, and breed out everyone else (including impaired people), and they encourage Fredy to breed (“*What have you got against joining us? Come home into the Reich! A wife? Divorce her! Forget her. Find a blond Berlin dolly. Find dozens of them. A bloodline like yours should breed!*”) (201)

Imagine how tempting this acceptance is to Fredy who, although he no longer has a need for acceptance by nondisabled people, still experiences the trauma of having not been accepted by nondisabled people for the past thirty-seven years, and now is being offered the promise of an end to that constant rejection. Furthermore, the Nazis accept “the nothing” in ways that he is not sure he does, since they want him to breed but, earlier in this novel, he was not sure if he should (“I wasn’t ready for kids – but wasn’t I fit to breed from?/ Was she saying that? Or did I suspect it of myself?”) (73). The other side of Fredy’s dilemma is the likelihood that his only other option is death. As he points out, he is in a cell that is “for most in them, the second last/ thing in the world” (202).

Eventually, the Nazis throw Fredy out on the street. He had not made a decision, perhaps because he realised that, like Basil, the Nazis valued “the nothing” but not his autistic characteristics. Nevertheless, presumably the Nazis calculated that while he would not experience the effects of torture because of “the nothing”, he would soon experience the effects of not having a job or any way to escape from Germany (“No one who walked out of the Columbia-Haus alive/ was likely to be trusted again. I might be a V-Mann,/ a trusty in the mighty jail of the New Germany”), and would then find he had no choice but to join the Nazis. And, at least to begin with, those calculations are correct. Fredy finds that “when I looked for Franz [the man who had hidden him], no doors would open”, a shipping job he had been promised disappeared (“They came to the phone and were nervous, they’d never heard of me, *no, no vacancy for me, please, thank you, goodbye, all right?*”), and, while he was able to return to his circus job he found that “Leland was the only person in the circus who’d talk to me/ with any enthusiasm” (203).

Drawing a Line

The Nazis' calculations may have stayed correct if Fredy had not met Hans, whose situation became the sixth one where Fredy had to decide whether to intervene. Fredy and Hans meet in late 1933, when Fredy is at a train station in Berlin, and Hans asks him for assistance (*"Pardon please Sir, he started, like something learned by heart/ and still shaky on it, and looked hopeful, ran out of words/ and handed me a letter"*) (203). The letter reveals that Hans was ordered to be one of the first victims of the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring:

The letter gave the address of a medical clinic
where he was to report that midday to be sterilized,
by removal of both testicles in accordance with the Law
for the Safeguarding of Hereditary Health of 14 July that year. (203)

This timing is slightly inaccurate. The sterilisation law was passed on 14 July 1933 but came into effect on 1 January 1934. Of course this does not mean that sterilisations of disabled people were not performed beforehand. It does, however, mean that they are unlikely to have involved an official letter. Also, most of the time the sterilisation procedure used for men was vasectomy rather than castration.

Fredy feels deeply personally committed to assisting Hans to escape sterilisation for two reasons. One reason is that Fredy believes sterilisation is cruel, difficult to justify when it is performed on animals, and should not be considered for humans:

I was up against partly why

I went to sea: all the gelding you have to do on farms,
sometimes it seems only one of any male thing there
is allowed its knackers. It used to make me sick
doing the job, and sad after, when they looked so bewildered
and broken-hearted. Life didn't flow through them any more
but stopped at them and left them just muscle.
You knew they sensed it
and felt shamed by it. Stallions would kill geldings for it. (203)

The other reason is that Hans is a disabled person. While eugenicists use a person's impairment to justify sterilising or murdering them, Fredy believes that if a person is impaired that is yet another reason that they should not be targeted, and that targeting them is

particularly cruel. This is especially so for Hans, who does not understand what the official letter he is carrying is ordering (“He’d no more idea than a bull calf going to be cut/ what was in store for him”) (203). This further indicates that Hans’s family have sent Hans to the appointment without explaining to him that his testicles will be removed. Thus Fredy explains it to him now – “*They’re going to cut out your balls, I said to Hans*” (204). Hans’s response – “and he covered his ears with his hands. *That’s rude*, he shouted”, and his focus on Fredy referring to something “rude” rather than that the letter orders his sterilisation, indicates his intellectual impairment, and how cruel his parents are to have sent him to this appointment. Fredy cannot resist a pun, and also affirms that he will assist Hans to escape – “*Bloody rude, I agreed with him. You don’t want that, eh?*” (204)

Though Fredy is certain about his commitment to assist Hans, he spends some time considering the form that his intervention should take. He has learned from the earlier situation, defending the Jewish man, that direct action, such as confronting Hans’s parents and demanding that they leave Germany with Hans, might not be effective, or might have other negative consequences. Therefore, he buys himself some time to deliberate on the best strategy by taking Hans to the zoo. Once there he first considers the parameters of the problem inside Germany:

What will I do with him? I’m asking myself. Next week

he’ll get another letter with maybe a cop to ensure
he keeps his appointment this time. I’d have to keep him,
kidnap him, get him out of Germany (204)

Then he considers the parameters of the problem outside Germany – “to where? No country would want him, they’d send him back/ to Germany and the doctors. Who were only doing what others/ didn’t do, but agreed with” (204). Unlike other groups persecuted by the Nazis, disabled people were not given sanctuary in other countries. Fredy decides the best option is to return with Hans to his family’s house and convince them that he should accompany Hans to the next sterilisation appointment. This slight delay will not endanger Hans and will provide Fredy with some time to consider how they will escape from Germany, and where they will go.

At Hans’s family’s house Fredy finds, not to his surprise, but to his disappointment, that Hans’s parents not only support the sterilisation of their son, but believe not sterilising him

would be callous, and his sister will not advocate for him. When Hans's father expresses his reverence for Hitler, Fredy asks "*Even though he'd alter your son?*" In response Hans's father asks, "*why did I want the German race weakened with/ sentimental claptrap?*" And Hans's mother adds, "*so cruel, to want her poor boy burdened with desires/ he could never fulfil unless in the disgrace/ of some unfortunate girl forced to raise more imbeciles*" (204).

Neurodivergence – “Green is the Golden Tree”

Like a lot of German houses they had these plaques on the wall
with sayings lettered on them. Green is the golden tree of life,

J.W.v. Goethe, went one. Make up your mind, I told it. (204-5)

Fredy's consideration of this plaque demonstrates his autistic observation of the scene, as well as his method for managing the difficult emotion of it. This is because Hans's mother has just implicitly stated that she is ashamed to have Hans as a son. Furthermore, Hans's mother's statement goes unchallenged by Hans's father and sister.

Fredy finds the mother's assertion, and the silent response to it, extremely painful on behalf of Hans in particular and disabled people in general. However, since he is trying to convince Hans's family that he should accompany Hans to the sterilisation appointment, and since he has already challenged them once and been met with hostility towards both himself and Hans, he knows he cannot risk challenging them a second time.

The plaque also highlights the father's and mother's eugenic values. They have just accused Fredy of being "sentimental" and "cruel" for suggesting that their son should not have his testicles removed, and yet they value the plaque's message, which has been rendered ridiculous by being taken out of context. The statement on the plaque insists that a golden tree is green, which is why Fredy says, "Make up your mind".

Moreover, the full quote is: "Listen, my friend: the golden tree of life is green, all theory is grey".⁷ Thus it was originally intended to advocate that theories such as eugenics cannot account for the practicalities of living, and should not have more significance than life itself.

⁷ Johan Wolfgang Von Goethe, "Faust," trans. John R. Williams, in *The Essential Goethe*, ed. Matthew Bell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 298.

Leaving Germany

Having also learned from intervening when the Jewish man was being attacked that sometimes it is useful to agree with attackers' demands temporarily, Fredy pretends to have realised that Hans's parents are correct and he is not ("I made out they were convincing me. I gave way bit by bit:/ *I'd have to agree. That works with cattle. I admit that.*") Then he offers to take Hans to his rescheduled appointment ("So I'd get their trust/ then volunteer to take young Hans to where they wouldn't// and whip him over the border instead. They'd thank me in their hearts"), and they agree ("I collected Hans next morning early with a port/ of clothes for his hospital stay, toothpaste and comb/ which he'd had none of the first time when I'd met him") (205).

Another example of Fredy's sense of security and confidence strengthening his ability to understand positions he disagrees with then occurs when he is leaving Germany with Hans on a boat they steal, and reflecting on how he feels about 1933 Germany and German people: "Germany was my people but not my country, was the short of it./ Germany was my people who had lost the War/ and I hadn't, so I couldn't cotton to their Adolf" (207). Fredy has previously tried to understand why the people of a country might act in solidarity with the genocidal beliefs of that country's leader, but he now recognises a possible cause. He recognises that the difference between him and other Germans might only be a matter of different circumstances, and that he may well have thought as they do if he had lived in Germany when they lost World War I. Similar to the scene where Fredy understands Sietz's position, this scene is likewise connected with Fredy's ability to manage trauma. For the first time he explicitly describes how the trauma operates in his body: "My Struggle was a body that wouldn't face atrocity, and vanished" (207). This is a new understanding which is a direct result of his security and confidence as a disabled person, and especially his relationship with Marlene Dietrich (Book III). When he described his impairment to her during their first meeting his understanding of his reaction to trauma was uncertain: "*I think it's the Inner Man/ keeps me from some strife. Maybe he feels, and just won't tell me*" (171). However, her recitation of "The Panther" gave him a method for understanding the fluidity of impairment, disability, and society, that he had not encountered before, and which made sense to him ("It sat me up. This wasn't the Turk's or Thoroblood's 'poems',/ big, dangerous, baggy. This was the grain distilled./ This was the sort that might not get men killed" (170).

By leaving Germany, however, he demonstrates that his contemplation on the issue of “sides” has broadened. That yes, it is one thing to understand why a person, or country, think as they do, but it is quite another to excuse any actions they take simply because one can follow their logic. For Fredy sterilising a person, and especially a disabled person, is unacceptable, regardless of who is advocating for it, or why they are advocating.

Having stolen the boat and left Germany, Fredy’s plan is to travel to Denmark, but they land at the domain of the Dowager Countess zu Knull, in the Ordensstaat. This is a territory that existed in the middle ages, and its location is described as being located where Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia now meet. It is fortunate they did not land in Denmark, because Denmark was sterilising disabled people at this time, as were most European countries.⁸ And they most likely would either have sterilised Hans themselves, or sent him back to Germany for sterilisation.

Considering Sides – Misidentified

While staying at the palace of the Dowager Countess zu Knull, Fredy has three encounters with the countess that shatter any remaining ideas he may have had on the straightforwardness of “sides”. The first occurs when one of the palace staff tortures Hans (“I never caught sight of Her Translucence again/ till the day I caught the coachman tormenting Hans with his whip:/ *Hopp, Dummerjan, hoppla!*”) In defence of Hans, Fredy does the same to the coachman (“I caught him, pulled his coat up/ over his head and thrashed him with that same thin leather stinger./ *I’ll kill you arsehole!* he muffled out, rolling in the gravel”) (209).

Consequently, the countess has Fredy brought to her and begins the conversation on the topic of “sides”: “*You defend the weak, Herr Golightly?*” Before he can answer she continues:

Where does it come from: I daresay from all the old centuries
of being under them, this holding your hat in your hands
over your privates when you are fronting the noblefolk,
then being wild with them and yourself for it, after? (209)

After responding to her observation (“I managed to notice and wrench my hands apart, letting go/ of the hat they weren’t holding”), he then draws the same clear line regarding others’

⁸ Suzanne E. Evans, *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 107.

treatment of Hans: “*I didn’t set out to, I said// but any man torments a bloke like Hans is scum*”. When, in order to understand the limits of the line he has drawn, she offers to have the coachman flogged or hanged, he broadens his remit to people with less power (“*I’d have to defend him then,/ I heard myself say. He’s the weak one, against you*”) (209). Yet, when he tells her the truth about his and Hans’s situation she immediately sympathises, and places the Nazi sterilisations in historical context:

*It was one difference between the Northern tribes, she said
in a different tone, and Greece and Rome:
They exposed their blighted children to predators in the wild:*

*we feared to hurt ours. It could bring a curse on us. Their tales
are full of such curses. You are a German! This Hitler is a Greek!* (210)

Her observation sounds like a reflection on a history to which she is unconnected. However, that night, while searching for a drink of water, Fredy overhears her state that this history is a current project for her: “*We have ruled Europe since Rome fell,/ we nobles, the only Germans. All/ you rest are a mingled peasantry*” (211).

Fredy is confused by this, and further confused when she requests to speak with him again. Ostensibly the meeting is to inform him that she has organised berths on a ship for him and Hans, but both of them know there is more to discuss. As Fredy says:

*Her Translucence summoned me again, to say
we had a ship, out of some port I’d never heard of.
I wondered that she hadn’t simply got me told.
Some queer good form to a guest?* (212)

In other words, the countess could have simply organised for a servant to inform him of the arrangements. Therefore, there is another reason that she has chosen to meet with him.

The other reason for the meeting is that they both implicitly trust each other but, although the countess suspects that she knows why, she wants to confirm it (“Turned out I’d puzzled her.”) Thus the countess directly asks him” “*Why, Mr Golightly, did you/ confide in me about your efforts to flee Germany?/ I might have had you arrested and sent to Berlin.*”) Fredy knows that she is correct, but is unable to find the words to describe why (“There she had me. I thought, for the first time, about it/ and got puzzled myself And grinned, and told her so,) then he adds: “*don’t ask me why: I must have thought you were above that*” (212).

For the Countess Fredy's answer confirms that he trusts her as much as she trusts him, and that it is safe to reveal the reason for that trust to him. She asks him to walk with her and he agrees ("*Will you walk with me?*" she asked. *Why er gladly*, I stammered"), and so she has her servants organise the chair and men who will carry her ("She pulled a long silk plait and spoke to a servant/ and a chair was brought in, on two shafts. Men carried it"). One might assume that this is due to her nobility, but she reveals to Fredy that it is also due to her physical impairment ("Madam lit from her chair// and hobbled, in pain and crooked, under big chestnut trees.") She describes her life prior to her impairment ("*I walked, I strode, I danced*"), then the sudden onset of a condition that resembles multiple sclerosis ("*then, within weeks, I crumbled. Here where we now are/ I had sent my companion away, to be alone. I'd sat down/ and I could not rise. It amazed me. Disobeyed by my bones!*") (213). Then she tells him another experience of implicit understanding and trust that is similar to the embodied expertise they share:

*Then I became afraid, but could not endure to cry out,
not on my own domain. Foolish pride, you see, Mr Golightly.
What happened? The mares came, from their field just by;*

*someone had left the gate ajar, and they came to me
and bent their heads down to me, till I understood to lift
my arms over their two necks. And be lifted up, and walked slowly
back through the trees, to where my servants saw and came running.
I confess my toes often trailed, as those two mares walked me. (213)*

Neurodivergence – “good damn cretin”

Hans woke and squawked *Can we*

*go home now, Fredy? I've been a good damn cretin. –
Who called you that? But he sat picking his face
which he'd just taken up. Blood like from lice on his fingers.
It's hard for them out among sneaky pushed-around people,
the simple ones need us decent. Some do rise to them. (212)*

This occurs towards the end of their stay in the palace. It implies that the servants have continued to torment Hans by teaching him to refer to himself using derogatory words for an intellectually impaired person. And it demonstrates the ongoing distress that this harassment causes Hans who, like Fredy softly banging his head in Book II, stims to manage severe stress.

Considering Sides – Dissident

On their way to Australia Fredy and Hans visit Sam in Paris. After dinner the conversation turns to who should leave Germany and, again, the topic of “sides”. Sam begins:

*You getting Hansel away equipped for Gretel is a start.
Millions more need to go. Then he added I've also got some to leave
your parents' Fatherland. Mad, though. Most Jews won't listen.
Run, from that corporal? We're Germans too. It'll return to normal. (215)*

Fredy initially responds to this topic in the same way that he did when previously discussing it with Sam, and with Fredy's mother, “*Aren't they really Germans, though?*” I asked”. However, when Sam responds “*Are blackfellers Australian?/ Sam asked me. If you're different are you the same?*” Fredy's experience with Hans means that he now understands Sam's point. Under Fredy's previous understanding of “sides”, the Nazis should have evaluated both him and Hans as impaired. The fact that Fredy was evaluated so positively that the Nazis wanted him to represent them at the Olympics, while Hans was evaluated so negatively that the Nazis ordered that he be sterilised, has confirmed for Fredy that “side” is a socially constructed concept. Therefore Sam's point now makes profound sense to him: “That one reached right through me. *Never have just the one passport, son*” (215).

Impairment and Fredy's Family

After Fredy and Hans arrive home in Newcastle, Fredy's son Joe completely accepts both of them, but Laura does not. With Fredy, Joe is endlessly curious (“Joe, who had got twice as tall,/ couldn't get enough of Zeppelins, Hollywood, Nazis”) (216). And though Fredy had worried that Joe would begrudge Hans living with them, they quickly become family (“He'd taken to Hans, where I'd been dead scared he'd resent him./ *Du Hansi komm schon!* and off they'd go down the beach/ or over to Sugarloaf Mountain and the farms out there” (219). A significant factor in their quick rapport is Joe's knowledge of German, learned from Fredy's mother when he was young. When Laura says she cannot talk to Hans, “Joe said I *can*, and did, from babyhood with his grandma/ and not too rusty yet. Hans stared for a while, then talked back/ as if here was the real talk, that others seemed queer in refusing him” (216).

By contrast, Laura is initially resentful of both Fredy and Hans, due to their impairments. As evidenced by Fredy not crying or publicly stinging in this book, “the nothing” has become an integrated and typical part of his experience, as he explains: “I'd forgotten most of touch; I

had got used/ to the inner man dealing with where I stopped and things started./ Only puffs at each end of me told me when lifting was a strain” (220). In other words, as most people who acquire an impairment do, Fredy has adapted to finding new ways of sensing his bodily experience. In this case, since he does not experience the soreness of his muscles, he knows that lifting is difficult for him when he begins breathing heavily or farting.

Yet Laura dislikes Fredy’s acceptance of himself. For example, he initially reports his experience of sex with Laura in entirely positive terms – “and my welcome from Laura, that’s lovely to remember, and private” (216). However, she continues to bring negative attention to “the nothing”. First this is with regard to sex, which changes how he describes it to us – “The nothing took away from my homecoming, but I played it// down when Laura asked” (216-7). Then she continues to insist that his acceptance of his impairment is problematic – “she said *Comfort is in every part of the skin./ You ought to go through the motions of that. It might bring you back*” (220). This is another common experience for people who acquire an impairment. Self-acceptance is not the final step in the adjustment process. The final step is having people who accept that you accept yourself. And those who believe that having an impairment is an inherently lesser life try to diminish disabled people who are comfortable with their impairments.

With Hans, Laura simply refuses to communicate with him, or understand his position. It is difficult for them to speak since Laura has not learnt German, but she also does not attempt to communicate with him by any other means. After a week of being deliberately ignored by Laura, on top of everything else he has endured, Hans has a meltdown and destroys the presents he is given for Christmas (“But next morning/ the presents he’d got were all ruined. The mug was broken,// the pyjamas ripped apart, the swimming trunks razored.”) Hans is clearly in severe distress, first in front of the others (“His face was unjointed, like a skin bag wobbling with passions/ from fury to shame. *Stubborn hateful bad!* he shouted”), and then alone, repeating the same words (“*Hartnackig gehässig* bos sobbed Hans, picking at his dinner/ on a blue enamel plate in his room.”) Fredy relates to his experience (“I put my arm round him./ Not his fault he had to be lost a world away from home./ Not his fault he was bewildered, and wild at us and himself”), and he reminds Hans of why it was necessary to bring him to Australia (“*Bad man Hitler was going to cut you, Hanno,/ down there in the rude parts. Make you like a sleepy old cat. –/ Wicked man, the Hitler? – Wicked man! Have a happy Christmas*”) (217).

Despite Hans's circumstances, Laura disregards his experience, though she does at least try to understand why Fredy brought Hans to Australia. Initially, after Hans's meltdown, she blames Hans, and still refuses to communicate with him, addressing Fredy instead (*"Is this how it's to be? A mad baby man in our house?"*) Later that day, perhaps after contemplating Fredy's friend Cos's opinion on Hans's situation (*"if he's short in his brains/ he deserves all the more to keep everything that does work!/ Only fair"*) (217), she theoretically understands Hans's position, but only communicates this to Fredy and Cos:

*Most people, she said,
if they do any at all, do ordinary-sized kindness.
Not my Fred. He smuggles a whole adult round the world
to – what? To draw a line between animals and people (218)*

Fredy and Laura soon decide to move to the bush. Laura is reluctant, but they are running out of money, and neither of them can find work (*"We lived along, watching the money trickle dry/ in spite of all Laura's chooks and eggs and veges./ I looked for work round the city, anything at all,/ never a dog's chance"*) (218). Fredy builds a hut for them in the bush in the location where he had lived ten years earlier (*"I caulked the hut walls, covered them with hessian bag/ and cement-washed it, I cleaned out the freshwater well,/ I made an oven from an oil drum set in antbed"*) (219), they rent out their house, and direct their mail to the local store.

Neurodivergence – "slow ignition"

*Odd letters would come care of Engels'
store, at the Bay. Yankee letters – one or two that caused words
and explaining from me. German letters with Hitler stamps.
Jost in the Wehrmacht: We've got these new forage caps
the boys call Fotzen for their folds that fit snug round your head.
Balz still at Zeppelins: This place is running down.*

*A lot of men are gone that I never noticed were dark
or oily or hook-nosed, but it's slow ignition in my head.
That one he never signed, but I knew it was Balthasar. (220)*

The person that Fredy refers to as "Balz" and "Balthasar" is "Zugbauer", the man that he rescued on Das Rheingold. Fredy knows that this letter is from Zugbauer, even though it is unsigned because, similar to Fredy, he describes his processing as "slow ignition in my head". This, along with the fact that he reacted to Fredy's impairment with curiosity rather

than prejudice, and that Fredy turned to him to find out the truth about where Das Rheingold was going, indicates that Zugbauer might also be thought of as having autistic characteristics.

Bush Living

Despite Laura's reluctance, their move to the bush allows them all to thrive. Hans learns to kill rabbits for them to eat ("Hans got so good/ with the rubber catapult I made him that rabbits nearly learned/ our veges were fatal. Enough didn't, though, and were our beef") (221), and learns English from all of them, including Laura ("Hans learned a bit of English gradually, swearwords first,/ off the timber puntmen, kitchen English off Laura, bits/ of beach and bush talk from Joe") (220). Joe leaves school ("School would end for young Joe: no doctor-college for him/ as if he'd wanted it. He'd leave school at fourteen like me/ and start in the life class. His sorrow kept busting out in grins") (219), Fredy describes to us experiencing a level of calm that he has previously only experienced alone ("It was the old life of the Lakes all over again./ Same people, same fun, same peace") (220), and Laura gives birth to their second child, Louise.

Chapter Six – Fredy Neptune Book V

Book V – Lazarus Unstuck

The “Story That Comes After the Story”

Before analysing Book V, I need to contextualise it within the verse novel, since it has a different narrative purpose to that of the other four books. Book I through Book IV is a sequential story: In book I (1914-19) Fredy acquired “the nothing” and adjusted to it, and other’s prejudice against it, as a German-Australian with autistic characteristics serving in Europe during World War I. In Book II (1919-29) he experienced a period of extreme negative self-consciousness, as he negotiated prejudice against being German and being impaired at home in Australia, while he also married (Laura) and had a son (Joe). In Book III (1929-32) he lived in America, where others were not prejudiced against his nationalities and, though some were prejudiced against his impairments, being in disabled-majority spaces and with other disabled people nourished his confidence in himself as a disabled person. In Book IV (1932-38) he lived as a proud disabled person, free from the desire for nondisabled people’s approval, learning and claiming self-respect and community responsibility. This began in early Nazi Germany where he met Hans and then kidnapped him so that he was not sterilised by the state. Fredy and Hans returned to Australia, where, after difficulties with both prejudice and finances in Newcastle, Fredy, Laura, Joe, and Hans moved to the bush. Book IV closes with the family living contentedly together, and Laura giving birth to Louise, her and Fredy’s second child, in September 1938.

This is the end of the story, though it may not seem so to readers who prefer confining disabled characters to disablist narrative structures. These structures, as Mitchell and Snyder have demonstrated, are only complete when the impaired person is killed or cured. Thus the moment where the main character is a proud disabled man, with a family that consists of his wife, two children, and a disabled man he rescues from sterilisation by the Nazi regime, and

who flourish in each other's company, if it can even exist in such a novel, unequivocally cannot end it.

The close of Book IV is, however, an exemplary crip ending, though not due to any specific elements of the plot. As a reminder from Chapter One, crip narratives are informed by disabled embodied knowledge, kinship, and culture. They do not demand adherence to narrative formulas where impairment operates only as a disposable figurative device. They recognise the richness in material atypical embodiment, and its infinite narrative possibilities.

Book V, then, is the section of the narrative that Fredy designated as significant in Book II – “I like the story that comes after the story” (81). It is not that “the story” itself is insignificant, indeed Fredy believes each person's stories are unique and precious (“I had shared with them what I owned most: a story”) (28), and together “the story” and “the story after the story” are what Fredy refers to at the end of the verse novel as “all my lone secret story” (265). “The story that comes after the story” is significant because it positions the end as a simultaneous beginning from which long-term consequences are explored. It is akin to an expansive epilogue.

Moreover, demonstrating that Fredy considers himself to be part of a crip community, Book V is not only his story after the story. It is also the stories after the stories of Hans and Sam. It presents the accumulated traumas with which they each contend as disabled people, and the methods that each utilises to manage those traumas. The point is not to create a hierarchy of acceptable reactions to trauma, the point is to attest to the constructed nature of identity attributes, the completely unnecessary and extremely damaging trauma that prejudice creates, and the love and community that thrives among crip kin nevertheless.

In Book V Fredy also changes his style of address to us as his readers. In contrast to the previous four books, during Book V he provides us with few explicit explanations, translations, or acknowledgements. Instead, similar to the poem “Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands”, Fredy invites us to witness his thoughts in greater detail as they occur.

Remembering Sensation

At the beginning of Book V, in mid-1939, Fredy has had “the nothing” for twenty-five years, during which his relationship with it has evolved substantially. In Book I his unconscious belief in the value of impairment was demonstrated in the contradiction between his claim to want a cure for it (“*I’m not completely blank now. I just feel no pleasure or pain,/ and I’m sick of it. Can anybody cure me?*”) (35), even though he had already explicitly been told how to cure it (“If ever you can pray/ with a single heart to be free of it, it will leave you that day”) (24). Then in Book II, though the cumulative impact of prejudice against both of his impairments made him negatively self-conscious of them, and the level of sensation he experienced began to change in synchronisation with his ability to manage trauma, this continual awareness of “the nothing” alerted him to its potential:

I was coming home, to where I hated, to the book I hated
but which educated me...
 ...I was coming home to my suspicion
that the null had more strength in it, greatly more than I’d get
just by not hurting. That it was the disguise of huge strength. (102)

In other words, he was beginning to understand that his physical strength was a minor advantage compared with the strengths that it concealed. The strength that he learned of in Book I, when he escaped being tortured (“I was the wilder ape, and tottered like one out the door/ because this horse I rode inside of had started/ to float, and yaw”) (28), and when he escaped being strait-jacketed (“I swelled/ the straps from their stitching, got my hands in those tears and ripped/ the thing into rag, with a big dry busting noise”) (35), was not all that the “null” provided.

He then began to learn about some of the other strengths. At the end of Book II, and throughout Book III, his education is initiated by other people. From being in spaces where he was not the only disabled person, the circus, Saint John, and camps of homeless people, his negative self-consciousness of his impairments decreased. Simultaneously Iowa (“*your word is keeping you alive*”) (157), and Marlene through “The Panther” enabled and authorised him to position impairment and cripple community as strengths on which he could rely. In Book IV, though still informed by others such as Sam and the Jewish man, he devised and implemented a plan to perform what he chose as his most significant task – rescuing Hans from the Nazi regime. Thus, by the end of Book IV his negative self-consciousness of impairment decreased

to such an extent that he stated of “the nothing”: “I’d forgotten most of touch; I had got used/ to the inner man dealing with where I stopped and things started” (220).

However, at the beginning of Book V, Fredy’s focus is returned to “the nothing”. As World War II approaches, reminding Fredy of World War I and the mass murder that triggered “the nothing”, his longing for sensation is also renewed:

As it came closer, I mourned how I’d forgot
how most things felt at all. Bag, stone, silk, skin, gravel, iron,
they all rubbed alike; fire was pale colours hopping
above brighter colours; water was a taste, a smell,
salt water another smell. (225)

Then Fredy breaks a bone for the first time in this verse novel, rendering him temporarily unable to work. While starting a truck, his nondominant arm breaks (“the engine/ of a big International truck/ kicked and broke my cranking arm. Not the right, thank God”). Of course he does not experience the pain, but he can hear the broken bones moving (“I heard my new elbows grind till they splinted them.”) This means that Fredy is unable to work for a few weeks, and can spend time with his and Laura’s second baby Louise, including taking her to be baptised (225).

Neurodivergence – “Living Plaster”

I carried Louise to church
because she was baptised; because I felt the need.
It was *flectamus genua* and all the Latin coming back
propter magnam I’m living plaster, Lord, look! *gloriam tuam*. (225)

Churches, though Fredy has rarely visited them, have always been a haven for him. When he first visits a church while staying at Saint John (Book III), he experiences it as a place where the people have no differences, and share one similarity (“We don’t see all of blessing and absolution,/ I know – but where I felt them was in being treated/ as just another person, among the Saturday confessors”) (137). While he is in Germany (Book IV), he and Sam escape the Nazis who are searching for them by hiding in a church, and he and Hans rest in a church before they begin their journey to Australia.

While Fredy has Louise baptised, being in church evokes a new description of “the nothing” which prefigures how his understanding of it will develop throughout Book V. As he kneels during the Catholic Mass (“*flectamus genua*”), he reflects on the words “*propter magnam*

gloriam tuam” (“for your great glory”), from the “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”. Nestled in these words is his request for attention from God, particularly regarding “the nothing”: “*I’m living plaster, Lord, look!*”

Throughout this verse novel, Fredy’s labels for his physical impairment have been an indication, not of the impairment itself, but his relationship with it. For most of the novel he has most often referred to it as “the null” or “the nothing”. Beginning here, however, the metaphor he most often uses is “living plaster”. Null and nothing either have no value or negative value, while “living” is both to experience life, and a lifestyle, or manner by which to live. Plaster holds the pieces of a broken body part in the configuration in which it is hoped they will fuse, and protects those parts and the surrounding area as they heal. As such, “living plaster” is an essential, but temporary measure, and Fredy spends Book V preparing to live without it.

There is significance, too, in the words Fredy uses to precede these labels. Before “nothing” and “null” has always been “the”. “The” indicates both that we and Fredy know what “nothing” and “null” refer to, and that Fredy does not claim possession of them. Now, however, he does claim possession of his physical impairment by shifting from “the” to “I am” (“*propter magnam I’m living plaster*”).

Work in Australia

In contrast to when Fredy was previously trying to remain employed in Australia after his return in 1919 (Book II), he now experiences no impairment-related prejudice at work. This is due to World War II, for two reasons. One is that Fredy represents Australia, serving on three occasions, totalling approximately two years. Therefore, he does not search for other work during that time. The other reason is that employers could no longer afford to discriminate against as many impaired people. The number of Australian men serving in World War II, and therefore not employed in their usual roles, resulted in more job vacancies, and fewer candidates to fill them. Consequently, employers were forced to re-evaluate what qualified or disqualified someone as a potential or current employee.

In other words, just as Fredy experienced with the Nazis, when the needs of government or society change, so do their constructions of impairment. Thus, though Fredy is warned by some friends that prejudice, on the basis of Germanness, in Australia is likely to increase

again as World War II begins (“*You been in Germany? Keep that quiet./ War’s nearly sure to make Fritz unpopular*”), now employer prejudice against someone who is physically impaired cannot be maintained. Consequently, for the first time since he acquired his “living plaster”, Fredy has no difficulty staying employed (“There was plenty of work, suddenly, // filling in for men enlisting. I was a night watchman, / a furniture polisher, a bouncer at the fights”) (226).

Neurodivergence – “The Trench”

but I thought of a trench half full of human blood
crossing two thirds of the world, getting soil-filled here and there
behind non-stop killings. Not many in Australia then, listening
to AIF Cheerios or the Youth Show on 2GB,
seemed to think like that. But my living plaster made me think it: (228)

Fredy utilises “trench” as a metonym that evokes powerful images. For him a “trench”, as well as being a method of warfare, holds a record of each individual life lost, and the collective total of those lives. In this image, each life is recorded by that person’s blood, which remains in the trench, though the rest of their body decomposes. The blood continues to hold the space of the body of which it was once part, while it simultaneously becomes indistinguishable from the blood of the other bodies. In this way the collective of lives lost is not an easily ignorable number, it has a spatial presence on earth that expands with each person killed.

In spring 1940, when England is “wrestling one end of the trench in the sky”, Fredy becomes profoundly distressed by it. He states that, while trying to process his thoughts, he “had to chop myself exhausted not to brood about the trench” as he and Hans prepare loads of wood for stoves (229). And he notes that “Not many in Australia then, listening / to AIF Cheerios or the Youth Show on 2GB, / seemed to think like that. But my living plaster made me think it”. In part his meaning is obvious, his “living plaster” reminds him of the trench because both began in World War I. However, this is also an expression of the loneliness Fredy feels, having lived with trauma for twenty-five years when nobody around him, that he knows, is experiencing a similar trauma. It might also be an admission that he now fully understands a comment Sam made during their last in-person meeting, when Fredy and Hans visited him before returning to Australia. After Fredy outlined how he kidnapped Hans so that he was not sterilised by the Nazi regime, Sam replied: “*Millions more need to go*. Then he added *I’ve also got some to leave / your parents’ Fatherland. Mad, though. Most Jews won’t listen. / Run,*

from that corporal? We're Germans too. It'll return to normal". Fredy responded "*Aren't they really Germans, though?*" (215), And though Fredy soon understood that Sam was implying that race is socially constructed, he perhaps did not understand then that Sam was also expressing loneliness because he understood the danger that his community was in, but others in his community did not.

Fredy dreaded being involved in the "sides" of war since he and Joe first signed up in mid 1939. And this builds over the next year since, though Joe is called up soon after war begins, Fredy is not in service until December 1940. Yet he does not have to negotiate "sides" during his first service, because it is only for a month, and only involves travelling as far north as Mackay (Queensland). Nevertheless, it feels to Fredy as though the "sides" that he did not experience at war have instead invaded his personal life. While Fredy is in service Hans is imprisoned in a "mental hospital", which throws Fredy's closest relationships into chaos.

Neurodivergence – "The Band Saw"

When I got back is when I walked into the band saw.
As a Christmas present to me the old lady, Laura's mother
had spilt her guts about Hans to the police and Welfare
and he was in the mental hospital. (230)

"Walked into the band saw" is Fredy's most brutal description of one of his emotional states throughout this novel. For example, in Book II, when Fredy arrives home from seven years at sea, only to find his family are gone and another family live on their farm, he describes his emotional state as "King-hit from inside" (60). And in Book IV, when he takes work on a seaplane from Germany to Singapore because that will bring him close to Australia, but then learns that his boss had lied to him and it is going to Russia, he describes his emotional state as "so knocked sideways" (189). Both of these descriptions denote a single shocking event. In contrast, a "band saw" is a continuous loop of excruciating pain and injury.

This description, then, represents the unrelenting and overwhelming torment that Hans's imprisonment causes Fredy. It indicates the closeness of Fredy's and Hans's relationship, and the breadth of Fredy's distress at their separation. It also indicates how deeply Fredy cares about Hans, and how terrified he is, based on his own experience as a hospitalised disabled person, of what might happen to Hans in the "mental hospital".

Speaking Unprepared

When Fredy learns of Hans's imprisonment, his first priority is to have Hans released. However, by trying to do so while he is still in shock, he accidentally provides the staff of the "mental hospital" with additional reasons for the imprisonment. He immediately meets with an "official", without having first considered the possible consequences of their conversation. Thus he begins by alerting the official to Hans being German, to which the official responds by explaining: "*There's no provision for mental defectives in the Act/ Mr Beecher. But if we release him he'll go/ into internment as a German i.e. enemy national.*") Fredy, not understanding that the official is saying that the hospital would have interned Hans already if they had known he was German, then also alerts the official that Fredy brought Hans to Australia illegally ("I told their official what I'd rescued Hans from"). Convinced that he has aroused the official's compassion for Hans's situation, and that he will increase it further by explaining that Hans's life would be at risk now in Germany, Fredy then: "showed him/ what a Yank paper had reported: the T4 Programme,/ Tiergartenstrasse 4, for killing off cretins and incurables." (230)

He genuinely believes the official would be as shocked by T4 as he was, instead the official is only glad to have been provided with yet another reason for detaining Hans indefinitely:

he smiled as narrow as his Rhett Butler moustache
and said *He'll be safer as a mental patient with us
than in internment. There he might be exchanged to Berlin
and, from what you show me, passed to the very Chiefest Secretary.* (230)

Then Fredy learns that eugenic policies and practices of that time are not unique to Germany. As he stated in Book IV, he believed that German doctors sterilising disabled people were "doing what others/ didn't do, but agreed with" (204). However, the official explains to him: "*You'd been in Berlin, Mr Beecher. Recently? Since you abducted Hans there? No? Castrating a defective/ guilty of sexual misconduct can be ordered here in some States./ Let your Hans beware the Tasmanian Chief Secretary!*" (230) As noted in Chapter One, Australia practised forced sterilisation throughout the twentieth century, and has continued into the twenty-first.

Hans's Imprisonment – Fredy and Hans

Fredy is then permitted to visit Hans, who is equally distressed at their separation. He "cried to go home, to go in the ute again, where was Joe?" And when Fredy notes that, "He was still

in pyjamas although it was afternoon”, and the nurse explains that “*We keep them in pyjamas till they settle and stop clearing out*”, this indicates that Hans has been trying to run to Fredy (230).

However, Fredy’s visit disrupts their relationship because the circumstances of it convince Hans that Fredy has abandoned him. Initially Hans pleads with Fredy: “*Bring me home! Fredy! I’ll be good. Bring me home!*” And though Fredy tells Hans that he was not involved in the decision to imprison him (“*I didn’t put you here, Hansi*”), when Hans asks if “*The Hitler put me here?*” Fredy only says, “*Don’t talk about the Hitler. Eh, Hans, remember, no Hitler./ Or they’ll send you to him. Bastards.*” Fredy’s response is motivated by the danger that he knows Hans is in. However, nobody has explained the danger to Hans, thus he is unaware of it, and Fredy’s response does not answer his question. Fredy’s credibility is then further undermined when he leaves without Hans and does not visit him again for months (230).

Of course, from Fredy’s position, he cannot visit Hans because he has to return to the war. His second service is in Shanghai but, despite being at sea which usually calms him, he is pre-occupied with his fears for Hans (“they sent me to sea again/ to fume and grieve for Hans in his beautiful lake resort/ of steel mesh and poor fellows who couldn’t seal the porridge in their mouths.”) Ultimately, he convinces himself, or tries to convince himself, that Hans is better off imprisoned than in Germany (“Better than the hospital needle or the furniture lorry/ with its exhaust feeding fumes to the hand-flappers locked inside it.” Here he is referring to the child murder program in Nazi Germany, as outlined in Chapter One, and documented in Murray’s poem “Dog Fox Field” (231).

Hans’s Imprisonment – Fredy and Laura

Hans’s imprisonment also disrupts Fredy and Laura’s relationship. Fredy reports that the imprisonment was initiated by Laura’s mother, and no doubt she had a key role in it given her attitude towards Hans. As Fredy states: “she hated me as much as ever, and Hans worse:/ *A German idiot in my daughter’s house, Mr Bircher*” (229). However, it is likely that Laura was also involved. Fredy reports that, when they lived in the bush, “Hans hugged Laura a lot” (220), but not that Laura hugged Hans; and when Hans destroyed his Christmas presents in distress soon after he and Fredy arrived in Australia Laura responded, not by understanding Hans’s position as Fredy did, but by refusing to understand his position and blaming his

impairments rather than his circumstances (“*Is this how it’s to be? A mad baby man in our house?*”) (217) And now, while Laura claims no involvement in Hans’s imprisonment, and an inability to affect her mother’s actions (“*I can’t undo what she’s done, Fred. You know I didn’t want it*”) (230), she does want it to continue (“*But – Laura struggled – but it might be best, with you gone a lot*”) (231). Most tellingly, when Fredy visited Hans and he “cried to go home, to go in the/ ute again, where was Joe?”, he did not ask about Laura, or say that Laura had visited him (230).

Whether it was Laura, or Laura’s mother, or a combination of the two, who had Hans imprisoned, it is clear that she or they had planned it and were just waiting for the opportunity to enact the plan. This is because the initial report to the authorities on Hans, the decision about which action to take, and Hans being captured and brought to the “mental hospital” all occurred within the month that Fredy was in service. At a time when government efforts are concentrated on the war, a month is a noticeably short turn-around for something that is not war-related. Therefore, this process must have been conceived of and formulated in advance, in order that it could be initiated the moment after Fredy left.

For some time Fredy is unable to untangle Laura’s and her mother’s motives. He explains to us that Laura had “only narrowly stopped her ma/ shelving me too, as a signaller to Nazi ships. In that wartime/ it would have worked. It had, on a few others. It still could” (231). This indicates to Fredy that Laura did agree to Hans being imprisoned. However, it also indicates that Laura’s mother reported Hans to the authorities in the hope that it would separate Fredy and Laura. During the trip from Newcastle to Manila, on the way to Shanghai, Fredy concludes that Laura was involved because she was not able to manage living with Hans and supporting a two-year-old child on her own:

It took me to Manila to admit that Laura wasn’t
all wrong. Her ma was, but not Laura. Nervous as a hawk

for two straight years that Hans might sit on, or drop,
or somehow break our baby Louise. (231)

Again Fredy notes that Laura’s attitude towards Hans is not the result of Hans’s actions, it is that “Some people are just terrified of ones/ like Hitler’s sister Paula – and lots more in his tribe, I’d heard” (231). Even so Fredy realises that, regardless of the cause, Laura and Hans cannot live together without him.

Second Service

Fredy's second service, beginning in late 1940 and continuing for a couple of months, is in Shanghai. Having been reminded by his meeting with the "mental hospital" staff that it is useful for him to prepare for difficult situations, before leaving he contemplates his options if he is discriminated against. Since, as I discussed earlier, it was convenient for Australian society at this time to relax constructions of impairment, Fredy knows he does not have to prepare for responding to that version of discrimination from his colleagues. His Germanness, however, as he was warned, is likely to be targeted, and thus he devises a plan for how he will react: "I'd worked out if I got chipped, like officially,/ for being German, I'd do my best to jump ship/ in a neutral port" (231).

In Shanghai Fredy witnesses divisions within a "side" at war for the first time. Previously "sides" at an international level had been a straightforward concept – regardless of what led a country to a particular "side", once there they acted cooperatively with the others on that "side", in service of the interests of that "side". Now, being a member of one "side" is no longer a guarantee that the other countries on that "side" are not simultaneously pursuing a contrary agenda. As the Australians are in Shanghai, anchored off the French concession, Fredy expects there to be cooperation between local forces. However, ashore he meets Ilya Chaikov, a Russian man working for the French police, and they witness an altercation between the French and Japanese police. A drunk Japanese policeman begins threatening French police with his sword. When they capture him and remove his sword, they then take possession of the sword rather than reporting the incident, as Ilya explains to Fredy: "*French Concession is Vichy. Ally of Japanese./ We would get orders to give sword back. So we don't report./ He smiled a little smile*" (233). In other words, even though the French and Japanese are theoretically on the same "side", there are also times such as this when they choose to withhold information from each other.

"Sides" at Home

When Fredy returns to Australia in early 1941, his relationship with Laura is strengthened, while his relationship with Hans is further strained. Laura lives freely in the community, and has only baby Louise to take care of, and thus requires nothing from Fredy. When he gives her a present, then, after having not done so for twenty years, he easily exceeds her expectations of him ("I brought Laura a coral and gold necklace from Shanghai/ and she

knocked me sideways by crying her eyes red over it./ Seemed I hadn't got her a present since the Twenties") (233).

In contrast to Laura, Hans desperately needs Fredy's assistance. He has now been imprisoned in the "mental hospital" for more than a year, without any visitors. His experiences during this time have traumatised him to the extent that he is unable to speak ("I went straight to see Hans. They told me with long faces/ he wouldn't speak.") The staff of the "mental hospital" have reacted to this, not by considering the possible causes, but by punishing him ("They'd put him in a locked ward for it") (233).

Though both Fredy and Hans desperately want to connect with and understand each other, their attempts are thwarted by their circumstances. Fredy "went straight to see Hans" after arriving home from war, but Hans does not understand why Fredy has not removed him from the "mental hospital", or even visited him, during the previous year. In a locked ward, patients are not likely to be permitted to meet with any visitor alone, which means that Fredy cannot explain his attempts to have Hans released because they will be overheard by the hospital staff. As such, Fredy can only talk to Hans about his time overseas ("I made conversation, told him how I'd been away/ to China where they wear quilt coats and sleep on stoves"), which further increases Hans's hurt and confusion. Equally, because Hans is deeply traumatised, he is not able to speak to anyone but, to Fredy, Hans not speaking feels personal ("*What's with you, Hanno?* But he wouldn't look at me.") Though he has no choice, Fredy compounds the difficulty of this situation for both of them by ultimately leaving without Hans, again (233).

Being unable to assist Hans also renders Fredy unable to comfort him or consider what might be contributing to his trauma. Fredy's first thought about Hans's situation – "Put them with the mad and they go mad" – is self-preservation to deflect his attention from his next thought: "Had I just brought him roundabout to his cutting?" (233) His second thought is very close to the truth, as he discovers when he returns from war for the third and final time halfway through 1942.

The Sensation of Disloyalty

Reflecting Fredy's denial of the trauma Hans is experiencing, Fredy's body begins to unconsciously react to disloyalty within each side of the war. The first occurrence of this is in

June 1941 when “Hitler turned on Russia and the killing-trench doubled on itself”. Since this particular instance of disloyalty within a side is between two governments who have already exploited each other, and have murdered many people, Fredy regains sensation. He then immediately takes the opportunity to enjoy acts enhanced by sensation, such as sex (“I felt my feet on the ground, my arms aching,/ my – well. Laura got rushed and came up smiling”). However, after a day the numbness returns, and Fredy soon has to return to Shanghai for his third service, thus does not have time to give the changes in sensation much thought (234).

Neurodivergence – “I Met Sam”

And I met Sam. You could have knocked me down. I met Sam
walking along the Bund. *Ah Fred, my dear old Fred!* (234)

There is so much joy in these two lines! Clearly Sam is thrilled to meet Fredy (“*Ah Fred, my dear old Fred!*”) and Fredy is equally delighted to meet Sam. This is expressed, not only in his exclamation, “You could have knocked me down”, but also in how he positions “I met Sam” on both sides of this phrase in his narration of this moment. In the context of an environment where there is disunity, both between and within “sides”, this line contrasts that as strongly as possible by both sides reflecting and amplifying each other’s meaning. In turn this echo reflects and amplifies Sam’s and Fredy’s joy.

A similar echo is established among the names within these phrases, creating increasing intensity. Fredy repeats Sam’s name twice in one line, in the same way that Sam then repeats Fredy’s name twice in one line. In this way each name is echoed, and each echoing of names echoes the other. Additionally, all of the names are accented, but each is in a different position within the sentence and the line. The first name “Sam” is at the end of a sentence a third of the way into the line; the second name “Sam” is in the middle of a sentence, at the end of the line; the third name “*Fred*”, is at the beginning of a sentence in the middle of the line; and the fourth and final name “*Fred!*” is at the end of the sentence, and the end of the line.

Their meeting occurs in Shanghai on the evening of 8 December 1941. Sam now lives in the Japanese district, while Fredy has been in Shanghai since October, anchored off the international settlement, for his third service representing Australia in World War II.

Sam's Disclosure

Sam and Fredy “made a night of it, straight after” to catch up on each of their news since their last contact was by mail in the late 1930s. Fredy discovers that Sam’s life, too, is increasingly impacted by “sides”, and the divisions within them. In Shanghai his family lives in the Japanese district (“*we live way up north, though, in the Jerusalem quarter/ of the Japanese district. Japs hate the Chinese, not us Jews*”), but he has to work in the French concession which is ostensibly, but not yet officially, Nazi-controlled (“*The French Concession has the Western palates, and it'll stay/ because it's Vichy. For that very reason we daren't live there./ Every day I'm braced to run if I smell a whiff of German policy.*” (234) In other words the lives of Sam, his wife, and their two daughters, and their choices about where to live, are dictated by World War II, and the ever-changing configurations of sides that each person, family, city, state, and country choose. As Jews they were forced to leave France when it was invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany in 1940. They moved to Shanghai, one of the few cities who welcomed Jews at that time. There, as a French-trained chef, Sam could only obtain work in the French concession. However, it is not safe for him and his family to live there because France was cooperating with the Nazis, thus they have to live in the Japanese district.

This is only the most recent layer of danger and trauma in Sam’s life. Being born in Australia to an Aboriginal father and Jewish mother, Sam grew up subject to an extreme amount of prejudice, but was also expected to represent Australia in World War I. Once he left Australia, he did not feel welcome to return (“*I enlisted in Childers; our photos are in the Town Hall. But/ I'd be far too cheeky to live as a blackfellow there now*”) (133). Outside Australia, as a chef, Sam has been able to earn enough money to out-manoeuvre life-threatening prejudice, and to assist others to do the same. Nevertheless, though he currently has limited options for survival, he also feels guilty that he has survived for so long, while other Aboriginals and Jews have not:

*Sam stared at the river. I feel like Noah, he said
safe on the Ark while all his fellow humans were drowning.
I've always felt that about my Dad's people. Now it's my mother's
people too. Both my worlds. (235)*

Sam’s simile – “*I feel like Noah, he said/ safe on the Ark while all his fellow humans were drowning*” – is obviously a biblical reference, but also alludes to Holocaust survivor Primo Levi’s concept of the drowned and the saved. The drowned were those who were murdered by

the Nazis. The saved were those who the Nazis decided, at least temporarily, not to murder, usually because the Nazis believed they could be exploited. Being one of the saved inevitably entails collaborating with those who determine who is drowned and who is saved. Thus even if, as one of the saved, you devote your life to assisting others to avoid being drowned, as Sam has (“*That’s what I was up to, getting our people out of Europe/ with some of their money to live on, if possible*”) (235), you still experience guilt from collaborating with a system that continues to drown people. Additionally, the longer you survive, the more people you know who have been drowned, and the more you begin to fear for the existence of your people as a group.¹

Paying attention to Sam’s embodiment as well as his words Fredy becomes increasingly aware that part of the reason Sam is so thrilled to see him is that Sam is desperate to tell him something important. Fredy has already observed that Sam “hunched over his coffee and didn’t touch his cognac”, and now, as Sam speaks, Fredy notices, “He was rocking very slowly/ back and forwards, like a beast that’s stunned.” Fredy says Sam’s name to try to connect with him, but Sam continues speaking (“*Sam, I said. But he went on*”). For these reasons, and because Sam says he has “*always*” experienced this level of distress, Fredy understands that Sam is disclosing his impairment to him (235).

I will not suggest a specific label for Sam’s impairment since, as I will discuss soon, he does not believe in doing so. It is also possible that, like Fredy, he has more than one impairment. However, there is evidence to suggest an impairment he has could be categorised as mental distress. Fredy and Sam first met in the hospital in Cairo (Book I) when Fredy had to pretend to need treatment after accidentally picking up a branding iron by the hot end. However, though we learned that Sam is a cook, it was unclear whether he was a staff member or a patient. Fredy simply introduces him as: “Sam Mundine the Jewish Aboriginal/ bait-layer from backblocks Queensland” (34). Additionally, early in the novel Fredy says of Sam, “He’d get bitter like that, then brighten, like Hobart weather” (37). Most significantly Aboriginal and deaf researcher Scott Avery, in his research on Aboriginality and disability in Australia, found that 42.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have an impairment, that disabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have mental illness at five times the rate of nondisabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that “the ‘trauma story’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability is an impairment uniquely

¹ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 82-4.

experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been dispossessed from both Country and body”.²

Fredy’s Disclosure

Fredy admires and appreciates Sam’s disclosure of impairment. In gratitude and to acknowledge Sam and their kinship, Fredy discloses his impairment to Sam (“For an answer I told him what I never had before/ from the burning women onwards. Me in my living plaster”), though with trepidation (“You never knew how they’d take it, the ones I did tell”) (235).

Since Sam has always known of “the nothing”, he was not surprised by that detail of Fredy’s disclosure. He is, however, deeply distressed to learn that both of them have been trying to manage trauma for decades but were unable to reveal this to each other before now (“Sam said *Well!* and looked shirty. He sat there fuming,/ getting ahold of himself”). In response to Fredy’s disclosure, Sam offers Fredy the best advice he has on labelling impairment, from his own experience with it:

*If you told that to one of your moderns
who think any name they can give to a phenomenon

is its social superior, he finally told me, they’d snub it
into line with a term like Shock or Reaction
or Flight from Reality. To contain it and make it barren.
I think myself it’s a story of law that you’re carrying
for all places. You’re wrong to call it the Nothing.
You should never accept any name for it, even from you.
Names don’t last. When it ends, you’ll have to tell it. (235)*

Sam outlined his definition of law while he and Fredy were at the Cairo hospital. He spoke first of the importance of law to his family, “*Mum’s people and Dad’s uncles live under Law./ I’d starve, if I kept both kosher!*”, and then his community, “*Law people, if they lose/ hold of their law, often turn into rubbish, worse/ and different from you lot*” (35). In other words, by “law” Sam means something similar to Fredy’s use of the word poem – a story of ways in which individuals and communities have chosen to live, and the reasons for those ways of living.

² Scott Avery, *Culture is Inclusion: A Narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with Disability* (Sydney: First Peoples Disability Network, 2018), 88; 162; 9.

Due to Fredy's trees-first processing, he is not yet able to consider Sam's advice. Similar to when Fredy disclosed his impairment to his mother, and it appeared to Fredy that she fell asleep, Fredy is first occupied with, and concerned by, Sam's physical response. To Fredy it seems as if Sam is angry with him ("And he left me, shaking his head. I'd upset Sam!/ I wished I'd never told him. I thought it might interest him,/ be in his line"). However, he also has an intuitive sense that he has misunderstood Sam's reaction ("If I was/ reading him right. I might be right out in my reading him). Sam is not angry with Fredy due to his disclosure, he is angry at compulsory able-bodiedness – the system that they have both collaborated with, which has prevented them from connecting in this way before now (235).

"Sides" Rearranged

Later that evening Fredy finds himself in the first of a number of life-threatening situations, controlled by divisions within "sides", which he only escapes through a combination of luck and intuition. He returns to his ship, anchored off Shanghai's international settlement, to hear the captain say to someone else, "*Held to ransom by those [Chinese] Green Gang bastards!*" Since this sounds to Fredy like the beginning of conflict, and he is not yet involved, he decides to avoid it by going ashore again. However, now the city is "like cyclone weather" (236), so he walks to the border between the international settlement and the French concession, only to find that it is "a high barb wire barricade all along now/ and just gateways through it. About a million Chinese/ were arguing and pleading to get in, and not getting." Having met the Russian French policeman Ilya Chaikov in the French concession during his last visit to Shanghai, Fredy name-drops him, and is permitted to pass through the barricade and visit him ("Already I'm talking like Ilya Chaikov. I got in/ and he and I met up, and punished the beer.") The next morning they discover that, later the previous evening, the Japanese had occupied and closed down the international settlement after the attack on Pearl Harbour. Since Fredy was in the French concession at the time he, unlike the rest of his ship, avoided internment, but now he has nowhere to stay, and no way to go home.

It occurs to Fredy that if he could obtain a passport that would be acceptable to the French and Japanese, he could then seek work on a French ship. That would move him away from Shanghai, and hopefully towards Australia. He asks Ilya, who says such a passport would be too expensive to buy ("he smiled and said *A passport now, of right country,/ would cost a fortune. Green Gang has whole boxes full*") (236). Fredy knows that, since Sam has assisted many people to escape from one country to another, it is likely that Sam could assist him now,

but he is concerned that the way Sam ended their conversation the previous night might mean that Sam is still angry at him. This is an extremely painful prospect for Fredy, and if such were the case he would rather not know.

It is only a lack of options that causes him to risk experiencing that pain directly (“I knew where Sam worked, and forced myself to race there/ and chance him still being dark on me.”) For Sam, who values their kinship equally highly, there is no question that he will assist Fredy now, regardless of his feelings on their conversation the previous evening (“Of course he wasn’t./ He just turned his kitchen over to his understrappers/ and took me to his office”) (236). Sam gives him the former passport of a Jewish man who is now in Israel on another passport, but also warns him:

*It'll get you safely past
Japanese, though. And if you strike Germans, ditch it.
Ditch it fast, I beg of you. Don't think that tricks will work.
Passports like this are going to be death, in Europe. (237)*

And he addresses the tension between them by affirming their kinship and advising Fredy on how to manage his trauma (“Go quick, old friend. God guide you. Don't let your steel rust, eh?”).

Fredy soon obtains work on a Spanish ship travelling to Manila. Before the ship can leave Shanghai, however, the Japanese, who are theoretically on the same “side” as the Spanish, search the ship for any Chinese who have hidden aboard. Those Chinese that the Japanese find are brought to the top deck and shot in front of the ship’s crew. The ship’s captain tries to object by yelling “Guernica!” (237) which, given Pablo Picasso’s Guernica painting completed four years before this event, he intends to mean “these people are civilians! Therefore you should not shoot them!”

This is another example of disunity within a “side”. In this situation, even though the Japanese and the Spanish are on the same “side”, the Japanese clearly suspect that they cannot trust the Spanish. From their position they are proved correct when it turns out that the Spanish are harbouring Chinese civilians. However, the Spanish are following the war convention that says that, as much as possible, war is between armies and not civilians, while the Japanese believe that war is against an entire country. They also differ on their investment in World War II itself, and their interest in each other: The Spanish participated in World War

II to repay Hitler for his support during the Spanish civil war, while the Japanese had an agenda of occupation of their own, on top of their support for Hitler, with which they might soon require Spanish assistance. This might be why, even though the ship's captain objects to the Japanese shooting the Chinese, the Japanese ignore him, but do not shoot him or his crew, and permit them to leave Shanghai.

After the ship arrives in Manilla, Fredy is in a bar when he is asked if he can crew a boat. He joins a small crew of two Chinese men and one English man, captained by a Black American, who are engaged to transport a wealthy, presumably white, American man (Chuck Pitty) and his new wife (Arlene) from Manila to Australia. They are unsure which nation it would be safest to represent on the way there though:

Next day and next we kept running

south from Leyte with a Bulgar flag up. We'd rummaged in the locker
for a flag of convenience, Liberia maybe, and the Bulgar one
was the best he had. God knew if they were on our side;
we bent it on and hoisted it. I still bless the white green and red. (238)

“Our side” is the Allies (America, Britain, Australia, China, etc), which is the opposite side to that of the ship on which Fredy was previously working. At this point, December 1941, Liberia is not involved in World War II, and Bulgaria, after having been neutral until March 1941, is on the other “side”. However, the crew are not interested in actively being on the Allies’ “side”, it is only a matter of “convenience”.

“Sides” Reframed

Their first stop is “Kadad Island” or “*former Neu-Schwaben*” as it is the closest visible land when they were running out of fuel. The Catholic missionary, who manages the small community living on the island, recognises Fredy as a fellow German (“Father Vogt whispered to me. *My parishioners still speak of/ marks when they mean money*”) (239). He also recognises that they have something else in common in that, though some would say that being German means they should act in solidarity with Germany, they do not – Fredy is thought of as an Australian by the rest of his ship’s crew, and Father Vogt will assist them, even though the Japanese, as allies of Germany, would not approve of him doing so:

He had them fuel us from his tanks
because he wasn't leaving. *We are technically allies,*

*Nippon and I, he laughed. I am an old summer vest
and my home is New Schwaben. (239)*

As they continue to travel south the ship, but not the crew, is damaged by machine gun bullets. The owner and his wife expect the crew to solve this problem, none of whom have any solutions, except for Fredy: “I took our drums of reserve fuel below/ forrard to the crew space – *We’ll sleep on deck; we do already* –/ and locked them in. Empty or full, they’d be buoyancy” (239).

In this way Fredy is able to slow, but not prevent, the ship sinking. By the time the ship is unsalvageable they are close to another island. They arrive there just after another mass murder:

On the dirt under a flagpole
lay seven white people, bloodied and like sleeping. Father Vogt
was one of them, and he’d been split open with a sword
so you saw the halves of his heart and liver and organs.

Pitty’s mouth was saying Buk! and I grabbed it
and held him till the Japs had boarded their patrol boat
and motored off. Then he overflowed, and leant on me
and overflowed again. I think our faces told the others
before we found the words. (240)

Fredy’s description of these events focuses on Pitty’s reaction, rather than his own. The only hint of Fredy’s reaction is at the beginning of this scene: “It was as bad as the burning women./ It stays with me like them” (240). He unconsciously exhibits this physically, in a similar way to his reaction to the mass murder at Trabzon. He attributed his condition at that time to “leprosy” (15). This time “It’s all a blur”, and he attributes it to “malaria” (241).

His condition soon worsens in response to more danger. While Fredy is ill, the rest of the crew locate another boat, and bring Fredy with them. However, they then discover Fredy’s German passport, and assume it proves that he is spying for the Nazis, “*You goddam Kraut spy bastard. We found your goddam Kraut passport!*” Already unwell, Fredy is completely overwhelmed:

I took it in, slowly. My heart turned edgeways with horror.
I was in so deadly a fix that I went to sleep again.
I kept waking up to it, and fainting
and each time it was still true. At sea with people who’d kill me
for something I’d. never ever convince them was nonsense.
I guess that was a picture of those times altogether. (241)

There is no explanation that Fredy can provide the rest of the crew that will satisfy them. This is because the truth of his situation is much more complicated than being on one “side” or the other. While it is not true that Fredy is spying, it is true that he has German heritage, though he was born in Australia, and has never had a German passport with his name on it. And though he has also been discriminated against in Australia for being German, Australia nevertheless have sent him to represent them in World War II. Moreover, the crew’s accusations are unfair because the passport, as well as being German, has “a great big J/ printed all through it” (236). This indicates that the person carrying the passport is Jewish, and would, therefore, be trying to escape from Germany rather than spying for them.

Nevertheless, the rest of the crew continue to believe that Fredy has infiltrated their “side”. Pitty, the ship’s owner, first considers abandoning him at sea to die (“Pitty was blabbering about how they should put me overboard”). His wife refuses to allow this (“Arlene spoke up: *I couldn’t bear a man// who’d murdered someone right in front of my eyes/ ever ever to touch me again*”), but this does not change the crew’s opinion of Fredy. As he regains awareness he tries to argue, but they have reframed the events of their time together in the context of what they believe to be the truth. Thus they ignore that if not for Fredy’s actions to lighten their previous boat it would have sunk in the middle of the ocean where they all would have drowned, rather than close enough to an island for them to swim ashore. Similarly, they now assume that, somehow, Fredy had the missionary who gave them fuel killed: “Pitty worked himself up to *You’re so cute/ you got the Japs to bump off that old Kraut missionary// because we’d seen you plotting with him! We’re onto you, Mac.*” Again, Pitty is in fact correct that both Fredy and Father Vogt are German, and that this is why they had a whispered conversation. However, he has not registered that Father Vogt recognising Fredy as German is the only reason that he directed his community to give the ship’s crew some fuel, which is the only reason they are still alive (241).

Soon the ship is bombed, and only Fredy and Ernie, the Englishman, survive the attack. Even though there is little to suggest that they will ultimately return from wherever they are to their home countries, Ernie is still determined to assert that they are ultimately on opposite “sides” (“*We’re in this together for now, lad./ Of course you know I’ll have to do my duty when we’re seaved*” (242)). Despite the fact that it is only due to Fredy caring for him while he is severely ill, and carrying him for weeks through the New Guinea jungle, that Ernie does survive, he

maintains his commitment once they have arrived in Port Moresby and have secured a flight home: “*Fredy Baer I’ll never forget what thee carried me and seaved me./ But I told thee from the start I have to report thee*” (245). Fredy deliberately misses their plane to avoid being reported, and is initially disappointed at his delayed home-coming, but soon finds well-paid shipping work back to Australia:

I did curse at not going straight on south
but after hanging round the ORs messes for a day or two

and getting bombed, I found a ship in the harbour
and got made acting supercargo on her. An officer job on crew pay. (245)

Limitless Power

When Fredy arrives home he visits Hans, who has now been imprisoned in the “mental hospital” for two and a half years. Fredy observes that the places in which disabled people are imprisoned have not changed in the thirty years since he was in hospital in Germany: “like that leper-gaol I was stuck in on the Verweser River,/ same drugs and rotting-flesh smell, same bars and locks, same sentence:/ Expect to die here. For you, time has dried up” (247). Though there might be changes in hospital policies, they make little difference in practice. For example, the “Kaiserly Leprosarium”, where Fredy was imprisoned, was “walled-in” (17), which means visitors were prohibited, while the “mental hospital” in which Hans is imprisoned has a visitors’ room. Therefore, it might seem that the “mental hospital” actively encourages visiting, however Fredy finds when he visits during winter that, “In spite of the cold breeze they had the window open” (247). This means that the staff deliberately make visiting uncomfortable and unhealthy for both visitors and patients, in order to discourage it.

Another demonstration of the unlimited power that the hospital staff have over the patients occurs during one of Fredy’s visits. He is talking with another patient when they are interrupted by a nurse, who intimidates the patient:

another man nurse in white
came round the corner. *Go back to your ward, McCudden,*
he snapped. The jiggling fellow jumped, and defied him:
You will not close on me! I am the Sabbath made for man!
the white-coat stood with his hands on his hips. *Cry,* he ordered
in an even voice. *Cry, you jamrag.* And the mad fellow
shivered and broke. His face knotted and blubs gasped out of him

as he stood there in his ruin. The nurse watched him bawl. (247-8)

As much as this is a demonstration of the nurse's power at this moment, and his eagerness to use it just to humiliate this patient, it is also how he ensures he has power over the patients later when he assaults them. For every patient present, including Hans, the nurse intends this display to remind them that reporting his treatment of them to anyone would be futile. As a fellow disabled person Fredy understands this implication, and assumes it is because, when the nurse usually treats a patient this way in front of visitors, none of the visitors challenge him. Therefore, he is determined to not stay silent: "I was up and holding the window bars. *That was a mongrel act./ I said to the nurse fellow.*" The nurse, however, is not concerned by Fredy's comment: "He looked me up and down./ *Fuck you, squire,* he said." Despite the regular swearing in this novel this is the only occasion when someone explicitly says "fuck you" to someone else (248).

Fredy reflexively uses his strength to respond, assuming that it will intimidate the nurse ("I snapped the fastenings of the bars/ and dropped them out beside him. *Now, care to say that again?*") However, this does not intimidate the nurse. In fact it gives him the opportunity that he has been waiting for to demonstrate that his power has no limits. Fredy's assumption that visitors usually do not challenge the nurse's actions is probably correct. However, even if a visitor does challenge his actions, it has no effect, as he gleefully explains to Fredy: "*Come inside here and you'll be detained./ As a patient,* he said. *We often see that strong-man stuff from them./ We just sedate them; the padded cells soak up their flash.*" Distressed by these events, Hans begins to cry ("At least he melted the big freeze. Hans started bawling too"). And this further gratifies the nurse ("The nurse bloke grinned as if/ he'd been chewing gold and got bits stuck in his teeth") (248).

The nurse then decides that he would like to enact his threat against Fredy. As such, he tries to anger Fredy further by insinuating that Fredy's only interest in Hans is sexual: "*Your Jerry imbecile has got a sweet little arse,* he said, *I can see how you'd badly want him back. But really/ he's happy as a sandboy. In here is a little Germany.*" Fortunately, Fredy guesses the nurse's goal and suggests a fight at the pub instead ("*Where do you drink?* I asked, but he waved and walked off") (248).

And finally, for the first time since Hans was imprisoned, Fredy and Hans are unsupervised by "mental hospital" staff. As the nurse leaves, Hans recognises what might be his only opportunity to confide in Fredy about how the staff are treating him. Through tears, and

through the window that separates them, Hans tells Fredy that he is being raped by the staff (“What bubbled out through Hans’s crying, it rocked me/ and I prayed it wasn’t true. But they don’t lie”) (248).

Neurodivergence – “They Don’t Lie”

By “they”, Fredy is referring to autistic people, including himself. As discussed in the introduction, autistic people as a population value truth-telling more highly than do nonautistic people and, throughout this novel, Murray makes a claim for truth-telling and embodied expertise to be recognised as autistic characteristics, just as a love of facts, and trees-first processing, are currently. There are five characters in this verse novel that Murray may have intended as autistic. Since they are both present in the novel for a significant period of time, I identify Fredy and Hans as autistic while, due to their short appearances in the novel, I identify Heimann (Book I), Iowa (Book III), and Zugbauer (Book IV), as having autistic characteristics. They each strongly present with a well-known autistic characteristic – Heimann has a love of facts, Iowa values being alone, and Zugbauer has trees-first processing. Additionally, however, Fredy values his relationships with each of them because they share embodied expertise, and because they value the truth.

As autistic people, truth-telling is one of the characteristics that both Fredy and Hans value in people in general, and each other in particular. Their relationship is much like that shared between Murray and his son Alexander, discussed in “It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen”. Since Murray and Alexander can rely on each other to be truthful, they each feel comfortable asking questions of the other that they could not ask of anyone else. Similarly, even though Hans feels abandoned by Fredy, he also knows that he can confide in Fredy that the “mental hospital” staff are raping him and, even though the nurse asserts that nobody will believe him, Fredy will.

Pause to reflect on two significant related points. One is that this verse novel accurately portrays how people with intellectual impairment are likely to be stereotyped as potential rapists on the basis of no evidence at all, while in fact they are seven times more likely than nondisabled people to be the victims of sexual assault.³ The other related point is that it is shameful that, in more than twenty years of critics discussing this verse novel, very few of

³ Joseph Shapiro, “The Sexual Assault Epidemic No One Talks About,” *All Things Considered*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/08/570224090/the-sexual-assault-epidemic-no-one-talks-about>.

them have devoted any more than a sentence to Hans, even though he is integral to the final quarter of the narrative. Those critics that do mention Hans note that he would have been sterilised in Nazi Germany but ignore that he was raped in Australia. Particularly at this point, it is pertinent to reiterate that to neglect these stories is to actively contribute to erasing them. And to erase these stories is to be complicit in a future where these cruelties continue to occur.

Power within Limits

As distressed as Fredy is by Hans being raped, he is aware that, when he previously tried to have Hans released from the “mental hospital”, he accidentally worsened Hans’s situation by acting without preparation. Therefore, this time, he discusses Hans’s circumstances with Laura. Laura recognises that if they do not remove Hans from the “mental hospital” they are equally as responsible as the staff who rape him, and the staff who are aware of the assaults and refuse to act (“I told it to Laura and she said *We can’t put up with that./ We can’t leave him in there, or we’re as bad as they are.*” In response Fredy thinks: “I’d got close at times to wishing/ I’d rescued somebody who could say Thanks mate, shake hands/ and walk off out of your life straight after.” This is not a wish specific to Hans, it is a wish Fredy has had each time he rescued someone. However, as Laura points out, this is unrealistic (“When I told Laura some of this, she said *Thanks Mr Baer!* in snorts of giggles.” By “*Thanks Mr Baer!*” Laura is referring to Ernie who, though Fredy carried him for weeks through the New Guinea jungle while he was deliriously unwell, said thank you to Fredy as soon as they were safe, and promptly reported him as a German spy. In other words, being able to simply walk out of someone’s life at that point is a sign of disloyalty.

Being Fredy’s Autistic Self

While determining how to rescue Hans from imprisonment, and conceal him from the authorities, Fredy finds work in black market petrol. The prospect of freeing Hans from the “mental hospital” and once again enjoying his company makes Fredy feel comfortable with himself as an autistic person. This is demonstrated when he has a meal with some of his colleagues in a café, some American soldiers arrive, and an argument between the two groups ensues. The cause, on top of Australians lately having received “less money and ordinarier cigarettes” than Americans, even though Australia and America are allies, is that here at the café the black market petrol workers had been given “little steaks/ like you’d give the cat

before the war”, whereas the American soldiers had been given steaks that “lapped over their plates, with tomatoes and eggs riding on them” (250).

The argument quickly escalates to a fight. It begins when one of the Australians provokes the Americans by saying “*They do all right, for men who ’ll buy dressed pelican for chook*”. When “the biggest Marine” responds, “*What’s your trouble, sonny?*”, the petrol sergeant from the Australian group takes the Marine’s plate, and swaps it for his own while saying to him “*That’s more your weight.*” The Marine responds by threatening the petrol sergeant with a knife, which surprises Fredy (“And the Marine amazed me:/ he flicked out a knife.”) Fredy is amazed because this division within a “side” is happening in a country where the war itself is not currently taking place. He has witnessed many divisions within a “side” while at war, but for this to happen in a civilian café, over steak, strikes Fredy as a new and unacceptable spread of war’s lack of ethics. Fredy also believes it is unacceptable that the Marine, who is “a man big enough to bash up/ four of the sergeant”, opts for using a knife to retaliate, rather than choosing one of the other options open to him, such as punching the petrol sergeant, or simply taking his plate of steak back. To Fredy this is an unfair fight, in the same way that the three Nazis against the Jew was an unfair fight in Book IV, and the three white men against the black man was an unfair fight in Book III, and the group of people at the dance against one policeman was an unfair fight in Book II. In those situations, Fredy used his strength to physically defend the person under attack (250).

Prompted by the reminder of the inadequacy of his strength when confronting the nurse at the “mental hospital”, Fredy changes his strategy. Instead of relying on his physical strength, he defends the petrol sergeant by speaking: “*You don’t do that,/ I said to the Yank. In Australia they look down on you for that.*” At first the Marine ignores him and continues threatening the petrol sergeant (“*Gimme back my goddam steak, boy, or I’ll spill your liver*”). But when Fredy speaks again this ends the fight: “*You’ve disgraced yourself, I said./ How can these mates of yours trust you in battle now?/ You’re a fuck-up. Just as well they found out here*”). He takes the Marine’s knife but does not need his strength to do so (“And I snapped the knife off him.”) Fredy’s response is so persuasive that the Marine’s colleagues support Fredy (“*Hey, Sweeney, says one of his squad,/ Sid down and eat your goddam little steak*”) (250).

This is the first time in this verse novel where Fredy has defended someone and had the support of almost the entire room. However, this holds no interest for Fredy because, as an

autistic person, taking an action for popularity rather than principled reasons has never been important to him. What is important to him is being able to be his impaired self in public. This means being able to both use his strength, and to act on his autistic ethics, without then being punished for them by others, as a result of their discriminatory attitude towards impaired people.

Since Fredy acquired his “living plaster” he has also been required to mask it for his own safety, due to the discriminatory attitudes of many nondisabled people. In situations where someone’s life was in danger, and Fredy felt he had to reveal his “living plaster” in order to rescue them, the rest of the group have immediately cast him out.

Fredy has also had to put a lot of effort into masking his autism due to the discriminatory attitudes of many nondisabled people. He has been able to do this in part because, at the beginning of this novel he was nineteen, and thus already had nineteen years of autism masking practise. There has been only one occasion in this novel when, under extreme stress, Fredy’s autism was revealed when he began to stim in public (“I was quietly bumping my forehead against the wheel/ just to hear the echoey bone”), and he was immediately threatened for this (“Matt snapped/ *What are you at? Stop banging your forehead like an idiot!!* and there was soft fire all round his edges, in the dark”) (75).

Subsequently, Fredy’s “living plaster” also became a method by which he could mask his autistic ethics. Whenever he wanted to act on his autistic ethics, but then felt concerned that he would be attacked for doing so, he deliberately exhibited his physical strength, thereby shifting attention to his “living plaster” and away from his autism. Here in the cafe, though, Fredy has relied on his autistic ethics, and, instead of using his physical strength to deflect attention from his autism, he has placed even more emphasis on his autism by using techniques that he learned from acting, (“Hooray for Hollywood, I said to myself”). In other words, he has found a way to be himself in public which makes him feel proud of himself, with no qualifiers, for the first time in this verse novel. Consequently, this is the first time in this verse novel that he has ended a scene by simply saying that he likes himself (“Hooray for Hollywood, I said to myself and liked myself”) (250).

The Rescue

Fredy and Laura consider and discard a number of strategies to rescue Hans, until a particularly ambitious idea occurs to Laura. Recognising and accepting the depth and closeness of Fredy's and Hans's relationship, she suggests what seems natural – that they become brothers, by pretending that Hans is now Frank, Fredy's brother who died from meningitis as a baby:

*Well, why couldn't
his disease have left him like Hans and talking mainly
his baby language? ...*

...She added *Their faces don't age as fast,*

I mean, if someone should think Hans looked too young (250)

Demonstrating how thrilled Fredy is by this idea, and by Laura suggesting it, he responds with his most effusive reaction in this verse novel: “*You're a worldbeater*, I said, kissing her. *An electric worldbeater!*” (250) As an autistic man with an intense interest in machines, calling her “*An electric worldbeater*” is a high compliment.

Laura also then leads and coordinates the rescue. However, the rescue would not have been possible without Laura's friend Kyle Bourke, whose skill at drawing enables him to fake documents (“*I can do you documents, passports, anything. I could do tenners but I don't.*”) (251) With Frank's identity documents at home and Hans's transfer to Queensland documents with her, Laura went to the “mental hospital”:

She signed Hans out and swept him
away to the specialist head-doctors. Who were us. And the weeks
And months piled up over the adventure, with never a copper
to our door. It had worked. (251)

Neurodivergence – “Bad Hospital”

And going round with me

to roll forty-four gallon drums onto lorries and off
and be called Frank, and knock on the empties with a bolt
cleared the Bad Hospital out of Hans's mood. He took up
singing, in fact. (251-2)

Fredy's wording of Hans's experience is deliberate and precise. It is not that working together removes the “Bad Hospital” from Hans's memory, but from his “mood”. This is an important point to emphasise due to the stereotype that intellectually impaired people and autistic people

do not feel or remember emotion, and therefore would not be affected by rape or other types of assault. This phrasing emphasises that Hans continues to live with the trauma of being imprisoned and raped, while also managing it in his direct style. Hans's responses always reflect his experience: When he was new to Australia and felt that everything he knew had been taken away, he destroyed his Christmas presents. When he was imprisoned and the staff who assaulted him told him that he should not tell anyone or that, if he did, nobody would believe him, he stopped speaking. Now that he is free from the "mental hospital" and its abusive staff, and living and working with Fredy, he sings.

And there are signs towards the end of the novel that there are people, besides Fredy, who value Hans's neurodivergent way of expressing himself. For example, as Fredy explains of Hans's singing, "He couldn't do music and words/ at the same time, or learn verses at all; he sang just voice" (252). Fredy is so fearful that other people will discriminate against Hans for this that he warns Hans not to sing when other people are nearby. One day, however, someone hears Hans singing, and interprets it in a completely different way:

Yer offsider singing in tongues?

a Gypsy bloke asked me up at Muswellbrook, and explained what that is:
the Holy Spirit singing through you, for once not harnessed to words
or any such cover-ups, was the way he put it. (252)

And who is to say that this way of understanding Hans's singing is any less valid than the usual stereotypes that are applied to him?

Becoming Crip

In early 1945, as Germany, and the territory that the Nazi regime occupied, was claimed by The Allies, Fredy becomes overwhelmed at the extent of "the trench". He is in part gratified to know that others also feel a responsibility to witness the extent of the destruction caused by the Nazis and World War II ("I, and not just me, was looking full on, in movies and papers/ at the worldwide trench I'd known was there.") Simultaneously, however, a broader and much more confronting realisation occurs to him – he cannot absent himself from this situation, because he is on all "sides" of it. As an Australian he is the allies – one of "The drivers in their flu masks/ rolling the corpses up and in" – as a German he is one of "the stubborn squinty-faced/ German civilians being made to look, and to help" – and as a disabled person he is one of the "shit-sticking stiff-jointed thousands" (255).

This is confronting because, for most of the verse novel, Fredy wanted to believe that it is possible to exempt oneself from a situation simply by not participating in it. As he said to Sam when they were in Cairo (Book I): “*The world's divided. Not me. I won't shoot my left hand, nor my right*” (37). Now, through “the trench”, and through feeling the trauma of people on all “sides” of this war so acutely, he bodily understands that passivity is not possible.

Fredy is overwhelmed by this realisation and does not know how to process it (“I felt I was dead myself, and stank, and just couldn’t rot away./ In the house, the family tiptoed around me”) (255). However, the same conditions that allowed him to be open to this realisation for the first time will also enable him to integrate it. One of those conditions is Sam’s advice on managing trauma: “*You should never accept any name for it, even from you./ Names don’t last. When it ends, you’ll have to tell it*” (235). Consequently, Fredy has not referred to his “living plaster” from then until now, and during that time it has transformed from a metaphor into a feeling: “I felt I was dead myself”).

Fredy is also ready to integrate these confronting ideas because he has become cripp. He has learned how to be proudly autistic in public without involving his physical strength, his autistic companion Hans is now his brother, and he has other disabled kin who, present or not, are also his companions. The ways in which Sam, Fredy, and Hans support each other, sometimes by providing companionship in distressing situations, such as Fredy visiting Hans in the “mental hospital”, and sometimes in unspoken ongoing commitments, such as Hans’s and Sam’s willingness to assist Fredy, stand in stark contrast to the many people throughout Book V who claim to be on one “side” together, and then betray each other.

The “Wrong Conditions”

Fredy continues not knowing how to respond to his realisation until the Americans bomb the Japanese. In that situation, since the Americans and the Japanese are on opposite “sides”, Fredy does not have to take disloyalty within a “side”, or being on more than one “side”, into account. For him, then, that situation is a country’s unethical tactics being used against it. For example, earlier in this book, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, even though America had a neutral position in World War II at that time, and then the Japanese shot the Chinese who were on the boat travelling from Shanghai to the Philippines, even though the Chinese were

civilians. America now bombing Japan, killing both soldiers and civilians as the Japanese did earlier, strikes Fredy as fair: “I heard myself say The Hermaphrodite! The Hermaphrodite,/ almost out loud. I spose I meant war was now equal/ for women and men. Now the front might even be safest” (256).

Simultaneously, though, Fredy feels that it is not fair that humans should be treated inhumanly, even if they have treated others inhumanly. Thus, he experiences both of these beliefs through his skin as “patches of feeling” and, therefore, also patches of numbness. When he then becomes aware that his experience of sensation would return completely if he allowed it to, he knows that he has integrated his realisation that he is actively on all sides, and decides that, since he can now control his experience of sensation, he will not allow it to return while it is mediated by other people’s pain: “I refused escape or cure. I fought to stop sensation/ as it crept on, because it came on via wrong conditions./ I wouldn’t be cured by others’ pain and destruction” (257).

Crip Dreaming

Serendipitously, Fredy electing not to experience sensation prevents him from being killed in a serious work accident. He and his son Joe are collecting fuel from a fuel dump, when Joe pulls out one of the forty-four-gallon drums, which sends many more toppling on to both of them.

Semi-conscious in hospital, Fredy dreams of four “faces round me looking down like a funeral” (257). The four are disabled people who are not currently with him, but have been instrumental in the development of his crip character. Iowa, who had autistic characteristics, and was one of Basil’s strongmen, and who Fredy dreamt of to assist him to understand his trauma, smiles and says, “*Hey Fred!*”. Basil, who gave Fredy the opportunity to live with disabled people, and taught him the importance of embodying the poem of your life, says “*Help me!*”. Marlene Dietrich, who noticed that Fredy was also disabled and, through poetry, told him he has the strength to manage in the world says, “*You hid your talent in the end and stayed a little person*” (257), and he responds “*My talent hid me*” (258). By “talent” they are both referring to “the nothing”. The final person is Heimann who had autistic characteristics and “lectured past me dry as fine print”. Heimann was one of the men who joined Fredy on the car he was driving through Germany at the end of Book I.

Hans's Relationship

While Fredy recovers in hospital, Laura visits and tells Fredy that a woman has begun a romantic relationship with Hans (“*The newsagent woman/ round the corner has put her eye on Hans. She asked me/ where I’d been hiding that gorgeous big Palooka.*”) Laura elaborates that the woman has offered Hans paid work and to live with her, and that “*she wears that blue button-through cleaner’s dress*” (260). Laura is uncomfortable with Hans having sex, and Fredy is uncomfortable that Laura is uncomfortable:

I worried a bit about the touch of police in Laura;
far-fetched, I spose, to see that in some sniffiness about
a button-through dress and a bit of the miraculous for Hans,
but police was a disease I had a nose for, always. (260)

Nevertheless, the relationship is joyful for Hans and “*The newsagent woman*”. Fredy notices this in Hans when he visits that day: “and that same Hans came in, with a goofy new authority to him,/ and called me a big Palooka. *I am a petrol*, he added” (260). And he notices this in Hans’s partner, Mrs Zdenovich, when he meets her once he is out of hospital. She first asks where Hans is (“*Is my sweetie over here? Tell/ him to come home for supper*”), and then attributes Fredy’s skill with languages to Hans (“*I like the way you pronounce my funny surname right:/ mostly I get Za-Dennovik. You must’ve learnt off your brother,/ he’s so European, isn’t he?*”) (264)

Not Confessing

After leaving hospital Fredy goes to confession. This is prompted by his dream including Iowa and Basil. Although he has attended church since the beginning of Book V, he has not been to confession since staying at Saint John.

The content and silences in his confessions demonstrate the shift in his understanding of his “living plaster”. During his first confession he believed that he had not been responsible for killing anyone and was told otherwise:

I got pulled up on
believing I’d killed no one, in the War. *You helped to fire
guns at cities? You sent horses for fighting men to ride?
It’s important not to fool ourselves, my son.* (137)

In his first confession he confessed to “the nothing” and was told otherwise (“On my numbness, I got nothing. *See a doctor*”) (137). This time he does not report to us what he confesses to, though it is most likely to be killing people at war; and he now truly believes his “living plaster” is not his fault (“I didn’t confess to the Nothing/ this time. It wasn’t a sin. Even if I’d done it”) (261).

Sam’s suicide

Soon after leaving hospital, Fredy visits Kyle to collect some petrol ration coupons, and Kyle has a message left by some sailors, from Sam, for him. Kyle first explains how he was told that Sam insisted that this message be conveyed to him, before drowning himself (“*Seems your man was sailing to Australia with his family/ and he gave this sailor his message, then that night/ went overboard, jumped they think, out to sea off Gladstone.*” Sam’s message was: “*Tell Fred that Noah couldn’t bear/ to look at the ground’ or maybe ‘to look at the drowned.’ / The sailor wasn’t sure which, exactly*”) (263).

This is a message that Sam knew would only be understood by Fredy. It refers to their last in-person conversation: “*I feel like Noah, he said safe on the Ark while all his fellow humans were drowning./ I’ve always felt that about my Dad’s people. Now it’s my mother’s/ people too. Both my worlds*” (235). The evening when they had that conversation, 8 December 1941, might have been one of the last evenings Sam was able to enjoy in Shanghai. The bombing of Pearl Harbor began a series of Japanese attacks and, since Nazi Germany convinced the Japanese that Jews supported America, it soon became life-threatening for Jews in Shanghai to stay there. Many countries who had programs to support Jewish refugees early in World War II, including Australia, had since closed them. However, Sam would have been able to return to Australia as an Aboriginal. Thus, again, he would have avoided being one of the drowned – a position about which he felt increasingly guilty. Regardless of whether Sam’s final word was “ground” or “drowned”, his message is the same. Returning to where his lifetime of trauma and survivor guilt began was too much for him.

Giving Up Strength

Fredy’s grief over Sam’s death prompts him to begin explicitly questioning whether his “living plaster” is preventing him from developing his “poem”. He had already realised, most recently at the café, that his physical strength was not useful to him and that he could rely on

his autism as a strength. Now he wonders whether his physical strength hampers him from developing his “poem” through his autism:

It was all leprosy again, rotting away inside me
and it asked: How good's your poem?
Can it make them alive again after dancing in the kerosene?

Can it help Sam swim into Heaven? Into Woodenbong, even?
That he called Nguthumbuyn, up there in the Border Ranges?
It's the white null spirit, that you can't imagine these things.
It's your deaf-body. (263)

Fredy's relationship with strength is crucial to understanding his “cure”. When the “cure” is discussed by critics, the focus is on Fredy gaining sensation. What is neglected, however, is that in order for Fredy to be able to gain sensation, he has to be ready to give up his strength. As Murray says of Fredy: “he's told earlier on how to get rid of his condition, told that if he could ever pray with a whole heart to be rid of it, it would leave him that same day. What he can't bear to admit, he doesn't even admit to himself, is it's too good to give up. It might be a dreadful limitation, but it's also what makes him special and different, and it has many advantages”.⁴ Fredy is only ready to give up his strength now that this is no longer true: His strength is not an advantage anymore – he did not need it in the fight in the café, and when he most needed it, to rescue Hans, it was ineffective.

“The Right Solution”

After realising that his physical strength is no longer of use, Fredy is ready to relinquish it. This, as opposed to being glad when humans suffer for having treated other humans badly, is “the right solution” for regaining sensation. However, this realisation is necessary but not sufficient – what Fredy also needs to do, as he was told in Book II, is pray with a whole heart (“*If ever you can pray// with a single heart to be free of it, it will leave you that day*” (24)). Praying with a whole heart means understanding himself as on all “sides”, not only in World War II, but throughout history. He is reminded of this a few days after he learns of Sam's death, when he is waiting in the car for Louise's music lesson to finish (“You have to pray with a whole heart, says my inner man to me,/ and you haven't got one. *Can I get one?*”) (264)

⁴ Peter Thompson, “Wisdom Interviews: Les Murray,” *Big Ideas*, ABC Radio National, March 27, 2005, www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/wisdom-interviews-les-murray/3446558.

These thoughts occur to him while observing the environment around him. Across the road from him Hans is playing a single-player version of tennis in a store space. And on a wall near Fredy is a crucifix:

and Jesus had his head turned hard
to one side, as if he was watching just one player
in Hans's tennis game; not Hans but the dark space that kept
returning his shots, mostly skew, so Hans had to chase them. (264)

It is as though Hans and Jesus are both directing and reflecting Fredy's thoughts. He is first asked to "Forgive the Aborigines" for "being on our conscience". This is uncomplicated for Fredy and, reflecting this, "Hans served, and the ball came bounding back/ like a happy pup." Next Fredy tells himself to "Forgive the Jews" because, although Fredy was not connected to the Nazi regime or earlier attacks on Jews, he has benefited from them ("It isn't on your head. But it's in your languages.") As Hans searches for his ball, indicating that forgiving is becoming more complicated for Fredy, Fredy's self then asks him to forgive all women. And then lastly, to forgive God (264).

For Fredy, forgiveness is possible because of his realisation that he is on all sides. The point of being on all sides is not that there is no such thing as sides, the point is, as it has been throughout this novel, that sides are socially constructed. Further to this, Fredy's realisation, in order for him to be able to pray with a whole heart, is that being on the same side as humans who are being dehumanised, or being on the opposite side to those who are dehumanising them, does not absolve him of responsibility for how humans are treated. This is not simply about being a bystander when an act of cruelty occurs, it is acknowledging that the act of cruelty is only the latest act in a socially constructed history. His forgiveness is not confined to individual incidents, it encompasses resentments that have gathered momentum over centuries so that, even if you are on the advantaged "side", you feel resentful but you cannot remember why.

The Story After the Story After the Story

Fredy regains sensation within hours. The next morning he "woke under weight./ Our bedclothes were on me, warming me to just above the perfect/ heat I must have been at for thirty-four years." He knew that "no counter-prayer, no horror, nothing// would bring my null-body back. It was gone forever." And he presents this to us just as fact, with no judgement attached.

And because Fredy likes “the story that comes after the story”, the stories continue to fan out. The next day is the only one of embodied “pure rediscovering.” Over the next week he learns that “the earlier/ times I’d been back had not been full returns,/ just ghostly half-measures”. The following year Joe gets married (265).

If there is an end to Fredy’s story it is that Fredy, as a proud autistic man, wrote the story of his trauma, as his crip kin Sam suggested he should: “*Names don’t last. When it ends, you’ll have to tell it*” (235).

Conclusion

In the final stanza of his poem “Sidere Mens Eadem Mutato” Les Murray celebrates his friends and fellow students from the University of Sydney:

they were our peerless company –
with Duncan the Sydney historian, who in an Australian
course might send off the First Fleet by August:
and Dave Croll who died of a train, having seen much reality
these dine with my uncles and hills in the restaurant of memory
(which is also a starship, a marriage, a crystal of heaven)
with the droll men of Physics who one day would capture the Quark
with Germaine a few tables off winning a hard conversation
and Lex who cried *Poetry is not the wine but the cognac...*¹

Like “Portrait of the Autist as a New World Driver”, this is a poem from half a century ago, from Murray’s fourth collection *Lunch and Counter Lunch* (1974). Also like “Portrait of the Autist”, it presents a scene that avoids relegating anyone, whilst also offering pride of place to both disabled people and poetry. “Lex” is Lex Banning, who had a love of poetry as strong as Murray’s and, as the only disabled-identifying poet in their literary circle, was the example that enabled Murray to create a career as a poet. As Murray was for Tammet and Sam was for Fredy, Banning provided both the encouragement and the map, not only for what, but also for whom, Murray could be.

As I have sought to demonstrate in this thesis, Murray subsequently became an exemplar of crip poetics. Central to crip poetics is the principle that embodiment is not simply a vehicle but a creator of poetry. In other words, a human creates poetry not because they are living and breathing, but according to how they live and breathe.

¹ Les Murray, “Sidere Mens Eadem Mutato,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 108-12. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this poem are from this version of it.

My introduction outlined how this concept is central to disability culture, and, therefore, literary disability studies. Against a 150-year history of being statistically designated as abnormalities, medically designated as tragedies, and eugenically designated as burdens, disabled people reclaimed their individual and collective stories through language and embodiment. Rather than continuing the medical narrative that disability was an individual tragedy, they articulated disability as socially constructed relationships, similar to those of race or gender. They explained that some embodied atypicalities are disabled by society, while others are not, and utilised the word impairment as the individual and collective identifier for those whom society constructs as targets of disablement. Compulsory able-bodiedness is the system by which these constructions operate, continually pressuring impaired people to desire normality, insisting that normal is better than impairment, rather than dependent on it.

In response to compulsory able-bodiedness, *crip*, and *crip poetics* in particular, is not only an expression of, but a method for, disabled pride and solidarity. It is an invitation for disabled people to flourish, not despite their impairments, but with and through them. *Crip* entails disabled people rejecting compulsory able-bodiedness, valuing embodiment, centring their experience, and utilising an array of techniques afforded them by their subjectivity.

I also posited two additional *crip poetics* characteristics – resisting erasure, and enhanced audience awareness. While nondisabled people often ignore disabled culture, history, and future, *crip poetics* corrects these inaccuracies, updating and enhancing the record.

Simultaneously, *crip poetics* does not assume a homogenous audience. It is written with a keen awareness of bodily diversity, interactional expertise, and in-group communication facilitated by means other than words, which I named embodied expertise.

Chapter One summarised autistic poetic techniques that result from, but are not unique to, autism. Since autism was designated as a diagnosis in 1938, these have been frequently portrayed as deficits. However, as the autistic community develops, it is replacing these dehumanising tropes with neurodiversity, which understands normal as just one, rather than the only, method of communication. Furthermore, invention (word-play), ricochet (repetition), ejaculation (fragmentation), apostrophe (monologues), discretion (systemising) and silence, when recognised as techniques rather than behaviours, are understood as creatively and fundamentally literary.

I argued that, though Murray did not employ the literary disability studies terms of this thesis, he acted in synchrony with them. He motivated and supported other autistic and disabled authors. He drew attention to the harm caused by the normative and eugenic values that are embedded in societal practices. He posited that a body – any body – can create poetry. He maintained that poetry was constituted by the thoughts, dreams, and physical body of the person who created it. And he identified his autism as being not just a contributor to, but a primary source of his poetry.

As such, this thesis then detailed some of autism's profound effects on Murray's poetry. Chapter One began with an analysis of "The Tune on Your Mind" (2006), a sonnet that explicitly focuses on Murray's identification as autistic. The first stanza embodies the convoluted process of autism becoming a medical diagnosis, and Murray's understanding of himself as autistic, through his intense interest in words. It skips within and between four languages, layering invention and ricochet to enhance each other.

Chapter One also sketched the history of autism. It includes key moments in autism's history from medical, societal, and autistic positions. As the history of autism is inextricably linked with the Nazi genocide of disabled people, and since this is a regular concern in Murray's poetry, it is a dominant topic.

Chapter Two began with an analysis of "Portrait of the Autist", the first of Murray's poem's explicitly mentioning autism which, as far as I am aware, is also the first published autistic pride poem written in English. It revels in the tactility of driving a car, the honour of swapping facts with other autists, and Murray's intense interest in words. It also expresses how nonautists miss and misunderstand an autist's profound loneliness, and their need to be alone. Similar to "The Tune on Your Mind", "Portrait of the Autist" utilises ricochet and invention, though it restricts itself to English, and specifically addresses the audience.

In Chapter Two I also analysed "It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen" (1994), which does not address readers, but is written for a diverse readership. This poem is notable for Murray's minimal use of metaphor, highlighting instead a technique representing autistic processing, referred to as "line scan". In the poem Murray describes his autistic son Alexander and how, together, they reclaimed the word "autism" from those who had used it

against them, and did not allow others' stereotypes of them to diminish their nourishing relationship. By presenting Alexander through statements from four subject positions, Murray expresses that autism is integral to Alexander. Comparing "It Allows" with "The Tune on Your Mind" confirms that father and son have a number of autistic characteristics in common, while "To One Outside the Culture" (2002) affirms their relationship and Alexander's agency. Other poems implicitly focusing on Alexander mentioned in this thesis include "Exile Prolonged by Real Reasons" (1983), and "The Joy at his First Lie" (1990). Other poems implicitly focusing on Murray's autism mentioned in this thesis include "Self-Portrait from a Photograph" (1983), "The Averted" (2006), and "The Shield-Scales of Heraldry" (1996).

Chapter Three discussed poems that do not explicitly mention autism, but which nevertheless exhibit autistic poetic techniques. In "Bent Water in the Tasmanian Highlands" (1981) autism is the reason that "Bent" has multiple meanings, and the reason that the water is metaphorised as an impaired body persistently negotiating a disabling environment. The poem allows the audience to observe Murray's thoughts on the water, and then on observation, as they form and reform. As the water rushes down the mountain to the ocean, increasing in pace, expansiveness, and magnitude, autism is the instigator of Murray's technique that I name cross resonance, which utilises different positioning of the same letters within nearby words to echo the water's proliferation. Similarly, autism is the reason that Murray devoted two poems to enumerating the types and qualities of "Interest". In "First Essay on Interest" (1979), interest is a benevolent, otherworldly force, that momentarily possesses a person, defamiliarising and recontextualising the ordinary details of their life. "Second Essay on Interest: The Emu" (1983) details the process of objectification, possession, and disposal that ensues when humans label something as "interesting". Murray's example is the emu which, because of its thorough observation of the world, he claims as heraldic of autistic people. "First Essay" is written in plain language, directly to the reader, while "Second Essay" is primarily an exchange with the emu.

The most substantial of Murray's autistic poems is the verse novel *Fredy Neptune*, analysed in chapters Four, Five, and Six. As a verse novel it writes both famous and everyday disabled people into twentieth century history through a range of autistic and crip techniques, presented as a self-narrated film. It is narrated by, and tells the story of, Australian-German Fredy Boettcher. Like Murray, Fredy has many autistic characteristics, though they are not

explicitly named as such, as there was not a term to classify them in the first half of the twentieth century, the period in which *Fredy Neptune* is set.

Early in the verse novel, as the result of witnessing a mass murder, Fredy develops a trauma-related condition, that does not have a name, where he can heal his wounds, his experience of his body in space fluctuates, and he cannot experience physical sensation. Afterwards, nondisabled people only recognise him as impaired when he reveals it in order to rescue someone from life-threatening danger. Yet, through interactional and embodied expertise, disabled people immediately recognise him as one of them. While Fredy endures prejudice against his races and impairments in 1910s Europe, 1920s Australia, and 1930s America and Germany, he also builds a crip community around him who assist him to develop crip pride. One of the most significant people in that community is Sam, an Aboriginal and Jewish man who meets Fredy in hospital early in the verse novel. Though their lives diverge, they take every opportunity, though rare, to enjoy each other's in-person company, while writing to each other in between those times. Fredy regards Sam as a mentor and, in turn, Fredy is a mentor to Hans, his other significant companion. Hans is an autistic and intellectually impaired German man whom Fredy rescues from being sterilised by the Nazi regime, and whom he brings to Australia to live with him. The stories of these three men represent the types of trauma that disabled people experience resulting from prejudice, and the crip kinship and pride that nevertheless flourishes between them.

The analyses in this thesis present crip and autistic subjectivity and poetic techniques as integral to Murray's aesthetic. They exemplify a method of analysing, classifying, and experiencing Murray's poetry that has been absent in Australian critical analysis of Murray's poetry thus far. However, this thesis is not an attempt to make up for that six-decade silence. It argues that these analyses add essential nuance to how Murray's writing is understood. Yet its most salient point is that it is only a beginning. For example, so far as I am aware, Murray extends the history of autistic poetics a further twenty years, and this has as yet unexplored implications for both Australian literature and autistic poetics world-wide. Moreover, other Murray poems may reveal other crip and autistic experiences and techniques.

More broadly, Murray's autistic techniques and subjectivity demonstrate the profound influence that impairment and disablement exert on writing. As such they also illustrate the centrality of impaired authors to Australian literature, and the value of recognising disability

as a critical category in the same way that Australian literature recognises Aboriginality and gender. Haunting the story of Murray's autism throughout this thesis is the untold stories of other Australian disabled authors. These include Australian critical inattention to Judith Wright's deafness, Alan Marshall's impairment-positive writing, and a vast history of disabled Aboriginal authors. Murray's vast contribution to Australian literature was, as he stated, substantially due to autism. Therefore, we can infer from it the richness that might have been possible if Murray's autism had been accepted by Australian literature, the variety of creativity in the writing of other Australian authors yet to be acknowledged as disabled, and the beginning of what is possible for future Australian disabled authors.

All creative expression is ultimately subjective and embodied. Artists – be they painters, sculptors, artisans, poets, or critics – draw on the entirety of their experience and unveil the contours of their inner, embodied realities. One poet's ecstatic language is another's soulless list, one critic's enthralling masterpiece is another's uncommunicative failure; but all testify to the infinite diversity of human consciousness.

Murray's poetic greatness springs from his steadfast refusal to follow the advice of his critics and extinguish his autistic essence. He rejected an inauthentic adherence to conventional notions of what a poet – even an outstanding poet – should say, and how they must or must not say it. Or, as he phrased it in “The Tune on Your Mind”, “Never towing a line from the Ship of Fools”.² Instead, he honed the poetic techniques available to him to express his subjective experience. In so doing, Murray beckons us to come closer. He invites us into his uniquely embodied world that is at once achingly lonely, irrepressibly joyous, endlessly playful, and profoundly human.

² Les Murray, “The Tune on Your Mind,” in *Collected Poems* (Carlton: Black Inc, 2018), 561-2.

Bibliography

- Adams, Rachel, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, eds. *Keywords for Disability Studies*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- Alexander, Peter F. *Les Murray: A Life in Progress*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Alland, Sandra, Khairani Barokka, and Daniel Sluman. *Stairs and Whispers: D/Deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back*. Rugby: Nine Arches Press, 2017. Kindle.
- American Psychiatric Association, ed. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed. Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.
- Antrobus, Raymond. *The Perseverance*. London: Penned in the Margins, 2018.
- Ashby, Christine E., and Julie N. Causton-Theoharis. "Disqualified in the Human Race: A Close Reading of the Autobiographies of Individuals Identified as Autistic." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 13, no. 5 (2009): 501-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110801886673>.
- Asperger, Hans. "'Autistic psychopathy' in childhood." In *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, translated by Uta Frith, 37-92. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Assaly, Alex. "'Home Is the First/and Final Poem'." Review of *On Bunyah*, by Les Murray, *Review 31*, 2015, <http://review31.co.uk/article/view/501/home-is-the-first-and-final-poem>.
- "Australian law allows disabled people to be 'chemically castrated', inquiry hears." *The Guardian*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/03/australian-law-allows-disabled-people-to-be-chemically-castrated-inquiry-hears>.
- Avery, Scott. *Culture Is Inclusion: A Narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with Disability*. Sydney: First Peoples Disability Network, 2018.
- Baggs, Mel (Amanda). *In My Language*, YouTube, January 15, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc>.
- Bailey, Benjamin, and Joanne Arciuli. "Indigenous Australians with Autism: A Scoping Review." *Autism* 24, no. 5 (July 2020): 1031-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319894829>.
- Bakan, Michael B. "The Musicality of Stimming: Promoting Neurodiversity in the Ethnomusicology of Autism." *MUSICultures* 41, no. 2 (2014): 133-61.
- Baker, Candida. "Les A. Murray." In *Yacker 2: Australian Writers Talk About Their Work*, 218-46. Sydney: Pan Books, 1987.
- Barclay, Paul. "Wisdom Interviews: Les Murray." *Big Ideas*, podcast, 27 March, 2005, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/wisdom-interviews-les-murray/3446558>.
- Barker, Clare, and Stuart Murray. *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Baron, Michael. "Autism – a Creative Process?: Poetry, Poets, Imagination." *Popular Narrative Media* 1, no. 1 (2008): 103-13. <https://doi.org/10.3828/pnm.1.1.11>.
- Baron-Cohen, Simon. *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Baron-Cohen, Simon, Alan M. Leslie, and Uta Frith. "Does the Autistic Child Have a 'Theory of Mind?'" *Cognition* 21, no. 1 (October 1985): 37-46. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277\(85\)90022-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(85)90022-8).
- Bartlett, Jennifer, Sheila Black, and Michael Northen, eds. *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*. El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2011.

- Bartlett, Jennifer, John Lee Clark, Jim Ferris, and Jillian Weise. "Disability and Poetry." *Poetry* 205, no. 3 (December 2014): 271-84. <http://jstor.org/stable/43591831>.
- Baynton, Douglas C. "'These Pushful Days': Time and Disability in the Age of Eugenics." *Health and History* 13, no. 2 (2011): 43-64. <http://jstor.org/stable/10.5401/healthhist.13.2.0043>.
- Belek, Ben. "Autism and the Proficiency of Social Ineptitude: Probing the Rules of "Appropriate" Behavior." *Ethos* 46, no. 2 (June 2018): 161-79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12202>.
- . "Autism as Heredity, Autism as Heritage. The Movement of Autism Back and Forth through Time." *Medicine Anthropology Theory* 7, no. 1 (April 2020): 167-75. <https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.7.1.758>.
- Benedict, Susan, and Linda Shields, eds. *Nurses and Midwives in Nazi Germany: The "Euthanasia Programs"*. New York; London: Routledge, 2014.
- Bengtsson, Staffan. "The Nation's Body: Disability and Deviance in the Writings of Adolf Hitler." *Disability & Society* 33, no. 3 (2018): 416-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1423955>.
- Bennett, Matthew, Amanda A. Webster, Emma Goodall, and Susannah Rowland. *Life on the Autism Spectrum: Translating Myths and Misconceptions into Positive Futures*. Singapore: Springer, 2018.
- Beresford, Peter. "'Mad', Mad Studies and Advancing Inclusive Resistance." *Disability & Society* 35, no. 8 (2020): 1337-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1692168>.
- . "Madness, Distress, Research and a Social Model." In *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research*, edited by Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, 208-22. Leeds: The Disability Press, 2004.
- Berry, Emily. "Raymond Antrobus Talks to Emily Berry." *The Poetry Society/The Poetry Review*, podcast, August 28, 2018, soundcloud.com/poetrysociety/raymond-antrobus-talks-to-emily-berry.
- Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, Hanna, Nick Chown, and Anna Stenning, eds. *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*. London: Routledge, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429322297>.
- Bérubé, Michael. "Disability and Narrative." *PMLA* 120, no. 2 (2005): 568-76. <https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900167914>.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self*. New York: The Free Press, 1967.
- Beum, Robert, and Karl Shapiro, eds. *The Prosody Handbook: A Guide to Poetic Form*. 2nd ed. New York: Dover Publications, 2006. Kindle.
- Bickerton, Ian J. "Why Australian, and American, Why Indeed All, Historians Should Read Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune*." *Journal of Australian Studies* 25, no. 70 (2001): 23-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443050109387702>.
- Billen, Andrew. "Observer Interview with Les Murray." Carcanet, June 22, 1997, <https://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?showdoc=19;doctype=interview>.
- Birch, Jen. *Congratulations! It's Aspergers Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2003.
- Birns, Nicholas. *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead*. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2015.
- Blaser, Arthur. "Always the First to Go: People with Disabilities." In *Anatomy of Genocide: State-Sponsored Mass-Killings in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Alexandre Kimenyi and Otis L. Scott. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001.
- Boldsen, Sofie. "Toward a Phenomenological Account of Embodied Subjectivity in Autism." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 42 (2018): 893-913. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-018-9590-y>.
- Bolt, David. "Not Forgetting Happiness: The Tripartite Model of Disability and Its Application in Literary Criticism." *Disability & Society* 30, no. 7 (2015): 1103-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2015.1071240>.
- Bombaci, Nancy. "Performing Mindblindness: Gertrude Stein's Autistic Ethos of Modernism." *Journal of Gender Studies* 21, no. 2 (2012): 133-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.661567>.
- Botha, Monique. "Academic, Activist, or Advocate? Angry, Entangled, and Emerging: A Critical Reflection on Autism Knowledge Production." *Frontiers in Psychology* (September 28, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.727542>.

- Botha, Monique, Bridget Dibb, and David M. Frost. “‘Autism Is Me’: An Investigation of How Autistic Individuals Make Sense of Autism and Stigma.” *Disability & Society* 37, no. 3 (2022): 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1822782>.
- Botha, Monique, Jacqueline Hanlon, and Gemma Louise Williams. “Does Language Matter? Identity-First Versus Person-First Language Use in Autism Research: A Response to Vivanti.” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. (2021): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04858-w>.
- Bottema-Beutel, Kristen, and Shannon Crowley. “Pervasive Undisclosed Conflicts of Interest in Applied Behavior Analysis Autism Literature.” *Frontiers in Psychology* (May 5, 2021): 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.676303>.
- Bourke, Lawrence. “‘Digging under the Horse’: Surface as Disguise in the Poetry of Les A. Murray.” *Southerly* 47, no. 1. (1987): 26-41.
- . “Les A. Murray: Interviewed by Lawrence Bourke.” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 27, no. 1. (1986): 167-87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002198948602100119>.
- . *A Vivid Steady State: Les Murray and Australian Poetry*. Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992.
- Brentari, Diane. “Phonological Representation in American Sign Language.” Review of *Phonological Representation of the Sign: Linearity and Nonlinearity in American Sign Language*, by Wendy Sandler, *Language* 68, no. 2 (June 1992): 359-74. <https://doi.org/10.2307/416945>.
- Broderick, Alicia A., and Ari Ne’eman. “Autism as Metaphor: Narrative and Counter-Narrative.” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 12, no. 5-6 (2008): 459-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802377490>.
- Brown, Lydia X. Z., E. Ashkenazy, and Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, eds. *All the Weight of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism*. Nebraska: DragonBee Press, 2017.
- Brueggemann, Brenda Jo. “An Enabling Pedagogy: Meditations on Writing and Disability.” *JAC* 21, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 791-820. www.jstor.org/stable/20866446.
- Burt, Steve. “The Odd Couplet.” *The Village Voice* 44, no. 12. (1999): 135-36.
- Bury, Simon M., Rachel Jellett, Jennifer R. Spoor, and Darren Hedley. “‘It Defines Who I Am’ or ‘It’s Something I Have’: What Language Do [Autistic] Australian Adults [on the Autism Spectrum] Prefer?” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04425-3>.
- Cage, Eilidh, and Zoe Troxell-Whitman. “Understanding the Reasons, Contexts and Costs of Camouflaging for Autistic Adults.” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 49, no. 5 (2019): 1899-911. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-03878-x>.
- Call, Josep, and Michael Tomasello. “Does the Chimpanzee Have a Theory of Mind? 30 Years Later.” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 12, no. 5 (2008): 187-92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2008.02.010>.
- Campbell, Fiona Kumari. *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Capp, Fiona. “An Interview with Les Murray.” *Australian Book Review*, no. 69 (1985). <https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/archive/1985/586-april-1985-no-69/8433-an-interview-with-les-murray-by-fiona-capp>.
- Carling-Jenkins, Rachel. *Disability and Social Movements: Learning from Australian Experiences*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.
- Casanova, Emily L., and Manuel F. Casanova. *Defining Autism: A Guide to Brain, Biology and Behavior*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2019.
- Cascio, M. Ariel. “Cross-Cultural Autism Studies, Neurodiversity, and Conceptualizations of Autism.” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 39 (2015): 207–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-015-9450-y>.
- Cassidy, Sarah, K. Gould, E. Townsend, M. Pelton, A. E. Robertson, and Jacqui Rodgers. “Is Camouflaging Autistic Traits Associated with Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours? Expanding the Interpersonal Psychological Theory of Suicide in an Undergraduate Student Sample.” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 50, no. 10 (2019): 3638-48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04323-3>.

- Cassidy, Sarah, and Jacqui Rodgers. "Understanding and Prevention of Suicide in Autism." *The Lancet* 4, no. 6 (2017). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(17\)30162-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(17)30162-1).
- Castillo, Keith J. "On Being Told Autistic People Can't Like Poetry." *The Rising Phoenix Review*, April 2017. <https://therisingphoenixreview.com/2017/04/>.
- Catala, Amandine, Luc Faucher, and Pierre Poirier. "Autism, Epistemic Injustice, and Epistemic Disablement: A Relational Account of Epistemic Agency." *Synthese* 199. (2021): 9013-39 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-021-03192-7>.
- Catalano, Gary. "'Evading the Modernities': The Poetry of Les A. Murray." *Meanjin* 36 no. 1. (1977): 67-72. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.793491748368940>.
- . "Les Murray's Ark." *Meanjin* 62, no. 1. (2003): 10-18. <https://meanjin.com.au/about-meanjin/>.
- Cathcart, Michael. "Les Murray – Living with the Black Dog." *Books and Arts*, podcast, October 9, 2014. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/les-murray---mental-health-week/5785468>.
- Charlton, James I. *Nothing About Us without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Chiasson, Dan. "Fire Down Below: The Poetry of Les Murray." *The New Yorker*, June 4, 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/06/11/fire-down-below>.
- Cho, Ivy Y. K., Kristina Jelinkova, Manuela Schuetze, Sarah A. Vinette, Sarah Rahman, Adam McCrimmon, Deborah Dewey, and Signe Bray. "Circumscribed Interests in Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Look Beyond Trains, Planes, and Clocks." *PloS One* 12, no. 11 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0187414>.
- Clark, Gary. "Transmuting the Black Dog: The Mob and the Body in the Poetry of Les Murray." *Antipodes* 16, no. 1 (2002): 19-24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41957158>.
- Clunies Ross, Bruce. "The Art of 'Cracking Normal.'" In *The Poetry of Les Murray: Critical Essays*, edited by Laurie Hergenhan and Bruce Clunies Ross, 110-20. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001.
- Coetzee, J.M. "Les Murray and the Black Dog." In *The Best Australian Essays 2012*, Edited by Ramona Koval, 136-48. Collingwood: Black Inc, 2012.
- Collins, Harry, and Robert Evans. "Quantifying the Tacit: The Imitation Game and Social Fluency." *Sociology* 48, no. 1 (2014): 3-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512455735>.
- Colvin, Mark and Yasmin Parry. "Les Murray: Poet's Latest Volume Reflects on Bunyah, the Place Where He Grew up and Always Returned." *PM*, podcast, October 13, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-02/les-murray-latest-volume-reflects-on-bunyah/6816714>.
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of Australia. July, 2018. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/AUS/CO/8&Lang=En.
- Conroy, M. *Nazi Eugenics: Precursors, Policy, Aftermath*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2017.
- Cook, Julia, Laura Crane, Laura Hull, Laura Bourne, and William Mandy. "Self-Reported Camouflaging Behaviours Used by Autistic Adults During Everyday Social Interactions." *Autism* 1, no. 16 (2021): 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211026754>.
- Cooper, Rosalind, Kate Cooper, Ailsa J. Russell, and Laura G. E. Smith. "'I'm Proud to Be a Little Bit Different': The Effects of Autistic Individuals' Perceptions of Autism and Autism Social Identity on Their Collective Self-Esteem." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51. (2021): 704-14 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04575-4>.
- Coopman, Stephanie J. "Communicating Disability: Metaphors of Oppression, Metaphors of Empowerment." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 27, no. 1. (2003): 337-94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2003.11679030>.
- Corbett, Sarah. "Writing the Postcolonial Body in Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune*; *Dreamriser*." PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2012. <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/uk-ac-man-scw:186328>.
- Corker, Mairian, and Tom Shakespeare, eds. *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory*. London: Continuum, 2002.

- Costley, Debra, Susanna Baldwin, Susan Bruck, Kaaren Haas, and Kerry Ritzrow. *Shining a Light on the Autism Spectrum: Experiences and Aspirations of Adults*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Couser, G. Thomas. *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.
- . *The Work of Life Writing: Essays and Lectures*. New York: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003107842>.
- Cowen, Tyler. "Autism as Academic Paradigm." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 55, no. 41 (2009): 1-6.
- . *Create Your Own Economy: The Path to Prosperity in a Disordered World*. New York: Dutton, 2009.
- Crawford, Robert. "Les Murray: Life, Work, and Life's Work." In *The West Verandah: The Life and Work of Les Murray*, edited by Sonia Mycak, 137-47. Seven Hills: Boraga Academic, 2016.
- Crompton, Catherine J., Danielle Ropar, Claire V. M. Evans-Williams, Emma G. Flynn, and Sue Fletcher-Watson. "Autistic Peer-to-Peer Information Transfer Is Highly Effective." *Autism* 24, no. 7 (2020): 1704-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286>.
- Crow, Liz. "Renewing the Social Model of Disability." *Coalition* (1992).
- Czech, Herwig. "Hans Asperger, National Socialism, and 'Race Hygiene' in Nazi-Era Vienna." *Molecular Autism* 9, no. 29 (2018): 1-43. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13229-018-0208-6>.
- . "Response to 'Non-Complicit: Revisiting Hans Asperger's Career in Nazi-Era Vienna'." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 49, (2019): 3883-87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04106-w>.
- Daley, Tamara C. "From Symptom Recognition to Diagnosis: Children with Autism in Urban India." *Social Science & Medicine* 58, no. 7 (April 2004): 1323-35. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(03\)00330-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(03)00330-7).
- Dalton, Trent. "Les Murray: Poet in Residence." *The Australian*, November 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=patmwvyZkew>.
- Daniel, Missy. "Poetry Is Presence." *Commonweal* 119 no. 10 (1992).
- Davidson, Jim. "Les A. Murray: Interview." *Meanjin* 41, no. 1 (April 1982): 112-29.
- Davidson, Joyce, and Victoria L. Henderson. "'Coming out' on the Spectrum: Autism, Identity and Disclosure." *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, no. 2 (2010): 155-70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360903525240>.
- Davidson, Joyce, and Michael Orsini. *Worlds of Autism: Across the Spectrum of Neurological Difference*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Davidson, Michael. *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- . "Disability Poetics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*, edited by Cary Nelson, 581-601. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . "Paralyzed Modernities and Biofutures: Bodies and Minds in Modern Literature." In *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, edited by Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, 74-89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Davis, Lennard J. "Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies." *American Literary History* 11, no. 3. (1999): 500-12. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/11.3.500>.
- . ed. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 5th ed. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- . *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. New York: Verso, 1995.
- . "Who Put the the in the Novel? Identity Politics and Disability in Novel Studies." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 31, no. 3 (1998): 317-34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1346103>.
- Dawson, Michelle, and Tyler Cowen. "Autistics Appear Different, but Also Are Different, and This Should Be Valued." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 42. (2019).
- Dawson, Michelle, and Sue Fletcher-Watson. "When Autism Researchers Disregard Harms: A Commentary." *Autism* 26, no. 2 (February 2022): 564-66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211031403>.
- De Pieri, Stefano. "Les Murray: Not an Encomium." *Arena Magazine* No. 160, June, 2019, <https://arena.org.au/les-murray-not-an-encomium-by-stefano-de-pieri/>.
- Deal, Mark. "Aversive Disablism: Subtle Prejudice toward Disabled People." *Disability & Society* 22, no. 1 (2007): 93-107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590601056667>.

- Debien, Noel. "The Interview: Les Murray." *ABC Local – Sunday Nights*, August 2, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/sundaynights/stories/s4285463.htm>.
- Dennis, Oliver. "Asperg Is Me." *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 11, 2006.
- Dietrich, Marlene. *Marlene*. New York: Grove Press, 1989.
- Dinishak, Janette. "Autistic Autobiography and Hermeneutical Injustice." *Metaphilosophy* 52, no. 5 (September 2021): 556-69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12514>.
- Dolmage, Jay Timothy. *Disability Rhetoric*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014.
- Dow, Deanna, Lindee Morgan, Jessica L. Hooker, Matthew S. Michaels, Thomas E. Joiner, Juliann Woods, and Amy M. Wetherby. "Anxiety, Depression, and the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide in a Community Sample of Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder." *Archives of Suicide Research* 25, no. 2 (2021): 297-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2019.1678537>.
- Duffy, John, and Rebecca Dorner. "The Pathos of 'Mindblindness': Autism, Science, and Sadness in 'Theory of Mind' Narratives." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 201-16. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2011.16>.
- Durgin, Patrick F. "Post-Language Poetries and Post-Ableist Poetics." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 2 (2009): 159-84.
- Duwell, Martin. Review of *Taller When Prone*, by Les Murray. *Australian Poetry Review*, June 1, 2010 <http://www.australianpoetryreview.com.au/2010/06/les-murray-taller-when-prone-melbourne-black-inc-2010-89pp/>.
- . Review of *The Biplane Houses*, by Les Murray. *Australian Poetry Review*, September 1, 2006, <http://www.australianpoetryreview.com.au/2006/09/les-murray-the-biplane-houses-melbourne-black-inc-2006-90pp-2/>.
- . "'One of Them Kinds of Kids': The Lives of Les Murray." *Australian Literary Studies* 20, no. 3 (2002): 192-200. <http://www.australianliterarystudies.com.au/articles/one-of-them-kinds-of-kids-the-lives-of-les-murray>.
- Easton, Anthony. "Autism: An Anecdotal Abecedarium." Special issue, "Dystranslation," *Kadar Koli* 8 (Summer 2013): 98-107.
- Eisenberg, Leon, and Leo Kanner. "Childhood Schizophrenia: Symposium, 1955: 6. Early Infantile Autism, 1943–55." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 26, no. 3 (1956): 556-66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1956.tb06202.x>.
- Emens, Elizabeth F. "Shape Stops Story." *Narrative* 15, no. 1 (2007): 124-32. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2007.0003>.
- Eskestad, Nils. "Dancing 'On Bits of Paper': Les Murray's Soundscapes." In *The Poetry of Les Murray: Critical Essays*, edited by Laurie Hergenhan and Bruce Clunies Ross, 64-75. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001.
- Evans, Suzanne E. *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004.
- Falk, Dean. "More on Asperger's Career: A Reply to Czech." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 49. (2019): 3877-82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04099-6>.
- . "Non-Complicit: Revisiting Hans Asperger's Career in Nazi-Era Vienna." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 50. (2019): 2573-84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03981-7>.
- Feinstein, Adam. *A History of Autism: Conversations with the Pioneers*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444325461>.
- Ferris, Jim. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at Crip Poetry." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28, no. 1-2 (2008): 6-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930701754275>.
- . "Aesthetic Distance And the Fiction of Disability." In *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, edited by Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, 56-68. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- . "Against Rhythm: Poetry in Uncommon Time." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 14 2007): 81-6. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.1.1.9>.
- . "Crip Poetry, or How I Learned to Love the Limp." *Wordgathering: A Journal of Disability Poetry and Literature* 1, no. 2 (June 2007). http://www.wordgathering.com/past_issues/issue2/essay/ferris.html.

- . “The Enjambed Body: A Step toward a Crippled Poetics.” *The Georgia Review* 58, no. 2 (2004): 219-33. <http://jstor.org/stable/41402415>.
- Field, Barbara. “Intellectual Disability and Society.” Master of Philosophy thesis, University of Sydney, 2012. <http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/9390>.
- Finkelstein, Vic. "Are we Oppressed?: Collected Contributions from Early UPIAS Circulars." Manchester, 1974; TBR Imprint, 2018), <https://tonybaldwinson.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/are-we-oppressed-vic-finkelstein-upias-1974-2018-isbn-9780993526749.pdf>.
- . “A Personal Journey into Disability Politics.” Presentation, Leeds University Centre for Disability Studies, Leeds, 2001, 1-15. <http://www.independentliving.org/docs3/finkelstein01a.pdf>.
- . “Reflections on the Social Model of Disability: The South African Connection.” 2005. <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/finkelstein-Reflections-on-the-Social-Model-of-Disability.pdf>.
- . “The ‘Social Model of Disability’ and the Disability Movement.” March 2007. <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/finkelstein-The-Social-Model-of-Disability-and-the-Disability-Movement.pdf>.
- . “The Social Model of Disability Repossessed.” *Coalition*, December 1, 2001, 1-5. <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/finkelstein-soc-mod-repossessed.pdf>.
- Fitzgerald, Michael. *The Link between Asperger Syndrome and Scientific, Artistic, and Political Creativity: Eleven Case Studies*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2014.
- Fitzgerald, Michael, and Brendan O’Brien. *Genius Genes: How Asperger Talents Changed the World*. Shawnee Mission: Autism Asperger, 2007.
- Fitzgerald, Michael, and Antoinette Walker. *Unstoppable Brilliance: Irish Geniuses and Asperger’s syndrome*. Dublin: Liberties Press, 2008)
- Fletcher-Watson, Sue, and Geoffrey Bird. “Autism and Empathy: What Are the Real Links?” *Autism* 24, no. 1 (2020): 3-6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319883506>.
- Ford, Star (Ian). *A Field Guide to Earthlings: An Autistic/Asperger View of Neurotypical Behavior*. Self-published, Ian Ford Software Corporation, 2010. Kindle.
- Forrest, Brady James. “Crip Feelings/Feeling Crip.” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 75-89. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2019.14>.
- Foster, Erica. “‘The Mouthless Image of God’: Philosophical Threads in Les Murray’s Poetry and Prose.” Master’s thesis, Queensland University, 1986.
- Fox, Kate. *Fox Populi*. Middlesbrough: Smokestack Books, 2013. Kindle.
- Franks, Matt. “Crip/Queer Aesthetics in the Great War.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 65, no. 1 (2019): 60-88. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2019.0003>.
- Friedlander, Henry. *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: from Euthanasia to the Final Solution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Friedner, Michele Ilana “What Is Taken for Granted in Autism Research?” *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 42. (2019): e90. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X1800225X>, e90.
- Frith, Uta, ed. *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Fulton, R., K. Richardson, and R. Jones. *Sensory Trauma: Autism, Sensory Difference and the Daily Experience of Fear*. Autism Wellbeing CIC, 2020. <https://www.autismwellbeing.org.uk/publications/sensory-trauma%3A-autism%2C-sensory-difference-and-the-daily-experience-of-fear>.
- Gaffney, Carmel, ed. *Counterbalancing Light: Essays on the Poetry of Les Murray*. Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 1997.
- Gallagher, Hugh. *By Trust Betrayed: Patients, Physicians, and the License to Kill in the Third Reich*. New York: Henry Holt, 1990.
- . “What the Nazi ‘Euthanasia Program’ Can Tell Us About Disability Oppression.” *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 12, no. 2 (2001): 96-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104420730101200206>.

- Galton, Francis. *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its development*. Macmillan, 1883; Online Galton Archives, 2018. <https://galton.org/books/human-faculty/SecondEdition/text/web/human-faculty4.htm>.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- . ed. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- . “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory.” *NWSA Journal* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 1-32. <http://jstor.org/stable/4316922>.
- . “Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept.” *Hypatia* 26, no. 3 (2011): 591-609. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01206.x>.
- . “Shape Structures Story: Fresh and Feisty Stories About Disability.” *Narrative* 15, no. 1 (January 2007): 113-23. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2007.0005>.
- Gernsbacher, Morton Ann, and Sarah R. Pripas-Kapit. “Who’s Missing the Point? A Commentary on Claims That Autistic Persons Have a Specific Deficit in Figurative Language Comprehension.” *Figurative Language Comprehension, Metaphor and Symbol* 27, no. 1 (2012): 93-105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2012.656255>.
- Gernsbacher, Morton Ann, and m. Remi Yergeau. “Empirical Failures of the Claim That Autistic People Lack a Theory of Mind.” *Archives of Scientific Psychology* 7 (2019): 102-18. <https://doi.org/10.1037/arc0000067>.
- Ghaziuddin, Mohammad. “Suicide Rates in Adults with Autism.” In *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, edited by Fred R. Volkmar, 4697-701. Switzerland: Springer, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91280-6>.
- Gibson, Margaret F., and Patty Douglas. “Disturbing Behaviours: Ole Ivar Lovaas and the Queer History of Autism Science.” *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 4, no. 2 (October 2018): 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v4i2.29579>.
- Gildersleeve, Jessica, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Australian Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2021.
- Goethe, Johan Wolfgang Von. "Faust." trans. John R. Williams. in *The Essential Goethe*, edited by Matthew Bell, 249-370. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Goggin, Gerard, and Christopher Newell. *Disability in Australia: Exposing a Social Apartheid*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005.
- Goodley, Dan. *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203366974>.
- Goodley, Dan, and Katherine Runswick-Cole. “The Violence of Disablism.” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 33, no. 4 (2011): 602-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2010.01302.x>.
- Grace, Elizabeth J. “Autistethnography.” In *Both Sides of the Table*, edited by Phil Smith and Scot Danforth, 89-101. New York: Peter Lang, 2013.
- Grandin, Temple, and Margaret M. Scariano. *Emergence: Labelled Autistic*. New York: Warner Books, 1986.
- Grant, Jamie. “Poetry's Superman.” *Quadrant* 43, no. 4 (April 1999): 74-5.
- . “Subhuman Redneck Politics.” In *Counterbalancing Light: Essays on the Poetry of Les Murray*, edited by Carmel Gaffney, 123-36. Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 1997.
- Gray, Robert. “An Interview with Les Murray.” *Quadrant* (1976): 69-72.
- Grethlein, Jonas “Is Narrative ‘the Description of Fictional Mental Functioning’?: Heliodorus Against Palmer, Zunshine & Co.” *Style* 49, no. 3 (2015): 257-84. <https://doi.org/10.5325/style.49.3.0257>.
- Grossman, Ruth B, Rhyannon H. Bemis, Daniela Plesa Skwerer, and Helen Tager-Flusberg. “Lexical and Affective Prosody in Children with High-Functioning Autism.” *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 53, no. 3 (June 2010): 778-93. [https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388\(2009/08-0127\)](https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2009/08-0127)).
- Grove, Rachel, Rosa A. Hoekstra, Marlies Wierda, and Sander Begeer. “Special Interests and Subjective Wellbeing in Autistic Adults.” *Autism Research* 11, no. 5 (2018): 766-75. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.1931>.

- Guinness, Daphne "A Word or Two to the Contrary." *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 24, 2002, www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/08/23/1030052964792.
- Hacking, Ian. "Autistic Autobiography." *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 364, no. 1522 (2009): 1467-73. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2008.0329>.
- Haddon, Mark. "asperger's & autism." *Mark Haddon* (blog). July 16, 2009. <http://www.markhaddon.com/blog/aspergers-autism>.
- . "B is for bestseller." *The Guardian*, April 11, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/apr/11/booksforchildrenandteenagers.features3>.
- . *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. London: Random House, 2003.
- Hadley, Bree, Morgan Batch, and Michael Whelan. "The Entitled Ally: Authorship, Consultation, and the 'Right' to Stage Autistic People's Stories." *Disability & Society* 36, no. 9 (2021): 1489-509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1794796>.
- Haigh, Sarah M., Jennifer A. Walsh, Carla A. Mazefsky, Nancy J. Minshew, and Shaun M. Eack. "Processing Speed Is Impaired in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Relates to Social Communication Abilities." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 48, no. 8 (2018): 2653-62. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3515-z>.
- Hall, Alice. *Literature and Disability*. Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2015.
- Happé, Francesca, and Uta Frith. "The Weak Coherence Account: Detail-Focused Cognitive Style in Autism Spectrum Disorders." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 36, no. 1 (2006): 5-25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-005-0039-0>.
- Harrison, Jessica L., Charlotte L. Brownlow, Michael J. Ireland, and Adina M. Piovesana. "Empathy Measurement in Autistic and Nonautistic Adults: A Cosmin Systematic Literature Review." *Assessment* (2020): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191120964564>.
- Hart, Kevin. "'Interest' in Les A. Murray." *Australian Literary Studies* 14, no. 2 (October 1989): 147-59. <https://doi.org/10.20314/als.588e4563f5>.
- Haruvi-Lamdan, Nirit, Danny Horesh, Shani Zohar, Meital Kraus, and Ofer Golan. "Autism Spectrum Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: An Unexplored Co-Occurrence of Conditions." *Autism* 24, no. 4 (2020): 884-98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320912143>.
- Harvey, Philip. "Pigeon English: A 'Lost' Les Murray Interview." *Eureka Street* 29, no. 9 May (2019): 53-56. <https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article/pigeon-english--a--lost--les-murray-interview>.
- Haskell, Dennis. "Bringing the C20 to Bay: The People's Otherworld" Review of *The People's Otherworld*, by Les Murray, *Westerly* 4 (December 1984): 73-76.
- . "Memories, Jokes and Inexhaustible Patterns: Waiting For the Past." In *The West Verandah: The Life and Work of Les Murray*, edited by Sonia Mycak, 47-59. Seven Hills: Boraga Academic, 2016.
- Hass, Robert. "Robert Hass Interviews Les Murray." *Poetry International*, Vimeo, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/25343574>.
- Heilker, Paul, and m. Remi Yergeau. "Autism and Rhetoric." *College English* 73, no. 5 (May 2011): 485-97. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23052337>.
- Hergenhan, Laurie, and Bruce Clunies Ross, eds. *The Poetry of Les Murray: Critical Essays*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001.
- Heyward, Michael. "Out of the Bush League." *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1992, 11.
- Hippler, Kathrin, and Christian Klicpera. "A Retrospective Analysis of the Clinical Case Records of 'Autistic Psychopaths' Diagnosed by Hans Asperger and His Team at the University Children's Hospital, Vienna." *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 358, no. 1430 (2003): 291-301.
- Hobgood, Allison P., and David Houston Wood. "Early Modern Literature and Disability Studies." In *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, edited by Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, 32-46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Hofmann, Michael. "Les Murray." In *Where Have You Been? Selected Essays*, 167-83. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.
- Holt, Abigail, Khadija Bounekhla, Christie Welch, and Helene Polatajko. "'Unheard Minds, Again and Again': Autistic Insider Perspectives and Theory of Mind." *Disability and Rehabilitation* (July 2021): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2021.1949052>.

- Howlin, Patricia. "Adults with Autism: Changes in Understanding since DSM-III." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, no. 12 (2021): 4291-308. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04847-z>.
- Hughes, Bill. *A Historical Sociology of Disability: Human Validity and Invalidity from Antiquity to Early Modernity*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429056673>.
- Hughes, Bill, and Kevin Paterson. "The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards a Sociology of Impairment." *Disability & Society* 12, no. 3 (1997): 325-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599727209>.
- Hughes, Ted. *Ted Hughes: Collected Poems*. edited by Paul Keegan. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- Hume, Romy, and Henry Burgess. "'I'm Human after All': Autism, Trauma, and Affective Empathy." *Autism in Adulthood* 3, no. 3 (September 2021): 221-29. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0013>.
- Hunt, Judy. "A Revolutionary Group with a Revolutionary Message." *Coalition*, 2001: 22-30.
- Hunt, Paul. "Letter to the Editor." *Magic Carpet* 25, no. 1 (1973): 36.
- Huxley-Jones, Lizzie, ed. *Stim: An Autistic Anthology*. London: Unbound, 2020. Kindle.
- Iezzoni, Lisa I., Sowmya R. Rao, Julie Ressalam, Dragana Bolcic-Jankovic, Nicole D. Agaronnik, Karen Donelan, Tara Lagu, and Eric G. Campbell. "Physicians' Perceptions of People with Disability and Their Health Care." *Health Affairs* 40, no. 2 (2021): 297-306. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.01452>.
- Indyk, Ivor. "The Awkward Grace of John Forbes." *HEAT* 8 (1998): 138-50.
- . "The Doctor Didn't Do It." *Australian Book Review* 227 (December 2000-January 2001): 55-56.
- . "Provincialism and Encyclopaedism." *Island* 127 (2011): 78-92.
- JT. "Kindred Spirits?." *The Other side* (blog). December 6, 2010, <https://theotherside.wordpress.com/2010/12/06/kindred-spirits/>.
- Jaarsma, Pier, Petra Gelhaus, and Stellan Welin. "Living the Categorical Imperative: Autistic Perspectives on Lying and Truth Telling – between Kant and Care Ethics." *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 15 (2012): 271-77. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-011-9363-7>.
- Jackson, Andy. "Marfan lives." *Among the Regulars* (blog), August 31, 2011, <https://amongtheregulars.com/2011/08/31/marfan-lives/>.
- James, Ioan. *Asperger's Syndrome and High Achievement: Some Very Remarkable People*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2006.
- Johnson, Martin "Two poets." *Seriously... from BBC Radio 4*, podcast, February 16, 2017, 30:00, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08dr5r4.
- Johnson, Merri Lisa, and Robert McRuer. "Cripistemologies." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 127-47. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2014.12>.
- . "Cripistemologies and the Masturbating Girl." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 8.3 (2014): 245-55, 372 proquest.com
- Jones, Sandra C., Muhammad Akram, Chloe S. Gordon, Nicole Murphy, and Fiona Sharkie. "Autism in Australia: Community Knowledge and Autistic People's Experiences." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51 (2021): 3677-89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04819-3>.
- Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- . "Crip Kin, Manifesting." *Catalyst* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1-37.
- Kandeh, Mariama Seray, Mariama Korra Kandeh, Nicola Martin, and Joanna Krupa. "Autism in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities: A Report on the First Autism Voice UK Symposium." *Advances in Autism* 6, no. 2 (2020): 165-76. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AIA-12-2018-0051>.
- Kanner, Leo. "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact." *Nervous child* (1943): 217-50.
- . "Follow-up Study of Eleven Autistic Children Originally Reported in 1943." *Focus on Autistic Behavior* 7, no. 5 (December 1992): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/108835769200700501>.

- . “Irrelevant and Metaphorical Language in Early Infantile Autism.” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 103, no. 2 (1946): 242-46. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.103.2.242>.
- . “Problems of Nosology and Psychodynamics of Early Infantile Autism.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 19, no. 13 (1949): 416-26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1949.tb05441.x>.
- Kaplan, Robert M. “Alois Maria Ott: I Was Hitler’s Psychologist.” *Psychiatric Times*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/alouis-maria-ott-i-was-hitler-s-psychologist>.
- Kapp, Steven K. ed. *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement: Stories from the Frontline*. Singapore: Springer, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8437-0>.
- Kapp, Steven K., Robyn Steward, Laura Crane, Daisy Elliott, Chris Elphick, Elizabeth Pellicano, and Ginny Russell. “‘People Should Be Allowed to Do What They Like’: Autistic Adults’ Views and Experiences of Stimming.” *Autism* 23, no. 7 (2019): 1782-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319829628>.
- Kavanagh, Paul, and Peter Kuch. “An Interview with Les Murray.” *Southerly* 44, no. 4 (1984): 367-78.
- Kinsella, John. “Heavy Machinery: An Interview with Les Murray.” *Meanjin* 60, no. 1 (2001): 153-65.
- . “Heavy Machinery (Part 2).” *Meanjin* 60, no. 2 (2001): 152-65.
- Kirsch, Adam. “Robes, Tat, Rig, and Scunge.” *New Republic* 222, no. 24 (2000): 52-57.
- Kish, Daniel. *How I Use Sonar to Navigate the World*. TED, April 1, 2015, 13:07. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH0aihGWB8U>.
- Kleege, Georgina. “Blindness and Visual Culture: An Eyewitness Account.” In *The Disability Studies Reader*. 5th ed., edited by Lennard J. Davis, 440-9. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Knittel, Susanne C. *The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.
- Kondziella, Daniel. “Thirty Neurological Eponyms Associated with the Nazi Era.” *European Neurology* 62 (2009): 56-64. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000215880>.
- Koval, Ramona, ed. *The Best Australian Essays*. Collingwood: Black Inc, 2012.
- . “Les Murray.” *The Book Show*, podcast, May 10, 2006, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/bookshow/les-murray/3333986>.
- . “Les Murray, Poet, 7/10/38 - 29/04/19.” *Ramona Koval* (blog), April 30, 2019, <https://ramonakoval.com/blog/2019/04/30/les-murray-poet-7-10-38-29-04-19>.
- Kuppers, Petra. “Toward a Rhizomatic Model of Disability: Poetry, Performance, and Touch.” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009): 221-40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jlc.0.0022>.
- Lake, Meredith. “Remembering Les Murray.” *Soul Search*, podcast, May 12, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/soul-search/remembering-les-murray/11100346>.
- Larsson, Marina. “Restoring the Spirit: The Rehabilitation of Disabled Soldiers in Australia after the Great War.” *Health and History* 6, no. 2 (2004): 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40111483>.
- Lawley, Sue. “Desert Island Discs – Les Murray.” *Desert Island Discs*, podcast, August 16, 1998, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p00942zs>.
- Lawson, Wendy. “ASPoetry.” *Popular Narrative Media* 1, no. 1 (2008): 87-102. <https://doi.org/10.3828/pnm.1.1.10>.
- “Les Murray OA Patron Mildura Writers Festival.” ABC Sunshine Coast, podcast, 2018, <https://soundcloud.com/abc-sunshine-coast/les-murray-oa-patron-mildura-writers-festival>
- “Les Murray with Daniel Tammet.” YouTube, September 28, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHGX3E71eYI>.
- Leudar, Ivan, and Alan Costall. *Against Theory of Mind*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Levaot, Yael, Gal Meiri, Ilan Dinstein, Idan Menashe, and Ilana Shoham-Vardi. “Autism Prevalence and Severity in Bedouin-Arab and Jewish Communities in Southern Israel.” *Community Mental Health Journal* 55 (2019): 156-60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-018-0236-x>.
- Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- . *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*. New York: Collier Books, 1961.

- Lewiecki-Wilson, Cynthia, Jay Dolmage, Paul Heilker, and Ann Jurecic. "Article Comment & Response: Two Comments on 'Neurodiversity'." *College English* 70, no. 3 (2008): 314-25.
- Lewis, Victoria Ann. "Crip." In *Keywords for Disability Studies*, edited by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, 46-8. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- Li, Jing, Liqi Zhu, and Michaela Gummerum. "The Relationship between Moral Judgment and Cooperation in Children with High-Functioning Autism." *Scientific Reports* 4, no. 4314 (2014): 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep04314>.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*. New York: Basic Books, 2017.
- Lilley, Rozanna, Wenn Lawson, Gabrielle Hall, Joanne Mahony, Hayley Clapham, Melanie Heyworth, Samuel R. C. Arnold, et al. "'A Way to Be Me': Autobiographical Reflections of Autistic Adults Diagnosed in Mid-to-Late Adulthood." *Autism* (2021): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211050694>.
- Lilley, Rozanna, Mikala Sedgwick, and Elizabeth Pellicano. "Inclusion, Acceptance, Shame and Isolation: Attitudes to Autism in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in Australia." *Autism* 24, no. 7 (2020): 1860-73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320928830>.
- Limburg, Joanne. *The Autistic Alice*. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2017. Kindle.
- . "'But That's Just What You Can't Do': Personal Reflections on the Construction and Management of Identity Following a Late Diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome." *Life Writing* 13, no. 1 (2016): 141-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2016.1120639>.
- . "Found Voices: How I Became a Poet." *The Jewish Quarterly* (Summer 2001): 65.
- Linett, Maren. "Crippling Modernism: An Introduction." *Modern Fiction Studies* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2019.0000>.
- Linton, Simi. *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Lock, Charles. "Fredy Neptune: Metonymy and the Incarnate Preposition." In *The Poetry of Les Murray: Critical Essays*, edited by Laurie Hergenhan and Bruce Clunies Ross, 121-41. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001.
- Longmore, Paul K. *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.
- Lovaas, Ivar, Crichton Newsom, and Carol Hickman. "Self-Stimulatory Behavior and Perceptual Reinforcement." *Child Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 20, no. 1 (1987): 45-68. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1987.20-45>.
- Mairs, Nancy. *A Troubled Guest: Life and Death Stories*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.
- . "Body in Trouble." In *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled*, 40-63. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- . "On Being a Cripple." In *Plaintext: Essays*, 9-20. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1986.
- . *Plaintext: Essays*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1986.
- . *Voice Lessons: On Becoming a (Woman) Writer*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- . *Waist-High in the World: A Life among the Nondisabled*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Malouf, David. "Les Murray: Lunch and Counter Lunch." In *The Writing Life*, 259-65. North Sydney: Random House, 2014.
- Malouf, David, Les Murray, and David Rowbotham. "Three Talks: David Malouf, Les Murray and David Rowbotham. [Talks Given at the Warana Writers' Weekend, Brisbane 16 September]." *Australian Literary Studies* 11, no. 3, (1984): 316-27.
- Manning, Erin. *The Minor Gesture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- . *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.
- Manning, Erin, and Brian Massumi. *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Marshall, Alan. *I Can Jump Puddles*. Camberwell: Puffin Books, 2004.
- Mason, David. "Ariel and Co." In *Voices, Places: Essays*, 141-8. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2018.
- Matthews, Steven. *Les Murray*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001.
- . "Les Murray in Conversation with Steven Matthews." *PN Review* 25, no. 2 (1998): 57-58.

- McCooley, David. "Collected Poems Review: Les Murray's Brilliant Linguistic Inventiveness." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/collected-poems-review-les-murrays-brilliant-linguistic-inventiveness-20181219-h19an2.html>.
- . "Speaking in Tons." *Eureka Street* 8, no. 7 (1998): 38-40.
- McCredden, Lyn. "Contemporary Poetry and the Sacred: Vincent Buckley, Les Murray and Samuel Wagan Watson." *Australian Literary Studies* 23, no. 2 (2007): 153-67. <https://doi.org/10.20314/als.dfeb3c5b4e>.
- . "The Impossible Infinite: Les Murray, Poetry, and the Sacred." *Antipodes* 19, no. 2 (2005): 166-71.
- . "A Poetics of Sacred and Secular in Australia." *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 20, no. 2 1-14.
- McDonnell, A., and D. Milton. "Going with the Flow: Reconsidering 'Repetitive Behaviour' through the Concept of 'Flow States'." In *Good Autism Practice: Autism, Happiness and Wellbeing*, edited by G. Jones and E. Hurley, 38-47. Birmingham: BILD, 2014.
- McDonough, Beth. "Poetry and Autism." *Agenda (London)* 50, no. 3-4. (2018): 65-7.
- McGrath, James. *Naming Adult Autism: Culture, Science, Identity*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017.
- McGuire, Anne. *War on Autism: On the Cultural Logic of Normative Violence*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.7784427>.
- McGuire, Anne, and Rod Michalko. "Minds between Us: Autism, Mindblindness and the Uncertainty of Communication." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43, no. 2 (2011): 162-77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00537.x>.
- McInerney, Stephen. "'Art with Its Largesse and Its Own Restraint': The Sacramental Poetics of Elizabeth Jennings and Les Murray." In *Between Human and Divine the Catholic Vision in Contemporary Literature*, edited by Mary R. Reichardt, 207-25. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
- McKernan, Susan. *A Question of Commitment: Australian Literature in the Twenty Years after the War*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020.
- McRuer, Robert. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- . "We Were Never Identified: Feminism, Queer Theory, and a Disabled World." *Radical History Review*, no. 94 (2006): 148-54.
- McRuer, Robert, and Merri Lisa Johnson. "Proliferating Cripistemologies: A Virtual Roundtable." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 149-69. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2014.13>.
- Mellenish, Gregory "Les Murray's Vernacular Republic: A Reply." *Quadrant* 20, no. 8 (1976): 33-36.
- Mendez, Mario F., and Adrian Mirea. "Adult Head-Banging and Stereotypic Movement Disorders." *Movement Disorders* 13, no. 5 (1998): 825-28.
- Milenković, Sanja, Goran Belojević, Katarina Paunović, and Dragana Davidović. "Historical Aspects of Left-Handedness." *Srpski Arhiv Za Celokupno Lekarstvo (Serbian Medical Society)* 147, no. 11-12 (2019): 782-5. <https://doi.org/10.2298/SARH190522095M>.
- Miller, Danielle, Jon Rees, and Amy Pearson. "'Masking Is Life': Experiences of Masking in Autistic and Nonautistic Adults." *Autism in Adulthood* 3, no. 4 (2021): 330-38. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0083>.
- Milton, Damien E. M. *A Mismatch of Salience: Explorations of the Nature of Autism from Theory to Practice*. East Sussex: Pavilion, 2017.
- Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder, eds. *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- . *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Mitchell, Paul. "Paul Mitchell Reviews Les Murray." Review of *The Biplane Houses*, by Les Murray. *Cordite Poetry Review*, July 11, 2006. <http://cordite.org.au/reviews/paul-mitchell-reviews-les-murray/>.

- Mitchell, Peter, Sarah Cassidy, and Elizabeth Sheppard. "The Double Empathy Problem, Camouflage, and the Value of Expertise from Experience." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 42 (2019).
- Mitscherlich, Alexander, and Fred Mielke. *Doctors of Infamy: The Story of the Nazi Medical Crimes*. New York: Henry Schuman, 1949.
- Mollow, Anna. "Identity Politics and Disability Studies: A Critique of Recent Theory." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43, no. 2 (2004): 269-96.
- Mor, Caiseal. *A Blessing and a Curse: Autism and Me*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007.
- Morgan, Lisa, and Mary P. Donahue. *Living with PTSD on the Autism Spectrum: Insightful Analysis with Practical Applications*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2020.
- Morris, Jenny. *Pride against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability*. London: The Women's Press, 1991.
- Morrison, Kerriane E, Kilee M. DeBrabander, Daniel J. Faso, and Noah J. Sasson. "Variability in First Impressions of Autistic Adults Made by Neurotypical Raters Is Driven More by Characteristics of the Rater Rather Than by Characteristics of Autistic Adults." *Autism* 23, no. 7 (2019): 1817-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318824104>.
- Morrison, Kerriane E., Kilee M. DeBrabander, Desiree R. Jones, Robert A. Ackerman, and Noah J. Sasson. "Social Cognition, Social Skill, and Social Motivation Minimally Predict Social Interaction Outcomes for Autistic and Non-Autistic Adults." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.591100>.
- Morsanyi, Kinga, Dušan Stamenković, and Keith J. Holyoak. "Metaphor Processing in Autism: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Developmental Review* 57 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2020.100925>.
- Morton, Hannah E. "Assessment of Bullying in Autism Spectrum Disorder: Systematic Review of Methodologies and Participant Characteristics." *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 8, no. 4 (2021): 482-97.
- Moseley, Rachel Louise, and Jie Sui. "The Loneliness of Me: The Assumption of Social Disinterest and Its Worrying Consequences in Autism." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 42 (2019).
- Mottron, Laurent, Michelle Dawson, Isabelle Soulières, Benedicte Hubert, and Jake Burack. "Enhanced Perceptual Functioning in Autism: An Update, and Eight Principles of Autistic Perception." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 36, no. 1 (2006): 27-43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-005-0040-7>.
- Murray, Dinah, Mike Lesser, and Wendy Lawson. "Attention, Monotropism and the Diagnostic Criteria for Autism." *Autism* 9, no. 2 (May 2005): 139-56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361305051398>.
- Murray, Les. *The Australian Year: The Chronicle of Our Seasons and Celebrations*. North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1983.
- . *The Best 100 Poems of Les Murray*. Collingwood: Black Inc, 2012.
- . "The Best of Our Man in Bunyah." In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 74-103. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . *The Biplane Houses*. Melbourne: Black Inc, 2006.
- . *Blocks and Tackles: Articles and Essays 1982 to 1990*. North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1990.
- . *Collected Poems*. Carlton: Black Inc, 2018.
- . *Conscious and Verbal*. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1999.
- . *Continuous Creation: Last Poems by Les Murray*. Collingwood: Black Inc, 2022.
- . *The Daylight Moon*. North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1987.
- . *Dog Fox Field*. North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1990.
- . "Embodiment and Incarnation." In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 309-25. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . *Equanimities*. Copenhagen: Razorback Press, 1982.
- . *Ethnic Radio*. London: Angus & Robertson, 1977.
- . *Fredy Neptune*. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1998.
- . *The Full Dress: An Encounter with the National Gallery of Australia*. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2002.

- . “How Fred and I Wrote *Fredy Neptune*.” In *The Best Australian Essays 1999*, edited by Peter Craven, 364-73. Melbourne: Bookman Press, 1999.
- . *The Idyll Wheel: Cycle of a Year at Bunyah, New South Wales, April 1986 - April 1987*. Canberra: Officina Brindabella, 1989.
- . *Killing the Black Dog*. Melbourne: Black Inc, 2009.
- . *Lunch and Counter Lunch*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974.
- . *New Selected Poems*. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1998.
- . *On Bunyah*. Collingwood: Black Inc, 2015.
- . *The Peasant Mandarin: Prose Pieces*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978.
- . *The People’s Otherworld*. North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1983.
- . *Persistence in Folly*. London: Sirius Books, 1984.
- . *Poems against Economics*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972.
- . “Poems and Poesies.” In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 372-85. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . *Poems the Size of Photographs*. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2002.
- . “Poemes and the Mystery of Embodiment.” In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 386-99. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . *The Quality of Sprawl: Thoughts About Australia*. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1999.
- . *Selected Poems: The Vernacular Republic*. London: Angus & Robertson, 1976.
- . *Subhuman Redneck Poems*. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1996.
- . *Taller When Prone*. Melbourne: Black Inc, 2010.
- . *Translations from the Natural World*. Paddington: Isabella Press, 1992.
- . “A Tribute to Old Delight.” In *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*, 354-59. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- . *The Vernacular Republic: Selected Poems*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982.
- . *The Vernacular Republic: Poems 1961-1983*. North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1988.
- . *Waiting for the Past*. Collingwood: Black Inc, 2015.
- . *The Weatherboard Cathedral*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1969.
- . *A Working Forest: Selected Prose*. Potts Point: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1997.
- Murray, Les, and Geoffrey Lehmann. *The Ilex Tree*. Canberra: ANU Press, 1965.
- Murray, Les, and Carole Oles. “An Interview by Carole Oles.” *The American Poetry Review* 15, no. 2 (March-April 1986): 28-36. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27777936>.
- Murray, Stuart. *Autism*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Murray, Valerie. *Flight from the Brothers Grimm: A European-Australian Memoir*. Self-published, Books Unleashed, 2016.
- Mycak, Sonia, ed. *The West Verandah: The Life and Work of Les Murray*. Seven Hills: Boraga Academic, 2016.
- Mykola. “James Joyce #wasNotNeurotypical.” Twitter, January 4, 2020, <https://mobile.twitter.com/mykola/status/1213203846169858050>.
- Nadesan, Majia Holmer. *Constructing Autism: Unravelling the ‘Truth’ and Understanding the Social*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.
- Nario-Redmond, Michelle R. *Ableism: The Causes and Consequences of Disability Prejudice*. New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2020.
- Ne’eman, Ari. “When Disability Is Defined by Behavior, Outcome Measures Should Not Promote ‘Passing’.” *AMA Journal of Ethics* 23, no. 7 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1001/amajethics.2021.569>.
- Neilson, Shane. *Constructive Negativity: Prize Culture, Evaluation, and Disability in Canadian Poetry*. Ontario: Palimpsest Press, 2019.
- . “A New Materialisms Poetics of Touch: David Eastham’s *Understand: 50 Memowriter Poems*.” *The Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 10, no. 1 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v10i1.733>.
- Nelson, Penelope. “Irony, Identity and Les Murray’s Poetic Voices.” In *Counterbalancing Light: Essays on the Poetry of Les Murray*, edited by Carmel Gaffney, 170-83. Armidale: Kardoorair Press, 1997.

- Nielson, Emilia. "Chronically Ill, Critically Crip? Poetry, Poetics and Dissonant Disabilities." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2016). <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v36i4.5124>.
- Nolan, Jason, and Melanie McBride. "Embodied Semiosis: Autistic 'Stimming' as Sensory Praxis." In *International Handbook of Semiotics*, edited by Peter Pericles Trifonas, 1069-78. New York, Springer, 2015.
- Norton, Rob. *I'm the Autistic One but I'm Not the Weeper*. Vimeo, February 9, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/254992802>.
- Nowell, Kerri P., Courtney J. Bernardin, Cynthia Brown, and Stephen Kanne. "Characterization of Special Interests in Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Brief Review and Pilot Study Using the Special Interests Survey." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51 (2020): 2711-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04743-6>.
- Nunn, Gary. "Les Murray: 'Subhuman Redneck' and Great Australian Poet." *BBC News*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-48089957>.
- O'Brien, Kerry. "Interview with Australian Poet Les Murray." 7.30, April 6, 2006, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/interview-with-australian-poet-les-murray/2669200>.
- O'Driscoll, Dennis. "Les Murray." *The Paris Review*, no. 173 (Spring 2005): 39-79.
- Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in Nazi Germany*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.
- Oliver, Michael. *The Politics of Disablement*. London: Macmillan Education, 1990.
- . "The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On." *Disability & Society* 28, no. 7 (2013): 1024-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.818773>.
- Osteen, Mark. Review of *See it Feelingly: Classic Novels, Autistic Readers, and the Schooling of a No-Good English Professor*, by Ralph James Savarese, *ALH Online Review*, Series 20 (2019): 1-4.
- Page, Geoff. "A Diagnosis." *Australian Poetry*, 1997.
- Palermo, Mark T., and Stefan Bogaerts. "The Dangers of Posthumous Diagnoses and the Unintended Consequences of Facile Associations: Jeffrey Dahmer and Autism Spectrum Disorders." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 59, no. 14 (2015): 1564-79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X14550642>.
- Palmer, Judith. "Interview: Les Murray's Adventures in Lexiconia." *Poetry News*, Spring 2010, <https://poetrysociety.org.uk/publications-section/poetry-news/adventures-in-lexiconia-judith-palmer-interviews-les-murray/>.
- Pearson, Amy, and Kieran Rose. "A Conceptual Analysis of Autistic Masking: Understanding the Narrative of Stigma and the Illusion of Choice." *Autism in Adulthood* 3, no. 1 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0043>.
- Perry, David. *The Ruderman White Paper on Media Coverage of the Murder of People with Disabilities by Their Caregivers*. The Ruderman Family Foundation, 2017. <https://rudermanfoundation.org/the-ruderman-white-paper-media-coverage-of-the-murder-of-people-with-disabilities-by-their-caregivers/>.
- Petersson, Irmtraud. "'Odysseus from the Outback': *Fredy Neptune* in German and Its Critical Reception." *Australian Literary Studies* 22, no. 1 (2005): 1-28.
- Petersson, Irmtraud, and Thomas Eichhorn. "Translating *Fredy Neptune*: Interview with Thomas Eichhorn." *Australian Literary Studies* 22, no. 1 (2005): 29-36.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah Lakshmi. *Tonguebreaker: Poems and Performance Texts*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019. Kindle.
- Pollnitz, Christopher. "Australian Verse Novels." *HEAT* 7 (2004): 229-52.
- Poore, Carol. *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- Porter, Peter. "The Enemy Within: Les Murray Attacks Culture Snobs, yet They Remain His Greatest Fans." Review of *Collected Poems*, by Les Murray. *The Guardian*, March 15, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/mar/15/featuresreviews.guardianreview13>.
- . "Les Murray: An Appreciation." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 17, no. 1 (1982): 45-52.
- Potts, Robert. "Voice of the Outback." *The Guardian*, May 15, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/15/featuresreviews.guardianreview15>.

- Premack, David, and Guy Woodruff. "Does the Chimpanzee Have a Theory of Mind?." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 1, no. 4 (1978): 515-26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00076512>.
- Prendergast, Catherine. "The Unexceptional Schizophrenic: A Post-Postmodern Introduction." In *The Disability Studies Reader*. 5th ed., edited by Lennard J. Davis, 232-42. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Price, Margaret. *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.
- Radulski, Elizabeth M. "Conceptualising Autistic Masking, Camouflaging, and Neurotypical Privilege: Towards a Minority Group Model of Neurodiversity." *Human Development* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1159/000524122>
- Raine, Craig. "Sprawled All over the Place: This Picaresque Odyssey of a Moral Simpleton Could Benefit from Quality Control." *Financial Times*, 1998.
- Reading, Anna "Neurodiversity and Communication Ethics: How Images of Autism Trouble Communication Ethics in the Global Age." *Cultural Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2018): 113-29. <https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v24i2.6040>.
- Reading, Jill. "The Sacrifice of Les Murray." Bachelor of Arts (English) Honours, Edith Cowan University, 1999. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/825.
- Redmond, John. "Backing into the Outback." Review of *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, by Les Murray. *Jacket Magazine*, October 1997, <http://jacketmagazine.com/01/redmond.html>.
- Renton, Jennie. "Les Murray Interview." *Textualities*, podcast, 2006, <http://textualities.net/jennie-renton/les-murray-interview>.
- Reuben, Katherine E., Christopher M. Stanzone, and Jenny L. Singleton. "Interpersonal Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress in Autistic Adults." *Autism in Adulthood* 3, no. 3 (2021): 247-56. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0073>.
- Richman, Robert. "Spaced Out." *The New Criterion* 11, no. 2 (1992): 61-65.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Rilke: Selected Poems*, 2nd ed., Translated by C.E. MacIntyre. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1940.
- Roberts, Neil. "Les Murray and the Vernacular Republic." In *Narrative and Voice in Postwar Poetry*, 108-21. Milton Park: Routledge, 1999.
- Robertson, Michael, Astrid Ley, and Edwina Light. *The First into the Dark: The Nazi Persecution of the Disabled*. Sydney: UTS ePRESS, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.5130/aae>.
- Robertson, Rachel. "Raw Experience." In *The Best Australian Essays 2012*, edited by Ramona Koval, 192-206. Collingwood: Black Inc, 2012.
- Robison, John E. "Kanner, Asperger, and Frankl: A Third Man at the Genesis of the Autism Diagnosis." *Autism* 21, no. 7 (October 2017): 862-71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316654283>.
- Rodas, Julia Miele. *Autistic Disturbances: Theorizing Autism Poetics from the DSM to Robinson Crusoe*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018.
- . "Diagnosable. Mothering at the Threshold of Disability." In *Disability and Mothering: Liminal Spaces of Embodied Knowledge*, edited by Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jen Cellio. Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2011.
- Rogge, Nicky. "When the Cost Has Sunk: Measuring and Comparing the Sunk-Cost Bias in Autistic and Neurotypical Persons." *Journal of Economic Psychology* 87 (December 2021): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2021.102432>.
- Rooney, Brigid. *Literary Activists: Australian Writer-Intellectuals and Public Life*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2009.
- Rose, Irene. "Autistic Autobiography or Autistic Life Narrative?." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008): 44-54. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2.1.6>.
- Roth, Ilona. "Autism, Creativity and Aesthetics." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 17, no. 4 (2020): 498-508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1442763>.
- Roy, Emil, Manuel F. Casanova, and Vandna Jerath. "Autistic Poetry as Therapy." *Journal of Poetry Therapy* 17, no. 1 (2004): 33-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08893670410001698505>.
- Runswick-Cole, Katherine, Rebecca Mallett, and Sami Timimi, eds. *Re-Thinking Autism: Diagnosis, Identity and Equality*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2016.

- Rushton, Alan R. *Talking Back against the Nazi Scheme to Kill the Handicapped Citizens of Germany 1933-1945*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.
- Russell, Ginny, Steven K. Kapp, Daisy Elliott, Chris Elphick, Ruth Gwernan-Jones, and Christabel Owens. "Mapping the Autistic Advantage from the Accounts of Adults Diagnosed with Autism: A Qualitative Study." *Autism in Adulthood* 1, no. 2 (2019): 124-33. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2018.0035>.
- Sacks, Oliver. *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales*. New York: Knopf, 1995.
- Sandahl, Carrie. "Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9, no. 1-2 (2003): 25-56. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-9-1-2-25>.
- Savage, Robert. "Eroicide Is Painless. Insensation in Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune*." *Australian Literary Studies* 23, no. 4 (2008): 422-33. <https://doi.org/10.20314/als.7d621d4dc2>.
- Savarese, Ralph J. *See It Feelingly. Classic Novels, Autistic Readers, and the Schooling of a No-Good English Professor*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2018.
- . "Toward a Postcolonial Neurology: Autism, Tito Mukhopadhyay, and a New Geo-Poetics of the Body." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010): 273-90. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2010.23>.
- Savarese, Ralph James, and Lisa Zunshine. "The Critic as Neurocosmopolite; or, What Cognitive Approaches to Literature Can Learn from Disability Studies: Lisa Zunshine in Conversation with Ralph James Savarese." *Narrative* 22, no. 1 (2014): 17-44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24615408>.
- Scammell, William. "Geography." *London Magazine* 28, no. 5 (1988): 108-12.
- . "In Conversation with Les Murray." *PN Review* 22, no. 6 (1996): 29.
- Schönwiese, Volker, and Angela Wegscheider. "'Don't Forget About Self-Help': the Fight for Disability Rights in Austria in the 1920s and 1930s." *Disability & Society* (October 2021): 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2021.1976111>.
- Schweik, Susan M. *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*. New York, New York University Press, 2009.
- Seers, Kate, and Rachel C Hogg. "'You Don't Look Autistic': A Qualitative Exploration of Women's Experiences of Being the 'Autistic Other'." *Autism* 25, no. 6 (2021): 1553-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361321993722>.
- Shakespeare, Tom. review of *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales*, by Oliver Sacks. *Disability & Society* 11, no. 1 (1996): 137-39.
- Shakespeare, Tom, and Nicholas Watson. "The Social Model of Disability: An Outdated Ideology?." *Research in Social Science and Disability* 2 (2002): 9-28. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3547\(01\)80018-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3547(01)80018-X).
- Shapiro, Joseph. "The Sexual Assault Epidemic No One Talks About." *All Things Considered*, January 8, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/08/570224090/the-sexual-assault-epidemic-no-one-talks-about>.
- Shaw, Barrett, ed. *The Ragged Edge: The Disability Experience from the Pages of the First Fifteen Years of the Disability Rag*. Louisville: Avocado Press, 1994.
- Sheffer, Edith. *Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2018.
- Shields, Kirril Robert. "Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Victims: Representations of the Third Reich in Australian Fiction." PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2014. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.885.1430&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Shirer, William L. *20th Century Journey: The Nightmare Years 1930-1940*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1984.
- Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Aesthetics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- . *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.
- Silberman, Steve. *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2015.
- Sinclair, Jim. "Don't Mourn for Us." 1993, http://www.autreat.com/dont_mourn.html.
- . "History of Ani," January, 2005, https://www.autreat.com/History_of_ANI.html.

- Singer, Judy. *Neurodiversity: The Birth of an Idea.*, Self-published, Amazon Digital Services, 2017. Kindle.
- Sission, C.H. "Confidence Not Always Well-Placed." Review of *Dog Fox Field*, by Les Murray. *The Spectator* 266, no. 8486. (1991): 27-8.
- Smith, Angela, ed. *Les Murray and Australian Poetry*. London: Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, 2002.
- Smith, J. Mark. "A Conversation with Les Murray." *Image*, 64, <https://imagejournal.org/article/conversation-les-murray/>.
- Smith, Pauline. "A Proper, Conscious Loner." *PN Review* 34, no. 4 (2008): 28-30.
- Smith, Sidonie. "Re-Citing, Re-Siting, and Re-Sighting Likeness: Reading the Family Archive in Drucilla Modjeska's *Poppy*, Donna Williams' *Nobody Nowhere*, and Sally Morgan's *My Place*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 40, no. 3 (1994): 509-42. www.jstor.org/stable/26284557.
- . "Taking It to a Limit One More Time: Autobiography and Autism." In *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 226-48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Snyder, Sharon L., and David T. Mitchell. *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- . "Disability Haunting in American Poetics." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 1, no. 1. (2007): 1-12.
- St. Pierre, Joshua. "Becoming Dysfluent: Fluency as Biopolitics and Hegemony." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 11, no. 3 (2017): 339-56. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2017.26>.
- . "Crippling Communication: Speech, Disability, and Exclusion in Liberal Humanist and Posthumanist Discourse." *Communication Theory* 25 (2015): 330-48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12054>.
- Steele, Peter. "Les Murray: Watching with His Mouth." *Australian Literary Studies* 20, no. 2 (2001): 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.20314/als.ac16d6daf5>.
- Steger, Jason. "From the Archives: In the Land of Les Murray." *The Age*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/from-the-archives-2002-in-the-land-of-les-murray-20190429-p51id2.html>.
- Stevenson, Ryan A., Sol Z. Sun, Naomi Hazlett, Jonathan S. Cant, Morgan D. Barense, and Susanne Ferber. "Seeing the Forest and the Trees: Default Local Processing in Individuals with High Autistic Traits Does Not Come at the Expense of Global Attention." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 48, no. 4 (2018): 1382-96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-016-2711-y>.
- Straus, Joseph. "Autism as Culture." In *The Disability Studies Reader, 4th ed.*, edited by Lennard J. Davis, 460-84. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- . "Idiots Savants, Retarded Savants, Talented Aments, Mono-Savants, Autistic Savants, Just Plain Savants, People with Savant Syndrome, and Autistic People Who Are Good at Things: A View from Disability Studies." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2014). <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3407/3640>.
- Sutherland, Allan. "Coming out Disabled." Presentation, Approaches to Disability Conference, University of Durham Department of Sociology and Social Policy, March 19, 1982. <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/library/author/sutherland.allan/>.
- Tammet, Daniel. "Autism: A Spectrum of Speculation." Review of *NeuroTribes: How to Think Smarter About People who Think Differently*, by Steve Silberman, *Brain* 139, no. 3 (March 2016): 999-1000. <https://doi.org/10.1093/brain/awv388>.
- . *Born on a Blue Day: A Memoir of Asperger's and an Extraordinary Mind*. London: Hodder & Stoughton 2007.
- . *Embracing the Wide Sky: A Tour across the Horizons of the Mind*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009.
- . *Every Word Is a Bird We Teach to Sing: Encounters with the Mysteries and Meanings of Language*. New York: Little, Brown, 2017.
- . "Les, My Friend and Mentor." *Australian Financial Review*. May 4, 2019, 1-3.
- . *Thinking in Numbers*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012.

- . “The wonderful Australian poet Les Murray died today.” Facebook, April 29, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/DanielTammetAuthor/posts/the-wonderful-australian-poet-les-murray-died-today-i-had-the-great-honour-of-sh/2594034054000161/>.
- Taylor, Neil, and Ann Thompson. “Obscenity in *Hamlet* III.Ii: “Country Matters.”” *Textus* 9 (1996): 485-500.
- Thaler, Lore, and Melvyn A. Goodale. “Echolocation in Humans: An Overview.” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 7 (2016): 382-93. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1408>.
- Thomas, Carol. “Rescuing a Social Relational Understanding of Disability.” *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 6, no. 1 (2004): 22-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15017410409512637>.
- Thompson, Peter. “Wisdom Interviews: Les Murray.” *Big Ideas*, ABC Radio National, March 27, 2005. www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/wisdom-interviews-les-murray/3446558.
- Timmons, Niamh “My Gender Is Crip: Engaging the Experience of Being Trans and Disabled.” In *Transnarratives: Scholarly and Creative Works on Transgender Experience*, edited by Kristi Carter and James Brunton, 249-61. Ontario: Women’s Press, 2021.
- Tink, Amanda. “‘If You’re Different Are You the Same?’: The Nazi Genocide of Disabled People and Les Murray’s *Fredy Neptune*.” In *Genocide Perspectives VI: The Process and the Personal Cost of Genocide*, edited by Nikki Marczak and Kirril Shields. Sydney, UTS ePRESS, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5130/aaf.e>.
- . “Uncovering the History of Australian Disability Literature.” Masters Thesis, Western Sydney University, 2016.
- . “Where are all the Disabled Writers?.” review of *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, edited by Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, *Sydney Review of Books*, May 8, 2018, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/cambridge-companion-to-literature-and-disability/>.
- Titchkosky, Tanya. *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.
- Tolan, Kathleen, Victoria Ann Lewis, Joan Lipkin, Cheryl Marie Wade, John Belluso, Michael Ervin, Carrie Sandahl. “We Are Not a Metaphor: A Conversation About Representation.” *American Theatre* 18, no. 4 (2001): 17-59.
- Tranter. John. “John Tranter Reviews ‘Lunch and Counter Lunch’ by Les Murray, 1974.” *The Australian*, November 2, 1974. <http://johntranter.com/reviewer/1974-murray-counter-lunch.html>.
- Tremain, Shelley L. *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- Turcotte, Gerry. “Les Murray.” In *Writers in Action: The Writer’s Choice Evenings*, 87-112. Paddington, NSW: Currency Press, 1990.
- Ulman, Jane, and Phillip Ulman. “‘To One Who Asked for Summer’: Les Murray.” *Poetica*, September 22, 2007, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/legacy/features/pod/poets/murray.htm>.
- Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation. “The Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation and the Disability Alliance Discuss Fundamental Principles of Disability” (London, 1976; Disabled People’s Archive, 1997), <https://disabledpeoplesarchive.com/fundamental-principles-of-disability-union-of-the-physically-impaired-against-segregation/>.
- University of Sydney. “Les A. Murray AO Poetry Reading – Part 1.” YouTube, August 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=431WXyYgLaM> YouTube.
- Van Goidsenhoven, Leni. “‘Autie-Biographies’: Life Writing Genres and Strategies from an Autistic Perspective.” *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 64, no. 2 (2017): 79-95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20512856.2017.1348054>.
- van Leeuwen, Tessa M., Janina Neufeld, James Hughes, and Jamie Ward. “Synaesthesia and Autism: Different Developmental Outcomes from Overlapping Mechanisms?.” *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 37, no. 7-8 (2020): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643294.2020.1808455>.
- von Contzen, Eva. “The Limits of Narration: Lists and Literary History.” *Style* 50, no. 3 (2016): 241-60.

- Wade, Cheryl Marie. "I Am Not One of The." *The Radical Teacher* 47 (Fall 1995): 30.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20709854>.
- Waggoner, Jess. "'The Seriously Injured of Our Civic Life': Imagining Disabled Collectivity in Depression-Era Crip Modernisms." *Modern Fiction Studies* 65, no. 1 (2019): 89-101.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2019.0004>.
- Walker, Nick (Nicholas). "Transformative Somatic Practices and Autistic Potentials: An Autoethnographic Exploration." PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, (2019).
https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Nick_Walker_Dissertation.pdf. Walker, Nick (Nicholas). "Transformative Somatic Practices and Autistic Potentials: An Autoethnographic Exploration." PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, (2019).
https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Nick_Walker_Dissertation.pdf.
- Wallace-Crabbe, Chris. *Author! Author! Tales of Australian Literary Life*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Walters, Shannon. "Crip Mammy: Complicating Race, Gender, and Care in the Ride Together." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 11, no. 4 (2017): 477-93.
<https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2017.36>.
- Waltz, Mitzi. *Autism: A Social and Medical History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137328533>.
- Waterman, Andrew. "Big Sprawl." *London Magazine* 38, no. 9 (1999): 90-94.
- Watermeyer, Brian, and Leslie Swartz. "Disablism, Identity and Self: Discrimination as a Traumatic Assault on Subjectivity." *Journal of Community Applied Sociology and Psychology* 26 (2016): 268-76.
- Watson, Nick, and Simo Vehmas, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020.
- Weiss, Jonathan A., and Michelle A. Fardella. "Victimization and Perpetration: Experiences of Adults with Autism." *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9 (2018): 1-10.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2018.00203>.
- Wexler, Alice. *Autism in a Decentered World*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Whelan, Paul J. "James Joyce and Asperger Syndrome." *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 195 (2009): 555-6. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.195.6.555a>.
- White, Jessica. "Silence Is My Habitat: Judith Wright, Writing, and Deafness." In *The Routledge Companion to Australian Literature*, edited by Jessica Gildersleeve, 243-53. New York: Routledge, 2021.
- "Widespeak: Waiting for the Past by Les Murray." *Sydney Review of Books*, May 15, 2015, <http://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/waiting-for-the-past-les-murray/>.
- Williams, Barbara. "An Interview with Les A. Murray." *Westerly*, 37.2 (1992): 45-56.
setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozlit/westerly/all/176613.pdf
- Williams, Donna. *Nobody Nowhere*. London: Doubleday, 1992.
- . *Somebody Somewhere: Breaking Free from the World of Autism*. London: Doubleday, 1994.
- Williams, Emma. "Who Really Needs a 'Theory' of Mind?." *Theory and Psychology* 14, no. 5 (2004): 704-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354304046180>.
- Williams, Gemma L., Tim Wharton, and Caroline Jagoe. "Mutual (Mis)Understanding: Reframing Autistic Pragmatic 'Impairments' Using Relevance Theory." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.616664>.
- Wilson, James C., and Cynthia Lieweck-Wilson, eds. *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001.
- Wing, Lorna. "Asperger's Syndrome: A Clinical Account." *Psychological Medicine* 11, no. 1 (1981): 115-29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0033291700053332>.
- . "Reflections on Opening Pandora's Box." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 35, no. 2 (2005): 197-203. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-004-1998-2>.

- Wing, Lorna, and Judith Gould. "Severe Impairments of Social Interaction and Associated Abnormalities in Children: Epidemiology and Classification." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 9, no. 1 (1979): 11-29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01531288>.
- Winter-Messiers, Mary Ann. "From Tarantulas to Toilet Brushes: Understanding the Special Interest Areas of Children and Youth with Asperger Syndrome." *Remedial and Special Education* 28, no. 3 (2007): 140-52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325070280030301>.
- Wood, Tara, Jay Dolmage, Margaret Price, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson. "Moving Beyond Disability 2.0 in Composition Studies." *Composition Studies* 42, no. 2 (2014): 147-50.
- Wootten, William. "Salt, Land and Tears." *The Guardian*, October 21, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/oct/21/featuresreviews.guardianreview28>.
- Wright, Judith, and Les Murray. "Judith Wright and Les Murray Correspondence." *Southerly* 63, no. 1 (2003): 162-80.
- Wroe, Nicholas. "A Life in Writing: Les Murray." *The Guardian*, November 22, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/nov/22/les-murray-poet-life-profile>.
- Yergeau, m. Remi. *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Young, Stella. *I'm not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much*. TED, April, 2014. https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much.
- Zener, Dori. "Journey to Diagnosis for Women with Autism." *Advances in Autism* 5, no. 1 (2019): 2-13. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AIA-10-2018-0041>.
- Zunshine, Lisa. "Theory of Mind and Experimental Representations of Fictional Consciousness." *Narrative* 11, no. 3 (2003): 270-91. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2003.0018>.
- . "Theory of Mind and Fictions of Embodied Transparency." *Narrative* 16, no. 1 (2008): 65-92. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2008.0004>.
- . "Why Jane Austen Was Different, and Why We May Need Cognitive Science to See It." *Style* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 275-98. www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.41.3.275.
- Zwick, Tamara. "First Victims at Last: Disability and Memorial Culture in Holocaust Studies." *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (2019): 45-63. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.21084>.