Shared Reading: A practice-based study of

The Reader Organisation reading model in relation to

Mersey Care provision and the English literary tradition

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<u>Abstract</u>

This thesis is a study of the literary practice of shared reading as practised by The Reader Organisation (TRO) in its Get into Reading (GIR) project.

The first and shorter half of the thesis offers an introductory location of the key elements of GIR practice within TRO's sense of the English literary tradition. The first two chapters thus examine the foundations for the reading of poetry (in chapter one with regard to the Elizabethan lyric) and prose (in chapter two in relation to Victorian realism) within GIR.

Part two investigates the actual praxis of shared reading aloud in groups. Chapters three to five provide an account of the methodology and findings of research into the practice of GIR. 'Bibliotherapy' is problematised here as a term which, whilst it appeals to the idea of the relevance and use of books, and points to the existence of a place for reading within a specifically prescribed area, also risks narrowing down the idea of the shared reading model.

Chapters three and four, forming the central part of the thesis, set out the terms of a literary-critical analysis of transcripts collected from GIR sessions, and outline the discovery within these transcripts of evidence of a varied model of literary thinking prompted by the reading-group leaders trained by TRO. Chapter three concentrates on the group-session transcripts; chapter four on individual case-studies across sessions. These chapters provide the focus for the thesis as a study of the non-specialist responses of real readers to what literature is. A toolkit is offered to identify certain tools and values that are implicit within the experience. It is to be hoped that future studies might refine, correct, or build upon the analyses set out in these chapters in particular through the use of established formal techniques such as conversation and discourse analysis. But the initial aim here was to investigate the phenomena in literary terms ahead of any such alignment with the categories of linguistics.

In chapter five the findings of the present study are consolidated through a series of individual interviews with a number of the participants, offering their experience at another level and in reflective aftermath. Increasingly GIR is being introduced as a form of intervention within modern mental health care, and the thesis closes with a consideration of the place of shared group reading within the context of health and the languages of cure or therapy.

Contents

Preface

The original working title of this thesis was 'A practice-informed study of the theoretical foundations for literary "bibliotherapy" within the English literary tradition'. It was funded under the Arts and Humanities Research Council Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) scheme, designed to enable research that forges links between Higher Education Institution (HEI) departments and non-HEI organisations and businesses, and in that it had the very specific charge and remit of investigating the role of The Reader Organisation's (TRO) shared reading model, Get into Reading (GIR), with particular relation to Mersey Care NHS Trust. It thus involved a triangulation between the School of English at the University of Liverpool, The Reader Organisation, and Mersey Care, representing, respectively, the study of literature, an outreach reading programme, and mental health provision.

Mersey Care NHS Trust, a provider of specialist mental health services, was one of the first partners to work with and commission The Reader Organisation to run reading groups for its service users. Mersey Care's launch of the Reader in Residence project in 2007 marked a significant shift for GIR, locating it not only as formerly within the field of education and reader development in libraries but now within mental health provision. A number of psychiatrists, along with members of Mersey Care's executive board, became actively involved in leading their own GIR groups after receiving training from The Reader Organisation, and took a keen clinical interest in its effectiveness for service users. Almost inevitably this development raised further questions about the role that reading might occupy in relation to mental health, and about the status of GIR as an activity. Though it did not set out to be therapeutic and does not advertise itself as a therapy, GIR became linked increasingly with a number of benefits to health and well-being. An

independent evaluation of the first year of Mersey Care's Reader in Residence project reported improvements in confidence, memory, concentration, creativity and listening skills amongst service users,[1] whilst also noting the effect on mood and levels of animation. 'Bibliotherapy' was the short-hand but probably unsatisfactory term used in relation to this development.

In 2009 a study was designed which would use the existing collaboration with Mersey Care in order further to test and interrogate the terms of this engagement across institutional and disciplinary boundaries of three key areas of interest: literature, reading and health. This study was awarded full project funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council: hence the present thesis and its designated purpose. In the original application for AHRC funding, the intention was stated that this thesis should investigate the case for the role of literature and the reading of literature not only in relation to health and wellbeing but also in offering a language alongside the social and biomedical sciences for the greater understanding of human experience.

Bibliotherapy is both a contentious and a vague term in this proposed endeavour. Brewster is cited by NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) as offering the best definition[2,3] by making a key distinction between

(i)   'self-help bibliotherapy', to denote the use of self-help literature; non-fictional materials designed as 'books on prescription' to guide the reader through self-help programmes actively aiming to change behaviours

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[1] Catherine Mills et al. (Service User Research and Evaluation), *Evaluation of the Reader in Residence Project* (Mersey Care NHS Trust, 2007-2008), p. 72.

[2] Liz Brewster, 'Reader Development and Mental Wellbeing: The accidental bibliotherapist', *APLIS (Australasian Public Library and Information Services)*, 22 (2009), 13-16 (p. 13).

[3] Additional references to previous articles in this series:
Liz Brewster, 'Medicine for the Soul: Bibliotherapy', *APLIS*, 21 (2008), 115-19
_____ 'The Reading Remedy: Bibliotherapy in practice', *APLIS*, 21 (2008), 172-7

and

    (ii)   'creative bibliotherapy' referring to the use of fiction and poetry

                encouraging reflection on personal experiences for therapeutic effect.

However, Brewster's definition of creative bibliotherapy also encompasses creative, expressive or biographical writing. Where so-called creative bibliotherapy focuses exclusively on literary reading (as in TRO's programme), it is placed by NICE under the heading 'informal creative bibliotherapy'. In contrast to more formally directed approaches, books in informal creative bibliotherapy are not selected with specific therapeutic outcomes in mind but are chosen for their relevance to the human condition.

That said, as this thesis developed, it has become increasingly clear that the term 'bibliotherapy' is misleading and even unhelpful. Despite Brewster's distinctions, 'bibliotherapy' threatens to make an instrumental therapy out of literature, such that it may seem to be no more than a literary version of what remains a self-help programme. What this thesis offers instead is a preliminary investigation of how far and in what ways the shared reading of literature in TRO reading groups may indeed be humanly useful without being instrumentally parasitic upon, or reductive of, literature's intrinsic value. If from the humanities, there is an objection to the increasing tendency to medicalise sorrow, without the intention to disparage the help that may be provided by therapies and drug prescriptions, it would be an irony if one proposed alternative to such understanding was to apply literature in a similar manner as a form of treatment. The structure and content of this thesis is intended to reinforce the primary power and use of a literary language and of the tradition of thought embodied within it, in relation nonetheless to actual readers in groups within Mersey Care provision. The content of part 2 is very much concerned

with the investigation of individual acts of attentive reading, and the identification of possible categories of mental processing. As a result of these considerations and the advice of the thesis' examiners the title has been changed to 'Shared Reading: A practice-based study of The Reader Organisation reading model in relation to Mersey Care provision and the English literary tradition'.

Shared reading: preliminary definition of terms

This thesis has an historical aim in relation to its task in investigating The Reader Organisation's central outreach project, GIR. It is the first extended work to take as its subject the practice of shared literary reading which over the past ten years TRO has been working to develop. The aim of the thesis has been to define the origins and parameters of this particular model of reading in practice as a phenomenon, prior to any further theoretical consideration that may result from, or be made explicit within, its initial empirical findings gathered through transcripts and interviews. Both the structure of the argument and the mode of inquiry employed throughout the thesis have therefore been determined by certain distinguishing features of the 'Get into Reading' (GIR) model. The key features are briefly summarised below in relation to three questions that might be posed in the process of introducing GIR:

    i)   What is meant by 'shared' reading?

    ii)   What is read in such groups?

    iii)   Who is it for?

(i) In GIR the reading becomes shared by virtue of the practice of reading aloud. The purpose of establishing GIR as a group activity is to enable this to happen. A group is gathered in which each person is provided with a copy of the literature that is being read not in advance but during the actual meeting of the group. Instead of using the group to discuss or evaluate the book or literary work in retrospect, attention is

focussed on the live experience of reading together and thinking together about what is being read. Groups are arranged to last around ninety minutes. The text is read aloud first of all by the TRO group leader; it is often read aloud again and again to keep the text present at the centre of discussion; participants are not required to read aloud but will often gradually volunteer to do so; room is left for discussion and analysis, with the group leader vigilant in trying to combine engaged response with careful and specific relation to the language.

(ii) The kind of slow, attentive and performative reading that takes place in GIR is determined by the nature of the material that is read. GIR deals exclusively with literature, ranging from single poems to full-length novels, and including short stories or extracts from longer works, across the whole chronological range of literature from the sixteenth century onwards. This is in marked contrast to traditional book clubs where the material is not only read in advance and often discussed without reference to specific passages but is often confined to recent fiction or biography or to novels of the last fifty years. TRO's commitment to maintaining the fullest possible literary heritage is related also to the desire to widen and deepen the range of *language* in relation to serious human concerns beyond (for example) the agenda of current popular therapeutic vocabularies (as in terms such as 'negative' as opposed to 'positive' feelings, the language of 'closure' or 'moving on', and so on). The challenge of an initially unfamiliar language, from a previous age, takes readers beyond or beneath immediate concerns for 'relevance': the recognition of meaning becomes an achievement and sometimes almost a personal revelation when it is hard won, within a supportive environment and in a context of shared seriousness.

(iii) The remit of GIR is not specific to any one set group of people, but it began with the attempt to take literature to people who are not trained or educated readers. TRO was initially formed out of a small outreach unit based at the University of Liverpool, and the aim from the outset was to create a way of making literature that is ordinarily read inside English literature departments available to people who were not otherwise likely either to find or to read it by themselves.[4] It used, in the person of its trained facilitators, the experience of the literary tradition and discipline created through university education. What has led to the expansion of this phenomenon,[5] and to the growth and establishment of The Reader Organisation as an independently administered charity[6] is the consistent response from its readers, across a diverse range of circumstances and settings, that such reading has been found to be mentally and emotionally engaging, pleasurable, and meaningful. This thesis does not seek to categorise or offer proof of such benefit: it does however rely upon the testimony and example of participants and readers in the GIR model in order to provide a supportive index of how shared reading is valued by the individuals who attend the groups as well as by certain professionals and agencies whose job it is to support them.

Whilst this was funded as a 'practice-informed study', and it is thus not primarily a theoretical thesis, the concern to make explicit important theoretical underpinnings and founding principles related to the praxis of GIR was a significant

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[4] Davis's own account of the rationale behind the project is supported in the chapter referenced below by comments given in a series of early interviews with reading group members.
Jane Davis, 'Getting into Reading', in *Reader Development in Practice: Bringing Literature to Readers,* ed. by Susan Hornby and Bob Glass (London: Facet Publishing, 2008), pp. 75-95

[5] To date there are over 350 GIR groups running nationally, with TRO staff based in Merseyside, London, South West and North East England, North Wales, and Glasgow. TRO also works with allied partner organisations in Denmark, Belgium and Australia.

[6] TRO became a registered charity in 2008, and in 2011 was awarded the Social Enterprise Mark.

element of the study design from the outset. I take here two key examples, each related to the above issues of reading a wide range of literature aloud, and reading it in groups.

<u>Reading, listening, performing</u>

One such functional principle concerns what from the 1930s onwards had been called 'practical criticism'; now more casually known as 'close reading'. It was assumptions within that practice that partly led to the theoretic turn in literary studies in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

In this respect, The Reader Organisation is aware that its Get into Reading project takes a bold risk: its venture is to take literature on its own, without an historical or theoretical context, and to see what it might do within small, supportive groups formed for the purpose of presently immediate reading. The emphasis in GIR is on the live performative reading of texts and on the responses that this allows and which follow from the reading. Its client group characteristically would not possess or allow for prior education in more scholarly concerns often rightly deemed important for full understanding. The urgent needs of both outreach and maintenance of a wide range of reading across the nation make GIR unlike other occasions of reading or literary study when readers may have the benefit of being further informed by theoretical and critical perspectives on the text. The live responses that GIR elicits enable the reader to 'get in' to the text and respond to its language in ways described in chapter three. The frameworks within which literary texts might ordinarily be read are at least temporarily dissolved, in this process, by that which is emergent from the direct reading of the literature itself, and by the surprise of that discovery.

Before 'close reading' became assimilated into the university teaching of English as a skills-based method, it was originally a more experimental practice

crucial in Cambridge to the launch of a syllabus which made the study of English literature a distinct discipline. It is in this latter sense that the acts of reading which go on in GIR could be said to inherit aspects of the literary-critical work and teaching of I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis. Richards for instance was concerned with the conditions (or as he also called them, 'protocols') that might make an initial, attentive reading possible. One must focus first on attaining what he describes as '*the mental condition* relevant to the poem':

> Our prime endeavour must be to get the relevant mental condition and then see what happens. … It is doubtful whether any principles, however refined and subtle, can help us much. Without the capacity to get the experience they cannot help us at all.[7]

Reading here is in itself a kind of experiment which relies upon not-knowing to start with; one protocol was that texts were unseen, not read in advance, without historical, social or biographical information which in other contexts might be provided as a guide. In Richards's model of literary reading, it is the mind's own attempted re-enacting of the work, moment by moment, and stage by stage, which in practice functions as the real guide to meaning.

A certain discipline of attention is required. In Leavis this becomes the hallmark of his approach in which, as Michael Bell identifies, there is more of a concern actively to demonstrate a particular mode of thought – called 'reading' – which is responsive to subtly different literary texts than to offer a theoretical formulation that might encompass these implicit working principles. 'The critical impact of Leavis,' writes Bell, 'lies not in a complexity of ideas *about* literature so much as in the quality of attention *to* it.'[8] Leavis's own practice is embodied in his account of how it should feel to read attentively:

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[7] I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929), (London: Kegan Paul, 1930), p. 11.
[8] Michael Bell, *F. R. Leavis* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 12.

> Faithfully reading out a poem, a poem that one admires, one should think of oneself as both the violinist and the violin.[9]

The text is a score. Reading aloud or sub-vocally is its performance and actual realization, as the reader tunes into what is written.

For Bell the implicit theoretic underpinning to Leavis, in his refusal of theory, lies in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, widening what would otherwise seem to be a narrowly Cambridgean perspective. Bell uses Heidegger's image of 'listening' to the language to indicate what he describes as 'the peculiar intensity of Leavisian reading' (p. 47). In Heidegger, attentiveness to 'Being' itself – a quality of un-anticipatable experience rather a named theme or a known subject – is achieved through attentiveness to language as it speaks:

> human speech, as the speech of mortals, is not self-subsistent. The speech of mortals rests in its relation to the speaking of language. … Man speaks in that he responds to language. This responding is a hearing.[10]

Bell writes: 'Leavis tries to listen not just to what the poet says but to what the poet has "heard" in order to say it' (p. 47). It is the implicit 'life' or 'being' of the poem that Leavis's reader must try to get out – the things that the poem is attempting to say which cannot be simply known in advance or literally repeated by the reader but which resonate from within the poem and are waiting to be heard. What is vital here is what Heidegger calls 'disclosure', the revealing of the presence of the poem in what Catherine Pickstock in *After Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) has described as ontological awakening. More than simply offering a tool of communication, language 'alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time'.[11] Art is effective insofar as it allows us to participate in the same move

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[9] F. R. Leavis, 'Reading out poetry' (1972), in *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, ed. by G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 253-75 (p. 260).

[10] Martin Heidegger, 'Language', in *Poetry, language, thought* (1971), trans. by Albert Hofstadfer (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 185-208 (pp. 206, 207).

[11] 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Poetry, language, thought*, pp. 15-86 (p. 71).

ourselves: 'a work is in actual effect as a work only when we remove ourselves from our commonplace routine and move into what is disclosed by the work' (ibid., p. 72). It is sufficient only to get into the right area, in order to be able to sense a fundamental shift in the level at which we are suddenly operating: that is what is meant by awakening to being.

The poet and critic Douglas Oliver stands in further development of that tradition. For Oliver in *Poetry and Narrative in Performance*, reading aloud makes past works *present* in the moment of their reading. It is an extended and deepened present because literary form is able to bring into line aspects of experience which usually are successive, characteristic of our common incapacity to realize an event until after it has happened. Literature encourages the reader to bring to the reading an emotional sympathy with what is happening, as well as thoughts about that happening, through a minute embodied attention to the work's own time or movement through the performance of it. 'The process reveals what our everyday experience and speech could be like if, when our emotions were real and not imaginary, our hearts and heads were in temporal consonance.'[12] In this way literature creates a particular kind of model of experience that is unmatched by any other.

Oliver, Leavis and Richards share a common foundation in the academic study of literature and of the practice of reading, as part of a tradition arising specifically out of the Cambridge School. But the effect of Get into Reading has been to translate such influences out into other environments existing beyond the university.

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[12] Douglas Oliver, *Poetry and Narrative in Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 170.

Therapeutic groups and individuals

There is a second factor intrinsic to the implicit assumptions of GIR but capable of

further theoretical explication. The model of the group recalls other interpretive

structures which might have been used, and may be used in future studies, to

investigate even by contrast the kinds of interactions that take place within GIR

groups.

The study of groups has played an important part in the development of the

psychoanalytic tradition, initially through the work of Sigmund Freud in *Group*

Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1922), to which, most specifically, Wilfred

Bion returns in *Experiences in Groups*. Bion's own experience of trialling

group-based treatment with psychiatric patients in military hospitals following the

Second World War was again further expanded upon by Irvin D. Yalom, who

described his attempt to develop out of similar kinds of group-work a model of

psychotherapy in *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*.

GIR may appear to fulfil a similar function as a therapeutic group activity.

For Yalom's patients, many of whom have 'an impoverished group history', 'the

sheer successful negotiation of a group experience may in itself be curative'.[13] This

touches on the social benefit which might equally have resulted from a comparator:

another gently enabling group activity. But GIR is at the same time markedly

different from these other models in the content that it offers for discussion. In

Yalom the nature of the group process and of the interaction of its members becomes

the main talking point, allowing group members for instance to work through their

own relationship difficulties explicitly, in terms of cases and problems and

confessional experiences. This is the group extension of Freud's 'talking cure'. In

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[13] Irvin D. Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (1970), (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 49.

GIR the content is determined instead by the text that has been chosen, and here the

text may even begin to be seen as another member of, or centre to, the group: a focal

representative presence of human thinking and feeling. The talk that follows works

around and *through* the poem or fiction.

Indeed the text, which creates and carries its own implicit framework, may in

fact challenge the underlying mental structure of the group and its individual

members. Bion, fearful of the coerciveness of a routine group mentality, is alert to

countervailing moments of what he thinks of as the presence of intense reality:

> I shall use the sign O to denote that which is the ultimate reality represented by
> terms such as ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the
> thing-in-itself. O does not fall in the domain of knowledge or learning save
> incidentally; it can be 'become', but it cannot be 'known'. It is darkness and
> formlessness but it enters the domain K when it has evolved to a point where it
> can be known, through knowledge gained by experience, and formulated in terms
> derived from sensuous experience; its existence is conjectured
> phenomenologically.[14]

The thing-in-itself – like Kant's noumenon or Heidegger's 'being' – is ontologically

prior to knowledge and to the systems by which knowledge is conveyed. Though

Bion locates it within a psychoanalytical discourse, the thing-in-itself transcends

even the framework, discipline or group within which it has been found. Bion writes

of the transformation of O into a known thing (K), using this as a marker of the kind

of process which the psychoanalyst will be aiming to see take place, in terms of

conscious reappraisal following upon unanticipated discovery. It is this active

creation of thought out of dense material experienced prior to conscious thinking that

is central to the transformative process.

In GIR there is no therapist, nor is there an explicit therapeutic framework to

which it would seek systematically to adhere, step by step. It is rather as if in GIR

this function has been transferred to the reader, who has the chance freely to become

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[14] W. R. Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* (1970), (London: Karnac Books, 1984), p. 26.

his or her own therapist, in entering the emotional territory that the literature has first located. The psychologist Richard Bentall[15] has identified GIR as a form of 'implicit psychotherapy', not added on to the reading of literature or forced upon it but arising out of the feeling thinking that reading arouses. This is the delicate balance between an intrinsic usefulness and an imposed instrumentalism that this thesis is in part concerned to investigate in the experience of the reading groups.

But certainly what is involved beneath the reading experience is articulated in a philosophy of surprise and realization; a philosophy in which the order – live surprise, before realization rather than knowing in advance – is important. As Jerome Neu indicates in *Emotion, Thought and Therapy*, the philosophy that underpins transformative processes such as psychoanalysis is in origin Spinozan. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza makes a distinction between 'adequate' and 'inadequate ideas': the latter indicate a 'passive' state of mind dominated by 'passions' which the mind does not yet know how to formulate, even to itself.[16] The 'adequate' thought is hidden inside the feeling, as what Spinoza calls a confused idea or Bion a thought that cannot (yet) *be* thought. There is a latent need to convert the passive suffering of a feeling into a thought which allows its content to be expressed. For, without this activating adequate idea transformed into consciousness, so much of human experience is likely to remain as inaccessible mental and emotional baggage, repressed, denied and above all suffered. A key quotation in the TRO programme is from Bion, in precisely this area:

> If a person cannot 'think' with his thoughts, that is to say that he has thoughts but lacks the apparatus of 'thinking' which enables him to use his thoughts, to think them as it were, then the personality is incapable of learning from experience. This failure is serious. Failure to eat, drink or breathe properly has disastrous consequences for life itself. Failure to use emotional experience produces a

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[15] Later referenced in chapters 3 and 4.
[16] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677), trans. by George Eliot, ed. by Thomas Deegan (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1981), p. 99.

comparable disaster in the development of the personality.[17]

In GIR it is the poem that stands for Bion's O as a site for the felt reality. From within its rich material, analogies are triggered to the reader's own rawer and unformulated experience, which the reader needs to be able to think about, whether he or she is aware of the need or not.

Spinoza's *Ethics* were translated by George Eliot, when still known only as Marian Evans. It is George Eliot who is one of the central literary models here for what GIR is seeking to achieve. This is a point vital to the argument whose structure I outline below. Namely: that although on another occasion it may be possible (and desirable) to make more explicit what is theoretically or philosophically at stake or in contention in GIR, it is in literature rather than in explicit theory – in George Eliot rather than in her translation of Spinoza – that GIR itself takes its practical foundations. It is that story and its history which is my subject.

Outline of chapters

The purpose of Part 1 of this thesis is to present an older, literary framework for the work that goes on within GIR, and to demonstrate why it is so important that the foundations for this practice are found principally within this tradition, giving the practice a sense of sustainable purpose and confidence rather than mere instrumental relevance.

The texts, writers and thinkers to whom I have pointed as structural markers in the thesis are crucial in that in each case they serve to demonstrate what it would have been like to realize for the first time one or more of the influences which may now be seen to have fed into the development of GIR. The idea that there is a history

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[17] W. R. Bion, *Learning From Experience* (London: Heinemann, 1962), p. 84.

behind GIR, that it is not merely a new invention designed to combat a modern crisis of meaning in the world, is essential to the argument that this is a practice that is deserving of attention within literary as well as non-literary contexts. I offer no more than a preliminary account of origins and history in Part 1, with analyses of case histories and taxonomic varieties in Part 2.

Part 1

There are two different periods of literary history that might be taken as representative of such originating influences, themselves representing the different contexts in which two essential literary forms – poetry and the novel – became established. These constitute chapters 1 and 2.

It was arguably during the Elizabethan age that the foundation was laid for the future of English poetry both as a written craft and as an inner mental discipline. Verse was created in order to contain passionate feeling as well as struggling, conflicted thoughts, in ways that alleviated or consoled human sorrow through aesthetic achievement. Yet poetry was not only seen as providing an outlet for the mind, a way of mapping out its contents on the page. For a poem was also importantly a carrier of voice. As Richard Wistreich has argued, in the early modern period all written texts were understood as needing to be 'brought to voice' in order to complete the process of making them efficacious.[18]

On the basis of this poetic craft and the accompanying principle of reading aloud, The Reader Organisation has built its own repository of poetry deriving out of that lyric tradition of personal voice and feeling.[19] In chapter one I also sketch

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[18] Richard Wistreich, 'Reading the Voice: The Anatomy and Physiognomy of Speaking and Singing': paper given at *Symposium on Reading and Health in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Newcastle University, July 2013).

[19] TRO does not produce set reading lists, but in recent years it has begun to consolidate its collection of resources, and in some instances to make this public through the compilation of

something of the modification and revitalization of that tradition that The Reader

Organisation locates in Romanticism as figured above all in the poetry of

Wordsworth and the cause set out in the great Preface to Lyrical Ballads. As Iain

McGilchrist dares to put it, in referring to what he takes to be the great turning-points

or re-beginnings in his model of the modern Western mind: 'It is notable that it is at

times when, according to my view, there has been a period of "release" in the right

hemisphere – the Renaissance and Romanticism – that there has been an interest in

the long view, and the high view, of life.' It is an extended view that becomes

necessary, he argues, 'if one is aware of the uniqueness of individual people and

things', for then one is also 'inevitably forced to confront separation and loss.'[20]

The second set of influences upon The Reader Organisation's ethos have

been inherited from a later period, broadly the Victorian age, with its more anxious

interest in the place that literature might occupy within the wider world, as a

regenerative force for good. It is a concern that manifests itself in the rise of the

realist novel during the formation of what was to become a modern mass-industrial

democratic society. The Reader Organisation inherits that cultural concern in seeking

to maintain the twin ideals of the nineteenth-century novel: continuing commitment

to a high form of serious literature as modified by the need to be able to increase its

reach within the everyday world. The realist novel has to re-begin in its own form the

argument of the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' in the commitment of literature to

ordinary experience or to the extraordinariness lodged within it. In maintaining this

closeness to the literal as well as a faithful attention to the literary, the novel would

effect what might almost be called a close reading of life. In relation to the practice

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anthologies. See for instance *A Little, Aloud*, ed. by Angela Macmillan (Chatto & Windus, 2010) and *Minted: Practical Poetry for Life*, ed. by Brian Nellist (2012).

[20] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 365.

of GIR, the novel was also to create a space within which the sometimes competing and sometimes interacting claims of the individual and the group might be re-encountered as a recurrent feature of ordinary experience.

Both chapters 1 and 2 risk selective generalizations which are to be justified in so far as they feed into the reading that goes on in GIR as disclosed in what follows. The second chapter is longer in so far as it also offers an account, albeit again a broadly suggestive one, of the challenging social circumstances for the maintenance of culture which are inherited even at the present time from the Victorian crisis. The account includes a possible answer to that crisis as represented in the spontaneous and eager discovery of high literature by members of the working class who began to be involved in the autodidact movement. Jonathan Rose has shown that at the point at which books were beginning to become more widely available, many readers were already displaying their preference for challenging works of literature which were not necessarily either of their own time or generation. In some circles, habits of close reading which had become ingrained through the dedicated perusal of Biblical and religious texts were being newly transferred to the reading of poetry and the novel, as the practice of reading itself began to widen.

Part 2

In the longer second half of the thesis I look at how these earlier precedents and influences have been realized within the work of GIR. These chapters follow the perspective of both a critical analyst of, and a facilitator/participant within a number of GIR groups. The aim in chapter three as a whole is to assemble an analytic catalogue of the processes and changes that go on often spontaneously within the group experience of reading. Chapter four follows with a shift in focus from the group to the individual, in order to be able to consider the evidence from accounts

which relate not only to specific sessions, but to experiences which seem to connect up across and within a participant's life.

In the final chapter I pull back out again to consider a range of conclusions from chapters three and four examined through a process of feedback and reflective interviews with a number of people who have been involved in GIR at different levels: as a reader (i.e. group member), as a project worker (the name I have used for a person who leads a GIR group), or as an independent health professional. This is where, again following on from chapters three and four, I consider in more depth that question of an alignment with a therapy or 'health' model, and also seek to address the longer-term future of shared reading as a model and a discipline.

The example in chapter five of a collaborative investigation of the use of GIR in relation to occupational therapy offers one instance which could be expanded upon by looking further at an existing range of therapies. Other approaches which it would be important to consider include forms of CBT and mindfulness therapy, which have become widely available not only in healthcare settings but also within the community, as part of workplace wellbeing programmes, or self-help schemes available online or through other media. A comparison with mindfulness theory for instance might explore the difference between the use of training or mental exercise to focus a person's awareness, and the manner in which concentration is achieved in GIR. Each of these possible comparisons is likely to help clarify what it is that is distinctive about the experience of shared reading in relation to other practices which may appear to bring about similar effects. It is in this final chapter of the thesis that I consider again the difficulties surrounding the term 'bibliotherapy'.

What I have tried to show in this thesis is how reading as a kind of practical art might happen out in the world, within the contexts of ordinary life but with the

added consciousness of those more-than-mundane values which an attentive immersion in the study of literature might be able to offer. GIR exists at some level to contrast with other reading group models in which reading is seen as a comfortable, casual leisure activity about which people might enjoy chatting. Jenny Hartley suggests that more generally reading groups could be perceived 'as part of the feminization of culture', creating 'a forum for the kind of talk associated with women': 'co-operation rather than competition', 'listening and sharing over self-assertion and winning the argument'.[21] In this model the reading group becomes a meeting-group that takes place after the event of reading has been concluded, and the literature itself apparently fails to have much of an impact upon the actual discourse of the group.

I use this example in order to emphasise once again that whilst there are all sorts of comparisons and fields of inquiry to which GIR could be linked, its project is in itself highly specific. Therefore this thesis does not claim to present either a comprehensive history of reading or a fully-developed theory of reading aloud. It is a preliminary study of what has gone into (part 1), and what goes on within (part 2) a model of shared reading and reading in practice, in the contemporary world.

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[21] Jenny Hartley, *The Reading Groups Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 137.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

reading groups that have been conducted during the course of this study. I have tried to do justice in this thesis to the memory that I hold of each of these people.

Behind this thesis is a sense of purpose which for many reasons I attribute in the first place to my family: my parents Michael and Mary, and siblings Joy, Peter, Lucia, Cherry and John. I am grateful also to Christian Lowe, whose presence during many difficult days has indeed brought a measure of calm.

Chapter 1: Origins in Elizabethan theory and praxis

The frame

The reading of poetry in Get into Reading begins, ontologically as it were, with the Elizabethan lyric as its basis.

Equivalently, the point of creative origin in Elizabethan poetics is when the poet makes order out of the forces and elements of human chaos within the form of the little world or multi-dimensional map offered by his or her poem. A place or site is founded:

> For the body of our imagination being as an unformed chaos without fashion, without day, if by the divine power of the spirit it be wrought into an orb of order and form, is it not more pleasing to Nature, that desires a certainty and comports not with that which is infinite, to have these closes, rather than not to know where to end, or how far to go, especially seeing our passions are often without measure?[22]

Samuel Daniel does not want to be rid of imaginative or passionate power, but to show how it might be incorporated into a structure, where it can be put into channelled use. For without direction from some perspective above themselves human passions are likely to expand and run on, sustained by their own strength, until they become almost independent of the original motive or substance of feeling, or simply run out of energy. Daniel's model of poetry is a mental safeguard, a rhymed holdfast, against such chaos or entropy. On the one hand, the poet can get above and outside the lines as the maker of the little world in which they are contained by rhyme and form. On the other, the poet may simultaneously remain inside the poem at the level of the lines themselves, making up as they do the separate elements, compounds and conflicts experienced within their world.

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[22] Samuel Daniel, 'A Defence of Rhyme' (1603), in *English Critical Essays (Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Edmund D. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 61-87 (p. 69).

Likewise, in Elizabethan structures we are particularly conscious of reading both along the lines as distinct units and down them in the turns of the whole.

So it is in Barnaby Googe's poem 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind', for example:

> The oftener seen, the more I lust,
> The more I lust, the more I smart,
> The more I smart, the more I trust,
> The more I trust, the heavier heart,
> The heavy heart breeds mine unrest;
> Thy absence therefore like I best.[23]

The poem, unhappily driven by the horizontal pressure of lust as it moves from line to line, generates in the end an ironic inversion of the longed-for return. It is 'absence' itself turned from being presence, which has now to be associated with 'like': the aspiration lies in the words of Robert Southwell: 'What thought can thinke an other thought can mende.'[24] For what is offered is a model of something more finally complete than one might be able to see visually in the form of the line, with its move from left to right or from a to b. By the turns across the lines, in search of a resolution in sanity, the poet (though he must know he protests too much) here tries to prevent the poem going round and round in circles. As Ben Jonson writes of Shakespeare:

> For though the poet's matter, nature be,
> His art doth give the fashion. And, that he,
> Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,
> (Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
> Upon the muses' anvil: turn the same,
> (And himself with it) that he thinks to frame;
> Or for the laurel, he may gain a scorn,
> For a good poet's made, as well as born.
> And such wert thou.[25]

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[23] Barnabe Googe, 'Deuli augent dolorem', in *Eclogues, Epitaphs, and Sonnets* (1563), ed. by Judith M. Kennedy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 97.

[24] Robert Southwell, 'Looke home' (from *St Peter's Complaint*, 1595), in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007), p. 49.

[25] Ben Jonson, 'To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author Mr William Shakespeare: And What He Hath Left Us' (1623), in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by George Parfitt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 265.

The poem is a second world beaten out by a blacksmith with the powers of a lower Vulcan. In forming that second world, the poet offers some initial spark but needs a second heat, something made and not just innate, to beat out a form in which that first heat is re-ignited and made constructive. Then as the poet turns across a line, it is not just the line he crosses but something in his own mind ('And himself with it') that turns, changes, and may be reconstituted with it. Poetic creation in this period becomes just such a process of reappraisal and reassembly, down the vertical axis. These turns and turning-points, the turn from one line or, further, one state to another that makes for transmutation and transformation: these are vital to the story that follows.

This is a craft to be learned by poet and reader. For that great Elizabethan reader and analyst, George Puttenham, poetry is a craft that involves the same awareness of practical human constraints that one might see for instance in the work of a carpenter or a builder or Jonson's blacksmith:

> Now ye may perceive … that there is a band to be given every verse in a staff, so as none fall out alone or uncoupled, and this band maketh that the staff is said fast and not loose: even as ye see in buildings of stone or brick the mason giveth a band, that is a length to two breadths, and upon necessity divers other sorts of bands to hold in the work fast and maintain the perpendicularity of the wall. So, in any staff of seven or eight or more verses, the coupling of the more meters by rhyme or concord is the faster band; the fewer, the looser band …[26]

The structure which the poet has to work with in his composition of the poem is designed to ensure the poem holds together. In poetry the perpendicular 'band' has to follow *down* rather than just across the page, creating along with a set of internal links a kind of 'fast'-ness that will give that certain movement of which Daniel speaks. For both Puttenham and Daniel saw poetry as being at least three-dimensional in its body and constructed form.

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[26] George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy* (1589)*: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 178.

Robert Frost was to talk of poetry as 'a momentary stay against confusion'.[27] The origins of that stay or hold lie partly in the defence of rhyme that Elizabethan poets such as Daniel mounted. It is rhyme 'whose known frame hath those due stays for the mind, those encounters of touch, as makes the motion certain, though the variety be infinite' (*English Critical Essays*, p. 66). Within the right frame there can be room for content which in its chaotic variety might otherwise feel 'without measure'. The mind requires those 'due stays', the linear pauses and holdfasts, which steady the writer and reader alike and provide a sense of something within the poem to rest upon. The formal achievement of rhyme contains this realization of the infinitely unknown or indefinitely uncertain within manageable limits. So in Daniel's sonnet 'Let others sing of knight and palatines', he says of his own lines here, written to and for the beloved:

> These are the Arkes, the Trophies I erect,
> That fortifie thy name against old age:
> And these thy sacred vertues must protect,
> Against the darke and Tymes consuming rage.[28]

'Protect' there does not merely tame or stave off the threat: at the next line it includes 'the dark', letting it back in again with a line of its own, in counterpoint against the overall sentence.

By contrast, the language of prose goes forward without such holds, potentially shapeless. As Ben Jonson says of sentence-structure: 'Periods are beautiful when they are not too long, for so they have their strength too, as in a pike or javelin.'[29] Yet in Elizabethan verse beauty is played out in the contrapuntal harmony across lines and between parts and wholes. Witness Jonson himself on the

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[27] 'The Figure a Poem Makes' (1939), in *Selected Prose of Robert Frost,* ed. by Hyde Cox and Edward Connery Latham (New York: Collier Books, 1968), pp. 17-20 (p. 18).

[28] Samuel Daniel, 'Sonnet 52' (from *Delia*, 1592), in *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse 1509-1659*, ed. by H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 250-1.

[29] Ben Jonson, 'Notes on Literature', in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), pp. 558-89 (p. 577).

brevity of a young life which nonetheless had its own completed shape and self-contained quality:

> In small proportions, we just beauties see:
> And in short measures, life may perfect be.[30]

The form seeks to create perfection against the dark of time.

The lyric's solidity was to create that 'moment's monument'[31] which would enlarge, rather than reduce the meaning of an individual life. Puttenham applied this idea to the situation at court, where despite all the privilege of their position, princes:

> have not one hour to bestow upon any other civil or delectable art of natural or moral doctrine, nor scarce any leisure to think one good thought in perfect and godly contemplation, whereby their troubled minds might be moderated and brought to tranquillity.
>
> *The Art of English Poesy,* p. 111.

For the adult caught up in the business of the day, time institutes its own law of automatic follow-on from one thing to the next, without any institution of form or priority or closes. Immediate considerations take over from higher ones, as if by necessity. But Puttenham feels that to be able to think 'one good thought' might in some way reset the balance, creating a fresh basis from which to carry on. Though the prince has not one hour for it, 'a sonnet is a minute' ('14 breaths and 70 heartbeats').[32] It is the perfect model, setting aside a single unit of time in which to develop and contain a complete thought.

This is where it is important to recall Daniel's sense that a poem at its finest recalls the shape of 'an orb' in which, through the use of 'measure', the poetic idea is at once contained and bodied forth. This orb is indicative not only of a perfect shape

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[30] Ben Jonson, 'To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison' (1629), in *The Complete Poems*, p. 214.

[31] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Sonnet on the Sonnet' (from *The House of Life*, 1881), in *Collected Poetry and Prose,* ed. by Jerome McGann (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 127.

[32] Seán Haldane, 'Note on Pulsation and Poetry', *The Reader,* 48 (2012), 41-3 (p. 43).

but also includes a secret vital power, as described in Ficino's 15th century

commentary on Plato:

> let the form of the world be spherical, for in this way it is fully uniform, spacious, cohesive, and energetic; and this is the only way in which one mass can be placed inside another without any void or can move without any collision. This is not the case if squares are placed within squares or within circles, but only if globes are placed within globes. In brief, there is a special cause of this world-sphere: the nature of the divine world is circular, being turned back to itself through the act of understanding and loving[33]

It is the power of that constant turn and re-turn. What we now tend familiarly to term

'emotion' begins more implicitly within motion or movement. With that movement

the sphere represents, says Ficino, the steady revolution of a continual return 'to

itself' – the turn of verses and lines backwards and forwards upon themselves in new

reformulations that make infinite variety out of still manageably finite matter.

Marvell's poem 'On a Drop of Dew' is that neo-platonic ideal of poetry that seeks in

its little self to mirror, like the drop of dew itself, the great forms of the universe:

> See how the orient dew,
> Shed from the bosom of the morn
>   Into the blowing roses,
> Yet careless of its mansion new;
> For the clear region where 'twas born
>   Round in itself encloses:
>   And in its little globe's extent,
> Frames as it can its native element.
>   How it the purple flower does slight,
>   Scarce touching where it lies,
>   But gazing back upon the skies,
>   Shines with a mournful light,
>   Like its own tear,
> Because so long divided from the sphere.[34]

With its vertical line movements delicately deployed in recreating the place of things,

this is the epitome of the little world of Elizabethan poetry, finding the tear of

separation stilled within its reflections of beauty. The tear is like a second appearance

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[33] Arthur Farndell, trans., *All Things Natural: Ficino on Plato's* Timaeus (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 2010), p. 25.

[34] 'On a Drop of Dew' (from *Miscellaneous Poems*, 1681), in *The Oxford Authors: Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Frank Kermode and Keith Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 12.

within the dew, as the form, like the droplet, at once recreates, holds and transcends the emotion within it. It is that subtle combination of transformation of, and loyalty to, the human content which is modelled here.

The healing 'turn'

Puttenham introduces an analogy with the work of the physician in that same common-sense mode that had led him to think of the comparison with the mason. Again he is interested in proportion, and the pain caused by imbalances:

> Lamenting is altogether contrary to rejoicing: every man saith so, and yet is it a piece of joy to be able to lament with ease and freely to pour forth a man's inward sorrows and the griefs wherewith his mind is surcharged. This was a very necessary device of the poet and a fine: besides his poetry to play also the physician, and not only by applying a medicine to the ordinary sickness of mankind, but by making the very grief itself (in part) cure of the disease.

> *The Art of English Poesy*, p. 135.

In early modern medical discourse the word 'cure' 'denoted a range of meanings, including 'a method of treatment … the relief of symptoms, and even sheer survival of an acute illness, as well as the modern sense of full recovery'.[35] For Puttenham the word seems to mean more than recovery back to a baseline. His description does imply a kind of acute experience of grief which is turned into something other than itself even by speaking of itself in song. Many situations in life are susceptible to ordinary cures, but poetry concerns those which have no answer or solution:

> Therefore, of death and burials, of the adversities by wars, and of true love lost or ill-bestowed, are the only sorrows that the noble poets sought by their art to remove or appease, not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the Galenists use to cure *contraria contrariis*, but as the Paracelsians, who cure *similia similibus*, making one dolor to expel another, and in this case, one short sorrowing the remedy of a long and grievous sorrow.

> *The Art of English Poesy*, pp. 136-7.

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[35] Lund refers here to a 1974 essay, 'Clinical Medicine', printed in *Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England: A Symposium Held at UCLA in Honor of C. D. O'Malley.*
Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England:* Reading *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 99.

In the ancient world there would have been certain appointed times and places for lamentation, in the same way that collective rejoicing was provided for and expected at communal feasts and festivals. Temples and statues served as places that one could visit, where the kind of emotional expression that Puttenham describes would literally have found a place for ritual. The poem is here the less material version of such temples and monuments, the repository for inward sorrows more private and less immediately communal, and often humiliatingly belittling.

For his idea that poetry might be cathartic and therapeutic, Puttenham takes as his model not Galen, the second-century physician and surgeon, but Paracelsus, a Renaissance physician. Instead of aggressive intervention, surgical counters to disease, what Paracelsus offers is homeopathy: 'similia similibus', a short intense form of the otherwise long linear suffering. So Puttenham cites Sir Walter Raleigh:

> With wisdom's eyes had but blind fortune seen,
> Then had my love, my love for ever been.

The secret lamentation 'my love, my love' internal to the second line in a way that turns against the mere linear movement left to right is an instance of epizeuxis or what Puttenham renames the cuckoo-spell (p. 285). It is like a little inner image of poetry, the repetition across the mid-point of the line almost lifting itself out of the ongoing account of what has been and is no longer. It is as if poetry finds a sudden place in which those little words which for so long had remained unspoken in loss are needed almost importunately by the voice of the poem.

'One short sorrowing the remedy of a long and grievous sorrow.' The act of 'sorrow-ing' offers to counter the silting up of sorrow as a noun, a process of calling out the dull inwardly constricted ache which is thus 'tunably running' in a form of music (Puttenham, p. 227). The transmutation is like that moment of relief when a person whom one knows to be suffering – and yet who will not speak of the cause –

begins to cry. The person may not be saying anything as yet, 'but at least there is some movement,' one thinks. Only in the poetry the cry is made beautiful by a healing art: 'my love, my love' Sidney imagines the poet in a vineyard, holding out 'a cluster of grapes'[36] to anyone who might venture in. He is confident that poetry's sweetness might work upon any reader, 'even those hard-hearted evil men' who 'know no other good but *indulgere genio*', and who 'feel not the inward reason' upon which a philosopher's admonitions might be based. 'My love, my love' is like that inward reason.

As Montaigne writes, 'we ought to grant free passage to diseases', rather than be forever fighting them, Galen-style.[37] In Tichborne's 'Elegy' the young protagonist thus faces his own fate unflinchingly as it presents itself before him on the page. The poem, apparently written the night before his execution, seems to allow him a space in which to consider the foreshortening of his own life even at that point when nothing can be done to alter it:

> My tale was heard, and yet it was not told;
> My fruit is fall'n, and yet my leaves are green;
> My youth is spent, and yet I am not old;
> I saw the world, and yet I was not seen:
> My thread is cut, and yet it is not spun;
> And now I live, and now my life is done.[38]

Sorrow is contained here within the form: 'and yet, and yet, and now'. For whilst the poem is mapped out as if it were a riddle or a paradox, what it spells out very plainly is the truth of this poet's otherwise untold tale. 'The spring is past, and yet it hath not sprung', 'My youth is gone, and yet I am but young': these are terrible present tenses just about to become past, 'I saw the world, and yet I was not seen.' Only poetic time

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[36] Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, *or The Defence of Poesy* (1595), ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 95.

[37] 'Of Experience' (1575), in *The Essays of Michael, Seigneur de Montaigne*, trans. by Charles Cotton (London: Ward, Lock, and Tyler, undated), pp. 849-892 (p. 869).

[38] Chidiock Tichborne, 'Elegy' (1586), in *Elizabethan Lyrics*, ed. by Norman Ault (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 120.

can hold onto individual time. Spring not sprung, youth gone but young: the very interplay of the words is the work of 'simila similibus'. Though the personal is thus contained within measure, it is still that fragile sense of the personal – its temporariness on earth, its vulnerability to loss – that remains the inner motive-force for the existence of poetry in the Renaissance. Antidotes against time, against the loss of tiny personal notes overwhelmed in anonymising obliviousness.

The purpose is 'to move men', so as ultimately 'to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved' (Sidney, p. 87). Yet the taste of such goodness amidst bitter experience has to be sweet and the touch delicate in order to entice in the reader from other hungers and thirsts than those which a poem might be able to satisfy. In Shakespeare's sonnet 29

> When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state

sweetness comes as a surprise to the 'sullen earth':

> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state
> (Like to the lark at break of day arising)
> From sullen earth sings hymns at heaven's gate.
>   For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
>   That then I scorn to change my state with kings.[39]

Burrow notes how that sudden response out of the sullen contained in the word 'sings' has already been anticipated in 'despi*sing*' and 'ari*sing*'. The internal recall of those two earlier words signals the transformation of the despised self, that unhappy state previously spelt out as 'all alone' which in a matter of two lines has been almost forgotten. So much in Elizabethan verse thus depends on one thing contained in another – one word in a longer or harsher one, goodness within sadness, grace found in the midst of disgrace – so that a healing art might carry out its restorative work

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[39] Sonnet 29, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 439.

from within grief itself. 'Usually these two stages have to be successive', George Santayana writes: 'first we suffer, afterwards we sing.'[40]

Sidney speaks more theologically of 'that second nature' which the work of a poet serves to activate:

> when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing [Nature's] doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.
>
> *An Apology for Poetry*, p. 86.

'These are the arks, the trophies I erect' wrote Daniel. It is that erecting that works against the infecting even by incorporating it. And in that it is nothing less than a small vital attempt to restore something pre-lapsarian to the post-lapsarian world, in the midst of the fallenness and not despite it. 'Against the dark'.

For Sidney the poem's 'embrace of nature'[41] is foundational to that higher purpose of developing 'another nature' (*Apology*, p. 85) which would purify the idea of pleasure from its fallen association with moral corruption. For the condition of a reflective human life is one of being caught between these higher and lower levels. In concluding his commentary, Ficino recalls Plato's statement that 'all the levels of the brute creation have gradually been increased in number by the rather serious fall of the rational soul' (p. 103). This fallen 'soul' has to inhabit a universe with which it is not wholly in sync, and in which its very form feels like a debased memory of the original. What poetry seems to offer within this general human predicament is the capacity to hold the various levels together. And what is important is the transformation into song, harmoniously crying out loud and soft, within the music of poetry. The frame thus acts almost like a tuning fork, allowing the reader to hear

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[40] George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory* (1896), (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 139.

[41] Christine Coch, 'The Woman in the Garden: (En)gendering Pleasure in Late Elizabethan Poetry', *English Literary Renaissance*, 39 (2009), 97-127 (p. 101).

where the sound is made truly perfect, and where the notes cannot be other than

broken and distorted. In another of Shakespeare's sonnets the 'base' figure keeps

company with the glorious image of a rising sun until it no longer seems right to

position them as exact opposites:

> Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
> Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
> Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy,
> Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
> With ugly rack on his celestial face,
> And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
> Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
> Even so my sun one early morn did shine
> With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
> But out alack, he was but one hour mine,
> The region cloud hath masked him from me now.
>   Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth:
>   Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.[42]

The poetry itself can be both cloud and sun in this second nature, alternately every

four lines, every two lines, even within the two halves of one line. To re-quote

Marvell, its little orb or globe

> Shines with a mournful light
> Like its own tear,
> Because so long divided from the sphere.

The music aloud

Such poetry cannot attain its full effect simply through being seen from without. It

also has to be performed, like an instrument that is sounded. It has to be given voice.

Walter J. Ong has written thus on the sudden effect of live sound in the

world, even from its most brutal origins:

in an oral culture, which knows words only in their natural habitat, that is, the
world of sound, words necessarily carry with them a special sense of power. For
sound always indicates the present use of power. A primitive hunter can see a
buffalo, smell a buffalo, touch a buffalo, and taste a buffalo when the buffalo is
dead and motionless. If he *hears* a buffalo, he had better watch out:

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[42] Sonnet 33, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 447.

something is going on. No other sensory field has this dynamism which marks the field of sound. So long as words are known only directly and without interference for what they ultimately are – sounds – and cannot possibly be imagined to be what they really are not – marks on a surface – they are sensed as physically powered events, happenings, of a piece with all present actuality.[43]

It is this presentness that Elizabethan verse transmutes when words are taken out of their natural habitat in the world and offered instead as notation on the page. When those marks on the page are released back out again in performance, they become a little verbal orb of sounds momentarily saturating the world's atmosphere. This is what Ong calls a sensory field – as in the sad beautiful music that pauses and moves the characters in *Twelfth Night* (II.iv) as though suddenly they were returned to another dimension:

Orsino: How does thou like this tune?
Viola: It gives a very echo to the seat
              Where love is throned.[44]

In the previous scene

Feste [Sings]: What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
              Present mirth hath present laughter;
                What's to come is still unsure.
              In delay there lies no plenty,
              Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
                Youth's a stuff will not endure.

In the aftermath of silence, it is to this note that the ludicrously comic knight Sir Andrew Aguecheek suddenly, seriously attunes himself when a few moments later he quietly cries, 'I was adored once, too' in a sudden turn of register.

T. S. Eliot writes that 'a good love poem, though it may be addressed to one person, is always meant to be overheard by other people'.[45] It is in the overhearing of

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[43] Walter J. Ong, 'Foreword' to Pedro Laín Entralgo's *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, ed. and trans. by L. J. Rather and John M. Sharp (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), xiii-xiv.

[44] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night or What You Will* (1623), ed. by Elizabeth Story Donno (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 94.

[45] T. S. Eliot, 'The Three Voices of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 89-102 (p. 90).

the voice that the dimensions of poetry suddenly multiply within the inner as well as outer ear of the auditor. For the echoes resound within dimensions that it is amazing the almost physically tangible quality of sound can reach: the dimensions of heart and memory.

Songs and poems are transporting, as though brought into the present in a transported form from elsewhere. They carry echoes from across time and space, such that the Elizabethan lyric seems a generic individual, at once a single voice and yet resonant on behalf of the collective race. Such poetic songs, I believe, are still meant to inhabit the air, to be an ayre, and not to be pent up as within the outwardly silenced form of a pair of headphones. In John Davies' poem it is the air that likes to dance:

> For what are *Breath, Speech, Ecchos, Musick, Winds,*
> But Dauncings of the ayre in sundry kinds?
>
> For when you breath, the *ayre* in order moves,
> Now in, now out, in time and measure trew;
> And when you speake, so well she dauncing loves,
> That doubling oft, and oft redoubling new,
> With thousand formes she doth her selfe endew:
>   For all the words that from your lips repaire,
>   Are nought but tricks and turnings of the aire.[46]

The song continually replenishes the universe with its 'doubling' and 'redoubling', its sounds and resounds, in the biological in-breath and the out-breath now made musical in this second world or nature. For the song literally plays upon and reissues an endless succession of air-waves. It is Puttenham's mode of lamentation or pouring forth, with all the hindrances removed.

And yet in the following poem the voice is heard only in the context of the absence of that which the poet most desires: the presence of the lover. Writing is thus

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[46] 'Orchestra, Or, a Poeme of Dauncing' (1596), in *The Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. by Robert Krueger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 90-126 (pp. 101-102).

made to take on the problem of not being able to be heard by the one person to whom one yearns to speak:

> Lyke Memnons rocke toucht, with the rising Sunne,
> Which yeelds a sownd, and ecchoes foorth a voice:
> But when its drownde, in westerne seas is dunne,
> And drousie lyke, leaves off to make a noise.
> So I (my love) inlightned with your shyne,
> A Poets skill within my soule I shroud,
> Not rude lyke that, which finer wittes declyne,
> But such as Muses to the best allowde.
> But when your figure, and your shape is gone,
> I speechlesse am, lyke as I was before:
> Or if I write, my verse is fill'd with moane,
> And blurd with teares, by falling in such store.
>   Then muse not (Licia) if my Muse be slacke,
>   For when I wrote, I did thy beautie lacke.[47]

Stone speaks as in the miracle of *The Winter's Tale*, the formal monument coming to life. Yet after the eclipse of such magic the poem and the poet have to act as the equivalent, the stone heart heated and made flesh again by the beloved's warm light. So in the answering echoes of the first two lines it is as though the speechless one is kissed into speech: the gentle touch (of the sun's rays) yields 'a sound', a response which resounds further as if increasing in volume, even innerly within the poet's soul. But once the 'you' of line 9 has 'gone', then the 'I' of line 10 is utterly left behind, to repeat only itself. It is as if the invisible connecting force in the words has been lost, now that the two people are separated in space. Hence it is no freak misfortune that suddenly makes the poet 'dumb' (at the end of line 3). Indeed such dumbed power (like numb feeling) becomes a common feature of the sonnets, as in the work of Shakespeare, for whom these come to represent 'my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect'.[48] It is a second sounding. The condensed power of the

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[47] Sonnet XLVII (from *Licia*, 1593), in *The English Works of Giles Fletcher, the Elder*, ed. by Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 107.

[48] Sonnet 85, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 551.

Elizabethan lyric still stems from its origins in 'unvoiced'[49] thought. It is as though the poem is produced out of that lack of any other means of expressing the inner voice.

It is that translation which triggers an echo in the auditor's or reader's own dumb thoughts. For perhaps the strangest thing about a lyric poem in the Elizabethan tradition is the way in which this echo from another person (living in another place and time) can seem to feel as if it came from inside its auditor, echoing his or her own thoughts, recalling the echo of his or her own forgotten or lost or hidden inner being (past and present). What is more a poem *retains* this echo over time, so that it can be re-sounded again, inside and out, when the poem is read a second, and a third time, recollected in quietness, listened out for carefully.

In the act of reading, poetry is able to rediscover and tap into wells of inner feeling that may not be apparent from the surface appearance of things. Douglas Oliver, twentieth-century poet and expert performer of poetry, is thus interested in the way in which feelings, re-created out of their natural habitat, get acted out in the process of poetry's live transmission:

> But the fictitious emotions are also mimed in an intonation pattern almost perfectly suitable for their expression; and the link between emotion and intonation pattern, even when mimed, is *extremely direct*, like that link between sight and cognitive awareness in perception, for it is sensuous once we begin the performance of a poem. What we do when we read a poem well is modulate our speed and emphasis of reading, so as to bring the conceptualised emotion into temporal consonance with the semantic field and to let emotion's necessary sensuous conjunction with sound create a unity between all three factors. It's almost as if the emotional and temporally accorded semantic concepts drag the sound directly and sensuously along with them: when we recite well we have almost to wait for the right instant to speak each syllable, delaying very minutely durations of vowels to make the tempo perfect.

Poetry and Narrative in Performance, p. 107.

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[49] George T. Wright, 'The Silent Speech of Shakespeare's Sonnets', in *Shakespeare and the Twentieth Century: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Los Angeles, 1996*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, Jill L. Levenson and Dieter Mehl (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), pp. 314-35 (p. 316).

In practice it is as in the opening of the final farewell poem of Michael Drayton's life, which begins: 'Soe well I love thee, as without thee I | Love nothing'.[50] The real gap seems to open up in between that repetition of 'thee', and the 'I' that follows afterwards, even in advance of the line break. It is a kind of hidden partition – the telegraphese of 'without thee' again musically disrupting with delicacy the otherwise straightforward left to right movement – that is only made present in the careful reading out-loud, even be it sub-vocally within one's own head.

To read a good poem well is not simply to ride the wave of an already known emotion. It is to sense the minute shifts, delays and crescendos that the composer barely writes into the score, but which the musician senses to be of a piece with the music as it has been written. Or perhaps it could be like a dance in which something moves *through* the dancer even as her body moves through the air.

For what is at stake here is the almost physical way in which a hidden inner emotional mentality is quietly released in response to the outer sonic motion: similia similibus. In Thomas Bowes's translation of the work of the philosopher Pierre de la Primaudaye[51] the secrets of that resonance are made for once explicit. First of all, deep inside the soul, there is a secret, internal form of unspoken thought:

> because our soules, being kept under our flesh as under a veile, useth cogitations & discourses, it standeth in need of speech, of words & of names, by means of which it may utter and publish that, that lieth hid as it were in a deepe and darke place, where nothing is seene… Our soule useth thoughts and discourses, which cannot be declared so long as it is inclosed in this tabernacle of flesh… And so wee say, that there are two kindes of speach in man, one internall and of the minde, the other externall, which is pronounced, and is the messenger of the internall, that speaketh in the heart. Therfore that which is framed in voyce, pronounced in speach, & brought into use, is as a river sent from the thought with the voyce, as from his fountain.
>
> (Bk. 2, Ch. 13, pp. 377-8).

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[50] 'Verses made the night before hee dyed', in *Poems of Michael Drayton*, ed. by John Buxton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 286.

[51] Quoted by Wistreich in his paper 'Reading the Voice'.
Peter de la Primaudaye, *The French Academie* (1577), trans. by Thomas Bowes (London: 1618)

But where to the philosopher the movement is logically from inside out, from inner soul through the body into outer sound, to the poet and to the reader of the poet the effect is always the other way round. The word rebounds upon its writer or hearer as if disclosing inside-out the hidden and veiled inner meaning which they could not otherwise find. That is why surprise is, quietly and subtly, a major explosive moment in Elizabethan verse – an inner meaning suddenly found, like an inner echo. So in the turn-around of Sidney's poem, the lover has his song of despised love sung by the beloved herself, hoping thus to move her but finds instead:

> A pretty case! I hoped her to bring
>   To feel my griefs, and she with face and voice
>   So sweets my pains, that my pains me rejoice.[52]

It is Stella's voice which finally enters, in this closing couplet, to produce that in-fill of air and of glad sounds into the voice of the poet, who suddenly and involuntarily finds cause for a re-echoing of joy instead of grief. 'My pains' repeated become transmuted.

As Primaudaye puts it:

> In the writings of the learned we finde mention made of a double speech or reason: the one internall, or of the minde, called the divine guide: the other uttered in speech, which is the messenger of the conceites and thoughts of man.
>
> (Bk. 1, Ch. 12, p. 52).

It is that double speech, the outer sound and the resounding inner message, that is the resonance of such poetry. It is that which, in a later time, Wordsworth heard from the solitary reaper:

> The music in my heart I bore,
> Long after it was heard no more[53]

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[52] Sir Philip Sidney, 'Astrophil and Stella' (57), in *The Major Works*, ed. by Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 175.

[53] William Wordsworth, 'The Solitary Reaper' (*Poems*, 1807), in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 319-20.

or from an ordinary anonymous woman casually saying to him, 'What you are

stepping westward?'

> The echo of the voice enwrought
> A human sweetness with the thought
> Of travelling through the world that lay
> Before me in my endless way.[54]

This is, in its last two lines also echoing Milton, a version of poetry's paradise

regained through erected wit. 'My own voice cheared me, and, far more, the mind's |

Internal echo of the imperfect sound' (*The Prelude*, 1805, I: 64-5).

The making of a Poet

It is Wordsworth who must stand, albeit abbreviatedly, at the end of this chapter as

the great transmitter and re-beginner of the lyric tradition as we shall see it

encapsulated in Get into Reading.

It is possible even to pinpoint an explicit place of influence. It occurs, in the

midst of social turmoil, in book 4 of *The Excursion* where unusally Wordsworth

quotes a poet at length, the poet being Samuel Daniel, in order to re-centre himself:

> "Knowing the heart of Man is set to be
> The centre of this World, about the which
> Those revolutions of disturbances
> Still roll; where all the aspècts of misery
> Predominate; whose strong effects are such
> As he must bear, being powerless to redress;
> *And that unless above himself he can*
> *Erect himself, how poor a thing is Man*!" [55]

Wordsworth himself writes in an unusually lengthy footnote, 'The passage quoted

from Daniel is taken from a poem addressed to the Lady Margaret, Countess of

Cumberland, and the two last lines, printed in Italics, are by him translated from

Seneca.' They are in fact the lines from Seneca that Montaigne also quoted at the end

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[54] 'Stepping Westward' (*Poems*, 1807), in *The Major Works*, pp. 313-14.
[55] 'The Excursion' (1814), in *The Poems of William Wordsworth,* ed. by Jared Curtis, 3 vols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), II, pp. 298-570 (pp. 400-01).

of his essay on Raymond Sebond in book II of his *Essais*. But though (as in Florio's translation of 1603) Montaigne described it as 'a notable speech and a profitable desire', he also called it absurd 'for to make the handfull greater than the hand … is impossible and monstrous' concluding:

> nor that man should mount over and above himselfe or humanity; for he cannot see but with his owne eyes, nor take hold but with his owne armes.[56]

This is Montaigne's sceptical but not irreligious response to the idea of the erected wit, 'unless above himself he can | Erect himself'. But it is Wordsworth's ambition, without ever forsaking what is down to earth, prosaic and common, to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, the poetry within the prose, the ability of the creative mind not wholly to become what circumstances were conspiring to make it. Wordsworth's footnote continues: 'The whole Poem is very beautiful. I will transcribe four stanzas from it, as they contain an admirable picture of the state of a wise Man's mind in a time of public commotion.

> Nor is he moved with all the Thunder-cracks
> Of Tyrants' threats, or with the surly brow
> Of Power, that proudly sits on others' crimes;
> Charged with more crying sins than those he checks.
> The storms of sad confusion that may grow
> Up in the present for the coming times,
> Appal not him; that hath no side at all,
> But of himself, and knows the worst can fall.
>
> Although his heart (so near allied to earth)
> Cannot but pity the perplexed state
> Of troublous and distress'd mortality,
> That thus make way unto the ugly Birth
> Of their own Sorrows, and do still beget
> Affliction upon Imbecility:
> Yet seeing thus the course of things must run,
> He looks thereon not strange, but as fore-done.
>
> And whilst distraught Ambition compasses,
> And is encompass'd, while as Craft deceives:

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[56] John Florio, trans., *The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne*, ed. by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1885), p. 310.

And is deceiv'd: whilst Man doth ransack Man,
And builds on blood, and rises by distress;
And th' Inheritance of desolation leaves
To great-expecting Hopes: He looks thereon,
As from the shore of Peace, with unwet eye,
And bears no venture in Impiety.

Thus, Lady, fares that Man that hath prepared
A Rest for his desires; and sees all things
Beneath him; and hath learn'd this Book of Man,
Full of the notes of frailty; and compar'd
The best of Glory with her sufferings:
By whom, I see, you labour all you can
To plant your heart; and set your thoughts as near
His glorious Mansion as your powers can bear.'[57]

It is the turn from beneath to above, registered in the closing lines of the first three stanzas ('appal *not*' '*yet*', '*un*wet') and the transmutation of feeling into determination that make the final stanza – it is that internal transformation that still seems possible here and in a letter of 20 November 1811, the year in which Luddism brought fresh social unrest, Wordsworth recommended Lady Beaumont to read Daniel's epistle 'To The Lady Margaret, Countess of Cumberland', directing her specifically to the lines beginning, 'He that of such height hath built his mind': it is, he concluded, 'strikingly applicable to the revolutions of the present times.'[58] It is a stance that goes with a moment in April 1808 when Wordsworth told Coleridge that he was minded to prefix 'The White Doe of Rylstone' with lines from Daniel's *Musophilus* which speak of what Milton called 'fit audience but few' for the solitary poet:[59] 'And for my part, if only one allow | The care my labouring spirits take in this | … This is my All, and all I am is his:

But what if none? It cannot yet undo
The love I bear unto this holy skill:
This is the thing that I was born to do,
This is my scene, this part must I fulfil.'

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[57] 'Notes' (to 'The Excursion'), in *The Poems of William Wordsworth*, II, pp. 754-55.
[58] Stephen Gill, 'Meditative Morality: Wordsworth and Samuel Daniel', *The Review of English Studies*, n.s., 55 (September 2004), 565-582 (p. 574).
[59] Meditative Morality, *The Review of English Studies*, 55, p. 576.

It was Coleridge who had introduced Wordsworth to Daniel, and Coleridge who in 1817 in *Biographia Literaria* was to describe Daniel's work as occupying 'the neutral ground of prose and verse, common to both'.[60] In the midst of the unpopularity of his later volumes in the early years of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth still stayed loyal to the principles of *Lyrical Ballads* and its preface − the poet as man speaking to men, the need to wipe poetry clean again of its accumulated verbal artifice, the belief in humble life as subject matter − even though the relation to the wider human world could remain as such only within his own mind and its work. 'This is the thing that I was born to do.'

As Coleridge concluded in chapter 22 of *Biographia Literaria*:

> Mr Wordsworth strikingly resembles Samuel Daniel, one of the golden writers of our golden Elizabethan age, now most causelessly neglected: Samuel Daniel, whose diction bears no mark of time, no distinction of age, which has been and, as long as our language shall last, will be so far the language of the to-day and for ever, as that it is more intelligible to us than the transitory fashions of our own particular age. A similar praise is due to his sentiments. No frequency of perusal can deprive them of their freshness. For though they are brought into the full daylight of every reader's comprehension, yet are they drawn up from depths which few in any age are privileged to visit, into which few in any age have courage or inclination to descend.
>
> (p. 267).

It is the same purity, principle and commitment that took Wordsworth to the translation of the Italian Renaissance poet Chiabrera whilst writing his *Essays upon Epitaphs*. In particular there was the epitaph in which Chiabrera makes the Archbishop of Urbino say of himself, that he was

> — "smitten by the great Ones of the world,
> But did not fall; for Virtue braves all shocks,
> Upon herself resting immoveably."[61]

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[60] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by George Watson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960), p. 216.

[61] 'Essays Upon Epitaphs', II, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), II, pp. 63-79 (p. 79).

It is the frame of the poem and the poetry that preserves the moral beauty of that stance on behalf of an original simplicity, 'an original intuition' close 'to the sources of things' (pp. 78-9).

It was a stance that in the *Essays upon Epitaphs* enabled Wordsworth to make a new beginning again, in trying to establish the very basis of what was poetry, even set in stone, in the open air, in the graveyard as the mark of man's mortality. There he takes an elaborate lyric engraved in St Paul's in memory of Sir Philip Sidney, in imitation of the French of Isaac du Bellay:

> England, Netherland, the Heavens, and the Arts,
> The Soldiers, and the World, have made six parts
> Of noble Sidney: for who will suppose
> That a small heap of Stones can Sidney enclose?
>
> England hath his Body, for she it fed,
> Netherland his Blood, in her defence shed:
> The Heavens have his Soul, the Arts have his Fame,
> The Soldiers the grief, the World his good Name.[62]

This is that false model poetry that Wordsworth hated, in its accumulation of verbal luggage. 'The memorial is nothing more than the second-hand Coat of a French Commander! It is a servile translation from a French Epitaph'. In contrast Wordsworth offers an example of how an epitaph ought to have been composed, not caring that it is ostensibly prose:

> But I cannot pass over in silence Sir Philip Sidney the elder brother, being (to use Camden's words) the glorious star of this family, a lively pattern of virtue, and the lovely joy of all the learned sort; who fighting valiantly with the enemy before Zutphen in Gelderland, dyed manfully. This is that Sidney, whom, as God's will was, he should therefore be born into the world even to shew unto our age a sample of ancient virtues: so his good pleasure was, before any man looked for it, to call for him again, and take him out of the world, as being more worthy of heaven than earth. Thus we may see perfect virtue suddenly vanisheth out of sight, and the best men continue not long.'
>
> (p. 72).

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[62] Essays Upon Epitaphs, II, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, II, p. 71.

And that remained Wordsworth's centre: that honour to the fundamentally human and honour to the ostensibly prosaic were alike the task of poetry in its fresh revolution. That is why he would look at over-elaborate poems and try to paraphrase them, try to see whether beneath their fattened flesh there remained the skeleton of real feeling. Too often he found the basis of a genuine original lost beyond recognition: 'there is no under current, no skeleton or stamina, of thought and feeling' (p. 75).

> O reader! had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,
> O gentle reader! you would find
> A tale in every thing.[63]

I shall turn later to the further commitment of poetry to ordinary experience, whilst chapter two will have to recommence Wordsworth's story from a different perspective: a perspective that leads instead to the popularity in prose fiction of Charles Dickens. But for the moment what remains to be stressed for the forward reach of this chapter into the second half of this thesis is this emphasis on Wordworth as the re-beginner of the tradition that (as he puts in *The Prelude*) 'through the turnings intricate of verse' effected 'a sorrow that is not sorrow to hear of'.[64] I save for later the further aspirations of Wordsworth's project: the sense of 'something' (a key word for this poet) within the ordinary world that transcends it yet remains unnamed and uncategorized.

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[63] 'Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman' (from *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798), in *The Major Works*, p. 87.
[64] 1805, V. 627; XII, 245-7.

Chapter 2: Missionary purposes

There is a kind of faith, Ruskin writes, that does not dwell on the future, and consequently is 'not very hopeful or cheerful'. But it fits people for living *in* the world – rather than trying to take them imaginatively out of it. It is a substantial kind of faith, lending substance to the person who is able to dwell in it:

> It is not intended that he should look away from the place he lives in now, and cheer himself with thoughts of the place he is to live in next, but that he should look stoutly into this world, in faith that if he does his work thoroughly here, some good to others or himself, with which however he is not at present concerned, will come of it hereafter.[65]

This is Ruskin's form of realism. One had to attend to the place in which one was living in the present, carrying out one's work without concern for the possible future rewards or validating proofs of its effectualness. One had to be faithful without knowing in advance.

Work takes place within the world, contributing to it, and being affected by its conditions. Not even the artist can be imagined to work in a rarefied atmosphere, closed off from the world, for the artist shares the same character as any other kind of worker: 'whatever bit of a wise man's work is honestly and benevolently done, that bit is his book or his piece of art'.[66] Art is that which remains in the world as a sign or indicator of the place in which a person has become present.

For Alasdair MacIntyre, ideas have to become present through embodiment in individual people in order to be kept alive within the modern world. For him, as a religious philosopher, it is a modern world of secular confusion and fragmentation that for Ruskin began in the nineteenth century, with loss of unified belief and coherent social purpose. In such a world 'characters' serve as representatives of

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[65] 'Modern Painters', Vol. V (1860), in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), VII, p. 267.

[66] 'Sesame and Lilies' (1865), in *The Works of John Ruskin*, XVIII, pp. 53-187 (p. 61).

'moral and metaphysical ideas and theories' which are thereby enabled to assume 'an embodied existence in the social world'.[67] To come across such representatives is like finding recollections of a tradition kept incarnately alive, even where the wider basis that it once held has been eroded or curtailed. The maintenance of a praxis, a craft in which the contributors could be relatively anonymous, was no longer simply possible.

The model of the 'character' illustrates the gravitation of the individual away from the contemporary group-norm for the sake of what is felt to be a higher prophetic purpose. It is as though this is a part of what is involved in the 'work': there has to be an active resistance in it. In Arnold's formulation such people are cultural 'aliens'; they are to be *in* the world, but disinterestedly not *of* it. Aliens are 'mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit' which takes them 'out of their class', out of that classic Victorian grouping.[68] 'General' indicates that it is not individualism as such that is being endorsed here but the effort at maintaining a surviving remnant. The individual is to relate back not to his class but to the *true* invisible human group, the spread across different times and locations of the whole human race. The function of the 'alien' is ultimately to be a missionary, to occupy and make existent a larger field.

Whilst the climax of the Renaissance movement seen in this country during the Elizabethan period had been prepared for by a revival of classical or ancient philosophy and culture, there are additional, new pressures which affect the Victorian ability to revive and maintain origins and traditions. The theory of advance and progress, fuelled by the Industrial Revolution, seemed to require a change in direction, a looking forward rather than back. In the face of such movement, there

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[67] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), p. 27.
[68] 'Culture and Anarchy' (1869), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by R. H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960-77), V, p. 146.

was a major task to be undertaken in determining those ideals which might be preserved as constant supports in an hastening future. The requirement, Ruskin said, was 'to go to [books] for help', 'to consult with the wisest and the greatest men on all points of earnest difficulty', and to be 'led by them into wider sight' (*Works*, xviii, p. 112).

John Ruskin: '*Read* the sculpture'[69]

For Ruskin art itself begins with vision. The person who has the vision might not always understand its content, and yet it is enough that the artist seeks to convey it. It is as Mary Jacobus writes of John Clare, that he 'not only observed nature minutely', but 'saw more than he knew, and perhaps knew more than he could see'.[70] The vision takes on the quality of a felt truth, a kind of embodied revelation, when for Ruskin 'to see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, – all in one' (*Works*, v, p. 333). In that endeavour, where a moment of insight may now have to stand in place of a whole lost framework of understanding, the impatient imagination of Ruskin even will risk the 'sacrifice' of the perfection of form in order that there may be a present realization of expansive content.[71]

For risks are now necessary when vision is giving way to sight, when the quickening sense of the imagination is in danger of being overwhelmed by the governing trend of materialism:

> The imagination would on the whole rather have it *not* there; - the reality and substance are rather in the imagination's way; it would think a good deal more of the thing if it could not see it. Hence, that strange and sometimes fatal charm, which there is in all things as long as we wait for them, and the moment we have lost them; but which fades while we possess them; - that sweet bloom of all that is far away, which perishes under our touch. Yet the feeling of

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[69] 'The Stones of Venice' (1853), Vol. II, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, X, p. 269.
[70] Mary Jacobus, 'Cloud Studies: The Visible Invisible', in *Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 219-47 (p. 224).
[71] Josie Billington, *Faithful Realism: Elizabeth Gaskell and Leo Tolstoy, A Comparative Study* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 102.

> this is not a weakness; it is one of the most glorious gifts of the human mind, making the whole infinite future, and imperishable past, a richer inheritance, if faithfully inherited, than the changeful, frail, fleeting present: it is also one of the many witnesses in us to the truth that these present and tangible things are not meant to satisfy us.
>
> *Modern Painters* III (*Works*, v, pp. 181-2).

It is not enough for sight to be limited to 'substance' – to that which one might touch – nor for a person to be sufficient to himself, or an age sufficient to itself. We need a larger range, a wider expanse, 'a richer inheritance' than that which can be gleaned from the present. There is risk here of mere nostalgic loving of loss, a retreat into what is past and absent. But for Ruskin our needs are more finely tuned than we often realize: we are not satisfied by the tangibly useful, but carry other desires for the 'sweet bloom' of that which cannot be possessed for any length of time.

Art might be a way of bringing back into the world what is not wholly of it. But if, within the world, art has to be a form of work, this in turn might raise the value of work itself, making it more akin to art even within the act of labour: art becomes 'more like an act or deed'.[72] But Ruskin's modern civilised world has long forgotten the close interlinking of such words as Puttenham had relied upon as the basis for his primary mode of thinking. The modern worker is becoming no longer a craftsman, but an invisible 'cog' in an inhuman machine, in peril of forgetting what he himself was made for. Such endless making and producing can have no meaning, unless this is in itself to be an act of creation, pointing towards a creator. The danger is that people become stuck with the image of the machine, in all the claim of its efficiency, and cannot see beyond it:

> You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanize them. All the energy of their spirits must be

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[72] Philip Davis, 'Arnold or Ruskin?', *Journal of Literature & Theology*, 6 (1992), 320-44, (p. 331).

given to make cogs and compasses of themselves … and so soul and sight be worn away, and the whole human being be lost at last – a heap of sawdust, so far as its intellectual work in this world is concerned …

The Stones of Venice II (*Works*, x, p. 192).

For Ruskin, the puritan believer in work, it is no bad thing for people to have something to give 'all the energy of their spirits' to. But soul must in some sense be matched by spirit; if workers are made to channel such energy into the machine-like structure of a system, the soul can only eventually die out, leaving behind the husk-like form of a dispirited and depressed creature. The accumulated human potential, that inheritance from generation to generation of a characteristically human spirit, is worn down in the one individual, to the part or segment that he represents within a whole that he cannot see and has no belief in. Or else the better-off young person is trained and made fit for a humanly devised '*station in life'* (*Works*, xviii, p. 54), as if there were nothing more to living than the effort of finding a class-position to fill.

In contrast, says Ruskin, walk into any great building from the Gothic age and you will see revealed the image of a great human society at work. Try out this model, Ruskin didactically urges, and imagine what life could be like if the heart was given a place in which to do its own, personal work. For it is in the visible marks of the original mason that one can see a person coming alive in his work, making the work itself a route towards something greater, rather than a diminishing act of slavery.

Ruskin showed how reading might achieve a similar effect, so long as the reader *worked* at discovering the author's 'hidden' meaning:

When you come to a good book, you must ask yourself, "Am I inclined to work as an Australian miner would? Are my pickaxes and shovels in good order, and am I in good trim myself, my sleeves well up to the elbow, and my breath good, and my temper?" And, keeping the figure a little longer, even at cost of tiresomeness, for it is a thoroughly useful one, the metal you are in search of being the author's mind or meaning, his words are as the rock which you have to crush and smelt in

order to get at it. And your pickaxes are your own care, wit, and learning; your smelting furnace is your own thoughtful soul. Do not hope to get at any good author's meaning without those tools and that fire; often you will need sharpest, finest chiselling, and patientest fusing, before you can gather one grain of the metal.

Sesame and Lilies (*Works*, xviii, pp. 63-4).

Even the life-giving work might still feel like painstaking activity: there is no easy calm of beauty but a desperate urging, as so often in Ruskin and his age. Yet for Ruskin this is a necessary reminder of the worth and purpose of the activity: that there is something that the miner is trying to 'get at', however long it takes.

His public lectures provide a number of pointers towards what Ruskin would class as the best material for such reading, from within the consolidated tradition of great representative classic literature, for which he coins the phrase 'the books of all time' (*Works*, xviii, p. 60). These examples, headed by the Bible, and the work of Milton, Shakespeare and Dante, cover a further range from Homer to Chaucer and Spenser. In other writings Ruskin reflects on those authors to whom he is personally indebted as a writer, and here he is led to think principally of Wordsworth and Carlyle '(with Dante and George Herbert, in olden time)'.[73] He is aware however that he is not the 'general reader', and that certain canonical works would only be available to those with a classical education:

The books that have most influenced me are inaccessible to the general reader, Horace, Pindar, and Dante, for instance; but these following are good for everybody: – Scott's "Lady of the Lake" and "Marmion" (the "Lady" first for me, though not for Scott). Pope's "Homer's Iliad." Byron, all, but most "Corsair," "Bride of Abydos, and the "Two Foscari."[74]

The later suggestions are all 'books of high caste', demonstrating the kind of cultural calibre that Ruskin is looking for, within books that readers do not need the knowledge of another language to be able to benefit from. Having already made this

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[73] Appendix to 'Modern Painters' III, *The Works of John Ruskin* V, p. 427.
[74] W. E. Gladstone et al., *Books Which Have Influenced Me* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), p. 43.

notion of 'high caste' the organising theme of the public lectures ('Of Kings'

Treasuries' and 'Of Queens' Gardens'), Ruskin continues to insist that it means more

than a place of status determined by the contemporary social world. 'High', in other

words, need not mean 'inaccessible': indeed it is important that there are some books

that are 'good for everybody' in that great alternative society of which an image is

offered in the abiding world of literature.

When he admits in his autobiographical writings to a 'most sincere love of

kings',[75] it is therefore the ideal quality of kingliness that Ruskin is referring to, over

and above its literal and compromised embodiment at any one time within a

particular personage. In giving the lectures he had similarly asked his audience

almost immediately to transfer the idea that such a word might have introduced into

another sphere:

> indeed I am not going to talk of kings, known as regnant, nor of treasuries,
> understood to contain wealth; but of quite another order of royalty, and another
> material of riches, than those usually acknowledged.

Sesame and Lilies (*Works*, xviii, p. 53).

It is the 'order' which the words stand for, and allude to, that matters to Ruskin. The

words themselves are like relics from another age, bearing a profusion of meaning,

like the effect of Gothic handiwork in a cathedral. These 'words of true descent and

ancient blood', members of the '*peerage* of words' (*Works*, xviii, p. 65), still

retaining their sense, are thus capable of regenerating the newer contexts into which

they are brought, as 'living powers' in Bishop Trench's phrase.[76] Ruskin uses them

to bring into being the kind of world that he believes in.

In the end nonetheless Ruskin proposed his own practical vision of an ideal

community of workers, as if the only way of realizing a true ideal was to have a

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[75] 'Praeterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in my Past Life' (1885-9),
    Vol. I, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, XXXV, p. 14.
[76] Richard Chenevix Trench, *On the Study of Words* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1882), p. 2.

practical formation of it in the world outside art. A decade after his conclusion of

Modern Painters, Ruskin began writing a series of letters in which he sought

personally to address the 'workmen and labourers', against the threat of his

becoming a mere lone maddened individual. He strained almost desperately to ensure

that people heard him rightly, that they did not think that in joining his 'guild' they

would be signing up to a kind of newly invented Utopian project:

> the very gist and essence of everything St. George orders is that it shall *not* be new, and not an "experiment"; but the re-declaration and re-doing of things known and practised successfully since Adam's time.
> … and although I shall endeavour to persuade you to accept nearly every law of the old guilds, that acceptance, I trust, will be with deeper understanding of the wide purposes of so narrow fellowship, and (if the thought is not too foreign to your present temper) more in the spirit of a body of monks gathered for missionary service, than of a body of tradesmen gathered for the promotion even of the honestest and usefullest trade.

> *Fors Clavigera* III (*Works*, xxix, pp. 133, 147).

There remains the neo-religious aspiration of the Ruskinian individual to create even

within small communities the remnant and the promise of a good society.

Matthew Arnold: 'I am, above all, a believer in culture'[77]

Arnold stated the central Victorian anxiety regarding the relation of the historically-

founded cultural tradition to the pattern of modern social formation:

> The difficulty for democracy is, how to find and keep high ideals. The individuals who compose it are, the bulk of them, persons who need to follow an ideal, not to set one; and one ideal of greatness, high feeling, and fine culture, which an aristocracy once supplied to them, they lose by the very fact of ceasing to be a lower order and becoming a democracy. Nations are not truly great solely because the individuals composing them are numerous, free, and active; but they are great when these numbers, this freedom, and this activity are employed in the service of an ideal somewhat higher than that of an ordinary man, taken by himself.[78]

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[77] Culture and Anarchy (Introduction), *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* V, pp. 87-9 (p. 88).

[78] 'The Popular Education of France' (1861), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, II, pp. 17-18.

For Arnold the only way to establish the 'best',[79] a key word throughout his writings in the discrimination of quality, was to work from the top down, beginning with the achieved ideals of human culture and thought. As a critic and a thinker Arnold wanted 'an adequate world over-view',[80] in which the current social issue of class could be redeemed from its degeneration by older literary versions of itself:

> I have had occasion, in speaking of Homer, to say very often, and with much emphasis, that he is *in the grand style*. It is the chief virtue of a healthy and uncorrupted aristocracy, that it is, in general, in this grand style. That elevation of character, that noble way of thinking and behaving, which is an eminent gift of nature to some individuals, is also often generated in whole classes of men (at least when these come of a strong and good race) by the possession of power, by the importance and responsibility of high station, by habitual dealing with great things, by being placed above the necessity of constantly struggling for little things. And it is the source of great virtues.

> *The Popular Education of France* (*Prose Works*, ii, pp. 5-6).

Arnold knew that the aristocracy of his own age had long been corrupted and was dying out. But the poetry of Homer provides him with another more deeply imagined source of a high aristocratic 'style', which still holds the force for Arnold of a living idea. As Arnold writes:

> The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the *best* knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.
> *Culture and Anarchy* (*Prose Works*, v, p. 113).

There is a noble heritage represented by 'the great men of culture'. Readers inherit it, and books remain the vehicle in which it is passed on, but it requires a human act of translation – a democratic educating mediator – to find a way for the meanings to be transmitted. It was 'the great teachers' that were needed, in the role of the writer and

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[79] 'The Study of Poetry' (1880), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, IX, pp. 161-88 (p. 163).
[80] Arnold or Ruskin?, *Journal of Literature & Theology*, 6, p. 323.

the reader both (Ruskin: *Works,* xviii, p. 78). Only they, as carriers of pre-digested wisdom, could raise the level of thinking above that of the 'ordinary self', the thinking common to one's own class (Arnold: *Prose Works*, v, p. 145).

Arnold's cultural ideal hence presents an alternative to the liberal appeal of the modern democratic ideal, which one might easily be led to accept, without thinking:

> the *Times* … urges that the English ideal is that every one should be free to do and to look just as he likes. But culture indefatigably tries, not to make what each raw person may like the rule by which he fashions himself; but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that.
>
> *Culture and Anarchy* (*Prose Works*, v, p. 96).

The social and the commercial world both thrive on the pursuit of personal taste, and on the fashioning of a publicly presentable self. But the law of self is ultimately neither 'beautiful' nor 'becoming', regardless of outward appearances. Arnold would even query whether the 'raw person' can know what he likes, given his limited experience. The rawness is not a sign of stupidity but simply an indication that the person may not be fully formed, or even found yet.

It was culture that was the reminder of the larger, greater, grander human concerns – crucially, culture itself far more than the cultured prophetic Ruskinian individual. And it was the new arising middle class which seemed to Arnold the most ready vehicle for its spread. He had been impressed by the Lyceum of Toulouse, a public school funded and maintained by the French State, and commented:

> These institutions give to a whole new class – to the middle class taken at its very widest – not merely an education for whose teaching and boarding there is valid security, but something – not so much I admit, but something – of the same enlarging, liberalising sense, the sense of belonging to a great and honourable public institution, which Eton and our three or four great public schools give to our upper class only, and to a small fragment broken off from the top of our middle class. That is where England is weak, and France, Holland, and Germany are strong. Education is and must be a matter of public establishment.
> … By public establishment [the schools] may communicate to those reared in

them the sense of being brought in contact with their country, with the national life, with the life of the world; and they will expand and dignify their spirits by communicating this sense to them.

A French Eton, 1864 (*Prose Works*, ii, pp. 294-5, 322-3).

But for Arnold in the role of inspector of schools (1851-1886) there were further issues to consider. The initial aim of the State was simply to maintain an acceptable minimum standard across the board. For this reason the syllabus was narrowed down at elementary level to three core subjects: reading, writing and arithmetic. Schools would receive State funding so long as they performed well in the assessments carried out by the inspectors within these subject areas. But as he wrote in an essay which combines 'Arnold, the brilliant polemicist and Arnold, the conscientious inspector of elementary schools'[81], the system

> turns the inspectors into a set of registering clerks, with a mass of minute details to tabulate, such a mass as must, in Sir James Shuttleworth's words, 'necessarily withdraw their attention from the religious and general instruction, and from the moral features of the school.' In fact the inspector will just hastily glance round the school, and then he must fall to work at the 'log-books'. And this to ascertain the precise state of each individual scholar's reading, writing, and arithmetic. As if there might not be in a school most grave matters needing inspection and correction; as if the whole school might not be going wrong, at the same time that a number of individual scholars might carry off prizes for reading, writing, and arithmetic![82]

The 'whole school' needs attention as a mini society reflecting that familiar problem of inundation by the 'mass'. As Ruskin had emphasised in relation to art, mechanical perfection cannot take care of everything; at worst it risks missing the very thing that matters, just as the test of 'the precise state of each individual scholar's reading, writing, and arithmetic' bypasses any marks of individual intelligence altogether. General human qualities or attributes are to be ignored in exchange for measurable skills that can be neatly assigned on the page. And thus within the context of his

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[81] Gillian Sutherland (ed.), 'Introduction' to *Matthew Arnold on Education* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 12.

[82] 'The Twice-Revised Code' (1862), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, II, pp. 212-43 (p. 235).

professional role Arnold saw how an ideal might be quashed even by the most well-meaning efforts practically to achieve it. John Stuart Mill wrote likewise that the true work of 'cultivation' has to be done 'without a particle of regard to the results'.[83]

In the annual reports on his work in elementary schools Arnold would make several further observations on the way in which the criteria for examination were affecting the teaching of reading. Learning to read means more than being able to read a single examination text for it is about developing 'a real love for reading and literature': 'in itself the greatest power available in education'[84] as Arnold states in one report. 'The only way in which such a love is ever really inspired' is 'by animating and moving' the student-reader (*Reports*, p. 83). Books need to be chosen which appeal to the reader at a primary human level, not just as a matter of factual interest in a particular subject: 'the atmosphere, the steam-engine, or the pump'. It is the same with poetry:

> … if a child is brought, as he easily can be brought, to *throw himself into* a piece of poetry, an exercise of creative activity has been set up in him quite different from the effort of learning a list of words to spell, or a list of flesh-making and heat-giving foods, or a list of capes and bays, or a list of reigns and battles, and capable of greatly relieving the strain from learning these and of affording a lively pleasure.
>
> <div align="right">Reports, pp. 228-9.</div>

The focus on the 'little things', in this case the dogged rote learning of lists and spellings, is always draining, because of the way in which the larger meanings have already been drained out, to be dealt with by others. And yet the very energy of the child requires something that he or she may be able to 'throw' themselves 'into', not with increased effort, but with a childlike joy in it, almost: that which an adult would describe as 'lively pleasure'.[85]

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[83] John Stuart Mill, 'Civilization', *The London and Westminster Review*, 3 (1836), 13-40 (p. 37).

[84] Matthew Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, first published 1889, ed. by F. S. Marvin (London: Wyman and Sons, 1908), p. 142.

[85] The pupil is likely to go further if they can start not by neatly fulfilling the requirements for the

Activities which have a larger human purpose, rather than a straightforwardly identifiable one, tend to fall outside existing frameworks, and are thus easier to sideline within the educational system as elsewhere. This is why the term 'culture' becomes so important to Arnold. What is literary gives a name, 'a single watchword',[86] which works beyond the literal definitions and strict classifications by which the world is often ordered. In itself the name is simply a 'convenient' prompt, a nuanced tactic broadly indicating 'a complex of features plainly listed':[87]

> culture … places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality. It places it in the ever-increasing efficacy and in the general harmonious expansion of those gifts of thought and feeling, which make the peculiar dignity, wealth, and happiness of human nature … Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it …
>
> *Culture and Anarchy* (*Prose Works*, v, p. 94).

Arnold did practically perform the kind of work which the spread and expansion of culture had seemed to require: 'carrying' it 'from one end of society to the other'. To begin with he had been one of just three lay inspectors appointed to cover English schools, and his district had stretched 'right across from Pembroke Dock [south-west Wales] to Great Yarmouth [Norfolk]'.[88] But it was as if the early readers of *Culture and Anarchy* could not see Arnold as a practical man, using ideal in practice to counter practice without ideals. To the public he was 'the prophet of culture, "the

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exam, or by getting in all the right foundations, but by discovering a pleasure in the literature itself. Here is Lord Taunton in his interview by the Earl of Harrowby for the Schools Inquiry Commission: 'The real difficulty of learning is, that the boy does not want to learn. Give him the taste for learning, and he will learn fast enough. You begin with the broad end of the wedge, and say, 'First learn that which is of the least utility, and the least pleasant, and then you shall learn something which shall be agreeable.' I would sooner he began with learning *Robinson Crusoe* than the Latin accidence, anything to give a boy a taste for learning, a taste for knowledge of any kind, and the thing is done. There is no difficulty afterwards.'
  'The Schools Inquiry Commission', in *The Nineteenth-Century History of English Studies*, ed. by Alan Bacon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 108-123 (pp. 119-20).

[86] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p. 114.

[87] John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 224.

[88] 'Thirty-Five Years of School Inspecting: Mr. Matthew Arnold's Farewell' (1886), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, XI, pp. 374-9 (p. 377).

elegant Jeremiah" of that popular mythology which the journalists of every age formulate about great men they cannot understand'.[89] Readers struggled to comprehend the meaning of what might later be described as the vague over-literary phrases of a 'cultured' man. Arnold knew that culture was a 'process' rather than an end in itself, but he struggled to find 'the material of that process' in the world around him, and as a consequence it began in his writing to sound more like an 'abstraction' than a real 'thing' (Williams, p. 127). As Arnold himself admitted in the Preface to *Culture and Anarchy*: 'it is not easy so to frame one's discourse concerning the operation of culture, as to avoid giving frequent occasion to a misunderstanding whereby the essential inwardness of the operation is lost sight of.'[90] But he also says, within the body of the text:

> what we are concerned for is the thing, not the name; and the thing, call it by what name we will, is simply the enabling ourselves, by getting to know, whether through reading, observing, or thinking, the best that can at present be known in the world, to come as near as we can to the firm intelligible law of things, and thus to get a basis for a less confused action and a more complete perfection than we have at present.
>
> *Culture and Anarchy* (*Prose Works*, v, p. 191).

In what follows in the second half of this thesis, the effort will be to locate 'the thing', the phenomenon and process of culture and reading in practice within a small-group educative community that partly derives out of an imprecise amalgam of the ideals of Ruskin and of Arnold.

The break-through of the realist novel

These first two sections in this chapter have tried to indicate some of the difficulties for culture which arise from the Victorian age. This next section corresponds more closely with chapter one in illustrating a literary response and (as we will again see in

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[89] J. Dover Wilson, 'Matthew Arnold and the Educationists', in *The Social & Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Victorian Age*, ed. by F. J. C. Hearnshaw (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1933), pp. 165-93 (p. 165).

[90] Culture and Anarchy (Textual Note), *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* V, pp. 529-30.

retrospect in chapter three) its creation of forms and powers that have future effect on the very nature of reading and the reading mind. That response lies in the realist novel and in particular in its sub-vocal language, in partial contrast to the musical voicings of poetry.

Neither Ruskin nor Arnold was fundamentally interested in the novel, the dissemination of which was indeed generating an excitement and interest around books and reading amongst large swathes of the population, during their own time. Though there were certain exemplary instances of the form that both would praise, the form itself was not felt to match the 'best' and the 'highest', the work of the poets, upon which the category of literature and the idea of culture had been formulated. For Arnold such criteria had an ancient standing, so that the ideal model was still that of Athens high culture. Dinah Birch has argued that 'what Arnold wants to present as a universal experience was in practice socially exclusive', during the Victorian age.[91] And yet the root of that sense of mission and purpose shared in their differing emphases by both Ruskin and Arnold was the idea of art and culture as a mode that might persist beyond the divisions and differences within society in order further to benefit the whole. It is a mode that was related to the democratising drive behind the realist novel. It is this unacknowledged connection which ushers in the next episode in the story that is being recounted in this chapter, as the missionary representatives begin to be heard not just speaking *about* literature, but advocating for its unique purpose from within its apparent new ordinariness.

Yet to the high priests of culture, the novel in challenging the cultural dominance of poetry, was too often only another part of the demotic ephemera of the times. When Ruskin announced his 'book plan' - the idea of establishing 'royal or

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[91] Dinah Birch, *Our Victorian Education* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 30.

national libraries', 'with a royal series of books in them': each printed in 'pleasant volumes, light in the hand' (*Works*, xviii, p. 104) - what he had in mind differed drastically from the way in which books were at that time being distributed and read. It was the marketplace which was bringing about the greatest change. New high-speed printing presses were increasing the efficiency of the book market, and this in turn seemed to be encouraging readers to get through more books at a faster pace. Not only was the number of readers growing but so was the number of books and periodicals of all kinds, of all orders, indiscriminately available to readers. John Stuart Mill had noted this change in the reading habits of a people, and found it worrying:

> The world reads too much and too quickly to read well. When books were few, to get through one was a work of time and labour: what was written with thought was read with thought, and with a desire to extract from it as much of the materials of knowledge as possible. … Nothing is now read slowly, or twice over. Books are run through with no less rapidity, and scarcely leave a more durable impression, than a newspaper article. It is for this, among other causes, that so few books are produced of any value.[92]

This pairing of books with newspapers, which appears to represent two opposite modes of writing, and is suggestive of 'the books of the hour' which Ruskin wanted to avoid (*Works*, xviii, p. 60), would be felt particularly acutely in relation to the novel, where even the book form was being exchanged for the regular publication of serialised parts. To Mill it was as though the notion of the book itself was being cheapened, as the actual cost was brought down: 'so few books are *produced* of any *value*'. As Henry Mansel wrote in relation to the novels of 'sensation' sold at railway bookstalls:

> Written to meet an ephemeral demand, aspiring only to an ephemeral existence, it is natural that they should have recourse to rapid and ephemeral methods of awakening the interest of their readers, striving to act as the dram or the dose, rather than as the solid food, because the effect is more immediately perceptible.[93]

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[92] Civilization, *The London and Westminster Review*, 3, p. 28.

It was felt that readers began to consume rather than to read books, judging them by the effect rather than the substance, and therefore opting for the quick 'dose' (much like the 'stimulants and sedatives' to which Newman referred),[94] instead of the 'better bread' that Ruskin would have wanted to make available (*Works*, xviii, p. 105). Reading itself was beginning to function as a sign of absorption within the mass, not a function of independent thinking. The illusion of progress in the possibility of getting somewhere faster, via the new railways, suggested that it was becoming increasingly easy to get carried along by the excitement of a new invention rather than stopping to work out where it might be taking you.

Though he enjoyed reading them, Arnold thus 'felt mildly, very mildly, ashamed' of his 'weakness for novels'.[95] He felt he could not even give sufficient credit to the novels he did admire, amidst the formless rush of a phenomenon to which the plentiful supply of books was now giving rise:

> to contemporary work so good as *David Copperfield,* we are in danger of perhaps not paying respect enough, of reading it (for who could help reading it?) too hastily, and then putting it aside for something else and forgetting it.[96]

It is this consciousness of the 'more' which the market will continue to feed. It is only 'when books were few' that they could be guaranteed to 'leave a durable impression', Mill thought.

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[93] Henry Mansel, 'Sensation Novels', *The Quarterly Review*, 113 (1863), 481-514 (p. 485).

[94] Newman wrote of 'what in one form or other is a chief error of the day, in very distinct schools of opinion, – that our true excellence comes not from within, but from without; not wrought out through personal struggles and sufferings, but following upon a passive exposure to influences over which we have no control.' Such 'diversions' and 'excitements' 'will tend to make novelty ever in request, and will set the great teachers of morals upon the incessant search after stimulants and sedatives, by which unruly nature may, *pro re natâ*, be kept in order.'

John Henry Cardinal Newman, 'The Tamworth Reading Room' (1841), II, in *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), pp. 254-305 (p. 266).

[95] Christopher Ricks, 'Matthew Arnold and the Novel', *Salmagundi*, 132 (2001), 76-95 (p. 83).

[96] 'The Incompatibles' (1881), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, IX, pp. 238-85 (pp. 273).

The crucial question for the novelist was whether novels were in fact capable of being 'read with thought': whether the future would see the creation of novels, 'written with thought', that made a claim for what Arnold called 'high seriousness' (*Prose Works*, ix, p. 171). Arnold provided his own answer to this question in his 1887 essay on Tolstoy, where he gives some thought to that which novels *are* able to do well. The essay would have a decisive effect on Tolstoy's reputation in England particularly amongst the generation that followed after Arnold.[97] But Arnold tries to ensure that this discussion of *Anna Karenina* is taken in context: 'The crown of literature is poetry, and the Russians have not yet had a great poet. But in that form of imaginative literature which in our day is the most popular and the most possible, the Russians at the present moment seem to me to hold … the field. They have great novelists'.[98] For Arnold, far more than even for Ruskin, form is crucial: 'complete poetic development' is accompanied by 'high architectonics',[99] as the form is conceived along with the idea. Poetry adds to art, and the novel may not even *be* art:

> But the truth is we are not to take *Anna Karénine* as a work of art; we are to take it as a piece of life. A piece of life it is. The author has not invented and combined it, he has seen it; it has all happened before his inward eye, and it was in this wise that it happened. Levine's shirts were packed up, and he was late for his wedding in consequence; Warinka and Serge Ivanitch met at Levine's country-house and went out walking together; Serge was very near proposing, but did not. The author saw it all happening so – saw it, and therefore relates it; and what his novel in this way loses in art it gains in reality.

> *Essays in Criticism: Second Series*, pp. 260-1.

It was a decade after the publication of *Anna Karenina* that Arnold wrote: 'Count Tolstoi has perhaps not done well in abandoning the work of the poet and artist, and … might with advantage return to it' (*Essays*, ii, p. 299). But the work of the realist

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[97] Marion Mainwaring, 'Arnold and Tolstoi', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 6 (1952), 269-74 (p. 272).
[98] Matthew Arnold, 'Count Leo Tolstoi', in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888), pp. 253-99 (p. 257).
[99] 'John Keats' (1880), in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, IX, pp. 205-16 (p. 215).

novel was already being well done, with unashamed demotic zeal and vitality in all its impure mixtures, elsewhere in England.

Dickens: Breaking through from below

It was Dickens who desired to make the work of the novel a familiar presence to his readers, an influence that might reach right into 'all homes, and all nooks and corners', and be found positioned 'at the window, by the fire, in the street, in the house'.[100] He was not in the least concerned by the fact that reading goes on within life, in amongst the prosaic concerns and unpoetic business of the day. Rather than subtracting from the attention that one might be able to give to books, Dickens took the potential of ordinary relevance as an invitation to involve himself in his readers' lives. He would play the role of a 'fellow traveller'[101] on life's journey, making his presence known as a regular feature of life, via the instalments of each new novel. The drive was to become 'from infancy to old age, everyone's inseparable companion' (John, p. 32).

In the midst of the nineteenth century, Dickens *was* the novel, was the force it constituted in opening up a nation both within his pages and in the readership of them. In 1849 Hugh Miller could already see the extent of the change that had been brought about during his own lifetime:

> The great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers of the present reading public could sympathize in the joys and sorrows of only kings and queens; and the critics of the day gave reasons why it should be so. Humble life was introduced upon the stage, or into works of fiction, only to be laughed at; or so bedizzened with the unnatural frippery of Pastoral, that the picture represented, not the realities of actual life, but merely one of the idlest conventualities of literature. But we have lived to see a great revolution in these matters reach almost its culminating point.[102]

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[100] Juliet John, *Dickens and Mass Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 31.
[101] Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and his Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 23-4.
[102] Hugh Miller, 'Literature of the People', in *Essays, Historical and Biographical, Political and Social, Literary and Scientific* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1862), pp. 291-99

That great revolution had begun with Dickens and 'the seriousness with which he took his own popular art' (John, p. 14). The public readings of his novels allowed Dickens to recreate live what he had been attempting to enact across the nation via the serialisation of his novels: a 'public event' (Andrews, p. 13) during which the resonance of each passage might be felt at the same time by each person as part of a collective family. Dickens, wanting to know that his audience was with him, would therefore say, in his introduction to the readings:

> If you feel disposed as we go along to give expression to any emotion, whether grave or gay, you will do so with perfect freedom from restraint, and without the least apprehension of disturbing me.
>
> *Charles Dickens and his Performing Selves*, p. 70.

The emotional response was vital to Dickens's sense of his success with his readers, of his having served them well, and of having made them feel along with him and in 'communion' with each other (John, p. 150). It was the root meaning of 'community' that he wanted to sustain: 'to commune with you, in any form, is to me a labour of love', he had told his readers (Andrews, p. 9).

'In England nowadays novels are written for families': so ran the statement made in *The Spectator* in 1857.[103] But Dickens began to achieve for families in a whole variety of circumstances that sense of being knit together (almost in defiance of the circumstances), which he would be unable to sustain forever, in his own family but sought across the wider nation. This family-feeling was the nucleus of the wider society he wished emotionally to recreate, as Burke had argued:

> To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind.[104]

(p. 291).

[103] Monica Catherine Lewis, 'Anthony Trollope among the Moderns: Reading Aloud in Britain, 1850-1960' (doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 2006), p. 16.

[104] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain*

So Jonathan Rose illustrates in his study of the reading lives of the working class:

> George Acorn … scraped together 3 ½ d. to buy a used copy of *David Copperfield.* His parents punished him when they learned he had wasted so much money on a book, but later he read it to them: "And how we all loved it, and eventually, when we got to "Little Em'ly," how we all cried together at poor old Peggotty's distress! The tears united us, deep in misery as we were ourselves. Dickens was a fairy musician to us, filling our minds with a sweeter strain than the constant cry of hunger, or the howling wind which often, taking advantage of the empty grate, penetrated into the room."[105]

The reading offers more than a distraction from the penetrating, 'howling wind'. It produces a new kind of emotional atmosphere, even in the midst of the empty want and lack. In the boy's offer to share it out loud, the book makes the family, transforming it into a united 'we', even after the initial punishment by the parents. It is as though the book's true value is now revealed in place of its monetary cost.

'My mind was being broken out of its shell', one reader reflects (Rose, p. 127). Another man, a former miner, would remember having literature recommended to him by his workmates whilst they were deep down in the pit, 'in the darkness and dark dust of a narrow tunnel more than a thousand feet below the earth's surface' (p. 243). Even the talk of books was thus sparking an energy and a new kind of 'hunger' in people to be able to get a more expanded view of life and its possibilities (p. 200). In Bristol, a woman had her friend, James Staples, to stay over Christmas, and showed him a copy of *A Christmas Carol:*

> It was read by all in the house with great enthusiasm. 'What a pity so great a pleasure should be confined to so small a circle', reflected Staples. He resolved to read it in public to 'a class amongst whom such literature never circulated'. So he did, to a large audience of the poor in the neighbourhood, at a Bristol's Domestic Mission Institution. The reading was such a success that he had to repeat it.
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> *Charles Dickens and his Performing Selves*, p. 57.

Societies in London Relative to that Event (1790), ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 135.
[105] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 111.

'So great a pleasure' yet 'so small a circle': it is as if there is an emotional force here that is bursting the bounds of what books could be thought to do – so that it *has* to get out of the circle in order to create a new (and bigger) one. To use Staples's words, it is as if one has to break the 'circle' in order just to keep the thing in 'circulation'.

Charles Lamb observed that Dickens was able to make 'the pulse of a crowded house beat like the pulse of one man' (John, p. 150), as if Dickens must have carried within himself not only a bulging crowd of characters but that essential pulse which ran through them all. Yet Ruskin wrote that Dickens 'never became an educational element of my life, but only one of its chief comforts and restoratives'.[106] To Ruskin, Dickens was characteristically no more and no less than consolingly familiar, in often demotic ways. Nonetheless for other readers the encouragement to feel which Dickens represents in fact often seems to issue in an explosion of emotion, as the force of private life, rarely expressed in full, begins to be felt in public. Dickens is repeatedly drawn to the survival of human feeling even in the lowest, least ideal and most unlikely of places, where the circumstances seem to militate against it, and where it tends to go unthought of. His aim to draw on the pre-articulate sense of the inner life and breath of a person, the beating heart so as to recreate via his readers 'an external community in which such innerness has a human home'.[107]

Dickens treated his characters as if one could not make a true estimation of them until one had got inside, and felt what it was like to carry the weight of that particular human story. The external definitions (of 'types' and 'classes' in Dickens's case) can only give an approximation to the truth. It is as if the democratic project of

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[106] Praeterita II, *The Works of John Ruskin* XXXV, pp. 243-468 (p. 303).
[107] Philip Davis, *Why Victorian Literature Still Matters* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), p. 135.

the novel has to go deeper than this, to get even to the 'inmost heart'[108] of things, and to rescue it before the reader passes on by. It is literature on behalf of those who have no voice, who do not seem worthy subjects of traditional writings. For what stands out to Dickens, as if this were almost a paradox, is the extent of the suffering that goes on within such places of apparent insignificance: suffering which cannot finally be expurgated as it might have been in tragic drama, but which is to be witnessed as part of an ongoing daily reality. In *Great Expectations*, whilst Jaggers makes a show of his housekeeper Molly's 'much disfigured' wrist (which is 'deeply seamed and scarred across and across'): 'coolly tracing out the sinews with his forefinger', it is Pip who notes the 'suddenness and flutter' in Molly's face, wondering 'whether any diseased affection of the heart caused her lips to be parted as if she were panting'.[109] It is a silent moment of almost unconscious recognition, across gender and the difference in age. For these two characters are connected in ways that are deeper than either can yet know, not only in terms of the structure of the plot, but in the position that they have found themselves occupying within a strangely harsh human world. In another version of such witnessing from *Bleak House,* Esther, accompanying Mrs Pardiggle on her charitable visit to the brickmaker's house, recognises how wide the gap is that separates them both from the ostensible objects of their charity. While she is there she observes the response to the sudden yet not surprising death of the child that one of the group is holding:

> An ugly woman, very poorly clothed, hurried in while I was glancing at them, and coming straight up to the mother, said, 'Jenny! Jenny!' The mother rose on being so addressed, and fell upon the woman's neck.
> She also had upon her face and arms the marks of ill-usage. She had no kind of grace about her, but the grace of sympathy; but when she condoled with the woman, and her own tears fell, she wanted no beauty. I say condoled, but her only

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[108] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), ed. by Harvey Peter Sucksmith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 68.

[109] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1860-1), ed. by Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 194, 196.

words were 'Jenny! Jenny!' All the rest was in the tone in which she said them.

I thought it very touching to see these two women, coarse and shabby and beaten, so united; to see what they could be to one another; to see how they felt for one another; how the heart of each to each was softened by the hard trials of their lives. I think the best side of such people is almost hidden from us. What the poor are to the poor is little known, excepting to themselves and GOD.[110]

Esther is a sincere and feeling witness, and yet even her attempt to relay the import of the glimpse that she has had of these lives ('I thought it very touching …') risks saying too much. The 'almost hidden' and the 'little known' means more for remaining so, a realism loyal to the limited reality it half augments, half reproduces. The 'little' signs that hold the capacity to 'mean more' create an excitedly asymmetrical or disproportional indicator of literary value disruptive of conventional forms. And so more important than Esther's reflection on the softening of hearts, or even the social issue of 'the poor' as a 'little known' class, is the almost musical tone in which the one woman still calls out the name of the other. Dickens makes the reader stay with it, quoting it twice, as if feeling that this is the only thing that can be said, and the very thing that must be preserved by a sub-vocal language of the novelist's art that existed to protect the vulnerably ordinary things of this world.

The small was innerly bigger than it seemed uncaringly from without. The moral shape of the world was utterly different from the form society distortingly imposed upon it. In thus challenging form by inner content, the danger was that the crowded novel might appear 'formless' and therefore 'void' as literature: not much more than 'large loose baggy monsters'.[111] But for Dickens there was a reason why the novel had had to grow and to adjust the proportions according to the content, suddenly finding form and connection in the midst of itself. For the effort to discover form from within crowdedness and to determine where characters fit in relation to

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[110] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853), ed. by Norman Page (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 160-1.

[111] Henry James, Preface to 'The Tragic Muse' (1890), in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 70-97 (p. 84).

one another is often a major part of the deeply emergent and shifting structure of a Dickens novel. It is as though the guide for the story itself is not so much a predetermined plan but the presence of a novelistic instinct for significance.

Even in an Elizabethan lyric, where the smallest number of words can be made to effect the greatest transformation, form had represented more than a 'container' of content. It is the very manner in which these forces of form and content interact, in formation itself, that makes for a strong but supple poetry. In Dickens's novels these creative forces are translated back out again at the larger level of character, where individual people are repeatedly found and re-found even from within the crowded world of human activity to make and re-make the form of the novel's world as it shifts from one catalytic human centre to another.

In *Bleak House* the interconnections are so many and so thickly interwoven that the risk is that some of these could be picked up simply by chance or coincidence, and thus by almost any character inside the novel, rather than by a person whom one might rely upon to understand the meaning and significance of that discovery. Thus when Guppy presents the results of his investigations into Esther's history and parentage to Lady Dedlock, it seems almost importunate of a man who ought only to have a minor role in this novel as a failed suitor to Esther, to be tying up the threads of a story which concerns some of the major characters so profoundly. As a reader himself of the situation, Guppy might represent the response of a reader who is still trying to piece together what he cannot yet understand. He thus relates the tale of his first discovery to Lady Dedlock: 'I found … such a resemblance between Miss Esther Summerson and your ladyship's own portrait, that it completely knocked me over; so much so, that I didn't at the moment even know what it *was* that knocked me over. And now I have the honour of beholding your ladyship near

… it's really more surprising than I thought it' (p. 462). Dickens will deliberately arrange these moments when a reader might almost be 'knocked over' by the information that he or she suddenly seems to see presented before them. And yet Dickens wants a reader who will not just exclaim upon the plot connection, but who will feel with him the emotional implication of that moment. For Guppy is too cleverly self-absorbed to care very much about the effect of his words upon Lady Dedlock, who will be left at the end of this chapter as 'a wild figure on its knees', uttering an unheard cry. It is only the space accorded here to that voice by the novel which rescues it from secret hiding. The repetition is unwitnessed this time by anyone save the reader: 'O my child, my child! … O my child, O my child!' (p. 466)

When those words are again uttered near the end of the novel, it is by a different mother, to a son whom she had little hoped to be able ever to see again. This time the observer in the scene, Mrs Bagnet, is herself a mother, and it is she who for some time has acted as the mother figure to whom George, the son, has most often turned for help. Mrs Bagnet thus looks on as Mrs Rouncewell is initially silent upon entering the room, and George remains unaware that anyone is there:

> Not a rustle of the housekeeper's dress, not a gesture, not a word betrays her. She stands looking at him as he writes on, all unconscious, and only her fluttering hands give utterance to her emotions. But they are very eloquent; very, very eloquent. Mrs Bagnet understands them. They speak of gratitude, of joy, of grief, of hope; of inextinguishable affection, cherished with no return since this stalwart man was a stripling; of a better son loved less, and this son loved so fondly and so proudly; and they speak in such touching language, that Mrs Bagnet's eyes brim up with tears, and they run glistening down her sun-brown face.
> 'George Rouncewell! O my dear child, turn and look at me!'
>
> *Bleak House*, p. 805.

As Mrs Bagnet's eyes brim up it is almost a sign of the overflow of this scene, which carries within it those long years of separation between the mother and son, and all the emotion of that time which only Mrs Rouncewell's fluttering hands have been

able regularly to give expression to. Thus the gesture of the hands and the tears have to come before anyone speaks in this scene. And yet the holding off of this speech throughout the quoted paragraph, as a reminder of that much longer wait which Mrs Rouncewell has already endured, only gives a greater force to that eventual calling out of the mother to her son. The reader moves from Mrs Bagnet's glistening face to the as yet undisclosed face of George, which Mrs Rouncewell must now see. It is like a turning point not between or within the lines, as in a poem, but between and amongst each one of these characters and across the multiple resonances of mothering in this book. For it is Mrs Rouncewell who must ask George to turn *back* to the mother whom he had turned away from so long ago.

The power of such moments emerges out of the saturated solutions which Dickens creates in his novels, where the chemical structure of the novel reaches a stage when it becomes ripe for explosion. Apparently bound to the limiting framework of common language and ordinary event, the novel creates a field *inside* its mundane human material, whereby the novel's half-events, picked up across the implicit vital memory of the whole work, suddenly come together, through a connection emotionally found as much as formally required. The whole experiment of realism might be regarded less as an attempt to transcribe reality than an effort to find space for a bigger quality that lies behind it all: the poetry buried secretly beneath its ostensibly undiscriminating continuities, with power to reveal that concealment at moments of transcendent reality, even through loyalty to the temporal-prosaic medium. It is a literary mission which lays a foundation and provides a template for the shared coalescing reading out in the world which is my subject in chapter three. Get into Reading, I shall argue, follows Wordsworth and Dickens in showing how literary human seriousness not only has a place within the

ordinary world, but, by finding a home there, helps transform the character and range of the ordinary and literary at once.

George Eliot: Hearing characters think

In Dickens's novels, the unspoken is often identified with those secrets which particular characters have to guard, as the ghostly residue of their own or others' pasts. It is also wincingly associated with social neglect and private vulnerability. And in this respect, with George Eliot increasingly most of what goes unspoken happens live in front of the reader, as the substance of those thoughts which the characters cannot share openly with one another is transmitted by the writer into a form that can be rendered in the present, on the page. In the novel's extension of the subject-matter of art, the capacity to listen in to one's fellow beings would test the very limits of what a human person might be able to tolerate:

> If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.[112]

As a writer, what George Eliot represents is the function of being a great reader of human beings, the ideal reader of her own novels, perhaps the ideal reader of any human work. This was a matter of developing not only a psychologically analytic language but a new method of translating the inner world:

> It was to be a long time before writers found out how to render inner movements, perceptions, reactions at the levels that precede thought and words, before they have found the way to consciousness and articulate utterance.[113]

The principal tool used to carry out this work within the classic realist novel is an extension of the narrating voice which, from Jane Austen to Dickens, reaches culmination in George Eliot as free indirect discourse. It is the great instrument of the

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[112] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871-2), ed. by W. J. Harvey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 226.

[113] Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 59.

reader of innerness serving the middle ground between the interpretative report or comment of the narrator (the mode in which George Eliot will speak out) and the direct speech and overt thoughts of a character (the chief mode of the epistolary novel).

The effect of free indirect discourse is usually momentary, just as the glimpse of the 'almost hidden' lives of the two women at the brickmaker's house in the Dickens' scene had been. The linguistic marker of free indirect discourse is the sudden syntax of indirect speech, whilst the statement is referred back to the character as if coming from inside him or her, as an inner voice (Pascal, pp. 8-9). It is a 'fusing' (pp. 26, 55) or 'melding'[114] of modes, creating 'the very special two-in-one effect' that for Dorrit Cohn ought not to be seen either as exclusively 'dual' or 'single' (p. 112). It is at once inside the character and yet also outside him or her. This may be illustrated by an example from *Middlemarch*, a novel in which even the title suggests how important the middling, in-between stages will be to the kinds of mundanely hidden stories that will be told within it.

Chapter 50 opens with two sisters sitting together watching a baby play. It is the first time that we have seen Dorothea since the death of her husband Casaubon, and there is a painful sense in the opening pages of that lapsed quiet when there is nothing ahead as yet to move on to, and the past is all raw and unresolved. It is accentuated by the contrast with Celia, who is comfortably married, and mother to the baby. As they are talking, Celia, in a moment of determination, decides to tell Dorothea about the details of Casaubon's will, shockingly conditional upon the widow not marrying Ladislaw. In the aftermath of the conversation Dorothea is left alone for a moment:

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[114] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 125.

> Dorothea by this time had turned cold again, and now threw herself back helplessly in her chair. She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feeling towards him, every struggle between them – and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew.
>
> *Middlemarch*, pp. 531-2.

This is form emergent from within the character herself. Yet it takes several sentences before Dorothea can 'say' anything to herself 'distinctly', in a world in which the problem will have to be presented to herself and worked out inwardly over time, before anything can be said to others out loud. It is as if the 'stirring of new organs' in response to a changing form of life creates an accompanying need for the invention of a new literary form or technique, a need for '*close writing*' as much as close reading.[115] For there are new meanings to be deciphered here, which free indirect discourse registers by keeping company with the character even where she is most alone. The realist novel, as art's rescuing corrective to life, hence attempts to do for Dorothea what her own sister Celia has failed to do, having consistently missed the depth of Dorothea's feeling.

Yet free indirect discourse is not offered as a consolatory technique. It is not like an extra presence that the characters in the novel can benefit from, for they cannot even know that it exists, or that the suffering which they experience in private can be perceived by anyone outside of themselves. Free indirect discourse is thus unable to resolve the internal disconnection even in the most significant of human relationships, as in the marriage of Dorothea and Casaubon. In the culminating

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[115] D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 58.

central crisis of their relationship earlier in the novel (chapter 42), free indirect

discourse seems more like a language of diagnosis than that of a possible remedy.

When Casaubon had first received confirmation from the doctor, Lydgate of

the seriousness of his illness, Dorothea, on going to meet him, had slipped her arm

through his, in an instinctive move not to placate him but simply to place herself

alongside him as if this were genuinely where she belonged. But 'Mr Casaubon kept

his hands behind him and allowed her pliant arm to cling with difficulty against his

rigid arm' (p. 462). The proffering of comfort or at least of companionship achieves

nothing but a painful reminder of the discord: the clash of two different arms in place

of the reassuring feel of another human body. There is then the painful spelling out

of what is implicit in this body language:

> Dorothea did not withdraw her arm, but she could not venture to speak. Mr
> Casaubon did not say, 'I wish to be alone', but he directed his steps in silence
> towards the house, and as they entered by the glass door on this eastern side,
> Dorothea withdrew her arm and lingered on the matting, that she might leave her
> husband quite free. He entered the library and shut himself in, alone with his
> sorrow.
>
> *Middlemarch*, p. 463.

It is worse for the wife to sense that the thought in her husband's mind is equivalent

to the sentence 'I wish to be alone', than to hear that sentence uttered aloud. Direct

speech would almost be a kindness here where, instead, the silent negations of

contact feel closer to a deliberate rejection. Words seem suddenly out of place or

redundant: Dorothea's leaving Casaubon 'quite free' seems less an act of liberal

sympathy, than a kind of giving up – a terrible reversal of intentions for the wife

who, in seeking our her mate, has almost 'represented a heaven-sent angel coming

with a promise that the short hours remaining should yet be filled with that faithful

love which clings the closer to a comprehended grief' (p. 462). In the midst of

Dorothea's seeing 'her own and her husband's solitude – how they walked apart' (p.

463), the narrative syntax is finely attuned to underlying connections which the characters themselves can*not* see. As 'Dorothea did *not* withdraw her arm, but … could *not* venture to speak', so Mr Casaubon correspondingly 'did *not* say, 'I wish to be alone,' while he 'directed his steps in silence towards the house'. She 'lingered' on the matting, while he at the same time 'shut himself in' – the space between the two so painfully ironic as to summon the presence of George Eliot herself.

At this point of crisis Dorothea has wanted to be for Casaubon, what Mr Tryan, the evangelical minister in George Eliot's early short fictional work, 'Janet's Repentance', is summoned to be for Janet at her own breaking point:

> He came forward, and, putting out his hand, said, 'I am so glad you sent for me – I am so thankful you thought I could be any comfort to you.' Janet took his hand in silence. She was unable to utter any words of mere politeness, or even of gratitude; her heart was too full of other words that had welled up the moment she met his pitying glance, and felt her doubts fall away. … In this artificial life of ours, it is not often we see a human face with all a heart's agony in it, uncontrolled by self-consciousness; when we do see it, it startles us as if we had suddenly waked into the real world of which this everyday one is but a puppet-show copy. For some moments Mr Tryan was too deeply moved to speak.[116]

This narrative language exists between a religious confession which substitutes for silence on the one hand and the 'mere politeness' of conversational norms on the other, offering itself as the only available serious language to release the hidden burden of those hitherto unused 'other words'. Tryan's response begins with that resonant silence which poetry also creates around it; it is as if this is instinctively the only way of truly realizing the power of such speech. This kind of response should tell us something about what human beings are capable of encountering, George Eliot thinks. For she includes the reader in that tacit observation that we would have this happen more often, this awaking out of artificiality into the truly real, if only we

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[116] George Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance', in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), ed. by Jennifer Gribble (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 197-350 (pp. 297-8, 299).

knew where to find it and how to make it happen. The great task of George Eliot's realism is to show how this rarely activated level of reality is the only dimension within which life can be felt to matter as deeply as it must to the individual living it. It is her art's way of attempting to save her readers from the widespread poverty of being unable to get a hold of anything beyond that puppet-show copy of life in which there can be but superficial meaning.

The confessional or encountering moment is valued as something exceptional and not available under ordinary conditions: 'In our moments of spiritual need, the man to whom we have no tie but our common nature, seems nearer to us than mother, brother, or friend' (*Scenes*, p. 293). There is no-one to whom Dorothea might turn, when her husband turns away. Indeed, at this crucial centre of the novel, we almost see how free indirect discourse has to take over from confession, when even *self*-confession is inadmissible:

> She was in the reaction of a rebellious anger stronger than any she had felt since her marriage. Instead of tears there came words: -
> 'What have I done – what am I – that he should treat me so? He never knows what is in my mind – he never cares. What is the use of anything I do? He wishes he had never married me.'
> She began to hear herself, and was checked into stillness. Like one who has lost his way and is weary, she sat and saw as in one glance all the paths of her young hope which she should never find again. And just as clearly in the miserable light she saw her own and her husband's solitude – how they walked apart so that she was obliged to survey him. If he had drawn her towards him, she would never have surveyed him – never have said, 'Is he worth living for?' but would have felt him simply a part of her own life.
> *Middlemarch*, p. 463.

Dorothea's own words chasten her into silence not only because they begin to say too much too bitterly and distortingly, but because they summon a partner thought too devastating to be borne. It is one which George Eliot will later articulate on Lydgate's behalf in relation to his own wife, Rosamond. 'In marriage, the certainty, 'She will never love me much', is easier to bear than the fear, 'I shall love her no

more' (p. 702). The point at which the character cannot bear to 'hear herself' is the point that George Eliot has to listen in more closely, to hear *for* Dorothea that terrible question which exists inchoately or resistedly *inside* her – 'Is he worth living for?' This passage marks not only Dorothea's apartness from her husband, but the separation of the very meaning of that loss as it turns into the private psychology of adult suppression and habituation on 'the other side of silence'.

Free indirect discourse is thus not simply a means of 'speaking for' characters. Together with the narrating voice it is the underlying and emotionally attuned verbal witness, needed but missing in ordinary life, which brings the hidden 'roar' partially to voice. In so doing, free indirect discourse helps restore or open up a sense of vital human community, not only between characters such as Dorothea and Lydgate, but between these struggling creatures and the witnessing readers, whose own ordinarily troubled lives these characters exist to represent. The existence of George Eliot as the culmination of the art of narration and interpretation is a mark of this realization: that ordinary people in the Victorian realist novel, failing in conventional ways, are always more than any linear narrative summary of themselves can do justice to.

That is why in this thesis free indirect discourse will continue to be an important image of how literature, as a way of thinking, helps create a reality deeper than the normal social world but contained within it – and thus in need of art's rescuing articulation and supportive contextualization. In place of the old religious language of confession, such silent language, heard beneath the apparent loudness of the ordinary world, is the realist novelist's way of producing the most serious language that can be found for the communication *and* lack of communication

between one human being and another. It is the great language of *reading* – of interpretation between the lines, beneath the surfaces, across the gaps.

These characteristics of Victorian realism will be seen in practice in chapter three – not only in examples of the group readings of prose fiction but in the very processes of the reading groups themselves, ordinary people struggling to interpret equivalent lives in a literary model.

Part 2: Introduction

This introduction to what follows in the remaining chapters of the thesis marks a crucial junction point for the argument I am presenting. The remaining chapters focus on the study of reading-group practice as it is carried out in the context of a particular setting broadly categorised under the term 'health'. Like the associated term 'bibliotherapy', as we shall see, the category of 'health' is problematic and contentious. Both terms represent, in the first instance, the immediate location of Get into Reading within the contemporary order of things. The health sector has proved to be the major source of funding and the largest single investor in GIR, providing 45% of TRO's income for the financial year 2013-14.[117] The emphasis of such investment has been on the therapeutic benefits of the reading intervention for mental health and mental well-being. But within the confused disciplinary categorizations of the modern world described, for example, by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, that positioning may be more an accident of history than an accurate definition of GIR's intrinsic human value. Such history itself may be partly an invention, a nostalgic simplification of an otherwise unbearable complexity. It is common to look back wistfully to some quasi-prelapsarian predecessor culture that was more whole than the contemporary one – to a Renaissance age, for example, in which the division of arts and sciences was not yet existent. It is common also to locate a period of mythic Fall, such as the division of labour that reached a culmination in the Industrial Revolution. But in their partial or distorted truth or neediness, these narratives at least pay testimony to a deep sense of uncertain location – in terms of both the contemporary situation and the alignment of categories and types within it.

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[117] 50% of TRO income comes from the public sector, and 73% of public sector contracts have come from the area covered by health care, specialist mental health care, and prisons. In financial terms this percentage equates to a total of £876,000.

In the aftermath of the Victorian period, T. E. Hulme reflected back upon the age of Romanticism, in which he saw evidence of the most recent major shift to have affected literature's place in the world. He famously wrote that in Romanticism the religious instinct had been redirected into poetry as 'spilt religion'. His idea was that powerful human capacities, interests and traditions do not simply disappear but find a different place for their continuance, through transformation, rediscovery, or residual lingering. The result can be confusing, one phenomenon reappearing within the terms of another: 'The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify and blur the outlines of human experience.'[118] Thus, in this present argument, instead of literature existing in the midst of education and culture as it had been for Matthew Arnold – itself for Hulme an example of literature confusedly taking over the spiritual function of religion – it is taken up in response to our society's search for health and wellbeing.[119] There the concept of health is claimed as a primary human 'right'.[120] Kenneth Boyd points to the prominence of 'health' as an 'expanding metaphor', where 'as a result of the declining vitality of religious metaphors in Western public discourse, metaphorical ideals such as "healthy behaviour" and "mental health" … have expanded to fill the vacuum'.[121]

To add to the confusion or the complexity, the role of literature within health has been increasingly to resist from within that context the very medicalization of human nature. The terms of what might be treated as a mental disorder or illness continue increasingly to be broadened. In the most extreme version of this process,

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[118] T. E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', in *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* (1924), ed. by Herbert Read (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 113-40 (p. 118).

[119] Further described for instance in Ian Dowbiggins's 2011 book, *The Quest for Mental Health: A Tale of Science, Medicine, Scandal, Sorrow, and Mass Society*.

[120] Jonathan Wolff, UCL professor of philosophy, further explores the issues arising from this in his 2012 book *The Human Right to Health*.

[121] Kenneth M. Boyd, 'Disease, Illness, Sickness, Health, Healing and Wholeness: Exploring Some Elusive Concepts', *Medical Humanities*, 26 (2000), 9-17 (p. 13).

the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in its fifth edition newly categorizes the grief of bereavement as a depressive disorder if symptoms of mild MDD (Major Depressive Disorder) continue two weeks after the loss of a loved one. Christopher Dowrick, professor of primary care, himself a GP, and author of *Beyond Depression*, warns that the prescription of antidepressants for such a sufferer 'substitutes a superficial medical ritual for deep and time-honoured cultural ones and stigmatises the experience'.[122] But this method of intervention is typical of the narrowly targeted approach in medicine, in which the emphasis is often on finding and treating the delimited, locatable illness rather than the person,[123] or rather than the person in the broader social context.[124]

Speaking to the role assigned to the reading of literature within the modern world of medicine, Hynes and Hynes-Berry note that 'the term used in many professional indexes' is *bibliotherapy*, meaning 'the use of literature to promote mental health'. But they also write that it is 'a somewhat problematic term', not least for making literature instrumental within an instrumentally oriented world, making doubtful claims for offering miracle 'cures' of crises, confusedly psychological or spiritual, with physical concomitants.[125]

One model of bibliotherapy restricts the books on offer to self-help texts.[126] The Books on Prescription scheme (led by The Reading Agency) represents a widely

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[122] Christopher Dowrick and Allen Frances, 'Medicalising and Medicating Unhappiness', *British Medical Journal*, 347 (14 December 2013), 20-23 (p. 22).

[123] In a lecture given by Oliver Sacks at Warwick University ('Narrative and Medicine: The Importance of the Case History', March 2013), Sacks describes how it is quite common for a doctor to say, for instance, 'there's a delirium in room 6', and to include no mention of the person who has the delirium.

[124] Innes H. Pearse and Lucy H. Crocker, *The Peckham Experiment: A Study in the Living Structure of Society* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943), p. 41.

[125] Arleen McCarty Hynes and Mary Hynes-Berry, *Biblio/Poetry Therapy, The Interactive Process: A Handbook* (St. Cloud: North Star Press, 1994), p. 10.

[126] This distinction is made for instance in Debbie Hicks's report: 'An Audit of Bibliotherapy/ Books on Prescription Activity in England', produced for Arts Council England and the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (2006).

available form of self-help bibliotherapy to which people with mild to moderate mental health problems might be referred by healthcare providers. A leaflet provides a list of books, available from the local library, and approved by bodies such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which each provide advice and recommended methods of dealing with or overcoming the problem that the patient has presented with. The list includes several classic self-help titles such as *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway* (1987) by Susan Jeffers or *Mind Over Mood* by Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky (1995). It is an approach that is closely aligned with CBT, and allows patients to access a form of help quickly (without having to join a counselling waiting list) in the form of mind-management, often concentrating on strategies for prevention of obsessive mental patterns. The content of what is being provided is measurable in so far as both the input and outcome can be clearly identified, which means that the intervention therefore meets the aims and priorities of evidence-based medicine.[127,128]

A second version extends self-help to include the reading of fiction and poetry. The Reading Agency itself has widened its lists of texts on that basis. The School of Life in London offers consultations with a bibliotherapist in which a client can receive personal recommendations of what to read next. *The Novel Cure: An A to Z of Literary Remedies* (by Susan Elderkin and Ella Berthoud, 2013) goes so far to offer itself only half jokingly as a 'medical handbook', with a suggestion in each entry of a novel to read to relieve one's particular ailment or categorized predicament, from anxiety to constipation to sibling rivalry. The word 'therapy' is used on the basis of its popular appeal as a term in order to advertise the benefits of

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[127] Deborah Dysart-Gale, 'Lost in Translation: Bibliotherapy and Evidence-Based Medicine', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 29 (2008), 33-43 (p. 34).

[128] Liz Brewster, Barbara Sen, Andrew Cox, 'Legitimising Bibliotherapy: Evidence-based Discourses in Healthcare', *Journal of Documentation*, 68 (2012), 185-205 (p. 186).

reading or of literature to a wider audience. In an older example of such bibliotherapy, the use of literature is assessed by Gottschalk,[129] Shrodes[130] and Alston[131] as a supplement to a more in-depth form of psychotherapy. This might include discussion with the therapist of books that the patient has read, where the book may offer both therapist and patient a model of a situation which they can talk about without having to work directly, at least at first, with the patient's own experiences. Alston writes that since the therapist may also recommend particular books to individual patients, 'the science and art of bibliotherapy will be the matching of the therapist, patient, moment, and content' (p. 174). The same principle applies in poetry therapy, where poems are often selected in order to emphasise a particular theme (such as hope) or mood which the poem might convey (usually positive over negative). The model remains essentially that of the single reader – where the reader, rather than the book or poem, proposes the theme and mood – not the reader interacting with others within an active reading community. In GIR the presence of the literary work makes this different from other group activity where discussion centres on the symptoms and problems of the members.[132] This is in contrast to the conventional reading group, largely middle class and female,[133] in which books are read in advance, not live, and in which discussion is usually apart

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[129] Louis A. Gottschalk, 'Bibliotherapy as an Adjuvant in Psychotherapy', *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 104 (1947-48), 632-37

[130] Caroline Shrodes, 'Bibliotherapy: A Theoretical and Clinical Experimental Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, 1950)

[131] Edwin F. Alston, 'Bibliotherapy and Psychotherapy', *Library Trends*, 11 (1962), 159-176

[132] This description includes groups led by a therapist as in the model proposed by Yalom (1970), as well as self-led support groups which are often symptom-specific. The following article considers the need for alternatives to such models:

Carol Emslie et. al, 'I wouldn't have been interested in just sitting round a table talking about cancer'; exploring the experiences of women with breast cancer in a group exercise trial', *Health Education Research*, 22 (2007), 827-38

[133] Elizabeth Long focusses exclusively on women's reading groups in her research and examines a number of reasons, both historical and social, for the continued popularity of such groups among women.

Elizabeth Long, 'Literature as a Spur to Collective Action: The Diverse Perspectives of Nineteenth- and Twentieth Century Reading Groups', *Poetics Today*, 25 (2004), 335-59

from the text. GIR's read-aloud model also involves those who are unable to read at present precisely because of their current psychological situation or their previous educational and cultural experience and expertise. In that way it is doubly social, in terms of group creation and wider inclusiveness.

In each of these instances books are being offered ultimately to serve certain kinds of instrumental purposes, which is partly a consequence of the attempt to occupy a middle ground between literary and health disciplines, for which a basis has not been securely defined. This does disservice to the more subtle ways in which literature has proved to be of use to human beings within the cultural tradition, since the very idea of use is made narrowly utilitarian within a world-view that thus still dominates the terms of what seeks to ameliorate it. Just as GIR has to work within the health sector to resist medicalization, so therefore it has to work within the shadow of bibliotherapy to resist misleading and reductively utilitarian claims of 'therapy' and 'cure'. My aim in what follows is to see what within these confusions and predicaments, a genuinely literary endeavour can achieve in terms of its intrinsic value, without the predetermined agenda of seeking to achieve a set of over-simply desired results. I shall argue finally that the extrinsic benefit of reading serious literature lies precisely within the intrinsic value of the immersed experience, and not as something narrowly 'healthy' or 'relevant' apart from it.

Chapter 3: The reading groups

This chapter begins to set out the terms of a literary-critical analysis of shared reading in practice. In this sense it is an attempt to bring the background influences discussed in chapters one and two into a contemporary model of research into reading practice undertaken with 'real readers'.[134,135] It offers a literary model of thinking within a sphere of operation often characterised as health and wellbeing. As I have argued in my introduction to this part of the thesis, the move of reading-group practice into a 'health' sector involves an encounter with a different set of priorities, a world that operates according to a different kind of vocabulary. This thesis is not so much an attempt to replicate that health model, as to determine what in operation within it may be better understood as literary, and to indicate its relevance to problems that are often now labelled as health concerns.

Within the field of medicine the diagnosis of illness is an essential step in the process of deciding upon a method of treatment. Psychiatry has inherited this same principle, particularly under the influence of Kraepelin, who in the late nineteenth century proposed the idea that 'psychiatric disorders fall into a finite number of types or categories'.[136] Yet the lines between these categories continue to be disputed, and for some this has brought into question the very idea of categorisation in its application to mental health. As president of the London Medical Society, James Sims had written in 1799 of the difficulty of distinguishing mental disorders which have an affinity to each other – 'the shades of difference, as they approach, being so very minute, as almost to escape the most experienced mind. Every thing in Nature is

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[134] David S. Miall, 'Empirical Approaches to Studying Literary Readers: The State of the Discipline', *Book History*, 9 (2006), 291-311 (p. 307).

[135] Included in the bibliography are a number of accounts of theoretical studies of reader response. This thesis instead offers an empirical approach.

[136] Richard Bentall, *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 42.

a continued chain, without those breaks and intervals which even the accurate describer is obliged to make, in order to keep up due discrimination, and to render himself intelligible.'[137] The language of literature, especially in its depiction of human trouble and human sorrow, offers just such a sense of the continued chain of nuanced experience, in implicit opposition to the language of simple separating diagnosis.

Within the medical humanities there has been a deliberate effort to find ways of addressing the experiences that lie behind or between such diagnostic categories, from within the stories or narratives of individual patients, as well as of doctors. Just as these stories are borrowed from literature as much as from the clinical gathering of case histories, so the reading of books is deployed here to educate readers in a deeper level of human understanding. The prescription of books such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman are offered in human mitigation of over-simple external diagnosis, but only in mitigation, not as offering an alternative world-view. But this emphasis on the work of empathy has to be accommodated alongside the fact that it is the scientific manuals, the DSM and the ICD, which provide the guide that still has mainly to be adhered to in practice. It is the diagnostic criteria that in a medical education produces the frame of understanding within which it is possible to treat a patient. In this study the diagnosis therefore forms a necessary part of the context within which a number of the participants are placed and labelled, even by themselves. But the object of the analyses in this chapter and more particularly in chapter four will be to enable the reader of this thesis to observe, perhaps from a different view, the person whom the act of reading makes present.

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[137] James Sims, 'Pathological Remarks upon Various Kinds of Alienation of Mind', in *Memoirs of the Medical Society of London, Instituted in the Year 1773*, V (1799), 372-406 (p. 406).

Robert Coles has written that as a psychiatrist he found that the most useful starting point in his interviews with patients was sometimes simply to ask him or her to 'tell me a story or two'.[138] He later writes however of the difficulty of translating such experiences into the form of a factual research report, and the struggle to find a method of saying what it is that he had wanted to be able to say. Eventually, by returning to his set of transcripted interviews, and remembering the way in which certain comments were voiced, he decided to risk writing up a selection of those moments which had felt to him to be experientially the most important, as the potentially breakthrough points to which some of the more humdrum material was leading or giving way. His method is essentially one of editing the data, like a practical novelist, in order to try to recreate what he has come to know of those people with whom he has been working through their own first-person reports to him.[139]

A similar approach has been taken in the analysis of the transcripts of reading groups, where the aim was to re-find, within the transcripts, moments which held a kind of excited significance for which we did not yet have a name. This thesis is the search for a way of describing such moments, the theory of a praxis. Often these are highlighted not only by what is said, but by the sub-vocal context, either remembered or recovered from the project worker's diary or log of sessions, or by listening again to the tone preserved in the recordings. Literary-critical attention was given by the research team, including the present writer, to the kinds of language used and to the interactions taking place, in order to apply the same level of attention to these live responses to poetry as an experienced reader might give to the poem itself. The premise for this level of attentiveness is that the responses that follow after the

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[138] Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), pp. 11-12.

[139] Robert Coles, *Doing Documentary Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 100.

reading aloud of a literary text are not always of the same order as casual conversation. What was required was a form of literary as well as linguistic understanding, in order to interpret what was implicit in the human responses to the literature being read:

> Art is shorthand between what the artist transmits and the reader picks up. Sometimes, I believe, we should spell out that shorthand, try to say more of what large tracts of experience are tacitly released in or by a small number of words.[140]

Reading the transcripts feels like translating the experience of silent reading back out into a form of live, voiced response, even given the unknowable change that must result from the change of medium from private to social. Analysis begins with the stirrings of thought and the pre-verbal utterances of group members who are not articulate experts, either as professional readers or even as students of literature, but who in their almost innocently unlearned responses offer a model of what it is like to read live and fresh and strugglingly.

(It should be noted that in the following accounts, all names have been fictionalised, and names of places either changed or omitted, to preserve participants' anonymity. Unless otherwise indicated, the project worker is myself.)

1. Reading a Shakespeare sonnet

The first section in this chapter follows the transcripts of two readings, on separate occasions and with different groups of people, of an Elizabethan sonnet, for which the background has been set out in chapter one. It is a model of Get into Reading in practice, both where it is working well (in the first instance) and where the session is to some extent unsuccessful (in the second).

William Davies remarked, in an essay published in 1873, that the sonnet 'might be almost called the alphabet of the human heart'.[141] For Davies the sonnet includes in its little structure all those disparate elements which in chapter one were

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[140] Philip Davis, *The Experience of Reading* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 48.
[141] William Davies, 'The Sonnet', *The Quarterly Review*, 134 (1873), 186-204, (p. 186).

shown to be part of the matter of the human universe. Yet its ordering is instructive: the sonnet does not just loosely convey the heart's feelings, it identifes the model or pattern of a replicable human situation within which those feelings might begin to assume a kind of form. Though it may occupy the status of a high literary form, a well-wrought piece of art, it is at the same time highly transportable into the realm of ordinary human situations of love and loss. Shakespeare's sonnet 29 is an example of one of the most frequently used sonnets in Get into Reading.

In the first transcript, originally collected for an earlier study,[142] the group meets in a mental health drop-in centre in an area of Liverpool represented by high levels of deprivation and long-term unemployment.[143] The five members present each have a confirmed diagnosis of depression, with several also struggling with anxiety. In two of the women this is expressed via an almost non-stop chatter, whilst with the others it is perhaps what makes them very quiet. Of the three women, one is in her eighties and recently widowed, there is a single mother with some learning disabilities, and also a middle-aged woman who is new to the group, presenting herself as an 'avid', experienced reader. The two men are more self-contained, and appreciate each other's company particularly since they tend to lack confidence in the group context. Meeting for the third time, with attendance having already varied each week, there is as yet much that is unsettled about what this group will become.

After reading Chekhov's 'The Lottery Ticket' the project worker has planned to finish with the poem but is aware that, in comparison with the only poem that has

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[142] Josie Billington et al., 'An Investigation into the Therapeutic Benefits of Reading in Relation to Depression and Well-being', LivHIR Research Report (2011).

[143] It is similar in this respect to one of the first Get into Reading groups to be written about in a research report; a group which met in a primary health care centre in a deprived area, where the GPs 'often felt unable to offer conventional medicine' for the problems that their patients were presenting with.
   Jude Robinson, 'Reading and Talking: Exploring the Experience of Taking Part in Reading Groups at Vauxhall Health Care Centre', HaCCRU Research Report 116 (2008), p. 10.

been read in the group previously, 'Leisure' (again by Davies), the sonnet is likely to

offer a formidable challenge. The group is given a reassurance however: though at

first sight the poem seems difficult, i) they will get through it, and ii) it will prove to

be worth their while. The project worker, confident in the poem, reads:

> When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state
> (Like to the lark at break of day arising)
> From sullen earth sings hymns at heaven's gate.
>   For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
>   That then I scorn to change my state with kings.[144]

Margaret is the first to break the silence that follows.

Margaret: That is very conflicting. You know, at the very beginning it's really down and out, and yet at the end it's on top of the world. Just in the matter of those -

Project worker: There is these two movements in the poem isn't there?

Margaret: Yes. Don't know why you bother living at the beginning and yet at the end, he has got everything to live for. A complete turnaround.

Project worker: And it turns around by his having a thought of something else, someone else.

Linda: By having the thought of something else. Think of thee.

Project worker: Yes, line 10.

Already both Margaret and Linda have found a way *into* the poem; they can feel the

shape of the thought. This is always the first stage to be achieved: what we are

calling *'Getting In'*. Margaret has grasped the implications of the poem's opening:

her colloquial phrase 'down and out' for example is a quite accurate spin-off of the

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[144] Sonnet 29, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 439.

poem's 'outcast state' in line 2. The phrase 'and yet at the end' which she uses twice

to get to the second half of her sentences suggests too that she has internalised the

structural key to the poem in lines 9, and 10 ('yet', 'haply', 'and then'). Linda has

quoted from the poem at its turning point. John Lyons in his textbook on *Semantics*

explains the role of this language tool, the explicit pointing action known as deixis:

> … deixis is one of the principal means open to us of putting entities into the
> universe-of-discourse so that we can refer to them subsequently.[145]

In picking out the phrase 'think of thee', Linda is able to demonstrate simply

(without having to explain) what it is in the poem that has caught her attention,

though again this is without having been 'taught' to do so. It is rather as though the

poem itself is acting as a form of implicit instruction.

On the other hand Margaret's reliance on quickly intelligent colloquialisms is

not showing very specifically where in the poem she is getting her thoughts *from*.

The project worker reads through the poem again in order to give those in the group

who have not yet spoken another chance to take it in.

Beryl: About a man with nothing isn't it. Or could be somebody who has lost
            everything, you know their home, their fortune: 'in disgrace with
            fortune and men's eyes'.

Margaret: He is really feeling sorry for himself. He feels as much as though he is
            like an outcast on an island. As though, just on an island by himself.
            He is crying for help. Just standing shouting and there is nobody,
            nobody there to listen to him.

Beryl's instinctive use of 'Or' allows her to develop her initial statement, half

replacing it with a second thought, bringing it back from a sense of lack to loss. It

does not make for a more 'positive' thought, but it is less like the kind of 'automatic'

thinking which may habitually reinforce a depressive mindset.[146] Margaret, too, via a

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[145] John Lyons, *Semantics*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), II, p. 673.
[146] Cognitive therapy uses such words as 'automatic' (as opposed to 'flexible') to explain the way in
which thought patterns are formed, and to recommend ways of changing these.
Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky, *Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by*

kind of step up – 'as though' – goes beyond the mere paraphrase of 'feeling sorry for himself' to get to a language closer to that of the poem: 'like an outcast on an island'. 'Or' and 'as though' are what might now be called *enablers* for the imagination, lending permission to guess and reformulate, informed by the model of poetry itself as a language. Margaret, re-using the adjective 'outcast' as a noun, thus attempts to refigure to herself the 'state' of the first nine lines.

After the second reading the group has started to do better at what may be called stage two, *'Staying In'* the poem. With the aid of the project worker the group begin to work steadily through the poem, chronologically, line-by-line, loyal to its unfolding. Coming upon the change which begins to take place in the sestet, Don now starts to become excited:

> He doesn't feel sorry for himself either. He comes out of his depression and his anger towards the world.

Don rarely speaks. He has a pronounced stutter. But even in this starting out with paraphrase there is a suggestion of a language usefully inflected by that of the poem. Don's introduction of the phrasal verb 'come out of' seems to reinforce the poem's sense of a 'state' as a real dimension, where the speaker is stuck '*in* these thoughts' (line 9).

The project worker, needing now to re-experience the breakthrough that the poem makes, asks if anyone would like to give a final reading of it. Don despite his stutter volunteers (for the first time), seemingly emboldened by his speech a minute ago. He reads carefully and successfully, and both the effort and the achievement are immediately recognised.

Project worker: Thank you Don, beautifully read.

Douglas: Very good.

Changing the Way You Think (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), pp. 83, 94.

Margaret: Thank you, Don.

Amidst that kindly group support, Don's comment at the end of the session is that the poem 'sounds a lot better now'. His initial response had been: 'I just don't understand quite a lot of it'.

      But Beryl is still glancing over the poem as she says:

Beryl: I hate Shakespeare, I can't stand him. No I really don't like Shakespeare.

The project worker, somewhat shocked by the violence of this outburst though having heard similar complaints before, provides Beryl with the option to explain further: 'Why is it you don't like him?'

Beryl: I just don't like him, I don't like the verse, I don't like his poetry, I just don't like Shakespeare. When we were doing it at school it was absolutely boring I couldn't stand it. But 'haply I think on thee and then my state like the lark at break of day rising' – isn't that a beautiful verse.

Project worker: 'Rising from sullen earth' – sullen earth was what the first half of the poem was about, back for a moment

Beryl: Isn't that lovely, isn't that lovely. I don't really like him, but that is beautiful.

'I *just* don't': the project worker recognises this as being the reductive opposite of the enabler 'it's as though'. These are tell-tale signs as capable of analysis as the poem itself. As small yet strong indicators of mood, attitude and response, these are the subtle drivers or inhibitors behind what is referred to more generally as 'positive' or 'negative' speech. But a so-called reductive 'downer' such as 'I just don't' (as opposed to the lift-off of 'it's as though') is not irreversible, as is shown in the switch that Beryl suddenly makes to thinking of the 'beautiful verse'. As she again feels the present movement of the poem from within the lines – the 'lark at break of day arising' – this movement gets into her, and lifts her. It is significant that '*beautiful*' then becomes 'isn't that *lovely*', for all the 'I don't *like*' again tenaciously repeated as

set opinion and attitude. In this sudden third stage an unforeseen good nonetheless breaks through, as the poem becomes the focus of genuinely attentive reading and listening. The project worker joins Beryl at this point: 'Beautiful isn't it.' Though the names must be tentative and the stages neither definitive nor irrevocably progressive, the third stage may be called *Breaking Through*.

For Beryl the sheer surprise of the thing itself, felt as if for the first time again, quickly shifts her out of a self-limiting mindset, and the self-perpetuating rhythm of 'I just don't like him, I don't like the verse'. It also alters the depressed state or condition which she had seemed to share with the poem's speaker (as earlier parts of the transcript suggest) – the state of feeling 'outside of everything' and lacking any feeling of 'connection with people'. The opening that she has created encourages others in the group to continue to look at this 'bit' – which less colloquially David Miall describes as a deictic example of a 'foregrounded passage', the very 'challenge' of which tends to evoke, in greater measure, 'the experiential resources of the reader' (*Book History* 9, p. 304).

Margaret: Like the lark, you know singing first thing in the morning: it's a new beginning.

Linda: From the sudden earth sings hymns at heaven's gate.

Beryl: That's what the lark does doesn't it, it goes up to heaven. Larks sing right up there you can't even see them. They go right up, they sing at heaven's gate. You can't even see them, but you can hear them.

Project worker: So instead of those 'bootless cries' that weren't making any impact, now we can hear singing! Instead of the sullen earth too, that final downer in the poem.

The poem is not just happening within one person here but has set off multiple related thoughts, all pointing in the same direction, whilst taking place differently in different people. Margaret permits the simile in line 11 – 'like to the lark' – to take hold, thinking of what it means to be able to hear the lark, as if it is setting a certain

kind of example to the human observer. Prompting activity, and inspiring a new release of energy, this is carried forward by Linda in her creative misreading of 'sudden' for 'sullen' (quietly corrected by the project worker), as also by Beryl. There is at once a testing of limits, and a transcendence of them, as she represents and attempts to follow the path that the lark takes in imagined flight. The imaginative threshold is the point at which direct sight fails and is transformed instead into the quality of what can be imaginably heard at a higher level in the skies.

The effortlessness – or at least the lack of any external compulsion – illustrated in these responses is an indicator of how beauty works, which is in contrast to the strategies of therapy. A self-help book exhorts the reader: 'Getting out of depression takes effort', and of course this is true in very real, practical ways. Yet it is as if there is another way, another language even, as is demonstrated with the unforced arrival of beauty, the encounter with that which is loved. Beauty seems to lift these people out of self-absorption, and away from the self-conscious issues and problem-solving methods of therapy, with its necessary agenda. It interests us in something or someone else who is able to call out of us that natural generosity of feeling to which we give the name 'love'. It is the same transfer – a whole movement from one state to another, and from one person to another – which Shakespeare makes the reader feel in this sonnet, by embodying it even within the syntax ('Haply I think of thee … and then … From …').

The experience comes out of a sense of awakened life or heightened vitality, rather than an emphasis on what is being corrected, or on the need for correction or cure. Indeed all that happened during this session, as recorded here, might be summarised in relation to what Ruskin perhaps idealistically says about Vital Beauty, or the beauty of living things. The person apprehending it or perceiving it has to be

able to answer to it in the same mode: 'Nothing but love can read the letters, nothing but sympathy catch the sound; there is no pure passion that can be understood or painted except by pureness of heart'.[147]

The counter-example

A small group, mainly of GIR project workers themselves, each of whom runs a number of weekly groups in different settings, were gathered on a separate occasion for a reading of Shakespeare's sonnet 29 as part of informal training. This was a group of experienced readers, most of whom had read the poem before, several having used it in their own sessions.

After the poem has been read aloud the group begin by studying the octave, in which the speaker is occupied exclusively with the thought of his 'outcast' condition among men. Erin then points to a line from the sestet:

Erin: It's funny, I really like this poem but every time I read it, the 'haply I think on thee' almost sort of jars with the rest of it. I feel as if it makes out that, you know, I think about this someone I know then 'it's all going to be ok'.

Elaine: It's almost too sudden that shift isn't it.

Maria: Yes.

Erin: And as if one person could make you feel better about everything else it doesn't seem

Mandy: Or if they did, they'd be there with you now.

Erin fundamentally objects to the poem's lift. As if on cue ('every time I read it'), something jars or distracts her just at the point at which the poem is ready to take off: 'haply I think on thee, *and then*'. What the poem offers as a solution – the thought of 'this someone I know' – Erin does not believe could be a solution, at least in as powerful a way as the poem suggests. It is like a blockage preventing her from

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[147] Modern Painters II, *The Works of John Ruskin* IV, p. 191.

'getting in' to the poem, and the fact that it comes up every time suggests that it

might be an over-determined response that could affect Erin's reading of other

poems too. It is a worry (for the researcher facilitating the session, the present writer)

that a project worker might find herself designating a poem as an externally good

choice for a reading group, without being moved, or feeling able to be moved by it in

practice herself.

Maria, an administrator (rather than a trained project worker) offers to read,

providing a chance to hear the poem in a different voice:

Erin: It's weird, the line that really stood out to me then was 'with what I most enjoy contented least'.

Emily: Yeah, me too. Cause actually that would be really scary if the things that you usually enjoyed and that usually cheered you up, if those things stopped doing that. You'd think will I ever enjoy them again, or have I lost it completely.

Erin: And the fact that it's 'contented least'. Like the best things are the worst things. I don't know if that makes sense.

Emily: It's cause it's '*I most enjoy* contented least'.

Jumping to line 8, the group seem not to be following the chronological structure of

the poem, and are at risk of avoiding the difficulty represented in those first eight

lines. The poem requires the reader to remain faithful to the contours of the

experience until the lift actually comes. The prolonged sense in the poem of a feeling

that the speaker cannot shake off, and which only seems to be added to with each

succeeding line, further enables the reader to realize the reversal of that movement in

that which follows after line 8. Still, Erin has highlighted the point at which things

appear to have reached their worst. The sensed pain acts as the emotional equivalent

of the work of deixis within the grammar: 'most' is 'least'.

Emily looks briefly at the next line of the poem:

Emily: It's funny he says 'yet in these thoughts'. You would have thought

it'd be 'yet with'

Erin: Yet with these thoughts. It's like, but he's like 'in'.

That little word 'in' is indicative of how big 'these thoughts' have become: they are not something one merely has, but a place in which one is stuck. This level of attention to the language will help to keep the readers in the poem: it may be the smaller words, not the names which can be made into themes or looked up in a dictionary, that are the real insights into poetry's working of meaning.

Mandy: What struck me when you were reading it is the word 'state'.

Erin: Yeah 'state' is like repeated all the way through.

Maria: Mmm. 'My outcast state'.

Mandy: It's his state that's the problem, in a way.

Emily: But it's as if he doesn't have any power over it.

Maria: It's as though he sees it as a separate entity. There's him and then there's his state.

These thoughts begin to offer further translations of Emily's observation regarding that word 'in'. The speaker's 'state' takes on the substance of a thing, becoming an 'it', an 'entity'. This picks up on that which the poem demonstrates through the form, placing 'I' and 'state' at either end of the line 'I all alone beweep my outcast state'. It is quite unlike what might be termed more casually as 'feeling sorry for oneself'. But these are thoughts the researcher has at the time inchoately, and then are recorded later in diary-form in retrospect, thinking of what was missed or went unclenched at the micro level of the language.

But at the macro level of simple response, Erin again returns to her stubborn problem with the later turn-around in the speaker's 'state':

Erin: I still feel like the end – the happiness is so lame. [*laughs*] Compared to the desperation.

Elaine: Yes, because of what's gone before.

Erin: It just, it seems like it's such a wet kind of. I don't know whether that's just cause I'm not a fan of love poems or what but. It's not even the 'thee', the 'haply I think on thee' that bugs me it's the [*sarcastic tone*] 'the lark at break of day' and the 'hymns at heaven's gate' and it's just like oh it's so cliché.

The tone is demeaning and deterioratingly persistent: 'I *still* feel'. The beauty of the poem seems to be utterly absent now that the syntactical link between the isolated phrases picked out by Erin has been broken. Without the work of this poetic muscle it seems much easier to make the poem sound 'lame'.

    'Happiness' continues, strikingly, to be the subject of a somewhat ugly resistance to the uplifting beauty of love in the poem. But the researcher tries now to bring back the poem's turning point, and to genuinely read and hear it:

Researcher: Well if we go back to line 8 again, that seemed to be the lowest point didn't it: 'With what I most enjoy contented least.' Is it at the beginning of line 9 that it changes? Do you think there's any other point where it changes?

Erin: I think where it says 'and then'.

Researcher: 'Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising'

Erin: It's like 'haply I think on thee' and you can just kind of feel him mulling something over in his head. 'And then my state'.

Researcher: And then if you think about the image of the lark it's just one bird.

Erin: Well it's the first bird, at least that's what it makes me think of. 'Up with the lark.' It's almost pushing out against the night, you know.

Erin begins to get in and now to stay in the poem for the first time since she was surprised by 'most enjoy' / 'contented least'. She has started to notice what the poem is *doing*, as opposed to being distracted by what it seems to her to be *saying*. 'You can just kind of <u>feel</u> him mulling something over' is very different from the rigidity of 'I still feel' or 'I just think', and this is a crucial distinction in terms of what

literary thinking is and should be like. The 'mulling' transmitted from writer to reader is like the preparation for lift-off, the imagined lark 'pushing out against the night'.

But instead of following the poem into that lift-off, the discussion starts moving backwards. Emily is thinking again about how the poem changes, and picks up on Erin's use of the word 'almost' in relation to the poem's use of it:

Emily: I suppose the only way he can get away with it is because he said 'myself almost despising'. If it said 'yet in these thoughts myself despising …' But cause it's '*almost* despising' it's still like a glimmer that he can save it.

Erin: I think it's to do with how it's read as well, like 'haply I think on thee, *and then*'. It's like a dawning. You're not sure what it is when it's first there but it sort of takes shape over time.

Emily is interested in the 'glimmer' of beginnings being detected in near-endings. But there are still comments being made which seem to detract from the poem's own use of language, as here in the casual attitude of 'getting away with it'. Erin shares in Emily's good idea, which seems to relate thoughts which 'take shape' to the experience of poetic structure and syntax. But the sense that this must happen 'over time' as Erin puts it weakens the effect of surprise, which in the poem is able to jolt the speaker into a sudden surety, rather than leaving him 'not sure what it is'.

Surprise functions to revive a forgotten good, and to make of old, accommodated memories a fresh discovery: 'Thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings'. It functions to make the complaint of 'I still feel' impossible. But surprise itself is by definition not automatic, and can easily be prevented. Reading poetry thus often requires a kind of unknowing of that which has been known, as this session with experienced readers and participants partly serves to illustrate.

2. The toolkit

The analysis of transcripts such as those used above suggests a number of ways in which a project worker might learn from the experience of reading them. In the more synoptic section that follows, a number of shorter examples have been gathered together in order to provide a general catalogue of what has been found in the transcripts thus far. These instances have emerged initially from the reading of poetry, which usually can be tracked across a single session, making it easier to determine the shape of a happening. The latter part of this chapter will demonstrate how the findings from this toolkit get redeployed within the messier form of prose narrative, which brings in additional dimensions and a larger network of connections and crossovers between people and thoughts.

The examples given in this toolkit each relate to one of the three stages that were identified in the first session described above: Getting In, Staying In, and Breaking Through.[148] What is shown in each case is an indicator or sign of this stage being achieved or beginning to happen, or alternatively the example will show how an intervention made by the project worker or another group member enables something to happen. But the process always begins with and depends upon getting into the little world of the poem, with establishing this as a presence within the room. The act of re-reading the poem will therefore be key to each stage, as a way of reminding the group of what has been read, and reawakening its literary power. The

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[148] These might be compared with the 'stages of *change'* upon which a number of cognitive-behavioural therapy interventions have been based, where one example of a change would be to stop an addictive behaviour, such as smoking. It has been shown that the same stages of change seem to be followed in individuals who improve without therapy as in clients who improve as a result of it. The article referenced below is one of the first studies in which an attempt is made to come up with a formulation of the processes and stages encountered within an extended range of psychotherapies. Four stages are identified: contemplation, determination, action and maintenance. The number of stages has since been represented differently, sometimes as three, five or six stages, but this basic progression has become a standard for many programmes of therapy.

James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. Di Clemente, 'Transtheoretical Therapy: Toward a More Integrative Model of Change', *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 19 (1982), 276-88 (p. 282).

repeated 'getting into' is itself a way of 'staying in' until 'staying in' and 'staying in'
produces breakthrough into felt meaning.

Deixis as a First 'Getting in'

The reading begins with finding a part of the poem to focus in on, often before one
has been able to grasp the poem as a whole. The project worker might suggest this to
the group as a first move. But the prompt can come from any reader within the
group, and might even begin in an apparently silent way. The person who at this
moment is the reader points to a line or a group of words, the significance of which
he or she may not yet be able to articulate. In an account from one project worker
who runs a group in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre,[149] she noted that there
was one particular phrase in the text that one man seemed to be drawn to. She could
see him underlining and, as she put it, almost stroking the words with his finger. He
then read out loud, for the first time in this group, the phrase that he had been
pointing to: 'there could still be many … many drops of happy – of good fellowship
– ahead'.[150] The project worker felt that at this moment the man was seeing the
possibility of another way of life offered to him on the page as also via the presence
of those fellow readers sat around the table. But in these early stages it may be the
project worker who has to spell out or intuit the meaning of such an action, for the
reader is operating on a level closer to blind instinct, and it is important that the
reader stays with this instinct rather than becoming too quickly self-conscious.

Deixis is a way of physically orienting oneself within the map of a poem. The
next step on from this will be to locate the part or parts that the selected bit connects

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[149] A longer account, written by Jane Davis, Director of TRO, is given in the guide to quality shared
reading practice prepared by Kate McDonnell for GIR group leaders. The guide is discussed
further in chapter five.
[150] George Saunders, 'Tenth of December', in *Tenth of December* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013),
pp. 215-51 (p. 249).

up with, as a method of reading the poem from within it. But deixis also allows the reader to enter into the space created by the group, perhaps for the first time. For the less confident reader it is a way of participating, of 'doing' reading, without having to know what to say or needing to question whether one will be understood.

Repeated Forms: 'Getting In' becoming 'Staying In'

The majority of a Get into Reading session is likely to be spent on the work of staying in the poem, and so this is the section of the toolkit that will carry the greatest number of examples. All of these however are to do with a kind of repeating or revisiting of that which the poem has begun to establish.

Re-readings

In many settings the groups have to take place amidst a range of potential disruptions and distractions. But in the following example it was the group member rather than the project worker who took it upon herself to make sure that the poem was heard, despite the disturbance which was coming from another chatty group of people sitting close by who had met up in the library to talk about a book. As she was reading the following three stanzas, Julie got up from the table and went and stood for a moment by the other group, so that they could see what she was doing in trying to read. She then came calmly back to the table and handed the rest of the reading on to others in the group. Brendan Kennelly's poem begins:

> A man should clear a space for himself
> Like Dublin city on a Sunday morning
> About six o'clock.
> Dublin and myself are rid of our traffic then
> And I'm walking.
>
> Houses are solitary and dignified
> Streets are adventures
> Twisting in and out and up and down my mind.
> The river is talking to itself

And doesn't care if I eavesdrop.

No longer cluttered with purpose
The city turns to the mountains
And takes time to listen to the sea.
I witness all three communing in silence
Under a relaxed sky.[151]

After the poem had been read in full, Julie commented on the experience of reading

aloud:

Julie: I think it's really good for the soul. You know if you can read, and
                 hear your voice, you know. It's good to hear yourself strong.

Richard: Yes.

Julie: It helps, you know, like if everyone just wanted, if you were able to
                 have a taste, each one have a little go.

Terry: Mmm definitely yeah.

Julie: Cause you can hear yourself, and the confidence it brings, even in
                 other people …

In this instance the actual reading helps to reinforce not only a sense of the poem, but

also a sense of self: echoing a deep need to be able to be heard and to hear oneself, or

one's own inner voice uttered out loud. This indeed is what the poem calls clearing a

space, taking time to listen.

In another group[152] there is a fairly quiet member who has told the project

worker that he is willing to have a go at reading aloud at some point. One of the

findings from the analysis of the transcripts is that it is often when a person reads

aloud within a group for the first time that they will begin to say more afterwards in

response to what is being read. The project worker will therefore be looking for

moments when he or she might enable this to happen within a group. On this

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[151] Brendan Kennelly, 'Clearing a Space', in *A Time for Voices: Selected Poems 1960-1990*
        (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1990), pp. 124-5.
[152] This transcript has not been previously used but was collected for the earlier referenced study: 'An
        Investigation into the Therapeutic Benefits of Reading in Relation to Depression and
        Well-being'.

occasion the group is reading W. B. Yeats's 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree',[153] and has

already heard it read once by the project worker:

Rick: He is waxing lyrical there

Project worker: He is

Rick: For want of a better way of phrasing … But to coin a phrase he is
                 waxing lyrical. And I don't know what the definition of lyric is, you
                 know.

Project worker: It is a very sort of beautiful poem really. Let's listen to it again shall
                 we, would you like to take your turn now Doug or how do you feel?

Douglas: Oh we will have a bash. [*reads the poem*]

       Final stanza:

              I will arise and go now, for always night and day
              I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
              While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
              I hear it in the deep heart's core. –

Project worker: Thanks Doug, beautifully read.

Rick: I think that's beautiful. Is there such a thing as metre, I don't know a
                 lot about poetry – I know snippets here and there – but there is such a
                 thing as, it's the way he puts the words together, because it seems
                 beautiful to me the way he, the way it hits you, you know. But you
                 know what I am saying, it's much more beautiful than what it says on
                 paper you know.

Project worker: Yes it's got like this deep rhythm to it, hasn't it,

Rick: Yes that's it,

Project worker: This resonance, which when Doug was reading then I was really, it
                 seemed to have this resonance to it, this rhythm and I think the idea
                 that it's the words on the page but they are also, it's the music of it
                 isn't it really.

Rick: Yes, yes

Project worker: That is bringing something out.

Douglas: Conjuring something else up in your mind.

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[153] W. B. Yeats, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' (from *The Rose*, 1893), in *Collected Poems*, ed. by
Augustine Martin (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 35.

This example illustrates the difference between reading the poem and discussing its imagery or metre on the one hand, and listening to it and responding to its 'music' on the other. The group are here rediscovering what a poem is, and finding that it has a kind of life beyond the words on the page as a result of the reading aloud. It is from within that experience of its resonance that Douglas is able to make that comment about the effect of the poem on the mind.

Re-doings or repetitions

In the first example the repeated return to a particular part of the poem acts as a kind of homing device. It is the reader's way of concentrating in on what seems to him or her most important. But often this happens not in relation to what the reader has picked out as their favourite line or lines, but to a part that the reader finds troubling, or difficult to grasp. Here the group takes place on a psychiatric ward, and the staff member picks up on the line which she likes, about the turtle doves. But Nigel's response to the poem is different:

> The lowest trees have tops, the ant her gall,
> The fly her spleen, the little sparks their heat;
> The slender hairs cast shadows, though but small,
> And bees have stings, although they be not great;
> Seas have their source, and so have shallow springs;
> And love is love, in beggars as in kings.
>
> Where rivers smoothest run, deep are the fords;
> The dial stirs, yet none perceives it move;
> The firmest faith is in the fewest words;
> The turtles cannot sing, and yet they love:
> True hearts have eyes and ears, no tongues to speak;
> They hear and see, and sigh, and then they break.[154]

Nigel: I don't know why the true hearts have to break. In that last bit there. Seems a bit strange.

Nigel again comes back to the concluding lines of each stanza:

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[154] Sir Edward Dyer, 'A Modest Love' (1602), in *The Oxford Book Of Sixteenth Century Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), p. 197.

Nigel: He's not talking about love, the previous lines is he. Then he just throws in 'love is love, in beggars as in kings'. He ends up with a broken heart here and I can't really see why he should end up with a broken heart. Maybe he wasn't feeling well when he wrote it.

Staff member: Yes, or he's a hurt man, a scorned man.

Project worker: Yes, maybe he was. It makes me think that you know the big romantic stories are often about, or they might have been about princes and kings, so you tend to think that the scale of love that they have is much bigger than what we might experience.

Staff member: Normal people, yes.

Project worker: And is the poem trying to say that that's not the case. That it's just that maybe we don't know how to measure it.

The project worker is thinking too that in the lyric poetry of this period the reader's sense of the size of an emotion or experience is often also dependent upon the sound of the verse, so that that which on the page may look small or lacking in significance, in the reading of it is able to carry a deeper and more resonant power. Nigel later has another go at explaining the difficulty that he is having with the poem:

Nigel: It starts off talking about small things and characteristically small things doesn't it. And then love is love, but that would be a small thing in a beggar and a large thing in a king, presumably. Although it's the same emotion.

Project worker: Is that what you think?

Nigel: Well having examined Henry VIII's activities in a recent set of classes in the education department, he made a lot more fuss about what he was doing than anybody else would be likely to do.

Project worker: Mmm. But he also kind of had to, because of his position …

This session stops very much short of breakthrough, but it is indicative of that attempt to stay in a particular area instead of leaving behind those moments of significance which we will be looking for within the poetry, as within the transcripts themselves. Also, because thoughts will sometimes continue to crop up in a non-chronological manner in response to the literature, a session may end up looking

more circular in shape rather than following a linear progression through the three different stages identified in this chapter. In this example the response to a particular part of the poem feels from the beginning too pressing to allow for that initially more steady process of 'getting in'.

Where the group member is however at risk of getting stuck, the project worker's recourse is to the poem, and to the poetry's own thought, which the project worker may sometimes have to re-present to the group member not in the form of an explanation but of an idea, or a creative analogy. At other times the project worker may be able to provide the link between thoughts by remembering what has been said by particular people during the session, and calling upon these thoughts again in order to secure the work that the readers may not fully realize they have been doing. So in another example Joe, who has just recently left secondary school, but who apologises for being 'really bad at poetry' nevertheless at one point offers to read. He comments afterwards on what he identifies as the enjambement in the poem, and points to the lines copied below:

> Give me one song of all your songs, that men
> May take your beauty winter's fire beside.[155]

Carol follows on to the final stanza:

> For memory passes
> Of even the loveliest things, bravest in show;
> The mind to beauty most alert not know
> How the August grasses
> Waved, by December's
> Glow, unless he see deep in the embers
> The poet's dream, gathered from cold print's spaces.

Carol: And the 'memory passes | Of even the loveliest things'. Sort of the sense of passing there in time, and the movement of time, through the seasons.

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[155] 'O Tree of Pride' (from poems dated 1917-19), in *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney,* ed. by P. J. Kavanagh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 56-7.

Project worker: Yes. So we're getting the movement through the poem and the passing of time. But still trying to hold onto something that's not like letting it just pass by.

Carol: So yes it's not, it's wanting to just hold onto that glimpse of summer in the transition into winter so, the mention of the 'one single leaf of summer's shade' [*in line 3*] and the 'one song of all your songs' – to almost take in to the 'winter's fire'.

Project worker: Mmm! Yes it's literally burning in the fire isn't it at the end.

Carol: Yes.

Following a third reading of the poem there is some talk of the suggestion of comfort in that word 'glow' in the second to last line. Patrick continues:

There's like a – erm you know this kind of warmth in the embers, whereas he is sort of coming from a cold space.

The project worker recalls a similar reappearance of warmth in the first few lines of the poem, where this can be sensed in the colour of the leaves on the tree. But the project worker is also interested in what Patrick makes of the last line of the poem:

Patrick: [*pause*] I think, I'm trying to think how to say it. Well, I'm not quite sure what the 'cold print's spaces' is, but I'm thinking of words, or printing press or you know stuff like that. And so in all of this kind of thinking about all this stuff, this line gives it a bit of a cold feeling. Whereas, as we were saying before like in the colours and in the stuff that he obviously doesn't understand, there's a comfort and a warmth there.

Project worker: Yes. Is it something to do with what you were saying Carol about the movement, as though you have to keep this poem moving, and once it gets to the end and it's left in its printed form, it's like it goes back to its kind of coldness. Because the 'poet's dream' has to be 'gathered from cold print's spaces'. I suppose 'print's spaces' is just the spaces between the words, you know.

Carol: Like it's literally like there's a gap in the transition. Whereas like there's no stop in what nature's doing, but in the printing there is, and there comes an end and there comes a stop. [*pause*] It's a lovely poem. [*reads it out loud*]

Where these links between thoughts can be made, this enables the group to begin to function *as a group*, allowing the people within it almost to stand for these different

thoughts, as individual contributors to a newly arising network of mind which allows for a different kind of model of thinking to begin to emerge. The independent function of the group as an entity in itself is like the achieved condition of what Bion calls the 'work group'. This creates something for Joe and others to contribute to in place of that pressure which he is used to of coming up with thoughts.

Reappraisal

The turnaround is a specific kind of poetic move described in the poetic structures of chapter one and shown earlier in this chapter in the first session where the group are looking at Shakespeare's sonnet 29. In the following example a different group again become interested in this mental technique and movement as they read sonnet 30, 'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought'. In this sonnet as Peter notes it is only in the last two lines that the effect of this technique is finally achieved. The sestet otherwise continues with a whole series of reflections on what the speaker has previously lost or suffered, or failed to achieve:

> Then can I grieve at grievances fore-gone,
> And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
> The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,
> Which I new pay as if not paid before.
>   But if the while I think on thee (dear friend)
>   All losses are restored, and sorrows end.[156]

Peter:　　　It ends with a sort of quick pro quo doesn't it, that he's got, however many sort of regrets in his life that his time spent with this 'dear friend' at the end sort of balances those out, sort of thing.

Project worker: It's a big thing isn't it once he's – after he's listed all that, for it to be cancelled out.

Gill:　　　Well that's the thing with the sonnet, it turns, it always turns at the end – the last two lines. And that has a greater effect because you're led into it, but the end is, completely different to the

Jackie:　　　You're sort of taken on a journey, and it has a twist and turn at the end.

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[156] Sonnet 30, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 441.

Gill: To its proper focus, you know.

The process of reappraisal is realized in two ways here. Gill describes how it enables the reader to reach a different position or mental orientation from that in which he or she had begun. The poetic 'twist', a word that Gill herself had used earlier on in the session, here creates that mental shift which the reader re-experiences. Peter on the other hand reproduces in his own comment that change of tone which the poem is able to bring about. It is almost self-forgiving in that exchange of 'regret' over 'his [own] life' for the thought of the 'dear friend', a phrase that the poem carefully includes in parentheses, and which Peter re-quotes. The transmutation of that commonly accepted word 'regret' into a re-discovery of that which is not to be regretted is what the process of reappraisal is able repeatedly to make happen.

Refining

The background for this and the next two sub-sections is as follows. A group was established in the rather unusual setting of a GP surgery,[157] to which patients who were receiving treatment for depression were to be referred. Lindsay who is in her mid-fifties has been unwell for some time, and took a number of weeks to settle. She had been nervous about coming to the group, and cried every week during this early stage, a reaction which often seemed to be triggered whilst the poems were being read or discussed. As an experienced reader, Lindsay had a number of years previously begun a literature degree at university, but now finds it too difficult to be able to enjoy reading as a private habit. This is quite common: that a person will have stopped reading after becoming depressed, feeling unable to manage the level of concentration that such an activity requires. It is typical of the loss of 'old routines'

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[157] The set-up of the group is described in further detail in the earlier referenced study: 'An Investigation into the Therapeutic Benefits of Reading in Relation to Depression and Well-being'.

in cases of depression: routines which have previously held life together.[158] Andrea

too talks of being debilitated at times by depression, but still actively involves herself

in the group, becoming worried for the quietness of other members.

The group is now a number of months in, and is reading 'Nostalgia' by Billy

Collins, a poem in which the reader is invited imaginatively to visualise a succession

of lost pasts before making a shift to a time closer to the present:

> Even this morning would be an improvement over the present.
> I was in the garden then, surrounded by the hum of bees
> and the Latin names of flowers, watching the early light
> flash off the slanted windows of the greenhouse
> and silver the limbs on the rows of dark hemlocks.
>
> As usual, I was thinking about the moments of the past,
> letting my memory rush over them like water
> rushing over the stones on the bottom of a stream.
> I was even thinking a little about the future, that place
> where people are doing a dance we cannot imagine,
> a dance whose name we can only guess.[159]

Linda:　　　Going back in time.

Project worker: Going back in time.

Linda:　　　Going back in time, thinking about the past, and forwards.

Project worker: Yes!

Linda:　　　So he is thinking of what that end bit means, it means that he is
　　　　　　thinking about the place where people are doing the dance I cannot
　　　　　　imagine, a dance with those names we can only guess. He's going
　　　　　　back and then forward, or something. [*Laughs*] Trying to …

Project worker: No, I think you're right, and this poem is interesting because when
　　　　　　we go back in our memories, often we can only go back so far, and
　　　　　　yet this poem goes *right* back,

Lindsay:　　and then becomes a bit more forward.

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[158] Mary Weston and Eleanor McCann, 'Get Into Reading with Mersey Care NHS Trust', *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 15 (2011), 12-16 (p. 14).

[159] Billy Collins, 'Nostalgia' (from *Questions About Angels,* 1991), in *Sailing Alone Around the Room: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Random House, 2002), pp. 42-3.

Linda brings to the fore this idea of mental movement ('he is thinking'; 'he is thinking'; 'he's going …') and of moving between times which in the process seem to be imaginatively reinvented, even as the past's sense of the future. The word 'back' is there in the poem: 'shoot me back to 1922 or 1941', but Linda's own introduction of its opposite, 'forward', mirrors the last verse in trying out possible words for that which cannot yet be fully known. Lindsay fills in, completing the project worker's thought, but also takes this slightly further. '*A bit* more forward' carries the tentative syntax of the poem: 'thinking *a little* about the future'. This which I call 'refining', aiming within a group member and between group members at a greater precision of hold on the meaning, is not about making giant leaps across time, but about testing out those imaginative possibilities which the poem has brought to the readers' attention. It is like feeling one's way towards a thought.

Moments in which a thought begins to be generated across the separate responses of individual readers allow us via the transcripts to follow the actual process of the sudden formation of a group. The work of refining provides an immediate motivation for such spontaneous collaborations, which happen independently of the normal, social process in which with some level of reservation one might gradually get to know unfamiliar people within a group. In the example below the group has been reading 'Those Winter Sundays' by Robert Hayden, in which the poet remembers the tireless work of a father on his family's behalf, who even on rest days would get up early to make the fire in readiness for the day. The group focus on the middle section of the poem:

> I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
> When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
> and slowly I would rise and dress,
> fearing the chronic angers of that house,
>
> Speaking indifferently to him,

who had driven out the cold[160]

Jackie: I don't understand the bit 'fearing the chronic angers of the house'.

Cathy: Cold.

Gill: Cold and dark.

Julie: And dark and rotten … You're coming down, there's no central heating … So that could be the chronic angers …

Here the responses to Jackie's query begin to spill over from one to the next in a stream of thought that starts to gather pace. But the tone of Julie's[161] reply is not finally conclusive: there is still an acknowledgement in her repetition of the phrase 'chronic angers' that the occurrence of such language is surprising in this context.

Julie: '*Fearing* the chronic angers of the house.'

Project worker: I just wonder whether, whatever the relationships are between the parents, that that might cloud over what the father's actually done for the child.

Jackie: Why – did you fear what's going to happen in the house during the rest of the day, thinking "what's the day going to bring" or something.

Project worker: Yes, that's what I was thinking.

Julie: I was going to say, 'chronic angers *of that house*', is it referring to the house or the people in it?

These repetitions ('*fearing*' / 'did you fear') and continuations of thoughts function to prompt further questions which may not be answerable by a single person on their own. But this is not only about working out what the poem means. The thinking here also serves to recreate something of the emotional atmosphere of the poem, which for this poet has a much more serious connotation than the physical space which the poem imaginatively re-inhabits.

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[160] Robert Hayden, 'Those Winter Sundays' (from *A Ballad of Remembrance*, 1962), in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Frederick Glaysher (New York: Liveright, 1985), p. 41.

A more briefly complete example is included, finally, in order to demonstrate the work of refining as a process caught from poetic thinking itself. Angela has been reading the poem 'A Child in the Garden' by Henry Van Dyke. Its depiction of 'That Eden lost unknown and found unsought'[162] is identified by the poem with that childlike state in which the speaker must once have lived, 'with eyes that knew no shade of sin or fear'. Angela, trying to imagine the background or the motive for this poem, comments:

> He could be an old gentleman, and he's wishing to have, wishing it could happen again I think, to him. Or what he saw – saw then, he can see now. Realize it now.

The step up from '[wishing it] could' to 'can', and then from 'see' to 'realize' enables a re-enaction of the poem at the level of syntax. It is a poetic response to a poem which is concerned with the realization of that which the speaker has long been disconnected from. In this respect the syntactical move is a way of trying to restore to reality that which might otherwise have remained as a vague wish for what is past. The reader is almost stuttering, but stuttering under control, reformulating and allowing the words to help reformulate themselves, and so doing the now allowed work of modification as she thinks aloud.

Re-working and re-emerging

The following example shows the poem suddenly repeating itself through the participants: it is a partial culmination of the staying in and re-working processes. The group, described above under refiners, is reading a poem which appears to be about the benefits of love, in despite of the fact that love cannot meet the problem of material or physical wants and needs:

> Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
> Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;

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[162] Henry Van Dyke, 'The Child in the Garden' (1903), in *Mvsic and Other Poems* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), p. 52.

> Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
> And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
> Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
> Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone; [163]

As the poem is read aloud, it seems to reach a kind of trigger point however, which in the recording is marked by Lindsay's 'oh!' uttered after the following lines:

> Yet many a man is making friends with death
> Even as I speak, for lack of love alone

Lindsay later re-quotes the three lines which end with the unexpected connection in which the word 'friends' appears – 'making friends with death':

Lindsay: So I mean is he speaking about loneliness, people being on their own, they don't have

Andrea: Or 'even as I speak, for the lack of love alone'

Project worker: Well that's an important point because it doesn't necessarily mean romantic love, it could be all kinds couldn't it.

Andrea: Yes, it could be family.

Lindsay: Yes.

Andrea later repeats the same lines, continuing on to the following:

> It well may be that in a difficult hour,
> Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,

Lindsay: You don't know whether he's talking, well I don't know, suicide?

Project worker: Well he …

Lindsay: 'Pain and moaning for release.'

The discomfort of this thought seems to have startled Lindsay out of the kind of 'mere politeness' which (in chapter two) George Eliot identified as a common safeguard against the real. Nevertheless the project worker, made somewhat nervous

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[163] Edna St. Vincent Millay, 'Love is not all' (from *Fatal Interview*, 1931), in *Collected Sonnets* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1959), p. 99.

by the sudden raising of suicide as a topic, re-reads the final six lines of the poem in

order to try to emphasise its conclusion:

> It well may be that in a difficult hour,
> Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,
> Or nagged by want past resolution's power,
> I might be driven to sell your love for peace,
> Or trade the memory of this night for food.
> It well may be. I do not think I would.

Lindsay: It's quite a hard one isn't it really.

Andrea: Mmm.

Lindsay: It is quite difficult within the poem.

Project worker: And I think the poet – that she's struggling with it as well, sort of like you know would it be better not to have feelings … but actually I don't think I'd quite give it up.

Andrea: No.

Lindsay's word 'within' is indicative of how she seems to want to 'stay in' with the

poet, rather than to get out of this difficult place that the poem has found for her. She

is not content to move on to a possible resolution until she has been able to pinpoint

the reality of this difficult feeling in its application to an actual person, a 'you' or

even an 'I':

Lindsay: I suppose it could depend on how far you are, in relation to that. I mean at some stage, if you're really down, and you feel as though you're sort of on the edge. I mean even if it's only sort of

Andrea: You do moan for a release.

Lindsay: Yes. So, you might be forced to er swap the love for peace. That's how I feel. I don't know …

There is something wonderful about the way in which Andrea, in a fairly loud and

suddenly inspired voice, meets Lindsay's tentative and risky suggestion here. It is

like an act of companionship offered even within that experience of utter loneliness

which Lindsay has been trying to speak about. That which could not be further from

providing comfort has been able to produce something better even than that. This is what Andrea offers back to Lindsay in the form of that quoted line. The poem has now re-emerged from the group process in its own re-established right. It is a revitalized repetition, very close to what I have been calling 'breakthrough'.

Launchers

The preceding examples of 'staying in' have been concerned mainly with securing this stage for longer immersion. But a launcher is an obvious example of a kind of preparation for breakthrough. The example that follows offers in addition a recapitulation of the two stages that we have seen so far.

The group is reading Louis MacNeice's poem 'Snow'.[164] This particular transcript[165] has been used previously for reports on the study of the benefits of reading in relation to depression,[166,167] but is included here with some new analyses.

Andrea, reading out the poem, comes to the last line of the first stanza: 'World is suddener than we fancy it.' 'Oh gosh, no,' she says, in an aside. Lindsay later picks up on the same line:

Lindsay: I don't think there is such a word really as, as 'suddener' is there? It's either sudden or not.

Andrea: Yes

Lindsay: That makes it sound funny.

Andrea: The world is suddener than we fancy it.

Lindsay: Don't like that.

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[164] Louis MacNeice, *Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), p. 44.

[165] In this instance, unlike the other examples which are also referenced to the depression study, the project worker is myself.

[166] Josie Billington, 'Research Workshop: Ask Me', *The Reader*, 38 (2010), 81-4 (pp. 82-3).

[167] Christopher Dowrick et. al, 'Get into Reading as an Intervention for Common Mental Health Problems: Exploring Catalysts for Change', *Medical Humanities*, 38 (2012), 15-20 (pp. 17, 18-19).

Lindsay would rather have things in place, and settled, grammatically. Andrea too is concerned by what almost seems to be coming at her via the poem. But this disturbed alertness might just cause them to stay with the poem a little longer. Re-reading aloud enables this:

Andrea reads out lines 1 and 2:

> The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
> Spawning snow and pink roses against it

> It's like, you wouldn't know if it was looking out or looking in

Project worker: Mm. It's as though the snow is looking in

Andrea: Or you are looking in.

Project worker: Or you're …

Andrea: Then again 'the room was suddenly rich'; mind you, you could be looking in, 'and the great bay window was spawning snow and pink roses against it'. As though you are looking into the room, the room is all lit, or warm and cosy. And you are standing in the snow looking at the window that has got snow on it and there is a vase of roses in the window or something – or could it be like old rose trees?

Project worker: Yes could be either couldn't it.

With the indicator 'it's like', boosted by the project worker's 'it's as though', Andrea begins to get interested in what the poem is doing instead of being almost overwhelmed by it. 'You wouldn't know' lends permission to explore the different possibilities, as Andrea's repeated phrase 'could be' offers a version of permitted guessing on the edge of becoming a more confident refinement. This is where the language of the readers begins to become more excited and more imaginative. It is no longer closing down the response, as Lindsay's 'Don't like that' had done in a kind of anxious reaction to the suddenness, but rather opening up and even prolonging it. It is as Andrea takes up these different positions, from inside, and then more strangely from outside, that she is able to see and not just feel the impact of what the

poem describes. From the right position, it becomes possible for the sense of the poem to be released again more implicitly, in that contrast for instance of realizing that 'the room is all lit, or warm and cosy', whilst the one who looks on is 'standing in the snow'. In the third line the poem describes a set of opposites at once 'Soundlessly collateral and incompatible'. And yet this is not simply a matter of scene-setting. Angela's suggestion of 'old rose trees' introduces another sudden dimension of past time in place of the temporary 'vase of roses'. This is like adding richness and depth to the picture.

The discussion of the second stanza throws up associations with Christmas. 'I peel and portion | A tangerine and spit the pips', MacNeice writes. But Lindsay agrees with the project worker that the already mentioned pink roses do not seem to fit either with this period of time, or with its tone of celebration:

Lindsay: Normally by Christmas even the most hardy of roses have zapped and given up. I don't really know what to make of it.

The poem itself returns to the roses in the last stanza, and it is here that Lindsay finds another opportunity to come back in:

> And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
> Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes –
> On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands –
> There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

Andrea, after repeating the last line:

I think this is, this is looking out from the room.

Lindsay: Just as though it's like a moment in time, isn't it. Like a little glimpse.

Project worker: yes

Lindsay: Just on that one moment.

Project worker: Yes, yes. It's as though he suddenly sees something that he hasn't seen before, or he hasn't noticed.

Lindsay: Mm, yes.

Andrea: 'The drunkenness of things being various.'

Lindsay: Do you think he feels as though it's, there is like a magic to just that moment.

The lost magic of the zapped roses and that downbeat sense of having 'given up' are transformed here in a moment of sudden realization. The little assents, the verbal push of 'yes', indicate how this is happening not just for one person but within the room, as a firing of electricity across individual minds. What keeps this going is the seemingly unconscious repetition of that original launcher, 'it's as though'. It is Lindsay who uses it this time, and it is perhaps Lindsay who has stood to be most in need of this kind of tool, as a means of getting to somewhere new. So 'magic' is an unlikely word for Lindsay to use. But it is as though she – the woman who initially baulked at 'suddener' – stretches out for a word within her vocabulary – 'a magic' – that is capable of capturing what the poem has evoked. It is an attempt at a recreation of a poetic vocabulary.

Breaking through

The purpose of the remaining examples is to show that there is something which the group might 'stay in' *for*, some kind of surprise pay-off for the work that the readers have done within the poem. In order to specify what this might be, these examples have been arranged according to three possible categories of a happening. The focus is on i) the emotional quality of a reader's vocabulary, ii) the sense of absence, and iii) the experience of dimensions, each provisional category offering a demonstration of the re-emergence for the modern reader of certain discoveries which in chapter one were associated with Elizabethan poetics.

Finding a vocabulary

This phenomenon occurs for the first time in this thesis in the first of the two readings of sonnet 29: 'Isn't that lovely', Beryl said, 'That is beautiful'. Such vocabulary arises out of a particular kind of responsiveness to the poem, where the very concentration upon the poem's language is able to prompt the readers to think more poetically after hearing it. We have already seen evidence of this in other places above, and further examples are to follow in chapter four.

One reason that this might be thought of as a breakthrough, finally, is that there are so many instances in ordinary existence where people can find it difficult to use or to find the vocabulary that a situation humanly requires, and the block may remain with them in aftermath and consequence.

The example that follows takes place on a unit for people who are recovering from brain injury; a kind of damage which in itself can sometimes lead to mental health problems. Depression and self-harm for instance are common, the ward manager tells me, along with difficulties in relating to others. It is a small unit with a much more diverse range of patients than was often seen on other wards, owing to the nature of the injury which is less specific to certain at-risk populations. Patients could quickly become frustrated with each other, and there were sometimes outbreaks of tension in the lounge where the reading group had been set to meet. Mutual support and a deeper sharing of common difficulties were in short supply here. There were usually more men than women on the ward, and on one occasion, which the project worker had realized would fall on Valentine's Day, there were three patients, all male, who agreed to take part. The group read Sir Edward Dyer's 'A Modest Love' and then later the poem 'Friendship' by Elizabeth Jennings. The last stanza of Jennings's poem reads:

> Two people, yes, two lasting friends.
> The giving comes, the taking ends.
> There is no measure for such things.
> For this all Nature slows and sings.[168]

　　Paul, who had been injured whilst serving in the army, and had had to leave behind that team of people amongst whom his life had been based for a number of years, was moved by this poem and afterwards talked at much greater length than he had done previously about the situation in which his injury had left him. He found the poem's word 'lasting' upsetting, saying that what ought to have been lasting for him had proved not to be; he felt forgotten by many friends, and said that a couple of weeks previously his partner had left him, finding it too difficult to adapt to the effects of his injury. What I remember most about this occasion is that it was hard at the end to leave, or to know when to make an end of it and move on with the day. The group was always attended by a member of staff from the ward, in case of a need for extra care in following up a person's response to what had been read, and ensuring that the person was okay after the session. But on this occasion the poetry appeared to allow Paul access to a level of emotional vulnerability in which few around him seemed (from his perspective at least) previously to have been interested.

Absences made present

There are a number of instances in which a poem has made a reader think of someone who is emotionally close to them but who is not present within the group, and often group members will want to follow this up by handing on a copy of the poem to the person of whom they had been thinking. But in some cases the person is too far away to reach; sometimes it is someone long dead who is recalled, and in the

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[168] Elizabeth Jennings, 'Friendship' (from *Relationships*, 1972), in *Collected Poems 1953-1985* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986), p. 103.

case of a woman who was reading a poem in prison, she was in a semi-permanent way physically separated from the daughter of whom she began to think.

What is interesting about these extra presences summoned by the poem is that the experience does make them present in some way, rather than simply taking the reader back into a past memory of them. In this example[169] the group is reading a poem by e. e. cummings, 'i carry your heart with me'. It opens with the lines:

> i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
> my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
> i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done
> by only me is your doing,my darling) … [170]

In the discussion that follows Alex begins in a slightly faltering way to say:

Alex: I suppose as well it's kind of, this is the idea of, you know people say, people in the past who you knew, maybe it's like my parents who are dead now, as long as you remember them, then they're in a way – alive, aren't they.

Project worker: I think I was thinking when I first read this that it was about someone who didn't have the person with them, and that's why they had to carry them in their heart.

Alex: Yes, it's one of the few poems I can read and actually understand.

Margaret: Well it is, if you've got something in your heart, you'd carry it everywhere you go, no matter where you are.

Alex: It's even like, say if you were born in a particular place, and that place is important to you and you leave it and you'll never go back again, that place always is there with you. You're always going to be associated, think of yourself as being kind of part of that place you grew up in.

That little transformation from 'dead' to ' - alive' in Alex's speech is like that shift of a person from a world of absence into that of presence: the word 'alive' is not automatic but discovered or re-discovered by virtue of the poetry. But Alex does not leave it there. He goes beyond the poem to think of another parallel: not of a person

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[169] This transcript has not been previously used but was again collected for the earlier referenced study: 'An Investigation into the Therapeutic Benefits of Reading in Relation to Depression and Well-being'.

[170] E. E. Cummings, 'i carry your heart with me' (1958), in *Complete Poems 1904-1962*, ed. by George J. Firmage (New York: Liveright, 1994), p. 766.

this time, but of a place. It is a rather poetic move, for even the place now seems to take on the quality of a living thing. 'That place' that 'always is there with you' and is so carefully syntactically recovered in his utterance is, Alex is saying, not just a particular geographical location but a dimension that exists also as a part of 'you', as you do of it.

Dimensions and depth

As the group described earlier carry on with their reading of Billy Collins's poem 'Nostalgia', both Lindsay and Linda remain focussed on the last three lines:

> I was even thinking a little about the future, that place
> Where people are doing a dance we cannot imagine,
> A dance whose name we can only guess.

Lindsay: I think that is in the far future.

Project worker: The far future.

This tiny insertion of 'far' performs a gear-change, a sudden increase in range. The project worker has instinctively repeated it in order to keep this little catalyst in play:

Project worker: Out of all our understanding: you can't grasp it, but it's going to be there.

Lindsay: Like hundreds of years later.

Andrea: Yes, it's still going to be there isn't it, even if we are not, still going to be there.

The group seem to be caught up together in a continuing imaginative movement of thought. 'Far' has now inspired another little signifier of large dimensions: 'out of' together with 'even if'. It is as though the imagination 'out of all our understanding' goes on beyond the time of the imaginer's death: 'even if we are not, still …' Increasingly, the words are matching up, falling almost into rhymes and patterns:

it's going to be there
- Like hundreds of years later.
it's still going to be there
- even if we are not
still going to be there

This collaborative, spontaneous creation of poetry is the result of a thinking-together out in the world. Once a breakthrough – an exploration of a new way of thinking – is under way, it begins to matter less who it is that is actually holding the thought, since the thought itself consists of a reaching into another kind of dimension:

> During thinking, as the imperious demands of action-oriented perception are relaxed, elements in a nonchronological region of time drift, slide, and bounce into communication with each other. The *creative* dimension of thinking flows from this encounter between a nonchronological region of time, the fugitive present, and an uncertain future.[171]

Thoughts, minds, memories, and elements-of-time bounce into communication, producing something new, and newly certain. And yet the newness may well be a discovery of something that is already 'there', as Andrea has said: 'there', in a dimension that lies quite beyond our individual selves, where 'we are not'.

Some of the principal symptoms to be observed in diagnosing depression include a loss of energy and diminished interest in activity of any kind. But for a moment, here, that behaviour or mode which over time has become typical of the person thus diagnosed is caught suddenly in reverse. This is not only like watching a dance taking a place in the future, but *doing* it, trying out the steps without even thinking about the movements, and the effort or strain to accomplish them.

In another example it is a different dimension from that of time that is reached. The group is reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet, 'Grief':

Julie: I mean when you use the word grief it implies it's – enormous, it's major, isn't it – the word itself really.

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[171] William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 97.

Jackie: Such a small word but it means such a lot doesn't it.

Julie: Well, you can use things like sad or tearful or …

Jackie: But 'grief'

Julie: But when you use the word grief it's something that comes, you think of something that comes right from inside and down don't you.

'If it could weep, it could arise and go', Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes at the poem's close.[172]

> Deep-hearted man, express
> Grief for thy Dead in silence like to death:—
> Most like a monumental statue set
> In everlasting watch and moveless woe,
> Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.
> Touch it: the marble eyelids are not wet;
> If it could weep, it could arise and go.

But it is within those inexpressible inner dimensions of 'deep-hearted man' that real grief has to reside. Julie is feeling this here – inside and down. It is a kind of pre-language that she has turned to: not that of the nouns (such as 'heart' or 'sorrow' for instance) but those words which give a sense of immaterial place or space, of size, and length and breadth and depth. This is a measuring or a sizing up of that which cannot be measured.

Conclusion

This series of examples in section 2 has been organised into a kind of catalogue of processes or happenings in order that one might be able to distinguish between the different types that have been identified. But this is a format which has resulted from the live practice of reading, one that could not have been set out in advance. In practice, the reading cannot proceed by known steps, but only by a kind of readerly

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[172] 'Grief' (1844), in *Selected Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. by Margaret Forster (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p. 79.

instinct and a sustained inner attention to what is being read, including the sensitivity of the project worker to the group.

William Webbe spoke of the dramatic effects of verse in his 1586 Discourse of English Poetry:

> Poets are either such as desire to be liked of on stages, as Commedie and Tragedie wryters, or such as woulde bee regestered in Libraries. Those on stages have speciall respect to the motions of the minde, that they may stirre bothe the eyes and eares of their beholders. But the other … seeke to please privately with[in] the walles [173]

The distinction is not absolute. By means of poetry, those 'motions of the mind' are performed not only on stage but (with quiet drama) within the walls of the library reading group and the walls of the minds within it. But a human mind may have to be awakened before this can be apprehended: we do not always look at life with the seriousness or intensity that the writer of a drama would lend it. The use of poetry within these shared reading groups is an attempt to carry out that same work of awakening within the contexts of the present-day. The awakening has to begin with that place where the reader has begun to be stirred, and moved and triggered by what he or she is reading.

3. Novel-reading: The lyric moment

The latter part of this chapter is concerned with the reading of prose narrative, beginning nonetheless with what may be called the discovery of poetry within prose. It has much to do with what was described in chapter two: the discovery of the extraordinary suddenly within the very experience of the ordinary.

The following longer example is included as a similar model to those readings of Shakespeare's sonnet 29 which were given early on in this chapter. This

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[173] William Webbe, 'A Discourse of English Poetrie', in *Elizabethan Critical Essays,* ed. by G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), I, pp. 226-302 (p. 300).

allows for a demonstration of that whole movement which took place during the session. But I begin with some background detail.

The group takes place in a continuing care unit – basically a long-stay care home – for older people diagnosed with a chronic mental illness. Many of the people here have lived with mental illness for a long time, dating back to a much earlier stage in their lives. This much was evident from the traces of autobiographical memory – stories relating to their younger selves, or involving family members – which patients would quite often recount in the context of being gathered for the reading group. It was however comparable to a group in a dementia care setting (or to groups with people recovering from a brain injury) in at least one respect: that the material chosen was restricted quite early on to poetry, as opposed to a novel or longer story which would require greater levels of extended comprehension and short- as well as long-term memory. Nonetheless, granted the opportunity provided by the research project, an occupational therapist who regularly worked on this unit made the suggestion of alternating the poetry sessions[174] with one in which the project worker would read to the patients from a book of their choosing. The idea was trialled as a kind of experiment to see if it would in fact help improve patients' motivation (a key issue in many mental health settings) and lengthen the period of time for which they were able to concentrate.

Membership of this group was always difficult to predict, varying from day to day and week to week depending on whether patients felt well enough to attend. Some of the major difficulties that they would report included having too little energy, being very low in mood or feeling too distracted. On the occasion described below the group was made up of three women. One has problems with speech and

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[174] These had been running for several months before I started visiting the unit, but in the session described below I was the project worker.

pronunciation, and usually responds only to direct questions, responding even then in a very brief manner. Another is more talkative, and often restless, saying at the beginning of this particular session that she had been unable to sleep the previous night. Her friend on the other hand has a more subdued and sunken appearance, and often complains of physical pain. The group has been following the story of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, in line with the occupational therapist's proposal, and the project worker suggests resuming the reading from where it had been left the previous week. Ellen is polite, but frank:

> I hope you don't mind me saying, but I'm never in the mood for reading – or hearing a book described and that you know. I'd rather have the poetry myself.

Ellen does have a reputation on the ward of making rather loud protests or demands, to which the project worker has been instructed not always to give in. Having the other two patients also to consider (one of whom has been particularly enjoying the book), the project worker decides to continue. Ellen stops her as she is reading the following passage:[175]

> One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever. One knows it sometimes when one gets up at the tender solemn dawn-time and goes out and stands alone and throws one's head far back and looks up and up and watches the pale sky slowly changing and flushing and marvelous unknown things happening until the East almost makes one cry out and one's heart stands still

Ellen: Excuse me Jean. I hope you don't mind me interrupting you,

Project worker: Yeah.

Ellen: but when you look at the sky,

Project worker: Yeah?

Ellen: it's got beautiful colours

Project worker: Oh I agree, I agree.

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[175] Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (1911), ed. by Alison Lurie (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 184.

Ellen: hasn't it, the descriptions in it, are lovely.

Project worker: I agree.

Ellen: I, I could look at it forever. [*Laughs*]

This is quite unlike an interruption, as Ellen calls it, and in fact contrasts with her earlier objection. It is participative, almost the act of a co-facilitator:[176] stopping to make time to share an experience that otherwise is mutually felt but in a quite unspoken way. What seems to lie behind Ellen's interruption is an immediately heightened sensitivity to the passing of time – even the transcendence and the getting outside of it happens within it – to the extent that Ellen crucially but politely wants to get in her response before even the sentence has ended. Her timing offers to demonstrate how her attention has been peaked. For 'I could look at it forever' is related to the 'heart stand[ing] still' in the passage, but also to what is even so a transient moment in life. The passage, positioned at the beginning of a new chapter at a point where the narrator pauses for reflection, creates a different kind of excitement and attention from that which a plot-driven narrative often produces. Ellen is not too concerned about getting to the end of a book: she is instead contented by the 'detail' of this small section, and content to let time stand still.

The project worker attempts to give Angela a way in to what has developed initially as a dialogue between Ellen and herself, as a result of the project worker's own supportive response to that to which Ellen has been calling attention:

Project worker: Do you like looking at the sky Angela?

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[176] French and Local distinguish between two types of interruptions, which they call turn-competitive and non-competitive, where the latter signals a different kind of interaction which is actually more like co-operation. Several examples are given where one person 'yields' to another; a so-called interrupter. The writers note that in these examples 'the original turn-occupants do not recommence speaking immediately upon interrupters' completions but fractionally delay their restarts. One plausible interpretation of this delayed re-start is that original turn-occupants are giving interrupters 'time to complete' thus exhibiting that they are treating the interruptive speech as non-competitive.'
    Peter French and John Local, 'Prosodic Features and the Management of Interruptions', in *Intonation in Discourse*, ed. by Catherine Johns-Lewis (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 157-180 (p. 171).

Angela: Yes, I do. Where I used to live on Park Avenue, I used to have that front bedroom: I had a front bedroom my mum and dad had a back bedroom, and I used to look out of the window, and I could see right over the district, and all the sky was lit up with, lovely little golds, gold and orange.

Ellen: There's greyness, there's pinkness, there's, little bit of whiteness, there's all sorts of colours isn't there. To meet the eye. [*Laughs*] Yes they could go on forever. Well they do go on forever, don't they. Let's say they fascinate the eye. [*All laugh*] Well they do.

Angela describes this scene as if at the time it might only have been she who had seen it, given the advantage of having the view from the front of the house. There is an awareness of being – as the book puts it – 'alone', and yet in Angela's account there is no accompanying feeling of loneliness. She is almost participating in the scene itself, as Beryl also had done in the first session in this chapter, where Angela's 'right over' recalls the lark which Beryl imagines singing 'right up there'.

Ellen still feels that sense in which the passage points above and beyond a solely individual experience even whilst this is what it begins from within. Back in the present tense, she follows Angela's captivation with the 'lovely little golds', beginning to imagine a list of other colours which she discovers 'could go on forever' (that word of hers again), in an infinitude of colour. Another sudden world is opening up to the imagination: one which is not governed by the same laws that operate in the realm of the finite or indeed normally within the walls of the enclosed institution.

We had been in the middle of a sentence however, and the project worker now returns to the reading in order to maintain its own momentum and to continue and further this act of attention:

and one's heart stands still at the strange unchanging majesty of the rising of the sun – which has been happening every morning for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. One knows it then for a moment or so. And one knows it sometimes when one stands by oneself in a wood at sunset and the mysterious deep gold stillness slanting through and under the branches seems to be saying

slowly again and again

Ellen: That's a way a putting it isn't it Jean.

Project worker: It is, isn't it, yeah.

seems to be saying slowly again and again something one cannot quite hear, however much one tries. Then sometimes the immense quiet of the dark blue at night with millions of stars waiting and watching

Angela: That main star's lovely. I watch that for hours.

Project worker: Do you.

Angela: Oh I watch that, absolutely for hours you know, and I love watching that. Just sitting there, and I'm gazing out the window at it you know,

Project worker: I do, 'slowly, again and again'

Angela: That's *my* star I say every time I see it you know. Must think I'm mad.

Project worker: No, no.

Ellen: The stars at night a sailor's delight! [*Laughs*] Go on Jean don't let us interrupt you.

Project worker: Oh no I like it, it's nice.

sometimes the immense quiet of the dark blue at night with millions of stars waiting and watching makes one sure; and sometimes a sound of far-off music makes it true;

Ellen: Oh, there we are. [*Laughs*]

Project worker: and sometimes a look in some one's eyes.

The gently energised atmosphere of close attention, moving between the literature and the people present in the room so that neither is emphasised at the expense of the other, provides an important context for Angela to be able to risk that qualifying statement: 'Must think I'm mad.' It is an expression of trust, both of the fellow group members and the project worker, and an indication of the need to be able to communicate at a direct human level. Although housed within this environment of care in which the nurses would often enjoy a friendly, comfortable banter with

Angela, it was the very safety of such conversation that she did not seem to want here. As a fellow resident on the ward Ellen too is aware of the implications of that word 'mad', yet unworriedly continues, acknowledging Angela from within the position that she shares alongside her: 'don't let *us* interrupt you'.

It is not that Angela does sound mad in this extract, though perhaps if one described her as gazing at and talking to the stars, she might be thought to seem somewhat vacant or wandering by her carers. What distinguishes both Angela and Ellen though is their apparent lack of an inner censor in response to the language of the passage, thus making available experiences that in a more ordinary setting might easily pass unregarded, without being spoken of. The experience of being taken out of oneself, for instance, is fairly recognisable and sought-after. And yet people are often unable to say too much about what this is like, precisely because of the way in which these experiences happen out of context, almost by removing us from the ordinary or the mundane.

Ellen later reviews those few pages which have been read during the session:

Now that's the part of a book I like. The author's done it very well hasn't she. She's spoken every detail that comes to the imaginary thoughts.

Reading is like being 'spoken' to, when it works well, allowing one to hear thoughts 'spoken' that one seems to have had inwardly oneself. 'The imaginary thoughts' thus become a vessel for a kind of shared reality. This makes reading a potentially quite different activity to the dreaming mind's evocation of fantasy.

The context of the passage itself is interesting. Colin, the young boy who for many years has been bedridden and treated as an invalid, has been thinking at length about what it will be like to see the garden in springtime (p. 180). When he is finally wheeled into it, in his chair, he looks around:

And over walls and earth and trees and swinging sprays and tendrils the fair green

veil of tender little leaves had crept, and in the grass under the trees and the gray urns in the alcoves and here and there everywhere were touches or splashes of gold and purple and white and the trees were showing pink and snow above his head and there were fluttering of wings and faint sweet pipes and humming and scents and scents. And the sun fell warm upon his face like a hand with a lovely touch. And in wonder Mary and Dickon stood and stared at him. He looked so strange and different because a pink glow of color had actually crept all over him – ivory face and neck and hands and all.

"I shall get well! I shall get well!" he cried out. "Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!"

The Secret Garden, p. 183.

It is a profound moment, to which Mary and Dickon bear testimony, in their 'wonder' at Colin. For in crossing over this threshold he has suddenly entered into a world that has been waiting for him all along, and which seems to invite him to take his place within it. He can suddenly see what it is to be alive and well, and this gives him the idea that it must be possible for him too; that it *could* be possible, at least in this new-found world. But part of the significance of this lies in the fact that the sudden intuition comes before there has been any real change in Colin's condition: he is still in the wheeled chair. Belief is released in despite of the question of whether it will later be proven correct. But the belief in itself has an effect. For already the person starts to look and to sound different, just as in the session here described. One would not necessarily have known that Ellen was the same person who shuffles (rather than walks) around the ward at a painfully slow pace, and who often struggles to hold a piece of paper due to the strength of the tremor in her arm.

The release was something that the patients would themselves look for. They would ask for poems about children (though not necessarily childhood, a subject which for several patients was associated with traumatic memories or thoughts). But they also liked poems about flowers: young, fresh, growing things. Ellen spoke with great excitement about a strawberry plant that she had been tending in the garden, and was adamant that I accompany her to see how it had grown. I was somewhat

perplexed to find that I could not actually see any evidence of the plant, as she pointed to the little plot of ground lying close to the benches positioned just outside the ward. Perhaps, I thought (disappointedly), it was all in her imagination. And yet there was something impressive in it: in what she had managed to create out of what seemed to me a rather dry corner, where the smokers would sit.

Supplements to the toolkit

What this chapter has yet to show is that added, explosive effect which is produced when the features already identified earlier in this chapter and in chapter one within poetry are translated back out at the macro level or dimension of a human story portrayed usually in temporally ongoing prose narrative. It is here that we see realism's mixtures at work in that simultaneity of different characters and different lives which are being lived sometimes almost in despite of each other. But because there is in this sense more to take in than with poetry, it becomes crucial within a novel to be able to find, as Ellen and Angela did, stopping points within the narrative. These are like the pauses which the structure of a poem formally creates; though the novel form also instils an awareness of the contingency of that pause within a narrative that in reality has no stop. Indeed for some authors even the close of the novel itself does not mark an end, but only a breaking point from which to begin again with the same characters in a new novel.

The very difficulty more generally for the characters created by nineteenth-century realism is that they often cannot experience certain crucial moments in their own story as having that distinct quality of a moment. For within a life which is ongoing, it can be difficult to tell where that pivotal moment might have begun, and when and how it might end. There can be no holds or holding places unless we create them. So for Janet Dempster, in a brief example from George Eliot's 'Janet's

Repentance', the beginning of a new chapter (16) might be a signal of a new chapter in her life also. She seemingly has the chance to be free of her husband after he has thrown her suddenly out of the house. But even the distinction between one day and the next is not clear cut. The chapter has begun without Janet having yet been able to fall asleep, still finding herself caught in the circularity of her own past rather than given the opportunity of a new future:

> Her ideas had a new vividness, which made her feel as if she had only seen life through a dim haze before; her thoughts, instead of springing from the action of her own mind, were external existences, that thrust themselves imperiously upon her like haunting visions. The future took shape after shape of misery before her, always ending in her being dragged back again to her old life of terror, and stupor, and fevered despair. Her husband had so long overshadowed her life that her imagination could not keep hold of a condition in which that great dread was absent; and even his absence – what was it? only a dreary vacant flat, where there was nothing to strive after, nothing to long for.
>
> *Scenes of Clerical Life*, p. 290.

The group within which this passage was read talked about how strange it is that all this movement to and fro is shown as taking place within Janet, whilst she is lying still in bed. 'Where is she?' the project worker asks. The reply from the group is that she does not seem to know herself: she can neither steady herself within the thought of the past, nor that of the present or the future. Suddenly 'everything's come to nothing' for her, one group member comments, pointing to the end of the paragraph. That everything might also be nothing, and hold for her no final meaning, is Janet's great fear here.

It is an instance that emphasises that need from within the novel for the conscious presence of a reader, in whom there is that option to stop and to notice, or to choose a focus point.

In a group that has been reading Dickens's *Little Dorrit*,[177] the decision is made to focus in on a passage from fairly early on in the novel, when Little Dorrit is still in the position of caring for her imprisoned father and justifying him before an actually sympathetic Arthur Clennam:

> If ever pride were innocent, it was innocent in Little Dorrit when she grew boastful of her father.
> 'It is often said that his manners are a true gentleman's, and quite a study. I see none like them in that place, but he is admitted to be superior to all the rest. This is quite as much why they make him presents, as because they know him to be needy. He is not to be blamed for being in need, poor love. Who could be in prison a quarter of a century, and be prosperous!'
> What affection in her words, what compassion in her repressed tears, what a great soul of fidelity within her, how true the light that shed false brightness round him!
>
> [*Little Dorrit*, p. 112.]

Project worker: When you hear her speaking, in that second paragraph, what do you think. 'It is often said.' What did you think as you read that for the second time Liz.

Liz: She's very proud of him, and she sees him as a good man.

Emma: She's not talking from her heart. It's said about *him*, why *they* make him presents. What do *you* think of your father though, she's not actually saying that. So the whole thing, she's at least one step detached. It's what others believe of her father.

Project worker: It's also quite defensive, isn't it.

Liz: Mmm, and it's as if she's coming up with responses to things that Arthur hasn't even said.

Project worker: Yes! That's it isn't it.

There is a second part to this discussion, which follows just below, but it is worth pointing out here that what is coming through in these responses is that sense of how the unsaid is contained within what is said, in the tonal layering of this passage. The reader is also like the listener, Arthur Clennam, silently thinking within whilst listening. These attitudes and stances – the possible defensiveness, and the unspoken

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[177] I am grateful to the members of the MA Reading in Practice seminar group for allowing me to record this session, which was conducted according to the same basic principles as a GIR group.

criticism or protective concern – are a part of that deeper mixture which it becomes possible to read into the prose.

Emma: I want us to go back to the first sentence of it. Pride and innocence. It is pride for – pride situated in - someone else. Is *that* what makes it innocent? I don't know, why …

Project worker: I think situated in someone else is really interesting here. Things being in people – feelings, states – working across the bounds still in place between them. I mean I think the relation of pride to innocent here must be the same as – related to the relation of

Emma: True to false

Project worker: Yes. But whose voice is this? I mean Liz's answer is it's an answer to the unspoken voice of Clennam. That's one good answer. There's a second good answer isn't there, whose voice is this … who does she sound like here?

Liz: William Dorrit

Project worker: The father himself, yes.

These voices heard within prose offer something different to the articulation of silent thought within the Elizabethan lyric. In a way it seems to come closer to the fallen experience of guilt than to the potential within Elizabethan poetry for what might be called emotional purity. For these voices within voices carry overlapping traces of inheritance and influence that even the character themselves may not be able to sort out or fully to realize. This is an act of reading *people* now, not just lines of verse.

But there is an alternative to this which is like the novel's own version of a kind of purity. In *Bleak House,* the revelation of Lady Dedlock to her daughter Esther as her mother is at one level a full revelation of the disgrace allotted to Esther as a result of the circumstances of her birth, which must continue to be kept a secret. And yet it is at this moment that Dickens draws the reader's attention to that overflow of a natural, filial emotion released even in the midst of that realization of the disgrace. Esther thus attempts to answer her mother's plea for forgiveness:

> I told her – or I tried to tell her – that if it were for me, her child, under any circumstances to take upon me to forgive her, I did it, and had done it, many, many years. I told her that my heart overflowed with love for her; that it was natural love, which nothing in the past had changed, or could change. That it was not for me, then resting for the first time on my mother's bosom, to take her to account for having given me life; but that my duty was to bless her and receive her, though the whole world turned from her, and that I only asked her leave to do it. I held my mother in my embrace, and she held me in hers; and among the still woods in the silence of the summer day, there seemed to be nothing but our two troubled minds that was not at peace.
>
> *Bleak House*, p. 565.

One reader commented on the absence of that characteristically urban crowd of people which in the opening of this novel creates a swarm of competing motives and interests. Here the mother and daughter are enabled to see past that which the social world would try to place between them: 'it's person to person, it's face to face', this reader concluded. Yet as readers, we only hear of the encounter after it has happened, via Esther's reported speech, and there is a preserved silence in that lack of an answer from Lady Dedlock. As one woman said at this point: 'she's got the acceptance of her daughter but I don't think she's forgiven herself.' At such moments the novel serves to place an experience that is here being inhabited by two very differently 'troubled minds'. As both receptacle and witness the novel offers to convey the import that Esther's direct speech had held at the time. For the reader here continues to think of what this is holding for the mother: 'she's able to experience the intimacy of the lost relationship with her daughter just in this very, very short space of time, but as she knows she's experiencing it she knows she's going to lose it as well.'

In George Eliot, a similar gap exists between couples as between the generations. But here the realist novel and its reader must work at the macro level silently to bridge that gap which at another level George Eliot herself is also seeking to fill, as that intermediary who yet remains unknown to her characters. In an earlier

scene from 'Janet's Repentance', George Eliot thus allows the reader suddenly to catch a glimpse of Dempster, Janet's alcoholic and abusive husband, guiding his elderly mother gently around the garden in company with his wife:

> The little old lady took her son's arm with placid pleasure. She could barely reach it so as to rest upon it, but he inclined a little towards her, and accommodated his heavy long-limbed steps to her feeble pace. … It was rather sad, and yet pretty, to see that little group passing out of the shadow into the sunshine, and out of the sunshine into the shadow again: sad, because this tenderness of the son for the mother was hardly more than a nucleus of healthy life in an organ hardening by disease, because the man who was linked in this way with an innocent past, had become callous in worldliness, fevered by sensuality, enslaved by chance impulses; pretty, because it showed how hard it is to kill the deep-down fibrous roots of human love and goodness – how the man from whom we make it our pride to shrink, has yet a close brotherhood with us through some of our most sacred feelings.
>
> <div align="right">Scenes of Clerical Life, pp. 244-5.</div>

In the group in which this passage is being read, Clare is struck by how this depiction of Dempster almost does not seem to fit with what the reader had seen of him in another passage, one which the group had previously discussed at some length. There Dempster's 'heavy arm is lifted to strike' Janet (p. 232), in a repetition of that act which for Dempster has become cruelly habitual. 'It's as though this is a different man', Clare now says. 'Yes, it's hard to believe isn't it,' Sue carries on. 'You wouldn't think that a man could be capable of any kind of human kindness when he treats his wife like that.' Anne admits: 'I don't want to like him. But we are being made to feel for him here aren't we? To feel that there is actually something likeable in him.' The project worker steps in at this point to say that this is indeed what thinking is like in a novel, in which different passages are like different places that allow the reader to have separate or opposing thoughts which nonetheless are not the same as contradictions. The project worker also presses further, questioning whether Dempster himself is able to benefit from this moment in which the reader is beginning to accord him a degree of sympathy:

Clare: [*pausing*] It never goes into his thinking does it.

Project worker: No, that's right. And why do you think that is? Why doesn't George Eliot give us the same insight into Dempster's thinking that she lets us have with Janet?

Sue: Because it's not there, maybe?

Project worker: Yes or he is unable to have the thought that the novel is trying to have for him.

Dempster himself knows neither the extent of his own badness nor what is unblighted of his own goodness. That inner voice which the novelist so often is listening out for seems barely to stir in this case. But it is because of that lack of conscious awareness that George Eliot feels such a responsibility to speak out on behalf of that surviving 'nucleus of healthy life'. It is not that this can save Dempster, or help to reverse that process by which his heart has become hard, but it does challenge any assumption that he might be categorised as a certain type and, as such, deserves no further attention. The novel discovers that people are more nuanced, and more capable of surprising themselves as well as those around them, than the normalised labels – often given to vulnerable, troubled individuals – are able to account for.

But it is also important in the novel that people can realize themselves at moments, that not everything is vicarious or unstated. The following comes at the end of that session where the group has been reading *Little Dorrit*. The discussion has moved to the passage in which John Chivery, the spurned, hopeless lover of Little Dorrit, finally gets through to Arthur Clennam the knowledge that Little Dorrit's love has long been committed not to John but to Arthur himself. Love:

> 'For whom?'
> 'You!' said John. And touched him with the back of his hand upon the breast, and backed to his chair, and sat down in it with a pale face, holding the arms, and shaking his head at him.
> If he had dealt Clennam a heavy blow, instead of laying that light touch upon

him, its effect could not have been to shake him more. He stood amazed; his eyes looking at John; his lips parted, and seeming now and then to form the word 'Me!' without uttering it; his hands dropped at his sides: his whole appearance that of a man who has been awakened from sleep, and stupefied by intelligence beyond his full comprehension.

 'Me!' he at length, said aloud.

 'Ah!' groaned Young John. 'You!'

[*Little Dorrit*, p. 762.]

Project worker: I love the fact don't you that it's done twice this 'Me'. That's very deep. What's that about, what did you think?

Elsie: He is finally acknowledging I guess his existence, even like acknowledging that he is a person that someone would love. I love how it stands out in that paragraph when he thinks it for the first time.

Eleanor: It reminds me of what we read last time, John Stuart Mill speaking to himself at the point of his breakdown, as if he had woken from a deep sleep too.

Project worker: [*finding the quote*] 'it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized … would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, 'No!' '

But this is the counterpoint to that isn't it. It's not 'No', it's almost like 'Yes'!

Eleanor: Yes, yes.

Emma: There's something about things being hidden or silent and then things being out loud.

Project worker: Oh, beautifully said, that's lovely. And it's as if we have to have, sometimes we're not aware of it, an inner voice, first of all. This pre-voice, of the 'me', before, for some reason, it can come out. And it's as if that is the working of me, the pre-voice and the voice. I don't know what that's about but there's some deep, deep law here.

Elsie: When he says 'Me', 'he at length, said out loud'.

Project worker: Oh yes.

Elsie: That's more than just right then.

Project worker: It's taken some time for this to come up hasn't it, from the depths. It's a different dimension now. Not just time. Beautiful.

Jilly: And these are the two truth figures in the book and you feel it's so difficult for them to be truthfully themselves. It comes from

somewhere, but it's as if it's the first time he's located it in 600 pages. And yet we believe in him.

The dimensions here seem in one sense to be so much larger than they can be with poetry: it is a large, macro moment fully realized, and morally vital, in a human scene and story with all the consequences at stake at a great turning point. And yet this moment is itself like another version of the discovery of poetry within prose. For those triggered words, the 'you' spoken by poor John, the lover who never succeeded, and then the 'me' twice repeated by Arthur, who never believed in himself, carry the resonance of the voicing of poetry in sound, as though returning to an original life-source in those basic words.

Chapter four will move on from this analysis at the larger scale of the group interaction, to focus on what might be going on in more hidden and quiet ways within individuals as they participate in a reading group over time.

Chapter 4: Introducing individuals

In chapter three the main component features of an analysis of the practice of shared reading were assigned identificatory names and grouped according to type. A clear division was made between the reading of prose and of poetry to reflect the different ways in which these are used within Get into Reading, allowing the group to re-experience the density of a particular human situation, but then also creating an opportunity to inhabit one isolated moment within that ongoing history of a life. This working distinction reflects the form of a shared reading session, where typically the reading of a number of pages of a novel will be followed towards the end by the reading of a poem, which is chosen either to complement or to offset the story. But chapter three has also shown how in the actual experience of reading even these boundaries might seem to shift, so that features of poetry can emerge within prose, whilst the form of the text on the page continues to adhere to the structure of a narrative often with latent stories resonant behind it.

Accordingly, this chapter, like the novel, will go beyond a single session to bring in additional background material in order to allow for a further linear consideration of the significance of a moment in relation to a person's ongoing individual life. It requires and creates an altered structure for the consideration of the personal effects of reading. As in chapter three, however, this chapter begins with two selective accounts from fully transcribed sessions, to recall the overall originating context of joint endeavour and the springs of individualism within it. These are given in preparation for several separate studies of some of the same individuals as they continued to take part in the reading over a period of time.

Glimpsing the background story: reading Elizabeth Jennings

The account that follows is of a session that took place with a group that has yet to be introduced. It meets each week in a public library in a small space at the back adopted for the purpose, and has been advertised specifically to people living in the community who receive ongoing support from specialist mental health services. It is a population that includes people with diagnosed illnesses such as bi-polar disorder, whose condition is stabilised (not requiring acute hospital care) but has to be regularly monitored (manic episodes for instance can begin abruptly, with immediate and escalating effect).

Now in its fourth month, people are continuing to join, but a close-knit group of core members has now begun to form. Few are readers, apart from Jackie, the community mental health nurse, who enjoys popular bestsellers that allow her to 'switch off' after work. None of the other group members is currently in work, and there are often conversations about the difficulty of getting by financially. There are five people present on this occasion, along with Jackie who has been asked to attend each week as a link person, representative of the mental health team. There are two people in the group who tend to be very quiet: a visibly withdrawn woman whose husband brings her to the session and picks her up each week, and a man in his sixties who is always polite yet difficult to connect with as a person. Then there are two women who had known each other before coming to the group: a recovered alcoholic who, as she says, has struggled with emotional problems, and a woman who, always arriving early to get herself settled before the group assembles, seems to rely on having control of her own space. Another woman, younger and with an open, friendly look about her, has been told about the group by her social worker, and has come for the first time.

In the novel that the group is reading week-by-week the father of the protagonist, whose story the book has been tracing from his early childhood, has just died of cancer, not long after the protagonist's quickly arranged wedding. It is one of many moments in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* which have needed to be handled with some sensitivity, given their emotional force – which could be called 'hard-hitting', as one person put it. The poem 'Comfort' by Elizabeth Jennings has been chosen to close the session, though this is not so much an attempt at resolution as a way of recognizing certain feelings and thoughts that the session may have raised.

> Hand closed upon another, warm.
> The other, cold, turned round and met
> And found a weather made of calm.
> So sadness goes, and so regret.
>
> A touch, a magic in the hand.
> Not what the fortune-teller sees
> Or thinks that she can understand.
> This warm hand binds but also frees.[178]

Following the reading there is a pause. The project worker asks what people think of it, whether anyone has anything to say at this point.

Richard: Well I don't really understand it at first.

Amanda: I was thinking the same. I'm glad you said that.

Jackie: I tell you what I didn't understand. The first bit: 'The other, cold, turned around, and met | and found a weather made of calm.'

Project worker: Lines 2 and 3.

These first few moments belong with the examples given in chapter three which are concerned with 'getting in'. This frank acknowledgement that there is a hurdle to be crossed, that even after the first reading there is a sense of not understanding the poem, gives the group something to work at together, thus fuelling that initial stage

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[178] Elizabeth Jennings, 'Comfort' (from *Growing Points*, 1975), in *Collected Poems*, p. 152.

of reading. There would be less to be gained if the poems were easier, so that everyone understood individually straightaway.

Gill: Well that's the one that's receiving the hand. The one that needs comfort.

Richard: Is it just a stranger he's met though? They're shaking hands.

Cathy: Something might have happened, so they're giving the hand to help you, you know to comfort you.

Gill, the woman who is now clear of her alcohol dependency though still physically weakened by its effects, has helped the others through her instinctive understanding of what is going on in the poem. She has often seemed particularly alert to what she has described as the emotional difficulty found expressed in poems. Her use of a vocabulary adjacent to that of the poem – 'receiving' – has also prompted Cathy in her answer about 'giving' a hand. It is a copying or indeed re-creation of the poem's own pattern of the meeting (in pairs) of opposites: binding but freeing, warm against cold. Cathy tends to be strongest in this supportive role or mental position, where an opportunity arises to come in and build upon what someone else has said.

The poem does suggest too a way of holding Richard's idea in relation to that expressed by Cathy. There is both estrangement, in the separateness of the two people, and comfort in the two coming together and meeting. But this is still a bit abstract for this stage. Aware that Richard seems still to be feeling somewhat on the outside, not quite *in* the poem yet, the project worker goes back and reads the poem a second time.

Richard: Is he at a fortune teller's?

Jackie: I suppose you do give them your hand don't you.

Project worker: Literally, yes. It's strange that mention of the fortune-teller in line 6 though isn't it. I mean it doesn't sound like any words are exchanged.

Amanda: 'A touch, a magic in the hand.' Just the physical touch is comforting

isn't it. Just the sheer warmth of somebody …

Project worker: Yes, 'this warm hand'.

Richard: Maybe that second verse is saying you know the fortune-teller doesn't realize the power that she's actually got. And how important just a touch is. Cause she has loads of hands put in front of her. It's just work for her.

Richard begins to see a kind of meaning in the poem. He is taking it too literally of course – since the fortune-teller is used analogously to challenge the assumption of claiming to 'understand' another person. It is the fortune-teller that the poem is actually trying to get away from. But the project worker is loath simply to correct Richard, who is not unlike other group members in finding it hard to get beyond a literal interpretation, as a way of trying to find a location or context for what is going on in the poem. Richard does start to get somewhere imaginatively even within his mistake. Making 'the fortune-teller' into a character introduced by the poem, he is able to guess at the different feelings involved, for the professional – 'it's just work' – and for the person on the receiving end. He adds in front of those phrases offered by the new group member, Amanda – 'just the touch' / 'just the sheer warmth': '*how important* just a touch is'.

There is time for a final reading of the poem, to get a sense of it again as a whole. Richard, feeling more engaged opts to read some of it, taking the first verse. The project worker reads the second. Joan then speaks up – although with the library having reopened after its hour-long close, the atmosphere of concentration in the group is beginning to break down.

Joan: I think it's trying to say that sometimes you don't need any words to be spoken do you and if you, you know just a touch onto somebody …

Jackie: [*having been distracted by library staff*] What was that Joan, what did you say there? We missed that.

Joan: I know. I don't know it's sort of like trying to say that you don't need any words to say [*phone rings, interrupting*] See I'm not meant to say anything.

Gill: Third time lucky Joan!

Jackie: Go on Joan.

Joan: No, I'm done now.

Having taken a risk Joan finds herself somewhat stranded, as the support that she had expected to find in stepping out of her comfort zone, disappears for a moment within the wider world. The project worker's need to keep an eye out for what is happening in the group as a whole (or in the room around it), means that such statements, tentative approaches towards a breakthrough, might still get missed, more frequently than may be ever realized. But there will be a cost to missing them: not only is the breakthrough lost but the new level of confidence that the person is stepping into is potentially curbed.

I will briefly bring to the fore some of the background elements in play here: details of Joan's story which the dynamics of the situation begin to make relevant. She has had contact with the mental health service for a couple of years now, following the diagnosis of her depression and of a personality disorder. But the project worker has been told that Joan has been resistant to the treatment provided, feeling patronised, and somewhat frustrated with the system. Her behaviour suggests that she values the group as a contrast to her experience of various forms of talking therapy. As the quotation above indicates, – 'you don't need any words to say' – she clearly feels strongly about this idea of verbal communication alone not always being useful or necessary. It is thus rare for Joan to talk about herself, and she is often reluctant to answer questions posed directly to her (by Jackie, and the social worker),

even about the reading. She is more likely to volunteer her own response on instinct, without the help of a facilitator's intervention.

On another, later occasion, after a visit to the doctor which had left her feeling 'preoccupied and a little down', Joan would describe the 'tonic' of being able to come to the group and, rather than relay all her problems, spend time in the company of other people, listening. Of the texts that the group has read one of Joan's favourites is 'The Door' by Helen Simpson. The short story features two characters: a bereaved woman whose grief has kept her isolated for some months, and a man from the local DIY shop who arrives to fit her new door. The woman expects nothing but irritation from the visit, and yet the man's manner proves to be in every way opposite to what she had feared. His smile is 'unforced' and 'natural'. The following two sentences indicate the woman's relief:

> He was not going to be chatty, how wonderful; I would be able to trust him and leave him to it and get on with my work … There was satisfaction in two people working separately but companionably in the flat. It was dignified.[179]

Joan liked this passage. Both the story and the poem 'Comfort' share this sense of the *dignity* of being allowed to be side by side, no one person intruding on the other. This unspoken connection and implicit trust of one person by the other is again very much like that quietly direct relation to the literature which Joan is feeling in response to the poem 'Comfort', in contrast to that other form of directness which is often used by those administering the psychological therapy that Joan has received. Something of this theme is apparent as Joan is urged by the others to repeat herself once more despite the interruption:

Joan:　　　　Sometimes you know if somebody's worried about something you don't need to say any words do you, you know you just need to go [*places her hand on Gill*]

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[179] Helen Simpson, 'The Door', in *Constitutional* (London: Vintage Books, 2006), pp. 1-10 (pp. 4, 5).

Cathy:	Touch of the hand.
Joan:	Yeah and that's comfort in itself. And the person who's giving you the comfort they're not saying "I understand how you feel" or, or anything like that. Cause it says the fortune-teller – he's not trying to say "I know how you feel". They just want you to know that
Cathy:	[*reaching out to touch Joan*] They're there.
Joan:	so somebody's there yeah for you.
Jackie:	Like in a friendship.

This extension of response beyond the verbal indicators quoted in the transcripts suggests a sudden increase in involvement. These people are responding to the poem and to each other, and working together now, a bit like the parts of a poem, or a group of musicians playing together. Cathy, despite her characteristic quietness, has stepped up her response to Joan, having seen the opening and the need. Her fillers, by supplying just the final portion of the sentence: a noun phrase ('Touch of the hand') and a short clause ('[to know that] they're there'), help to make sure that what was thwarted earlier will reach a completion not by her interrupting but by her adding-in where a space has been left. She does it without straying from the poem's own use of the third person. It is not 'I'm here' or 'we're here' that she adds but 'They're there'.

Even so, Joan's unfinished formulation 'They just want you to know that …' is probably (thinks the project worker, later) the best account of the unspokenness in the poem. Like the examples found within the sonnet in chapter one, these echoes of unvoiced thought allow us to hear something other than ordinary speech. It would perhaps be better for this to have been left as it was without that closing and normalising explanation from Jackie, who is often keen to make sure that everyone in the group is understanding what is going on, and tries to avoid silences. Joan's

complaint has been in regard to people who, seeking to give comfort, take on an overly familiar manner towards the other person. Their phrasing may be well-meaning but it is almost too *appropriate*, too easily stated as empathy: 'I understand; I know how you feel'. The poem on the other hand holds back from any such confident 'saying'. In Joan's paraphrase the previous order of the pronouns is reversed. 'I know how you …' becomes, in a shift of emphasis from 'I' to 'you', 'They want you to know …' A different more delicate type of knowing is suggested which, along with the poem, 'also frees', leaving space for the other person. A member of another community group in which this poem was read also recognised the importance such restraint within the very form of the poem:

Simon: It's such a short poem, it says it without having too many superfluous words doesn't it. So it's very powerful for such a concise poem.

And there is something extra too in the transcript above: Joan touching Gill, Cathy touching Joan. In this physical acting out of the poem, the language or 'wording' finds its answer in the corresponding behaviour: a touch, the recreation of an impression made by the poem, 'in the flesh'.

For Angela[180] who was to read the same poem in the context of quite a different setting, this impression would be a lasting one, suggesting how there is potential for a fourth stage beyond getting in, staying in and breaking through: the take-away. In this stage what happens after the session may serve as a further sign of some kind of breakthrough that had happened during the live reading. Thus for several months after we had read it together Angela would occasionally make reference to how the poem, of which she had kept a copy, had stuck with her. Angela suffers from a severe mental illness, with symptoms of psychosis and very low mood, and yet is able at times to maintain a level of functioning and clarity of mind

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[180] Cross ref. pp. 122, 138-41.

that many of the other patients on the ward do not have. On one occasion she admitted how difficult this could be for her. Speaking once the session had finished about the failure of her attempts when sitting in the lounge to talk to other patients, and to get a response from them, she commented, 'I think they think I'm looking at them.' In the poem, however, such silence and the sense of isolation that comes with it seems to be abated for Angela:

Angela: There's a lovely one I like. 'Comfort' I think. It's the most loveliest piece of poetry I've ever come across. Very loving it is. It built me.

That the poem is both 'lovely' and even 'loving' suggests its value as a document of human feeling inseparable from literary aesthetics; almost like a person who becomes touchingly present in the reading of it. Where human interaction is missing, and missed, the poem seems to be able to provide a genuine, sustaining form of comfort. 'It built me' is an extraordinary formulation: a language response exceeding normal expression and itself a tribute to poetry, in Angela's learning an enhanced emotional and psychological vocabulary from it.

Glimpsing the difficulty behind the diagnosis: reading Dylan Thomas

The group described below was based in another inpatient facility. But unlike the care home layout of the unit where Angela is resident, this particular group took place within a quite unique environment, in a hospital governed by the highest levels of security, designed to support the provision of specialist care to forensic psychiatric patients. Walking through the security controls for the purposes of each visit, one could not fail to be reminded that these patients have been deliberately placed at a distance from the rest of society. There is a strange feeling (on the other side of the wall) of being in a kind of 'space station', as one project worker said with reference

to another secure environment.[181] The atmosphere is highly regulated, tending towards the exclusion of regular forms of cultural engagement such as might characterise ordinary life, and making much more unusual the normality of certain kinds of human interaction.

There is a feeling of relief for the project worker in getting past each stage – firstly of getting onto the ward, and then getting help from ward staff in order to make the group happen. Now the real work of the reading can begin. It almost feels as if we are on safe territory again now: no longer enemies caught up in the system, but a small group of people brought together for (at least an attempt at) a common purpose. It is different from the sense of a pause from the everyday routines of life which a group in a community setting might give.

The particular focus of this ward is on rehabilitation. It is where patients will be assessed before being transferred out of the hospital, although patients can still be on the ward for several years. The ward manager has been supportive, seeing the group as a further opportunity for patients to engage in socialising and educative activity. A reading group has already been running on the ward for the past two years, as promoted by one of the ward psychiatrists, so a number of patients and staff have become familiar at least with the idea of it happening. As with many long-standing groups, the original group has come to establish its own sense of routine, and will steadily read through a book rather than regularly breaking for discussion. The group have found that this makes for a manageable level of stimulation and group interaction. What has not been tried for a while is using shorter stories or poems. The psychiatrist suggests that starting off with these might help keep the

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[181] Antony Mason, 'Diaries of the Reader Organisation', *The Reader*, 41 (2011), 104-5 (p. 104).

newer group, set up by the project worker for patients who have agreed to be recorded for the purposes of the research, open to a wider number of people.

Dean, the project worker is told, is keen on poetry and has done quite a lot of work on his own painting and writing of verse whilst on the ward. Nigel[182] is also a reader. He is often quieter when Dean is there, and sits at a distance from others. Adam seems fairly neutral in feeling about the group, but is happy to come and read aloud. He is hearing-impaired and as a result has difficulties with speech and in keeping pace with the comments of others.

This time, six weeks in, the project worker has included in the texts she has brought a poem that Dean had asked for the previous week.

Dean: Can you get Dylan Thomas? His 'Do not go into the dark, dark night'. When his father's dying on his bed.

Dean says it is years since he read the poem. He remembers having read it in 'education' – one of the classes that he had taken during a previous stay in prison.[183] Yet Dean interestingly misremembers the first line. It is 'Do not go *gentle* into that *good night'*. The group agree to take turns at reading a verse each.

> Do not go gentle into that good night,
> Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
>
> Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
> Because their words had forked no lightning they
> Do not go gentle into that good night.
>
> Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
> Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
>
> Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
> And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,

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[182] Cross ref. pp. 113-14.

[183] A fairly large proportion of the patients at this high secure hospital are transferred here from prison (and some may be moved back there eventually), once the severity of their mental health needs has been fully assessed. It is a matter of legal judgment whether the patient should be in prison or in a hospital.

> Do not go gentle into that good night.
>
> Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
> Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
>
> And you, my father, there on the sad height,
> Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
> Do not go gentle into that good night.
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.[184]

Nigel is the first to speak afterwards. He picks up on the poem's repeated refrain:

Nigel: Doesn't seem very reasonable does it, raging against dying.

The conversation following the short stories read earlier in the session had been chatty and tangential, leading to questions about the age of the characters and the setting of the stories. But this first response to the poem is immediately to the point. Nigel's tone is an indicator already of the resistance there will be to getting into the poem. As another project worker who has run groups at the hospital put it, 'raging' is not the kind of behaviour that will be encouraged here. Nigel's tag question nevertheless allows Dean room to answer him:

Dean: He doesn't want him to die does he. He's telling him to fight, be strong, fight, not surrender to death. I think that's what he's trying to do.

Nigel: So Dylan Thomas isn't accepting the reality of death then is he?

Dean: No and everybody has a different view of death.

There is a sort of complex negotiation beginning to go on between Nigel and Dean – if, that is, it can get beyond mere argument. The poem has started something; some form of exchange. Nigel is trying to match up what he knows about the world *as it is* with the world of the poem, wanting the two to be aligned. It is important to him to

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[184] Dylan Thomas, 'Do not go gentle into that good night' (1951), in *The Poems*, ed. by Daniel Jones (London: Dent, 1982), p. 207.

keep 'reality' in mind. Dean returns to the line: 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light.'

Dean: I think he should go softly – softly into the light rather than think of it as a darkness. It says you know 'against the dying of the light'.

This is a little strange, as if Dean is suddenly saying the opposite to the poem, replacing the 'should' of line 2 with another alternative. It is the language that seems to have moved him. 'Softly' appears to have come from the poem's 'gentle', and the (notably caring) tone of a 'good night' – both of which Dean originally omitted in his initial misremembering of the opening line. 'Softly' (the word that is now repeated, in place of 'dark') is quite unlike any of the other words in the poem, and is almost another way of fighting the idea of 'darkness'.

Dean continues, launching into an expression of his own beliefs:

I think you become part of the cosmic mind of things. Your spirit moves on from this experience into another and I think that death's just a pathway into that experience. You think of the universe and you know people think of stars and suns and planets, but really, there's nebulaes of nebulaes, and they spit out suns and stars and planets. You think how big is the universe, you can't even fathom it. And so that's the womb of space and that's where all creation begins and not ends. Nothing ends, it just expands and expands …

This is a worrying moment for the project worker. She is not sure how long the rest of the group will tolerate listening to Dean's speech, now that he has turned exclusively to expounding his own thoughts. There is a sort of passion though to what he is saying which seems in some way to have been released by the poem – 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light' – and for this reason she wants to be able to demonstrate to him that she, at least, is listening. The staff member, in an attempt to normalise the discussion a bit, brings in a reference to a kind of popular news item: a spaceship that has been out searching for other life forms for thirty years now. It is something that others in the group might relate to – more easily, at least,

than a personal religious belief – but at the same time it takes us a step further away from the poem into chatty literalness.

The project worker instead goes back to the first line:

Project worker: 'Do not go gentle into that *good* night.'

Dean: So in one sense he thinks it's nothing to be afraid of, but he doesn't want his father to go away – leave him I suppose.

Dean connects for the first time (in this session) explicitly with the poem's personal address, in the last verse, to 'you, my father'. The poem is now shown to be less concerned with fighting death for its own sake than with the feelings of the person who will be left behind. Dean identifies with the son. The little intensification from 'go away' to 'leave him' is another instance of what has already been identified in chapter three as a form of refining.

Adam: I'm just thinking whether I've seen this poem before. Probably at school. It sounds like someone who just doesn't want to go to bed. 'Rage, rage against the dying of the light.'

Adam seems to have been getting frustrated with the talk of death, raising his eyebrows and sighing (more than once). Instead, he points to the time of life that the poem reminds him of: that of a schoolchild, before anything else happened in his life. 'Sounds like' often works as a way of saying 'it reminds me of something I know', although it can be difficult for the project worker to take this any further unless the person is able or willing to say more about that personal identification.

Nigel, who is significantly older than Adam, representing that part of the population within the hospital of patients who have been there for many years, restates his original objection:

Nigel: No, Dylan Thomas is being fundamentally unreasonable.

Dean: Why do you think he's being unreasonable Nige?
[*uses a colloquial, shortened form of N's real name*]

Whilst he may be right to react in this way – for there is a kind of worried desperation in the position that Nigel 'still' clings to – even so this inflexibility is also typical of his way of thinking. Dean's question encourages him to explain a bit more. It suggests at least a possible interest on Dean's part in what Nigel has to say, instead of reacting to defend his own choice of poem. Nigel answers:

> Well he's trying to deny something that is reasonable. 'Though wise men at their end know dark is right': he says that but he's not giving the same advice to anybody. I mean if you've got a clearer idea as opposed to an emotional idea you should be obviously promulgating the clearer idea and kind of accepting the emotion involved but saying that it's the wrong way to react. We've actually had two people die on this ward, well we've had one dead and one on his way, *well* on his way in a hospice. That's been the last fifteen months so there's quite a lot of death floating around the ward even. People aren't necessarily in all that good condition even when they are walking round so we're saying that as well.

The question of whether the poem is promoting the 'right' idea only really matters because of the real-world implications it might have. If one was to stick by what Nigel calls the clearer idea, Dean's 'fight' would certainly be considered 'the wrong way to react'. This over-rationalized emphasis on the real is nonetheless what compels Nigel to divulge the disturbing information to the project worker about the deaths on the ward. It is to take on 'death' as a topic, to extend the reach of the poem beyond the matter of its father-son relation. At this point Nigel's manner seems to the project worker to become almost accusatory, as if the events that the poem speaks to are *too* real. It is as if he wants the project worker to know that the community on the ward, though it may seem secured against the outside world, has its own difficulties and troubles to deal with. This may not be spoken of very often, and it may not be obvious how one should deal with it either, but as both an observer of and participant in ward life (the pronoun 'we' is representative), these situations clearly matter to Nigel. It is as though he *is* affected by the absences, the effect of which is still 'floating around' the ward as if it were a disease or an infection, as he is also by the

people who are present, whom he continues to see 'walking round'. The emotional

and interpersonal recognitions registered here in Nigel's use of language seem

significant given what has been diagnosed as his narcissistic personality.[185] And yet

there are emotions here which Nigel cannot allow himself to have. If one cannot rage

against dying, Nigel thinks, one cannot openly grieve over it either.

Nevertheless a risk is taken by both Nigel and Dean during this session, as

they transcend the everyday to bring deep and difficult content into the conversation,

in a context in which the consideration of safety, of boundaries and even personal

reputations often involves keeping disturbing content out. Dean had already begun to

do this, albeit less productively, with his talk of the 'cosmic mind'. Rather than

ignoring Nigel, as group members may be tempted to do when someone starts to

introduce more discomforting subject matter, Dean now continues to keep the

dialogue open:

> But is he saying that 'though wise men at their end know dark is right', meaning
> that really it's not anything to be afraid of, death – there's more to death than
> meets the eye you know …

The poem is a useful tool for Dean here, a necessary anchor which he almost offers

back to Nigel, who had previously quoted the same line. He is meeting Nigel as if at

the point at which he himself might be 'afraid', and suggests a way in which the

poem tries to counter this: 'dark is right' (bringing this closer to the 'clearer idea'

that Nigel had been wanting to emphasise).

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[185] In the clinical, rather than the literary, sense of the term, where the description is used to indicate a severely disordered personality. The ICD-10 comments with regards to the term 'personality disorder': 'These types of condition comprise deeply ingrained and enduring behaviour patterns, manifesting themselves as inflexible responses to a broad range of personal and social situations. They represent either extreme or significant deviations from the way the average individual in a given culture perceives, thinks, feels, and particularly relates to others. Such behaviour patterns tend to be stable and to encompass multiple domains of behaviour and psychological functioning. They are frequently, but not always, associated with various degrees of subjective distress and problems in social functioning and performance.'
   The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Clinical Descriptions and Diagnostic Guidelines (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1992), p. 200.

In this session Nigel and Dean both seem to be interested in what it means to be 'wise' before death. In some ways Nigel and Dean have based their lives on very different conclusions, which come through in their attitudes towards the poem. What does seem to happen in this session however is that they find a way of not allowing these different starting points wholly to separate them. It was the one session during several months of difficult work on this ward during which there were signs of this group beginning to truly become a group.

Individual stories

The remainder of this chapter will trace the recorded experiences of five very different individuals as they participated in the reading groups. Three of these were introduced in the two accounts with which this chapter has begun. The sections on Nigel, Joan and Angela therefore offer continuations of the stories which these accounts have already provided instances from. This experiment in a different way of writing about the groups began as an attempt to look for something that might serve as an alternative to the language of outcomes, a language that can only be applied to what has already been pre-defined as measurable as in health and well-being questionnaires. This thesis, as a foundational study, has maintained throughout that true significance cannot be proposed in knowing advance of a real happening. In the studies that follow I have therefore tried to learn from individual readers as they are reading, and to use this process as a guide to following the story of certain discoveries that might be made not only about those individuals but also about what reading might be able to give to a person.

These accounts differ from the form of the clinical case study in as much as the perspective that has been taken is that of a project worker responding to, and trying to weigh up her responsibilities in the light of, what she has seen. Whilst in

health settings there will be mechanisms in place to ensure that reading groups, like any other activity, are supervised and well-run, there is a certain degree of autonomy within the project worker role, which may provide a space for insights that would not be likely to occur elsewhere. The very focus of the project worker upon the task of facilitating the reading may potentially keep his or her perspective more open to that which a health professional simply may not be looking for.

Because of the nature of reading, and the kind of open-minded attention that it requires, the project worker cannot view his or her readers according to a type or a history. This is a final reason for including a study of individuals in the thesis. For a type can never serve as a wholly accurate description of an individual, and this is what the study of a reader may begin to illustrate. In one brief example, again from the group who are reading Shakespeare's sonnet 29 in the opening to chapter three, the project worker tries to draw out a conclusion from the poem which might properly offer encouragement to someone suffering from depression. What she says is: 'So there's hope for him.' A group member replies, under their breath: 'almost'. It is another sudden instance of refining, where the general noun 'hope' will not suffice as a summary of experience, the presence of that individual thinker instead requiring this extra grammatical inflection. It is this focus on the individual making often minute adjustments which must alter the relative sizes of experience – as will be seen in different ways throughout the studies that follow.

Nigel

I first met Nigel on a visit to the ward reading group with the psychiatrist. The new group would not be set up for another six months. At the time the group were reading Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Nigel drew my attention by the way in which he kept his eyes fixed on the book almost throughout the whole session. He would carry on

the reading when it came to his turn, but otherwise responded very little to the other people in the room. I wondered what he felt in relation to the book, whether he was moved by it, and whether he and I were both engaged in the same mutual experience of reading as we followed Dickens's thoughts down the page. It was only as I began to learn more about some of the characteristics of the patients on the ward that my expectations of how they might be affected by the literature began to change.[186] In this group it would not be possible to use my own feeling about the text as an accurate measure of what the rest of the group were feeling. Here I felt I was coming up against the challenge that mental illness represents to the ideal of a sharable human experience.

On a later occasion we were reading *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon. The story is narrated by a boy with Asperger's syndrome, in a very matter-of-fact manner, so that the reader is taken aback at times by the content that unfolds. A senior member of staff sitting in on the group described how its emotional impact 'hits you' when the boy finds a letter addressed to him from his now dead mother. A few pages later another member of staff was struggling to keep a straight face during a comic schoolroom scene. Nigel remained apparently unmoved throughout, as if he could see no reason for the flow of the reading to be disturbed.

This apparent lack of emotional response makes the task of the project worker a difficult one, and one response to this difficulty would be to view it negatively as a symptom, an indication only of what Nigel cannot do. Yet Nigel was at the same time the most committed member of the reading group on this ward.

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[186] A staff member who works on the ward and sat in on one of these sessions commented to me afterwards that the problem with personality disorder patients is the way in which they tend to 'break away' from normality. The programme of rehabilitation (a lengthy process) is designed to try to help them to get 'back to' normality.

There were occasions when he would be waiting near the door of the ward for the person who was taking the group to arrive. It was clearly an event that he anticipated and valued as a significant part of his week. This factor alone might suggest that the problem is not to do with what is lacking in Nigel, in terms of a level of feeling or heightened interest in what he is being presented with. As we shall see, it was more as if he struggled to know how to *read* what was going on around him – to make a connection between what he saw and what the feeling might be that ought to accompany or to match that experience.

Nigel would sometimes try almost to talk himself through this process, wondering aloud what the real purpose of an emotional language might be. In one example the session was brought to an end with the poem 'Boy at the Window' by Richard Wilbur,[187] as a way of staying with a child's perspective following another reading during the session of a chapter from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Wilbur's poem reads:

> Seeing the snowman standing all alone
> In dusk and cold is more than he can bear.
> The small boy weeps to hear the wind prepare
> A night of gnashings and enormous moan.
> His tearful sight can hardly reach to where
> The pale-faced figure with bitumen eyes
> Returns him such a god-forsaken stare
> As outcast Adam gave to Paradise.
>
> The man of snow is, nonetheless, content,
> Having no wish to go inside and die.
> Still, he is moved to see the youngster cry.
> Though frozen water is his element,
> He melts enough to drop from one soft eye
> A trickle of the purest rain, a tear
> For the child at the bright pane surrounded by
> Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear.

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[187] Richard Wilbur, 'Boy at the Window' (from *Things of this World*, 1956), in *Poems 1943-1956* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 124.

Nigel began in chatty mode, thinking a bit about how the poem related to the book.

But after a pause he returned to the last line:

> I wonder what 'fear' is being spoken of there at the end of the poem. Any ideas? Are people afraid for you know the welfare of small boys or is he talking about the small boy's fear?

'Are people afraid for …' makes it sound as if Nigel would not know from his own feeling. But he is also aware that this is a feeling that others presumably must know of. He goes on to ask another question, without yet having worked out how to answer this one:

> It's saying 'the small boy weeps to hear the wind prepare'. Now why do, why is the boy weeping. Weeping cause the snowman is standing alone in the 'dusk and cold'. So he's very sympathetic to Mr Snowman. But the snowman's quite happy where he is thank you.

Nigel is concerned about the superfluous expression of emotion in any setting, and remains unsure of what the grounds might be for it. For him the poem seems to inherit this more general difficulty from a world that Nigel does not quite understand or even feel a part of. Yet in the poem the act of mirroring and reflecting back is an attempt to recreate the beautiful: a moment that might overcome that rational separation between the human and the non-human, the inanimate cold and the warm tears. It is a way of re-presenting the human in a form which is alien to it, as 'the man of snow', in order that the feeling can be translated back into life. This is the area that Nigel is (and needs to be) interested in, even if the way he has to express such interest is via a kind of objection to the poem.

The structure of the poem itself offers a possible turnaround in the break between the two stanzas, and the alteration of position that follows. Nigel is almost stuck with the one single position, so that the snowman's contentment makes sense to him, but he cannot then occupy that additional position of the boy who weeps for the snowman. It is as if he needs those others who are also in the room along with

him to be able to represent those possible alternatives. Nigel did ask the project

worker at one stage: 'Have you asked people what their feelings are about this poem

before?' Following Nigel's suggestion a recording was later made of another group

reading the same poem but this time in a community setting. Ideally this might have

served as a prompt for a further discussion with Nigel, but by this point it would have

been difficult to regain access to the psychiatric ward where he had been based.

Chapter five will however provide a number of examples of this process of feedback

to participants about their own or others' reading work.

Here is that other session on the same poem. Rose began by imagining the

child as being the central figure in the poem, and commented on his 'warm, secure

environment' within the house. Though she has no children of her own, Rose has

spent a number of years working in the NHS, carrying out assessments with children

who might require either specialist medical care, certain kinds of physical therapy, or

equipment. But Rose's comments also went beyond what she might identify as the

particular situation of the boy in the poem. She noticed that the poem itself does not

mention any of the other people with whom the boy lives. So instead of turning

inwards to the family environment, in the poem the boy 'seems to be relating to the

snowman like a human being almost,' Rose said. It is this imaginative relation that

triggers a real expression of emotion, which is answered in the second stanza by the

reappearance of that 'trickle of the purest rain, a tear'. Lydia carried on:

> I thought it was interesting like the 'god-forsaken stare' at first and then the way
> that the snowman's tear is *for* the child, it's not for himself. It's like there's not
> much bitterness there, it's just wanting the child to kind of enjoy the full paradise
> that he's got.

Lydia can see that the most rational thing for the snowman to feel might be a kind of

pity for his *own* condition: he, after all, is the apparently 'forsaken' one who is soon

to melt away. But instead of staying stuck within himself he is 'moved' beyond his

own 'frozen … element' to drop a melting tear for the child on the other side of the window pane. 'It's quite reciprocal isn't it, from a distance,' Rose concluded. Nigel on the other hand had continued to grapple with that reciprocity, and a sense of how it might be reached or achieved:

> I keep coming back to this 'so much fear' thing at the end, with the child 'surrounded by' 'so much fear'. I suppose the child is fearful that the snowman's gonna get cold out there. That's a strange thing to think of but that seems to be just about the only problem somebody has in the cold. You know cold climate is – that somebody's going to be damaged by it.

The problem of the 'fear' is exchanged for a problem in the natural: that of literally surviving in the cold.[188] Nigel allows the poem some lee-way – it is 'a strange thing to think of' with reference to a snowman – but he is still trying to make it more manageable for himself. The ungrounded part of him keeps coming back to the 'fear thing', and it is the same instinct which allows him to pull out that word 'damage' in connection with the fear. 'Somebody' is an indicator that there is a thought here which goes deeper and feels more personal than the ostensible subject of the poem: that of a child and a snowman. But it is also that word 'somebody' which seems to offer the first sign of Nigel doing what Rose has pointed to. It is a version of relating, and of using that possible relation to think a thought.

In one of the final sessions on the ward, we read a sonnet by Keats.[189] It begins with the lines:

> Four seasons fill the measure of the year;
> There are four seasons in the mind of man.

Nigel focussed on the part which refers to Autumn:

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[188] I am reminded of a similar 'character' who wanted to refute the Wordsworthian idea of the 'pleasure' that nature is able somehow to inhabit: 'The budding twigs spread out their fan, / To catch the breezy air', Wordsworth's poem says. The reader, 'a man who keeps his powerful feelings well-coated with a glaze of rationality', argued that in reality the unfeeling twigs are simply obeying a natural law of survival.
Jane Davis, 'There Was Pleasure There', *The Reader,* 46 (2012), 81-85 (p. 84-5).

[189] John Keats, 'The Human Seasons' (pub. 1829), in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Barnard (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 232.

> Quiet coves
> His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
> He furleth close;

Nigel: I was just thinking about the ducks, who can fly, but don't do very much of it.
    They are busy furling their wings …

He is referring to the ducks that are often to be seen in the hospital grounds in the area that each ward, housed in its own separate building, opens out onto. Certain patients who are based in the rehabilitation wards can ask to take a walk here, and Nigel does this quite regularly. He has taken an interest in the ducks, and the issue of their safety, realizing the threat of 'damage' posed by other birds. Yet he also seems aware of how he has begun to identify with the ducks as with another kind of non-human living thing:

> But I think they perform a very useful function here reminding us that, you know, the seasons are going round and that kind of social living that they enjoy is also enjoyed by us. I was on an R&R [Reasoning and Rehabilitation] course, let's see, eighteen months ago something like that. And the teacher had us – a big sheet of paper – on a flip open chart. And they said put down all the emotions you can think of. And all the emotions came down, starting with hate, and they came down and down different emotions being written in and suggested. But at the end of it nobody suggested love or friendship at all. You know they were just not there, in the list. So I think the ducks are quite a beneficial aspect of our stay here.

It is a 'useful function' that the hospital authorities, who have arranged for the provision of the R&R course, would not tend to encourage: the ducks are in fact treated as a pest. But for Nigel what he is seeing here is the restoration of a natural order even from within the boundaries of that highly regulated institutional framework. The ducks are for him a vital reminder of what the environment itself seems to argue against: that at some level he does still play a part in this community of living things, however isolated he often appears to be in relation to other people on the ward.

A report on shared reading in prisons has noted the importance of the way in which poetry can convey 'the very feel of the sensory world,'[190] re-evoking the richness of sensuous experience in the context of what is often a tense and jarring atmosphere. In the example above it is actually the word 'furleth' which has caught Nigel's attention, and which he repeats. The physical action of a bird folding its wings triggers his imagination in such a way that he seems almost to be able to feel what that is like. This is an example of Nigel reading, offering a sign of his capacity to respond to the language of poetry, and an indication of where this might lead him to.

The reminders of what Nigel does know, or might be able to access, gain added significance from the fact that he also knows how big the gaps are in his own personal experience. 'Nobody suggested love or friendship at all', he says, of that workshop session when the group were looking at the language of emotions. Nigel understands that these words ought to have a place in the list, and that they stand for something that he ought to be able to relate to. But what he notices is how this is profoundly missing, from his own life, as well as from the lives or at least the mentality of his fellow patients.[191]

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[190] Josie Billington, ' "Reading for Life": Prison Reading Groups in Practice and Theory', *Critical Survey*, 23 (2011), 67-85 (p. 73).

[191] In another example there was one reader that came onto a short stay psychiatric ward for adults, who had been placed under a serious court sentence, and who after several weeks was placed on one-to-one obs after threatening to attempt suicide. The project worker noted how the man had responded to William Blake's 'A Poison Tree'. 'There's only two lines about friendship', he said:

> I was angry with my friend:
> I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

'The rest is about hatred':

> I was angry with my foe:
> I told it not, my wrath did grow.
> And I water'd it in fears...
> And it grew both day and night... *etc*

'It's because there's more hatred. And hatred is stronger than love.' It is as if the accumulation of bad feeling leads to a conclusion that the reader himself cannot find the experience to correct. It again underlines the need for a substitute or reminder like that which Nigel has found in the poem.

William Blake, 'A Poison Tree' (from *Songs of Experience*, 1794), in *Selected Poems* (London:

At an earlier session Nigel had quickly picked up on the word 'healing' in the information sheet that had been prepared for patients who were interested in taking part in the reading group. He understood that the research that the reading group was to contribute towards was focusing on the idea of a kind of literary method of healing or cure. He had then made the following comment:

> I think most of the healing happens in the first few months, when they're getting your medication right. After that it's just waiting.

This was the only reference that Nigel made during these sessions either to the fact that anything had been wrong, or that he was being treated as a patient in the hospital. For him the connection between the word 'healing' and the process of medication felt fairly straightforward. He was not particularly looking for any other additional gains, at least in terms of his own recovery, in the various forms of therapy that he might be offered. And yet Nigel's responses to poetry did at times seem to allow him to tune into a deeper level of vulnerability or need. In the following poem for instance Nigel became interested in the quiet signals that might be given off by a man's outward appearance. The title is 'How to Listen', by the contemporary American poet, Major Jackson:[192]

> I am going to cock my head tonight like a dog
> in front of McGlinchy's Tavern on Locust;
> I am going to stand beside the man who works all day combing
> his thatch of gray hair corkscrewed in every direction.
> I am going to pay attention to our lives
> unraveling between the forks of his fine-tooth comb.
> For once, we won't talk about the end of the world
> or Vietnam or his exquisite paper shoes.
> For once, I am going to ignore the profanity and
> the dancing and the jukebox so I can hear his head crackle
> beneath the sky's stretch of faint stars.

Nigel starts with the end of the poem:

Penguin, 1996), p. 94.

[192] Major Jackson, 'How to Listen' (first published in *The New Yorker*, 2000), in *Leaving Saturn: Poems* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002), p. 74.

> So is Major Jackson trying to hear the 'head crackle' of this man. Trying to kind of sum up what he is as a person. So it's somebody he's had long conversations with previously and 'for once' we're gonna talk about something different. But he has still got something attractive about him, and maybe something to say.

Nigel's thought here seems to come from the same kind of place that his comment about 'waiting' had done. He is familiar with the habit of 'long conversations', introducing this phrase as back up to the poem's 'for once', but for him it is as if these long conversations so often miss the real heart of the matter. There is something else that has not yet been said during the conversation, something that is yet undiscovered about 'what he [the man with the head crackle] is as a person'. After a second reading of the poem Nigel reiterates his point about the 'head crackle', which he says is to do with:

> Trying to work their way underneath the outward signs into what's possibly more real underneath.

He goes on to think about the setting of the poem outside the tavern:

> It's a place where obvious things take place and more subtle things have to be worked on I suppose. With alcohol and I suppose the normal things of life kind of concealing what's going on underneath. But Major Jackson does seem to be saying that there is something of value to be found here, something of value to be detected or listened to, and you've got to learn how to listen beyond what people are actually saying …

For Nigel that 'head crackle' was a way of summing up not the oddity of the man but that 'something of value' which still lay within him. He later continued:

> So Major Jackson is trying to understand one man, how one man ticks, so 'I can hear his head crackle'…

That second, translated idiom, 'how one man ticks', illustrates too how Nigel himself is listening to the poem and alert to the regularity of its inner music. He is discovering how a poem might provide a language for a reality that in ordinary life is easily concealed.

There were further ways in which the reading aloud of the poetry also allowed Nigel an opportunity to listen more closely to other members of the group. In fact he seemed to find a particular role for himself, over the course of a number of sessions, in helping another member of the group with pronouncing unknown or difficult words. Nigel, who had been educated to degree level, admitted at one point to enjoying the opportunity that reading aloud gives to 'show off'. But his approach towards Rick, who is now in his fifties and has only learned to read since having come into hospital, was careful and considered. He would give Rick time to attempt the word first, and then if there was a pause would slowly pronounce it himself, marking each syllable so as to show how to make sense of the way the word is written. He later did the same with Dean who sometimes lacks confidence and has a stammer. In this demonstration of an attentiveness via the language to other group members, it was as if the reading aloud thus became even momentarily a medium for kindly human contact.

These examples of ways in which Nigel was beginning to establish connections and a means of relating within the reading group are still offered in the context of that earlier impression that the project worker had of Nigel as a rather lone figure. Given this background it is interesting that in the last remaining example his response is to that representative human voice of the poem, which he then continues to speak from within. In the poem 'Begin' by Brendan Kennelly the reader is reminded of a series of possible instances of beginnings: 'the sight of light at the window', 'the roar of morning traffic', and so on.[193] But there are also two places that stand out more as *thoughts* about beginning:

Begin to the loneliness that cannot end

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[193] Brendan Kennelly, 'Begin', in (collection entitled) *Begin* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1999), p. 104.

> since it perhaps is what makes us begin
>
> Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
> that always seems about to give in
> something that will not acknowledge conclusion
> insists that we forever begin.

Nigel: He was saying very roughly that beginnings – like the beginning of the day or beginning of activity – is something that is built into us. Although it might appear that, you know, things are ending, or we may have thoughts of things ending, there's something inside us that says, you know, begin. I'd have a hard time saying anything else about it.

Nigel is usually quick to get out a thought and then move on. And yet there are perhaps two big thoughts in what he has said here. It is continuing his interest in what is not quite an inner voice, but certainly an inner prompting that carries something like the force of speech. He is allowing here for a countervailing power that might overrule a thought – the thought of 'things ending' – and in so doing alter the focus of a life. Nigel later came back to the poem's ending:

> I think, 'though we live in a world that dreams of ending', it's, you know, people are looking for a happy conclusion to things – the stories that they read, the day's news – all looking for a happy ending. But we might not be very happy if our dreams did come true, if our wishes were all granted and that. Really, we're meant for something slightly higher than the comfortable ending to the day.

It is the last sentence that genuinely adds something extra to the poem. Nigel has begun to use it to think not only about how we can keep going, or what it is that keeps us going, but about what 'we're meant for'. This is what takes him into the territory of 'something higher', where the word 'slightly' acts as a refiner without merely understating the thought. It adds a kind of poetic tension, as the flipside of the phrase that the poem uses, '*about* to give in'. This is an attempt to generate a language that is more powerful and more poetic than the words that we are used to thinking of as good and positive outcomes as in 'happy' and 'comfortable'. It is significant too that Nigel does not specify or give an example of what that 'something slightly higher' is, or what it would translate into in actuality. It is a way

of feeling for a language for something that exists at another level from those things in the ordinary world which can be named and evaluated. This is like feeling for something to aim for that might take you beyond easier notions of happiness or contentment.

It is a powerful and surprising thought for someone in Nigel's situation to have. It is like looking beyond the 'happy ending' that he may never be able to have. Another project worker writes of her experience of reading Daphne du Maurier with a group of prisoners:

> They focus on the ending. I wonder if endings have particular significance in jail. That's all there is to focus on – lib dates – however far away. They don't like stories that are left hanging in the air, unresolved.[194]

But this is what stories do: they run on indefinitely until an end point can be achieved. Poetry on the other hand is often more content to stay within that pause, and to rethink the possibilities, both past and future. Arguably Nigel's concern is thus with what Wordsworth, in *The Prelude*, famously called 'something evermore about to be' even after that crucial moment in the poem of disappointed expectation (1805, VI, 542).

But there was another final moment which will be important to Nigel's story. During one of the reading group sessions it emerged that Nigel had been doing some further work alongside this in the creative writing classes which he also attended. Encouraged by a staff member, he agreed to read to the group a short piece which he had written during one of these classes. It was a piece in which he remembered being a child of about eight or nine, and going down to the local river. 'Once upon a time,' he begins, 'my sister and I were playing by the river':

> The river's bed varied from one side to the other. Big rocks were washed by deep water on one side, and on the other side the river bed was sandy with shallow

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[194] Kate Hendry, 'Daphne du Maurier Gets the Jail', *The Reader*, 34 (2009), 80-3 (p. 82).

water. Halfway across the clear and bitterly cold water came up to mid-thigh, but the possibility of crossing the river by wading was clearly a peril-fraught one. A strong sense of self-preservation stopped any serious adventures. … In the middle of the river, a dead chicken floated past, bright red of comb, and brown of feathers. Raising our eyes past the chicken we could see the river's width, tempting us again to consider wading across. Instead, thinking better of it, we walked along the rocky bank towards the bridge. Looking down from the bridge the clear water came to an end at the weir across the river. In the space of a single foot, the water changed from transparent, to murky grey where, as we had been told previously, the river received sewage effluent from the town of Richmond. The river was effectively transformed by this act of wanton vandalism into an open sewer, featuring long skeins of dark green water plants waving in the current. Beyond the weir too, the banks had been deliberately worked on by human hand, tightening up the natural sprawl of the water. The murky river, seen from the other side of the bridge, curved round the bend, to become hidden by trees.

This felt almost like Nigel's way of feeding back to the group; of relating something of himself and his own story to others, with whom he characteristically shared very little. It seemed as though the reading had helped to demonstrate to him a way in which he might do that. It was the only time for instance that he made reference to anyone else whom he had known or been close to in his life. Though he does not make any further reference to his sister once he has initially mentioned her, she is implicitly present to him as he describes the scene that unfolded. It is a kind of shared memory that he is representing here, much like that of Hemingway's story *The Old Man and the Sea*, which we had been reading over the previous weeks. But it is also a description that is authentically felt, mapping out Nigel's inner reactions to what he had observed on that day, and indicating his sense of mixed unease and fascination in the face of both the human and the natural world as it had presented itself to him in this early memory before his adult troubles began.

Linda

Linda was briefly introduced in several examples included in chapter three.[195] The following excerpt from an earlier case study of Linda is taken from a report dedicated to the two reading groups that she had begun by taking part in. It describes her state on arrival:

> Linda is in her early 50s. She has learning disabilities and also suffers from depression and anxiety. She lives alone (her daughter is currently in care) and feels quite isolated in her community and local neighbourhood. Due to past experiences Linda is also rather nervous about going out by herself, especially in the evening and outside of her local area. She has also reported that she finds it difficult to trust people. Linda has been attending the centre for over 2 years and this is one of the few places she can go to and mix with other people in a supportive and safe environment.[196]

Linda has herself since that report reflected further on what the experience of reading within a group was like to begin with. She frequently refers back to the group's reading of *Great Expectations* which she now thinks of as her favourite book. It had been 'hard' for her personally, she remembers. Whilst she did not say a lot about this during the recorded sessions of the group, she would later comment that the early chapters of the novel, in which Pip suffers both the violent threats of the escaped convict and the continual threat of beatings from his sister, had brought powerfully back to mind the physical abuse that Linda had undergone as a child, which she still believes was the original cause of her enduring mental health problems. She worries she may have suffered brain damage as a result of serial beatings, though her GP suggests she may be suffering from prolonged mental cruelties. She felt that in these chapters she was herself feeling along with Pip the wounding that he receives from various characters who unfairly wield their own power over him.

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[195] Cross ref. pp. 97-8, 101-2, 119-20, 132.
[196] An Investigation into the Therapeutic Benefits of Reading in Relation to Depression and Well-being, p. 72.

What made this experience an important one for Linda was the opportunity that it gave for reflecting afterwards that she had been able to get through it. When I spoke to her about what it had been like to read those particularly difficult passages, she said:

> If I can't get a funny part, I try to grit my teeth. But I didn't sort of walk out because of it, I still sort of carried on in the group.

One of the main concerns in the treatment of a person who has undergone trauma is that the re-experiencing of it may simply trigger a repetition of the person's originally frightened responses to that primary event. This is acknowledged as a risk attendant upon the use of mindfulness training for instance, in that the process may allow an access of memory and thought for which the trainee or client is not adequately prepared. In the context of the reading group Linda said that on reaching potential trigger points during the session it did feel 'a bit like having a back flash,' but it was different from having the same experience in another context, whilst on her own. The presence of the group and their discussion of what was going on in the book helped her to stay with it, she said, alongside the continued unfolding of Dickens's narrative which added to her involvement with the story on other levels too. As she pointed out, this was not just a story about childhood. Thinking of the different possible endings that she had seen portrayed in both the film and the book, Linda commented: 'I had a feeling Pip and Estella would get together.'

The transcripts provide several instances of what Linda would pick up on and vocalize within the group during the early part of *Great Expectations*. At the conclusion of the first chapter the group try to re-imagine what it would have been like for Pip to enter into the churchyard on his own, and in the dark:

Project worker: I don't know if anyone's got any memories of this. I remember as a child, I used to come back from my nan and grandad's in the car, and as soon as we passed the churchyard I'd actually hide, down in the

backseat.

Linda: I was too scared to walk into it. I was a bit scared to walk into a cemetery when I was younger but it doesn't bother me now. I think I'm used to it now.

Later on in this session as Linda listened to the rest of the group talking, she added:

Linda: I still look behind me when I'm walking. Just on North Bank.

There are certain fears that the force of habit has weakened, and Linda is able quickly to talk herself out of these. But as she begins to stay in the atmosphere of the text, it is the more uncontrolled, irrational fears that start to surface. It is these which continue to bother Linda. 'I don't really like the dark for some reason,' she comments on another occasion; 'I don't really know why.' Behind it, she later told me, was an experience of rape.

It was during the reading of this book that Linda volunteered to read aloud for the first time. She would regularly ask for help with pronouncing a word that she did not know, stopping after every couple of sentences to do so, and said that normally she would have been frightened of being insulted for her poor reading ability. But the group – again in evidence of kind-ness and fellow feeling – enjoyed helping her, and it was during this process that Linda gradually began to develop a greater confidence in reading. In the following example the group are now up to chapter 4:

Linda: [*re-reading from the text*] Whether the church would be powerful enough to shield me from the, what's that,

Project worker: vengeance

John: They used to say like sanctuary you couldn't be arrested in a church sort of thing.

Linda: the terrible young man.

Project worker: Yes, let's look at that sentence in particular.

Linda: Something that's trying to protect.

John: Remember in the hunchback of Notre-Dame he went into sanctuary.

Project worker: Yes, let's just look at that, we'll just read out that last sentence so everyone can hear it, what Linda is picking out. Ok so Pip is going into the church and it says:

Under the weight of my wicked secret, I pondered whether the Church would be powerful enough to shield me from the vengeance of the terrible young man if I divulged to that establishment (p. 23).

So you were interested in that sentence Linda?

Linda: Yes it's something he feels that he will be protected?

Project worker: Yes, so it's a question of whether he can get some protection.

In this brief excerpt John attempts to historicise the vocabulary, remembering that he has previously learned something about the use of the word 'sanctuary'. But Linda immediately picks up on what for her is the key word carried by that almost archaic verb 'to shield'. There is an urgency for her, as for Pip, in the idea of seeking something that will be able to 'protect', and in fixing upon this word Linda instinctively identifies the kind of translation that will make the reading of this novel a deeply live experience.

Linda likes the idea of being an advocate for the reading group, and comments: 'I always say, whatever's buried in your tummy comes up.' This deep personal response to the literature is related to the third kind of breakthrough identified in chapter three under the name 'dimensions and depth'. But it is made more powerful in this example by the fact that the project worker will not always know – and need not, perhaps should not know – exactly what the literature is bringing up for individual readers. As a result the project worker has to remain focussed on what is sharable – that is, the literature – and is permitted not to have to be responsible for offering a treatment or remedy for painful and damaging human experiences that can neither be fully remedied nor forgotten, but remain at once still

private and yet tacitly used and implicated within the group experience. One of the ways in which the project worker does take on a measure of responsibility however is in his or her choice of a poem with which to end the session. In this case one of the poems that the project worker chose to pair with *Great Expectations* was Robert Frost's 'Acquainted with the Night'. A kind of company is offered via the poem, which the group member is enabled to take away with them into whatever situation they may still continue to face.

Joan

Joan, who was first introduced at the beginning of this chapter, had come to the first session of the reading group at the library feeling tense, and not expecting to be able to settle. She said that she was not a reader herself, and would later comment on how reading would never have been particularly encouraged in her family. Joan was conscious of feeling that she had learned very little at school, and of still feeling limited by this lack of education. She did say though that she had been writing poems herself since the age of eighteen. Now nearing forty, she rarely read fiction, but had a collection of true crime books which she had been steadily adding to over the years.

Joan spoke of how she is often uncomfortable in groups, and when on another occasion I attended a poetry workshop with her, she sat right at the back making sure that she could not be seen and that it was unlikely she would be asked a question. She had worked for many years as a qualified chef, having enjoyed the buzz of the kitchens and the demand for speed and efficiency. But several years before coming to the reading group a series of events had led her to a point of breakdown, and since this period her life seemed to have slowed dramatically. Her circle of acquaintances had shrunk to just a few trusted individuals, and the group itself became one of the only regular activities which she would look forward to in a week. It was one of

several attempts that she was making to start her life up again, and yet the sense of

these other losses still continued to weigh upon her.

Joan was the first person in the group to respond to a poem by Mary Oliver in

which the speaker eventually faces up to a person whom for 'a long time' they had

not been able to 'bear' to see. 'A Visitor' opens with the following lines:

> My father, for example,
> who was young once
> and blue-eyed,
> returns
> on the darkest of nights
> to the porch and knocks
> wildly at the door

When, after many nights, the speaker decides to open the door, the father is described

as:

> pathetic and hollow,
> with even the least of his dreams
> frozen inside him,
> and the meanness gone.
> And I greeted him and asked him
> into the house,
> and lit the lamp,
> and looked into his blank eyes
> in which at last
> I saw what a child must love,
> I saw what love might have done
> had we loved in time.[197]

Joan: I think that's kind of saying [*pause*] – father's got older hasn't he and
             the child's grown up and then they've lost that bit there haven't they.

In her phrase 'that bit there' Joan attempts to point to something that even the poem

would struggle to name. It is like the poem's phrase, 'I saw what', which is twice

repeated. There is a recognition of huge blanks in this poem, in its sense of past time,

in the relationship between the father and child, and even in the look in the father's

eyes. But Joan is also interested in the glimpse that the poem provides of what might

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[197] Mary Oliver, 'A Visitor', in *Dream Work* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), pp. 40-1.

once have existed, before the father got older, losing his 'blue-eyed' youth and 'even the least of his dreams'. 'That bit there' might once have been love, or at least the potential for it.

Joan responded at greater length to a poem that we read several weeks after this session. It was the first half of John Burnside's 'Unwittingly' which she felt particularly drawn to:

> I've visited the place
> where thought begins:
> pear trees suspended in sunlight, narrow shops,
> alleys to nothing
>
> but nettles
> and broken walls;
> and though it might look different
> to you:
>
> a seaside town, with steep roofs
> the colour of oysters,
> the corner of some junkyard with its glint
> of coming rain,
>
> though someone else again would recognise
> the warm barn, the smell of milk,
> the wintered cattle
> shifting in the dark,
>
> it's always the same lit space,
> the one good measure.[198]

'There's lots in there that … my mind may have a lot of things …' Joan began. She went back to some of the lines that she had found particularly evocative:

> Like the 'pear trees suspended in sunlight'. Well my mum and dad live in an orchard. And the 'junkyard with its glint' in the 'coming rain': when I was young I always used to go with my dad to the scrap yard, so you know if it had been raining you know, and the sun shining off, they're all stacked up … 'The warm barn' and 'the smell of milk'. Well we used to have jersey cows. It was like a smallholding. So the smell in the barn, the hay, the straw, and milking the cows, mum used to make butter …

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[198] John Burnside, 'Unwittingly', in *A Normal Skin* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), pp. 31-2.

Joan says all this in a rather low and thoughtful tone, and seems to find it hard to pass over these details, which for her are so rooted in the placing of this original home. There is a revived sense of there actually being for her 'the one good measure', a world which was once already complete. There is also a certain appeal for the rest of the group too in what Joan is describing, for none of the other readers around the table would have had a similarly rural upbringing. The sound of it evokes delight:

Julie:　　That sounds – that sounds great.

Terry:　　It does doesn't it, yes!

Julie:　　That sounds fabulous. Do you remember it, are they very happy childhood memories?

Joan:　　Erm I think so, probably, if you dug deep somewhere. Yes. I remember feeding the – we used to have lambs …

At this stage in her life, when Joan thinks back to her childhood, it is more often with a sense of what had begun gradually to go wrong. Her relationship with her father for instance seemed always to have been physically distant even if they were once on better terms than they are now. And yet in those first responses to the poem Joan had had no need for 'digging deep'. She immediately recognised the sensual feel of an experience that she seems largely to have forgotten that she had, there perhaps having been little cause to recall it in such detail previously. Julie asks another question:

Julie:　　Do they have all that still?

Joan:　　No, they haven't, they've moved on to – they've got a garden centre now. They're still in the orchard, they still live there, they still have the land, but they've moved away from the animals. They've had a garden centre for about the last ten years I think …

The poem has made this place live again, as it once was, prior to that changed aspect which it has since come to wear in Joan's surviving memory of it.

A number of months after this Joan was again present during a reading of part of 'Little Gidding', from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. She commented on the following lines:

> At the source of the longest river
> The voice of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree
> Not known, because not looked for
> But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
> Between two waves of the sea.[199]

Joan: I'm thinking of where we lived when I was a child … We had a brook running along the back, it ran under the bridge and it was like a small waterfall as the water hit the stones of the bridge and fell back into the brook which ran all the way back to the sea. I used to fish in the brook … sticklebacks, eels, and once such a small plaice. It was something I loved doing …

Joan always seemed to feel a shock of surprise when these memories came back to her, though in retrospect they clearly follow a similar or recurring pattern. There is a clarity in her response to the T. S. Eliot which suggests too that this goes beyond the recovery of a memory, allowing her suddenly to realize a part of herself that has been almost 'hidden'. Her final comment again stands out: 'it was something I loved doing'. This is the kind of remark that might sometimes be noted with sadness, and if this was a deliberately therapeutic intervention one would perhaps want to recommend a way of taking up the same activity in the present. But what Joan seems to be doing here is simply remembering the quiet pleasure that she had in it, and almost feeling that again, for a moment.

Joan was keen to mention, as the group continued each week, that since attending it she had begun to take up her interest in painting again. She felt that the two were somehow connected in that she had felt a new prompting to get back into it, as she gradually began to feel genuinely part of the reading group. Later she would

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[199] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p. 59.

organise for members of the group a little exhibition of a number of pieces that she had designed to reflect the book that was now being read. But it was principally the poetry that Joan would respond to during the sessions, and after about a year of coming to the group she would describe how she had been framing some of the poems in order that she could hang them next to the paintings in her hallway.

There will be a continuation of this story of Joan in chapter five as part of the process of feedback to group members. It was here, with the more dedicated focus of a one-to-one interview, that I was able to encourage Joan to take the process of the reading itself further.

Angela

The reading group that Angela[200] attends takes place in the early afternoon. When the project worker arrives there are usually a number of patients who are dozing, and there is often a drowsy lull in the atmosphere. Angela tells me that the television, which is always on in the lounge area, can feel 'hypnotising' after a while. There are rarely any signs of communication between patients even in the different rooms that the project worker has to walk through. Angela is often seated on her own, sometimes after having taken refuge in a smaller front room which she likes to call 'the parlour'.

In order to be able to record some of the sessions in which Angela participated, I had first to ask for her consent to this, and to explain what the recordings would be used for. The look of the consent form made her anxious. She was worried that it might be to do with her being 'mental', and that it might mean being moved back to another acute psychiatric ward, which she has previously stayed on. She said on another occasion that she 'would hate to be put away because she

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[200] See p. 160 for cross references to other earlier examples.

was mental,' and was worried that this might still happen to her. She did not seem to be sure of where she actually was at such times.

Angela suffered with very low moods. I would also sometimes find her crying and talking to herself more distractedly. From what she said it appeared that Angela often found herself caught up in what to another person would sound like a strange, otherworldly narrative of events. She talked of being 'burned to cinders' during the night, of having died over and over again, and of there being some kind of requirement that she should fulfil the role of a saviour. But I have deliberately chosen the example of Angela, with a view to exploring how useful shared reading might be to someone who experiences psychosis, and in order to address the possibility that it 'can't work' for such people.

One early discovery was that the effect of the symptoms of psychosis was not necessarily to distort the reading, or indeed to stop Angela from reading at all. When a poem by Emily Brontë was introduced, prefixed by the title and the name of the poet, Angela as if recognizing it or quickly identifying with the poem said: 'Oh I wrote this'. But as well as identifying sometimes with multiple people at a time, Angela was also regularly affected by the voices which she heard. Though Angela's responses to this might seem rather rare or eccentric, it is worth noting that this is a type of experience which has been reported to affect something like ten per cent of the population. It only seems more rare since a significant proportion of this percentage do not seek help for it as a symptom of illness, and instead find other ways of explaining or coping with it.[201] In the reading group these voices would sometimes add to the competing claims upon Angela's attention, including that of the text itself and the other people in the room, thus involving her in multiple

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[201] Richard P. Bentall, *Doctoring the Mind: Why Psychiatric Treatments Fail* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 107-8.

conversations at a time. 'He just said that', she told me one day, at a point when just the two of us were present. At other times her gaze would become fixed and her eyes would glaze over a little, as if the internal voices that she was hearing had become suddenly louder or more insistent. During the reading of *The Secret Garden* I wondered whether Angela was trying at some level to rationalize these experiences. The characters Mary and Dickon develop a special way of communicating with a robin that regularly visits the garden. Angela talked about how a child might imagine from the robin's chirping, that it was talking to them. She made a similar suggestion when we were reading 'Boy and Egg', by a poet who has worked on writing both for children and adults. The poem describes how the boy 'pressed' a newly laid egg 'to his ear', and was 'riveted to the secret of birds | caught up inside his fist'.[202] Angela, thinking that perhaps the boy could hear voices coming from the egg, given 'the house of muttering | hens' that it has come from, commented by way of explanation that 'children can have funny ideas'.

Yet there is a difference between welcome and unwelcome voices; between voices that often threaten or even inflict death and those that might speak of the 'secret' of life. At best, poems might be able to offer the latter, and Angela, one would think, is likely to be particularly attuned to hearing them. But there was also one way in which poetry seemed to remind Angela of a personally known, beneficent voice: that of her father. She knew that he had liked poetry, and remembered him reciting Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' to her when she was younger (another example where Angela said it was her poem; that she wrote it). On at least three occasions she said that she would save the poem we had been reading to give to

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[202] Naomi Shihab Nye, 'Boy and Egg', in *Fuel* (New York: Boa Editions, 1998), p. 102.

her father (whom I doubt that she now sees, if indeed he is still alive). She was quite clear of the poems that he would have liked.

Reading aloud however could still be a discomforting experience for Angela. Her eyesight was gradually worsening, and she also had a fear that she had lost the memory of certain words. 'I was frightened to say those words,' she said after reading out one poem, having been unsure whether she would be able to get the words right. 'They' had 'wiped her memory', Angela had told me more than once; it was 'empty', 'wiped clean'. Whatever this referred to (whether it was the effects of the medication Angela was on, or other treatment she had received in the past, or a kind of persecutory, delusional idea), it certainly represented something traumatic that Angela felt had happened to her.

A fellow group member who had already read out a couple of poems earlier in the session encouraged Angela, another time, to have a go at reading 'A Noiseless Patient Spider' by Walt Whitman. Angela, reaching the third line, protested that she could not continue any further. She had been working through each line very slowly, wondering if it was 'spidder' or 'spider', and reading 'nonseless' for 'noiseless'.

Angela:　　Oh I can't read, pronounce it. I'm just, I haven't got any. I can't put my feeling in – I can't make it look like poetry.

Ellen:　　Don't worry dear.

Angela:　　It's terrible the way it's being read.

Project worker: It's ok, don't worry. Well done for having a go. Ellen you have a go.

Ellen:　　Should I read it? [*addressing Angela*]

Angela:　　Yes you read it, you can put it over better than I can. I can't put it over.

It is being unable to get her feeling out, and into the words, that causes the crisis. 'I haven't got any,' Angela begins to say, but it feels this way because, as she goes on

to say: 'I can't put my feeling *in*'. She remembers having been proficient at reading aloud at a younger age: 'I used to really make poetry sound like it was talking you know.' But now she would tend to worry about how her reading compares with mine: 'I haven't got the same voice.' It is this expressive reading voice that she feels the loss of, as if it had been an essential power, a way of realizing her own self. Now not only do the lines not sound right, but they do not 'look' right to Angela either, as if the difficulty of reading is not exclusively associated either with the condition of her sight or her hearing.

The group's quick response does allow the distress to be contained however. Ellen continues (after her kind 'Should I read it'): 'we're not going different than each other. We carry along.'[203] Carrying *on* keeps the crisis from taking over, but Ellen offers – more than this – to be the carrier, and to carry 'along'.[204] I was often conscious when reading aloud to this group of the need to use my own voice, and eye contact with individual people, to create a kind of invisible net of support, to carry people with me. It was a way of using my eyes to try to interest them in what I was saying with my voice, and of staying with them long enough that they might begin to be able to stay with the text. I noted after one session the 'lifting of [Angela's] gaze until she is looking at me as I am reading'. At the end she had commented: 'it holds you doesn't it'. And on another occasion she told me: 'You hold a person when you read a book, you know.' It is another kind of instance of Frost's 'temporary stay

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[203] C.f. the group-work described in Nigel's story above where helping Rick and Dean with the words becomes a way of supporting the reader in the reading.

[204] Ellen would quite often use phrases like these – which may sound like a slip of the tongue – as a way of getting to the word that she wanted. But there was also another instance when she asked me simply to carry on in the normal sense of that phrase. Ellen had started to look distressed due to the severe and recurring tremor in her arm which had begun to start up again:

Ellen: The shaking Jean.
Project worker: Ah it's ok … Does it help if you have something to hold onto.
Ellen: Oh no. No. You carry on, maybe the story will take my mind off it.

against confusion' which poetry itself has represented since its early foundations in the Elizabethan era. To find this temporary hold, and indeed to be held as an adult, is like having one's own strength reinforced; feeling held together; finding a foothold. It is like the way in which a good poem holds itself together. As Louis MacNeice writes of Yeats's short-line poems (thinking in particular of the collection entitled *Responsibilities*):

> Any one who has tried to write such a poem, when it is not broken into short stanzas, knows how hard it is so to arrange the sentences as to avoid breaking the run of the whole, and so to control the rhythms that the poem does not get into a skid. Yeats, as Mr Oliver St John Gogarty has put it, keeps his poem balanced in the middle of the page; it does not run off into the margins.[205]

The balance is held, even in the presence of the risk that (in the work of another poet) it could break up, and 'run off'. The project worker has to model and to reinforce this same sense of order and balance via the use of her reading voice, maintaining the inner structure of the text even when the outer frame which rhyme would have provided is lacking.

In one session, on a day when Angela had been particularly unwell, I was told by the staff that she had needed to be given extra medication an hour beforehand to calm her. But it was during this session that Angela later made the comment that poetry 'makes your feeling come out', as she attempted to describe that particular way in which it brought relief without blunting a feeling. Again, she said: it 'makes you feel inside true'. Angela's use of this word 'true', an initial instance of a sharpening of vocabulary in response to the reading, drew my attention in retrospect to another little moment in the transcript. As I had re-read the opening lines of Hilaire Belloc's sonnet on the theme of 'May',[206] Angela had come in, as below:

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[205] Louis MacNeice, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1941), (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 105.

[206] H. Belloc, 'Sonnets of the Twelve Months' (from *Verses and Sonnets*, 1896), in *Complete Verse* (London: Duckworth, 1970), p. 5.

> This is the laughing-eyed amongst them all:
>   My lady's month. A season of young things.
>   She rules the light with harmony, and brings
> The year's first green upon the beeches tall.

Angela: That's true. That's bringing the trees alight and the flowers alight, with warmth into the earth for them to grow and get watered and to grow. They come out in May don't they, flowers do.

Angela's assertion of the 'true' might recall for the reader that analogous connection to the constant cyclical patterns of the non-human world which Nigel had re-found via the lines from Keats. The way in which the flowers 'come out' in Angela's observation is like a re-translation via another medium of the sense that her own 'feeling' is now coming out. The world is in some sense renewed by it.

But there is a deeper conviction in the example below where we are reading 'The Word' by Edward Thomas.[207] The strength of Angela's tone as she responds to the poem is in direct contrast to the preoccupied state that I would sometimes find her in, upon entering the ward, where she would look as if she were quietly muttering to herself.

> There are so many things I have forgot,
> That once were much to me, or that were not,
> All lost, as is a childless woman's child
> And its child's children, in the undefiled
> Abyss of what will never be again.
>   … One name that I have not –
> Though 'tis an empty thingless name – forgot
> Never can die because Spring after Spring
> Some thrushes learn to say it as they sing.
> There is always one at midday saying it clear
> And tart – the name, only the name I hear.
> While perhaps I am thinking of the elder scent
> That is like food; or while I am content
> With the wild rose scent that is like memory,
> This name suddenly is cried out to me
> From somewhere in the bushes by a bird
> Over and over again, a pure thrush word.

Angela: I think this is all inside him and it looks like it's come out of him. The

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[207] Edward Thomas, 'The Word' (1918), in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 154.

> word. He mightn't have been well when he wrote it. Or she's upset over something, or something's happened, and he's wrote it, and it's brought memories. Something's been said or something happened and it's brought out all this writing. By her.
>
> … And it's coming out of him now, it's all coming out of him now. He'd had it hidden, or he's been ill and he hasn't been able to bring it out, and now it's coming out now. He's bringing it out now. And it's making him feel better I think in himself.

However obscure this sounds, it is evident from Angela's response that the 'word' has reached her here, tapping into a deep and 'hidden' place (like that of the bird who is heard from 'somewhere in the bushes'). It is as if the non-verbal cry of the bird has resonated with that which Angela has been unable previously to find a language for. It is interesting that the repeated phrase 'coming out' is now converted several times to 'bringing it out'. These are beginning to be *chosen* words, much like that one single 'name' in the poem. The reader is beginning to inhabit the mind of a poet. But what Angela herself recognizes is that this is also somehow connected to 'feel[ing] better' as a result. As in the quotation which in chapter one was located by Wistreich from the writings of a sixteenth century philosopher, the soul:

> standeth in need of speech, of words & of names, by means of which it may utter and publish that, that lieth hid as it were in a deepe and darke place, where nothing is seene [208]

Such spoken utterances may also bear an intrinsic relation to the origins of reading as a praxis. Manguel references a 1976 study by Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, in which Jaynes argued that 'the bicameral mind – in which one of the hemispheres becomes specialized in silent reading – is a late development in humankind's evolution, and that the process by which this function develops is still changing. He suggested that the earliest instances of reading might have been an aural rather than a visual perception. "Reading in the

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[208] Cross ref. p. 43.

third millennium BC may therefore have been a matter of *hearing* the cuneiform, that is, hallucinating the speech from looking at its picture-symbols, rather than visual reading of syllables in our sense."[209]

The story of Angela is thus offered as a reminder that part of the mission of Get into Reading is to get to and access those places 'where nothing is seene', or where as in Angela's formulation 'he hasn't been able to bring it out'. The following diary note is typical of the impression that I would have of Angela both before and after the reading:

> At the beginning Angela had a heavy look about her – her head resting on her hand. By the end she was smiling – grinning; making eye contact, sitting back against the chair and resting her hands on her stomach as if in content.

A longer example is given below where by the time we had come to the final poem, 'The Flower of Mending',[210] only Angela and myself were left in the room. Angela was keen to continue, so I read the poem out as follows:

> When Dragon-fly would fix his wings,
> When Snail would patch his house,
> When moths have marred the overcoat
> Of tender Mister Mouse,
>
> The pretty creatures go with haste
> To the sunlit blue-grass hills
> Where the Flower of Mending yields the wax
> And webs to help their ills.
>
> The hour the coats are waxed and webbed
> They fall into a dream,
> And when they wake the ragged robes
> Are joined without a seam.
>
> My heart is but a dragon-fly,
> My heart is but a mouse,
> My heart is but a haughty snail
> In a little stony house.
>
> Your hand was honey-comb to heal,

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[209] Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: Flamingo, 1997), pp. 46-7.

[210] Vachel Lindsay, 'The Flower of Mending' (from *The Chinese Nightingale and Other Poems*, 1917), in *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 329-30.

> Your voice a web to bind.
> You were a Mending Flower to me
> To cure my heart and mind.

The poet addresses this to 'Cousin Eudora', to whom he paid a visit during a time when he was out of favour with many members of his family and struggling to find sufficient money on which to live. He later writes that 'it was the kind hearts around me in that particular spot that made me want to live.'[211] His aim in response would be to reach through his poetry others who were in a similar state of need. Though the poem begins with the lyric simplicity of a children's rhyme, the 'cure' that is spoken of by the end carries that same transformatory effect which in chapter one was found in Elizabethan verse. The heart, secured in its 'stony house', remembers finally its beloved.

My expectation was that the poem would make Angela think of people in her own life, or even just one person, whose 'hand' or 'voice' had been dear to her. I knew she had a husband who still visited her, and that she was a mother to several children. Yet Angela seemed largely to bypass this aspect of the poem, focussing initially on the non-human – the dragonfly and the snail, and the suggestion of a bee in relation to the word 'honey-comb'. There was then a long pause (twenty-five seconds on the recording). Gradually, Angela then began to wonder about the flower itself. The project worker, waiting to see where she would go with her thought, kept Angela going in the extract below with little repeated signs of verbal agreement ('yes' and 'mmm'):

Angela: Odd isn't it. It's a strange flower: heals, makes honey. And heals the dragonfly … and the snail, when they go on it.

Project worker: Yes. It is a strange flower isn't it.

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[211] To Ethelind S. Coblin (February 23, 1927), in *Letters of Vachel Lindsay*, ed. by Marc Chénetier (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1979), pp. 385-88 (p. 386).

Angela: Yes … It is isn't it I've never heard of a, a mending, mending flower

Project worker: No.

Angela: flower of mending. Don't think so.

It is a new starting point, marked by what Angela has 'never heard of', not what she thinks she might be able to identify.[212] And instead of the hint of danger in her remark about the bee, she now spots that the use of the word 'honey-comb' is in relation to the verb 'heal', which in the alliterative metre of the gently running verse follows after it.

Angela would later say that in trying to get to grips with the poem, 'I had to go all round then … couldn't put my tongue on it.' It is not with her finger but with her tongue that she will try to fix upon what it is that the words of the poem signify, by the process I have described as verbal refining. The pace of thinking is much slower here than in those instances when Angela would suddenly report upon ideas which seemed to have a delusional basis. At one point Angela remembered the poem about tulips which we had read earlier in the session:

Project worker: So maybe it's a tulip of mending.

Angela: Could be couldn't it. [*Pause: 15 seconds*] Or, someone go heaven or
                  something you don't know what, really. Not too sure about it.

It costs Angela a great deal to volunteer this new suggestion. There is something of the ineffable in it, making it harder to get out, but she begins now to allow herself to develop this out loud:

Project worker: Something of heaven?

Angela: [*Pausing*] Could be – it could be in er heaven this, couldn't it.
                  [*Project worker continues to answer encouragingly with 'yes!' and*

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[212] In another example, the first time one woman speaks, after several weeks of having been in the group, is to ask one of these 'wondering' questions. The group are reading Jackie Kay's 'In My Country', and Liz looks up at the project worker, looking for a pause in which to say: 'I wonder what that means – 'an honest river'? I've never heard a river described as 'honest' before'.
   Casi Dylan, 'Beginning', *The Reader,* 47 (2012), 75-80, (p. 79).

> 'mmm'] Flowers – certain flowers, certain flower in heaven. That
> bee's the honey. Here's the snail and the little flower.

Project worker: That's a lovely idea.

There is a clue in the project worker's own tone here, which recalls chapter three where Beryl's response is to a kind of loveliness in the poetry itself. The project worker, feeling excited though still not knowing why exactly, tries to stay with Angela, and to help her to stay with the thought. Angela has been beginning to piece a picture together in her mind:

Project worker: Yeah. Cause you can imagine – that heaven would have

Angela: A beautiful rose garden … so it's all nice flowers you know.

Project worker: Mmm. Mmm. That's a lovely idea.

This suggestion of a whole garden in place of the one flower immediately expands upon what the project worker herself had been thinking of. It also acts as a memory of the third poem we had looked at in this session: Christina Rossetti's 'The Rose'.[213] In the following excerpt the poet addresses the question of where a rose belongs:

> Thou shouldst bloom surely in some sunny clime,
> Untouched by blights and chilly Winter's rime,
> Where lightnings never flash, nor peals the thunder.
> And yet in happier spheres they cannot need thee
> So much as we do with our weight of woe;
> Perhaps they would not tend, perhaps not heed thee,
> And thou wouldst lonely and neglected grow;
> And He Who is All-Wise, He hath decreed thee
> To gladden earth and cheer all hearts below.

After reading this Angela had talked enthusiastically about the roses she had had in her own garden, and how she was sorry not to have been able to continue looking after them. A number of the rose bushes had had to be dug up, she says, as they had gone 'unruly'. The word is another little sign of the influence of a poetic vocabulary

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[213] Christina Rossetti, 'The Rose', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by R. W. Crump (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 557.

upon Angela's own use of language, connecting too with the risk of 'neglect'

imagined by the poem. It is almost maternal (children might be described as

'unruly'), and emphasises the caring role of the human (Angela made reference in

another session to how 'some plants do come up, if you talk to them').

But this also underlines why there has been a need for the rediscovery (from

'below') of that which seems to belong, almost 'by nature', in a 'happier sphere'. It

is the failure to 'tend' that has led to the need for 'mend[ing]': where the person

cannot do it for the flower anymore, and has to allow the flower to do it for her.

Wondering, as she has done previously, if I will think she is 'mental' after listening

to her depictions of heaven, Angela sums up her feeling about 'The Flower of

Mending':

> It's one that heals, a flower that heals – a dragonfly if it's hurt its wings or
> anything, or a snail's hurt himself, or [*inaudible*] that's hurt himself, that heals it.

There is something much more vulnerable about Angela's statement than even

Nigel's word 'damage' might have allowed for. It is her openness to the idea of 'a

flower that heals' which has disclosed the sensitivity, even at the level of the nerve

endings, of 'hurt'. This is the human area that the poem is truly working in, even if

via those little representatives, the fly and the snail. The poetic indicator is in the

shift from 'its' to 'himself'; from the creaturely illustration to the personal depth of

human feeling.

I suggested to Angela that what happens in the poem (to the 'pretty

creatures') is somewhat like the journey that the characters in *The Wizard of Oz* take,

each in pursuit of a kind of cure for their own 'ills', or major shortcomings. I

mention the example of the lion to start with, and Angela then joins in:

Angela: That's right the lion needs courage … And the tin man, normally the
tin man, 'I can't do anything'. As in – 'you can do it, do this, now.'
And he does it. And she – 'I'm not very good myself,' or something.

         'Put these red shoes on.'

Project worker: Yes. Yes that's it. I think it's a bit like that.

Angela: Yes I think it is.

Angela's use of 'I' in relation to more than one of the characters (a step-up from the pronouns 'it' and 'he' used just before) enacts the final breakthrough of this session. For in getting out these inner voices, and articulating these at the same time as she almost comments upon them, presenting each phrase as an instance of a more general attitude or mode of being, Angela suggests a way in which one might learn to talk to oneself differently. The 'red shoes' are a kind of imaginative tool, a way of stepping out of that 'not very good' self, and inhabiting instead that better self which already exists.

For Angela the experience of shared reading thus provided more than a merely positive sense of stimulation and activity. To see Angela reading and responding to poetry, in something of the very manner of a poet, was like watching a person become more alive, in using what she has rather than suffering from it. Her story is perhaps in this sense reminiscent of a more literary case, that of Ivor Gurney, a poet and also a musician. In 1913 Gurney had a nervous breakdown, and in the years that followed suffered recurrent periods of suicidal and psychotic depression. In 1922 he was admitted to an asylum, showing signs of paranoid schizophrenia, after which point he would remain inside an institution for the remaining fifteen years of his life.[214] He would eventually cease producing music – by 1926 the structure of his compositions had begun to 'loosen', showing a 'lack of cohesion'[215] – but he continued to write poetry well into his stay at the asylum. His letters make

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[214] Michael Hurd, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 158.
[215] W. H. Trethowan, 'Ivor Gurney's Mental Illness', *Music and Letters,* 62 (1981), 300-09 (p. 304).

mention of 'the impossibility of serenity for any but the shortest space,'[216] and yet in the following lines he suggests how important it was to him to continue to aspire to the kinds of sane expression made possible by 'the crafted art': [217]

> To some perfection that grows, man's thought wills his hand –
> Roots rent, crown broken, grub-holed, it is drawn upward.[218]

Terry

Terry was involved for about a year in supporting the group that was described in the first account given within this chapter. Aged about forty, he is based as a social worker in the local community mental health team. Terry tells me that the pressures of the workload there, and of the emotional burden attached to the work itself, carries a high risk of burn out. He would hate to end up shutting down to it internally though, as his colleague has done after thirty years in the job. Terry has helped to run several groups previously (seventy per cent of his time is based around supporting activities, he says) although the only groups which the service has committed itself to continuing to provide long-term are those that encourage participation in physical exercise. Terry had not really known what to expect from the reading group. His own interest, so far as reading goes, was in autobiographical and non-fiction writing.

Terry was nevertheless moved by the first story that I had brought, 'The Door' by Helen Simpson. There were several sentences that he picked out and read over again, out loud. The sentence below for instance felt important to him:

> The business of trying to utter natural words from the heart, frank and clear, struck me with dismal force, the inevitable difficulty involved in discovering ourselves to others; the clichés and blindness and inadvertent misrepresentations; but I thought I would have a go anyway.[219]

[216] Ivor Gurney, *Collected Letters*, ed. by R. K. R. Thornton (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1991), p. 375.
[217] 'We Who Praise Poets', in *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney,* p. 110.
[218] 'Of Cruelty', in *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney,* p. 195.
[219] 'The Door', *Constitutional*, p. 7.

Terry later remembered the feeling of awkwardness that had been there in that first session, and the sense of the difficulty of getting past it, where people were almost entirely unknown to each other. At the time he had felt an admiration for this idea of 'trying to utter natural words', largely because he was so familiar with the 'inevitable difficulty' that it entails, particularly given the expectations associated with his professional role. Terry said to me in a private conversation after the group that he would often identify with service users and the problems that they talk to him about, and found it a strain not to be able to respond to these people simply as one person to another. Talking about one's personal life as a staff member (even a staff member who has struggled with the same problems as the service user themselves) is discouraged. But this idea of 'discovering ourselves to others' felt useful to Terry, because of the way in which it highlights that point at which participation turns into a kind of spontaneously triggered sharing, yet without the threat associated with direct confessional exposure or deliberate personal intrusion. It was as if he needed a tool from outside his own professional tool-kit for this kind of subtler sharing.

In the second month a service user who was trying out the group that week volunteered that they liked to read autobiographies. Terry identified with this, saying that he had been the same but that he had enjoyed the variety of what we had read, and that there was something different about this kind of reading: 'it stays with you'. He recalled for instance the second story that we had read, 'Through the Tunnel', by Doris Lessing. It is about a young boy on holiday with his mother, who sets himself the goal of swimming – as he has seen a group of older boys do – through an underwater tunnel hewn out of the rock. He wants to *prove* himself, to demonstrate (to himself) that he can achieve something, and yet it becomes a risky game to play. Terry remembered the story partly for its suspense – it was 'fearful,' he says – but

also commented that he had found it 'relaxing, in a way,' feeling carried along, immersed in the language, even as he was being drawn forward to the approaching conclusion of the plot. He had noted at the time the evocativeness of the language and how it enables you to imagine the scene – as though this created a 'better' experience than actually being able to see it. In the story itself the boy asks his mother for some goggles to aid his swimming:

> Now he could see. It was as if he had eyes of a different kind – fish-eyes that showed everything clear and delicate and wavering in the bright water.[220]

The world of this story felt 'real' to Terry, as if seeing with these 'different … eyes' might give you more access to reality than reading the autobiography of a so-called real person, a celebrity. Terry told us the following week that he had taken the story home and read it with his twelve-year-old son. The son, too, had enjoyed it. This would gradually develop into a shared habit; 'ninety per cent' of the poems that we read in the group Terry would end up sharing with his family, he later told me, thus allowing him to feel a bit more in touch with his son, who was beginning to read bits of Shakespeare in school.

Terry continued to feel engaged by the texts as we moved onto a novel: *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. It is a book about friendship, betrayal and loyalty (and a powerfully masculine version of such ideals), focussing on the relationship between two boys as they grow up, and apart; but it is also about distance and closeness between fathers and sons where the ideal of a kind of equality – as in the brotherhood of friends – is mediated by the vertical fact of precedence over inheritance. One of the saddest parts of the book is about halfway through where the protagonist Amir's father, Baba, dies after having contracted cancer. The scene

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[220] Doris Lessing, 'Through the Tunnel', in *The Habit of Loving* (London: Granada, 1966), pp. 61-70 (p. 65).

describing Baba's funeral and Amir's presence at it is a pivotal one, marking as one group member put it 'the end of one era', with Amir's realization that his identity as Baba's son will no longer have quite the same rootedness (in a physical reality) which up until now has helped to ground him. The event causes Amir to reflect further on the kind of man that Baba was, as Terry picked up:

Terry: There's some powerful stuff in that last bit wasn't there. [*giving an example*] The old story of Baba wrestling a black bear.

[*passage referred to*] 'As words from the Koran reverberated through the room, I thought of the old story of Baba wrestling a black bear in Baluchistan. Baba had wrestled bears his whole life. Losing his young wife. Raising a son by himself. Leaving his beloved homeland, his *watan*. Poverty. Indignity. In the end, a bear had come that he couldn't best. But even then, he had lost on his own terms.'[221]

Terry: You know he's a bit, I think he's a bit of a man's man as well isn't he. You know maybe that's why he was popular amongst the other males. They probably looked up to him, especially the weaker ones who wanted to be like that, so I think that's how he's got most of his popularity. I think a lot of people'd be scared of him, as well, you know.

Jackie: And as the party-goer, he was always the life and soul of the party …

Terry: He's a very able bloke. You can feel his presence coming through in the book can't you.

There were times during the group when Terry would be demonstrably in role, concerned to help prompt some of the quieter group members and to stimulate discussion of the text. At other times, as here, he seemed to speak from a more inward place, as if going off-duty for a moment, having been drawn in by the book. And yet this was in fact the most useful mode that he could be in, in the same way that literature might be therapeutic precisely by not being offered as therapy, as shown in the reading of Elizabeth Jennings's 'Comfort'. Getting into his own conversation with the book, Terry had been unsure whether he liked the character of Baba, noting for instance how he seems to be 'a man of pride' (where Terry himself

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[221] Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 152.

would not want to be thought of in such terms). And yet Terry is drawn to the man. It is as if he is looking for a model, or is at least interested in the different models that a man might measure himself against.

It was at the end of this session that we read the already mentioned poem 'Comfort'. Terry liked it, but often seemed disinclined to stay with a poem for long. There were several occasions when he would put the poem back down on the table after the first reading, as if putting it to one side, having had enough of it. In this case his quick acceptance of the poem's meaning makes his comments seem almost dismissive, although unintentionally so:

Terry: Clever isn't it at the end, very clever.

Jackie: Yes I really like the last line, 'This warm hand binds but also frees.' You're saying yes it's safe to let go – you've got to do the let going. So it's protective and it is 'comfort' isn't it but it's also –

Terry: A gentle hand, a simple touch on the heart. I think that's Hemingway. But I think this is more simplified isn't it.

The notion of cleverness immediately gets Terry onto the wrong track, and gets in the way of the more 'natural words' (to go back to Helen Simpson), that Jackie is trying to get out here.[222] His follow-up reference to Hemingway is indicative of how far Terry is from having got into *this* poem, which needs to be for the moment the only poem in view. (The tendency to drop in references to other writers was noticeable with other members of staff too; an implicit warning to project workers that what may be intended even as an explanatory aid in practice will often have a distancing effect). Even Terry's sense of the poem's simplicity is distracting, for the

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[222] A number of months later, as we were reading the sonnet 'Grief' by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Terry again referred to its cleverness, but this time as part of his struggle to find the right words for the poem: 'The way it's described is a bit, it's clever but it's, it's tricky sort of clever isn't it. It's not straightforward is it. You don't look at it and think, "oh yeah, that's that". It's one of those ones you need to keep reading I think.'

poem is instead full of contrasts and pairs of things, as Jackie identifies even with the tiny word 'also'.

But sometimes a group member was able, without 'trying', to bring a staff member back – to something in the text, or something in themselves – through his or her more uninhibited responses. As we began to pack away, conversations amongst the group continued, during an important moment of transition between a kind of 'group time' and a return to the individual life pattern:

Terry: *The Kite Runner*'s certainly getting more and more interesting every week isn't it.

Jackie: It takes turn after turn after

Gill: Just like life, everybody's life.

Terry: Yeah it does doesn't it, you relate to your own journey don't you.

Gill: Oh yes.

Terry: You know from your own experiences and what you go through.

Gill: Well that of losing a parent is very, it's the worst thing that ever happens to you isn't it.

Terry: Yes, hundred percent on that one.

Gill: [*looking down as she speaks*] You know, especially when you've lost one and you lose the second one, you know, I don't think you ever get over that. [*looking up again*]

Terry: No words, is there.

Gill: No, no, no.

Terry's 'no words' is the kind of response to Gill's body language that the poem has tried to model to the reader. Gill's phrase 'the worst thing' is the alert switch, for Terry, as a sudden downer that contrasts with the group's earlier focus on the appeal of a certain kind of 'comfort'. I had been conscious, when preparing for the session, of the fact that Terry himself had been absent from work for a number of weeks

earlier in the year following the death of his own father. Gill would not have known this. Yet something of the experiences that both Gill and Terry have been through separately becomes shared briefly here. It is not the kind of conversation that would be likely to happen in the whole group context. Gill for instance is quite a private person, and as Terry later said he had always been aware of her characteristic 'restraint'. But it is a moment that is certainly enabled by the events of the session, and by effect of the session upon the group. In this feeling of the aftermath of events it is as though there is a brief realization of that emotional community which Dickens always intended the novel to create. The quiet mutual recognition replaces a need for resolution, or to move on and 'get over' things, as if a bereavement were a hurdle rather than the sign of a suddenly huge gap in experience.

The following week, continuing with *The Kite Runner*, we came to a passage where Amir and his wife begin to talk of starting their own family:

> The idea of fatherhood unleashed a swirl of emotions in me. I found it frightening, invigorating, daunting, and exhilarating all at the same time. What sort of father would I make, I wondered. I wanted to be just like Baba and I wanted to be nothing like him …
>
> [*The Kite Runner*, p. 160]

Project worker: It was interesting that bit: 'what sort of father would I make'.

Terry: Mmm, yeah, 'like Baba' and not like him.

Jackie: I suppose there's parts of every parent that you like, but which parts is he gonna? He doesn't want the part that …

Terry: I can honestly say, I'd like, I like every part of my mum. I couldn't fault her. A lot of people'd say, wouldn't they, I'd like to be like *this* part of my mum, but for me personally. My dad, yeah. Probably like Baba, yeah. It's funny isn't it how we're like that.

There is something beautifully disarming about this sudden discovery of the memory of 'my mum' (utterly different from Terry's mention, on another occasion, of the

standard Christmas present that he had received from her), as if the transcript almost displays her suddenly coming into being for him as a real living person.

But Terry also begins to come to some conclusions, both in terms of why the character of Baba 'sticks out' for him (as he put it on another occasion) so strongly, and what he is to make of the likeness between Baba and his own father. The relationship he has to his father is less straightforward than that with his mother, which must be why he speaks of her first. There is something held back in reference to his father, as if he is still working this one out, just as he is still working on the idea of the kind of person that he himself wants to be.

Quite early on Terry told me he was collecting the poems that we read each week. Two years on, he still has hold of the file of print outs, and returns to look at the poems now and then. It marks a shift from shared to private reading. One of the most important moments in bringing about this shift was perhaps the following, when we were reading Siegfried Sassoon's 'The Child at the Window'.[223] At this stage the group had been together for nine months, and we were now reading through a novel by J. B. Priestley set during World War II. The poem reads:

> Remember this, when childhood's far away;
> The sunlight of a showery first spring day;
> You from your house-top window laughing down,
> And I, returned with whip-cracks from a ride,
> On the great lawn below you, playing the clown.
> Time blots our gladness out. Let this with love abide …
>
> The brave March day; and you, not four years old,
> Up in your nursery world – all heaven for me.
> Remember this – the happiness I hold –
> In far-off springs I shall not live to see;
> The world one map of wastening war unrolled,
> And you, unconscious of it, setting my spirit free.
>
> For you must learn, beyond bewildering years,

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[223] Siegfried Sassoon, 'The Child at the Window' (from *Rhymed Ruminations*, 1939), in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), pp. 252-3.

> How little things beloved and held are best.
> The windows of the world are blurred with tears,
> And troubles come like cloud-banks from the west.
> Remember this, some afternoon in spring,
> When your own child looks down and makes your sad heart sing.

Terry: Best poem yet that.

Project worker: Really?

Terry: Oh wow yeah. Yeah. It's amazing that.

Project worker: I think you should read a bit of it [Terry].

Terry: I could cry!

Jackie: Mmm it's very, very.

Julie's companion: Think you're gonna give that to your children tonight.

Terry: Yeah. Definitely. Yeah. It's lovely that isn't it. Oh. Kept all the rest of the poems. Definitely keeping, that's going into a special plastic wallet.

The group gathers around Terry here, in the transcript, as if the poem suddenly seems lodged in him, and he has almost become it. The poem becomes his to give (to his children), and to keep, in that 'special plastic wallet'. Keeping, remembering and holding 'little things beloved' are what the poem is itself about.

     For my last session with this group I brought along a poem by Alden Nowlan, 'Great Things Have Happened', which I was hoping might prompt reflection on the time that we had spent together, though in such cases the intention is vague and I am untroubled if it is not fulfilled as hoped or expected. The poem compares the greatness of an event such as the moon landing with the small-scale event of three friends, who share a flat, waking before dawn and eating toast together. As it was, the group were not really in the mood to focus, and yet there was a moment just before we finished when Terry interjected:

Terry: It's the last three lines for me.

Project worker: Do you wanna read it [Terry]?

[*Terry reads*]

           [it was like the feeling
  you get sometimes in a country you've never visited
  before, when the bread doesn't taste quite the same,
  the butter is a small adventure, and they put
  paprika on the table instead of pepper,]

  except that there was nobody in this country
  except the three of us, half-tipsy with the wonder
  of being alive, and wholly enveloped in love.[224]

Terry: That seals what it's about doesn't it really. It's about a personal
     experience isn't it. And a global experience doesn't come anywhere
     near that personal experience that they – that person – went through
     on that night.

The global 'doesn't come *anywhere near*' the personal. The frustratingly digressive

conversations about the historical moon landings – a popular kind of response to this

poem – do not come anywhere near to what Terry, customarily a reader of non-

fiction, has been able to find within it. What his response thus offers here is a final

example of what it might mean for a person to become a reader. And for Terry this is

closely linked to the kind of person that he wants to be able to be. It is when he is

reading that his self-consciousness drops momentarily away, and his sense of the

scope open to him becomes suddenly entirely different. At these moments Terry

seems to come into what Nietzsche once described as 'A man's maturity: having

rediscovered the seriousness that he had as a child, at play.'[225]

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[224] Alden Nowlan, 'Great Things Have Happened', in *Between Tears and Laughter: Selected Poems*
  (Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2004), p. 133.
[225] Friedrich Nietzsche, Epigrams and Interludes (94), in *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a
  Philosophy of the Future* (1886), ed. and trans. by Marion Faber (Oxford: Oxford University
  Press, 1998), p. 62.

Conclusion

The conclusion is divided into three summary sections:

Shaping a life

This range of accounts attempts to follow the different shapes of the emerging stories of several individual readers. But what is interesting about these stories is how the shapes that they take convey more than could be told simply from a linear chronological narrative of events. For the effect of the reading operates at a different level from, for example, a staged process of recovery. In these stories the reader or group member is sometimes called *back* to a past, which the narrative of the text that is being offered to the group may happen to recall for the reader. But there is also a sense in which these moments are adding up to some provisional conclusion about the individual, or to some sign of growth or change. In each case a past is brought in as a kind of preparation for a future, instead of having to prevent or to occlude it.

This sense of a preparation for a future is also evident in the later focus of this chapter upon how one might learn to become a reader. The chapter as a whole has looked in detail at what reading might be able to begin to do for a person. In practice this is further sensed in the person that the reader is enabled to become, both within and outside of the different roles that a person might have to occupy in a life.

Writing about individual readers

The perspective from which this chapter has been written is largely that of the project worker. But even this practical vision or way of seeing brings with it an inheritance from a literary tradition. This chapter is an attempt to continue in some modest, minor form the work of the realist novel, which George Eliot would use to integrate not only a host of different characters, but also to examine the connection between multiply different aspects even of individual selves. She describes the experience of

literary reading as that of being surprised *out of* 'a sympathy ready-made' and 'into
… attention'.[226]

A second model for this chapter, also arising out of realism, is the work of the
doctor-writer;[227] itself a hybrid, a somewhat amalgamated position. The motivation
which might lead a person to occupy this position is what makes this interesting. For
it is where the doctor's engagement with his patients generates insights that might
well be surplus to the requirements of the clinical work itself that the doctor begins to
be moved into becoming a quasi-novelist. So it is in John Berger's classic *A
Fortunate Man*. There a country doctor John Sassall acknowledges that in a
professional context, or according to the dictates of professional knowledge, 'the
implications of medical cases are strictly limited'. But to the man who meets his
patients each day, knowing implicitly that any of them could potentially be imagined
as fully as a character in a novel: then this 'strictly limited' view of individual
patients does not even feel possible, let alone sufficient. Berger writes of the contrast
between Sassall and his colleagues: 'the implications for Sassall can be almost
limitless.'[228]

This sense of the limitless carries with it that same democratic relation to size
which was emphasised by the realist novel. Sassall works amidst the utterly ordinary
conditions of a rural community, in which the patients whom he meets tend to be
suffering nothing more than what might be seen as ordinary little human hardships.
And yet to the individual who is suffering it, this notion that the experience is merely
mundane is part of the predicament, when so much that can or must be called small
or normal is at another level large and lasting.

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[226] George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', *Westminster Review,* X (1856), 51-79 (p. 54).
[227] Faith McLellan reviews a number of instances in which this 'type' has been identified and written
about.
  Faith McLellan, 'Literature and Medicine: Physician-Writers', *The Lancet*, 349 (1997), 564-567
[228] John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Fortunate Man* (London: Writers and Readers, 1976), p. 132.

The question of the normal

I have tried to include as large a range as possible amongst the individuals whom I have selected for this chapter, in order to demonstrate the potential reach that shared reading might have across those very boundaries which are often used to distinguish between different types of people. My conclusion, after examining examples from across this range, is that in reading both normal and abnormal are misleading terms across a subtler spectrum of experience. Literature makes for a wider and a higher human norm than we are used to expecting to find. Certain instrumental versions of bibliotherapy may work by helping to reinforce a standard or a norm: it is understandable that one should feel like this in a situation of this kind. But literature offers to expand upon the narrow remit of bibliotherapy by relating back always to individual human experiences within an expanded range of what is to be accepted as human, without any corresponding sense of the reductive or the normalized. 'All we really know about what we are is what we do,' says novelist Marilynne Robinson,[229] and reading in this context is active, is a self-surprising doing.

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[229] Marilynne Robinson, 'Freedom of Thought', in *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (London: Virago Press, 2012), pp. 3-18 (p. 7).

Chapter 5: Reflections and re-evaluations

The principle method in chapters three and four involved the use of transcriptions, offering further time for reflection upon what is often so fleeting, minute or implicit in real-time reading practice, through analysis of language patterns and movements. These chapters offered an essentially literary model for understanding the thinking that was going on in and around the literature itself, by looking at the transcripts in ways analogous to those in which readers examine the texts before them. This final chapter adds a further stage to this process of reflection by reporting back to people who have participated in the reading groups, either as a group member or a project worker, some of the findings of chapters three and four, and seeking their responses in aftermath at a distance from a specific group or text. The reflections in this chapter are thus of a different kind, offering the opportunity to consider how useful the findings of this thesis might be not only to future research in this area, but also to the particular individuals with whom it has been concerned.

Group members have often commented on how the experience of Get into Reading is 'hard to put into words'. In having this thought, often what is meant is not that the shared reading has become a thing of mystery, but that it produces an experience in which there is always the potential for it to mean more than was articulated out loud, both at the time and in retrospect. This thesis is an effort to find, and now begin to test, a language to account more fully for that experience.

The method in this chapter is two-fold. It has involved firstly re-using some of the transcriptions gathered for the purposes of chapters three and four, and reading these again with a range of individuals from outside the research team, in order to gather their reflections on what we have found in the transcripts. The second

procedure has involved carrying out a series of reflective interviews with people who are able to view the shared reading project from a series of different standpoints.

The chapter as a whole is therefore divided into three sections which track the experiences and reflections of i) the reading group member, ii) the project worker and The Reader Organisation and iii) the implication for health services. I have also used this chapter to consider practical conclusions arising from this feedback process as to the different potential uses of those two procedural methods which have here been briefly introduced.

Section 1: The reading group member

This section includes interviews with four different individuals who have previously joined reading groups taking place in community settings. In the first example I introduce a group member who was not involved in the groups described in chapters three and four, but who was interviewed separately about her long overall experience of Get into Reading by a trainee clinical psychologist.[230] It is the first recorded instance that we have of someone reflecting aloud on what it is like to take part in such a group, and why the experience might be different from that of other group activities or counselling classes that could have had therapeutic value. The psychologist herself also commented on this, saying that what had interested her about Get into Reading as she was preparing to carry out these interviews was how it had 'strong clinical value,' but as a 'non-clinical intervention'. I also re-interviewed this participant to bring her experience to the findings of this thesis.

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[230] Eleanor Gray has since completed her dissertation entitled 'Making Sense of Mental Health Difficulties through Live Reading: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Being in a Reader Group'. She is currently working for the 5 Boroughs Partnership NHS Trust, within the eating disorder service.

Olivia

In the first interview, with the psychologist, Olivia remembers how at the time when she first found about the reading group she had been 'very low and down'. She had been sacked from her previous job where she had been bullied for some time. By now she had reached a point where she was beginning to notice that she had become 'very very overweight'.

Olivia describes several ways in which she had tried to get out of her depression. Friends had tried to suggest things that she might enjoy doing: 'a lot of the time', Olivia remembers, 'my friends would say, 'Do you want to come out and do this?' And I would say, 'Oh no, I'm not doing that.' Or they would say, 'You used to enjoy this, why don't you go and do this?' ' In the end Olivia had tried out a drama group, but 'after a few minutes' of being there she had thought 'This is too much', and walked out again. She found that when she was depressed she had a lot less patience, and had attended anger-management classes as a way of trying to address the problem. But the teaching or advice 'was very hard to use', she said, and 'I never used it'. She gave a final example of a kind of group therapy that she had attended in the interests of improving her mental health more generally. 'That was hard', she says, 'because I suppose everybody there had an agenda to talk about'. She felt that people would come to a session with the mind-set that 'I need to talk about this and I'm going to talk about it today'. But Olivia said that in the reading group it was different.

The problem had been that though she knew she needed to reconnect with people socially, for the sake of her own health, inwardly she was aware that what she actually felt in many of these situations was defensively *anti*-social. 'After the being bullied at work, I … I didn't like people much,' she remembers. She felt quite unlike

others around her, 'thinking that I was the only person who had problems … I knew that I wasn't right, but you kind of, you feel that.' As she listened to others respond to what was being read in the group however Olivia described the surprise that she felt upon discovering that she was not the only person who identified with the experiences that were being portrayed in the literature. She gave the example of Mitch Albom's novel *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, which she described as having 'a lot of plot points about not feeling significant in the world'. As others in the group shared how they too struggled with this feeling, Olivia said it made her feel gradually more 'accepting' of them:

> 'Cause some of the people in the group, at first you think, 'oh they're really, you know, they're coping with everything fine', and then they might say something and, you know … they're just, they sometimes feel just as lost as I do.

In my own later follow-up to this interview, Olivia made the further comment that 'even if someone only ever learns how someone else feels, *it's useful*.' She said this as I was showing her a transcript in which a group had been reading from *Great Expectations*. It is a passage from chapter 13 in which the reader follows Pip's account of his own feeling as he brings his uncle Joe, a local blacksmith, to meet Miss Havisham for the first time. Pip shares with the reader a kind of confession of the way in which he responded inwardly to Joe at a time when those very responses had felt like a betrayal of the intimacy that Joe was still assuming existed between them. This is one aspect of what Olivia was pointing out as useful: that the reader is enabled to follow the character's feeling. But she also commented on a part of the following transcript in which one group member is reflecting on the character of Joe:

Project worker: The fact that he feels intimidated, does that tell us anything about what kind of a man Joe is, do you think, at this stage? Or … Does he strike you as a confident man?

John: No, I mean he is a very humble man, and a very nervous man. You sort of feel for him, you know he is very good at what he does, and

that he doesn't need to feel that.

Olivia, thinking of why it might be useful for John to respond in this way, said: 'You can sort out someone else's situation better than your own sometimes. Someone else in the group might have heard that and thought, 'I don't have to feel that'.'

This apparently simple idea that one might not have to have the bad feeling or allow a situation to turn bad became for Olivia a major realization, which she would turn to use in certain examples that she gave from both within and outside the group.[231] But this idea was also made possible for her by an acceptance of the bad feeling itself, an acceptance that she began to develop the more that she saw painful matters occur within the literature, and in the experiences of others within the group. In the transcript that we were looking at, the project worker turned the focus of the discussion about the *Great Expectations* passage from Joe to Pip, and to the question of what Pip was feeling during this interview. 'Embarrassed isn't he,' one group member says. Linda[232] asks for clarification: 'Who is ashamed of who?' The project worker then re-reads the sentence to which Linda is making reference in thinking about shame:

> I am afraid I was ashamed of the dear good fellow – I *know* I was ashamed of him – when I saw that Estella stood at the back of Miss Havisham's chair, and that her eyes laughed mischievously.
>
> *Great Expectations*, p. 92.

It is a sentence that holds together two dimensions of feeling: that of the young boy whose eyes are met by the stunning, dazzling mischief of Estella's, and that of the older Pip who is consciously recalling that which he cannot now go back and correct.

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[231] In the interview with the psychologist Olivia described the kind of thought process which had led her during one session to step in to avert a more serious confrontation developing between two other reading group members. 'I found myself in a position where I wouldn't usually do that, and I found that I suppose if I can do it in that group I can go out and do it in real life,' she said.

[232] Cross ref. beginning of individual story, p. 184.

From his early sense of being ashamed of Joe, Pip is finally ashamed of *himself* for having felt so. In the group itself, Linda responds with another question:

Linda:　　　　　What does ashamed mean, do you feel guilty of something?

John:　　　　　Embarrassed sort of thing.

Linda:　　　　　See what shame says in the dictionary.

Project worker: [*as she leafs through the dictionary*] It's interesting we are going from embarrassed to ashamed and then guilt came out, and I think they are all linked. And they all must fit in to how Pip's feeling.

Linda:　　　　　I think it's the same thing.

Project worker: It doesn't say that much I am afraid. But interestingly it says ashamed means either to feel embarrassed, or guilty. Isn't that interesting …

The dictionary is not used because the people do not know the answer, as if this were a literacy test. Linda's later 'I was right, I was right!' is a moment where she forgets that she has a 'learning disability', as the diagnosis calls it.

Looking at this with me, Olivia commented on how the 'classics' tend to be 'wordier', but described this as an advantage: 'the wordier the book, the deeper you have to go into it'. This attention to the detail of the language within what was being read was something that she had commented on in the previous interview. She spoke then of how other kinds of book groups that she had been along to 'want to *discuss* the books', exchanging opinions. But the phrase that Olivia used to describe Get into Reading carried a different emphasis: 'It's a deeper way of reading I suppose. You can discuss how a line in the book made you feel, not just how the book as a whole made you feel.' And for Olivia this language of feeling, and the regular use of it within the reading group, had not only created a more congenial group atmosphere, but had enabled her to reconsider the problem of her depression. The more she began to feel what she described as a sense of 'belonging' within the group's working

together, the more she realized that 'feeling depressed' had been 'about being alone'.

She had also begun to readdress feelings that she had struggled with for a long time:

'A lot of my anger wasn't me being angry, it was me being sad, but not expressing

that I was sad.' One of the poems that she particularly remembered reading, and had

kept hold of as a reminder, was Blake's 'A Poison Tree'. 'I was angry with my

friend: | I told my wrath, my wrath did end. | I was angry with my foe: | I told it not,

my wrath did grow.'[233]

Olivia spoke warmly of the project worker who had taken the group, and of

the 'personal touch' that she brought to it. For Olivia it had been crucial that the

project worker too would 'discuss how she's feeling'. It offered another version of

the modelling that was being provided within the literature, one which was live and

genuine. Olivia pointed out how different this was to the approach that would be

taken in a more formal therapeutic setting, where the facilitators seemed to her to be

trained almost to appear 'above human'. Reiterating her point about the GIR project

worker, Olivia said:

> So even though they're technically in charge of the group, you know that they
> have feelings too, and that they perhaps have lost their temper, or they have
> experienced this, they have experienced that. Whereas the people in the
> anger-management group, it was just like 'this is what you're supposed to' – they
> never said, you know 'oh the other week I was in Tesco and I felt so frustrated at
> this and I could feel my temp starting …'

The rising temperature and temper is what feeling is like for her: before it becomes

identifiable as a noun it begins simply as a response to a situation. After looking at

the *Great Expectations* transcript Olivia said that what GIR reading groups would

often end up talking about was not so much 'issues' as 'situations': 'everyday social

matters that you don't often sit around and discuss'. Earlier on in my interview with

her Olivia had spoken of the difference between the kinds of conversation that one

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[233] Cross ref. p. 177.

might have with friends, and that which tended to happen within the group. 'Some friends, you can predict what the conversation will be about,' she said. But in the reading group, 'you don't always know what's going to happen'.

Joan

In this second interview with a group member I tried to focus more specifically on one of the texts that had been read in the group sessions that Joan[234] had attended. This has been part of the purpose of the interview process: to see if it is possible to deepen the level of reflection on one's own experience of reading by looking again at real examples of one's own participation, whilst at the same time potentially testing or developing for me my own interpretations of what had happened. Although at the time of the original reading of the poem 'Those Winter Sundays' there was no evidence in the transcript itself of Joan having responded to it, other later responses on her part had suggested that it had held some significance for her: the following week Joan reported to the project worker that she had gone home and written a poem about her father, 'which at the moment is very hard as we don't see eye to eye at the minute'. Much later, in my interview with her, Joan said that her father had printed a copy of this onto parchment paper, which he then sent back to her, in a kind of silent conversation. I actually re-read Robert Hayden's poem with Joan to see if she would say any more about it, given a bit more space and time to reflect. It is a sort of descendant of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. By this point she did not remember the poem particularly, and was able to respond to it afresh:

> Sundays too my father got up early
> and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
> then with cracked hands that ached
> from labor in the weekday weather made
> banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

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[234] Cross ref. beginning of individual story, p. 188.

> I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
> When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
> and slowly I would rise and dress,
> fearing the chronic angers of that house,
>
> Speaking indifferently to him,
> who had driven out the cold
> and polished my good shoes as well.
> What did I know, what did I know
> of love's austere and lonely offices?

'Yes,' Joan said, 'I knew his hands were cracked.' Pointing to lines 3 and 4, she described how her father's hands had been deeply stained by the black oil that was used in his trade, making the cracks in the worn, dry skin show up more markedly. In later years he had developed a skin condition, she said.

For Joan the very accuracy of the way in which the poem's description seemed to fit her father provided a direct route into the poem. But as she continued to point to each line, I wondered if this one-to-one match would prevent her from getting anything extra from the poem to what she already knew. We came to that brief sentence in line 5: 'No one ever thanked him.' At first Joan said: 'Well yes, no-one ever thanked anybody in our house. It was expected.' I could see her imagining herself back in her childhood home, and this seemed to happen again later as she read out line 9, underlining with her finger: 'fearing the chronic angers of that house'. I asked Joan if she thought the sentence in line 5 ('no one ever thanked him') was sad. I was initially surprised as she replied: 'No, there's nothing sad about that at all'. She continued:

> I don't think he [*referring now specifically to the father in the poem*] was the sort of father that needed to be thanked. He *knew*. He's that sort of person: if he didn't want to do it, he wouldn't have done it. You see it made him feel – not wanted – but that he had a purpose, both in the house and in life.

With this thought, Joan was able to move beyond the sense of regret which so often accompanies the reading of this poem, and which her comments on her own

relationship to her family (as shown both here and in chapter four) were often tinged

by. She was prompted to inhabit for a moment a world that the poem makes

imaginatively real: the unseen and unknown experience of the father who worked for

such a long time without thanks. This re-imagining is a literary kind of reflection

which the personal reflection may not necessarily allow for. Indeed, I felt that she

was here using her experience precisely in so far as she felt authoritatively that this

was *not* for once like it had been for her, but something else, even something

imaginably better, unaffected by what had harmed her and her father. This is a

significant mental adaptability. In ordinary human relations, as Buber famously says,

a person will often become assimilated into the It-world, as someone or something

that we can count the characteristics of, or describe as occupying a certain fixed role

or function. But whenever two beings come into relation – 'as soon as we touch a

You' – 'we are touched by a breath of eternal life'.[235] It is these entry-points into a

kind of second person consciousness[236] which literature might remind the reader how

to have.

Joan continued to be interested in the last two lines of the poem: 'What did I

know, what did I know | of love's austere and lonely offices?' It was a bit that she

wanted to come back to, having not been sure exactly what it meant in her previous

encounter, particularly in the case of that more difficult word 'austere'. Joan

wondered about the presence of the word 'love' here. She felt that for the father this

was a love that he 'did not know how to show' openly to the child, except through

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[235] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923), trans. by Walter Kaufmann (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1970), p. 113.

[236] In a section on '*Daniel Doronda* and Second-Person Relations', Miller quotes the example of Deronda modestly removing himself to a third-person perspective from which to view his own rescue of Mirah. In her reply Mirah seeks to pierce through this, and to provoke a deeper recognition: "It was you, and not another, who found me, and were good to me."
Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 71.

the duty of fulfilling those 'offices' which the poem uses to describe him. Joan said that the sadness is of the child in not having known or realized at the time what these meant to the father. 'But saying that, would the words ever have been said?' Joan asked herself, thinking of the words of 'love' or 'thanks' that went unspoken by the child as well as perhaps by the father. 'Back then, probably not,' she concludes. But it is an interesting formulation that enables Joan again to consider this issue of saying and the power of unsaid words.[237]

Following this second reading of the poem Joan spoke of how much she had enjoyed the one-to-one experience of reading in this interview, and of how it reminded her of what had first excited her about the reading group in which she had participated. This collaborative way of reading had been essential, she thought, in creating what she called the group's 'structure', its sense of what it was there for. The actual process of getting into a poem 'would make you think about how it's being translated', she said. This is what would bring about the gains that she reported getting from the group: an 'enjoyment' and 'understanding', as she began to be able to 'visualise' what the poem was speaking of.

Joan felt that this could be recaptured in just the same way in a meeting of two people, one-to-one over the poem. But she emphasised how it could only really work with 'the right person'. She said that with other people (such as friends and family) who had not got into reading themselves, her own attempt to share a poem or to talk about what the reading group was like had not got very far. It was as though 'they were on a different wavelength', Joan said. It is a statement that highlights the ongoing need for the role of the project worker. But it also carries an

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[237] Cross ref. pp. 156-60.

acknowledgement from Joan of just how different literary thinking is both from ordinary thinking and from what ordinary thinking takes it to be.

Beth: 'you don't notice what you're saying as you're speaking'

The third interview was carried out with a reader who had attended a session I had run one evening with a group of friends as a one-off experiment. The interview was arranged so that I could show Beth several excerpts from the transcript of that session, along with my own reflective write-up of that session. The aim was firstly to check whether the process of analysing and reading the transcripts was producing findings that group members would agree with and recognise from their own experience of the sessions. But the other reason for carrying out the interview was to see whether this would prompt any further reflections from the group member on what had been taking place during the session itself.

The part of the session that I chose to talk to Beth about was where we had read the sonnet 'A Child in the Garden' by Henry Van Dyke. Lauren, Beth's sister, had been the first to respond to the poem, excited at the sense of being able to see herself reflected within it. Beth's response however was slower, and marked by a different tone:

> When to the garden of untroubled thought
> I came of late, and saw the open door,
> And wished again to enter, and explore
> The sweet, wild ways with stainless bloom inwrought,
> And bowers of innocence with beauty fraught,
>   It seemed some purer voice must speak before
>   I dared to tread that garden loved of yore,
> That Eden lost unknown and found unsought.
>
> Then just within the gate I saw a child, –
>   A stranger-child, yet to my heart most dear;
> He held his hands to me, and softly smiled
>   With eyes that knew no shade of sin or fear:
> "Come in," he said, "and play awhile with me;
> "I am the little child you used to be."

I showed Beth this transcription. Where Lauren had immediately responded to the turnaround in the final two lines of the poem, and to what is 'found' again here, Beth begins with what has been 'lost'.

Beth:　　　　　I think it's kind of sad … I think it's sad that you know he wants to go back into this garden and he wants to – you know go and explore again – but he's, like he's lost that innocence and he's lost that sort of

Kirsty:　　　　Grown up too quickly.

Beth:　　　　　Yes or just life. Just how life is and what you deal with and what you kind of go through. And you lose that sort of, you know, that innocence and that sort of purity.

Kirsty:　　　　Ignorance?

Project worker: I think the 'purer voice' is quite a key bit isn't it.

Beth:　　　　　Yes.

Project worker: 'It seemed some purer voice must speak.'

Reading this bit of the transcript several months later, Beth is struck by her barely conscious response, at a time when she remembers 'I really was lost'. Her marriage of a couple of years had broken down several months before, and Beth often spoke during this time as if she was struggling to think clearly, but struggling also to admit how she was feeling to others. As Rachel (another member of the group) read this part of the transcript, she commented that Beth did not explicitly refer to any of this in her response to the poem: 'But I suppose in a way that's why it is therapeutic, because you can deal with the issue that's the poem *over here*, rather than actually speaking about your own sorrow.'

　　　Beth's tone as she looked at the transcript was more thoughtful and questioning. Thinking again of the poem's phrase, 'that Eden lost unknown', she wondered: 'Do we *know* that we lose that innocence?' The poem's own discovery comes as a surprise, she noted. But she was also interested in the line that I as the

project worker had highlighted about the 'purer voice', and in where this comes

from. It's 'a fundamental part to us', she said, adding that it came from somewhere

deeper than a person's individual characteristics and opinions. 'We have to get past

what we are to get to that part of us,' she commented, 'because it's not clouded by

life.' This was a voice that existed at a more primary level than a person's later and

particular state of mind, she seemed to suggest. This claim has significant relation to

the Elizabethan purity of voice discussed in chapter one: a near pre-lapsarian poetic

formed out of post-lapsarian predicaments.

We moved on to the following excerpt, in which Lauren had tried to offer

Beth a more reassuring view:

Lauren: It's kind of like the door was open, it's not like it's shut to you, so it's as if you can. For me when I imagined it in my mind it was like wow, the excitement of youth –

Beth: You can go back there again cause it's

Lauren: You *can* go back there again and you *can* be that person. Because the door's open for you and you can walk in. And I like the fact that it was like 'I dared to tread that garden',

Project worker: Mmm.

Lauren: 'that Eden lost unknown and found unsought'. Instead of looking at it with sadness it was like, *yes*! We can go back.

Lauren wants to be able to give Beth the verb 'can' which she repeats

well-meaningly. This was the part of the session which most moved Beth as she read

this for the first time in the transcript. 'This is like therapy!' Beth exclaimed. But she

also recognised that there was something more to the poem than simply the offer or

the permission of being able to 'go back'. And she did not give up on the feeling of

released sadness that Lauren wanted to wish away for her. In this area of feeling, she

said: language is always 'inhibited by time, whereas you can read a poem, and it's

outside of time'. It is a thought that seems to reach for a similar conclusion to that

which has been shown in chapters three and four: a poem might not be able to give you something that you can identify and take away with you as a learning point or a possible solution; but the poem itself does remain as a record and a return, a take away that is secure from time's changes.

Rachel

Rachel kept quiet for the first part of the discussion in the reading of the Henry Van Dyke poem described just above. But she was fascinated later to read the transcript. I have quoted below from the part where Rachel begins to find a place for herself in the discussion:

Beth: I really like where it says 'the sweet wild ways with stainless bloom inwrought, | and bowers of innocence with beauty fraught'. But I'm not, I think someone's gonna have to explain it to me a little bit cause I'm kind of stuck on it. Stainless blooms is that going back to the purity sort of … Or, I don't know.

Project worker: Yes, stainless …

Rachel: So they're not tainted.

Lauren: Yes. Just like magnificent and in bloom and just stunningly innocent and beauty.

Rachel: And 'wild', because they haven't been hampered or tamed …

But though Rachel is happy to offer these suggestions, in line with the poem's own vocabulary and also with Beth's response to it, it soon becomes apparent that Rachel's underlying feeling here is one of frustration:

Rachel: So do you identify with it?

Kirsty: Me?

Rachel: All of you.

Kirsty: I think probably in some ways yes.

Lauren: Do you?

Rachel: Not really. I find it really challenging.

Lauren: Why.

Rachel: Cause I've always. I wouldn't say I remember a time of being 'untroubled thought'.

Lauren: Just, just pure and innocent and harmony that's fine.

Rachel: [*laughs*] No because I've always – felt troubled, so I look back

Beth: Even in your early childhood.

Rachel: Yes.

Beth: Really?

Rachel: So I don't have a time where I look back, massively …

Kirsty: I don't remember my childhood.

Rachel: Well it's patchy but the bits that I remember were stress.

Rachel's phrase 'all of you' carries something of the pain of an outsider, a feeling that is heightened by the group setting, which is likely sometimes to recall other experiences of being in groups. In the interview Rachel expanded upon what this had felt like at the time:

> … as you well pointed out, it became even more of a problem to me, because it made me the outsider in the group, the realization that a) I didn't understand it, b) I don't identify with it, and it's brought up the fact that I don't have untroubled thought, I don't remember that innocence and purity that they were all … They were all talking with some sorrow because 'oh isn't it sad that it's gone,' but I felt even more ostracised from them because I didn't have that, I don't remember that. It was like I just sat there in this little bubble that was apart from everyone here.

This kind of dignified report is a useful supplement to the transcript, in that it gives a sense of the volume of thought lying beneath and behind even some of the shorter spoken remarks that can be heard within the group. There are two main lines of thought to which attention might be drawn within any reading group session: that of the project worker (focussed on leading and guiding), and that of any one of the group members (potentially separate or intermittent). It is likely to be more difficult

to attain a record of the latter, partly because the group member will be less concerned than the project worker to keep track of his or her own thinking process during the course of the group. But in this instance the transcript serves as a sufficient prompt for the group member. And I say this is dignified because it seems to release a second person by the act of reading the first one to be found there in the transcript. It is not that this second self is wholly different from the first or a cure for her. But by such reading, self-reflection does credit to the capacity to be both the self reflected upon and the self that is doing the reflecting. Perhaps this is analogous to a writer being able to write about his or her own situation;[238] perhaps a story or poem may often stand as an imaginatively equivalent first self for the reader to think from; but certainly the creation of this second reflective self however or wherever it happens is an important aspect of human evolution closely related to literature and thinking.

Rachel had spoken on previous occasions of her depression which during her teenage years had been severe, but which she remembered even from early childhood. As the group continued to talk the memory of this isolate feeling seemed again to be present in Rachel's speech:

Beth: I kind of see it as like an ideal. Kind of like a childhood that just, not necessarily your personal childhood but, just that sort of idea of innocence and that idyllic sort of childhood. Do you know what I mean?

Rachel: Yes. But I don't. So I don't identify with this …

To make the reading 'personal' is one possible route into a poem. But Beth suggests another tool for reading, inventing the idea of the 'not personal', 'an ideal'. Rachel however needs something that she *can* connect with personally at this stage. The

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[238] As Edward Dowden, early reviewer of George Eliot, suggests in his description of 'that "second self" who writes her books, and lives and speaks through them'.
    David Carroll, ed., *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 321.

discussion has become too emotionally relevant for her to be able to put to one side

her own 'personal childhood'.

Lauren concludes: 'It's a great poem. I might go back to that garden, a bit

later on.' The group moved on to read several pages from *The Secret Garden*.[239] The

discussion begins with several questions about the plot:

Beth: I wonder what's with that tree.

Rachel: Have you read the book?

Lauren: What's it about, can you tell us.

Rachel begins to retell some of the story to the rest of the group. She finds that more

of it keeps coming back to mind, and at one point stops herself, surprised at what is

happening:

Rachel: Ah. See I love this! This is 'untroubled thought'. From the first one
                 [*the poem*], if we go back and look at that one now I'm quite there
                 with it. Cause, I'm now realizing that my happy memories, I hadn't
                 realized I had them, were from books like this … I wanna read the
                 book. So my 'untroubled thought' places of my childhood

Lauren: Was the secret garden.

Rachel: was disappearing into books. And I *so* wanted the secret garden,
                 desperately. When we used to go places like Speke Hall, I went
                 looking for secret gardens.

The breakthrough that takes place here is marked by Rachel's ability to begin to

reflect out loud on her own experience, instead of feeling inwardly inaccessible to

others, and set apart from what they are able collectively to enjoy. It is important too

that the reflection starts with what is happening in the moment: Rachel first

reconsiders her own reaction to the poem, in the light of what she has found in the

book, before going further back again to speak about her childhood. This anchors the

happening in a present reality. In the interview Rachel later commented:

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[239] Part of the reason for this experiment had been to test the use of the same material with a different
kind of group. In chapter three (pp. 136-43) the demographics and situation of the reading group
members are quite different.

I guess that's, you know the concept of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, it's like that in action. Only without all the official counselling nonsense that you have to write down the thought and then where it came from. That's it in action isn't it.

This interested me: particularly the emphasis in Rachel's repeated phrase ('in action') upon a kind of unprompted process and outcome. Later on in the interview we went back to talk further about this comparison with CBT. But before this Rachel spent some time again reflecting on what she had meant by the association that she makes in the transcript between 'my "untroubled thought" places' and her own book-reading:

> I think for a while, when I was in some of my darkest times of depression, I couldn't read books. I didn't have the attention span to read books at all. So that just shut down completely. When I was coming out of that in my early twenties, I read *Harry Potter*, and that was quite absorbing, and then I read *Twilight*. But it was like the childhood thing of I just disappeared into the book, and the world stopped. I did the things you have to do, so I went to work, and my commitments that I had I went to, but everything else was put on hold. And I don't think that's a particularly healthy thing … So, to have now read *The Secret Garden* again, and ok I wouldn't disappear into it in the same way because I'm not a child anymore so I'm not reading it as a kid, and because I've read it a million times before so it's not something new to me. But it was like, how do you say that, it was almost like closure, it was like full circle of I can look back as an adult, and look back and enjoy it almost. Enjoy the book for what it is rather than 'I need to read this book, otherwise I can't get through' kind of thing. And think of it as a happy thought rather than – I guess I was a bit wary of reading *The Secret Garden* before cause it would remind me of somewhere where I don't particularly want to go back to.

This reflection is partly about recovering the same thing in a different context. But it is also concerned with transitions, and the kinds of thoughts that might enable a person to make these. The biggest transition for Rachel has been between childhood and adulthood, a transition that for her has been blurred by the intermediate years which had followed what she describes here as her depressive 'shut down'. Even the transition out of her depression has taken a lot longer to deal with than might be suggested by her initially improved mood. She has needed new thoughts with which to be able to mark the beginning of a new phase or period in her life.

Reflecting on whether CBT was able to assist in answering this need, Rachel comments that there were aspects of the therapy that she found helpful. But initially she had resented the prescription, when all she really wanted at the age of fifteen was some way of quickly feeling better. But 'the CBT came with the tablets,' she says. After quickly dropping out from any form of psychological therapy, Rachel had tried CBT again in her early twenties. It had worked, she said, because of the gentle guiding of the therapist who had helped Rachel to understand the purpose of her questions. But Rachel had still reacted against the formal prescription of 'homework', which in CBT interventions is designed always to play a crucial part in the control of self. Rachel commented on how difficult it was deliberately to carry out the kinds of rational reflections that were required for the purposes of filling in the form:

> The homework stuff is too clinical, and just basically ridiculous, from a depressed person's point of view … You have to trace 0-10, 'where are you mood-wise,' 'what are you thinking about,' and 'what led to it'. So you have to sit there and think 'Why am I miserable today? It's because so and so says I was horrible at work' … But when you're actually there, and you're in it … you're not gonna go: 'oh! I'm gonna put my depression aside for a minute, and think about *why* I'm feeling depressed' – you're feeling depressed, which means *everything* has a dark cloud around it.

The problem with CBT for Rachel was that the theory behind it seemed to dominate the structure of the intervention itself, and even its practical outworking. It all felt too rigidly neat. But Rachel also described the moment when she realized what it was that CBT was trying to aim at. For her this felt more like having an idea:

> I guess one turning point for me was when she [the therapist] gave me a load of [clinical] literature. As I was reading through – this supposedly helpful stuff – there was this comment that 'you may think you're a giraffe, but you're not'. And so what it was trying to get across, and it really, it stuck with me – I still quote it – was that just because you're thinking something, it doesn't mean it's true. And actually, that is the very essence of what CBT is about.

There is more to be said about the philosophical implications of that idea, and how far it ought and might be implemented as a useful guide to daily living. It is clearly in a related area to the issues discussed in this thesis, but to answer this question would require more dedicated attention than can be given to it here.[240] I have included this quotation from the interview however because of its interest as a reflection upon the 'essence' of that which tends now to be referred to only in the form of a three-letter acronym. It is illuminating moments like these, which are largely unplanned-for, and remembered often only as illustrations or examples of something else, that have formed the subject matter of this thesis. It was not the control of one's own ruminations or the suspicion of one's own thinking that struck Rachel: it was the idea of those things coming *as* a thought rather than as a disciplined lesson not-to-think.

Aware now that she would be familiar with a term which, since the advent of Freud's talking cure, has served as a marker of a key stage to be reached in any course of psychotherapeutic treatment, I asked Rachel whether she would agree with my description of what had happened for her in the reading group as a 'breakthrough':

> I would say that it's not a huge breakthrough, but it was a breakthrough. But it only became real, or completed, when I read this [the write-up of the transcript] … There was something about seeing it in black and white, seeing it in writing and kind of going, 'oh yes, that actually happened didn't it'.

Rachel hoped that some form of feedback to participants would be included in future reading group projects:

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[240] Donald Robertson, a trained psychotherapist, has written about CBT's application of philosophical thought in *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy* (London: Karnac, 2010). Jules Evans has again written about CBT's rediscovery of ideas that are rooted within the ancient tradition of Stoic philosophy in his book *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations* (London: Rider, 2012). But he has also commented on his blog (http://philosophyforlife.org) that the rationalism of such an approach may still have its limits. Darian Leader, who in a review of his book *What is Madness* has been described as 'as much a philosopher as a psychoanalyst', has on the other hand strongly challenged the rise of CBT in recent years. Leader associates the straightforward removal of 'surface'-level symptoms in CBT with the denial of a deeper human capacity for individual thought.

>What you've done is feed back to me what I said, and what I realized on the night, but I didn't realize I realized it … It was almost under the radar wasn't it. I thought it was about a book.

Changing roles: from group member to group leader

The form of the individual story was used in chapter four to identify certain incremental signs of a person growing, and discovering specific areas of his or her own capacity, during the process of reading. One of the questions for this present chapter is whether a person might be able to use these experiences, however fully recognised or not they are; and then whether what is learned or gained through reading becomes transferable to other human situations thereafter.

In the following interview with Clive I asked him about his continuing involvement with The Reader Organisation following his earlier attendance of two weekly GIR groups. After eighteen months he had decided to volunteer to run his own group: a move which is particularly encouraged and supported by the organisation, through the ongoing provision of training and by regular contact with others also leading groups.

For Clive the experience of volunteering had done more than give him a role and a revived sense of a purpose to pursue but had allowed him to take his own reading to another level. He began by describing the significance for him personally of having been able to get back into reading after not having read any literature since school. His first experience of GIR had been on a 'taster day' which he had attended three and a half years previously. It was the first time that anyone had read to him as an adult which felt 'delicious', he says. He remembers the months that followed however as a period in which the stress that he was under, in his position at work, led him almost to the point of breakdown. It was during this time, when he had decided finally to close down his failing business, and was having to make his whole staff

redundant, that he had begun to attend a reading group that was being run in the local arts centre. At the time the group were reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*. 'It was the sound of it' that caught Clive's attention, he remembers. And the 'intensity' of the poem was such that 'it was impossible to think of anything else' for the length of time that he was there in the room. Clive stayed with the group long enough to be able to read both *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. It was a 'quantum leap' for him he says, to begin to be able to get into these epic, cosmic works of literature.

Clive has since had experience of GIR in the context of a number of different settings: attending another group in a local library, as well as training sessions and masterclasses. The more he has observed it happening the more he has begun to notice that in GIR one's own 'susceptibility', as he calls it, is often an advantage rather than a disabling hindrance that might prevent a person from becoming involved. Clive has therefore become interested in reading with people who have suffered badly and endured painful losses. He says that it is only through his own recent experiences that he has begun to discover what moves him when he reads; citing as an example 'Be near me when my light is low', from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Having made this discovery, he is not interested in settling for anything less than that expression of an emotional depth of experience which literature might create room for. For some time, Clive remembers, he had been looking for a capacity in which he might volunteer his time. But the shared reading idea 'was the only thing I have found that provided the kind of meaning I needed', he said.

Clive runs a group in a hostel for men who are homeless, a number of whom have drug and alcohol addictions. He stresses that this is a 'gritty' setting, and yet at the same time comments that the experience of reading with these men has

completely worked against the kinds of expectations that he would have had of them. He speaks of how his 'entire outlook on life' has shifted, to include 'a group of people that weren't on my radar', people of whom he would previously have felt very judgmental. He comments on the way in which he and the other men who attend now relate to each other within the group: 'nobody needs to say "what we say in here is confidential" – it just is.' It is different from the relationship that other members of staff in the hostel have with the men. 'I know a lot more about what's going on than the case worker', Clive admits.

One of the books that Clive has read in the hostel is John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. He describes it as the story of a certain 'dream' which sustains the two characters George and Lennie with the imagined possibility of finally settling in a home of their own. The writing resonated powerfully with the men in the hostel, Clive felt, partly because of the way in which this dream would keep 'recurring', never quite to be lost, even in despite of the actual circumstances that the characters knew themselves to be in. But Clive also mentions how he has continued to develop his own personal reading, both of poetry and novels. For him it is an ongoing journey: 'It is my Odyssey', he says. But he is keen to keep the shared reading and his own personal reading as connected activities. For him reading is not to be a place of retreat.

Clive's progress brings me to the role of the project worker and the development of The Reader Organisation.

Section 2: The Reader Organisation responses
The project worker

This next section is divided into two parts, reflecting the different recollection technique of transcription analysis and interview perspectives. The first offers a

series of instances of project workers reading some of the transcripts of group work and reflecting upon what these show and what one might learn from them. The second part includes a further selection of interviews in which I have tried to track different ways in which a project worker's thinking and approach might develop over time.

Readings of the transcripts

Christina, who had been the project worker for six of the sessions referenced in chapters three and four, described her initial responses and feeling upon seeing some of these transcripts for the first time. She was the first project worker to have had this experience of having led a session and then being able later to look back over it in its recorded form. Christina had already been writing up weekly logs of the sessions in which she had been noting any good moments that had stood out to her, as well as some of the difficulties that she was encountering or having to negotiate as she ran the group. But she commented on how much more detail the transcripts were able to capture, having been struck by 'the sheer quantity of words that were physically on the page', and 'how many thoughts' were being shared during each session. 'In the midst of doing the thing,' she said, 'you sometimes lose track of just how much ground you have covered in a group.' But it was not only the quantity of verbal response but the richness of it that began to excite her as she proceeded to read through some of the transcripts. 'It is great to be able to see … how people's sentences and thought processes grow and evolve – quite literally – from each other's as well as the text's … and to be able to pause over those moments, and look closer at what is happening.' As Christina points out, the benefit of having transcripts available to show both to project workers and group members is that it allows the reader to be able to retrace the work that he or she has done during a session without

having to reduce this to a summary description. Christina also suggests how this allows the reader of the transcripts to do further cross-group mapping work. In her project-worker logs, she had named certain individuals to which each of her notes related, so for instance: 'The idea of not being too hard upon yourself was the first to be picked up by Maggie, leading to a discussion about how people deal with their problems.' But the project worker would have been unable to record in any detail the collaborative thinking-together of the individual group members. This is what the transcripts have allowed us to study more closely.

Often when I have shown transcripts to a group of project workers, they concentrate (understandably enough) on problems that require practical trouble-shooting, such as the group member who reads too literally or takes up too much of the time – as if the transcripts were primarily to be used to create a manual for solving difficulties through learned techniques. One project worker talked about the need to be able to include quotes from group members in reports on shared reading projects. One option would be to ask group members for their comments at the end of a session, or of a group of sessions, as is typical of an evaluation process. But the project worker said that what she had found more useful and exciting were what she called 'mini wow moments', 'unprompted' or apparently 'throwaway' comments that group members might make during the course of the reading, when she herself would be surprised by a person's response. Sessions with project workers seemed to go better when they concentrated on such moments. For example, they noticed group members referring back to earlier parts of a poem in the midst of thinking about later ones, which seemed important in terms of something subtler than literally straightforward reading. Or the psychological mixture that often seems to go into formulations such as 'doesn't it' or 'couldn't it', which may be in tentative need of

confirmation and yet also are themselves bold guesses. In several sessions distinctions were made between a group member 'going off on their own thoughts', 'on a tangent', and moments when the thinking would become more immediately focussed. 'There's some real team work here', a project worker commented at one point. But there was also a moment when a project worker suddenly said of one of her own group members in the transcript, 'Maggie thinks aloud a lot'. In a way this is not surprising – that is how thinking has to be registered in a group. But in a read-aloud group, that thinking aloud, on the spot, offers project workers and researchers the privilege of actually *seeing* people thinking, immaterial though thinking is.

But given that project-worker group responses could become too much concerned with problem-solving, I read through a transcript with one project worker individually to see if this made a difference to the level of reflection that might follow. Helena became interested in the language of each individual response to the poem, and began to connect up the different speeches made by particular people. But she also seemed to enjoy the actual process of reading the transcript, responding at certain moments to say 'I like that', or to laugh in acknowledgement of the aptness of a person's remark. Thinking more seriously about some of the comments that were made, she wondered about one word (in the phrase 'what exactly is *it*?'), which seemed to her to act as 'shorthand' for a wider notion of 'meaning'. She then reflected on how important such shorthand references may be in a reading group, where the question 'what exactly is *the meaning*' might feel too dogmatic or direct an approach.

Two longer examples follow below from another project worker, Sarah, as she reads and responds to the transcripts (which again are not of her own groups).

Sarah has several months' experience of running shared reading groups in mental health settings. The group are reading Wendell Berry's 'The Peace of Wild Things':[241]

> When despair for the world grows in me
> and I wake in the night at the least sound
> in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
> I go and lie down where the wood drake
> rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
> I come into the peace of wild things
> who do not tax their lives with forethought
> of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
> And I feel above me the day-blind stars
> waiting with their light. For a time
> I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

After reading through the poem once to start with, I asked the project worker if she could identify certain points within it that she would hope would be highlighted during a session in which the poem was being read. As a principle of what Get into Reading is, I wanted to start from the literature, not from the instrumental problems of running a group. It is also important in terms of the methodology being used here that the accuracy of any reading of the transcripts is dependent upon an equal attention to the triggers of the text itself. Sarah replied that a group needed to be able to feel the grip of 'despair' and 'fear' in those first three lines in order to be able to experience the release which the poem later discovers from these feelings. She noted the recurrence of this idea later on in the poem in the phrase 'forethought | of grief'. But she was also interested in what she saw as a different kind of happening in lines 9-10: 'And I feel above me the day-blind stars | waiting with their light.' The project worker thought this use of the verb 'feel' would be important.

But the project worker then mentioned a problem that she had noticed when using poems like this one in her groups. Typically someone would remark:

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[241] 'The Peace of Wild Things' (from *Openings*, 1968), in *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1998), p. 30.

'Wouldn't it be lovely if you *could* go and sit by [a lake, for example] / [a place as lovely as this sounds],' feeling at the same time something like an objection in that they themselves could not. It is as though this experience which the poet seemed to have had was felt to be unavailable to the readers in the group who might have been stuck in hospital, or meeting in an underprivileged part of town. Actually, of course, it is not about going to the particular, yet unnamed place that the poem describes.[242] The poem itself is meant to do for the reader what the experience had done for the poet.

The problem for the project worker is the difficulty of finding a way to redirect such a reading. 'It's such a big leap to make,' she says. It is another instance of needing to be able to translate the literal into a literary way of seeing.[243] But having talked this through by way of introduction, the project worker now reads the example from the transcript:

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[242] Another example in relation to a poem which is often used in Get into Reading groups concerns Yeats's 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. Though the poem repeats its phrase, 'I will arise and go now', the peace of 'Innisfree' is still imagined from within the place that the poet begins from: 'While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey, | I hear it in the deep heart's core.' Cross ref. pp. 99-100.

[243] An example is included from a session in which both Ellen and Angela were present. After two initial readings of Wordsworth's poem 'The Pet-lamb', Ellen was still finding it difficult to see what the poem was about. However she did say that she liked the following two stanzas:

The Lamb while from her hand he thus his supper took
Seem'd to feast with head and ears, and his tail with pleasure shook.
"Drink, pretty Creature, drink," she said in such a tone
That I almost receiv'd her heart into my own.

'Twas little Barbara Lewthwaite, a Child of beauty rare,
I watch'd them with delight, they were a lovely pair.
And now with empty Can the Maiden turn'd away,
But ere ten yards were gone her footsteps did she stay.

[from 'The Pet-lamb, A Pastoral', in *The Poems of William Wordsworth*, I, p. 438.]

Ellen thought these lines were 'rather pretty', and then after a pause, asked whether the girl, Barbara Lewthwaite, was 'real or imaginative'. Both Angela and the project worker answered that they thought the girl was real. 'You think she's real, reality?' Ellen asked. 'He must have known her very well', she then said, in a final reflection. It is an example of a question which seems to be less to do with the factual data surrounding the composition of the poem than with the way in which it might be read. It is crucial therefore that the child in this poem has the status of what Ellen is calling 'reality'. It is only from such a position that Wordsworth can write that line, 'I almost received her heart into my own', and that the reader on his or her part can receive it.

Joan: It's true isn't it, we do tax ourselves with what's to come, worry ourselves with what's to come …

Jackie: [*becoming interested in what is being described in the poem*]
Never heard of a wood drake. Assuming it must be … 'Rests in his beauty', so it must be a good looking bird mustn't it. 'Lie down' with the wood drake, rest 'in his beauty on the water'. You know, spectacular bird.

Joan: Calm, on the surface.

Jackie: Mmm. In the 'still water'.

Joan: You see the water it's calm, it's 'still' isn't it. You can't see what's going on. Underneath it's going like that, [*swimming motion with her hands*] going absolutely *mad*, you know.

Julie: [*Laughing*] There's a monster down there.

As the project worker who had originally been present at this session, I had at first thought that this *was* a good moment, allowing Joan to express something of her own inner anxieties,[244] and to have this recognised by another group member, Julie. There are always these tense issues of the relation of the response and the poem, in determining how far the response is useful in itself for the person concerned even if at somewhat of a tangent from the text. But Sarah pointed out that the transcript allows you to see that Joan's own feeling is getting in the way of rather than assisting her reading of the poem. Joan is staying in the feeling described in the first three lines of the poem, rather than allowing that the poem might be able to take you out of that. Re-reading Joan's response, Sarah suggested that one might point out that the poem itself does not use the word 'calm'; its own word is 'rest'. It is a method of not simply ignoring Joan's feeling but of making use of her comment, and then improving upon it by reminding her of what the poem is doing. The project worker said that she would also try to use other members of the group at this stage,[245] asking

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[244] Cross ref. p. 188.
[245] In another instance the project worker may have to occupy this alternative position herself. Christina spoke after a session of how her group's response to the poem (Emily Bronte's 'Often rebuked, yet always back returning') had begun to worry her. Lindsay 'began to cry

if anyone else felt that they were in 'the presence of still water' – as the poem was being read.

Sarah later looked at another transcript, where a different group are reading another sonnet, 'Portrait of a Child' by Louis Untermeyer:[246]

> Unconscious of amused and tolerant eyes,
>   He sits among his scattered dreams, and plays.
>   True to no one thing long; running for praise
> With something less than half begun. He tries
> To build his blocks against the furthest skies.
>   They fall; his soldiers tumble; but he stays
>   And plans and struts and laughs at fresh dismays –
> Too confident and busy to be wise.   8
>
> His toys are towns and temples; his commands
>   Bring forth vast armies trembling at his nod.
> He shapes and shatters with impartial hands …
> And, in his crude and tireless play, I see   12
>   The savage, the creator, and the god:
> All that man was and all he hopes to be.

The project worker, admitting that she did not usually like 'baby poems', was interested in how in the transcript one group member in particular had responded with quick excitement to the poem:

John: That's a cracking one ain't it.

Project worker: [*after several further comments*] Let's listen to it again, and after we've heard it another time, we can look in more detail at different lines and what we think. Would anyone like to take a turn of reading it?

John: Oh can I can I can I can I. [*Laughs*]

Project worker: Course you can John, over to you!

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during my reading of the poem, saying it was a 'horrible' poem that was just talking about feelings of loneliness and isolation.' 'The other group members, once witnessing Lindsay's reaction, also began to interpret the poem in a negative way, as one general message of depression and gloom rather than noticing the particular state of the poet/poem.' The project worker had been keen to find evidence from within the poem to show that this was not the only way of seeing it, wanting to defend the poem, but also feeling concerned at what the group would otherwise be missing out on.

[246] Louis Untermeyer, 'Portrait of a Child', in *These Times* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917), p. 70.

John's unaffected response is that of the child, willingly playful and undisturbed by the conscious, adult presence implicit within the voice of the poem. Sarah was interested in how John's response compares with a slightly later part of the transcript when Maggie joins in:

Project worker: Maggie you were asking about a line …

Maggie: He sits among the scattered dreams and plays

P.W.   Yes!

Maggie: 'He sits among *his* scattered dreams and plays'

P.W.   Yes!

Maggie: So, why is. 'Unconscious of amused and tolerant eyes, he sits among his scattered dreams and plays.' Obviously something has gone on hasn't it if his dreams are scattered.

John: It's like having a butterfly mind … Go from one thing to another and then forget the first one.

The project worker notes John's light-heartedness and his untroubled sense of being able simply to 'forget'. She also notices that Maggie's repeated mulling over the line demonstrates a different kind of more concentrated thinking: a more adult grappling with that which the child is happy to pass over. The way that GIR thrives upon and seeks almost to create a sort of inarticulacy is important here. It relates to a distinction the psychoanalyst Eugene Gendlin notes in his therapy sessions to which the project worker later drew my attention:

> At some point in the session, the successful therapy clients would *slow down* their talk, become *less articulate*, and begin to *grope for words* to describe something that they were feeling at that moment. If you listened to the tapes, you would hear something like this: "Hmmm. How would I describe this? It's right *here*. It's … uh … it's … it's not exactly anger … hmmm." Often the clients would mention that they experienced this feeling in their bodies, saying things like, "It's right here in my chest," or "I have this funny feeling in my stomach." So the successful therapy clients had a vague, hard-to-describe body awareness that they were directly sensing during the session. By contrast, the unsuccessful therapy clients stayed articulate through the whole session! They stayed "up in their heads." They didn't sense in their bodies, and they never directly felt something that at first was

hard to describe.

But in GIR it is the poems themselves that profitably get in the way of simple default articulacy.

In terms of the embodiment to which Gendlin refers, Christina had something to add about the dangers of relying upon the transcripts alone:

> It was when reading some of the transcripts against the audio recordings, that I realized how different they could appear to different readers. One person's 'no' or 'yes' can be very different from the next person's – is it quiet or loud, timid or assertive, emphatic or disinterested? Does the tone of that certain person's 'yes' or 'no' change during the course of the session and impact of those of others? The audio recordings were able to give us a strong sense of individual voice and experience in a way that the transcripts were unable to do. This is why I believe they need to be 'read' alongside each other. This is also important to get a sense of the silences as much as the words; silences which can be incredibly revealing and productive. Video recording in future research would also help to capture other forms of non-verbal communication such as body language.

This is a warning against all sorts of interpretive reading that seem as it were to derive from the dimension of sight alone, from an over-cool distance that flattens the text, be it poem or group transcript.

There is a moment in the transcript of the Untermeyer reading when one of the group members turns to the last line of the poem: 'All that man was and all he hopes to be.'

Val: It sounds like someone maybe who's lost someone in the army, and they're thinking back to when they were a child. They think about when they used to play when they were little, and they played soldiers.

It is an example of one of the odder yet deeper moments that seem to happen when an inexperienced reader is using imagination to catch the extra-literal meaning of the poem, even via this attempt at a literal explanation of it. The project worker, reading this, observes that there are a number of phrases in the poem itself which pick up on a sense of what is missing, absent or still unfulfilled: from the 'something less than half begun' in the child's play to the gap between 'all that man was' and 'all he

hopes to be'. She suggests that the group member's idea both about the loss of someone and the memory of them picks up on these gaps, and on the double move in the poem between looking back (seeing the child in his first stages of infancy) and looking ahead, to what the child will become (as representative of 'man'). Replacing mere seamless continuities of meaning, it is these gaps, she concludes, that both entice and let in readers' guesses, moving towards imagination.

Thinking about Gendlin, I turned to a psychologist who now runs her own GIR group specifically for service users who have been referred on by the community mental health team. She comments on what for her differentiates these GIR transcripts from the kinds of transcripts that she had been introduced to in psychoanalytic training. Her claim was that the first focus in GIR is not on 'interpreting' the material, which is where the work of the therapist begins, in seeking explanation for responses. Rather GIR must concentrate on being able to sense the 'power' of the poem as 'that thing in the room that you want to make come through'. This included it coming through the group participants at the level of thoughtful feeling, individual and shared: *Performing It, Not so much Explaining It,* is how the psychologist put it, in shorthand.

Interviews

Project workers often describe their awareness of the complex balance to be maintained between different elements or forces within a reading group. One project worker said that particularly when reading older poems it felt important to be able 'to cash out' the meaning of what was being read, line by line, into examples from 'real life'. But another person said that while it can give 'a sort of grounding' to the discussion when someone relates the reading to an event or situation that is 'very personal to them', 'when that goes on too long it feels like there's been a bit of a

mistake in the relevance'. Or, in a subtle variation of this thought, someone might have 'mistaken their own thinking … for something in the poem'.

One experienced project worker said that what distinguishes GIR but can also make it difficult to pass on to others is that the personal approach of the group leader matters: 'kindness is what oils the wheels of the group and makes it work'. Another project worker, Maxine, agreed that 'it needs to start with me; I need to be kind and generous to everybody in the group, all the time … a big ask!' 'The group take the lead from me,' she explained. But she thought that it was important that the manner in which she led nevertheless remained 'largely hidden':

> Maybe it's almost like tuning in music. I choose the tune/key we are going to play in and ideally people follow that and tune in too. My desire in choosing the tuning is that it will generate the sort of atmosphere (or music) I want in the group … People come along and join the group and like what they experience and choose to tune in also.

Maxine said that she will also try to reinforce certain characteristics or achievements which she might 'notice' in individual members of the group over time:

> It's about holding onto something for other people until they can take it up themselves. I 'carry' the idea that someone is intelligent, clever, helpful, determined, kind, capable of healing and health etc etc until they can start to see it themselves and don't need me to do it. They might need me to carry it for a long time. And when I have an opportunity I try to reflect to the person what I'm seeing so they might see in themselves things that I can see.

This is another version of trying to get the tuning right. But it also illustrates a kind of leading which is inclusive of such attention to the individual whilst not being exclusively focussed on one person as either a mentor or counsellor.

I spoke to one project worker with whom I had shared several earlier drafts of chapters three and four. Pippa commented on the way in which the analysis of group members' responses placed a kind of premium on what was said out-loud during the sessions. She felt slightly uncomfortable about this, and wondered whether it was necessary for there to be this level of articulated response within the group. It would

mean, she said, having a feeling and then *saying* that you were having a feeling. The project worker thought of several instances of groups that she had run in forensic mental health settings, or with groups of young men, where someone might acknowledge by giving a kind of 'gruff' response: 'That's good that is'. The impression that the project worker had received was that 'They want you to know that something happened, but they don't want to say what it is.'

The issue that Pippa was trying to raise here is important because of how it relates to the central motive of this chapter. The feeling in the group may be implicit, there in its working, even if not fully or properly articulated. For the project worker there is a question to be asked: should the practice of reading become conscious? There seem to be two concerns here. The first is more theoretical: the project worker, thinking of her previous experience of taking group counselling sessions, says that 'our reflective consciousness is a construct'. Even if the GIR process somewhat resists the forming of default constructs, she feels there is a risk of getting overly interested in the vocalisation of thoughts, through anxiously needing what can become an intellectualization, and thereby missing some of the underlying emotional force of the group experience. 'I'm inclined to let it be,' the project worker admits. But the project worker is also thinking of the sense that she gets of the vulnerability of many of the people with whom she reads. To encourage and push for a deeper level of response often does not feel appropriate within the mental health settings in which she works. The project worker gave an example of an occasion when she had led a group on an older people's mental health ward. She had begun with some 'jolly animal poems', but as it was going well, decided 'as the session progressed, to move

on to some deeper things'. She ended with a poem by Siegfried Sassoon, 'The

Heart's Journey (XI)',[247] as copied below:

> *'When I'm alone'* – the words tripped off his tongue
> As though to be alone were nothing strange.
> *'When I was young,'* he said; *'when I was young ....'*
>
> I thought of age, and loneliness, and change.
> I thought how strange we grow when we're alone,
> And how unlike the selves that meet, and talk,
> And blow the candles out, and say good-night.
> *Alone* … The word is life endured and known.
> It is the stillness where our spirits walk
> And all but inmost faith is overthrown.

'We didn't analyse it much,' the project worker notes in her log, 'just sat with the

companionable feeling of sharing something about the experience of innerness.'

It is an interesting example to think about in relation to what exactly might

characterise what we are calling *shared* reading. Perhaps one way of keeping this

poem going for longer as a presence within the room, without necessarily having to

ask people how they felt about it, would be to ask if someone other than the project

worker would read the poem again to the group. What is important in this particular

poem is that despite its repeated theme of 'loneliness', there are two voices that can

be heard within it: the voice which the poet hears and afterwards repeats, and that of

the poet himself. Sometimes (we have to guess) there is a silent intermittent voice in

aloneness going on inside a group-member's head simultaneous with the reading of

the poem and the discussion arising from it. The relation of private and social in the

groups may be somewhat different from what we are used to in the world, and this

remains obscure in detail. But given that what is private and implicit can never be

fully exhausted by whatever is made explicit in the group-work, then the classic text

here in response to the project worker's anxiety about over-articulation may be in

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[247] from 'The Heart's Journey' (1927), in *Collected Poems*, p. 180.

Newman's *University Sermons,* 'Implicit and Explicit Reason' (13) where he argues

that the implicit must always come first both chronologically and ontologically. But

the consciousness, the explicitness, coming in the second place, gives implicit

thinkers more belief in, more development through, more secure possession of what

it is they think. It is what McGilchrist in *The Master and his Emissary* would think of

as the use of both hemispheres, in the right order.

The process is the same for the project worker. One of the uses of interviews

is that they may trigger reflections that the project worker may not otherwise have

had time to think about. As Petitmengin writes, during activity 'we are entirely

absorbed by the objective, the results to be achieved, the "what", and not or only

very slightly aware of the way in which we try to achieve this objective, that is the

"how".'[248] It is this awareness not only of what had been happening but of the

underlying process supporting that happening which became noticeable in an

interview with a project worker who has managed a number of projects based in

dementia care homes.[249] Early on in the interview she described what she felt to be

the appeal of these groups, in which the effect of reading poetry is often 'so visible',

and 'instant'. Often people will connect particularly with poems that they remember

reading in childhood, and will speak of memories which again re-evoke that time.

But the project worker had noticed that this included a level of access not only to

individual memory but also to 'shared memories', which a whole group of people

would recognise and would each be able to inhabit in different ways. It would

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[248] Claire Petitmengin, 'Describing One's Subjective Experience in the Second Person: An Interview Method for the Science of Consciousness', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 5 (2006), 229-69 (p. 233).

[249] Katie has written about some of her earlier experiences of the work in the following published article:

Katie Clark, 'Poems for Life: A Reading Group with a Difference Where People with Dementia Can Rediscover the Joys of Reading Poems Together', *Journal of Dementia Care*, 18.5 (2010), 14-15

happen for instance with poems that might include a description of a fireside or an image of a fire. People would start to remember aspects of a kind of shared experience which would once have been a much more common and regular feature of life (sitting about the fire, and doing things together such as toasting bread over it). It was the same with Blake's 'The Echoing Green': the discussion that arose from this was often not so much about the rural village setting of the poem but instead centred on what the project worker suggested might be an increasingly rare form of 'inter-generational play': the 'sports' of the 'little ones' make the 'old folk' in the poem 'laugh' and remember their own 'youth time'.[250] I asked her how much she thought these memories were being produced as responses to the poem or whether it was more in the context of the group discussion that they were able to be revived. Pausing, she replied, 'When you're reading, your imagination is sparked. You're creating that image in your head, not just reading it on the page.' This was what made the sharing of it a suddenly physically live, literary experience.

In a final interview the project worker had already been using a blog to reflect personally on her experiences of running groups. In her written account of a session in which the group has been reading D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, Maxine comments:

> It seems that this book is much more about who the characters 'are' in the world and less about what they 'do' in the world. It's a book about being rather than doing and I think this is part of what makes it hard, but also what makes it so fantastic to read in a shared reading group.

In the interview the project worker used the same terms to describe the way in which she will lead her groups. When it is going well there is a grounded sense that she has of 'being there in the body'. It is not as though the mind switches off. But Maxine finds that she can use her own feeling to monitor what is going on in the group, as

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[250] 'The Echoing Green' (from *Songs of Innocence*, 1789), in *Selected Poems*, p. 66.

she listens to the different responses, and tries to work out what kind of direction needs to be taken next. For this project worker, getting into and staying in the right feeling is crucial to the experience of the literature.

This intrinsically focused approach also informs the way in which this project worker speaks about shared reading as an activity. 'I try not to talk about the groups as beneficial to mental health,' the project worker explains, 'It becomes irrelevant to say – "the group will do you good".' She describes the actual benefit to the person as taking place at another level. But for this project worker, it is not the primary reason that people choose to come to the group: 'Nowhere have people signed up to engage with me, other than through the literature.' Maxine holds the same perspective towards the group members themselves. Information about one of the open groups that she runs was passed on to local health services, to provide a route by which people might be referred on to it; but 'it was important that people could come and not ever say that they had been sent, or have to give the background to them being there.'

Maxine similarly described one conversation that had taken place during her first visit to a prison where she was to set up a reading group. The prison staff had quite casually begun to tell her about the offences of which each inmate on the ward had been convicted. She quickly decided that for her such information ought to be 'irrelevant'. Information about past events, both known and unknown to others, may become relevant in time, triggered perhaps in response to the text that is being shared. But otherwise these facts cannot help the project worker in getting to know the human being with whom she is presented in the group, and from Maxine's point of view, this was all that she was concerned with, rather than seeing the person in

terms of his (sometimes horrifying) crime.[251] This remains true, she believed, outside

a prison context: assumptions and labels should 'go' in the room just as in a poem. In

his discussion of the principles upon which the practice of psychoanalysis must be

based, Wilfred Bion writes of what this project worker seems intuitively already to

have apprehended. Bion's theory is that the accumulation of sense impressions or

remembered data about the patient limits the analyst's capacity to receive new

impressions, and to perceive in his interactions with the patient those 'elements that

cannot be sensed' (*Attention and Interpretation*, p. 41). Making room for such

unforeseen elements is for Maxine a crucial aspect of the project worker's task in

creating the kind of environment in which group members are enabled to benefit

from the reading.

The Reader Organisation managers

This sub-section features material from two interviews with individuals whose

role within TRO is to oversee the implementation of quality shared reading practice

throughout the organisation.

Casi Dylan, Literary Learning Manager

In a recently published essay Casi reflects on some of the tensions that her role exists

to uphold even on the project worker's behalf. Above all, she stresses the need for

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[251] Wordsworth quotes Robert Burns, 'pleading for those who have transgressed', in a letter in which
Wordsworth laments the treatment that Burns himself has received in Currie's biography of the poet:

> "One point must still be greatly dark,
> The moving *why* they do it,
> And just as lamely can ye mark
> How far, perhaps, they rue it.
> …
> Then at the balance let's be mute,
> We never can adjust it;
> What's done we partly may compute,
> But know not what's *resisted*."

'Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, III, pp. 117-129
(p. 119).

risk and courage in taking on difficult texts in painful areas:

> As dangerous as, say, a Gerard Manley Hopkins sonnet, or Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* may be, I know that they are no more dangerous than the version of me which creeps towards steady, deadening security at the expense of something more alive. I am more likely to forget my commitment to serve the lively excellence of the writing than I am to forget kindness towards the group members, or respect, or care. It's this stunting maintenance that frightens me … [252]

The training sessions which Casi runs are designed both to inspire and to challenge, to point the beginner towards texts that they might otherwise shy away from using, and to instil in the more experienced project worker a reminder of what reading might be able to achieve, in spite of the difficulties which by this stage he or she might have become used to encountering in practice.

One other thread which runs consistently throughout such training provision in terms outside familiar comfortableness is an emphasis on the use of older literature: especially pre-nineteenth-century poetry, and novels that pre-date the kinds of work to be found on contemporary bestseller lists. Often this will mean re-introducing project workers to literature that they may not have read or heard of, but would be inclined to dismiss as too difficult or too far-removed from the present to be worth trying in a group. Casi gave an example of one session that had been attended by an intern, a recent graduate of English, who had commented that she was still nervous of reading Shakespeare and had avoided having to read any of his work at university. The group ended up spending the whole session reading Shakespeare's sonnet 121. Casi remembers how the intern continued to find this a struggle:

> we had to go through from the beginning just to navigate our way around it, and even as we were breaking through, beginning to get a sense of what the poem was about, she would often say something like 'oh see this is why I hate Shakespeare'. And I was thinking: 'Oh, but what you did was a brilliant thing. This is what it's meant to be like.' This mode or this particular zone that you get into when you're struggling with a piece is what English literature is like. Whatever it is that doesn't feel comfortable. That's partly the point.

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[252] Casi Dylan, 'On Balance', *The Reader*, 50 (2013), 131-36 (p. 133).

It was not unusual for such trainees still to be afraid of poetry itself. Casi said that one aim of the training was to help such readers to 'develop the tools' to begin to be able to relate to the literature themselves. But she also commented further on some of the issues involved in this attempt to negotiate a higher literary language. Although often for the contemporary reader such language must bring with it a sense of unfamiliarity, Casi suggested that to focus on historicising these differences would be largely to miss what the poetry stands for. It is no good simply trying to translate the older language into modern terms for a modern audience:

> You do tend to hold the bit that's most like what we'd say, and then dive into the difficulties. Because the bit I remember from Shakespeare's sonnet 121 is 'No, I am that I am.' It's not difficult or different language as such word by word. But we started by talking about how as moderns claiming 'I am *what* I am' is almost always like a celebration, as if you can imagine people singing it in karaoke bars. But in the poem it didn't have that unambiguous celebration to it; it was a much odder statement:
>
> <div align="center">
>
> 'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemèd,
> When not to be receives reproach of being,
> And the just pleasure lost which is so deemèd
> Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing.
> For why should others' false adulterate eyes
> Give salutation to my sportive blood?
> Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
> Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
> No, I am that I am, and they that level
> At my abuses reckon up their own … [253]
>
> </div>

This was about the poem and the person in it finding and keeping its own terms in the midst of a reductive social world. Readers had to translate into it, not just translate from it. There is in this not only the sheer mental achievement of understanding something not easy or everyday; there is also a sense of new primary meaning outside secondhand conventional clichés.

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[253] Sonnet 121, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems,* p. 623.

Kate McDonnell, Quality Practice Manager

The initial task that this role has involved for Kate has been to compile a guide towards definitions of 'quality' reading in practice. She comments on how the interest in quality from within the organisation is not new, yet 'for many years we were small enough for this expertise to be passed on informally'. The more the organisation has grown, the more a need has developed to be able to come up with a formulation of what long-established staff have come implicitly to know over a period of time. This is important for new staff, for potential funders, and for the organisation's own development of a reading revolution which nonetheless has to be sustained and organised without being institutionalised.

The structure of Kate's guide reflects that ongoing tension which has had to be maintained within GIR of a social responsibility to the people with whom the project worker is reading and a duty to the literature. In its discussion of five principles that lie behind the reading work, the guide begins with the injunction 'Be kind' and ends with 'Be bold'. But in the latter section Kate's explanation of this simple principle suggests how both of these concerns might sometimes seem to branch off separately from one core idea in which they are actually interlinked:

> The shared reading model was developed to open up great literature to all people. Democratising and enabling, it has always been about reader development in its widest possible sense. We invite people to join us in reading something different, something a bit more difficult together, so that venturing into the new comes to be seen as a pleasurable, rewarding, self-esteem-boosting experience.[254]

True kindness is related here to being bold and not just soft as a project worker, and offering to the group something other than what might be thought of as comfortably conventional or easily accessible reading-group material.

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[254] 'Quality Shared Reading: An Interactive Guide for Reading Revolutionaries' (2013), pp. 36-7.

In our interview Kate also talked about the significance for the project worker of becoming individually 'responsible' for finding and choosing material to bring to a session, for all the library of tried and tested texts that TRO provides as a resource for its project workers. It is 'a quality moment in a session when you bring out the poem', and it is therefore important that project workers have been able to take time to reflect on the selection of it out of their own personal sense of reading. Kate emphasised how all of this 'takes time in terms of your reading life'. But it also begins to discover a practical use for one's personal reading, making the individual development matter to that of the group.

One aspect of shared reading practice that Kate herself models particularly well is what she calls 'staying with it'. Once the poem has been deliberately chosen by the project worker there will be a sense, Kate says, of what he or she does not want the group to miss, without being overly and uselessly insistent. It is when these moments are reached in the reading that Kate will often stop, and re-read a sentence or a line, implicitly thus holding it open for the group as long as possible, in order that they might 'see' and have the chance to respond to it.

For Kate it seems a key part of quality reading practice actually consists in making reading possible for people, and creating opportunities for people to do their own reading. It is a reflection upon the kinds of conditions and framework which might allow for the practical work of reading, such as has been evidenced in chapters three and four, to be carried out and further sustained.

Section 3: The health service

As I have indicated, the story of how Get into Reading has been seen as a health intervention is historically complex and also potentially misleading. There is a distinction between mental health and mental well-being, but even the latter which

rightly extends the range of what TRO offers to all readers, beyond those diagnosed with problems, may seem to provide an over-sanitised account of what shared reading offers its participants. This is an issue connected equally with the use in my thesis-title of the contentious term 'literary bibliotherapy' which by now should be taken as no more than indicating the kind of area, even as contemporarily conceived, with which this thesis is concerned. Again, the idea of therapy may make claims and, worse, the wrong sorts of claims for what this thesis explores as the intrinsic value of Get into Reading. Nonetheless the fact remains that the National Health Service in its various forms has been to date the largest commissioning client of The Reader Organisation.

I therefore took these concerns to two health professionals who have themselves been personally involved in helping to run shared reading groups within mental health services. In the first instance a framework is offered for incorporating the practice of shared reading into an existing model of healthcare, where it is understood in the context of the theoretical aims and terms of occupational therapy. The later second interview offers a deeper reflection on the impact of bringing literature into health settings on a broader scale.

GIR and occupational therapy

The detail that follows is based upon a document produced by a group of OTs,[255] each of whom had some experience of GIR in a mental health setting, but who at the time were based on a number of different wards across a spectrum of services. The 'rationale' for using GIR took as its starting point the underlying principle of occupational therapy with regards to mental health, as stated by the College of

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[255] The following, each of whom at the time was working as a Band 5 OT, were all involved in contributing to the document: Jenny Fleming, Jill Corker, Kelly Johnston, David Cooper, Chris Vaughan, Rachel Albrecht, Hazel Budnarowski, Lisa White, Maria Gleeson, Linsey O'Donnell, Karen Birchall, Georgia Fair, Samantha O'Shea and Laura Tyndall.

Occupational Therapists: 'health and wellbeing are supported by engagement in a balanced range of occupations that are chosen and valued by the individual'. This placed the reading group within a range of possible activities which in an in-patient setting might also include reminiscence, exercise or relaxation sessions. But the therapists involved in GIR suggest that the emphasis on meaningfulness makes reading particularly important:

> Maintaining an acceptable and personally satisfying routine of activities that have meaning and value for the individual gives a structure to time and creates a sense of purpose and direction to life. Such a routine enfolds the individual within a physical and sociocultural context, thus supporting feelings of identity, normality and wellbeing, even in the presence of disease or disability.[256]

The work of occupational therapy in fact tends to take the focus away from disease and disability:

> The centrality of occupation in the thinking of occupational therapists leads to a focus on the strengths of individuals, rather than their problems, and on their contribution to recovery … The service user becomes an active participant in the creation of his or her future, learning hope and building confidence.[257]

The authors of the rationale comment on a deeper meaning for what is recovery:

> Modern mental health services are directed to provide opportunities for self-exploration that help to develop interests rather than attempting to cure people back to so-called 'reality'.[258] Reading is one such method that can be utilised to help facilitate this process by providing new ways of expressing feelings and knowledge.

The rationale gives the following summary:

> Motivation for Occupation:
> - Provide/develop leisure interest
> - Promotion of self-expression, identity and choice
>
> Pattern of Occupation:
> - Structure and routine
> - Engagement in a planned structured activity

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[256] College of Occupational Therapists, 'Recovering Ordinary Lives: The Strategy for Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Services, 2007-2017' (London: 2006), p. 3.

[257] Recovering Ordinary Lives, p. 10.

[258] Nora Jacobson and Dianne Greenley, 'What is Recovery? A Conceptual Model and Explication', *Psychiatric Services,* 52 (2001), 482-485.

- Role development: as participant, reader; group interactions, community building
- Responsibility for own leisure time

The rationale tries to strike a balance between the way in which GIR facilitates the development of certain skills, including communication and interaction, process and motor skills, as well as literacy skills, and the degree to which this might be enjoyed as a valuable 'leisure' activity that is effective precisely by *not* concentrating on skills which are a by-product of involvement in the meaning itself. Whilst there is a recognition that leisure is 'essential to occupational functioning', nonetheless even the words leisure or pleasure are names that are often in reaction against instrumentalism: rather than offer a view which captures the deep characteristics of the work, these descriptors are first of all intended not to scare or deter. But what is really at stake is that deeper meaning for recovery, including the recovery of a sense of self, within the context of redundancy not only as job loss but loss of existential purpose in the world. In an article published in a magazine for OT professionals, Yee points out that in contemporary society one's identity is often heavily dependent upon a sense of one's occupation, and yet often what accompanies mental illness is the loss of employment. So-called leisure activities are important in offering 'a safe venue for persons to re-engage in doing', enabling the individual potentially to reassess their own 'life importance'.[259]

In another context, this time within primary care, one OT became interested in the work that was being done in a reading group for chronic pain sufferers. She noted that the reading not only helped to distract group members from their pain, it also set up a valuable activity that is likely to produce what Csíkszentmihályi has called a state of 'flow'. Anne-Louise Humphreys argues in relation to OT:

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[259] Susan Yee, 'Re-capturing an Important Piece of Self through Leisure Occupations', *Occupational Therapy Now*, 9 (2007), 11-13 (p.11).

> Occupational flow describes a point at which someone is presented with a "just-right challenge" where their skills are balanced harmoniously with the challenge and the person is focused upon a clear task with strong concentration and focused attention. This state is associated with loss of inhibiting self-consciousness, and a heightened awareness of present being.[260]

For one of the members of this group, after taking early retirement once his pain had begun to inhibit his capacity to work full-time, it had been twenty years since he had been in employment. But as the occupational therapist observes, he misses the routine with which work had provided him, and so for him it is an important moment when he realizes that this 'flow' experience allows him to recover for a period of time that which he has been missing: 'I feel like I'm in work again … it makes you think … and I haven't had that for *such* a long time.'

The collectively-produced rationale continues by identifying a set of skills that may be used or developed within the reading group. These are efforts that may be achieved without consciousness of effort when they are means of enjoyment or excitement not ends in themselves, but the modern framework must still foreground them:

Communication and Interaction Skills:
- Non verbal: requires being socially appropriate for group setting / can address social skills
- Verbal skills through discussions
- Vocal expression
- Relationships – stimulates constructive conversations between group members
- Promotes constructive dialogue and communication techniques
- Skills and knowledge development

Process Skills:
- Increase concentration
- Seeking and retaining information for discussion
- Decision making

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[260] Dr Anne-Louise Humphreys, occupational therapist and university lecturer, was co-author of the quoted report:
Josie Billington, Anne-Louise Humphreys, Kate McDonnell and Andrew Jones, 'An Evaluation of a Literature-Based Intervention for People with Chronic Pain' (2013), p. 12.

- Memory recall

Motor Skills:
- Posture
- Energy: channeling a person's energy into positive activity; also requires the maintenance of attention
- Fine motor and dexterity

Other:
- Increase self-confidence
- Reduce anxiety
- Group working
- Relaxation

The authors of the rationale comment further that 'Reading groups have demonstrated an ability to build community and promote social interaction and social inclusion. Research states these areas are fundamentally affected by mental health difficulties.'[261] Although this rationale applies specifically to reading groups that might be run in inpatient mental health settings, the use of the language of wellbeing extends its relevance also to much of the reading work that takes place in community settings.

It is however an official, professionalised language, one to which this thesis has largely attempted to provide an alternative, albeit no more than preliminary.

As one provisional conclusion, I offer a suggestion of what that alternative might mean in practice. Thus: the comments that a staff member makes after a session – such as 'I wonder what he/she made of that,' or 'she's deep, isn't she,' – might be more informing than a more precisely professionalised observation of the kind that would seem more beneficial to add to the patient's clinical record. It is partly because one could not necessarily *say* how this deeper interest in the patient or service user might become useful that it is likely to be important.

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[261] Deborah Harrison and Adrian Sellers, 'Occupation for Mental Health and Social Inclusion', *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy,* 71 (2008), 216-19.

In a later interview with one of the authors of the rationale, the interviewee, Chris Vaughan said that what he had remembered in preparation for this discussion was a certain impression that he had had as a result of his own personal involvement in the groups. 'The transformative effect that these groups have is quite remarkable. And I've seen aspects of people – things they say, how they present – which I wouldn't have had an opportunity to see anywhere else.' Chris said that he does assist in running other kinds of groups as part of his role, and recognised that there were similarities with the kinds of interventions offered by members of the local Philharmonic Orchestra, or by visitors from the local dance school. These too are able to engage the patients on the ward and provide a means of participating in a creative activity. 'I suppose it's about expression,' Chris said: 'freedom of expression'. 'And a kind of individualism – or individualised kind of … I don't know, outpourings if you like – that often are contained or forgotten, because so many people are medicalised aren't they, you know.'

I asked Chris if there were any examples that came to mind as he was thinking about this. He proceeded to give an account of a woman in her early eighties who had been on the acute psychiatric ward for a relatively long time – months instead of weeks – during a 'very severe bout of depression'. Chris said that the woman had received help for her depression on previous occasions, but that her husband had commented that 'it had never been this bad before'. The woman had been undergoing a course of ECT treatment (Electroconvulsive Therapy), but had not responded to this, so that 'the care staff were finding it difficult to determine how best to treat her really'. Chris said that he knew the woman was very well-read, and would be likely to be interested in the reading group, but that he had not quite known whether she was ready for it or whether she might feel a little too overwhelmed.

However a student who was helping out on the ward decided one week to take the woman in to join the group. They were reading a chapter from a Dickens novel, Chris remembers:

> A lot of the people were familiar with Dickens, and were keen to take turns to read. And this lady had just been kind of passively participating in a way: she was listening to others read and following the text, you could tell she was still very much attentive and engaged. And then after a pause, about halfway through the session she said, 'Can I read now?' She asked that without any prompting at all. And then she read a passage in the most *beautifully* enunciated way that I think I can ever remember. And everybody was just staggered because that kind of expression, it hadn't been revealed to anyone before. It was almost like things just stood still when she announced that she'd like to read, and then read perfectly and then suddenly said, 'Shall I stop now?' I thought that when she started reading it was almost as if she'd crossed a threshold, in a way, in her recovery. That's how I'd describe it. And then she went on to become a regular member of the group until she became well again, and then asked if she could attend the group as an outpatient, which we arranged.

There is a moment when this ceases to be an 'intervention' and becomes more simply an act of reading. This is what allows the woman voluntarily to engage in a way that is more active than might at first be apparent: it is as though the woman has been attentively waiting for the right moment to speak. Moreover it appears that what Chris had meant earlier by that expressive 'outpourings' was not so much the mental relief that might be afforded by an offloading of personal trouble, but was closer to a vocal expression from that person's inner being. As he re-tells the story, he goes back to imagine the kind of position in which the woman would have been finding herself at this time:

> There's a term called anhedonia that often accompanies the conditions that many patients we work with are admitted into hospital with, and it's that lack of pleasure from most things that would generally gratify us as humans, which also informs your outlook, your world view, your sense of future. And she was very flat, very low, and probably the future for her was very, you know, didn't hold an awful lot. Because I suppose for most of her stay she was confused as to where she was, or she didn't probably see where else she could go from here, she was so in the depths of that depression.

Chris felt that even though she had now been discharged from the ward in which he had worked with her, for him himself in his working practice 'it was one of those moments in time that you're almost always going to remember because of the poignancy or significance of it'.

Chris Vaughan also made reference several times to the idea that GIR may be particularly important in helping to expand people's options and provide access to certain 'freedoms'. He had noticed this particularly in the high-secure hospital where he had first had experience of observing the effect of GIR in the context of life on the wards. It was the most extreme version that he had encountered of a setting in which 'life was so clearly defined and structured for patients', and the 'freedoms' patients had 'to make some choices linked to their own volition' were very much limited. Even as a staff member, he could sense the effects of that limitation on the ward:

> There's lots of security protocols and things are really slowed down to a snail's pace, and as a consequence things don't happen in a spontaneous way. Whereas in the group there was a kind of fluidity, because no-one knew really where the conversation was going to take us.

This is about freedom in time, in thought, in present existence outside a set programme or an institutional requirement. For Chris this extended to his own position, in which he felt that normally he would be expected as the health professional to demonstrate expertise, and to be able to manage a situation, in control of what was happening. In the reading group he felt that this expectation did not lie solely with him; there was a differently shared order in operation here.

This finding on behalf of both staff and patients seems rooted in a principle of relative non-selection – the generous principle of not narrowly focussing or planning too much in advance or exclusion such as Ruskin advocated when he wrote of faithful realism:

It is only by the habit of representing faithfully all things, that we can truly learn

what is beautiful, and what is not. The ugliest objects contain some element of beauty; and in all it is an element peculiar to themselves, which cannot be separated from their ugliness, but must either be enjoyed together with it or not at all. The more a painter accepts nature as he finds it, the more unexpected beauty he discovers in what he at first despised; but once let him arrogate the right of rejection, and he will gradually contract his circle of enjoyment, until what he supposed to be nobleness of selection ends in narrowness of perception.

Modern Painters III (Works, v, p. 58).

It is relative non-selection because just as Turner did select the scenes he would depict, did not go into his paintings without any plan or sense of discrimination, so GIR does indeed largely select the texts, whilst leaving room for choice and improvisation. Equally, its project workers do have in mind key places and emphases, and work hard to manage these groups carefully; its stakeholders do recommend and encourage particular participants in particular areas and conditions of life. But the rich literary material that is selected is chosen for its greater human inclusiveness rather than for the sake of cultural elitism. Furthermore, the participants are largely unselected, voluntarily finding in the works what interests them without pressure. And again, the resulting upshots within the texts and the readers alike are largely unexpected and uncontrolled in the interests of human beauty and human flourishing rather than narrowly programmatic ends.

Dr David Fearnley,

forensic psychiatrist and Medical Director of NHS Trust

A number of psychiatrists in particular have welcomed the opportunity to put to one side their professional knowledge and expertise, and to enter into a different kind of mental space with the people with whom they are reading. One psychiatrist for example who works in a forensic setting commented that she does not take any of her 'therapy skills' into the reading group. This kind of approach allows the reading group to become a space that would not be found elsewhere within the hospital, and

that exists on different terms from those of the institution, even momentarily

transcending it. One member of a group that meets in a prison confirmed this idea:

the reading group, she said, was 'something the prison couldn't touch'.[262]

David Fearnley,[263] who for several years has been running a reading group on

one of these hospital wards, has long been interested in what it is about the reading of

literature that distinguishes this activity from certain forms of therapy, and even from

other forms of art and cultural experience. To bring any kind of cultural activity into

a health setting will often produce something of a shock to the system, and is likely

to be of benefit simply by providing something of a link with the normal,

unconstrained habits of a human community. But Dr Fearnley was also interested in

how literature might allow readers to connect with the experiences of men and

women down the generations and across time:

> Jung talked about archetypes and how we're all very similar.[264] And maybe
> literature is a way of subtly sometimes reminding us that we are similar, and that
> collective man, collective humanity has experienced things. … So is literature
> providing over time a sort of a package of emotional experience? A bit like
> archaeology where you're digging for a fossil, and finding it. It was put down a
> long time ago. But actually you can experience it as if it was yesterday. And I
> suppose then if that is the case, what's the value of that …

Fearnley used a similar kind of thinking to this analogy with archaeology to describe

how shared reading might 'take you back to early experiences', to those which 'pre-

date the stress of adult experience'. This would be a deep model of recovery –

recovering lost or damaged memories, feelings, faculties or beliefs. And, again, it

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[262] Jude Robinson and Josie Billington, 'An Evaluation of a Pilot Study of a Literature Based Intervention with Women in Prison' (full report, March 2013), p. 34.

[263] Dr Fearnley has been Medical Director of Mersey Care NHS Trust since 2005, and was Deputy Chief Executive of the trust during the period 2007-10. In 2009 he was awarded 'Psychiatrist of the Year' by the Royal College of Psychiatrists for his work in encouraging change in the development of mental health policy. Fearnley is currently the trust lead (as one of eight European partners) for INTERREG IVB, the three-year Innovate Dementia project.

[264] 'It is sufficient to know that there is not a single important idea or view that does not possess historical antecedents. Ultimately they are all founded on primordial archetypal forms whose concreteness dates from a time when consciousness did not *think*, but only *perceived*.'
C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (collected, 1959)*,* trans. by R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series (Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 33.

would be a version of the restoration of a state if not prior to the Fall, as in Elizabethan poetics (as on p. 233 above), at least prior to some trauma. But as a process this is likely to involve a response coming from beneath a person's own conscious understanding or ability to describe what is happening. Fearnley commented that 'before they know it's going to appeal to them, it's already started to appeal'. It is the reading aloud of the literature in GIR that seems to invoke a response which Fearnley said is likely to be situated primarily within the body, as the biological substrate of an emotion, before it ever reaches the stage when we might be mentally aware of what this means. It is this operation at a level that is 'pre-linguistic' and 'pre-verbal', he said, which contrasts with the approach that tends to be characteristic of psychotherapeutic settings and treatment, where the aim is to work *within* language, including that of the speech patterns generated by the patient, to effect change. Furthermore, the non-targeted approach of GIR allows a connection to be made at a point of need which may be more primary and more personally relevant than what the categories of a person's diagnosis or even their characteristics as an individual may be able to indicate. The repeated re-readings of the text, which each time recover it afresh for the reader, mirror at another level this attempt to find a person anew.

Dr Fearnley talked about the implications of these ideas for the function of the project worker within the group:

> I suppose I think that the poem is chosen because there's something in it. So it's part of the selection that immediately gives it a status, it wasn't sort of random. So all the people involved, both the facilitators and the people taking part, are primed for 'this is something significant'. Now that could make people curious, it could make people read into it in different ways. And I suppose the facilitator has a key role in directing that.

Fearnley felt that the aim of such direction, or what he described as the 'nudging' of the project worker, would be to bring people to a point of connection with the text, 'an insight that you didn't have at the start':

> And I suppose the facilitator and the group are there to try to *hold* that, at least do something with it, otherwise it just evaporates. And going through things more slowly, and in that sort of process, gives time to stop and reflect, and that in itself can be quite a therapeutic experience, and people can pause and start to look at things differently. … And maybe there's a coming together then there's a divergence that's part of this process of – we are trying to get people somewhere but then we're letting go. … It's like an hourglass I suppose to me that you're moving people through a point of connection, but then they fall into wherever they go. But they've all got that reference point again, they've all had that moment of penny dropping or, you know some sort of movement in their emotional experience to sort of think 'oh yeah, I hadn't thought of that'.

These last comments were made as Dr Fearnley looked at some of the transcripts and reflected on the kinds of movements through a session which these allow the reader to retrace. He also commented further on why the direction of the project worker might be particularly valuable and necessary for some groups. He emphasised how without such guidance the experience of shared reading could be 'quite threatening' for certain people who were not used to closely reading and pondering over a text. And for some people, taking part in the group could mean 'crossing the first threshold of speaking to other people about emotions'. It was a step that must not be underestimated, he said. It is a comment reminiscent of Dickens's account of Clennam's imprisonment in the Marshalsea, that 'dangerous resting-place', near the end of *Little Dorrit*, where there is a 'marked stop in the whirling wheel of life … It comes with sickness, it comes with sorrow, it comes with the loss of the dearly loved, it is one of the most frequent uses of adversity' (p. 752).

Fearnley later reflected further on the implications of opening up this 'package of emotional experience' within the group, and whether this kind of shared experience is actually much more rare in our culture than we realize:

you know when you get together in a group, and there's a profound bit, and a lot of poems will have this sort of 'life', existential moment – it's really interesting whether that might be one of the few times people have come across it whereas maybe many years ago that was much more common.

He mentioned several changes that have affected us on a large scale. Life expectancy for instance is much higher than it was a century ago. Fearnley wondered if this had begun to alter the way in which people think. 'Maybe when the life is shorter, the intensity is different'; 'I wonder if that's part of our modern thinking that we've lost the urgency to express the things that really matter.' He again commented on the strangeness of a society in which 'people want to preserve their digital life as much as an emotional life'. Fearnley began to conclude by returning to his idea about what is found preserved in literature, and within the carefully crafted structure of literary form:

> it could be getting back to maybe a state of change or a state of our humanity that was easier for the emotions. Maybe we've reached the golden age of emotional experience and now we're in the sort of rushing round stressed phase. And that's probably, you know, true. I'm sure every generation's had its stresses but we've never been so wealthy, and yet we're probably more unhappy.

I do not think however that Dr Fearnley's phrase about this 'golden age' is particularly concerned with the question of relative degrees of happiness. What is more important here is whether it is possible to access and express that emotional experience, in any age, in a way that might produce what Fearnley described as the resonant sense of an 'afterglow' following the experience of reading.

As we came towards the end of the interview, Dr Fearnley commented on where shared reading might fit in, given current approaches in modern mental health practice, and considering also his broader concerns over life in a fast-paced society in which many individuals now find themselves struggling to keep up:

> I think a lot of modern mental healthcare is not always trying to get to the cause [of mental ill health], but it's trying to build up more resilience, so that people can manage.

I remembered Dr Fearnley having used this word 'resilience' in a number of previous discussions that we had had about the uses of shared reading. It signals a move away from the language of 'cure'. And yet it is better too than the language of 'coping'. Though in some current training packages, resilience means a sort of mental toughness that resists weakness, just as CBT resists certain ways of thinking, what Fearnley meant was a resilience that included dealing with weakness, vulnerability and pain rather than excluding them. Angela's response to the poem 'Comfort' had been: 'it built me'. This is what this version of resilience is like. It is a form of acceptance of one's experience, or situation, which is not passive but rather productive. Like the writer, it becomes possible for the reader to *use* his or her experience, even or especially when denied or regretted or buried.

<u>Conclusion</u>

There are three main areas of conclusion resulting from this thesis. These areas are similar to those indicated in the division of the bibliography; in both cases content overlaps across the divisions.

1) <u>Liveness in shared reading</u>
   and what follows from its resonance

   What distinguishes the practice of GIR from traditional book clubs or individual reading habits is the reading aloud of the literature. This creates, with each reading and within each new group of people, a fresh starting point and a dynamic presence for what follows. The literature is now re-experienced as a live happening in which the reader is invited to participate, by attending not only to the words on the page but to the human voice in which those words are being made present. It is an embodied and performed realization of the potential that literature offers as the container of a sharable human event: a point which will later feed into the second conclusion.

   In many instances in ordinary public experience the achievement of a sense of community and commonality between people will be dependent upon an agreement or acceptance of certain shared norms for a particular purpose. This may limit both the depth and the reach of such community as well as the place that the individual is able to occupy within it. But a non-reductive literary language works beneath conventional defaults, and allows the reader, out of an immediate sense of being personally moved, to relate both to the literature and to the other responsive readers. The reading aloud creates a present moment in time and an imaginative space within which this emotional response is called for when so often emotions are denied or regretted, personally repressed or deemed socially inappropriate. It is not

just that the feeling is validated or made understandable through the exemplary presence of the human literature. Personal resources of feeling are instead given place in the world within an expanded range of experience that includes and accepts what otherwise might be derogated as 'bad' or 'negative' experiences. It is inclusive not only of a wide range of persons in the group but also of a wide range of experiences in the literature, throughout different ages of time.

Getting into reading often starts with the reader being able to identify with the human predicament that is presented within the literature. But it may also go beyond that personal recognition in which the primary response is to triggered memories or feelings of self. At its best, the experience of such reading characteristically involves an immersion of attention and an awakening of creative, emotional, cognitive and imaginative mental faculties in place of fixed opinions known in advance. This widens the scope of the personal to include what is or seems 'not me'. The transcripts of reading groups give us a unique insight into what this inward attention to the literature is like in its shared external manifestations.

It offers a new model of community in which the individual and the social are unexpectedly closer than in most settings, as a result of the effect of the reading of literary works prompted and guided by the group leader.

2) A Holding Ground

Get into Reading is an attempt to recreate a lost habit not only of community but of contemplation, formed around literature as its focus. Even as the group work has been established as an ongoing joint activity, readers are also enabled to discover personal spaces for contemplation, in further recovery of more ancient human practices. The model builds upon a foundation in which literature itself stands as a holding-ground, a space for modelling, reminding, and imaginative thought. In

offering a permanent record of fleeting and transient moments, which often pass too quickly for us to be able consciously to take in their full significance, literature offers something enduring as well as live, something slow as well as sudden. The practice of reading and re-reading a text makes transient or anomalous experience find a place and last longer, sustaining the resonance of the text as a recovered reality at once shared amongst and contained within a group of readers. GIR is a kindly, safe and shared environment that even thus enables and encourages the taking of mental risk.

The project worker or facilitator of this process has a key role to play in holding this imaginative space open for as long as possible in order to prevent conversation lapsing back into default attitudes or degenerating into potentially divisive personal opinions or easy chat. The project worker responds to the other readers in the same way that he or she might respond to the literature: attentive to those inarticulate gestures towards meaning which are often indicative of the beginnings of creative breakthrough. He or she will be focussed upon holding – on the group member's behalf – that which is as yet implicit and unstated, to give the reader the opportunity of making this more explicit in active articulation of a thought. At such times the project worker is concerned neither exclusively with the individual nor with the group, but with the place out of which that thought has begun to be developed.

3) Health and Well-Being

The Reader Organisation should not be narrowly defined by its work in mental health, but then both health and well-being should not be narrowly defined either, and neither can 'mental' health be considered as exclusively separate from 'physical' health. In part GIR exists implicitly to challenge the over-medicalization of human experience, particularly sorrow, trouble, loss and trauma, through the

deeper and wider force of literary models rather than simple labels and easy diagnoses. But that challenge should not in turn result in the instrumentalizing of literary value, ironically medicalizing the uses of reading literature in the name of another utilitarian agenda. Literature for The Reader Organisation begins with the attempt to get behind existing worldly classifications and definitions of individual human experience in the search for meaning in any form or language. Any idealistic human practice which seeks to embed itself within the world is liable to face a two-handed struggle: to be useful without being utilitarian, to work within institutions, structures and categories without being determined by them. So much of what GIR does is therefore described in this thesis as 'implicit' in its working, achieving its effects outside the usual language of targets, plans and foreseen outcomes.

Nonetheless, for all the challenges to the notion of simple health and illness, many of the examples offered in this thesis do indeed come from a number of people diagnosed as living with moderate to severe mental illness and suffering genuine difficulties. It is the extremity of their predicament which allows us to see with greater emphasis versions of sadness, distress or perplexity that are part of a more widespread, ostensibly normal human experience, which often goes unadmitted in public. Literature itself locates these extremes within an extended range of what is to be considered the human 'norm'. But it does so by also implicitly challenging over-normalized opinions and agendas. What this produces as a result in Get into Reading is evidence of a not-quite-so-normal human community, along with a level of discourse and interaction which in fact is rather *un*-ordinary. The endeavour in this thesis has been to locate such evidence of the implicitly extra-ordinary from within the ordinary world as experienced by a group of readers.

<u>Further research</u>

The thesis is inevitably limited to being no more than an initial exploration across three institutions: The Reader Organisation, Mersey Care NHS Trust, and the community of academic research. I am aware of limitations concomitant with the need for further future study. This might include, for instance:

the relation of the work of Wordsworth, Milton and of Shakespearean drama to the development of GIR in practice;

the relation of the literary toolkit here assembled with discourse analysis as practised by experts in linguistics;

given the embodied nature of reading aloud and reader response, research into measurable physiological changes in response to the literature;

the study of GIR group members' progression through various stages of transition (from an inpatient ward to a community setting; from unemployment either to employment or involvement in volunteering) and thus the sustainability of GIR and its after-effects within the lives of individuals.

Appendix 1: Participation in GIR

		Number of men	Number of women
Group members included in the thesis		18	27
Project workers included in the thesis		2	13
Project workers employed by TRO (as of Dec 2013)		7	41
Trained group leaders (total number of participants to date in TRO's 'Read to Lead' programme)		approx. 250	approx. 750
Trained group leaders working as volunteers (as of Dec 2013)	Wirral	4	40
	Merseyside (excl. Wirral)	4	12
	London	20 trained	90 trained
	Wales		6

Appendix 2: Mersey Care groups

As indicated in the Preface, part 2 of this thesis includes a discussion of the findings from research carried out within Mersey Care NHS Trust. This research was approved by the Liverpool East Research Ethics Committee and also by Mersey Care's Research Governance Committee.

The following summary shows the range of specialist services which Mersey Care provides as one of 58 mental health trusts currently in operation in England:

> Mersey Care NHS Trust is located in Merseyside, within the North West of England. It was established in April 2001 as a specialist provider of adult mental health, substance misuse and learning disability services. It provides services to individuals with acute, severe and enduring mental health, learning disability and substance misuse needs and it is one of only three organisations in England providing high secure services. The Trust covers Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley (a total weighted population of nearly 1.5 million), Cheshire and Merseyside for low and medium secure services (a total weighted population of nearly 3 million) and the North West of England, Wales and West Midlands for high secure services (a male only weighted population of nearly 7 million). The population communities it serves are diverse and the North West of England is the 2nd most socially deprived area of the country (A Better Future in Mind, Mental Health Services in the North West, 2008). About half of the local services' population is male and common conditions include depression, dementia, anorexia, schizophrenia, personality disorder, illicit drug taking and alcohol abuse.

Data was collected from three Mersey Care groups for the purposes of this study. Group members were initially asked to complete a well-being measure in order that a record could be made of any changes and improvements over time. WEMWBS (The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale) was chosen for its use as a population-based measure of mental wellbeing. It is a measure that has been validated for the assessment of groups, but not for that of individuals, and is designed for use before and after an intervention. In practice it was only possible to collect before-and-after data from the community group, and no significant changes were found using this method, the results of which will have been affected by other variables and inconsistencies. In the hospital-based groups it was difficult to control for the more transient population, the variations in group attendance, and the effects of significant changes in the ward environment.

<u>Appendix 3</u>: Sonnets from different periods

The aim in GIR is to offer a wide range of literature spanning different ages and cultures, in order to include that which may be familiar alongside the new or unfamiliar. As an example, I have traced below different instances of the use of a particular literary form in GIR, in order to highlight the connections between more recent poetry which may be brought in to ease groups into reading, and older verse which often makes a different kind of demand on its readers.

a) Sonnets used during GIR sessions carried out across two research projects

<u>Elizabethan</u>

Shakespeare, William, 'When in disgrace' (29), 'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought' (30), 'From you have I been absent' (98), (*Sonnets*, 1609).

Sidney, Sir Philip, 'And do I see some cause a hope to feed' (*Astrophil and Stella*, 1591); 'Oft have I mused, but now at length I find' (*Certain Sonnets*, 1598).

<u>Nineteenth-century</u>

Barrett Browning, Elizabeth, 'Grief' (*Poems*, 1844).

Browning, Robert, 'Now' (*Asolando: fancies and facts,* 1889).

Dyke, Henry Van, 'The Child in the Garden' (*Music and Other Poems,* 1904).

Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire' (from the period 1876-89), (*Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 1918).

Keats, 'The Human Seasons' (*Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats*, 1829).

Lampman, Archibald, 'Outlook' (*Among the Millet and Other Poems*, 1888).

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, 'Memories' (*In the Harbor*, 1882).

Meynell, Alice, 'Renouncement' (*Preludes*, 1875).

Rossetti, Christina, 'Remember' (*Goblin Market and Other Poems*, 1862); 'I wish I could remember that first day' (*A Pageant and Other Poems*, 1881); 'The Rose' (pub. separately).

Turner, Charles Tennyson, 'Letty's Globe' (*Collected Sonnets, Old and New*, 1880).

Wordsworth, William, 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' (*Poems, in Two Volumes*, 1807).

<u>Twentieth and twenty-first century</u>

Belloc, Hilaire, 'May' (*Verses and Sonnets*, 1896).

cummings, e. e., 'i carry your heart with me' (*95 Poems*, 1958).

De La Mare, Walter, 'Silver' (*Peacock Pie*, 1913).

Frost, Robert, 'Acquainted with the Night' (*West-Running Brook*, 1928).

Pugh, Sheenagh, 'What If This Road' (*What If This Road and Other Poems*, 2003).

Thomas, R.S., 'The Moor' (*Pietà*, 1966).

Untermeyer, Louis, 'Portrait of a Child' (*These Times*, 1917).

Vincent Millay, Edna St., 'Love Is Not All' (*Fatal Interview*, 1931).

Yeats, W. B., 'In the Seven Woods' (*In the Seven Woods*, 1903).

b) Sonnets included in shared set of GIR resources

Barker, George, 'To My Mother' (*Eros in Dogma*, 1944).

Barrett Browning, Elizabeth, 'My future will not copy fair my past', 'Patience Taught By Nature', 'How do I love thee?' (*SP* 43), (*Poems*, 1850).

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Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 'Time does not bring relief' (*Renascence and Other Poems*, 1917).

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