

**WHEN LITERATURE COMES TO OUR AID:
INVESTIGATIONS INTO PSYCHOLOGICAL
UNDERSTANDING IN THE WRITING OF
SENECA AND MONTAIGNE,
WORDSWORTH AND GEORGE ELIOT**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the ways in which literature creates therapeutic spaces in which to do personal thinking. By a combination of literary analysis and practical experimentation this thesis seeks to provide a contribution to the relation of the reading of literature to the practice of psychology. It argues that literature has a vital role to play in the real world, whilst insisting that the methods of close literary analysis and literary thinking are preserved.

Chapter one establishes the relationship between Stoicism and certain modern day psychological therapies. It offers an analysis of the Roman philosopher Seneca's letters in relation to the tragedies that preceded them. These texts are usually studied in isolation whereas this thesis identifies places of overlap and exchange between the two literary forms.

Chapter two explores the work of the sixteenth-century essayist Michel de Montaigne, focussing on his valuable modification of Stoicism into what we might today recognise as an individual model of personal psychology and self-exploration.

Chapter three examines Wordsworth's relationship to Seneca and considers the poet's transformation of Stoic thought into a philosophy of restorative transmutation. This chapter sets out what is meant by 'literary thinking' in relation to Wordsworth's poetry and argues for its practical, therapeutic value in the world.

Chapter four consists of two reading experiments which test the interpretations made within the previous chapter on modern readers. Experiment A compares reader responses to a newspaper article with responses to extracts from Wordsworth's poetry. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of data collected suggests that, in certain cases, the poetry triggered more active reading, greater emotional focus, and higher levels of imaginative uncertainty. Experiment B examines the effects of sustained personal engagement with one of Wordsworth's longer poems. Analysis of diaries written over a period of two weeks by a group of participants suggests that, in certain cases, the poetry encouraged blended forms of thinking and stimulated readers to shift out of default modes.

Chapter five examines the therapeutic model that is contained within George Eliot's realist novels, rooted to her reading of Wordsworth, Feuerbach and Spinoza. A third experiment, based upon a letter-writing task, tests whether/how her fiction can trigger significant thinking capacities in modern readers, such as the capacity for perspective taking.

The thesis concludes by consolidating its vision of a literary-based form of therapy and discussing the implications for future research. It argues that the therapeutic potential of literature is specifically related to its ability to encourage the blending, widening, repositioning and reappraisal of thoughts.

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Written with love for my family

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Preface

The methodology of this thesis is rooted in the scholarly tradition of practical criticism. This is a form of literary study which is grounded in the attentive close analysis of primary texts, rather than a reliance on works of secondary criticism. It is a methodology which was first developed by I. A. Richards in his seminal work of 1929, *Practical Criticism*, in which he set out the results of a reading experiment which sought to demonstrate some of the limitations of methods of literary study which depend too heavily on the crutches of historical or theoretical context, at the expense of the actual words on the page. This approach is in line with what in the social sciences is now known as Grounded Theory, involving the bottom-up gathering and analysis of data, working inductively rather than being driven from above by the framework of a deductive hypothesis.¹

This thesis is concerned with the impact of literary texts on real lives. It was important therefore to select a methodology that would allow me to forge a direct connection to the literature being analysed and to get closer to the real, first-hand experience of serious reading. The chosen methodology also helped to establish a sense of continuity across the thesis as it placed me, within my own terms, in the same testing position as the experimental participants of chapters four and five: as a reader and struggling human, tasked with responding directly to a series of primary texts, without the assistance of external critical apparatus.

While certain critical approaches and theories have a tendency to make literature feel prohibitively distant and disconnected from the real and present struggles of individual modern life, the aim of this thesis has been to develop forms of interdisciplinary thinking and experimental design which firmly reconnect actual readers with texts and which demonstrate how literature might be of aid to human beings in those very struggles.

In her recently well-received monograph *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski

¹ Barney G. Glaser, and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New Jersey: Aldine, 1967).

offers a theoretical argument against the dominance of any one theoretical model of reading: in particular, critique based on the hermeneutics of suspicion. She makes the case for the encouragement of what she calls 'post-critical reading' in which 'the reader' is not an abstract concept as in reader-response theory, but a specific autonomous individual capable of a range of responses besides the trained default of intelligent suspicion:

We need ways of thinking about individual readers that does not flatten and reduce them, that grasps their idiosyncrasy as well as their importance. Texts cannot influence the world by themselves, but only via the intercession of those who read them, digest them, reflect on them, rail against them, use them as points of orientation, and pass them on.²

Such individual readers should not be restricted to those trained within the professionalised confines of a single approach, as for example socio-political context, but should be allowed to offer from within themselves, Felski argues, riskily generous, personal and imaginative responses that arise prior to formalization:

The import of a text is not exhausted by what it reveals or conceals about the social conditions that surround it. Rather, it is also a matter of what it sets alight in the reader – what kind of emotion it elicits, what changes of perception it prompts, what bonds and attachments it calls into being. One consequence of this line of thought is a perspective less dismissive of lay experiences of reading (which also precede and sustain professional criticism). (Felski, p.179)

It was with this aim of investigating lay-reading that the memory of I. A. Richards is evoked in this thesis, and the techniques that he first introduced into English Literature scholarship are put to service.

² Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp.171-2; hereafter cited as 'Felski'.

Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the therapeutic potential held within literature. It examines the ways in which literature has served - since ancient times - as a repository for collective human thinking and a source of what we would now call therapy. It argues for the ongoing need for literary thinking and literary models of care, repair and human connection in the world today.

It makes the claim that important therapeutic models are to be found within the classical writings of Seneca, the Renaissance reclamation of knowledge in Montaigne, and then again within the major nineteenth-century work of the Romantic poet Wordsworth and realist novelist George Eliot. Of course these four central figures are my choices and could have been otherwise (St Augustine's reading of Seneca or Byron's reading of Montaigne are two specific examples). But the principle remains – that each author acts as a representative of a different literary form in relation to problems of human psychology: Seneca the philosopher-playwright, Montaigne the essayist, Wordsworth the poet and George Eliot the novelist. As such, this thesis demonstrates how different forms can create different – and yet analogous - spaces in which to do existential thinking.

The four authors were selected due to the strong links between them: Montaigne is a reader of Seneca, Wordsworth is a reader of Seneca and George Eliot is a reader of Wordsworth as well as the Senecan-influenced Spinoza. It was important to show each writer as a reader in order to establish a model for the connection between the literary and the experimental work of this thesis; between the representative authors and the modern readers who participated in the reader-writerly experiments of chapters four and five. Furthermore, these four authors have had strong influence upon the future that came after them, with particular relation to what might now be called (albeit perhaps too reductively) mental health and wellbeing. There are well-established links between Seneca and modern psychological techniques for effecting calm (outlined in chapter one). Montaigne's *Essays* offer a vital model of personal and practical psychology, an individualistic experiment born out of his reading of

Stoicism. Wordsworth became established for future generations as the archetypal 'healing poet', and the work of George Eliot, this thesis will argue, had a significant role within the intellectual climate that help found the discipline of psychology itself.

In each chapter, literary models are compared and contrasted with existing modern-day psychological therapies. In lieu of a secondary review of research literature and in order to allow sufficient scope to construct a first-hand argument that spans disciplines, a range of texts were selected from across the spectrum of psychological interventions (including popular self-help books, CBT texts, Mindfulness programmes, Freudian and Post-Freudian Psychoanalytic texts) to act as representative examples of what psychology currently has to offer. Analysis of and reference to relevant research is incorporated into the argument throughout. Additionally, literature reviews carried out by researchers in the field of reading and health are included in section 2.2.1 of the bibliography.

In chapter one, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is examined in relation to the Stoic philosophy out of which, it has been argued, it derives its origins. Through an examination of the letters of Seneca and the tragic vision that precedes them in his plays, it seeks to reconstruct a context for Stoic therapy within a more profound world-order than is understood within the modern psychological therapies that have partially evolved from it.

Chapter two explores the essays of the sixteenth-century philosopher Montaigne, as a reader of Seneca. It examines his adaptation of Stoicism into a personal form of thinking within praxis, adding a further dimension to Seneca's epistles. It is argued that through reading, writing and re-writing, Montaigne creates an individualistic model for, but also counter-example to, what we might today call self-examination and self-help. The *Essays* are also linked forward to both the self-reflexive processes of psychoanalysis and to Freud's own work as an essayist and thinker preoccupied with the individual self, with relation (for example) to Adam Phillips' Freudian-based work on the linkage between psychoanalysis and the reading of serious literature.

Chapter three takes a second major creative reader of Seneca two hundred years after Montaigne. It examines William Wordsworth's poetic use of

Stoicism and his move beyond Stoicism towards a philosophy of transmutation. More broadly, this chapter presents the case for the particular and distinctly therapeutic forms of literary thinking that are contained within Wordsworth's poetry, not least because Wordsworth's poetry, as representative of a reformed poetic to serve ordinary life, was held by several readers and commentators to be vital to the recuperation of the Western psyche. The patterns of psychoanalysis, as outlined in Freud's essay 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through', are an important point of comparison in chapter three, in relation to the restorative and revisionary patterns of Wordsworth's poetry. Linked to this chapter, chapter four consists of two experimental studies which aim to investigate what reading Wordsworth's poetry can do to and for modern readers.

Chapter five sets out the connections between George Eliot and Wordsworth. It examines George Eliot's contribution to the nineteenth-century development of psychology and argues that there is a specific and useful model of therapy contained within her realist novels, just as surely as within Wordsworth's poetry of common nature. It is argued that George Eliot is a 'proto-psychoanalyst' who in stern demand requires patients to stay *in* their difficulties, with relation to her own realist novelist's version of what Freud was to call 'the reality principle'. This chapter includes a third reading experiment which aims to test whether George Eliot's fiction can in fact trigger particular thinking capacities in modern readers.

The experimental studies within this thesis are an attempt to test the theoretical and literary work that sits alongside them in ways that would not generally be accommodated by a traditional PhD in English Literature. They are exploratory attempts at multidisciplinary thinking and serve as preparatory real-world work for a series of future pilot studies investigating the potential therapeutic effects of a specifically designed literary intervention on a range of individual readers. They are also an attempt, in some way, to bridge the gap between the arts and sciences, between theory and practice, and between private concerns and public health. The experimental work of this thesis is indebted to research carried out by The Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society (CRILS) at the University of Liverpool. In particular,

research into the impact of shared reading on mental health and wellbeing.³ The distinct difference between this thesis and the previous work of CRILS is that the focus here is on private rather than shared reading.

If the thesis is to some degree an alternative to literary studies as conventionally carried out within the academy, it is also offered as a challenge by literature and literary study to certain therapeutic prescriptions adopted within the field of psychology. By separating itself off from the means through which humans have traditionally thought about and found ways of dealing with the psychological – whether that is art, literature, philosophy or religion – there is the risk that the discipline of psychology cannot help but become narrowed and diminished into popular instrumental programmes that offer up second-order solutions to problems that they cannot fully understand. As Philip Rieff writes in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, ‘Scientific regression may occur in any discipline that does not insist upon mastery of its own historical development. A social science that refuses to remember its founders will not realise when it is being silly or repetitious’.⁴ Freud recognised the important role that literature played as a holding-ground for the psychological, before psychology came into existence as a distinct concept or discipline: ‘the poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious; what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied’.⁵ The psychoanalyst Adam Phillips claims in the introduction to his new edition of Freud’s collected works that ‘It would not be overstating the case to say that, for Freud, reading has been the modern equivalent of what, beginning in the eighteenth century, had been called the experience of the sublime. To write and to read was to be close to the source of something, close to the source of the most important something’.⁶ Where in most contexts that ‘something’ may seem all too vague, in literature it becomes a powerful inner drive towards meaning in the secular age.

³ See bibliography section 2.2. for further references to the work of Professor Philip Davis and Dr Josie Billington of CRILS, in particular their report into ‘What Literature Can Do’ (2016), <www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/instituteofpsychology/researchgroups/CRILSWhatLiteratureCanDo.pdf> [accessed April 15th 2017]; hereafter cited as ‘What Literature Can Do’.

⁴ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1966), p.101.

⁵ Lionel Trilling, ‘Freud and Literature’, in *Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Perry Meisel (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971), p.95.

⁶ Adam Phillips, Introduction to *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin, 2006), p.xi.

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1.

Seneca: Cosmology before Psychology

In *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations*, Jules Evans traces the origins of modern psychological therapies, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, back to their roots in the ancient philosophy of Stoicism. Evans interviewed two of the founders of CBT, Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck, of whom he writes:

Albert Ellis told me, for example, that he had been particularly impressed by a saying of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus: 'Men are disturbed not by things, but by their opinions about them'. This sentence inspired Ellis's 'ABC' model of the emotions, which is at the heart of CBT: we experience an event (A), then interpret it (B), and then feel an emotional response in line with our interpretation (C). Ellis, following the Stoics, suggested that we change our emotions by changing our thoughts or opinions about events. Aaron Beck likewise told me he was inspired by his reading of Plato's *Republic*, and was also influenced by the Stoic philosophers, who stated that it was the meaning of events rather than the events themselves that affected people [. . .] These two pioneers – Ellis and Beck – took the idea and techniques of ancient Greek philosophy, and put them right at the heart of Western psychotherapy.⁷

The belief that 'we change our emotions by changing our thoughts or opinions about events' is fundamental to CBT and it is an idea of self-control that comes directly from Stoic philosophy. The most extensive surviving evidence that we have of ancient Stoic philosophy is provided by Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the Roman philosopher (4BC - AD 65) described by Jules Evans as the author of 'one of the first works of anger management in Western culture' (Evans, p.60). In several of the one hundred and twenty-four surviving philosophical letters in

⁷ Jules Evans, *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations* (London: Rider Books, 2012), pp.3-4; hereafter cited as 'Evans'.

which many of the general principles of Stoicism are set out, Seneca outlines how our thoughts can determine our feelings. For example, in epistle LXXVIII, 'Everything depends on opinion; ambition, luxury, greed, hark back to opinion. It is according to opinion that we suffer. A man is as wretched as he has convinced himself that he is'.⁸ Bestselling CBT self-help books such as *Mind over Mood* have translated Stoic philosophy into practical manuals for modern living: '*Mind over Mood* teaches you to identify your thoughts, moods, behaviours, and physical reactions in small situations as well as during major events in your life. You learn to test the meaning and usefulness of various thoughts you have during the day and to change the thinking patterns that keep you locked into dysfunctional moods, behaviours, or relationship interactions'.⁹

In the forty years since CBT was first developed by Ellis and Beck, its popularity and prevalence has dramatically increased. Today CBT is the most commonly prescribed evidenced-based psychological therapy in the UK. Between 2013 - 2014, 38% of the 3.2 million appointments made under the government's 'Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies Scheme' (IAPT) – set up to improve outcomes for patients suffering from anxiety and depression – were for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.¹⁰ A large number of studies have identified the benefits of CBT and shown it to be as effective – and in some cases more effective – than medication, particularly when used to treat depression and anxiety: 'Many randomised controlled trials have shown that people *can* challenge and overcome even deeply entrenched emotional disorders through CBT. Researchers have found that a 16 week course of CBT helps around 75 per cent of patients to recover from social anxiety, 65 per cent to recover from PTSD and as much as 80 per cent from panic disorders' (Evans, p.8).

Yet there are concerns - not least from amongst practising clinical

⁸ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, trans. by Richard M. Gunmere, The Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), ii, Letter LXXVIII, p.189; hereafter cited as *Epistles*.

⁹ Dennis Greenberger & Christine A. Padesky, *Mind over Mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), p.2.

¹⁰ Health and Social Care Information Centre, 'Psychological Therapies. Annual Report on the use of IAPT services – England, 2013-14' (2014), <<http://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB14899>> [accessed February 12th 2015].

psychologists - about the apparent dominance of CBT and its rigid, top-down and overly manualised approach. A survey carried out in 2010 by the charity Mind found that only 8% of patients deemed to require psychological therapy were offered any choice as to what that therapy might be: invariably patients were simply prescribed a course of CBT.¹¹ As the Clinical Psychologist Joanna Cates writes, 'There are a large number of people whose symptoms of anxiety and depression are caused by a myriad of other factors and for whom CBT is not necessarily the panacea it is sometimes promised to be. For this reason I question IAPT's over-dependence on this model as a means of conceptualising and 'treating' a person's emotional distress'.¹² In response to some of the concerns surrounding CBT, a 'third-wave' of psycho-dynamic therapies have begun to develop. These include Cognitive Analytic Theory (CAT) which combines some of the cognitive elements of CBT with a psychoanalytic approach, and Acceptance and Cognitive Therapy (ACT) which incorporates mindfulness and acceptance strategies into CBT. These new therapies address some of the perceived limitations of CBT.¹³

However, while rooted in Greek and Roman philosophy, CBT and its new variants still offer, I will argue, only second order versions of the original, ancient models of therapy of those philosophies. Evans himself acknowledges that they are fragmented over-simplifications of much more complicated thought-systems:

[Ellis and Beck] proved that philosophy, even in a very simplified and basic form, *can* help millions of ordinary people to live happier and more examined lives. Nonetheless, it is inevitable that, in turning ancient philosophy into a sixteen-week course of CBT, cognitive therapists had to

¹¹ Mind, 'We need to talk: Getting the right therapy at the right time' (2010) <<https://www.mind.org.uk/media/280583/We-Need-to-Talk-getting-the-right-therapy-at-the-right-time.pdf>> [accessed February 12th 2015].

¹² Joanna Cates, 'Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Is Not Always the Answer for Anxiety and Depression', *Huffington Post*, 10th March 2015, <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/joanna-cates/cognitive-behavioural-not-always-the-answer_b_6814562.html> [accessed 20th March 2015].

¹³ Tom J. Johnsen, and Friberg Oddgeir, 'The effects of cognitive behavioural therapy as an anti-depressive treatment is falling: A meta-analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 141.4 (2015), 747-68.

Lars-Goran Ost, 'Efficacy of the third wave of behavioural therapies: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 46 (2008), 296-321.

truncate it and narrow its scope, and the result is a rather atomised and instrumental form of self-help, which focuses narrowly on an individual's thinking style and ignores ethical, cultural and political factors [. . .] Self-help in the ancient world was far more ambitious and expansive than modern self-help. It linked the psychological to the ethical, the political and the cosmic. (Evans, p.11)

By turning back to the classical antecedents of modern psychology, this chapter aims to rediscover the 'ambitious' and 'expansive' model of therapy that was originally developed by the Stoics. It will attempt to restore an understanding of Stoicism as a whole, rather than the 'truncated' version of it that has been co-opted by the discipline of psychology.

*

Seneca's surviving body of work consists of eight tragedies, a series of moral treatises, three consolations and one hundred and twenty-four letters to his friend Lucilius. The tragedies were written first and contain a degree of brutality and violence that does not sit comfortably alongside either the restraint of his later letters or our conventional understanding of Stoicism. In the centuries after Seneca's death the tragedies and letters were deemed to be so incompatible that the misconception developed that there must have been more than one Roman philosopher named Seneca. The fifth-century orator Sidonius Apollinaris and later Renaissance thinkers Erasmus and Diderot are amongst those who believed there were multiple Senecas.¹⁴

While the philosophical letters have been celebrated and absorbed by the discipline of psychology, Seneca's tragedies have been largely ignored in recent scholarship despite their noted influence on Shakespeare and other Renaissance dramatists.¹⁵ One such example is Professor of Classical Philosophy Brad Inwood, who makes no mention of the tragedies in his collection of essays *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome*, other than to explain his omission in the introduction: 'I have not said a word about Seneca's poetic works, his

¹⁴ Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p.8; hereafter cited as 'Rosenmeyer'.

¹⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation', in *Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1956), pp.3-55 (p.3).

dramas. In these essays I have focussed entirely on the prose corpus [. . .] My decision rests partly on a sense of my own limitations and partly on the conviction that any philosophical influence probably runs from the prose works to the plays rather than the other way around [. . .] For the purpose of this collection, Seneca the philosopher writes in prose'.¹⁶ Within the philosophical letters themselves, Seneca argues against the kind of scholarship which focuses on fragments of a body of work at the expense of the whole. He admonishes his friend Lucilius for attempting to subdivide the complex philosophical ideas that they are studying together: 'Look into their wisdom as a whole; study it as a whole. They are working out a plan and weaving together, line upon line, a masterpiece, from which nothing can be taken away without injury to the whole' (*Epistles*, i, XXXIII, 237). By dividing Seneca's writing into two categories - namely the philosophical and literary texts - and examining each in isolation, scholars have both marginalised Seneca's literary output and failed to acknowledge fully the unifying thought-system of Stoic cosmology which connects the two. This chapter will begin by looking at Seneca's tragedies, arguing against Inwood's assertion that 'any philosophical influence probably runs from the prose works to the plays', not least because the tragedies were most likely to have been written first. More particularly, the tragedies are home to first things, primary emotions and forces that demand they should be read first. The chapter will then go on to look at Seneca's letters to Lucilius which contain his second-order attempts at setting out generalised guidance for living in adaptive accordance with the rules of Stoicism.

Contradictions and tensions are an important element of the Stoic cosmology and they exist within the tragedies and the prose as well as between them. In fact, internal contradiction is one thing which unifies these two seemingly disparate bodies of work. While on the surface, the tragedies are preoccupied with intense violence, unimaginable excess and cosmic repercussions, they also contain places where small and very recognisably human pressure points are revealed. Similarly, within Seneca's letters there are places where the surface restraint of Stoic philosophy appears to crack and

¹⁶ Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp.5-6.

reveal underlying psychological fault lines. The aim of this chapter will be to gain a greater understanding of the philosophy of Stoicism as a whole in light of the connecting Stoic cosmology which underpins both the tragedies and letters. Important parts of that whole have been lost in the translation of Stoicism into modern therapy.

1.1. The Tragedies

Tragedies are ancient holding-grounds for primary forces and raw emotions which – by their very nature – can barely be held in place at all. Tragedies provide a vehicle for material that is too big to be held inside one individual mind: Jules Evans describes how Seneca – like his Greek predecessors – saw Tragedy as ‘a form of mass therapy’ (Evans, p.66).

The chorus is a collective consciousness which in Seneca’s tragedies has a distinctly human fragility. In *Agamemnon*, the chorus advocates a model of group therapy and blended feeling which is rarely achieved within the tragedies between characters, but which Seneca would have hoped could be established amongst his audience:

It helps to mingle tears with tears.
Cares wound more deeply
The people they afflict in private;
It helps to mourn one’s losses in common.¹⁷

By feeling ‘in common’ rather than ‘in private’ we open up a bigger mental space for ourselves in which we can place our individual cares. Joining together *more* ‘tears with tears’ across the group is paradoxically what helps here to *lessen* individual loss. In the original text, the line reads, ‘Lacrimas lacrimis miscere iuvat’ (*Agamemnon*, p.180). There is no requirement for the preposition ‘with’ in Latin so the two sets of tears can simply be placed alongside one another on the page, doubling up the emotional width available to the suffering individual. The depth of suffering felt by the single person when they are alone with their cares in private is now being spread out – horizontally – across the group.

¹⁷ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, ‘Agamemnon’ in *Eight Tragedies*, trans. by John G. Fitch, The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), ii, pp.115-213 (p.181); hereafter cited as *Agamemnon*.

Nonetheless, within all eight tragedies the chorus is also an anxious, fretful presence which exemplifies the risks as much as the benefits of this kind of communal thinking. Seneca's choruses lack any omniscient perspective and instead seem to exist in an almost permanent state of shock. In *Thyestes*, a play about a bitter feud between two royal brothers (Atreus and Thyestes), the chorus reacts with terrified panic when it discovers – later than any other character in the play other than Thyestes himself - that Atreus has killed and cooked his three nephews and fed their bodies to their father. This transgressive act of violence breaks all moral boundaries and triggers a cosmic breakdown. As the sky suddenly goes dark and the stars begin to fall, the chorus calls out:

The stars have not appeared, there is no light in all the sky,
No moon to break the darkness.
What darkness it may be, we cannot tell,
But pray that it be nothing else than night.
This is the fear, the fear that knocks the heart.¹⁸

Seneca's chorus speaks with a ritualistically repetitive voice, but in this passage, rather than forming healing epigrams, the repetitions jarringly span across lines and between sentences. 'The darkness. / What darkness' and 'the fear, the fear' reveal the chorus' vulnerability. Now there is no safety in numbers, as anxiety vibrates through the chorus to create a downward psychological spiral. As the group descends into stuttering rumination, there is no-one to help. This is a world in which every link of commonality is strained to breaking point, whether it is the bond between brothers, parents and their children or the mental bonds between members of the chorus. On a macro level the physical bonds holding the structure of the universe together are breaking apart in this scene as the chorus watches each constellation in turn fall out of the sky; on a micro level the chorus' taut, balanced syntax is disintegrating.

In Act Three, as Thyestes leaves behind the safety of a life of obscure poverty and is tempted back to the royal palace by his brother's false promises

¹⁸ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, 'Thyestes' in *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, trans. by E.F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp.43-96 (p.81); hereafter cited as *Thyestes*.

of reconciliation, some primitive part of himself – an almost archetypal version of anxiety – surfaces and attempts to halt the tragic momentum by which he is unknowingly being carried along:

You ask me why, I cannot tell you why
I am afraid; I see no cause for fear,
And yet I am afraid. I would go on;
But I am paralysed. (*Thyestes*, p.64)

A battle is taking place within these lines between different parts of Thyestes' mind; between the surface logic and the lower, inner feeling of dread that can neither compromise nor explain itself in the language of reason. The first three lines are each split into two clauses which pull against each other on the page. In the first half of the line the instinctive, primal simplicity of 'I am afraid' comes from a different place within Thyestes to the second thought, the rational counterbalance of 'I see no cause for fear'. The two conflicting feelings exist simultaneously within him, each emerging from a different level or layer of his self. Reading vertically down the page, Thyestes' fear is as relentless as his opposing drive to keep moving, 'I am afraid / And yet I am afraid / But I am paralysed' is like the sound of ruminating cogs in his brain. Thyestes' logical half simultaneously struggles to understand how something can exist within him without evidence and without answers, 'I cannot tell you why' / 'I see no cause for fear'. The result of this internal conflict is psychological paralysis. His fear is the last barrier holding back the destructive momentum of the tragedy. And yet in the face of what seems an external urge for life, Thyestes is persuaded by the arguments of his son to return to the palace and 'I would go on; / But I am paralysed' quickly turns to 'Let us go on, then' (*Thyestes*, p.66).

The impetus to keep driving onwards is the most powerful force within Seneca's plays. The tragedies hinge on moments where something is about to snap as the tension becomes too tight between two relentless forces pulling in opposite directions. Even when some part of Thyestes is instinctively dragging him back and trying to halt, another part of his self is leading him onwards; it is hard to know which is the force for good. Thyestes overrides the survival mechanism that has been triggered within his body and now the only way he

will finally come to a halt is at the end of the play when tragedy has piled on top of tragedy and everything has been destroyed. Seneca pushes his characters towards the extreme point of disintegration and that final point of impact is the only thing that can stop their momentum.

Seneca identifies the very limits of emotion and tests what happens when you keep expanding and stretching out a feeling until breaking point. As such, the tragedies help to show the real size of emotions when they are not simply felt within, in that mismatch which can exist between the intensity or weight of feelings as they are privately experienced on the inside compared to the merest of ripples that they seem to produce in the outside world. Here there is no disconnect between internal catastrophe and the external world: the cosmos responds in line with the inner space and draws it outwards.

The tragic momentum is a damaging consequence of a Stoic cosmology in which everything belongs to one unified continuum which is held together by a system of tensions: '*Tonos* is the energy system that, for better or worse, welds the Stoic cosmos into a unity. The tensional relationship between the constituents of the cosmos, including the incorporation of man and his life in the larger world, Posidonius called *sumpatheia*' (Rosenmeyer, p.107). This is not sympathy in the modern sense, but rather a mutual interdependence or simultaneity of being at all levels in the cosmos. The concept of *krasis* - translated as 'blending' - was the epitome of *sumpatheia* for the Stoics. The 'tensional relationship' means that different elements within as well as between humans must be held together, and not necessarily in harmony: 'Another term by which Cicero chooses to render *sumpatheia* is *contagio*, which is contact, in the medical sense, hence, sadly, infection. Certainly medicine, though supportive of the notion of harmony and balance and healthy tension, is fully alive to the variety of causes that may trigger a breakdown of the harmony, and to the extreme narrow scope within which tension can be expected to operate successfully' (Rosenmeyer, p.111). Tragic relationships are characterised by the version of *sumpatheia* that is *contagion*, and revenge spreads like an infection between Seneca's characters. Generations of the same family are marked with violence as if their bloodline has been infected. The interconnected Stoic world view is dangerous because the set of conditions which are required to maintain

healthy connections across the continuum are the same in nature as those that lead to sickness, but are much more difficult to sustain. The tragedies show what happens when the universe deviates from this 'extreme narrow scope' and is no longer operating successfully either on a macro, cosmic level or a micro, interpersonal level.

In Act Five of *Thyestes*, the tragic hero continues to struggle with a sense of dread and foreboding, yet he has in fact already – unknowingly – eaten the flesh of his three murdered children:

Why, fool, what griefs, what dangers
Does your imagination see?
Believe your brother with an open heart.
Your fears, whatever they may be,
Are either groundless, *or* too late. (*Thyestes*, p.87)

The formulation 'either groundless *or* too late' is disturbingly characteristic of the tragedies. In this instance, it is already 'too late', and the unarticulated fear that has hung over Thyestes since the beginning of the play has now overtaken him, coming to pass in a form beyond anything he could have imagined. The future has already happened and it is only by not yet knowing the truth that Thyestes is able partially, but only temporarily, to hold off its full realisation. In Act Five, Thyestes is the last to learn what it is that he has already done. It is Atreus' only regret that his brother consumed his own children without knowing it:

His torture came too late; he never knew
What he was doing when his cursed teeth
Gnawed at those bones! (*Thyestes*, p.91)

Thyestes' tragic 'too late' is mirrored and distorted by his brother here. It is as if the idea of the continuum is being applied to the language of the tragedies to create a series of connections, tensions, sympathies and contagions on the page.

There is a strange relationship between time and fear and time and knowledge in the tragedies. Time can speed up or slow down, go forwards or turn back on itself, stretch out or stall in the presence or absence of knowledge

or fear. In the moments after something bad is revealed to have happened, the time before a character found out the truth can feel to him retrospectively warped. The structure of this play reflects the real instability of time, a deep discrepancy between time as it is felt internally and how it exists externally. By refusing to follow a sequential timeline, Seneca creates a different kind of framework that feels more like how it is to be stuck inside the nightmare-like logic of a bad experience. We cannot return to the moments before we knew something bad had already happened. When a truth is discovered the past is retrospectively reshaped by the present and what was small, insignificant and fleeting at the time becomes large. There is a sickening vertigo in this forward-backwards motion which acts in defiance of simple cause and effect, for the effect almost creates its cause in retrospect. Boundaries that are crossed blindly in real time can only be seen afterwards and from a distance. The tragedies seem to be fixated with these boundary lines: Where does a tragedy start? Where does it finish? And where is 'too late' located if anywhere? Ignorance, like fear, is a mechanism for holding back or temporarily halting the flow of time, it creates a temporary safety. But fear, ignorance and paralysis are the unhealthy versions of stopping, just as revenge and greed, lies and secrets provide the fuel for a negative, unhealthy version of progress.

*

In Stoic thought, the cosmos is moving inevitable towards a final disintegration. But rather than a straight downward slope of decline, the Stoics saw a series of peaks and troughs in the trajectory of the world. *Conflagrations* occur cyclically, they are like periods of fever that contrast with the otherwise slow process of decay. This intermittent burning down of the world creates both desolation and the potential for life to restart. The Stoics identified two different types of conflagration: *tecknikon*, a productive or creative kind of burning, and *atechnon* or destructive fire. Worryingly a character might not know at the time which was which, since they may be sympathetic at root. Fire is one way of halting the spread of infection. In *The Phoenician Women* for example, Oedipus calls for the

city of Thebes to be 'cremated'¹⁹ in a desperate attempt to put a stop to the contagious tragedy of his life.

Seneca explores the fragile relationship between *technikon* and *atechnon* most thoroughly in the tragedy *Medea*. Medea's name means 'the thinking and inventive woman'²⁰ and she is the archetype of a creative woman whose power is subverted into an all-consuming destructive force. Fire is one of Medea's weapons and at the end of the tragedy she stands atop a burning tower and drops her son to his death. When Jason – Medea's partner and the father of her two sons – chooses to marry another woman, all of Medea's invention and thought is redirected into her need for revenge. In *Medea* the nurse attempts to reinstate some element of Stoic restraint back into the chaotic world of the tragedies by calling on her mistress to 'Stop, curb your anger, control your aggression' (*Medea*, p.379). But ultimately she is not only ignored, but also made complicit in Medea's crime as she is sent off to prepare the ingredients for the poison that will be used to kill Jason's new bride.

In Act Two, as the nurse again attempts to persuade Medea to escape, stichomythia – a characteristic of Senecan tragedy which consists of a stretched-out thread of dialogue between two people – is used to reflect the breakdown of *sumpatheia* between these two women. Their minds have fallen out of sync and as such the lines are short and disjointed, creating a linguistic version of the fragile extended continuum:

NURSE: You will die

MEDEA: I desire it

NURSE: Escape!

MEDEA: I regret escaping

NURSE: Medea

MEDEA: I shall become her

¹⁹ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, 'The Phoenician Women' in *Eight Tragedies*, trans. by John G. Fitch, The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), i, pp.275-331 (p.307).

²⁰ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, 'Medea' in *Eight Tragedies*, trans. by John G. Fitch, The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), i, pp.334-433 (p.423); hereafter cited as *Medea*.

NURSE: You are a mother

MEDEA: You see by who.

(*Medea*, p.359)

In Latin these lines are even more condensed for as David Slavitt notes in his *Introduction to Senecan Tragedy*, 'Latin is an extremely economical language. Since it is an inflected language, in which the endings of words signal their grammatical functions, most prepositions and auxiliary verbs are unnecessary. It also lacks articles. Consequently, Latin can say something in about half the words English would require'.²¹ The twenty-three words spoken in the stichomythia above are a translation of a passage that consists of only twelve words in the original Latin text:

NURSE: Moriere

MEDEA: Cupio

NURSE: Profuge

MEDEA: Paenituit fugae

NURSE: Medea

MEDEA: Fiam

NURSE: Mater es

MEDEA: Cui sim vides

(*Medea*, p.358)

The linguistic world is broken up into its bare elements here. Each response from Medea is like a full stop as she rejects the way out of tragedy that the nurse is offering her. Medea refuses to reciprocate the sympathy of the nurse and casts off motherhood in the belief that it has been tainted by the betrayal of her husband Jason. Instead, she puts on the shield of 'Medea'. 'I will become her' is a simultaneous rebirth and death: it is a perversion of reinvention as she throws away motherhood and instead embraces the worst part of herself which cannot accommodate all the other parts of herself and has no room within it for her to be a mother. She is now only able to define herself through the bad things that she has done in the past. The relentless forward motion of the tragedy contains a simultaneous backward movement as who she is becomes the sum of what she has done, and what she will do can only be a repetition of what she has

²¹ David Slavitt, *Introduction to Seneca: The Tragedies*, 2 vols (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), ii, p. xv; hereafter cited as 'Slavitt'.

already done. Having previously murdered her innocent brother in order to punish her father, she has destroyed the bonds of family and created a framework or pattern for her future: killing her innocent children in order to punish her husband. She becomes the myth of Medea; this provides her with an armour but it also cuts off any possibility of connection with the people outside herself.

And yet, while the Stoic cosmology suggests that every creative force has the potential to become a destructive force, the resulting destructive force still also holds within it the original creative potential. In Medea's case, this can perhaps best be glimpsed in the places where she reveals herself to be more than the narrow myth of Medea allows her finally to become. That is when she shows herself to be not yet a finally fixed, singular entity, but still a multiplicity of different, uncontainable and unpredictable parts. It is in these places that 'Medea' the myth translates herself back – if only momentarily – into a human being.

In Act Five, in place of the two opposing voices of Medea and her nurse, there are two opposing voices within Medea's own mind, fighting against one another. The argument is no longer whether she should save herself or not – as it was when she was arguing with the nurse – but whether she should save her children from herself or not:

My heart is struck with horror, my limbs freeze, my breast trembles.
Anger retreats, and the mother returns, with the wife utterly banished.
Could I shed the blood of my children, my own youngsters? Do not say so mad rage! Let that unheard of deed, that abomination, be left untouched by me as well. What crime will the poor boys pay for? The crime is having Jason as their father, and the worse crime is having Medea as their mother. Let them fall since they are not mine; let them perish, since they are mine. They are free of guilt and blame, they are innocent, I admit: my brother was, too. Why do you vacillate, my spirit? Why are tears wetting my face, and anger leading me to shift in one direction, love in another? Conflicting currents whirl me from side to side. Just as, when whirling winds wage savage warfare, the contending waves drive the seas both ways, and the waters seethe in confusion: so my heart wavers:

anger puts mother love to flight, then mother love, anger. Give way to
love, my pain. (*Medea*, p.425)

She cannot balance her anger at her husband with her love for the children that are as equally a part of him as they are a part of her; she cannot navigate between his betrayal and their innocence. The impersonal 'Medea' that she addresses herself as is only one version of herself, it is the form that she took on when she resolutely called out 'I will become her'. It is the worst part of herself, but it is not the entirety of herself. In this passage, as Medea's body reacts with horror and paralysis to the path that her mind has brought her along, the maternal instinct that she had tried to deny comes flooding back from somewhere deeper within her than the anger that has taken over her mind. In the moment of pause created by her frozen limbs, a space is made for her thoughts to realign, 'Anger retreats, and the mother returns'. By placing the feeling 'anger' alongside the person 'mother' in this way, it suggests that the two belong to either end of a single psychological scale; restraining anger allows the mode of mother to come to the fore and vice versa. The construction makes 'anger' feel closer to a person and 'mother' to feel more like an emotional state that can fluctuate, rather than a fixed role. Destruction or (re-) creation are for a moment held together as equal possibilities. Suddenly the fight for the final shaping of what is to be her nature and her world is open again, for the very last time within this psychological tempest of 'whirling winds' and 'conflicting currents'.

*

The tragedy of *Phaedra* is set in motion when Phaedra attempts to seduce her step-son Hippolytus. As so often in Seneca's tragedies, the terrible consequences of the breakdown of natural relationships subsequently unfolds like a distorted version of the genetic code. The nurse is again the ignored Stoic counsellor who calls on her mistress to 'restrain that impulse, child! Hold these hot thoughts in check'.²² When the nurse falters in her role as the voice of Stoic restraint, the chorus leader breaks off from his group and encourages her with his own Stoic

²² Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, 'Phaedra' in *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, trans. by E.F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp.97-152 (p.108); hereafter cited as *Phaedra*

maxim, 'Do not weep over her. Grief cannot help the afflicted' (*Phaedra*, p.114). It is as if the responsibility to hold onto or keep verbalising the Stoic law is passed between characters; when one fails, another takes over. Each of these guiding voices is however ultimately ignored. As in *Medea*, the nurse becomes complicit in her mistress' violence, for it is she who suggests that Phaedra frame Hippolytus as a rapist, 'Crime must cover crime. The safest shield in danger is attack' (*Phaedra*, p.127). While the syntax mimics that of a Stoic maxim, the nurse is now advocating a total perversion of Stoic restraint.

Phaedra's husband Theseus is another who attempts to help and guide his wife. He takes on the role of Stoic counsellor, unconscious however of the fact that Phaedra is threatening to kill herself because of having secretly seduced his son:

THESEUS: Why must you die?

PHAEDRA: To tell the cause is to destroy the purpose.

THESEUS: No one shall hear your reason, but myself.

PHAEDRA: Chaste wives least trust their secrets to their husbands.

THESEUS: Your secret will be safe with me; speak out.

PHAEDRA: A secret is best kept when shared with no one.

THESEUS: We shall protect you from all means of death.

PHAEDRA: Death cannot hide from one who means to die.

THESEUS: Is it to expiate some sin? What sin?

PHAEDRA: My being alive.

THESEUS: Are my tears nothing to you?

PHAEDRA: To die lamented is to die content. (*Phaedra*, p.133)

Theseus makes a distinction in the third line between 'no one' and 'myself'; he tries to draw closer to his wife and mark himself out from the void of nothingness that is outside of her. While Phaedra's language is detached and impersonal, Theseus tries to break through the impersonal using 'myself', 'me', 'my', 'you', 'your' and 'we' to re-establish the husband and wife as a connected pair. Phaedra refuses to return to the complicity of marriage, 'A secret is best kept when shared with no one', and pushes Theseus away from her, back into the void of 'no one'. Theseus' offer of a local *sumpatheia* and protection is cut

short as Phaedra rejects this opportunity for confession and for the re-establishment of trust. She adamantly refuses to deviate from a path which takes her both relentlessly onwards towards death and simultaneously inwards away from any external human help. She cannot 'speak out', she must close herself and turn back within in order to protect her secret which in turn, under intense pressure, can only come out and must come out in action. Phaedra sees confession as a threat to her survival, for the meaning of survival has shifted here to now mean the survival of her secret and the destruction of her life. Again, life forces shift their place and purpose in the chemistry of the cosmology. Her version of self-preservation is through self-destruction.

When Theseus hears that his son has raped his wife he calls on the Furies to exact a terrible punishment on Hippolytus. The innocent son is brutally killed and his body is torn into fragments. The image of the physically broken child lying in pieces before his guilty father powerfully recurs in *Thyestes*, *Phaedra* and *Hercules*. Dismemberment is one of the worst transgressions that can take place against the body in the tragedies as it prevents the proper funeral rites from being performed. The fragmentation of human bodies – and more specifically of children's bodies – is another consequence of the forces at work within the tragedies that are breaking apart the connective bonds of the Stoic cosmos. There is a constant struggle and a constant failure within the tragedies to keep hold of the whole of something, whether that be the whole of a body, a family, or a much larger cosmic whole.

In Act Five of *Phaedra*, having discovered his wife's deception too late to save his son, Theseus weeps over his dismembered child and desperately attempts to rebuild Hippolytus' body out of the rubble of his limbs. As so often, it is only after time has run out and characters have reached rock bottom that a kind of space or stillness emerges that means that the tragedy has finally ground to a halt. I am interested in Seneca's work in these areas: what happens after the breaking point has been reached and what does a character do after it is already too late? Amidst all the fury and chaos of the tragedies this is one of the moments of quiet where the resolve to repair and preserve something of what has been broken resurfaces:

THESEUS: Trembling hands, be firm
 For this sad service; cheeks, dry up your tears!
 Here is a father building, limb by limb,
 A body for his son . . . Here is a piece,
 Misshapen, horrible, each side of it
 Injured and torn. What part of you it is
 I cannot tell, but it is part of you.
 So . . . put it there . . . not where it ought to be,
 But where there is a place for it. (*Phaedra*, p.149)

The father tries to reconstruct his offspring, but here in the chaotic world of the tragedies the starting point is utter fragmentation, and the process of rebuilding cannot hope to reconstruct the body as 'it ought to be'. In this world of physically and mentally broken people where minds and bodies have been mangled, there can only be this hesitant, stilted attempt to retain and reassemble some trace of the human form. It is impossible to replicate life as it was before tragedy, but, out of the jumble of pieces that we are left with, the task is to create something that resembles life: a second version of ourselves.

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More than any of Seneca's plays, *Hercules* is preoccupied with what happens after tragedy. Here the powerful force of energy or momentum which made Hercules a hero is subverted when he murders his own family in a frenzied attack fuelled by madness. It is however that same force of energy which must somehow be preserved and reactivated if he is to survive beyond the immediate tragedy.

Hercules seems to exist outside of the boundaries of time. His own force of momentum propels him on at a rapid rate that nobody else can keep up with. His friend Theseus describes the speed at which he expects Hercules to exact revenge on his enemies now that he has returned from completing the last of his twelve labours, 'If I know Hercules, Lycus will pay the penalty to Creon. "Will

pay” is laggard, he *is* paying. That too is laggard, he *has* paid’.²³ Theseus shifts rapidly from the future to the present and then the past tense here, trying and failing to keep up with Hercules. These syntactical shifts across time are even swifter in the original grammar of the Latin text, ‘Lentum est “*dabit*”: *dat*. Hoc quoque est lentum: *dedit*’ (*Hercules*, p.100). The attack that Theseus predicts here does not however come to pass and instead Hercules’ momentum spirals into madness, and it is his wife and children who end up dead before anyone – even Hercules himself – has any idea what has happened. After this transgressive act of violence, the core of Hercules’ own body revolts against himself. Some part of him takes drastic, physical action to shut his self down and force the tragedy to halt. His stepfather Amphytrion is there to watch as Hercules falls unconscious:

What is this? Are my eyes failing, and grief dulling my sight, or do I see Hercules’ hands trembling? His eyes are closing in sleep, his head sinking, his weary neck drooping. Now his knees bend and his whole body collapses on the ground, as heavily as an ash tree felled in the woods, or a mass of masonry dropped in the sea to create a harbour. Are you alive, or killed by that same frenzy which sent your loved ones to their death? It is sleep: his breath comes and goes regularly. He must have time for rest, so that deep sleep can overcome the violent sickness and relieve his burdened mind. (*Hercules*, p.133)

This brief moment of deep, restorative stillness exists in stark contrast to the frenzied violence that preceded it. Pauses invariably create opportunities for psychological repair within the tragedies, but sometimes the only way that a character can be made to pause is for them to be struck down in a coma. This self-imposed unconsciousness creates a temporary shelter for Hercules’ broken mind. It is the only way to protect his mind from further damage and it is the only way to protect himself and others from his mind. The regularity of Hercules’ breathing signifies the return to a version of self-control, albeit unconscious. The internal rhythms of the body can now reassert their influence

²³ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, ‘Hercules’ in *Eight Tragedies*, trans. by John G. Fitch, The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), i, pp.36-159 (p.101); hereafter cited as *Hercules*.

and power, restoring some kind of calmness and at least partially preparing Hercules for the difficulty that he will have to face when he wakes up.

Hercules wakes to find the dead bodies of his family lying around him and has no recollection of what has happened:

AMPHITRYON: These troubles must just pass in silence.

HERCULES: And I remain unavenged?

AMPHITRYON: Revenge often does harm.

HERCULES: Has anyone passively endured such troubles?

AMPHITRYON: Anyone who feared worse.

HERCULES: Can one fear anything, father, that is even worse or more painful than this?

AMPHITRYON: How little of your calamity you understand!

HERCULES: Have pity, father, I hold out my hands in supplication. What? He pulled back from my hands: the crime is lurking here. Why this blood? What of that shaft, soaked by a boy's blood. Now I see my weapons. I need not ask about the hand. Who could have bent that bow, what hand flexed the string that barely yields to me? I turn to both of you again, father is this crime mine? They are silent: it is mine. (*Hercules*, p.145)

Amphitryon attempts to keep the next wave of the tragedy at bay by holding back the knowledge of what Hercules has done. But what begins as a father's attempt to counsel his son falls apart as the truth bursts out of the very silence that Amphitryon has tried to create as a protection. His counsel fails when it comes up against the enormity of the tragedy. His body cannot help revealing the truth that his brain had attempted to conceal as - despite himself -

Amphitryon instinctively flinches from his son's supplicating hands. In the final line, Hercules' question 'is this crime mine?' is answered with a silence that can have no other meaning than 'it is mine'.

Unlike many of Seneca's tragedies which end with only the promise of further acts of vengeance, *Hercules* finishes with the fragile hope that the hero - with the help of his two companions Theseus and Amphitryon - will be able to heal his wounded mind and find a way to continue living.

In Act Five - in another ancient version of *sumpatheia* - Amphitryon

threatens to kill himself unless Hercules refrains from suicide. Faced with Amphitryon's threat, the tragedy grinds to a halt. Repetition across the tragedies is key. Every character, across all eight plays, is caught within the same cycle of cosmic decline and each is rushing towards these points of stillness in the aftermath of repeated action:

Stop now, father, stop, draw back your hand. Give way, my valour,
endure my father's command. This labour must be added to the
Herculean labours: to live. Theseus raise up my father's body, collapsed
on the ground. My crime-stained hands shun contact with the one I love.
(*Hercules*, p.157)

As Hercules repeatedly calls for death to 'stop', the trajectory of the tragedy turns from death back towards life. The parts of Hercules that allowed him to be heroic are called into action again, but now the monster that he must slay is a psychological one. What is crucial is this shifting internal chemistry that turned a man from hero to crazed murderer: both are made of the same elemental ingredients. After the tragedy, the struggle is now to regain some version of that first formulation that allowed Hercules to survive unbearable situations. It is impossible to go backwards and retrieve an unstained version of his self: he must find a second copy of that first self and apply it now to the essential labour of living. Keeping himself alive after the tragedy will be the hardest labour of all for Hercules. Rather than a single act of strength or valour, it is a task which will demand a continuous, extended exertion of will. The same force of energy is required to save himself as to destroy himself. It is just that while destruction can be done in a flash, survival is a long, drawn-out process.

Theseus is an almost silent companion to Hercules throughout the play, but here at the end of Act Five he is at Hercules' side to help him. Theseus and Hercules are the two model ancient Greek heroes, but at the end of each of their lives their battles turn from the external and physical to the internal, psychological and temporal as they must live in ongoing time, post-drama. The capacity for wild violence and madness exists within the heroism of both men. They have a shared story and a shared makeup, and it is because of this that when Hercules is infected by his crime and unable to touch his step-father,

Theseus is in a position to take over and lift up Amphitryon. This passage shows an attempt to rewire the connection between father and son. Just as Amphitryon had unconsciously revealed his son's crime by instinctively flinching from Hercules' supplicating hands, here there is a physical barrier created by Hercules' guilt that prevents him from touching his father, and Theseus instead acts as a bridge between them.

While the Stoic cosmology tells us that with every connection comes the threat of infection, and that every creative force holds the potential to become a destructive force, the tragedies also tell us that these are the very parts of human beings – the riskiest parts on the very knife-edge between order and chaos – which must be preserved. The Stoic laws reassert themselves here at the end of the tragedy through the voice of Theseus, a man who has himself endured huge tragedy and who now guides Hercules to 'Rise up, break through adversity with your usual energy. Now regain that spirit of yours which is a match for any trouble, now you must act with great valour. Do not let Hercules give way to anger' (*Hercules*, p.153). It is as if the Stoic maxims can only do some good once the tragedy has fully run its course. When more conventionally Stoic voices interrupt the tragedies too early – as happens elsewhere when nurses, attendants, messengers or the chorus try to restore order or demand restraint – they are cast aside, ignored or corrupted. The task of self-preservation can only begin once we have first witnessed the primal limits of self-destruction. It is through the tragedies that an audience can come to know what they – as humans – are up against and which parts of themselves most need to be preserved. The tragedies, with their original, primal forces must therefore come first and the more generalised laws and guidance of Stoicism – like that of Seneca's one hundred and twenty-four philosophical letters – can only come second.

1.2. The Letters

Seneca's philosophical letters were written during the final years of his life when he had retired from public life. Having served as tutor and advisor to the Roman Emperor Nero for fifteen years, Seneca had become extremely well known and wealthy. He had also become entangled in an increasingly corrupt

and brutal political elite. In his enforced retirement Seneca attempted to bring his life back into line with the Stoic principles that he had been advocating throughout his professional life but perhaps not always adhering to.

The letters are addressed to a Sicilian official named Lucilius, although scholars have suggested that he is a fictional rather than a genuine correspondent as no historical evidence of Lucilius's existence has been found other than Seneca's letters to him. In her biography of Seneca, Emily Wilson notes that, 'His name, again suspiciously, seems reminiscent of Seneca's own: Lucilius is like Seneca's own smaller, younger self. At times, Seneca seems to present Lucilius as an idealised counterpart to himself'.²⁴ However, whether Lucilius was a real person or not, writing to him allowed Seneca to remain ostensibly within the private rather than public realm during his retirement and to be more personal than he had previously been in the tragedies or in the moral treatises that he had written earlier in his life.

Seneca presents himself as the older and wiser of the two friends in the majority of his letters. His explicit aim is to provide Lucilius with a set of useful guidelines which will help him to maintain a healthier mental life: 'There are certain wholesome counsels which may be compared to prescriptions of useful drugs; these I am putting into writing' (*Epistles*, i, VIII, 37). In these letters Stoicism is used as a second-order preventative medicine, holding back the threat of contagion which proved to be so damaging in the tragedies:

Hold fast, then, to this sound and wholesome rule of life; that you indulge the body only so far as is needed for good health. The body should be treated more rigorously, that it may not be disobedient to the mind. Eat merely to relieve your hunger; drink merely to quench your thirst; dress merely to keep out the cold; house yourself merely as a protection against personal discomfort. (*Epistles*, i, VIII, 39)

This programme of Stoic restraint is designed to prevent the possibility of miniature versions of the tragedies taking place. The mind must remain in control and even the smallest degree of excess cannot be tolerated. The very syntax of the letter is related to its function of prevention. Rather than writing

²⁴ Emily Wilson, *The Greatest Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.181.

for example, 'relieve your hunger by eating', the instruction here is to 'eat *merely* to relieve your hunger'. In each clause of both the English translation and original Latin, the preventative action precedes the effect that it aims to preempt: '*Cibus famem sedet, potio sitim extinguat, vestis arceat frigus*' (*Epistles*, i, VIII, 38). This almost back-to-front syntax disrupts the pattern of cause and effect and demands a mental readjustment from the reader.

In letter XIII, Seneca encourages Lucilius to keep his thoughts fixed upon the reality of the present and thus avoid the self-inflicted, internal tragedies of dread and anxiety which distort the actual size and scale of experiences:

Allow me to offer some additional safeguards by which you may fortify yourself [. . .] What I advise you to do is, not to be unhappy before a crisis comes; since it may be that the dangers before which you paled as if they were threatening you, will never come upon you; they certainly have not yet come. Accordingly, some things torment us more than they ought; and some torment us when they ought not to torment us at all. We are in the habit of exaggerating, or imagining or anticipating sorrow. (*Epistles*, i, XIII, 75)

Again this is the reverse syntax of prevention. Rather than commanding Lucilius to 'be happy until a crisis comes', Seneca instructs him '*not* to be *unhappy before* a crisis comes'. These double negatives are a syntactical attempt to shape the way that his reader is thinking and to combat the kinds of thinking errors which helped to fuel the tragedies.

Seneca wrote the epistles after the tragedies, with the full knowledge of how bad tragedy can really be, and with the expressed aim of avoiding future manifestations of it. However, strains of the tragic forces continue to exist within the letters, not on the wide, cosmic level of the tragedies, but instead on a personal, psychological level. Seneca is sensitive to the fact that he too is yet to reach the Stoic ideal and he is conscious of the ever-present threat of his own worst instincts. In letter CXVI Seneca uses the pronouns 'we' and 'our' to identify himself as amongst those struggling against their own worst selves to comply with the laws of Stoicism:

Do you know why we have not the power to attain the Stoic ideal? It is because we refuse to believe in our power. Nay, of a surety, there is something else which plays a part: it is because we are in love with our vices; we uphold them and prefer to make excuses for them rather than shake them off. We mortals have been endowed with sufficient strength by nature, if only we use this strength, if only we concentrate our powers and rouse them all to help us or at least not to hinder us. The real reason for failure is unwillingness, the pretended reason, inability. (*Epistles*, iii, CXVI, 337)

The tone of Seneca's letters is often terse and the syntax is correspondingly compressed. In Latin, the final sentence of this passage is characteristically succinct, 'Nolle in causa est, non posse praetenditur' (*Epistles*, iii, CXVI, 336). The dynamic syntax allows concepts to be rapidly turned on their heads; false and unhelpful beliefs can be quickly replaced by or remade into new, more constructive beliefs.

The relationship between Seneca and Lucilius is not always straightforwardly that of a teacher and student or of comforter and comforted. Against hubris and against the borrowed authority of teaching a version of himself, Seneca occasionally steps down from his position of authority and repositions himself not as doctor but as his own patient, not as teacher but as his own student, and not as wise philosopher but as a man struggling to meet his own demands. It is in these places that the dynamic of the letters changes. Cracks appear in the surface veneer of Stoic restraint and Seneca's own psychological struggles can be glimpsed. In these places where the individual is revealed within the general, tensions are shown to exist between the philosophy of Stoicism and the psychology of the man attempting to comply with that philosophy. In letter LXIII for example, there is a discrepancy between the general Stoic guidance on grieving that is advocated by Seneca and his own actual lived experience of grief:

Our fore-fathers have enacted that, in the case of women, a year should be the limit for mourning; not that they needed to mourn for so long, but that they should mourn no longer. In the case of men, no rules are laid

down, because to mourn at all is not regarded as honourable. [. . .] He who writes these words to you is no other than I, who wept so excessively for my dear friend Annaeus Serenus that, in spite of my wishes, I must be included among the examples of men who have been overcome by grief. (*Epistles*, i, LXIII, 435-7)

Despite himself, when the testing moment of grief occurs Seneca fails to comply with his own rules and guidance; theoretical self-control is impossible in the face of the strength of the emotions which ‘overcome’ him. In the process of writing this letter he admits this inconsistency between his outer and inner self, and flips from the generalised ‘men’ to a personal, confessional voice, ‘*He* who writes these words to *you* is no other than *I*’. The restraint and surface control breaks open to reveal someone who ‘wept so excessively’. The insertion of ‘in spite of my wishes’ is an attempt to re-establish his second-order self and disrupt the surfacing of the inner voice which reacted instinctively to the death of his close friend.

While it is useful to have frameworks and maps that provide a general route or strategy for healthy thinking, the really useful parts of the letters are often paradoxically where the framework doesn’t quite accommodate reality, where something bursts out from deeper within or when the strategy is derailed, and Seneca admits his contradictions, failures and struggles rather than always trying to have a solution. Without these cracks, the letters can be smoothed too easily into something like what has become the generic counsel of CBT. In Letter LXVIII Seneca deviates from the conventional pattern of him imparting advice on his struggling friend. Here he rejects the idea that he can help Lucilius and instead attempts to pause and find a place to ‘lie quiet’ and repair himself:

What, then, am I myself doing with my leisure? I am trying to cure my own sores. If I were to show you a swollen foot, or an inflamed hand, or some shrivelled sinews in a withered leg, you would permit me to lie quiet in one place and to apply lotions to the diseased member. But my trouble is greater than any of these, and I cannot show it to you. The abscess, or ulcer, is deep within my breast [. . .] There is no reason why

you should desire to come to me for the sake of making progress. You are mistaken if you think that you will get any assistance from this quarter; it is not a physician that dwells here, but a sick man. (*Epistles*, ii, LXVIII, 49)

Seneca is at his best when he rejects or rather transmutes the doctor/invalid dynamic and instead moves fluidly between the two roles: sometimes he is one, sometimes he is both, and at other times he is neither. Then the reader sees both the need for counsel and the underlying condition that struggles to follow it, in dialogue. So in Letter XIII Seneca again takes off his public mask and writes:

There are more things, Lucilius, likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. I am not speaking with you in the Stoic strain but in my milder style. For it is our Stoic fashion to speak of all those things, which provoke cries and groans, as unimportant and beneath notice; but you and I must drop such great-sounding words, although, Heaven knows, they are true enough.
(*Epistles*, i, XIII, 75)

This is the shift from public philosophy to personal psychology. Despite the claim that he has dropped his usual 'Stoic strain', the repetition of 'more [. . .] than' and the balance of cause and effect in the first sentence are characteristically Senecan formulations. The 'Stoic strain' is a fragile and finely balanced web of preconditions and there is always potential difficulty in bridging the gap between general solutions and personal, specific experiences. The letters exist on one 'plane' but beneath them, bubbling under the surface, are powers and problems akin to the dangerous forces and resistances that explode in the tragedies. The letters need to be interpreted in terms of an extra dimension of shifting relationships, and not simply taken as abstract and programmatic counsel.

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Prior to writing the letters to Lucilius and during a period of forced exile in Corsica that lasted from 41 – 49AD, Seneca wrote a series of three 'consolations'. Two of these texts - 'The Consolation to Marcia' and 'The Consolation to

Polybium' - were addressed to members of the Roman elite whose children had died. They provide an outline of Stoic guidance on grief but were also written in the hope of gaining favour with influential figures who may have been able to help Seneca after he had been cast out of Rome, accused of committing adultery with Emperor Caligula's sister. But the third consolation was written to Seneca's own mother Helvia, not as with the others to give her comfort or guidance following a bereavement, but rather to ease her suffering during his own exile. In this letter, personal tragedy, individual psychology and general philosophy intersect as Seneca attempts to put Stoicism into practice. Now Seneca is both his mother's comforter and the cause of her distress and this paradox is at the heart of the text, where Seneca is always at his best when he is two-sided:

Although I consulted all the works written by the most famous authors to control and moderate grief, I couldn't find any example of someone who had comforted his own dear ones when he himself was the subject of their grief. So in this unprecedented situation I hesitated, fearing that I would be offering not consolation but further irritation. Consider, too, that a man lifting his head from the very funeral pyre must need some novel vocabulary not drawn from ordinary everyday condolence to comfort his own dear ones. But every great and overpowering grief must take away the capacity to choose words, since it often stifles the voice itself.²⁵

Seneca was living through his own tragedy now and as all personal tragedies feel on the inside, this experience was 'unprecedented'. None of the general and theoretic 'works written by the most famous authors to control and moderate grief' offer any assistance to him in this moment. Seneca requires 'some novel vocabulary' rather than generic words of hope or condolence. 'Everyday' language proves inadequate when faced with the messy, painful reality of actual life. Neat Stoic maxims cannot work here for they would appear too straightforwardly reductive. Instead Seneca needs a way of communicating with his mother which acknowledges the duality of their current relationship and

²⁵ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, 'Consolation to Helvia', in *On the Shortness of Life*, trans. by C.D.N Costa (London: Penguin, 2004), pp.34-67 (p.34); hereafter cited as *Helvia*.

which will allow him to comfort her both despite and because of the fact that he is also the cause of her suffering.

As in *Hercules*, where the counsellors Theseus and Amphytrion fall silent in the face of tragedy, 'overpowering grief' silences Seneca. Tragedy renders us mute, removing 'the capacity to choose words'. However, despite Seneca's initial sense of inarticulacy and hesitancy he is able to fashion a letter of consolation to his mother. Seneca's approach – like that adopted from him by CBT – is not to try to change his situation, but instead to change the way that he and his mother think about his situation. He describes his letter as his mother's 'treatment' (*Helvia*, p.37) and as such it is an early model of therapy. The consolation contains a description of the long chain of losses that Seneca's mother has suffered throughout her life, beginning with the loss of Helvia's own mother who died while giving birth to her. Like Hercules' step-father Amphytrion for whom 'the end of one trouble is the stepping stone to the next' (*Hercules*, p.65), Helvia's life appears to have been an interminable cycle of sorrow. But Seneca is writing now in the hope that he can help his mother to think her way out of this cycle of trauma rather than being destroyed by it as would have happened in the world of the tragedies:

Come, put away wailings and lamentations of feminine grief. For all your sorrows have been wasted on you if you have not yet learned how to be wretched. (*Helvia*, p.37)

Seneca's choice of the verb 'wasted' – *perdidisti* in Latin and elsewhere translated as 'lost' or 'squandered' – retrospectively changes the way in which his mother must now think about her accumulated sorrows, making them seem as if they might have been a series of chances or opportunities rather than a punishing burden. Instead of becoming a victim of the tragic momentum, Helvia must have a way of thinking about her past suffering that will help her now to face her present suffering. Not by getting rid of it but by being it, changing its shape and using it as best she can. As his mother's counsellor, it is Seneca's job to provide her with the new helpful thought that she herself – stuck within her own predicament – might not have been able to create for herself. The paradox of this letter is that Seneca has not only caused the suffering that he must now

counsel his mother through, but that he must counsel her through a predicament that he too is trapped within. The letter is an explicit attempt to re-programme Helvia's thoughts, but in the writing of it, Seneca was also rewiring his own thoughts:

So this is how you must think of me – happy and cheerful as if in the best of circumstances. For they are best, since my mind, without any preoccupation, is free for its own tasks. (*Helvia*, p.67)

In the first sentence Seneca instructs his mother to think of him 'as if in the best of circumstances', but in the second sentence the wishful thinking of 'as if' becomes a reality: 'for they *are* best'. This shift demonstrates on the page the way in which an opinion can determine reality and thus define the subsequent emotional response. If Seneca or his mother permit themselves to face his exile with the wrong opening thought - that Seneca is unhappy and miserable and in the worst of circumstances – then further negative emotions will duly follow.

Seneca finds counsel for himself in the primary chemistry and physics of the Stoic cosmology rather than the compact, second order maxims of more conventional, 'everyday' Stoic philosophy. What he needs is a different perspective:

How silly then to imagine that the human mind, which is formed of the same elements as divine beings, objects to movement and change of abode, while the divine nature finds delight and even self-preservation in continual and very rapid change. (*Helvia*, p.42)

Seneca is always at his most powerful when he is speaking of 'the same elements' and seeking ways to recombine them. By finding a way to reconcile his particular position in the world – alone, uncertain and involuntarily detached from his community – with the wider universe beyond his single, particular self, Seneca was able to comfort himself and then go on to at least try to comfort his mother:

So, eager and upright, let us hasten with bold steps wherever circumstances take us, and let us journey through any countries whatever: there can be no place of exile within the world since nothing

within the world is alien to men. From whatever point on the earth's surface you look up to heaven the same distance lies between the realms of gods and men. Accordingly, provided my eyes are not withdrawn from that spectacle, of which they never tire; provided I may look upon the sun and the moon and gaze at the other planets; provided I may trace their risings and settings, their periods and the causes of their travelling faster or slower; provided I may behold all the stars that shine at night [. . .] provided I can keep my mind always directed upwards, striving for a vision of kindred things – what does it matter what ground I stand on? (*Helvia*, pp. 45-6)

The mother and son are reunified as Seneca begins to write in the first person plural, 'let us hasten'. Here is the healthy version of the cosmology, rather than the fractured and infected cosmos of the tragedies where the system has failed. Individuals are able to reconnect the circuitry between one another and plug into the wide expanse beyond them, to think further than the limits of their own internal psychologies and to escape the limitations of the everyday, small world. The tensions of the cosmos are still visible here in the repeated formulation, 'provided I may' or 'provided I can', for the success of this system is dependent on a series of conditions or provisions which must be met. There is a fragility built into this worldview, and health and sickness, consolation and sorrow are all finely balanced. By mentally positioning himself within the cosmos, Seneca rejects the constraints and difficulties of this one particular spot of earth that he has been exiled to and enters into a vision of a much larger common space.

Seneca himself needs the cosmology, but it is the cosmology which has been dropped from modern psychology. In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre writes of the broader threat of moral incoherence posed by the fragmentation of ideas into isolated or fragmented disciplines:

What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely,

if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.²⁶

By retaining only the vocabulary of self-mastery, regularity and moderation or only the surface appearance of Stoic strategies whilst rejecting the core of the ‘conceptual scheme’ that holds together and provides the motivation for those strategies, we are left with only a shadow of the original thought. Psychology is smaller than cosmology and secondary to cosmology and necessarily so because psychology seeks to fulfil the second-order need for a smaller, private, personal space in the midst of the great all or nothing extremes of the tragedies. But equally, this thesis argues that a psychology that has stripped Stoicism of its cosmology is depleted and must seek to reformulate that core cosmology if it is to offer more expansive forms of therapy.

²⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), p.2.

2.

Montaigne: Philosophy in Action

2.1. Montaigne and Seneca

The French aristocrat Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592) devoted himself to public service as a magistrate, counsellor and Mayor of Bordeaux during the period of political and religious upheaval in France marked by the civil war that raged intermittently from 1562 to 1598. In 1571 – at the age of thirty-eight – Montaigne retired from public life, set up a library in the tower of his chateaux, and focused on studying ancient philosophy and writing a book of essays.

Montaigne was a particularly keen student of Seneca and was described by his contemporary, Estienne Pasquier as ‘another Seneca in our language’.²⁷ This chapter will consider how Montaigne took the principles of Stoicism and put them into practice, testing them against the reality of his own experiences and adapting them to better serve and suit himself. As he wrote in the essay ‘On some lines of Virgil’, ‘My philosophy lies in action’.²⁸

Montaigne’s self-enforced retirement followed the example of Seneca who had himself retired from his public role as advisor to the Roman Emperor Nero towards the end of his life and who, in retirement, had written his series of letters to Lucilius. In these epistles, Seneca had advised his friend to follow his lead and ‘withdraw into yourself, as far as you can’ (*Epistles*, i, VII, 35). As I have shown in chapter one, the Stoics believed that only by withdrawing from the public realm could a person take full possession of their private self. Montaigne described Seneca’s letters as ‘the most beautiful part of his writings and the most profitable’ (*Essays*, II, 10, 463). As he retreated to his library he was trying to put Seneca’s advice into practice: ‘It seemed to me then that the greatest favour I could do for my mind was to leave it in total idleness, caring for itself, concerned only with itself, calmly thinking of itself’ (*Essays*, I, 8, 31). However, in

²⁷ Donald Frame, *Montaigne’s Essais - A Study* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p.97; hereafter cited as ‘Frame’.

²⁸ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), Book III, Essay 5, p.950; hereafter cited as *Essays*.

reality Montaigne found himself struggling to achieve anything close to the Stoic ideal of tranquillity, as his mind immediately 'bolted off like a runaway horse' (*Essays*, I, 8, 31). The discordancy between the Stoic theory of retirement and Montaigne's own lived experience was an early indication for him that philosophy was something that had to be made and moulded afresh by each individual through the act of living. It was mental and not public action to which his retirement was dedicated.

Writing in his essay 'On Solitude', Montaigne uses Seneca's advice on retirement as a starting point, but then goes on to add the caveats that he has learned through years of troubled experience:

Withdraw into yourself, but first prepare yourself to welcome yourself there. It would be madness to entrust yourself to yourself, if you did not know how to govern yourself. There are ways of failing in solitude as in society. (*Essays*, I, 39, 277)

'But' is always an important word for Montaigne and here the sharp second thought allows him to launch on past Seneca's initial advice. Experience has shown Montaigne that there is not a simple binary choice between tranquil solitude and public chaos. There is still room for 'madness' and 'failure' within the private realm of solitude. In practice the Stoic maxim can only be a starting point. After the first shift of withdrawal from the public realm into the private space, there must be a second move, developing from the private sphere into the individual space. The relationship between the repeated pairs of 'yourselves' in this passage points to the work necessary for this second switch from private to individual mode to take place.

In 1580 - nine years after retiring - Montaigne published the first edition of his *Essays*, consisting of ninety-four chapters split into two volumes. He wrote in the first person, in French rather than Latin, and covered a whole host of varied themes, for as he would later assert, 'All topics are equally productive to me. I could write about a fly!' (*Essays*, III, 5, 990). Montaigne called these short improvised bursts of writing 'essais' or 'attempts', re-inventing the essay as a form of relatively unpremeditated thinking. Time and mood took the place of a prior sense of assumed importance or a definitive commitment to hierarchical

size. After their first publication, Montaigne continued to work on his *Essays*: a second edition was printed in 1582, and in 1588 a radically altered third edition was produced. This version of the *Essays* contained a third volume consisting of thirteen new chapters. Rather than simply adding to the length of his work over time, Montaigne also returned again and again to the original ninety-four essays of Books I and II, revising and adding quotations to them in light of his further thinking and reading. Approximately five hundred and fifty new quotations were inserted into the third edition of the *Essays*, along with a further six hundred additions to the text. In the four years between the publication of the third edition of the *Essays* and Montaigne's death in 1592 he continued to make changes to his book, adding one thousand new passages and making an estimated nine thousand revisions to his punctuation. The final manuscript that he had been working on up until his death is known as 'The Bordeaux Copy' and provides the source material for the posthumous editions of the *Essays* that are published today. This manuscript was the culmination of twenty-one years of work, yet it remained unfinished because Montaigne's method of continual revision meant that there could never be a definitive, fixed version of the *Essays*; instead it was a living text.

The *Essays* were originally conceived as a tribute to Montaigne's friend – his fellow councillor, writer and Stoic – Etienne de La Boétie, who had died in 1563. Montaigne planned to publish his friend's work, *De La Servitude Volontaire*, alongside his own writing in order to preserve the memory of La Boétie and recreate a dialogue between the two men. However, Montaigne eventually resolved not to publish his friend's work, replacing what was to be the heart of the book with his own essay 'On Friendship'. A chapter of La Boétie's sonnets was included in early editions of the *Essays* but was later struck out by Montaigne in protest at the misappropriation of his friend's memory and political ideas by radical Protestants calling for a revolt against the Catholic monarchy. Instead, Montaigne left a blank space where the sonnets had previously been printed and the statement, 'Nine and Twenty Sonnets of Etienne de la Boétie: These verses can be found elsewhere' (*Essays*, I, 29, 221). While La Boétie's work can no longer be found within the *Essays*, his Stoic beliefs did leave an important imprint on Montaigne's life and work, for in death

La Boétie had given Montaigne a practical lesson in how Stoicism could ease a person's suffering.

Montaigne turned to ancient philosophy for comfort after the death of La Boétie. He read widely in his retirement and inscribed his favourite quotations onto the walls and beams of his study, making them a concrete part of his physical environment. The philosophers that he frequently quotes in his *Essays* became his companions in thinking and provided him with a supporting structure or scaffolding upon which to build his own work. Writing 'In Defence of Plutarch and Seneca', Montaigne outlines the strong influence that these two particular philosophers had on his work, 'My intimacy with these two great men and the help that they give me in my old age, as well as to the book which is built entirely out of their spoils, bind me to espouse their honour' (*Essays*, I, 32, 817). The clause, 'as well as to the book which is built entirely out of their spoils', was only added to this passage at the end of Montaigne's life after the publication of the third edition of the *Essays* in 1588. Despite the fact that by this stage Montaigne's philosophy had significantly shifted away from the austere Stoicism of Seneca and towards a broadly more informal personal Scepticism and Epicureanism, he still returned to this earliest of essays in order to cement the debt that he owed to these two philosophers. It is entirely characteristic of Montaigne that the two philosophers who meant so much to him – and whom he places together in this essay – held contrary views. Plutarch belonged to the Platonic school of thought and believed that Stoic restraint and detachment was 'unnatural' and 'at odds with common sense'.²⁹ Despite this, Montaigne had no difficulty interweaving quotations from both Plutarch and Seneca into his work if and when their contrary views proved useful to him

Sometimes Montaigne cited his sources but very often he did not. In the essay 'On Books' he explains this strategy:

In the case of those reasonings and original ideas which I transplant into my own soil and confound with my own, I sometimes deliberately omit to give the author's name so as to rein in the temerity of those hasty criticisms which leap to attack writings of every kind [. . .] I want them to

²⁹ Plutarch, 'Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions', in *Moralia*, trans. by Harold Cherniss, The Loeb Classical Library, 17 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), xiii.ii, pp.660-873 (p.675).

flick Plutarch's nose in mistake for mine and to scald themselves by insulting the Seneca in me. (*Essays*, II, 10, 458)

Montaigne finds it amusing that a reader might unwittingly attack one of the great, ancient philosophers when meaning to criticise his *Essays*. The joke is only possible however because Montaigne's tone is fluid enough to disguise quotations from a whole range of different sources. In 'On the inconstancy of our actions' he writes:

It is impossible to put the pieces together if you do not have in your head the idea of the whole. What is the use of providing yourself with paints if you do not know what to paint? No man sketches out a definite plan for his life; we only determine bits of it. The bowman must first know what he is aiming at: then he has to prepare hand, bow, bowstring, arrow and his drill to that end. Our projects go astray because they are not addressed to a target. No wind is right for a seaman who had no predetermined harbour. (*Essays*, II, 1, 379)

Montaigne gives no indication that these are not his own original ideas, the passage being almost a direct translation of a section of Seneca's Epistle LXXI:

No man can set in order the details unless he has already set before himself the chief purpose of his life. The artist may have his colours all prepared, but he cannot produce a likeness unless he has already made up his mind what he wishes to paint. The reason we make mistakes is because we all consider the parts of life, but never life as a whole. The archer must know what he is seeking to hit; then he must aim and control the weapon by his skill. Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind. (*Epistles*, ii, LXXI, 73-5)

Montaigne has an easy personal intimacy with the material that he quotes. He assimilates his reading into his writing and blends ancient philosophy with his own thoughts to create a chorus of co-opted voices within one text. The idea of 'essaying' or 'trailing' is central to Montaigne's work. As he writes, Montaigne is putting philosophy - and in particular the philosophy of Stoicism - to the test.

Over the course of the twenty-one years that Montaigne was writing the *Essays* he repeatedly questions whether Stoicism is a philosophy that can work in practice. Over time, as his conclusions begin to change, he is less inclined to disguise quotations from Seneca within his writing and instead more likely to hold them up - distinctly apart from his own thoughts – so that they can be properly inspected and critiqued.

‘The taste of good and evil things depends in large part on the opinion we have of them’ is characteristic of the early essays of Book I in which Montaigne is largely supportive of Stoicism. He begins by thinking about the same Stoic maxim of Epictetus that Jules Evans described as being the starting point for Albert Ellis in the development of CBT, ‘Men are disturbed not by things but by their opinions about them’ (Evans, p.4). Montaigne measures this central tenet against his own lived experiences:

There is an old Greek saying that men are tormented not by things themselves but by what they think about them. If that assertion could be proved to be always true everywhere it would be an important point gained for the comforting of our wretched human condition. For if ills can only enter us through our judgement it would seem to be in our power either to despise them or to deflect them towards the good: if the things actually do throw themselves on our mercy why do we not act as their masters and accommodate them to our advantage? If what we call evil or torment are only evil or torment as far as our mental apprehension endows them with those qualities then it lies within our power to change those qualities. And if we did have such a choice and were free from constraint we would be curiously mad to pull in the direction which hurts us most, endowing sickness, poverty or insolence with a bad and bitter taste when we could give them a pleasant one, Fortune simply furnishing us with the matter and leaving it to us to supply the form. Let us see whether a case can be made for what we call evil not being evil in itself or (since it amounts to the same) whether at least it is up to us to endow it with a different savour and aspect. (*Essays*, I, 14, 52)

The repetition of 'if' five times in this passage shows Montaigne's sceptical mind in action, while the phrase 'let us see' marks the movement from theory to personal, practical example. Montaigne is testing the concept set out by the Greek Stoic Epictetus, for can it actually be possible in reality that a person can determine their own emotional responses by regulating their thoughts? Can the theory be translated into practice? And if it can, then why isn't that the end of all of our problems? Why do we still suffer if it is in our power to transform our suffering by changing the way we think? For the Stoics, the extent to which pain is felt is a choice; its magnitude is determined by how much mental territory it is given to exist within. While certain patterns of thought accommodate pain and give it space to grow, Stoicism was developed as a means of starving and shrinking it.

In his essay 'On Practice' Montaigne describes a riding accident that brought him close to death. Before the accident Montaigne had been intently preoccupied with his own mortality, but this experience led to a change in his thinking and was a practical reminder of what Seneca had warned of in his Epistle XIII, 'Some things torment us more than they ought; and some torment us when they ought not to torment us at all' (*Epistles*, i, XIII, 75). For Montaigne, knowledge that is gained through chance or by accident – as happens here – seems to be a particularly important way of learning:

Many things appear greater in thought than in fact. I have spent a large part of my life in perfect good health: it was not only perfect but vivacious and boiling over. That state, so full of sap and festivity, made thinking of illness so horrifying that when I came to experience it I found its stabbing pains to be mild and weak compared to my fears.

Here is an everyday experience of mine: if I am sheltered and warm in a pleasant room during a night of storm and tempest, I am dumbstruck with affliction for those then caught out in the open; yet when I am out there myself I never want to be anywhere else.

The mere thought of always being shut up indoors used to seem quite unbearable to me. Suddenly I was directed to remain there for a week or a month, all restless, distempered and feeble; but I have found that I used to pity the sick much more than I find myself deserving of pity now I am

sick myself, and that the power of my imagination made the true essence of actual sickness bigger by half. I hope the same thing will happen with death, and that it will not be worth all the trouble that I am taking to prepare for it. (*Essays*, II, 6, 418)

Montaigne demonstrates his characteristic mental mobility in this passage as he builds a case for Stoicism out of his own 'everyday experiences' and thus translates reality back into philosophy. The riding accident demonstrated to him the disparity between the fearful expectations he had supposed absolute and the sudden upsetting reality of experience. His previous state of health meant that he was both physically and emotionally distanced from illness, leaving space for his imagination to create something much worse than reality. While previously, fear, dread and 'the power of my imagination' even in health had warped his perceptions and magnified certain unknowns, making the thought of sickness seem 'bigger by half'. Montaigne learns through experience to measure the world more accurately. The ability to rescale experiences in order to give them their correct weight and significance is an important part of the attitude that Montaigne cultivated. A vital element of this system of weights and measures is Montaigne's humour; the lightness of his tone and wry, carefree approach to the world helps to lighten and to shrink potentially large, heavy problems. Wry humour, born of accidents, serves as an alternative to and a defence against tragic fear and dread.

While chapter one showed how tragedy was used by Seneca to create a communal space large enough to hold within it the primal forces of the Stoic cosmology, in his moral tract 'On Tranquillity of Mind', Seneca describes how comedy also has a Stoic function. Using the contrasting examples of Democritus and Heraclitus – two pre-Socratic Greek philosophers who influenced early Stoicism – Seneca shows how humour can function as a part of detachment to reduce the power of external events and emotions. For Seneca, laughter is an act of hope and a powerful defence against dangerous emotions like despair and fear which can so easily overmaster us:

We ought, therefore, to bring ourselves to believe that all the vices of the crowd are, not hateful, but ridiculous, and to imitate Democritus rather

than Heraclitus. For the latter, whenever he went forth into public, used to weep, the former to laugh; to the one all human doings seemed to be miseries, to the other follies. And so we ought to adopt a lighter view of things, and put up with them in an indulgent spirit; it is more human to laugh at life than to lament over it. Add, too, that he deserves better of the human race also who laughs at it than he who bemoans it; for the one allows it some measure of good hope, while the other foolishly weeps over things that he despairs of seeing corrected. And, considering everything, he shows a greater mind who does not restrain his laughter than he who does not restrain his tears, since the laughter gives expression to the mildest of the emotions, and deems that there is nothing important, nothing serious, nor wretched either, in the whole outfit of life.³⁰

Montaigne uses the ideas set out by Seneca in 'On Tranquillity of Mind' in an essay of his own called 'On Democritus and Heraclitus'. Montaigne is once again using Seneca as a starting point, but rather than simply translating Seneca – as he does elsewhere – here it is possible to see the progression of Montaigne's thinking as he begins to shift away from Stoicism and towards Scepticism:

Democritus and Heraclitus were both philosophers; the former, finding our human circumstances so vain and ridiculous, never went out without a laughing and mocking look on his face: Heraclitus, feeling pity and compassion for these same circumstances of ours, wore an expression which was always sad, his eyes full of tears [. . .] I prefer the former temperament, not because it is more agreeable to laugh than to weep but because it is more disdainful and condemns us men more than the other – and it seems to me that, according to our deserts, we can never be despised enough. Lamentation and compassion are mingled with some respect for the things we are lamenting: the things which we mock at are judged to be worthless. I do not think that there is so much wretchedness in us as vanity; we are not so much wicked as daft; we are not so much

³⁰ Lucilius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Tranquillity of Mind', in *Moral Essays*, trans. by John W. Basore, The Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), ii, pp.203-85 (pp.273-5).

full of evil as of inanity; we are not so much pitiful as despicable. (*Essays*, I, 5, 339)

The syntax of the final sentence, with its repetition of ‘not so much [...] as [...]’ shows Montaigne engaging in his characteristic process of re-calibration. He reclassifies a whole series of threats and shrinks these vague, oppressive dangers by turning them into objects of humour and ridicule. Montaigne’s humour is in part borne out of a refusal to indulge in tragedy. For him, humour is not so much a defence against hopelessness as it is for Seneca, but signifies an absence of undue respect. Laughter is an act of healthy defiance which strips away the power that tragedy confers upon the people and the things that hurt us.

In the ‘Apology for Raymond Sebond’ Montaigne directs his mocking humour towards – amongst others – Seneca and the Stoics themselves. This is the longest essay that Montaigne ever wrote and marks a distinct break with Stoic philosophy. It can be read as Montaigne’s manifesto for Scepticism or as Donald Frame describes it, ‘a declaration of intellectual independence’ (Frame, p.31). In 1569 Montaigne had translated Raymond Sebond’s fourteenth-century text *Theologica Naturalis* from Latin into French at the request of his father. Sebond had written the book with the aim of proving the existence of God, but his attempt to reconcile philosophy and theology had proven controversial and in 1595 its prologue was placed on the Pope’s list of banned books. In his ‘Apology for Raymond Sebond’ Montaigne does not take long to deviate from the task of defending the text and its author, and the essay instead quickly becomes ‘a devastating critique of all dogmatic philosophy’ (Frame, p.24) which therefore included criticism of Sebond himself.

In the final passage of ‘The Apology for Raymond Sebond’ Montaigne takes one particular quotation from Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones* and – as he has done so often in the *Essays* – puts it to the test:

To that very religious conclusion of a pagan I would merely add one more word from a witness of the same condition, in order to bring to a close this long and tedious discourse which could furnish me with matter for ever. ‘Oh what a vile and abject thing is Man,’ he said, ‘if he does not

rise above humanity.'

A pithy saying; a most useful aspiration, but absurd withal. For to make a fistful bigger than the fist, an armful larger than the arm, or to try and make your stride wider than your legs can stretch, are things monstrous and impossible. Nor may a man mount above himself or above humanity: for he can see only with his own eyes, grip only with his own grasp. He will rise if God proffers him – extraordinarily – His hand; he will rise by abandoning and disavowing his own means, letting himself be raised and pulled up by purely heavenly ones.

It is for our Christian faith, not that Stoic virtue of his, to aspire to that holy and miraculous metamorphosis. (*Essays*, II, 12, 683)

Montaigne dismantles Seneca's argument with three concise clauses which mimic the Roman philosopher's own succinct style: 'A pithy saying; a most useful aspiration, but absurd withal'. The first three editions of the *Essays* were published with the gentler alternative of 'There is in all his Stoic school no saying truer than that one: *but* to make a fistful bigger than a fist [. . .]'. But after 1588, this initially hesitant critique of Seneca was substituted by Montaigne's final crisp verdict. The confidence of the three new clauses correspond with Montaigne's growing Scepticism. Rather than using Seneca for support, here the voices of the two men are distinctly separate. Montaigne deconstructs Seneca's theory by separating the Stoic's theoretical man into his physical parts; by giving him a 'fist', an 'arm', a 'stride' and a 'grasp' he demonstrates what it would mean in practice for a man 'to rise above humanity'. For Montaigne, not only would it be impossible for an individual to singlehandedly exceed the physical capacities of his species, it would be 'monstrous' or inhuman to reject our natural boundaries and try to become something beyond our own natural limits. This is the kind of philosophy that would lead to a state of constant disappointment and repentance, for every attempt to stretch beyond the physical and biological parameters of the human species is doomed to fail. Rather than setting himself up for failure or regretting his insufficiencies Montaigne is interested in a philosophy that will make his life more able to be lived.

2.2. The Experience of Reading Montaigne's *Essays*

To read Montaigne's *Essays* is to meet somebody who has achieved ease with his own self, who can nonchalantly dismiss a precept with a shrug and relax within his own skin. So much here depends on tone, for it is as though tone is the almost unconscious physical accompaniment to what is thought:

Volume and intonation contribute to the expression of meaning: it is for me to control them so that I can make myself understood. There is a voice for instructing, a voice for pleasing or for reproving. I may not want my voice to simply reach the man but to hit him or go right through him. When I am barking at my footman with a rough and harsh voice, a fine thing it would be if he came and said to me, 'Speak more softly, Master. I can hear you quite well.' (*Essays*, III, 13, 1234-5)

In *Montaigne and the Art of Free Thinking*, Richard Scholar describes Montaigne's tone as 'luminously sane',³¹ while Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the nineteenth-century French literary critic, called him 'The wisest Frenchman that ever lived' in his personal sense of living being, 'What a happy nature, curious, open to everything, detached from himself and the parochial, freed from illusion, cured of all stupidity, purged of all prejudice. And what serenity, indeed what blitheness, even in suffering and pains! What affability to all comers! What good sense in all matters! What vigour of mind!' (Frame, p.102).

The *Essays* are completely un-replicable because they are a manifestation of Montaigne's individual self. There is a certain degree of audacity required to focus so relentlessly on himself, as Montaigne acknowledges when he writes, 'I dare not only to speak of myself, but to speak only of myself' (*Essays*, III, 8, 1067). It is his underlying humour – evident even in the syntax of this single sentence – that creates the leeway for such daring. It is rare to meet somebody who is able to think of themselves or to relish in themselves in this way. He is capable of speaking about himself without the shadow of anxiety or of self-doubt or of cynicism creeping in and he is able to reveal himself as he is without worry or dread or shame. It is not that Montaigne

³¹ Richard Scholar, *Montaigne and the Art of Free Thinking* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p.2.

did not possess any of these traits, but that he was able to transfer and translate them into something far healthier. To read Montaigne is to be reminded of what sanity might look like, but it is also to be reminded of how far – as a culture – we are from it.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson declared in his essay on Montaigne in *The Representative Men*, 'Cut these words and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive; they walk and run'.³² This live energy is particularly pronounced in the longer essays of Book III which were written after 1582, when, as Donald Frame argues, Montaigne's 'sense of his procedure is clearer' (Frame, p.45). As such, the thirteen essays of Book III are amongst the longest of the whole collection and are considered to be bolder and even more candid than the versions of the essays in Book I and II that were published prior to 1582, before later additions were made to them.

Montaigne was not writing to confess or to redeem himself. In his essay 'On Repentance' he unpicks the entire concept of repentance itself - particularly when it is an act that seeks to reach a fixed point of conclusion or closure - and instead demonstrates how to cast off the weight of guilt and self-criticism:

Others form Man; I give an account of Man and sketch a picture of a particular one of them who is very badly formed and whom I would truly make very different from what he is if I had to fashion him afresh. But it is done now. The brush-strokes of my portrait do not go awry even though they do change and vary. The world is but a perennial see-saw. Everything in it – the land, the mountains of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt – all waver with a common motion and their own. Constancy itself is nothing but a more languid rocking to and fro. I am unable to stabilize my subject: it staggers confusedly along with a natural drunkenness. Grasp it as it is now, at this moment when I am lingering over it. I am not portraying being but becoming. (*Essays*, III, 2, 907)

In the second sentence of only five small words - 'But it is done now' - Montaigne changes direction, leaves conventional repentance behind and

³² Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Montaigne or The Sceptic', in *Representative Men* (London: Routledge, 1850), p.102.

instead flips to a state of relaxed acceptance. To agonise over his deficiencies would be a waste of energy and this short, concise sentence puts a stop to any such tendencies. 'But' acts as a junction and allows Montaigne to turn and establish the second, healthy thought. While Montaigne's thoughts twist and turn and contradict themselves throughout the *Essays*, when he does reach a point of solid realisation like this, it stands on the page like a marker stone. It is a point of solidity within the flux, but also creates a launch pad from which Montaigne is able to go onward creating ever more flux. This combination of solidity and flux is another characteristic of Montaigne's sanity.

Concise sentences like 'But it is done now' or elsewhere, 'I cannot do better' (*Essays*, III, 2, 917), 'I speak about myself in diverse ways' (*Essays*, II, 1, 377) and 'I follow no predetermined route' (*Essays*, III, 9, 1114) punctuate Montaigne's *Essays* and put a stop to secondary ruminations. Each abrupt statement, emerging like a suddenly corrective sense of form, feels as if it would have been accompanied by a self-accepting shrug. These are the places where Montaigne's principles are surfacing and asserting themselves. The tone of these sentences is uncompromising. Montaigne is setting limits on what he can and cannot, will and will not do. These limits and laws define what seems to him his first nature:

You cannot extirpate the qualities we are originally born with: you can cover them over and you can hide them. Latin is a native tongue for me: I understand it better than French; yet it is forty years now since I used it for speaking or writing. Nevertheless on those two or three occasions in my life when I have suffered some extreme and sudden emotion [...] the first words that I have dredged up from my entrails have always been in Latin – nature, against long nurture, breaking forcibly out and finding expression. (*Essays*, III, 2, 914)

Montaigne's father developed an ambitious strategy to ensure that his son learnt Latin fluently as a young child. He employed a Latin tutor and Latin-speaking servants and instructed them that Montaigne was only to be spoken to in Latin. The first language that Montaigne communicated with remained buried within him and when he was stuck by trauma, for example, when his father

unexpectedly died, he reverted back to this original language. When the outer layers cannot withstand some extreme or sudden shock, he turns back to the language that was drilled into him in early childhood and which is now retained within the oldest, deepest parts of his self. His nature - closely related to attitude and tone - provides Montaigne with an underlying framework, beneath the fluid surface:

Provided that he listen to himself there is no one who does not discover in himself a form entirely his own, a master form which struggles against his education as well as against the storm of emotions which would gainsay it. In my case I find that I am rarely shaken by shocks or agitations; I am virtually always settled in place, as heavy ponderous bodies are. If I should not be 'at home' I am always nearby. My indulgences do not catch me away very far: there is nothing odd or extreme about them, though I do have some sane and vigorous changes of heart. (*Essays*, III, 2, 914)

Out of Montaigne's rambling progress, a form emerges. This 'master form' is something sturdy and constant, like an inner template. It is a voice which acts as a guide and an anchor. In Book II he had written that 'anyone who turns his prime attention onto himself will hardly ever find himself in the same state twice' (*Essays* II, 1,377); here in Book III, with a 'sane and vigorous change of heart' he writes, 'I am virtually always settled in place, as heavy ponderous bodies are'. Rather than contradicting himself – which he would not have any problem doing – the second statement is here in fact a realisation of the first; the man existing somewhere in between 'hardly ever' and 'virtually always'.

Montaigne's natural changeability contains within it something subtly constant and all the more constant for not being under fixed mental control. In his essay 'On Vanity' – also in Book III – Montaigne deviates from his central theme to discuss his travels around France. His physical freedom of movement corresponds with his mental mobility and provides in this passage a model or template of a particularly sane kind of non-linear progress that is itself explicitly against pre-set templates. Montaigne's *Essays* offer a model of healthy thinking,

even while existing as they do in defiant opposition to the possibility of universally applicable templates for living:

I, who most often travel for my own pleasure, am not all that bad a guide. If it looks nasty to the left I turn off to the right; if I find myself unfit to mount the saddle, I stop where I am. By acting thus I really do see nothing which is not as pleasant and agreeable to me as my home. It is true that I always do find superfluity superfluous and that I am embarrassed by delicacy, even, and by profusion. Have I overlooked anything which I ought to have seen back there? Then I go back to it: it is still on my road. I follow no predetermined route, neither straight nor crooked. (*Essays*, III, 9, 1114)

Montaigne is not constrained by straight lines or pre-set routes; if there is danger ahead, he simply turns off in a different direction. There is no obligation to follow a certain path, he is guided by an internal compass which serves him. As there is no pre-set route then it doesn't matter which direction he takes. There is no need to endure and maintain a damaging straight route. The flexibility required to change direction is something to be nurtured.

Montaigne has no difficulty in looping back to repeat or remake his path, hence his revisions of the *Essays*. He goes back again and again to build up layers of experience just as in the *Essays* he loops back into earlier attempts at writing to consider again something he may have overlooked at first or not explored to its full depth. But importantly, he also gives himself the time to move away from certain places – often for many years - before returning again to add new layers of thought. As he declared in the essay 'On Vanity', 'I make additions not corrections' (*Essays*, III, 9, 1091). The additions made to the essay 'On Friendship' - Montaigne's ode to Etienne de La Boétie in Book I - show this process in action. In the first edition of the *Essays*, Montaigne wrote:

In the friendship which I am talking about, souls are mingled and confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joins them together so that it cannot be found. If you press me to say why I loved him, I feel that it cannot be expressed. Mediating this union there

was, beyond all my reasoning, beyond all that I can say about it, some force of destiny. (*Essays*, I, 28, 211-2)

In the Bordeaux copy of the *Essays*, which Montaigne was working on up until his death, he returned to this passage and added the following words in bold:

In the friendship which I am talking about, souls are mingled and confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joins them together so that it cannot be found. If you press me to say why I loved him, I feel that it cannot be expressed **except by replying: 'Because it was him: because it was me.'** Mediating this union there was, beyond all my reasoning, beyond all that I can say **specifically** about it some **inexplicable** force of destiny. (*Essays*, I, 28, 211-2)

It was at least eight years after the publication of the first edition of the *Essays* and over twenty-five years after La Boétie's death that Montaigne was able to complete his sentence and answer the question of 'Why I loved him'. Saul Frampton goes further in his examination of Montaigne's final manuscript when he notes that 'each part of the addition [was] written in a different pen'.³³ Frampton breaks down what at first appears to be one addition into its three component parts. From the initial full stop after 'I feel that it cannot be expressed' Montaigne first of all makes an opening for himself, deleting the full stop and reigniting the thought by inserting 'except'. He writes 'except by replying' in one colour ink, 'because it was him' in another and 'because it was me' in a third shade, indicating that each small segment was written at a different time as the thought continued to germinate mid articulation. The bursts of clarity within these short sentences are the closest that Montaigne gets to some kind of end point or realisation, but the process of revision that he follows in writing, namely his constant looping back into the text, mean that these moments of crystallisation are scattered throughout the *Essays*. The clarity, when it surfaces, is not an answer to the question of 'Why I loved him', but an acceptance of the felt unknowable that existed between the two friends, as the two words, 'specifically' and 'inexplicable' themselves add.

³³ Saul Frampton, *When I am playing with my cat, how do I know she is not playing with me* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), p.27; hereafter cited as 'Frampton'.

An important feature of Montaigne's sanity is his capacity and willingness to go backwards and to think again by making additions to old thoughts. In order to do this he needs a language which will allow him to return to, re-open and re-energise old thoughts. In 'On Repentance' he writes about the value of the specific terms which allow him to do this important work of revision:

You make me hate things *probable* when you thrust them on me as things *infallible*. I love terms which soften and tone down the rashness of what we put forward, terms such as 'perhaps', 'somewhat', 'some', 'they say', 'I think' and so on. And if I had had any sons to bring up I would have trained their lips to answer with inquiring and undecided expressions such as, 'What does this mean?', 'I do not understand that', 'It might be so', 'Is that true?' so that they would have been more likely to retain the manners of an apprentice at sixty than, as boys do, to act as learned doctors at ten. (*Essays*, III, 11, 1165)

Montaigne avoids the false language of certainty by using a set of terms that instead introduces a helpful uncertainty and flexibility into his thought process. These words are a set of tools for developing a healthier way of thinking, 'softening' rigid straight lines, 'toning down' black and white absolutism and instead creating space for contradiction, compromise and indecision in the very midst of the route. This is a vocabulary for changing the way of thinking that must be learned and practised. Having a syntactic language enabling the expression of doubt or contradiction – not a set of nouns but a series of functional route-seeking adverbs and conjunctions - makes it possible to have doubts and to be contradictory. Without a linguistic mechanism to help call forward these layers of feeling from the unconscious or implicit mind, it is impossible for them to exist in the conscious world. Montaigne was engaged in a lifelong apprenticeship and part of the sanity of the *Essays* is due to the fact that he never stopped being willing to rethink and rework his ideas and thus he never reached - or even tried to reach - a conclusion. That is his creative and buoyant scepticism.

2.3. Montaigne's Model of Self-help

Warren Boutcher writes in *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe* that the *Essays* have 'recently been re-discovered as a kind of self-help book that is relevant to our time'.³⁴ The final section of this chapter concludes that the *Essays* do contain a valuable therapeutic model, but one which is distinctly different from conventional modern self-help therapy.

The programme of exercises typically contained within self-help books lead readers – theoretically – in a straight line from sickness to health. The imperative, instructive tone that they adopt establishes a sense of the counsellor–patient dynamic within the mind of the solitary reader and helps to impose a particular therapeutic framework. In his *Essays* Montaigne refuses to be explicitly instructive or to comply with any kind of permanently set framework. His tone is instead wryly comical, and it is this humour which, as Alexander Welsh describes in *The Humanist Comedy*, allows him to create a certain degree of mental 'leeway'³⁵ for himself. It is Montaigne's capacity to create mental leeway, humour being only one of his methods for doing so, which is perhaps his most important contribution to psychology. It is his most valuable modification of the otherwise seemingly constrictive philosophy of Stoicism and the nuanced, discretionary quality most lacking in conventional self-help.

In my local library there are multiple, well-worn copies of *Mind over Mood*, a CBT self-help book first published in 1995 by Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky and since translated into twenty-three different languages. They are just inside the main entrance on a shelf entitled 'Books on Prescription'. These books contain the rubbed out remnants of people's attempts to change their lives. The Reading Agency which set up the nationwide 'Reading Well Books on Prescription Scheme' has evaluated that between 2013-2014, 275,000 people accessed self-help books through the program: 91% of service users said that the book that they had studied had been useful, 37% said their symptoms had reduced or got better. Within the same period there was a

³⁴ Warren Boutcher, *The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), ii, p.459.

³⁵ Alexander Welsh, *The Humanist Comedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p.97.

70% increase in sales of the recommended self-help books.³⁶

The pencilled in answers of real people jar against the structured, sanitised language of the self-help book with its straight lines which lead from sickness towards health. On page thirteen of one of the copies of *Mind over Mood* in Liverpool Central Library, in an exercise entitled 'Understanding My Problems' and under the heading 'Thoughts' somebody has written:

Always overlooked. Too old and too tired to keep looking for job. Have to look after mum.

There is an exhausted certainty in these lines that begins at the first word 'always' and is enforced by the repetition of 'too' and the obligation of 'have to' in the last sentence. Even in its simplicity, a little marginal essay, the language does not say '*I am* always overlooked' or '*I* have to look after mum'. The 'I' is overlooked even by itself in this note of despair. Yet the act of writing these words out here is itself something: a personal act of writing more poignant than the advice to which it fails to respond. The omitted 'I' hints at the difficulty people can have in speaking about themselves as agents, let alone speaking about themselves in 'diverse ways' as Montaigne did. There is no diversity here although the three sentences are not simply sequential upon each other. In the repetitions of 'look' - not looking for a job, looking after mum, and overlooked - there is no place to turn. The certainty of 'always' - a default in need of help - prevents the possibility of any alternative perspectives emerging and has the opposite effect to Montaigne's softening words like 'perhaps' or 'yet'.

Marion Milner, a writer who later became a psychoanalyst, was reacting against the constraints of textbook psychology when, in 1926, she began keeping a diary. In *A Life of One's Own* (1934) she went on to analyse her own diary writing experience:

Of course there were books on psychology, handbooks telling one how to be happy, successful, well-balanced, thousands of words of exhortation

³⁶ Reading Well, 'Reading Well Books on Prescription Evaluation Report 2013-14' (2014) <<https://readingagency.org.uk/adults/RWBOP%20Evaluation%20Report%202013-14.pdf>> [accessed 14th March 2015].

about how one ought to live. But these were all outside me; they seemed too remote, they spoke in general terms and it was hard to see how they applied in special cases; it was so fatally easy to evade their demands on oneself. Was there not a way by which each person could find out for himself what he was like, not by reading what other people thought he ought to be, but directly, as directly as knowing the sky is blue and how an apple tastes, not needing anyone to tell him? Perhaps, then, if one could not write for other people one could write for oneself.³⁷

Milner was looking for a genuinely self-directed therapy rather than one which was imposed upon her from the outside or which told her what to do and how to think in ways that could only ever be overly generalised. As Milner explains in *A Life of One's Own*, her diary writing project was inspired by reading Montaigne's *Essays*:

I must have known vaguely what lay ahead of me, for I still have a crumpled piece of paper with a quotation which I had copied out, and which I remember carrying about in my pocket at the time:

This soul, or life within us, by no means agrees with the life outside us. If one has the courage to ask her what she thinks, she is always saying the very opposite to what other people say [. . .] Really she is the strangest creature in the world, far from heroic, variable as a weathercock, 'bashful, insolent; chaste, lustful; prating, silent; laborious, delicate; ingenious, heavy; melancholic, pleasant; lying, true; knowing, ignorant; liberal, covetous, and prodigal' – in short, so complex, so indefinite, corresponding so little to the version which does duty for her in public, that a man might spend his life in merely trying to run her to earth. (Milner, p.31-2)

³⁷ Marion Milner, *A Life of One's Own* (1934), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), p.33; hereafter cited as 'Milner'.

Milner is quoting an essay on Montaigne written by Virginia Woolf and published in *The Common Reader* in 1925. In turn, Woolf is quoting from Montaigne's essay 'On the inconstancy of the self':

Every sort of contradiction can be found in me, depending upon some twist or attribute: timid, insolent; chaste, lecherous; talkative, taciturn; tough, sickly; clever, dull; brooding, affable; lying, truthful; learned, ignorant, generous, miserly and then prodigal – I can see something of all that in myself, depending on how I gyrate; and anyone who studies himself attentively finds in himself and in his very judgement this whirring about and this discordancy. There is nothing I can say about myself as a whole simply and completely, without intermingling and admixture. The most universal article of my own logic is DISTINGUO.
(*Essays*, II, 1, 377)

This essay was first published in 1580, yet Montaigne returned to it at the end of his life to add more to his list of contradictory characteristics. In the Bordeaux copy of the *Essays* he inserted the words, 'chaste, lecherous', 'learned, ignorant', 'generous, miserly and then prodigal'. The revisions that Montaigne made add further complexity to his already rich catalogue of personality traits, suggesting that as time passed he became to himself ever harder to pin down. Each contradictory pair is divided by only a comma; this removes any value judgement from the list and indicates how easy it is to shift from one state to its opposite. The final trio of traits that Montaigne added to this passage break up the pattern of pairs and move him even further from a binary understanding of human behaviour. The movement from 'generous' to 'miserly and then prodigal' defies conventional patterns of progression and instead follows a backwards-forwards motion that ends with Montaigne swinging towards wasteful extravagance rather than settling at a balanced Aristotelian middle ground. Montaigne's 'own logic' is determined by his own personal preference, signalled here by the Latin term 'DISTINGUO' that is used in formal debates to declare that a distinction has been made. Montaigne's additions defy the idea that mental clarity is associated with a minimalist stripping back or that contradiction and complexity signify a chaotic mind. The density of ideas that is

created within the *Essays* by this gradual process of revision helps to demonstrate just how much is really contained within a person, and by extension just how much is at stake for a person in the act of living. Montaigne gives himself permission to wander as he thinks. He eschews maps or guidelines and as such his work offers up a model of a non-linear process that is markedly different to that provided by CBT self-help books and which perhaps more closely resembles the thinking shapes of psychoanalysis.

Sigmund Freud first read Montaigne's *Essays* in 1914 as war broke out in Europe and his annotated copy of the text can be found today in The Freud Museum. The *Essays* would have offered Freud a model of self-directed analysis for they contain 'the first sustained representation of human consciousness in Western literature' (Frampton, p.7), or as Montaigne put it himself in the essay 'On Repentance', 'No man ever went more deeply into his matter' (*Essays*, III, 2, 908). In *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*, Philip Rieff highlights the 'genuine affinity between psychoanalysis and the psychological theories of Stoicism',³⁸ and positions Freud - alongside Montaigne - within a long tradition of thinkers that were inspired by Stoicism: 'The Stoic imagination [. . .] produced a number of psychologists - Montaigne, Burton, Hobbes, La Rochefoucauld - with whom it would be apt and even historically sound to compare to Freud' (Rieff, p.17). Freud is connected to the Stoic tradition via Montaigne, for like Montaigne, Freud was somebody who set to work thinking about his own self. Freud was also a writer and Montaigne's *Essays* provide the original template for the literary form that Freud adopted himself. Rieff argues that it is Freud's commitment to honest self-examination through writing that links him to Montaigne: 'I know of only one writer who, in a mood or urbanity not unlike Freud's, may be said to have resolved the problem of being honest about himself: Montaigne' (Rieff, p.66). Freud's psychoanalytic work can be considered as an evolution of what Montaigne began when he retired from public life, turned inwards and made himself into his own subject matter. For in doing so, Montaigne began to translate the generalised theories of philosophy into something personal, specific and practical, and as such moved from

³⁸ Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (London: Methuen, 1965), p.17; hereafter cited as 'Rieff'. The authorship of this book has since been credited to Rieff's then wife Susan Sontag.

philosophy into something that would come to be termed as psychology. By taking Stoicism personally and applying it to his own individual self, Montaigne demonstrated the *differences* both between and within individuals, and between general rules and particular practices. A further connection between Freud and Stoicism – in relation to the work of the seventeenth-century philosopher Spinoza – will be discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

In an interview with *The Paris Review*, the psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips spoke of the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature, and more specifically, made a connection between psychoanalysis and the essay form that he himself has admired in Montaigne: 'Psychoanalytic sessions are not like novels, they're not like epic poems, they're not like lyric poems, they're not like plays – though they are rather like bits of dialogue from plays. But they do seem to me to be like essays [. . .] There is the same opportunity to digress, to change the subject, to be incoherent, to come to conclusions that are then overcome and surpassed, and so on [. . .] Essays can wander, they can meander'.³⁹ Montaigne makes no attempt to think or to write in progressive sequence, for his content – namely his own psychological matter – cannot be arranged in a single, linear form. As he writes in the essay 'How we weep and laugh at the same thing', 'We deceive ourselves if we want to make this never-ending succession into one continuous whole' (*Essays*, I, 38, 265).

In an interview with *The Economist*, Adam Phillips again discussed characteristics of psychoanalysis which are akin to those of literature: 'It is as though Freud invented a setting or a treatment in which people could not exactly speak the poetry that they are, but that they could articulate themselves as fully as they are able'.⁴⁰ Montaigne developed a process of revision that was entirely unrepentant and which allowed him to articulate himself – in all his multiplicity – in full. His *Essays* defy conventional hierarchies of correction which would insist that mistakes are a source of shame and that first thoughts,

³⁹ Adam Phillips, 'The art of nonfiction no. 7', interview by Paul Holdengraber, *The Paris Review*, 208 (2014), <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6286/adam-phillips-the-art-of-nonfiction-no-7-adam-phillips>> [accessed 15th April 2016]; hereafter cited as *Paris Review*.

⁴⁰ London, E.H., 'The Q&A: Adam Phillips. Poetry as therapy', *The Economist*, 29th March 2012, <<https://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2012/03/qa-adam-phillips>> [accessed 15th April 2016].

once contradicted or superseded by a second thought, must be got rid of. He shows how it is possible to go backwards in a way that is healthy rather than regressive or ruminative. In particular, it is Montaigne's sense of constructive uncertainty which allows him to loop backwards again and again, opening up more thinking space for himself and reactivating formerly closed off lines of thought. The psychoanalyst Susie Orbach discusses the importance of a similar kind of constructive uncertainty in her book *In Therapy: The Unfolding Story*:

Psychoanalysis and psychological theories of development see the capacity to hold complexity in mind – which is to say, when thinking is not arranged in banishing binaries – as a hallmark of psychological selfhood [. . .] Over-simplification is a detriment. It diminishes our capacity to hear another. It dilutes the richness of our inner life and opinions. It weakens our resilience [. . .] Complexity is essential to thought. There is rarely one story, one subjectivity, one way to look at and evaluate things [. . .] Complexity and category-making are the dialectical prerequisites of being human. We all struggle with the tension between the two poles of questioning and certainty. Out of that tension comes an enormous creativity.⁴¹

Montaigne's *Essays* provide a clear demonstration of this creativity in action and thus offer a model of a sane adult. The importance of this cannot be overstated for it is very difficult to even begin to imagine doing or being something without access to an external template that proves that it is possible: Montaigne is the external template that defies any other fixed template. His portrayal of individual psychology in action demands to be met with ways of thinking and versions of therapy which go beyond universal cures or overgeneralised theories.

The experimental fourth chapter of this thesis will in part look at exactly what does happen when a group of individuals are asked to write diaries arising out of their reading in the act of becoming personal essayists. But it would be to take Montaigne too literally, too slavishly, if, like Marion Milner, everyone was required to write. *The Essays* cannot show us in steps how to attain the healthy

⁴¹ Susie Orbach, *In Therapy: The Unfolding Story* (London: Profile Books, 2018), pp.83-4.

attitude that Montaigne has cultivated because his writing is so emphatically individual and unreplicable, but he has shown that it is possible to carve out an individual space and to develop individual thinking patterns that serve to make life much more bearable. That is why in my fourth chapter the writing is prompted by reading.

3.

Wordsworth: The Mind's Excursive Power

3.1. Wordsworth and Seneca

William Wordsworth was twenty-one years old when he first travelled to France in November 1791. He discovered a country that had been radically transformed by a revolution that was still unfolding, and remained there for over one year. Jane Worthington argues that Wordsworth developed a particular interest in and understanding of Roman philosophy – and specifically Stoicism – while living in France. In *Wordsworth's Reading of Roman Prose* she describes how the culture and philosophy of the Roman Republic had gained a new significance in revolutionary France: 'The heroic figures of Rome were regularly set up as models of virtuous conduct. French republicans were constantly urged to imitate Roman simplicity of manners'.⁴² In Wordsworth's own account of his time in France in Book IX of *The Prelude* he draws on classical imagery to describe the long debates that he had while travelling with the revolutionary Captain Michel de Beaupuy: 'Such conversations, under Attic shades, / Did Dion hold with Plato'.⁴³ As Worthington goes on to argue, 'In France he learned that history, and particularly the ancient history of Rome, could be made to serve present ends. History had come to life' (Worthington, p.11).

While in France, amidst a new world of freedom, Wordsworth also formed a relationship with a woman called Annette Vallon, with whom he had a daughter named Caroline. However in December 1792, just before The Reign of Terror took hold of the country and war was declared between England and France, Wordsworth returned home, leaving Annette and Caroline behind. Immediately after returning from France, Wordsworth struggled to find relief from his own guilt, grief and sense of disillusionment in the revolution, in an

⁴² Jane Worthington, *Wordsworth's Reading of Roman Prose* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1970), p.8; hereafter cited as 'Worthington'.

⁴³ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995), Book IX, Line 407-8; hereafter cited as *Prelude*.

intermingling of private and political feelings. In 1795 he began work on a text that was referred to until its eventual publication forty-eight years later simply as 'a tragedy'. What eventually became known as *The Borderers* is a relentlessly bleak drama which followed the template laid down by Seneca in that it served as an initial holding-ground for the trauma – both individual and national – that Wordsworth had experienced in France.

The first section of this chapter will explore the toxic repetitions of *The Borderers*, before turning to consider Wordsworth's secondary attempts - after tragedy and within poetry - to work through his trauma, moving away from cycles of rumination and contagion. The more productive versions of repetition that Wordsworth developed will be sketched out in relation to the series of Salisbury plain poems that he returned to and revised throughout his career. The chapter will also give a brief overview of the distinctly Stoic poems that Wordsworth wrote in his post-*Borderers* attempt to pull back from trauma and reinstate some form of internal order. Wordsworth's development of healthier forms of repetition will be explored in greater detail in the final section of the chapter on *The Excursion* - the poem which also best exemplifies Wordsworth's relationship to Stoic principles of therapy.

*

The Borderers is a closet drama that was never intended to be acted out on a stage but exists in a strange in-between space between private and public discourse. As Byron said of his own closet drama *Cain*, it is 'mental theatre'.⁴⁴ *The Borderers* belongs to a cluster of plays written by Romantic poets in response to The French Revolution: Coleridge's *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) and *Osorio* (1797), Shelly's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and *The Cenci* (1819) and Byron's *Cain* (1821). Karen Raber establishes a link between these plays and the closet dramas of the English Civil War, the Restoration and the Renaissance. The Renaissance poets, in particular Coleridge's favourite Samuel Daniel, are 'often called "neo-Senecan" because they take as their model the

⁴⁴ Lord Gordon George Byron, *Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, ed. by Thomas Moore (London: John Murray, 1892), p.525.

domestic tragedies of the Latin poet Seneca'.⁴⁵ Raber argues that during periods of instability or revolution, closet drama and specifically tragedy provided a more private space for writers to explore the psychological impact of political upheavals than the stage could afford.

In the Fenwick note of 1843, Wordsworth explicitly sets out his aim in writing the tragedy as 'To preserve in my distinct remembrance what I had observed of transition of character and the reflections I had been led to make during the time I was witness of the changes through which The French Revolution passed'.⁴⁶ This is a tragedy that is concerned with psychological rather than physical movement, mental transitions and incomplete internal changes which, privately existent only fleetingly between definite points of public action, are so difficult to observe. As Mortimer – the tragedy's main character – says as he stands on the cusp of committing a terrible crime, 'There is something / Which looks like a transition in my soul, / And yet it is not'.⁴⁷ In *The Borderers* Wordsworth is concerned with identifying those points of transition which do exist, though lost in the moment of their very conversion into abrupt event. As Rivers, the villain of the tragedy, states in Act III:

Action is transitory, a step, a blow -
The motion of a muscle – this way or that -
'Tis done – and in the after vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed. (*Borderers*, III, v, 60-4)

It was within that 'after vacancy' that Wordsworth had found himself writing *The Borderers*.

The Borderers is set in thirteenth-century England during the Baronial Revolts which turned the north of the country into a strange and lawless no-man's land. Wordsworth uses this historical setting as a testing-ground, conducting an experiment to re-examine – within the controlled space of a five act tragedy – his experiences of the Revolution and the effects of a lawless

⁴⁵ Karen Raber, 'Closet Drama', in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of British Literature*, ed. by David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.28-32 (p.28).

⁴⁶ William Wordsworth 'The Fenwick Note', in *The Borderers*, ed. by Robert Osborn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp.814-815 (p.815); hereafter cited as *Fenwick*.

⁴⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, ed. by Robert Osborn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), Act II, Scene i, Line 91-3; hereafter cited as *Borderers*.

vacuum on human psychology. Wordsworth writes in the Fenwick note, 'As to the scene and period of action, little more was required for my purpose than the absence of established law and government, so that the agents might be at liberty to act on their own impulses' (*Fenwick*, p.814). 'At liberty' hints at a more problematic freedom than the Liberté lauded in the slogans of the French Revolution. The central characters of *The Borderers* – Mortimer and Rivers – are veterans of the Crusades and their memories of the lawless battlefields of the Middle East expand the setting outwards and backwards in space and time. This was no simple, linear account of revolutionary progress to a new world.

There are three acts of desertion or betrayal in this tragedy. The first takes place in Act III when Mortimer abandons an old blind man called Herbert on a heath, having been manipulated by Rivers into believing him to be an imposter, posing as the father of the woman Mortimer loves. He leaves him 'where no foot of man is found, no ear/Can hear his cries' (*Borderers*, III, iii, 128-9). But the tragedy's real psychological starting point and original model of betrayal is revealed in Act IV when Rivers tells the retrospective story of how, when sailing back from Palestine, he had been persuaded by the rest of the ship's crew to turn against his captain and abandon him on a desert island. It is this act which is replicated in different forms – and each time with different configurations of guilt and awareness throughout the tragedy. Firstly by Mortimer and then by Robert, a cottager who has a chance to save Herbert, but who instead chooses to leave him abandoned for a second time:

RIVERS: One day at noon we drifted silently
By a bare rock, narrow and white and bare.
There was no food, no drink, no grass, no shade,
No tree nor jutting eminence, nor form
Inanimate, large as the body of man,
Nor any living thing whose span of life
Might stretch beyond the measure of one moon;
To dig for water we landed there – the captain
And a small party of which myself was one.
There I reproach'd him for his treachery
His temper was imperious, and he struck me -

A blow! I would have killed him, but my comrades
Rush'd in between us – They all hated him -
And they insisted – I was stung to madness -
That we should leave him there, alive – we did so.

(*Borderers*, IV, ii, 22-30)

There is a terrible simplicity to Rivers' final three words, 'we did so', for like the firing of a starting pistol, they initiate the tragic momentum of the whole play. 'Action is transitory', but there is then an after-sense of contagion running through the tragedy as different characters not only repeat the same acts but also repeat the same words and syntactical forms, unconsciously demonstrating how the driving mental structures behind those acts have spread between them. Mortimer's construction, 'no foot of man is found, no ear / Can hear his cries', finds its root here in Rivers' own repetition of the words 'no' and 'nor' which strip away all life from this place, before ending ironically with that very word 'alive'. In his preface to *The Borderers*, Wordsworth writes of the strange forward-backward process that recurs when somebody commits to and pushes on with a terrible action:

In a course of criminal conduct every fresh step that we make appears a justification of the one that preceded it, it seems to bring back again the moment of liberty and choice; it banishes the idea of repentance, and seems to set remorse at defiance. Every time we plan a fresh accumulation of our guilt, we have restored to us something like that original state of mind, that perturbed pleasure, which first made the crime attractive.⁴⁸

Repetition is here a way of returning to the first moments, just before a crime, not out of some desire to repent or make amends, but rather as a means of reviving the first sense of relish at the act, unaffected by the thoughts of remorse or repentance which come later. For Rivers, this process of psychic return to an original, pre-criminal state of mind is heightened by the fact that rather than

⁴⁸ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *The Borderers*', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), i, pp.76-80 (p.79); hereafter cited as *Prose*.

abandoning someone else again himself, he forces Mortimer to commit the crime afresh.

Wordsworth explains that one of his central concerns when writing *The Borderers* was 'the position in which the persons in the drama stood relatively to each other' (*Fenwick*, p.814). As Rivers continues to tell his story, Mortimer interjects to blend his own fresh experiences into the narrative:

RIVERS: 'Twas a spot -
Methinks I see it now – how in the sun
Its stony surface glittered like a shield
It swarmed with shapes of life, scarce visible;
And in that miserable place we left him -
A giant body mid a world of beings
Not one of which could give him any aid,
Living or dead.

MORTIMER: A man by men deserted,
Not buried in the sand – not dead or dying,
But standing, walking – stretching forth his arms:
In all things like yourselves, but in the agony
With which he called for mercy – and even so,
He was forsaken.

RIVERS: There is a power in sounds:
The groans he uttered might have stopped the boat
That bore us through the water. (*Borderers*, IV, i, 22-51)

Mortimer enters into Rivers' memory, chorically adding to the narrative despite not having experienced this specific 'spot' nor having previously heard the story. His own recent memories of abandoning Herbert merge together with Rivers' memories from a more distant place and time. When Mortimer describes 'the agony / With which he called for mercy', the echo of Herbert calling out on the heath, 'Oh! Mercy! Mercy!' (*Borderers*, III, iv, 141), reverberates through the tragedy and joins with the cries of the abandoned captain to create one awful sound.

In contrast to Rivers' indifference, Mortimer comes to represent remorse in all the force of momentary action becoming fact, shorn of excuse, 'I led him to the middle of this heath/I left him without food and so he died' (*Borderers*, V, ii, 169-70). But then the third character, Robert - a poor cottager living with his wife in the only house on the heath - complicates the dialectic by inhabiting the space between remorse and indifference. It was Robert's own choice to leave Herbert to die and yet his past experience of tyranny and the lasting damage that it has inflicted on his character provide him with a degree of mitigating innocence. As Robert is travelling home he discovers Herbert close to death. He leaves him because he is afraid of being blamed for murder if the man were to then die in his own home. Robert's paranoia is a result of having been falsely imprisoned, 'his confinement / Has made him fearful, and he'll never be / The man he was' (*Borderers*, III, ii, 20-2). The line ending that dissects 'be' and 'the man' reinforces Robert's diminished state.

The ongoing rhythm of the tragic momentum is related to the forces of Senecan tragedy that run on and on and on, repeating and layering tragedy upon tragedy as contagion takes effect. So it is that Mortimer cries 'Oh monster! Monster! There are three of us, /And we shall howl together' (*Borderers*, V, ii, 55-7). This trio of men, who at different times and in different contexts have committed the same sin of abandonment, are pulled back together; all three are monstrous distortions of men who - sharing their crime - can now only howl like wild animals.

3.2. After the Tragic

There is a fine line between being at risk of contagion and not risking anything because of its threat. In the immediate post-revolutionary period of *The Borderers*, this was the predicament that Wordsworth found himself grappling with. During the French Civil Wars, Montaigne had responded to the threat of infection by withdrawing from public life and advocating an inward individualism. In his essay 'On Solitude' he writes:

Contagion is particularly dangerous in crowds. Either you must loathe the wicked or imitate them. It is dangerous both to grow like them because they are many, or to loathe many of them because they are

different. Sea-going merchants are right to ensure that dissolute, blasphemous or wicked men do not sail in the same ship with them, believing such company to be unlucky [. . .] It is not that a wise man cannot live happily anywhere nor be alone in a crowd of courtiers, but [. . .] if he has the choice, the wise man will avoid the very sight of them. (*Essays*, I, 39, 267)

In *The Borderers*, the story of Rivers' corruption at sea exemplifies the dangers of contagion within the closed confines of a ship, acting as a microcosm of the wider dangers within society that Montaigne experienced during the French Civil Wars and which Wordsworth also faced during The French Revolution. In his essay 'On Solitude' Montaigne borrows from Seneca's epistle VII 'On Crowds':

Do you ask me what you should regard as especially to be avoided? I say, crowds; for as yet you cannot trust yourself to them with safety. I shall admit my own weakness, at any rate; for I never bring back home the same character that I took abroad with me. Something of that which I have forced to be calm within me is disturbed; some of the foes that I have routed return again. Just as the sick man, who has been weak for a long time, is in such a condition that he cannot be taken out of the house without suffering a relapse, so we ourselves are affected when our souls are recovering from a lingering disease. To consort with the crowd is harmful; there is no person who does not make some vice attractive to us, or stamp it upon us, or taint us unconsciously therewith. Certainly, the greater the mob with which we mingle, the greater the danger. (*Epistles*, i, VII, 29-31)

And yet for all the madness of zealotry Wordsworth had concerns about complete withdrawal: his characteristic mental position is poised between separation and connection. This stance coloured Wordsworth's translation of Senecan thought in the poems that he wrote after *The Borderers* and ultimately lead him away from Stoic withdrawal towards a version of transmutation which finds its most notable expression in his poem 'The Ruined Cottage'.

Energy is neither created nor destroyed, it can only be transferred from

one form into another. Within the poetry of Wordsworth, feelings seem to act in a similar way. They transmute into different forms: they are transmitted between people and more strangely, between people and places in ways radically different from the mere repetition of contagion in *The Borderers*. To arrive at the realisation of the possibility of transmutation, Wordsworth had to find forms of repetition that were not wholly destructive, not seeking to inhibit the painful material but delivering it again and again for revision and re-use. After the initial toxicity of *The Borderers* and its cycles of contagion, this was partly achieved through Wordsworth's writing and rewriting of his *Salisbury Plain* poems. This section of the chapter will look only briefly at that series of poems, and at Wordsworth's Stoic poems, in order to concentrate most fully on their culmination in *The Excursion*.

In the summer of 1793, at the age of twenty-three and just following his return from France, Wordsworth set out with his friend William Calvert on a tour of the West Country. While crossing the Salisbury Plain - a three-hundred square mile expanse of grassland - the pair had an accident with their horse and carriage. Calvert continued on but Wordsworth was left behind to cross the plain on foot. The three solitary days that he spent walking across the plain had a lasting influence on him. He remarked fifty years later, 'My ramble over many parts of Salisbury Plain left upon my mind imaginative impressions the force of which I have felt to this day'.⁴⁹ Wordsworth composed the first version of the poem 'Salisbury Plain' as he walked, but long after this journey he continued to return mentally to this place, retelling the story of those three days and creating a series of *Salisbury Plain* poems that spanned his whole career. Between 1795 and 1799 he substantially reworked 'Salisbury Plain' into what he considered to be 'almost another work'⁵⁰ renaming it 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain'. In 1798 he extracted part of the poem for publication as 'The Female Vagrant' in *Lyrical Ballads*. He retold the story in Book XII of the 1805 *Prelude*, transforming the three days into a mystical journey of time travel, 'I had a reverie and saw the

⁴⁹ Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth's Revisitings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.187; hereafter cited as *Revisitings*.

⁵⁰ William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Early Years, 1787-1805*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edition, rev. by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.159; hereafter cited as *Letters EY*.

past, / Saw multitudes of men' (*Prelude*, XII, 320-1). In 1841 he returned to 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' turning it into 'Incidents on Salisbury Plain' and in 1842, at the age of seventy-two and forty-nine years after the original composition, the poem was reworked and renamed as 'Guilt and Sorrow' and published as part of the collection entitled *Poems, Chiefly of the Early and Late Years*. Wordsworth's revisions do not however follow a linear pattern of progress. Sometimes his later versions of the poem were improvements, sometimes they were not: the latter most often as a result of an over-explicitness or over-simplification that verges on summary mode. But by reworking the poem in this way Wordsworth was mirroring those lonely figures who circle around the plain in the poem.

The Salisbury Plain was a very different, more painfully monotonous landscape compared to the Lake District in which Wordsworth had grown up. The plain is characterised by absence: it is a 'void'.⁵¹ This is a landscape that just goes on and on and on. It is a psychological as much as a geographical background. The first Salisbury Plain poem was composed at the same time that Wordsworth was writing *The Borderers* and both pieces begin from the same mental and physical starting point, containing much of the same traumatic material. The broken people that find themselves wandering here struggle across this inhospitable landscape, 'the traveller with a sigh / Measured each painful step' (*Salisbury*, l.38-9, p.22). But Wordsworth is able to work through and transform this material and the mechanisms found in *The Borderers*, to go beyond the tragic or traumatic.

In 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain', a sailor and a female vagrant encounter a wounded boy who lies bleeding on the ground. The tyrannous father who has beaten his son close to death stands opposite the sailor, who is the 'he' of the following passage and a man who is himself on the run after the brutal and unprovoked murder of a stranger. The two male aggressors become strange duplicates. The mother who looked on helplessly as her child was beaten stands opposite the female vagrant, herself the grieving mother of two dead children. These repetitions create a place of intense, overlapping human

⁵¹ William Wordsworth, *The Salisbury Plain Poems*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), Line 174, p.128; hereafter cited as *Salisbury*.

suffering. The four figures converging around the child's body create a model of human circuitry that is very different to the contagious relationships of *The Borderers*:

and as the boy turn'd round
His battered head, a groan the sailor fetch'd.
The head with streaming blood had dy'd the ground,
Flow'd from the spot where he that deadly wound
Had fix'd on him he murdered. Through his brain
At once the griding iron passage found;
Deluge of tender thoughts then rush'd amain
Nor could his aged eyes from very tears abstain.

(Salisbury, l.641-8, p.149)

While the father stands in stunned silence, unable to bear what he has done, the sailor becomes a kind of substitute father. He experiences a delayed reaction to his own earlier crime. The child's wound, which mirrors the wound that the sailor inflicted on his victim earlier in the poem, is now somehow replicated within the sailor himself as 'Through his brain / At once the griding iron passage found'. But out of these repeated wounds, rather than pain, it is tenderness which emerges. The sailor's tears are not a resolution or cure for trauma, but they are the outpouring of sympathetic feeling and a counter to the child's 'streaming blood'.

Most importantly, it is inside Book XII of the 1805 *Prelude* that Wordsworth returns to the memory of the Salisbury Plain and creates the fourth incarnation of the poem. It is here that an idea emerges that is very different to the perpetually resurfacing guilt and sorrow within every other version of this poem. It is a realisation that formed the foundation of Wordsworth's poetic philosophy:

I seemed about this period to have sight
Of a new world – a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted, and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,

That which both gives it being, and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without:
The excellence; pure spirit, and best power,
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees. (*Prelude*, XII, 370-9)

While in earlier versions of *The Salisbury Plain* poems the sufferers project their pain outwards onto the blank landscape around them and receive little back, here, through the process of revision and repetition, Wordsworth has arrived at the possibility of reciprocal exchange between inner and outer worlds. It is this 'ennobling interchange', complicating the mechanisms of repetition, which will form the basis of his response to the two-way threats of contagion and withdrawal, explored in greater detail in *The Excursion*.

Between 1802 and 1809 Wordsworth also wrote a series of poems that Jane Worthington has described as his most explicitly 'Stoic' (Worthington, p.60). These include 'Resolution and Independence' (1802) and 'Ode to Duty' (1804), which begins with an epigraph from Seneca's epistle CXX: 'I am no longer good through deliberate intent, but by long habit have reached a point where I am not only able to do right, but am unable to do anything but what is right' (*Epistles*, iii, CXX). Coleridge scornfully remarked that 'you may get a motto for every sect in religion or line of thought in morals or philosophy from Seneca; but nothing is ever thought out by him'.⁵² But the explicit link to Seneca at the beginning of 'Ode to Duty' was a signal of Wordsworth's growing emotional engagement with Stoicism.

'The Character of the Happy Warrior' was written in 1806 as a memorial to Lord Nelson, a hero of the Napoleonic wars who had been killed a year earlier in the Battle of Trafalgar. In his notes to the poem Wordsworth wrote that it was not only Lord Nelson who had been the inspiration behind the poem's Stoic model of control, 'Many elements of the character here portrayed were found in my brother John, who perished by shipwreck as mentioned elsewhere. His

⁵² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1835), i, p.181.

messmates used to call him 'The Philosopher'.⁵³ The poem is at once a public memorial to a national figurehead and an act of private remembrance. It is here that a subtly different form of Stoicism emerges in the man who:

[. . .] doomed to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
In face of these doth exercise a power
Which is our human nature's highest dower:
Controls them and subdues, transmutes and bereaves
Of their bad influence, and their good receives:
By objects, which might force the soul to abate
Her feeling, rendered more compassionate;
Is placable – because occasions rise
So often that demand such sacrifice;
More skilful in self-knowledge, even more pure,
As tempted more; more able to endure,
As more exposed to suffering and distress;
Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.⁵⁴

'Controls them and subdues' seems like a familiar expression of Stoic order and restraint, but 'transmutes and bereaves', which connects back to 'turns', is more unexpected. Instead of submitting to 'necessity', The Happy Warrior is able mentally to transform his predicament to one of 'glorious gain'. He shifts away from the frugal, bare existence typical of Stoicism by changing the very form of his pain and fear. The rhyming line endings, 'pain' / 'gain', 'bereave' / 'receive', 'distress' / 'tenderness', demonstrate a corresponding transmutation of feeling. While Stoicism often seems to be a process of bereavement and self-deprivation, here the movement from 'bereaves' to 'receives' is a surprising change. The latter gain is a result of the former loss.

⁵³ Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Henry Reed, 2 vols (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1851), i, p.299.

⁵⁴ William Wordsworth, 'The Character of the Happy Warrior', in *Wordsworth's Poetical Works*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Derbyshire, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-9), iv, Line 12-26, pp.86-7; hereafter cited as *PW*.

Transmutation is the key to Wordsworth's further development of a broadly Stoic quietism. Whilst for Seneca and the Stoics dangerous passions needed to be discarded or 'banished', Wordsworth saw feelings of loss and pain as having a value that should not be wasted, but rather, converted into a form of aid. Within seven lines of this poem the word 'more' is repeated seven times, but the 'mores' are not simple additions: they are changes and result from unexpected shifts. The double 'more' at the centre of line 24, separated by a semicolon, is the place of transmutation where temptation is converted to endurance - 'As tempted more; more able to endure' - and culminates in the distinctly un-Stoic, 'Thence, also, more alive to tenderness', where 'tenderness' is the final 'glorious gain'. It is a risk to expose a soft, sensitive delicacy, but in order to receive back the tenderness of others it is a necessary risk. Wordsworth offers an alternative kind of defence to that offered by Stoicism and it comes not from withdrawal but from becoming *more* receptive, sensitive and permeable to feelings. It is as if removing the armour could be a more effective defence, as it instead allows for the growth of the skin.

3.3. *The Excursion*

The Excursion (1814) is the culmination of this phase of adapted Stoicism and is the only poem of any great length written by Wordsworth that was published during his lifetime. Composed primarily between 1806 and 1809 and originally intended to form one part of Wordsworth's never completed masterpiece *The Recluse*, it was begun in response to Coleridge's demand to 'Write a poem in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind'.⁵⁵

This section will trace the progress of the particular model of Stoic-therapy that is offered up within the text and consider how the poem was used both by Wordsworth and subsequent readers as a form of therapy. It will also explore the shapes and circuits that are created between people within *The Excursion*, in particular its more constructive forms of repetition, as a

⁵⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), i, p.527.

counterpoint to those enacted in *The Borderers*,

The Excursion follows a pedlar and a poet as they walk together over the course of five days through the Lake District, encountering on the way an old recluse who joins them in their walk. The pedlar has been described by Bruce Graver as one of Wordsworth's 'clearest representations of the Stoic sage'.⁵⁶ It is in Books III and IV of the poem - entitled 'Despondency' and 'Despondency Corrected' - that the pedlar attempts to counsel the depressed recluse using a distinctly Stoic model of therapy. In Book IV Wordsworth incorporates eight lines from Samuel Daniel's sixteenth-century poem 'To the Lady Margaret Countess of Cumberland' into his own text. This fragment itself ends with a two line quotation from Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones*, the same quotation that Montaigne critiqued in his 'Apologie for Raymond Sebond':

Knowing the heart of man is set to be
The center of this world, about the which
These revolutions of disturbances
Still roll; where all th'aspects of misery
Predominate; whose strong effects are such
As he must bear, being pow'rless to redress:
*And that unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man.*⁵⁷

Jane Worthington suggests that Wordsworth was the first to identify this part of Daniel's poem as belonging to Seneca, a sign for her that 'his knowledge of Seneca was as wide as it was thorough' (Worthington, p.45). In his notes to the first edition of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth quoted an additional four stanzas from Daniel's poem, writing that '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' (*Excursion*, p.301). Montaigne called into question the possibility of contorting the self into something beyond its own physical limits, but for Wordsworth that

⁵⁶ Bruce Graver, 'Wordsworth and the Stoics', in *Romans and Romantics*, ed. by Timothy Saunders et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.146-59 (p.149).

⁵⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), Book IV, Line 327-34; hereafter cited as *Excursion*.

transmutation almost to the point of self-transcendence is exactly what must be done in order to preserve some degree of central calm at the core of the self in protection against the encroaching agitation of external forces.

The first book of *The Excursion*, also known as 'The Ruined Cottage', is one of the best demonstrations of Wordsworth's commitment to preventing suffering from serving only as mere waste and will form the basis of the fourth chapter of this thesis with its reading experiments. In his essay on 'Wordsworth's Ethics', the Victorian critic Leslie Stephen – who himself attested to the psychological benefits of reading Wordsworth – describes the poet's commitment to the prevention of emotional waste: 'Wordsworth's favourite lesson is the possibility of turning grief and disappointment into account. He teaches in many forms the necessity of 'transmuting' sorrow into strength [. . .] the waste of sorrow is one of the most lamentable forms of waste'.⁵⁸

Wordsworth's revisionary process was in part an attempt to prevent emotional pain from being futile or meaningless. By perpetually returning to and revising his work over time, beginning again and again from the same emotional or physical point of departure, he was trying with each rewrite to turn his traumas 'into account'. Stephen Gill writes in *Wordsworth's Revisitings* that he 'never let go of anything that had once interested or moved him' (*Revisitings*, p.21). Instead, through a long process of revision and repetition, he sought to preserve places of concentrated emotional matter and find the correct home for them. For material needs to be placed in the correct position in order for it to release the better thought.

A fragment of poetry entitled 'Incipient Madness' and written in approximately 1797 is regarded as the original germ of an idea that later grew, through a series of revisions, into 'The Ruined Cottage':

I crossed the dreary moor
I entered in, but all was still and dark,
In the clear moonlight: when I reached the hut
Only within the ruin I beheld
At a small distance, on the dusky ground

⁵⁸ Leslie Stephen, 'Wordsworth's Ethics', in *Hours in a Library* (1829), 3 vols (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1892), ii, pp.270-307 (pp.299-300).

A broken pane which glittered in the moon
And seemed akin to life. There is a mood
A settled temper of the heart, when grief,
Becomes an instinct, fastening on all things
That promise food, doth like a sucking babe
Create it where it is not.

(‘Incipient Madness’, *PW*, i, l.1-11, pp.314-5)

The poem was written during the same period that Wordsworth was working on both *The Borderers* and the first of *The Salisbury Plain* poems and is set in a very similar location. As in both of those texts, the man in these lines projects his own psychological state out into this space and receives back a reflection of his own hungry grief that serves only to increase it further. This is an unhealthy grief, ‘fastening’ and feeding upon anything that might allow it to grow, even the smallest fragment of reflective broken glass on the ground. However, in the later version of ‘The Ruined Cottage’, the pedlar is able to guard against the mind’s tendency to feed on sorrow when he encounters not a ‘broken pane’ but ‘the useless fragment of a wooden bowl’ on the ground before him:

Stooping down to drink,
Upon the slimy foot-stone I espied
The useless fragment of a wooden bowl,
Green with the moss of years, and subject only
To the soft handling of the elements:
There let it lie -- how foolish are such thoughts!
Forgive them. (*Excursion*, I, 491-7)

Rather than ‘fastening’ upon this external manifestation of his internal grief, it is an act of Stoic detachment to ‘there let it lie’. In the pause after those four words the pedlar is able to create enough distance between himself and ‘it’ to stop the process of contagion. This is a disciplined distance which leads not simply to withdrawal, but to a different form of detached-relatedness.

The Excursion is made up of a series of conversations between a gradually increasing circle of people. In Book I the poet is joined by the pedlar and in Book II they meet the recluse. Between Books V – VII the group enlarges to include a

pastor and by the end of Book VIII the company has expanded further to accommodate the pastor's wife and two children. The different sets of relationships that develop between this shifting group of characters provide an alternative to those of *The Borderers*, marked and brought together by contagion. In *The Excursion*, even in the midst of the trauma of Book III as the recluse speaks of his dead wife, the presence of the silent, listening minds of his two companions - the pedlar and the poet - create the very earliest possibility of healing:

You never saw, your eyes did never look
On the bright form of Her whom once I loved:-
Her silver voice was heard upon the earth,
A sound unknown to you; else, honoured Friend!
Your heart had borne a pitiable share
Of what I suffered, when I wept that loss,
And suffer now, not seldom, from the thought
That I remember, and can weep no more.
Stripped as I am of all the golden fruit
Of self-esteem; and by the cutting blasts
Of self-reproach familiarly assailed;
Yet would I not be of such wintry bareness
But that some leaf of your regard should hang
Upon my naked branches: lively thoughts
Give birth, full often, to unguarded words;
I grieve that, in your presence, from my tongue
Too much of frailty hath already dropped;
But that too much demands still more. (*Excursion*, III, 484-501)

The relationship between the different pronouns of this passage creates a circuit that runs across and down the lines. The accusatory 'you' and 'your' of the opening line stand in contrast to the repeated and capitalised 'Her' of the beloved wife. There is a huge disconnect between all that the recluse has gone through ('I loved', 'I suffered', 'I wept', 'I remember') and his companions who did not know the woman and therefore can never comprehend the tragedy of

her absence. With each 'I' the recluse sinks deeper into his depression. The presence of the poet and pedlar does however now offer the recluse the chance of plugging back into the mental circuitry of a group: 'Yet would I not be of such wintry bareness / But that some leaf of your regard should hang / Upon my naked branches'. The back-to-front syntax of these two lines reflects how difficult it is for the recluse to articulate or even to imagine the possibility of feeling better and yet also his unwillingness to surrender. He needs the 'regard' of another mind outside of himself to do the work of esteeming himself that he is not able to do. Although located prior to the explicit counsel of 'Despondency Corrected', this passage feels like a version of counselling, and is more successful due to the silence of the addressees. The presence of the listening companions draws the recluse's words out of him with a silent force that overpowers his own reticence to reveal his emotional fragility. The syntax of the final two lines acts as a formula for a particularly Wordsworthian version of therapy. 'Too much' + 'too much' = 'but [. . .] still more' is a distinct departure from Stoic principles of emotional detachment, bareness or curtailment, into a working-through and a revision.

It is in Book IV that the pedlar intentionally takes on the role of counsellor, dominating the dialogue and offering the recluse a version of therapy rooted in Stoic principles:

There is a luxury in self-dispraise;
And inward self-disparagement affords
To meditative spleen a grateful feast.
Trust me, pronouncing on your own desert,
You judge unthankfully: distempered nerves
Infect the thoughts: the languor of the frame
Depressed the soul's vigour. Quit your couch -
Cleave not so fondly to your moody cell;
Nor let the hallowed powers, that shed from heaven
Stillness and rest, with disapproving eye
Look down upon your taper, through a watch
Of midnight hours, unseasonably twinkling
In this deep Hollow, like a sullen star

Dimly reflected in a lonely pool.

Take courage, and withdraw yourself from ways

That run not parallel to nature's course. (*Excursion*, IV, 475-90)

The idea that 'distempered nerves/ Infect the thoughts' recurred throughout Seneca's philosophical letters. The pedlar's tone, as from an early version of self-help, instructs the recluse to 'trust me' and 'take courage' and warns against the self-indulgence of continued self-criticism, which - in a metaphor that recalls 'Incipient Madness' - 'affords / To meditative spleen a grateful feast'. This inward looking, self-perpetuating depression is one version of emotional wastage, but the pedlar's explicit counsel, which attempts to 'correct' the recluse's mood, does not work. In his response the recluse undercuts what he perceives to have been overly simplistic advice:

"But how begin? And whence? 'The mind is free -

Resolve,' the haughty moralist would say,

'This single act is all that we demand.'

Alas! Such wisdom bids a creature fly

Whose very sorrow is, that time hath shorn

His natural wings! - To friendship let him turn

For succour; but perhaps he sits alone

On stormy waters, tossed in a little boat

That holds but him, and can contain no more. (*Excursion*, IV, 1077-85)

For the recluse, instructions like 'resolve' or 'take courage' are inadequately glib. Any suggestion that 'a single act' is 'all' that is needed to get him out of his depression feels like a bitter mockery of a predicament that has robbed him of his 'natural' wings. He cannot fly, he sits. Reducing the size of the task that he is facing is not helpful: he is already in a 'small' world with 'but' himself, alone. The final image of this passage, of the recluse 'tossed in a little boat / That holds but him, and can contain no more' recalls the syntax of the passage in Book III where, 'Too much of frailty hath already dropped; / But that too much demands still more'. But his difficulty now is that he has no physical capacity or mental space for the 'still more' that is needed and his therapist-companion is offering him in this instance even less.

The titles 'Despondency' and 'Despondency Corrected' suggest a sequential movement from ill health to wellbeing, but in reality such a linear pathway towards recovery could not hope to succeed if Wordsworth was to remain true to his own rules of living. Accordingly, the recluse must veer repeatedly towards and then away from the healthier 'corrected' way of thinking towards which the pedlar is trying to steer him. In his notes to *The Excursion* Wordsworth acknowledges the deficiency of the pedlar's counsel. As *The Excursion* was only ever supposed to be one part of the longer poem *The Recluse*, Wordsworth always intended for the character's recovery to occur not in Book IV – 'Despondency Corrected' - but much later:

It was my wish, and I might say intention, that we should resume our wanderings, and pass the Borders into his native country, where as I hoped, he might witness, in the society of the Wanderer, some religious ceremony – a sacrament, say, in the open fields, or a preaching among the mountains – which, by recalling to his mind the days of his early childhood, when he had been present on such occasions in company with his parents and nearest kindred, might have dissolved his heart in tenderness, and so have done more towards restoring the Christian faith in which he had been educated, and, with that, contentedness and even cheerfulness of mind, than all that the Wanderer and Pastor, by their several effusions and addresses, had been able to effect. An issue like this was in my intentions. But, alas! (*Excursion*, p.1224)

Had Wordsworth ever been able to finish the poem, it would have been some form of direct but chance encounter that would have given the recluse his best hope of recovery. By recalling his non-tragic past this live experience would have allowed undercurrents of feeling to re-emerge from within him, unlike the unsuccessful attempts at consciously directive therapy in Book IV which tried to impose a cure upon him from the outside.

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Wordsworth's childhood was marked by the death of his mother when he was eight years old and of his father five years later. In 1805, when Wordsworth was

thirty-five years old, his beloved older brother John died in a shipwreck and in 1812 two of his children died within the space of six months. While *The Excursion* was primarily composed between 1806 and 1809, it was as a grieving father that Wordsworth turned back to the poem for support in 1813 and made further revisions to the text. He wrote as a defence against his own chronic grief, against the stagnating paralysis suffered in this poem by the characters of Margaret and the recluse, following their own multiple bereavements. In January 1813, a few weeks after their second bereavement, Wordsworth's sister Dorothy wrote, 'William has begun to look into his poem *The Recluse* within the last two days and I hope that he will be better for it'.⁵⁹ Like Coleridge fourteen years earlier, Dorothy believed that this poem could do some good. Editors of The Cornell Edition of *The Excursion* have identified that it was in early 1813 that Wordsworth returned specifically to Books III and IV of the poem. In lines added to Book III after January 1813 Wordsworth writes about the sudden deaths of the recluse's own two children:

- With even as brief a warning - and how soon
 With what short interval of time between
 I tremble yet to think of - our last prop,
 Our happy life's only remaining stay -
 The Brother followed; and was seen no more! (*Excursion*, III, 654-8)

In these stuttering lines, without his usual syntax, Wordsworth was writing his own grief into the poem. The line endings cut short each unit of sense, reflecting the structural breakdown of the family unit and of the poet's own mental state.

For many subsequent readers, and in particular his Victorian readers, Wordsworth's poetry became an instrument for finding a way through difficulties. In his autobiography, first published in 1873, John Stuart Mill described how reading Wordsworth had helped him through a period of mental crisis:

⁵⁹ Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Middle Years: Part II, 1812-20*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edition, rev. by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.84.

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty [. . .] I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this, not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings.⁶⁰

Matthew Arnold wrote of 'Wordsworth's healing power'⁶¹ and John Ruskin described using Wordsworth's poetry 'as a daily text book from youth to age'.⁶²

William James, one of the founders of the discipline of psychology who himself suffered repeated psychological crises throughout his life, attested to the personal therapeutic benefit of reading Wordsworth's poetry and in particular of reading *The Excursion*. On the 1st of February 1870, he wrote in his diary, 'Today I about touched rock-bottom'.⁶³ It was however directly after this lowest of points that his first biographer Ralph Bardon Perry recorded a period of partial recovery in James' lifelong struggle with depression. This recovery was in part fuelled by the books William James was reading at the time. In a letter of 1873, James' father writes of a recent and dramatic improvement in his son's mental state, 'He came in here the other afternoon when I was sitting alone, and after walking the floor in an animated way for a moment, exclaimed "Dear me! What a difference there is between me now and me last spring [. . .] now feeling my mind so cleared up and restored to sanity. It is the difference between life and death" [. . .] I ventured to ask what specifically in his opinion had promoted the change. He said several things: the reading of Renouvier (specially his vindication of the freedom of the will) and Wordsworth, whom he has been feeding on for a good while' (Perry, p.339). 'Reading' doesn't seem to be an adequate verb to describe what James was doing with Wordsworth's poetry; instead he was 'feeding' on it. David E. Leary has identified that it was

⁶⁰ John Stewart Mill, *Autobiography* (1873), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.89.

⁶¹ Matthew Arnold, 'Memorial Verses' (1850), in *Matthew Arnold Selected Poems*, ed. by Miriam Allott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), l.63, p.96.

⁶² John Williams, *Wordsworth Translated* (London: Continuum, 2009), p.127.

⁶³ Ralph Bardon Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 2 vols (London: Humphrey Milford, 1935), i, p.322; hereafter cited as 'Perry'.

specifically Book IV of *The Excursion*, 'Despondency Corrected', that James found particularly helpful to him: 'He was reading and re-reading Wordsworth's long poem *The Excursion* especially the section on 'Despondency Corrected'. He left that work – as Mill had – with an enhanced sense that human cognition entails what Wordsworth called a 'marriage' of mind and matter; a union of the subjective and objective brought about by the mind's 'excursive power' to 'walk around' phenomena, viewing them this way and that, from one vantage point and another'.⁶⁴

In his criticism of *The Excursion*, William Hazlitt argued that rather than portraying a series of different characters, the poem was made up of 'soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject'.⁶⁵ The pedlar was after all the man that Wordsworth had imagined he might have become, the poet was not dissimilar to the man Wordsworth was at the time that he was writing *The Excursion* and the recluse – suffering in the wake of the failed French Revolution and grieving the loss of his family – was a character who shared much of Wordsworth's own trauma. Whether the poem's central characters are considered as distinct individuals, different facets of the same person, or both, they allowed Wordsworth to shift between different mental positions as he wrote, looking in at the recluse's predicament from different vantage points, as well as looking out from within his own despondency. In turn, the poem's interlocking characters demand a certain mental mobility from the reader and it is this that proved useful to William James, helping him to get unstuck from the fixed psychological state of 'rock bottom' that he had found himself in.

Another troubled reader – who like so many others found guidance in the poetry of Wordsworth – wrote an anonymous letter under the pseudonym 'Mathetes' to Coleridge's magazine *The Friend*. In this letter the twenty-four year old John Wilson laid out his admiration for Wordsworth. In anxious concern for the progress of his generation he called on the poet to come forward and accept

⁶⁴ David E. Leary, 'Instead of Erklaren and Verstehen: William James on Human Understanding', in *Historical Perspectives on Erklaren and Verstehen*, ed. by Uljana Feest (Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2007), pp.121-140 (p.124).

⁶⁵ William Hazlitt, 'On Mr Wordsworth's *The Excursion*' (1814), in *William Wordsworth: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Graham McMaster (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp.114-20 (p.116).

the role of teacher, guide and protector of their fragile minds, 'If a teacher should stand up in their generation, conspicuous above the multitude in superior power [. . .] to his cheering or summoning voice all hearts would turn' ('Letter of Mathetes', *Prose*, ii, p.33). In his response to Mathetes' letter, also published in the magazine, Wordsworth refused the role that his young admirer had proposed and questioned the assumption that the transfer of knowledge was best achieved through pre-meditated and explicit teaching. Instead Wordsworth encouraged a transaction that relied as much on the mind of the student as the teacher:

There is a life and spirt in knowledge which we extract from truths scattered for the benefit of all, and which the mind, by its own activity, has appropriated to itself – a life and spirit, which is seldom found in knowledge communicated by formal and direct precepts [. . .] I trust that the assistance which my Correspondent has done me the honour to request will in course of time flow naturally from my labours, in the manner that will best serve him. ('Reply to Mathetes', *Prose*, ii, p.8)

Wordsworth refuses to help in the way in which help has been requested, because for him the interchange must occur on a subliminal level, almost by psychologically syntactic stealth rather than through straight lines of directed transmission. Help that is not known to be needed, or help that is not known to be being given, or help that is directed at one person but deflected into another are permitted and it is these implicit, almost accidental kinds of teaching and learning that Wordsworth supports.

In his 'Answer to Mathetes' Wordsworth goes on to reject straight-line versions of progress and in doing so casts off the anxieties that false, linear templates enforce. He describes progress as a subliminal phenomenon that combines backwards and forwards motion:

The progress of the species neither is nor can be like that of the Roman road in a right line. It may be more justly compared to that of a river, which both in its small reaches and larger turnings is frequently forced back towards its fountains, by objects which cannot otherwise be eluded or overcome; yet with an accompanying impulse that will ensure its

advancement hereafter, it is either gaining strength every hour, or conquering in secret some difficulty, by a labour that contributes as effectually to further it in its course, as when it moves forward uninterrupted in a line, direct as that of the Roman road with which we began the comparison [. . .] It suffices to content the mind, though there may be an apparent stagnation, or a retrograde movement in the species, that something is doing which is necessary to be done, and the effect of which will in due time appear; - that something is unremittingly gaining, either in secret preparation or in open and triumphant progress. ('Reply to Mathetes', *Prose*, ii, p.11-12)

If a reader were to trace the track of the recluse's mind as he proceeds through the course of *The Excursion* - as if he or she were tracing the route that the men follow in their journey - it would be a line that moves backwards more frequently than forwards, that stops and refuses to go onwards or attempts to veer back on itself before surging forwards only to then come to an abrupt halt. In Wordsworth's re-definition of progress, these moves all belong to the indistinct and unknowable process that he can only pin down as far as to say 'something is doing which is necessary to be done'. The 'is doing' only emerges when 'done' and perhaps long after that. The pedlar's too linear corrective passages attempt to carry the recluse too directly out of his despondency and therefore actually sidestep this unidentifiable but crucial interior preparatory work of pre-conscious 'doing' that must come first. Wordsworth's is a model of progress that is particularly important in this thesis as it exists as an antidote to the overly linear, reductive pathways to recovery that are commonly prescribed by modern psychological therapies.

Despite the failure of the pedlar's attempts at correction in Book IV, there are several places within *The Excursion* where more successful forms of therapy take place almost by accident. These are places which are distinctly non-linear and which are instead characterised by circular movement, reflection, rebounds, turns and returns. For example, in Book IV it is the poet rather than the recluse who receives the benefit of the pedlar's therapy as if by deflection. He is able to gain benefit from words that were not intended for or

directed at him, but which were unknowingly needed by him, in a way that the recluse is not able to:

The words he uttered shall not pass away
Dispersed, like music that the wind takes up
By snatches, and lets fall, to be forgotten;
No – they sank into me, the bounteous gift
Of one whom time and nature had made wise.

(Excursion, IV, 1280-4)

In the downward shift of ‘they sank into me’ the pedlar’s spoken words become heavy and permanent, as if converted into a more solid currency that can be put to later use. In the silent give and take of this passage, something of real value is transferred between the three individual but somehow connected main characters and thus preserved intact.

A further example from Book IV occurs as the pedlar remembers listening to the cry of a solitary raven echoing through the mountains. As he recalls the gradations of silence created by the bird as it circled over the valley, the poem moves from the mode of surface dialogue and linear exchange that has hitherto dominated it, and shifts instead to a different kind of language that belongs at the very edge of the unspoken and unwritten:

Within the fabric of this circuit huge,
One voice – the solitary raven, flying
Athwart the concave of the dark blue dome,
Unseen, perchance above all power of sight -
An iron knell! With echoes from afar
Faint – and still fainter – as the cry with which
The wanderer accompanies her flight
Through the calm region, fades upon the ear,
Diminishing by distance till it seemed
To expire; yet from the abyss is caught again,
And yet again recovered! *(Excursion, IV, 1140-50)*

In the shift from 'faint' to 'still fainter' the limits of sound and distance are stretched as though an analogue to the creation of memory itself. The echo is momentarily lost in the pause at the end of the line between 'it seemed' and 'To expire', but with each line the pedlar is attuning himself to the silence and becomes able to catch the sound again and again, even when it seems to have been lost. Non-linear progress is a particularly literary feature of Wordsworth's philosophy due to its specific connection to his use of lineation. The resounding echo of the bird's call and the shift in mode that its remembrance triggers is one in a series of moments within the poem where a sound unexpectedly disturbs the surface world and creates some kind of inlet into the deeper parts of its characters' minds. In these places the poems dialogue must cease so that a different frequency can be tuned into. This passage provides a model of the kind of non-linear and barely perceptible progress that Wordsworth outlined in his reply to Mathetes, its patterns of turns and returns leading to the final recovery of the last line. The sequence of recovery is 'yet [. . .] again/And yet again'.

In his essay 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through', Freud describes the way in which patients undergoing psycho-analysis often unwittingly re-enact their memories:

The patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it [. . .] As long as the patient is in treatment he cannot escape from his compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering.⁶⁶

It is the job of the analyst to unpick the memories stored within these repetitions and re-enactments and to then lead the patient towards the hoped for third mental stage of 'working through'. Wordsworth's repetitions and revisions similarly reveal traces of his own traumas, and were also the means by which he too managed to attain that third stage of mental repair.

The Latin word for a line of poetry – *versus* - originates from the word

⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), xii, pp.145-56 (p.150); hereafter cited as *RRWT*.

for 'a furrow', while *verto* - the corresponding verb - describes the action of the plough as it turns at the edge of the field to begin each new furrow.⁶⁷ In the Roman mind poetry is therefore connected – if only subconsciously – to movement across a physical space, the marking out of a distinct pattern onto the land and to a repeated pattern of turns and returns that connect together a series of straight lines. This is cultivation and culture. Wordsworth composed much of his poetry as he walked outdoors and there is a relationship between the rhythms of the poet's stride, the pathways that he followed as he walked, and the mental structure of linear turns and returns within his poetry.

In a letter to John Thelwall written in 1804, Wordsworth identified line endings as places of particular concern and power for him: 'As long as blank verse shall be printed in lines, it will be physically impossible to pronounce the last words or syllables of the lines with the same indifference as the others, i.e. not to give them an intonation of one kind or another, or to follow them with a pause, not called out for by the passion of the subject, but by the passion of metre merely' (*Letters EY*, p.434). By creating a gap in the circuitry of the poem, line endings trigger an electrical surge amidst temporary silence or hesitation that in the midst of formulation rather than at its end cannot fail to have some kind of effect – whether conscious or unconscious – on the mind of the reader. Wordsworth took full advantage of the opportunity that line endings provide for rewiring the mind as we would now put it, and this is one reason for the particular therapeutic power of his poetry. It was not however until the mid-twentieth century that critics such as William Empson, Donald Davie, Christopher Ricks and Herbert Lindenberger specifically began to study Wordsworth's use of lineation and to build the argument that it was a central component of his literary language. In *Articulate Energy*, Donald Davie argues that 'this is poetry where the syntax counts enormously, counts for nearly everything'.⁶⁸ In his 1971 essay 'A Pure Organic Pleasure from the Lines', Christopher Ricks locates in the line endings a holding-place for 'what the poet

⁶⁷ Rosemary Huisman, *The Written Poem: Semiotic Conventions from Old to Modern English* (London: Cassell, 1999), p.108.

⁶⁸ Donald Davie, *Articulate Energy* (London: Routledge, 1955), p.111.

values, as well as the instrument by which his values are expressed'.⁶⁹ In 1951, William Empson wrote extensively on Wordsworth's use of the single word 'sense' in his book *The Structure of Complex Words*, noticing that three-quarters of the instances of the word in *The Prelude* were located at line endings and arguing that this meant that it was held 'slightly apart from the stock phrase it comes in, so that some wider meaning for it can be suggested'.⁷⁰ Line endings function as junction points that disrupt straight line thinking and trigger what Davie described in relation to Milton as a 'flicker of hesitation'⁷¹ in the reader's mind as they hang momentarily in the gap, uncertain of quite where the turn into the next line will take them. Again this under-sense is to do with something other than simple, conscious sense, final ends or directed goals and outcomes.

In Book V of the 1805 *Prelude*, as Wordsworth watches a boy mimicking the hooting of an owl, his use of lineation helps to expand space, creating width and depth that stretches both inwards into the body and outwards into the landscape:

And when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
Then sometimes in that silence while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents. (*Prelude*, V, 404-9)

The line break between 'hung' and 'listening' famously creates a moment of mental suspension, slowing the pace of time and creating a holding place for thought. This gap feels like an extended physical realisation of the 'flicker of hesitation' and is reinforced by the subsequent line which ends with the word 'surprise'. Silence becomes a 'deep' space or a substance that a person can be 'in' – can 'sink' into. It is in this silent space – as the boy listens intently for the returning calls of the owls – that he is able to tune into another previously

⁶⁹ Christopher Ricks, 'Wordsworth: "A Pure Organic Pleasure from the Lines"', in *William Wordsworth: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Graham McMaster (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp.505-34 (p.507).

⁷⁰ William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), p.289.

⁷¹ Donald Davie, 'Syntax and Music in *Paradise Lost*', in *The Living Milton*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Routledge, 1960), pp.70-84 (p.73).

unnoticed layer of sound, 'the voice of mountain torrents'. The horizontal span of the word 'far' corresponds with the vertical depth of the silence in which the boy first hung. Thomas De Quincey wrote of the same lines that 'This very expression, "far", by which space and its infinities are attributed to the human heart, and to its capacities of re-echoing the sublimities of nature, has always struck me with a flash of sublime revelation'.⁷²

In the final book of *The Excursion*, as the much enlarged group of travellers – which now includes the pastor and his family as well as the poet, pedlar and recluse – all walk down to a lakeside, one of the pastor's daughters begins to sing. Her voice sinks into the hearts of the collective group with a vertical inward movement that is akin to the horizontal shift inwards of *The Prelude* so admired by De Quincey:

That lovely Girl supplied a simple song,
Whose low tones reached not to the distant rocks
To be repeated thence, but gently sank
Into our hearts; and charmed the peaceful flood.

(*Excursion*, IX, 534-7)

The line break after that Wordsworthian verb 'sank' extends the interior space into which the song can travel down into, revealing an internal landscape that is as expansive as that of the mountains and lakes on the outside. It recalls the place in Book IV when the pedlar's words of counsel 'sank into' the mind of the poet, rather than being wasted 'like music that the wind takes up / By snatches, and lets fall, to be forgotten'. The preservation of such therapeutic material is a collective human endeavour, and in both these cases more than one mind is needed to provide a home or a holding place for words that contain the potential for healing. They become lodged in deep places where they are needed, if not necessarily known to be needed, and where they in turn can be protected and stored wholly intact.

It is in the second half of *The Excursion* – located after the poem's core book of counsel 'Despondency Corrected' – that a second attempt is made at

⁷² Thomas de Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* (1839), ed. by David Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.161.

alleviating the recluse's depression. Within the enclosure of the churchyard and now in the company of the pastor, the poem's forward movement is replaced by a long period of stillness, interrupted only as the recluse asks to hear the stories of the men and women buried there. It is these stories, or spoken epitaphs, which provide the group with a more solid form of counsel – grounded in live experience– than that which the pedlar had been able to offer in the earlier books of the poem:

May I entreat
Your further help? The mine of real life
Dig for us; and present us, in the shape
Of virgin ore, that gold which we, by pains
Fruitless as those of aery alchemists
Seek from the tortured crucible. There lies
Around us a domain where you have long
Watched both the outward course and inner heart.
Give us, for our abstractions, solid facts;
For our disputes, plain pictures. (*Excursion*, V, 630-9)

Acting as a bridge between the 'outward course and inner heart' the pastor is able to switch the poem's direction of travel from horizontal movement across the physical landscape to vertical movement down into the psychological mine. The recluse calls on the pastor's ability to 'pronounce [. . .] authentic epitaphs', for in this churchyard, where the graves are almost all unmarked, the epitaphs of the dead are held within the minds of those who remain alive, and are transferred between people through speech. These oral epitaphs retain the physical qualities of their stone counterparts and the pastor's words are marked out as different from the kinds of speech that have thus far filled the poem. These are not 'fruitless [. . .] abstractions' but 'solid facts' and 'plain pictures' that have a particularly permanent value, or which hold in memory some kind of foundational truth.

It was F. W. H. Myers, the psychologist and poet born in the Lake District in 1843 – seven years before the death of Wordsworth – who developed the idea of the 'subliminal' to describe the domain beneath the threshold of

consciousness. Myers was a friend of and influence on William James and in 1881 wrote a book on William Wordsworth. In *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, published posthumously in 1907, Myers writes of the possible transfer or surfacing of material from the subliminal layers of the mind and into the consciousness: 'I conceive that there may be, not only co-operations between these quasi-independent trains of thought, but also upheavals and alternations of personality of many kinds, so that what was once below the surface may for a time, or permanently rise above it'.⁷³ Myers believed that material that the subconscious was holding in storage could be pulled back up to the surface in time of need and put to conscious work. In the churchyard books of *The Excursion* an attempt is made to get at those buried resources.

Wordsworth wrote three essays on the subject of epitaphs. The first was initially published in *The Friend* on the 22nd of February 1810 alongside Coleridge's poem 'The Tombless Epitaph' and Wordsworth's own translations of the epitaphs of the sixteenth-century Italian Poet Gabriello Chiabrera. This essay was republished in 1814 alongside *The Excursion* as a footnote to Books VI and VII, the section entitled 'The Churchyard in the Mountains'. In doing so Wordsworth repurposed the essay as a companion and aid to reading this part of the poem. In *The Excursion*, when the recluse asks for the pastor's help he is speaking out of a desperate need for some kind of clue that will help him to live on after the death of his family. While he has survived the immediate moment of tragedy he now needs the stories of the dead to serve him. After the failure of the pedlar's words to effect real psychological change in 'Despondency Corrected', this second attempt at counsel tunes into the primary language of the epitaph as if looking now for a quality within written language that when spoken by the priest will make up for some deficiency in the pedlar's words. The epitaph is a model of bareness, which, as Wordsworth wrote in his first 'Essay Upon Epitaphs', 'should speak, in a tone which shall sink into the heart' ('Essay Upon Epitaphs I', *Prose*, ii, p.57). It is again the vital therapeutic word 'sink into' that bears weight but allows for slowness rather than immediate feeling.

One of the stories that the pastor tells in Book VI is of a young mother

⁷³ F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903), (New York: Dover Publications Ltd, 2005), p.27.

called Ellen who, having been forced to leave her new-born baby and take on a job nursing the children of another family, becomes caught in a paralysing grief when her own child dies. Abandoned by her baby's father and in turn abandoning the child to its death, Ellen is one of Wordsworth's many tragic mothers:

You see the Infant's grave; and to this spot,
The mother, oft as she was sent abroad,
On whatsoever errand, urged her steps:
Hither she came; here stood, and sometimes knelt
In the broad day, a rueful Magdalene!
So call her; for not only she bewailed
A mother's loss, but mourned in bitterness
Her own transgression; penitent sincere
As ever raised to heaven a streaming eye!
- At length the parents of the foster child,
Noting that in despite of their commands
She still renewed and could not but renew
Those visitations, ceased to send her forth;
Or, to the garden's narrow bounds, confined.
I failed not to remind them that they erred;
For holy Nature might not thus be crossed. (*Excursion*, VI, 1004-19)

Ellen's stolen visits to the churchyard 'in broad day' contrast with the restorative and tranquil pockets of shade – particularly within the churchyard – that provide shelter throughout the poem for the group of travellers. Here Ellen is exposed to the light of the sun and finds no comfort from returning again and again to the spot where her baby is buried, 'she still renewed and could not but renew / Those visitation'. Like feeding on unhappy grief, 'renew' loses its natural meaning or finds it turned to purposes that work against life's health. Ellen is part of a pattern of grief that runs through the poem and which includes Margaret, the recluse and Wordsworth himself, writing as he was out of his own need to mourn the deaths of two of his own children and yet somehow avoid the unresolved grief that the lives of these dead mothers warn against. As the pastor

speaks it is as if in composing Ellen's epitaph he is attempting for a second time to realign her disturbed life and allow the grief that was restricted while she lived to play out now in full.

It is in the silent aftermath of Ellen's story that the priest's epitaph is shown to be doing its work on the group, as if in secret:

The Vicar ceased; and downcast looks made known
That each had listened with his inmost heart.
For me, the emotion scarcely was less strong
Or less benign than that which I had felt
When seated near my venerable Friend,
Under those shady elms, from him I heard
The story that retraced the slow decline
Of Margaret sinking on the lonely heath,
With the neglected house to which she clung
- I noted that the solitary's cheek
Confessed the power of nature – Pleased though sad,
More pleased than sad, the grey-haired Wanderer sate.

(Excursion, VI, 1074-85)

The feelings transmitted by the pastor are absorbed by each member of the group separately, but it is the pedlar who is able to transmute what he has received into the blended feeling of 'Pleased though sad / More pleased than sad'. This composite emotion requires the syntax of poetry to exist for it defies linear either/or frameworks of thinking. The pedlar retains a sadness that cannot but deduct something from his pleasure, a pleasure which in turn is adding something to his sadness.

In this passage the poet recalls the corresponding spot in Book I where he had heard the poem's original template of unresolved and unhealthily ruminating grief. His remembrance of Margaret here is part of the poem's long effort - which began in 'The Ruined Cottage' - to prevent her life and suffering from being wasted:

At this the Wanderer paused;
And, looking up to those enormous elms,

He said, "'Tis now the hour of deepest noon.
At this still season of repose and peace,
This hour when all things which are not at rest
Are cheerful; while this multitude of flies
With tuneful hum is filling all the air;
Why should a tear be on an old Man's cheek?
Why should we thus, with an untoward mind,
And in the weakness of humanity,
From natural wisdom turn our hearts away;
To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears;
And, feeding on disquiet, thus disturb
The calm of nature with our restless thoughts?" (*Excursion*, I, 630-43)

Wordsworth was trying not to diminish his sense of loss or to turn his losses into gains, but instead to create sorrow that was not wholly sorrow to hear of, for the human value buried within its pain. In *The Master and His Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist warns that 'Error arises from 'either/or' thinking (it must be pleasure or it must be pain), coupled with sequential analysis (if both are present, one must give rise to the other, presumably pain to pleasure). The option that both emotions might be caused at the same moment by the very same phenomenon is excluded'.⁷⁴ Without a framework that allows for something other than either/or thinking, the spectrum of blended, reciprocal emotions that Wordsworth shows to be so necessary and internally beneficial to us are wasted. The experimental work of chapter four will in part aim to explore whether Wordsworth's poetry does offer modern readers such a framework for more non-linear, non-binary thinking patterns to develop, and whether this has any corresponding therapeutic implications.

⁷⁴ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p.362.

4.

Experiments in Reading ‘The Ruined Cottage’

Having explored the therapeutic effect that Wordsworth’s poetry had on nineteenth-century readers such as John Stuart Mill and William James, while also demonstrating how Wordsworth himself used writing as a form of personal therapy, the fourth chapter of this thesis will investigate the effects of Wordsworth’s poetry on modern readers. Two practical reading experiments aim to show Wordsworth’s poetry in action and thus illuminate its workings in ways that theoretical criticism cannot. The experiments are designed to investigate whether personal engagement with Wordsworth’s poetry can open up particular areas and ways of thinking and thus illustrate the genuine use that poetry can have in the real world. What is offered in this and the following chapter is not, of course, final proof but supportive and testing evidence in relation to emerging positions and propositions.

- **Experiment A** compares reader responses to a news article with responses to two short extracts of Wordsworth’s poem ‘The Ruined Cottage’ (see section 4.1.1 for a detailed outline of the study).
- **Experiment B** examines the effect of sustained personal engagement with Wordsworth’s poetry. It compares diaries written over a period of two weeks by a group of participants who were reading the entirety of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ with diaries written over the same time-period by a group given no literary stimulus (see section 4.9.1 for a detailed outline of the study).

Thematic analysis was selected as the primary analytical methodology in both experiments due to its flexibility and capacity to ‘potentially provide a rich, detailed, yet complex account of data’.⁷⁵

‘The Ruined Cottage’ was selected to form the basis of these two reading experiments in order to put the work of chapter three on *The Excursion* to the

⁷⁵ Virginia Braun, and Victoria Clarke, ‘Using thematic analysis in psychology’, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3.2 (2006), 77-101 (78).

test. The poem is 1009 lines long and its distinctly slow pace was particularly important in Experiment B, which was designed to encourage participants to build up a relationship with the text over time and to engage in daily, careful contemplation. As discussed in chapter three, the character of the pedlar is Wordsworth's most explicit representation of a Stoic sage. The poem therefore shares a certain amount of the Stoic DNA of a modern CBT self-help book. The question here is whether, once distilled through the mind of the poet, it can have any comparable therapeutic effect on readers.

The two experiments aim to reactivate the arguments of chapter three and demonstrate how theoretical literary study can benefit from accommodating more imaginative, empirical methodologies. For as Iain McGilchrist writes in *Against Criticism*, with specific reference to the study of Wordsworth, 'To criticise his poetry properly one would need to have a knowledge of theology, philosophy, syntax, psychology and biology, as well as a powerful enough imagination to hold them all together, and to see them finally as an aspect of the same thing'.⁷⁶

The experiments have been designed with two models of innovative literary scholarship in mind: I.A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* (1929) and Michael Pafford's *Inglorious Wordsworths* (1973).

In *Practical Criticism* Richards sets out the results of a project in which he handed out copies of thirteen poems - stripped of all historical and biographical context - to a large group of Cambridge undergraduates and colleagues and then analysed the written responses that the students produced. Whilst the majority of the participants were studying English at Cambridge, Richards discovered a widespread inability to successfully 'read' the poetry. In his analysis of the responses that he collected from his participants, Richards outlines a series of common reading faults. He highlights a propensity to rely on preconceptions and 'stock responses' in the analysis of the poetry and comments on the sense of bewilderment and confusion felt by his participants when faced with unfamiliar material that has been stripped of all the props of context. By measuring the true state of reading at the university, Richards could

⁷⁶ Iain McGilchrist, *Against Criticism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), p.35.

identify the work that was still to be done in teaching: 'It is not inevitable, or in the nature of things, that poetry should seem such a remote, mysterious, unmanageable thing to so large a majority of readers. The deficiencies so noticeable in the protocol writers [. . .] are not native inalterable defects in the average human mind. They are due in a large degree to mistakes that can be avoided, and to bad training. In fact does anyone ever receive any useful training in this matter?'⁷⁷ Ninety years after *Practical Criticism*, poetry may have become even more of a 'remote, mysterious, unmanageable thing' to an even larger majority of the population than Richards found it to be.

Richards argued that while some aspects of life are suited to scientific modes of thinking, there are many others which are not, and in order to think about those grey areas of existence that do not correspond with logic and reason and black or white statements of truth we need something closer to poetry:

There are subjects - mathematics, physics and the descriptive sciences supply some of them - which can be discussed in terms of verifiable facts and precise hypotheses. There are other subjects - the concrete affairs of commerce, law, organisation and police work - which can be handled by rules of thumb and generally accepted conventions. But in between is the vast corpus of problems, assumptions, adumbrations, fictions, prejudices, tenets; the sphere of random beliefs and hopeful guesses; the whole world, in brief, of abstract opinion and disputation about matters of feeling. To this world belongs everything about which civilised man cares most. I need only instance ethics, metaphysics, morals, religion, aesthetics, and the discussions surrounding liberty, nationality, justice, love, truth, faith and knowledge to make this plain. As a subject matter for discussion, poetry is a central and typical denizen of this world.

(Richards, p.5)

The aim of the experimental work within this thesis is to investigate the impact that 'literary language' can potentially have on human thinking and expression and to explore the role that it can play in helping people to inhabit the grey

⁷⁷ I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930), p.309; hereafter cited as 'Richards'.

areas that exist outside of the reach of 'everyday' language. The experimental methods of psychological science are thus being put to use here in the service of something deeper than empiricism.

Michael Pafford conceived of his book *Inglorious Wordsworths* whilst struggling to teach English literature - and in particular Wordsworth - to a class of sixth-form students. Uncertain of the degree to which his pupils could relate to Wordsworth's poetry, Pafford developed a questionnaire which he eventually handed out to 500 sixth-form and undergraduate students. The aim of the survey was to find out if participants had ever experienced 'transcendental' moments that could be in any way akin to those famously described by Wordsworth in his poetry. The questionnaire itself makes no reference to Wordsworth, instead Pafford includes a paragraph from the autobiography of the naturalist W.H. Hudson, in which he describes watching the sunset as a child, 'The sight of the magnificent sunset was sometimes more than I could endure and made me wish to hide myself away'.⁷⁸ He then asks his participants, 'Does this remind you of anything you have ever felt? If you have ever had an experience which you feel is in any way similar to the ones the writer of this passage is describing, please try to write about it on the blank page overleaf' (Pafford, p.251). Of the 400 questionnaires that were returned to him, 222 participants responded to this question, and it was these responses that the book goes on to analyse and catalogue in more detail. Pafford's conclusions can be applied to a much broader range of psychological experiences than the transcendental: 'Transcendental experience demands another voice. One of the least controversial things that can be said about it is that it craves a language to express the inexpressible, a poetic, religious, extravagant language which is most effective when it is non-prosaic, non-propositional and logically odd' (Pafford, p.228). The reading experiments in this chapter will aim to explore whether Wordsworth's poetry can offer modern readers 'another voice' with which to express thoughts and feelings that exist outside of the remit of everyday language. In doing so, these experiments will begin to set out what the syntax, language, pacing and tone of Wordsworth's poetry can actually do to and

⁷⁸ Michael Pafford, *Inglorious Wordsworths* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), p.251; hereafter cited as 'Pafford'.

for people in practice.

In addition to the experimental models of Richards and Pafford, innovative research into reading has been carried out by David S. Miall and Donald Kuiken. Reacting against many of the post-structuralist theories that dominate literary criticism, Miall and Kuiken have adopted empirical methods for the study of real readers' responses to literature, concentrating in particular on readers' reports on 'foregrounded' language (derived from the Prague School of linguistics in the 1930s) which had a salient effect upon their experience of reading literature in a way that took them beyond browsing or scanning.⁷⁹ Research methodologies implemented by The Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society (CRILS) - in particular the use of reflective interviews in which participants watch video recordings of sections of the group reading sessions that they have attended - were a useful point of reference in the design of the experimental protocols in this thesis.

4.1. Introduction to Experiment A

Advertisements were placed across the University of Liverpool in order to recruit ten participants for this study (see Appendix A for advertisement). The only restrictions for inclusion were that participants had to be at least eighteen years of age and fluent in English. Participants were aged between twenty-two and sixty-one years and consisted of four males and six females (see Appendix B for full breakdown of participants A1 – A10). All potential recruits were sent an information sheet about the study (see Appendix C) and invited to attend **an individual one-hour session** in the University of Liverpool library.

4.1.1. The Study: Method

Session One:

1. The **ten** participants were given a consent form (see Appendix D) and a questionnaire to complete, specifically asking about their

⁷⁹ David S. Miall, 'Empirical Approaches to Studying Literary Readers: The State of the Discipline', *Book History*, 9 (2006), 291-311.

David S. Miall, and Don Kuiken, 'The form of reading: Empirical studies of literariness', *Poetics*, 25 (1998), 327-41.

general reading habits and prior experience of reading poetry (see Appendix E).

2. Participants audio-recorded themselves reading one short news article and two extracts from Wordsworth's poem 'The Ruined Cottage' (see Appendix F for the three extracts used in this study).
3. After reading each passage in turn they were asked to speak freely about anything that seemed important, interesting or moving within it.

Follow-up task:

- **Seven days later**, participants were sent a follow-up questionnaire by email.
- They were asked to write down everything that they could remember about each of the three texts that they had read during the first session.
- They were then asked to re-read the two extracts of poetry and write down any further thoughts or ideas that they had about the texts.

The two extracts of poetry used in this study both focus on bare, primary emotions. The first explores the emotional turmoil that the pedlar felt as a teenager. In the second extract the pedlar recounts the story of Margaret, the last inhabitant of the now ruined cottage, who was abandoned by her husband and lived in despair for seven years, until her death. A short introductory summary was provided alongside each extract of poetry in order to give readers an idea of the wider context of the poem.

The news article selected for this study gives an account of the suicide of a ninety-two year old woman called Olive Cooke; a death which had been linked in the media to the pressure caused by the large amount of junk mail that she had been receiving from charities asking for donations. It is an emotionally charged article and was chosen because its themes correspond with those of 'The Ruined Cottage', namely the distress, depression and death of an isolated female.

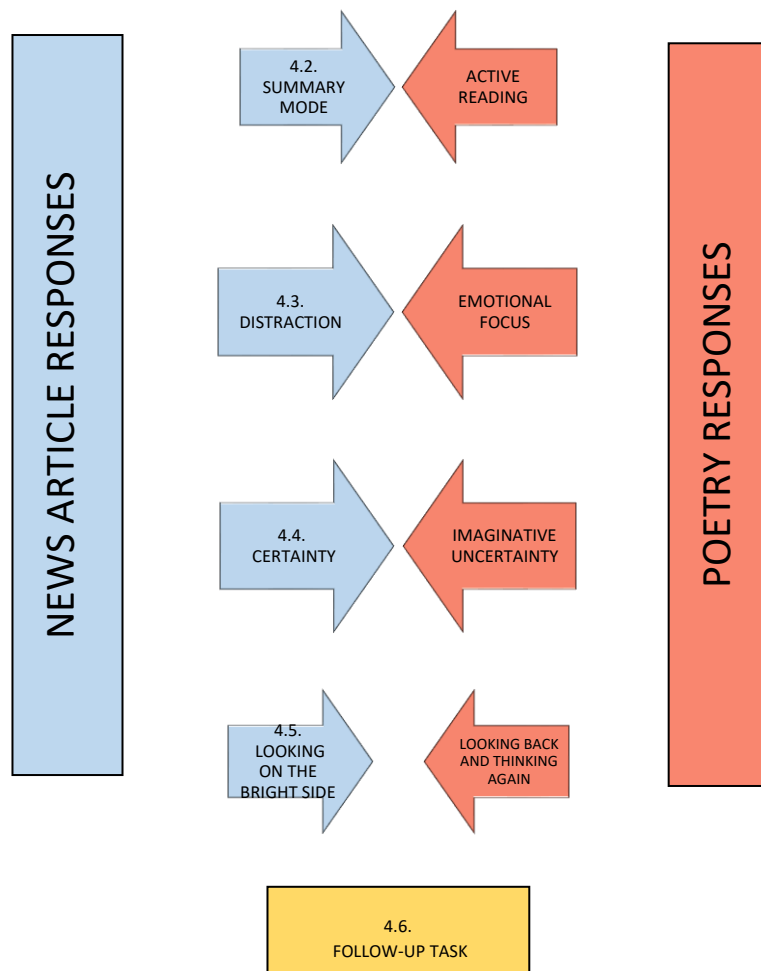
4.1.2. The Analysis:

In order to collect as much varied evidence as possible, data was subjected to a combination of qualitative (thematic), quantitative, linguistic and literary analysis. This blended approach was in keeping with the multi-disciplinary nature of the thesis.

1. Audio recordings were fully transcribed and double checked for accuracy.
2. Distinctions and similarities were identified within the responses to the news article and poetry and these were clustered into the most salient themes.
3. Themes were checked against one another to minimise overlap and also checked against both the original data and existing research in this field.⁸⁰
4. A degree of linguistic and quantitative analysis was carried out, with the aim of further illuminating the results and testing the validity of the themes that had been identified during the qualitative analysis.

The results are presented here in four sections which each contrast one characteristic of participant responses to the news article with one characteristic of responses to the poetry extracts. A fifth subsection will separately discuss the written responses to the follow-up task:

⁸⁰ The themes of 'active reading', 'emotional focus' and 'imaginative uncertainty' relate to certain 'intrinsic elements of shared reading', namely: 'liveness', 'absorption', 'immersion', 'creative inarticulacy' and 'the emotional' identified by researchers at CRILS, E. Longden, et al., 'Shared reading: Assessing the intrinsic value of a literature-based health intervention', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 41.2 (2015), 113–20.



4.2. Summary Mode vs. Active Reading

An initial reading of all transcripts indicated that participants typically spoke for longer about the two extracts of poetry than they did about the news article (see Appendix G for table showing the length in words of each participant response). A paired t-test was conducted in order to compare the length of the two sets of responses. There was a statistically significant difference between the length of the news article responses ($M=240.3$) and the poetry responses ($M=850.2$) ($t(9) = -5.3094$, $p < 0.0004878$) (see Appendix H).

While perhaps it was to be expected that participants would grow in confidence as the task progressed and speak for a longer amount of time after reading the second and third texts, the unfamiliarity and difficulty of the poetry in comparison to the news article might have led to the opposite result. Equally, the combined responses to the two poetry extracts could be expected to be

longer than responses to a single text on one coherent topic. However, the average response length to each of the individual passages of poetry are also longer than the average response length to the single news article.

The difference in the length of the poetry and news article responses is partly due to the large amount of direct quotations that participants used when talking about the poetry, something which did not feature in responses to the news article. Direct quotations helped participants to focus on specific details within the poetry. In contrast, the shorter responses to the news article tend to contain general, conclusive statements which mirror the summary mode of the article itself. The following two examples from participant A6 provide evidence to suggest that there is a difference between the ‘summary mode’ typically adopted in response to the news article and the more expansive thinking that is produced in response to the poetry due to ‘active reading’ of the texts:

Summary Mode in News Article Responses	Active Reading in Poetry Responses
So overall, I remember the story from the time, although I remember it in a slightly different way, and it’s a sad story. Obviously the media angle - being the way that she was pestered and put under pressure - that was the main focus. (A6)	Coming back to the actual text of the poem, so it’s opening and it’s saying immediately, ‘It would have grieved / Your very soul to see her’ so you would have been . . . her grief is so obvious, she must have been ravished by it. So again that creates a picture in my mind of this poor woman in her cottage having been abandoned, looking a right old state. So yeah, that’s really sad. She is described as a ‘poor woman’, she looks destroyed. (A6)

In the news article response, the combination of ‘overall’ and ‘obviously’, which here lead onto the conclusion, ‘that was the main focus’, are suggestive of the detached summary mode which centres around the presentation of the story in the media, somewhat at the expense of the actual real person contained within the story itself.⁸¹ In an example of ‘active reading’ from the same participant’s

⁸¹ Further examples of the ‘summary mode’: ‘My *overall* thought on reading the article was one of sadness at the circumstances of the elderly woman’ (A2). ‘I do remember this story on the news when it first came out when they were blaming all the charities for it. I didn’t really believe that the

response to the second extract of poetry, she quotes the line, 'It would have grieved / Your very soul to see her'. She begins to see 'a picture in my mind' of Margaret, and shifts to speaking about her in the present tense, 'she *looks* destroyed'. Direct quotations seem to draw readers back into the text while simultaneously allowing them to move on into places of greater imaginative depth. In examples such as this one, the literary material appears to evoke the cognitive capacity of mental imagery in a way that the non-literary text did not. This is a feature of literary reading which will be discussed further in relation to 'Imaginative Uncertainty' in section 4.4. This reader has become imaginatively present within the story by returning to 'the actual text'. No comparable mental shift occurs in any of the responses to the news article. The unexpected use of the word 'ravished' at the centre of this example demonstrates how the use of quotations from the text, interwoven alongside the reader's own voice, can trigger the use of different, unusual words. Readers not only borrow or re-cycle the vocabulary of the poetry; in cases like this they pull words out of their own minds that they would perhaps be unlikely to use in normal, everyday speech and which they did not use in their responses to the news article. The argument posited here is that it was the poetry that seems to be demanding a more varied vocabulary.

The following table shows the number of participants who directly quoted from each line of the first extract of poetry, and indicates the most frequently quoted parts of those lines:

Line Number	Number of Participants Quoting from the Line	Details
1	0	-
2	5	'Accumulated feelings pressed his heart'
3	2	'still increasing weight'
4	4	'turbulence'
5	2	'mystery and hope'
6	2	'passion'
7	1	'glorious universe'

charities had actually pushed her towards her death. I would say that this passage is just really really factual' (A7).

8	3	'Full often wished he that the winds might rage'
9	1	'far more fondly now'
10	0	-
11	7	'Tempestuous nights'
12	3	'intellect'
13	1	'abstracted thought'
14	5	'failing oft to win'
15	5	'The peace required'
16	3	'the roar of torrents'
17	0	-
18	4	'A cloud of mist'
19	3	'rainbow'
20	3	'And vainly by all other means'
21	5	'To mitigate the fever of his heart'

Table 1: The most frequently quoted sections of poetry extract one.

There is some sense of commonality in the choices that each individual participant made. For example, the first two words of line 11 - 'Tempestuous nights' – were significant for seven of the ten participants. The group as a whole appeared to share an understanding of where certain pulse points or places of particularly powerful meaning were within the text. The following graphic illustrates these findings, the largest size font indicating the most frequently quoted sections of the poem:

And thus before his eighteenth year was told,
Accumulated feelings pressed his heart
 With still increasing weight, he was o'er-powered
 By Nature; by the **turbulence** subdued
 Of his own mind; by mystery and hope,
 And the first virgin passion of a soul
 Communing with the glorious universe
Full often wished he that the winds might rage
 When they were silent: far more fondly now
 Than in his earliest season did he love
Tempestuous nights - the conflict and the
 sounds
 That live in darkness. From his intellect
 And from the stillness of abstracted thought
 He asked repose; and, **failing oft to win**
The peace required, he scanned the laws of light
 Amid the roar of torrents where they send
 From hollow clefts up to the clearer air
 A cloud of mist that, smitten by the sun,
 Varies its rainbow hues. But vainly thus,
 And vainly by all other means, he strove
To mitigate the fever of his heart.

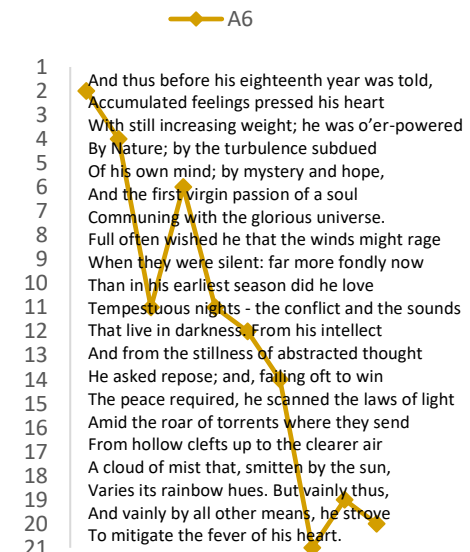
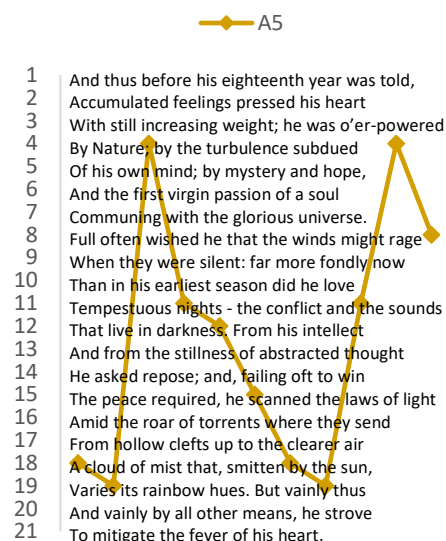
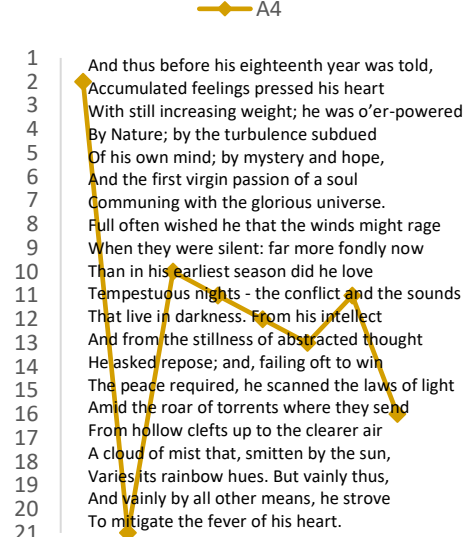
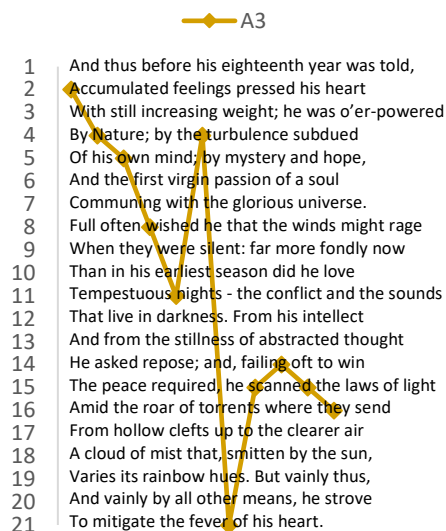
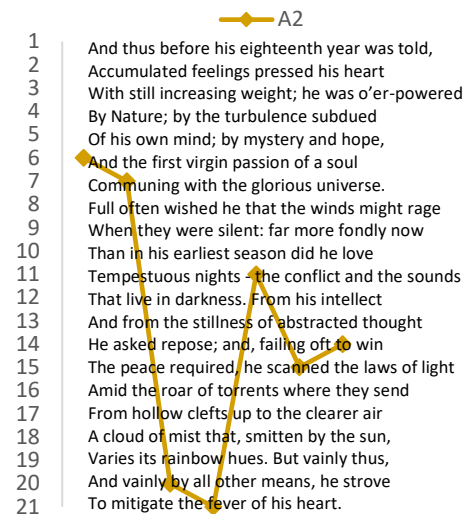
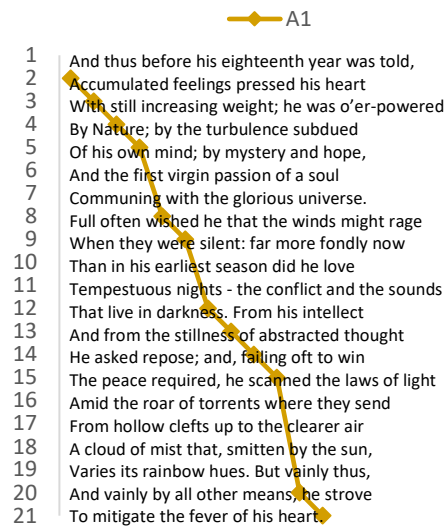
Figure 1: The most frequently quoted sections of poetry extract one.

The highlighted sections of the text form a map of interconnections down the lines. In a number of responses participants did not seem to quote from the text in a regular, sequential order. To gain a clearer understanding of each participant's reading pattern, the order in which they quoted from different line numbers of each extract of poetry was recorded. For example, participant A2 quoted from the following lines in the following order in his response to the first extract of poetry:

Line Number	Quotation
6	The first virgin passion of a soul
7	Communing with the glorious universe
20	Strove
21	To mitigate the fever of his heart
11	Tempestuous nights
15	Scanned the laws of light
14	He asked repose

Table 2: The order of direct quotations used by participant A2 in response to poetry extract one.

Corresponding information for each participant was then plotted on a series of graphs



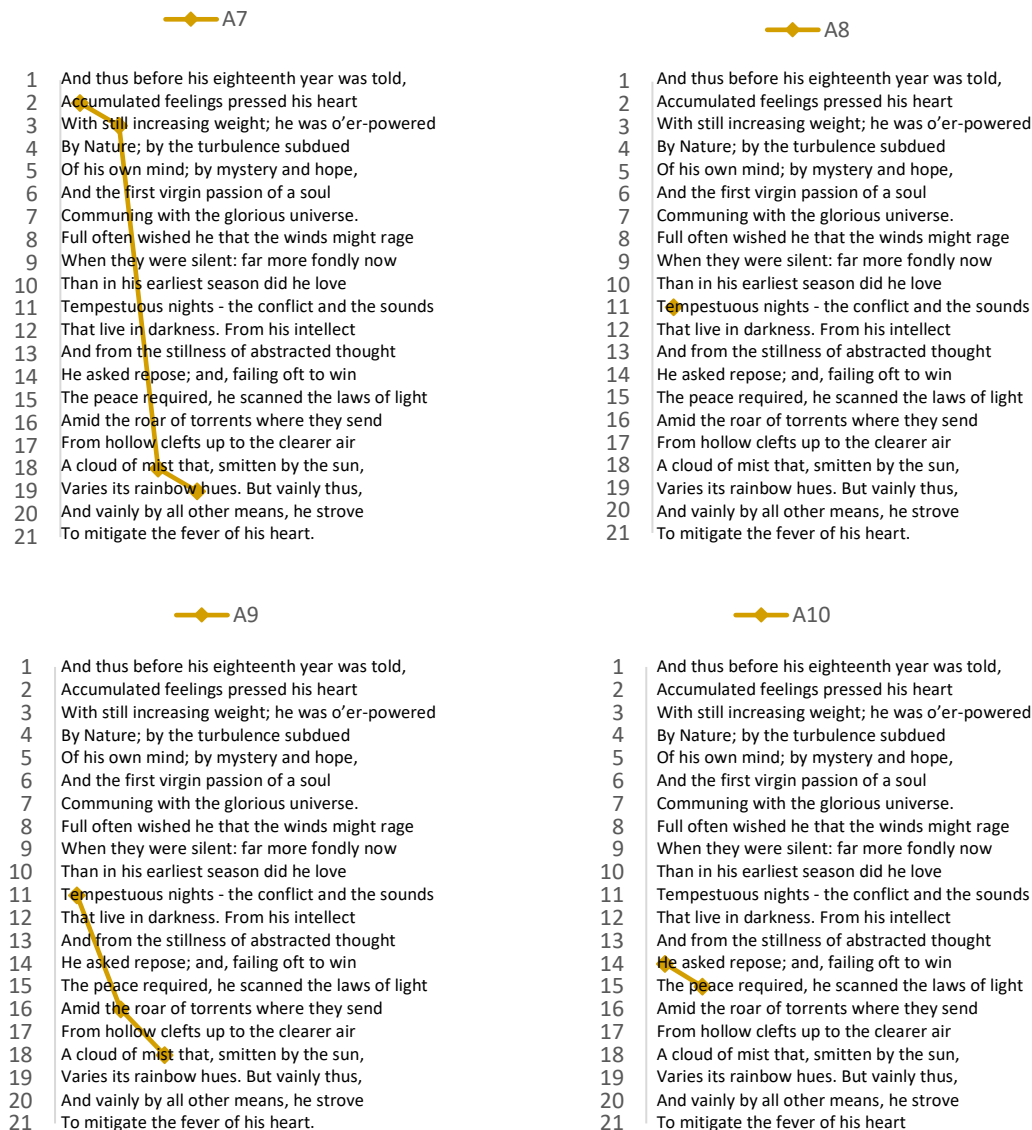


Figure 2: Graphs showing the order of direct quotations used in each participant response to poetry extract one.

- Participant A1 was the one reader who clearly worked steadily through the poem, making regular stops, to produce a detailed but linear close reading of the text.
- Participants A2, A3, A4, A5 and A6 all jump vertically and horizontally across the lines.
- The graphs for participants A7, A8, A9 and A10 are reflective of the lower levels of direct engagement with the text in these four responses.
- Comparable analysis of responses to the news article would not be possible due to the near total absence of direct quotations from the text in this set of responses.

Participant A6 reflected on her non-linear approach to reading the text:

Active Reading in Poetry Responses

I feel that I'm not quite reading it right, but I don't know why I should feel that really. I can read it in any way I wish to. I could do it a sentence at a time in quite a clinical way, but I think . . . I think . . . It's quite a powerful piece of writing, and some of the words used like 'pressure on his heart', 'turbulence', 'tempestuous nights', it's quite dramatic isn't it? As I'm doing this now my eyes are going to different parts of it and picking different things out and again I'm thinking maybe I should be more systematic, go line by line, rather than picking things out instantly, but I think that's just how I read, I'm trying to get a feel for it. (A6)

In part, readers A2, A3, A4, A5 and A6 appear to be casting about as they jump through the lines, looking for anchors that will help them to understand the meaning of the text. However, as they move instinctively up and down the lines, readers appear to be tuning into the internal circuitry of the poetry. For example, there is a connection between line 2, 'Accumulated feeling pressed his heart' and line 21, 'To mitigate the fever of his heart' that is picked up on by participant A4. A number of participants also instinctively link together the word 'turbulence' in line 4 with 'tempestuous' in line 11. Once this connection is made it helps to unlock the wider meaning of the passage and the relationship between external turmoil and internal, psychological unrest. Participant A5 for example, pairs these two words together twice in her response:

Active Reading in Poetry Responses

There are parts in there with 'turbulence' and 'tempestuous' and 'darkness' and then it mentions 'peace' and 'sun' and 'rainbows' and the light is breaking through . . . He is talking about 'tempestuous' and 'turbulence' and 'the winds might rage', so it conjures up a scene of darker clouds, walking through more of a bleak landscape, but visually I see a darker landscape. Walking through the wind with your head down, battling against it to get through it, and then the sky becomes lighter and then, I don't know, life becomes brighter. (A5)

The changing pronouns used here, '*He* is talking about', '*I* see' and '*your* head down', suggest that a live relationship exists between the reader and the poem. The shift to the third person singular '*your*' indicates an indistinct but shared

experience.⁸² In the final sentence of this example – just as in the poem – the external physical landscape and the internal mental landscape are blended together and ‘walking through *the wind*’ becomes ‘battling against *it* to get through *it*’. The shift from noun to pronoun suggests that this is not simply a battle against the weather, but rather some more indefinite ‘it’. The move from ‘*the sky* gets brighter’ to ‘*life* gets brighter’ again provides evidence of the blending of external and internal, the physical and the emotional.⁸³

This process of analysis was repeated for the second extract of poetry. The following table shows the number of participants who quoted either part or the whole of each line:

Line Number	Number of Participants Quoting from the Line	Details
1	4	‘It would have grieved’
2	4	‘Your very soul to see her’
3	1	‘my heart’
4	1	‘my spirit clings’
5	4	‘poor woman’
6	4	‘her manner, and her look’
7	2	‘presence’
8	1	‘goodness’
9	5	‘A momentary trance’
10	3	‘I seem to muse’
11	4	‘By sorrow laid asleep’
12	6	‘A human being destined to awake’
13	6	‘To human life, or something very near’
14	6	‘To human life, when he shall come again’
15	4	‘For whom she suffered’
16	1	‘evermore’

⁸² The capacity to shift between pronouns has been identified as relating to positive health outcomes. Sherlock R. Campbell, and James W. Pennebaker, ‘The secret life of pronouns: Flexibility in writing style and physical health’, *Psychological Science*, 14.1 (2003), 60-5.

⁸³ Further example of a connection being made between lines eleven and four: ‘There seems to be a lot of ‘*tempestuous*’ ‘*turbulence*’, a lot of this madness going on. There is a battle. There is a storm going on for him. I suppose that is what it feels like to be before your eighteenth year. That’s what it feels like to be an adolescent, to have a ‘fever of the heart’ (A3).

17	3	'Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast'
18	5	'And, when she at her table gave me food'
19	7	'She did not look at me'

Table 3: The most frequently quoted sections of poetry extract two.

There was a particular focus – across much of the group – on lines 12, 13, 14 and 19, which were quoted in their entirety by the majority of participants. In response to the first extract of poetry participants tended to quote specific words, but here they were generally quoting much longer chunks of the text. These findings are again illustrated by the following graphic:

It would have grieved
Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
The story linger in my heart; I fear
'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
To that poor woman: - so familiarly
Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
And presence; and so deeply do I feel
Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
A momentary trance comes over me;
And to myself I seem to muse on One
By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
A human being destined to awake
To human life, or something very near
To human life, when he shall come again
For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
Your very soul to see her: evermore
Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
And, when she at her table gave me food,
She did not look at me.

Figure 3: The most frequently quoted sections of poetry extract two.

Each individual reading pattern was again plotted on a graph:

—◆— A1

1 It would have grieved
2 Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
3 The story linger in my heart; I fear
4 'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
5 To that poor woman: - so familiarly
6 Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
7 And presence; and so deeply do I feel
8 Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
9 A momentary trance comes over me;
10 And to myself I seem to muse on One
11 By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
12 A human being destined to awake
13 To human life, or something very near
14 To human life, when he shall come again
15 For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
16 Your very soul to see her: evermore
17 Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
18 And, when she at her table gave me food,
19 She did not look at me.

—◆— A2

1 It would have grieved
2 Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
3 The story linger in my heart; I fear
4 'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
5 To that poor woman: - so familiarly
6 Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
7 And presence; and so deeply do I feel
8 Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
9 A momentary trance comes over me;
10 And to myself I seem to muse on One
11 By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
12 A human being destined to awake
13 To human life, or something very near
14 To human life, when he shall come again
15 For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
16 Your very soul to see her: evermore
17 Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
18 And, when she at her table gave me food,
19 She did not look at me.

—◆— A3

1 It would have grieved
2 Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
3 The story linger in my heart; I fear
4 'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
5 To that poor woman: - so familiarly
6 Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
7 And presence; and so deeply do I feel
8 Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
9 A momentary trance comes over me;
10 And to myself I seem to muse on One
11 By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
12 A human being destined to awake
13 To human life, or something very near
14 To human life, when he shall come again
15 For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
16 Your very soul to see her: evermore
17 Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
18 And, when she at her table gave me food,
19 She did not look at me.

—◆— A4

1 It would have grieved
2 Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
3 The story linger in my heart; I fear
4 'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
5 To that poor woman: - so familiarly
6 Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
7 And presence; and so deeply do I feel
8 Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
9 A momentary trance comes over me;
10 And to myself I seem to muse on One
11 By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
12 A human being destined to awake
13 To human life, or something very near
14 To human life, when he shall come again
15 For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
16 Your very soul to see her: evermore
17 Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
18 And, when she at her table gave me food,
19 She did not look at me.

—◆— A5

1 It would have grieved
2 Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
3 The story linger in my heart; I fear
4 'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
5 To that poor woman: - so familiarly
6 Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
7 And presence; and so deeply do I feel
8 Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
9 A momentary trance comes over me;
10 And to myself I seem to muse on One
11 By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
12 A human being destined to awake
13 To human life, or something very near
14 To human life, when he shall come again
15 For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
16 Your very soul to see her: evermore
17 Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
18 And, when she at her table gave me food,
19 She did not look at me.

—◆— A6

1 It would have grieved
2 Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
3 The story linger in my heart; I fear
4 'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
5 To that poor woman: - so familiarly
6 Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
7 And presence; and so deeply do I feel
8 Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
9 A momentary trance comes over me;
10 And to myself I seem to muse on One
11 By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
12 A human being destined to awake
13 To human life, or something very near
14 To human life, when he shall come again
15 For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
16 Your very soul to see her: evermore
17 Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
18 And, when she at her table gave me food,
19 She did not look at me.

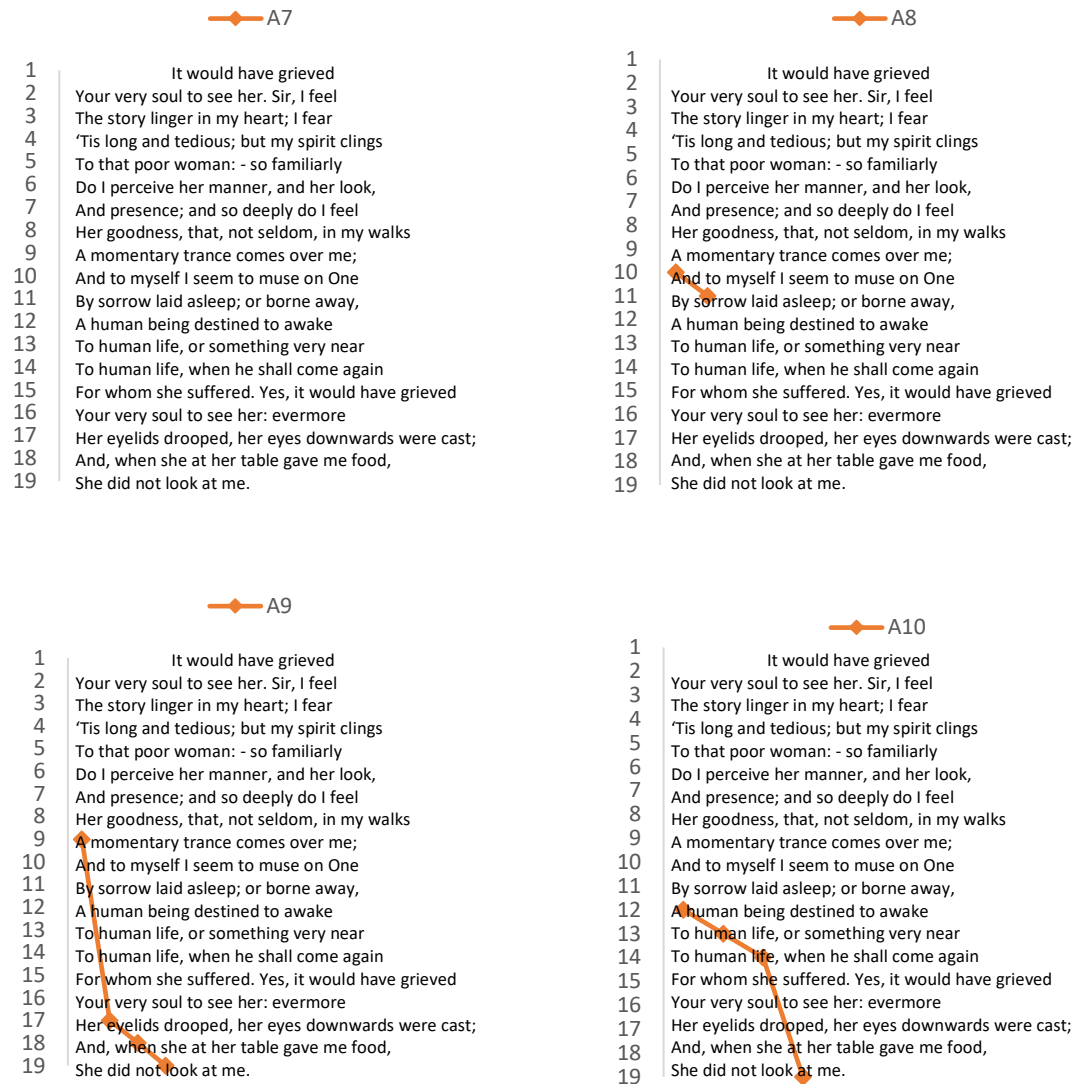


Figure 4: Graphs showing the order of direct quotations used in each participant response to poetry extract two.

- Participant A1 demonstrates the same linear reading pattern as he did in response to the first extract of poetry.
- The graphs for participants A2, A3 and A4 do jump vertically up and down the lines. For example, participant A3 appears to implicitly recognise the relationship between 'to see her' in line 2 and 'she did not look at me' in line 19. However, reading patterns for the second extract are generally more linear.
- Participant A5 used no direct quotations from the second extract of poetry, despite being amongst the most 'active' readers of the first passage of poetry. This was perhaps due to her sense of unease with the content of the second passage and desire quickly to skip past it, 'This

makes me feel, I don't know, slightly depressed if I read too much more of it' (A5).

- Participants A7, A8, A9 and A10 again quoted less frequently – if at all – from the text. Despite the minimal use of quotations in participant A9 and A10's responses, they still seemed to be tuning into the places within the poem which held particular significance for the group as a whole. There is something strange and striking about the vertical movement from 'human being' to 'human life' that takes place within these lines. This strangeness is perhaps one reason why the majority of participants needed to repeat these specific lines within their responses in order to decipher the meaning that is tied up within their vertical as well as horizontal circuitry:

Active Reading in Poetry Responses	
He is almost screaming out for some kind of empathy and connectivity with her. You can see how he wants that connection. He says 'A human being destined to awake / To human life or something very near / To human life', he is almost saying I am trying to reach something unreachable, but I want to try to get to something akin to the human condition. (A2)	I think this really is about being human because if you look through those lines 'A human being', 'To human life', 'To human life', it seems to be what it is all about. (A3)
The following lines, 'A human being destined to awake / To human life, or something very near / To human life, when he shall come again'. Just thinking about that, that is the only thing that is going to awaken her I suppose. So it sounds like she is permanently asleep since he's gone or she's been abandoned that she's not been awake, she's not been living. (A6)	This woman has her whole life been dependant on a man and she is completely lost without him, she is a shell, 'a human being destined to awake to human life or something very near to human life'. So she doesn't feel that she has her own life because he has part of it and she can't function without it. (A10)

The vertical repetition of the word 'human' creates a particularly powerful surge of current in lines 12-14. The prominence of this section of the passage in responses supports the position that even prior to consciously understanding the content of the poetry, participants are, to some extent, tuning into its inner circuitry.

4.3. Distraction vs. Emotional Focus

An initial reading of the transcripts suggested that having made brief, summary statements about the news article, participants appeared to become quickly distracted and either abruptly stopped talking or veered away from speaking about the text. In contrast, participants tended to be able to maintain greater focus in their responses to the poetry, not only because of their increased use of direct quotations from the text, as previously discussed, but also because they often seemed to be able to establish a personal connection with the content of the poetry.

In order to quantify levels of emotional focus, the frequency of the pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'my' were measured and compared across the two sets of transcripts. Research into this method of textual analysis, in particular by James Pennebaker, has demonstrated that 'word use is a meaningful marker and occasional mediator of natural social and personality process' (Pennebaker, p.548). Analysing pronouns has been shown to be particularly useful: 'Pronouns are among the most revealing. Use of the first person singular, for example, is associated with age, sex, depression, illness, and more broadly, self-focus' (Pennebaker, p.570). The frequency of the two mental state verbs, 'think' and 'feel', as well as the nouns 'thought' and 'feeling' were also measured here. 'Feel' is a verb that indicates emotional engagement, while 'think' was the most commonly used verb in the first person across both sets of transcripts. It was therefore important to examine whether the verb 'think' was being used to a different degree or for different purposes in the news article and poetry responses (see Appendix I for full table of results).

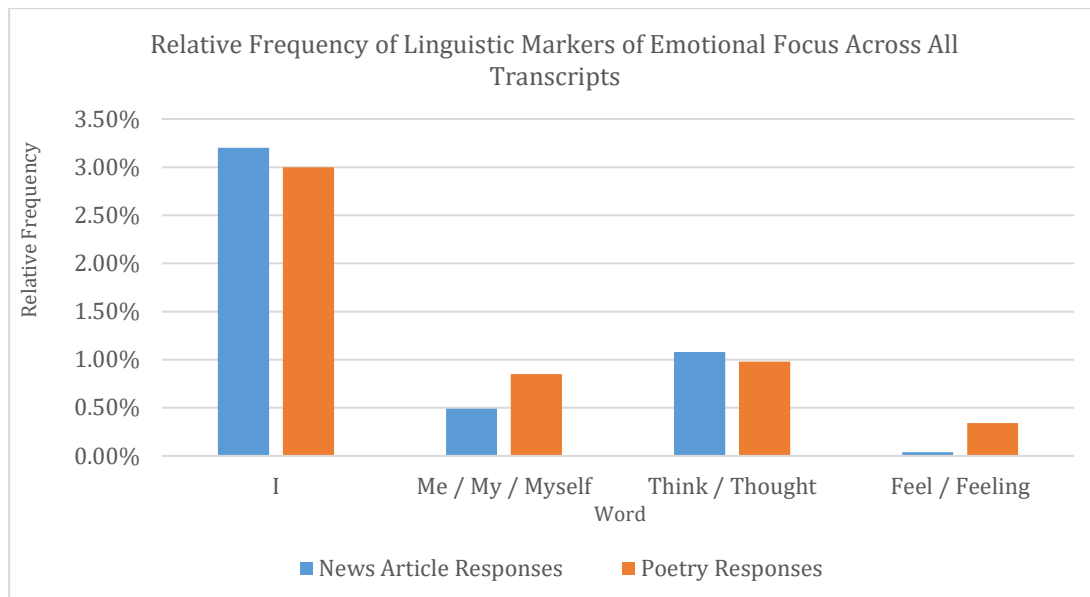


Figure 5: Graph showing the relative frequency of linguistic markers of emotional focus.

- Although the pronoun ‘I’ is used with almost equal frequency within both sets of transcripts, the words ‘me’, ‘myself’ and ‘my’ occur nearly twice as frequently in the poetry responses.
- Paired t-tests were conducted to compare the frequency of each of the linguistic markers of emotional focus across the two sets of transcripts. There was a statistically significant difference in the frequency of the words ‘feel / feeling’, with more instances in response to the poetry ($M = 0.0033$) than the news article ($M = 3e-04$) ($t(9) = 5.3094$, $p < 0.0004878$) (see Appendix J). Participants spoke about their own emotions after reading the poetry in a way that did not happen at all in response to the news article. It was this focus on participants’ own feelings towards the text which often seemed to prevent responses to the poetry from becoming distracted, and which appeared to facilitate a deeper individual relation to the poetry.
- There is no difference in the frequency of the verb ‘think’ and noun ‘thought’ across the two sets of transcripts, but a closer qualitative analysis of the instances where ‘think’ is used indicates some variation in the way the verb is being used. In the majority of cases across all transcripts ‘I think’ is used to begin a sentence that enables an opinion. Certain constructions such as ‘I think this means’, ‘I think maybe’, ‘but I

think', 'I just think' and 'it makes me think', which can be indicative of more personal reflection, are however only used in the poetry responses.

The following two examples provide evidence to support the position that responses to the news article tended to be distracted, while responses to the poetry demonstrated greater emotional focus:

Distraction in News Article Responses	Emotional Focus in Poetry Responses
<p>She was a ninety-two year old woman so obviously she had had a lifetime of um . . . well a lifetime of, well a long time of umm of upset, with losing a first husband and it doesn't say whether she got over that or whether . . . well it sounds like she's gone onto marry again umm but at ninety-two she's had quite a long, happy life, well I say happy life . . . she's had a long life. Obviously she has wanted to sell poppies all that time, umm and maybe it was just an age thing that saw her off or she'd given up, as people tend to do once they're around that age. (A5)</p>	<p>He says that up to the point of his eighteenth year there have been 'accumulated feelings', 'accumulated feelings' that only increase in weight. I would agree, although for me it was probably not at eighteen years, for me it was twenty or twenty-one. But the idea is still the same, the feelings are still the same. There is a point of transition when the teenager moves into adulthood. I agree that there will be a point when there will be a difference, the person will feel a difference. (A1)</p>

Participant A5 repeatedly pauses as she struggles to give even the most basic assessment of Olive Cooke's life. The initial 'obviously' is followed by a series of pauses and self-corrections as she drifts away from the actual emotional content of the article. Ignoring or perhaps having already forgotten the fact that Mrs Cooke committed suicide, she instead suggests that 'it was just an age thing that saw her off'. In contrast, A1's repetition of 'for me' appears to draw the focus towards the reader's own emotional experiences. In cases like this, 'me' is needed when 'I' does not go far enough in creating a personal connection.⁸⁴

While most participants did seem to maintain focus in their responses to the poetry by connecting the passages to their own emotional experiences,

⁸⁴ Further example of 'emotional focus' in the poetry responses: 'I like that 'a momentary trance comes over me', that seems a familiar thing. I think everybody knows that feeling of suddenly being in another world for a minute. Something just pops into your mind that makes you stop' (A3).

participant A2 had a consistently distracted approach to both the news article and poetry:

Distraction in News Article Responses	Distraction in Poetry Responses
<p>Bristol was an interesting one because I am both familiar and unfamiliar with it, I've not been there a lot but my uncle lives there and it also actually reminded me of that Jefferies chap who was wrongly accused of murder. As for the day of death or the date of the pronouncement of death, the 6th of May, because I'm interested in politics that's usually election time, we will have elections this year on the 5th of May, so that date stuck out for me. (A2)</p>	<p>There is a famous portrait of Elizabeth I when she is old, in perhaps 1600, before she dies in 1603 and she is holding her head in her hands and there is a skeleton behind her and other images. And again, perhaps to use another historical example, Henry II was thought to have died of heartbreak after the rebellion of his sons, Richard the Lionheart and King John, then Prince John. So I guess as a historian I compare and contrast these things with both quite broad historical events. (A2)</p>

A2's fragmented response to the news article ignores much of its emotional, human content. He flits between different topics that have only a tenuous link to the text itself and becomes preoccupied with inconsequential details. His focus on the date of the pronouncement of Mrs Cooke's death is one good example of a participant missing the point of the article. In response to the second extract of poetry, participant A2 is equally distracted. Speaking 'as a historian' makes it harder for him to establish an emotional connection with the text. Instead he begins to talk about a whole range of topics that he feels might have some kind of relationship to what he has just read, but which miss the point – or the emotional core – of Margaret's life.

This is not however a typical response to the poetry and the majority of participants achieved a greater degree of focus in their responses to 'The Ruined Cottage' by making at least some tentative attempt to connect emotionally with the content of the poetry. It is surprising to note that none of the participants displayed any sign of having established an emotional connection with the news article.

In a final example taken from participant A10, pronouns are particularly

good indicators of the emotional connection that I am suggesting is being built between the reader and poetry:

Emotional Focus in Poetry Responses

It sounds like, and I know I'm a long way from my teenage years, but you're full of all those conflicting thoughts and emotions and growing pains and life choices and this is this person confused and overwhelmed by love and by all the thoughts going around in his head, trying to still everything, to slow it down and find out where he sits in all that, becoming a man. He asks for repose, looking for rest, looking for peace of mind, but there is so much going on when you're young, so much going around in our head that it seems to allude him. I think it's very powerful because it does demonstrate how difficult life can be. I particularly like, 'he asked repose' and 'failing oft to win the peace required' because that seems to be what we are all looking for, some peace and some time to reflect and be calm, and it's just not there. (A10)

In her mental mobility, this reader shifts between 'I', 'you' and 'he' as she describes her own experiences of the feelings contained within the poetry. The third person singular 'you' acts here as a bridge between the reader as they are now, their past teenage self and the pedlar. 'You' offers a more impersonal way of speaking about the self than 'I', but halfway through this example there are further shifts from 'you' to 'our' and then 'him': 'There is so much going on when *you're* young, so much going around in *our* head that it seems to elude *him*'. The unusual use of 'our head' in the middle of this sentence seems to be a real point of psychological and emotional blending between the reader and the poem. It is followed by a shift to the first person plural, 'what *we are all* looking for', further evidence of the emotional concordance between the reader and poetry.

4.4. Certainty vs. Imaginative Uncertainty:

An initial reading of the transcripts suggested that the tone of the news article responses tended to mirror the matter-of-fact tone of the article itself, while responses to the poetry appeared to be characterised by a greater sense of uncertainty. In several cases, a premature sense of certainty appeared to close down thinking in relation to the news article. The poetry responses which adopted a tone of imaginative uncertainty contained much more expansive, flexible thinking. Research has shown that a person's tolerance of uncertainty can influence their wellbeing, for 'when individuals are able to tolerate

ambiguity and thus manage uncertainty, they may more effectively respond to negative life events'.⁸⁵ It was therefore important to begin to establish whether the poetry was encouraging participants to embrace uncertainty in ways that the news article was not, and furthermore, whether uncertainty was being put to use to fuel more imaginative and complex responses.

To quantify levels of certainty across all transcripts, eleven words were chosen and their frequency in each person's news article and poetry responses was calculated and compared (see Appendix I for full table of results and Appendix J for statistical analysis). Eight qualifiers (actually, really, obviously, just, sort of, some, maybe, perhaps) as well as three conjunctions (but, or, if) were chosen for closer analysis.⁸⁶ In addition to these eleven words, the frequency of question marks across both sets of transcripts was also measured. These words were selected because they are all epistemic stance markers which indicate a speaker's degree of certainty or confidence in what they are saying.⁸⁷ 'Just' can be considered a marker of both certainty and uncertainty, depending on the context in which it is used, demonstrating why qualitative analysis was also required to supplement this initial quantitative analysis.

⁸⁵ Mark H. Freeston, 'Why do people worry?', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 17.6 (1994), 791-802 (791-2).

⁸⁶ Alain Auger, and Jean Roy, 'Expressions of Uncertainty in Linguistic Data', *2008 11th International Conference on Information Fusion* (2008), 1-8.

⁸⁷ Elise Karkkainen, *Epistemic Stance in English Conversation* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2003).

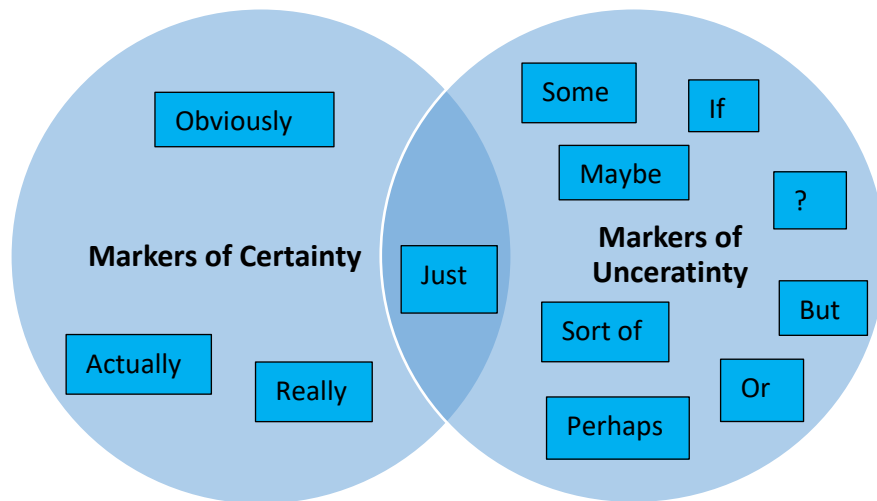


Figure 6: Epistemic stance markers.

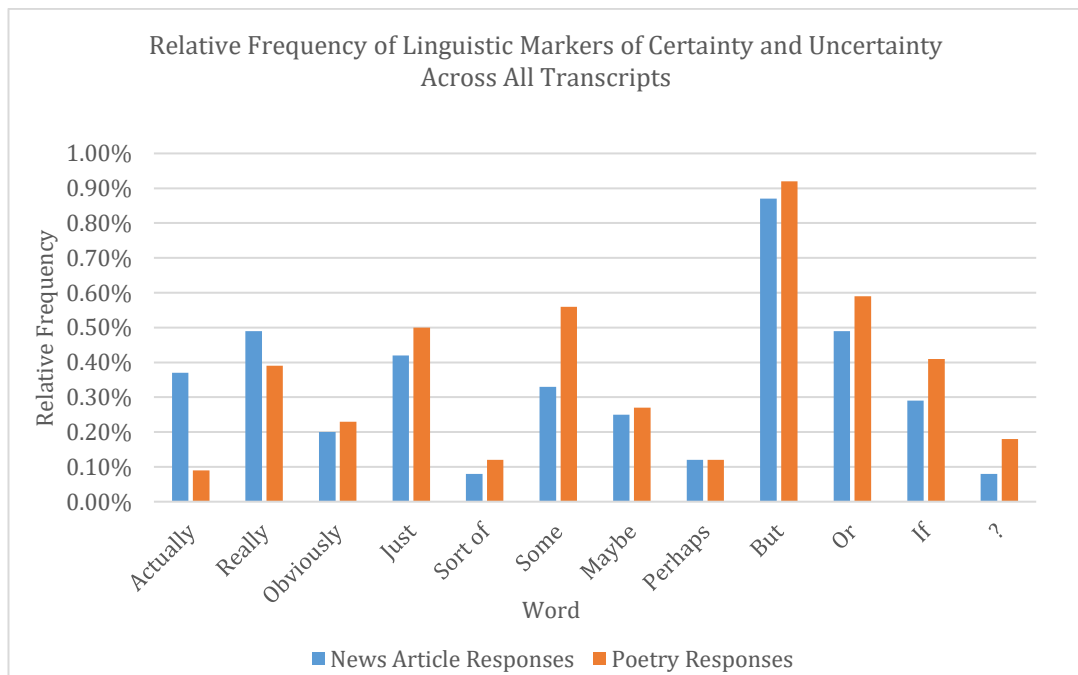


Figure 7: Graph showing the relative frequency of linguistic markers of certainty and uncertainty.

- Of the markers of certainty (actually, really, obviously), the most distinct difference is in the frequency of the word 'actually'.

- The remaining nine words, which can all be considered markers of uncertainty, were found with greater frequency in the poetry responses.⁸⁸
- Qualitative analysis of the transcripts indicates that ‘just’ - a word which can be used to indicate certainty or uncertainty - was generally signalling hesitancy in the poetry responses. For example, ‘It *sort of* felt like the start of a journey, and you *just sort of* feel the increasing weight, like he is overwhelmed by a burden’ (A2), ‘I suppose I can *just about* remember when I was eighteen’ (A4), ‘She’s *just*, I don’t know, functioning but asleep’ (A6).

Participant A10 provides evidence of the over-certain approach that was typical of the news article responses, while participant A3 demonstrates a more imaginatively uncertain mode of reading in relation to the poetry:

Certainty in News Article Responses	Imaginative Uncertainty in Poetry Responses
Obviously she was a dedicated woman who had dedicated herself to a cause and to helping others and as I said before had been moved to take action to be part of a charity generating income and interest in the British Legion. (A10)	Well he repeats the word ‘heart’ at the beginning and at the end so I think that’s quite important . . . The heart is interesting because it’s something very bodily and very functional and yet, humans sort of consider it as an emotional centre of the human body as well, it’s kind of like a soul or something like that. It says ‘by the turbulence subdued of his own mind’ he seems to be subdued by turbulence . . . maybe because it’s very powerful? Because his own mind is so powerful, he feels sort of vanquished? Vanquished by it? Something like that. (A3)

⁸⁸ No statistical significance was detected here. Further research could use a larger sample size as ten participants would not generally be a sufficiently large enough of a group to reveal statistically significant effects (See Appendix J). There is however an interesting relation between the findings in this section of the study and research that has shown that a person’s use of ‘absolutist words’ is a more effective indicator of anxiety and depression than their use of ‘negative emotion words’. Mohammad Al-Mosaiwi, and Tom Johnstone, ‘In an Absolute State: Elevated Use of Absolutist Words is a Marker Specific to Anxiety, Depression, and Suicidal Ideation’, *Clinical Psychological Science* (2018), 1-14.

By beginning with a word like ‘obviously’ the possibility for new thinking is immediately eliminated and A10’s response becomes repetitive and stuck in summary mode.⁸⁹ In contrast, in participant A3’s response to the second extract of poetry, her pauses lead onwards into second thoughts. The cluster of question marks indicate that she is actively working through a problem or place of uncertainty and the words ‘sort of’, ‘kind of’, ‘something’, ‘yet’ and ‘seemed’ all help to create openings for the tentative development of new ideas, while also mirroring the language of the poetry itself and Wordsworth’s own sense of ‘imaginative uncertainty’.

Three further examples, which all relate to the final line of the second extract of poetry, ‘She did not look at me’, provide evidence of how the linguistic markers of uncertainty function within the poetry responses and signal the places where participants are making breakthroughs in their understanding of the text:

Imaginative Uncertainty in Poetry Responses
‘When she at her table gave me food, / She did not look at me.’ So there is <i>some</i> kind of . . . she is inviting him in for food <i>but</i> she doesn’t look up at him. There is <i>some</i> kind of distance there which she can’t, she can’t get past. (A3)
In the final part of the poem he writes ‘her eyelids drooped, here eyes downwards were cast; / And when she at her table gave me food, / She did not look at me.’ Interpreting this, this woman is in a very bad way, <i>but if</i> I understand correctly, she has invited him in to eat and by not looking at him she is, I don’t know, <i>perhaps</i> ashamed. (A9)
‘She did not look at me.’ That’s <i>just</i> very sad. It’s her own self-esteem, as <i>if</i> she’s not worthy of being a person in her own right. (A10)

There is a particular bareness to the line ‘she did not look at me’ - already identified as the most frequently quoted part of the second extract of poetry – which calls to be met by greater imaginative engagement from the reader. That this is something that *did not* happen means that it requires a greater degree of imagination to activate the line. In many of the responses it is as if participants are trying to flesh out some of this bareness and ambiguity as they tentatively

⁸⁹ Further example of ‘certainty’ in response to the news article: ‘In terms of junk mail pestering from charities, which is what this story is all about essentially, I have heard that on the news so it does seem fairly topical’ (A2).

speak. In contrast, there are no gaps to fill or ambiguities to struggle with in the news article. Less is demanded from readers and as such, less is produced by readers in their responses.

In one case, the vocabulary of ‘imaginative uncertainty’ was used in relation to the news article. This was the only time that a participant was able to avoid summary mode and respond to the news article in a more contemplative manner:

Imaginative Uncertainty in News Article Response
I think that what is particularly powerful is the um well I’m trying to think of the word . . . What I found really moving was that a ninety-two year old lady would take her own life. It seems that if it was suicide, it seems that a lady of this age would not be one for suicide really. From a larger perspective, what I find quite sad really is the bigger picture of how older people are quite disconnected from our society, because if she was suffering from depression then of course that could be partly due to the fact that we don’t really take notice, or listen to or make use of the elderly very much and if we did she would possibly be alive today. (A9)

The words ‘or’, ‘if’, ‘partly’, ‘seems’, ‘may’ and ‘possibly’ create openings for deeper and more expansive thoughts. ‘I’m trying to think of the word’ is an indicator of a live, pre-articulate thinking process, where the sense that something ‘particularly powerful’ is contained within the article precedes the reader’s ability to express it in words. This response moves out towards the ‘larger perspective’ or ‘bigger picture’ of what this specific story can tell us about our wider society. The long final sentence is not a conclusive summary, rather it is an attempt to get a bigger thought out of the small individual tragedy of this one woman’s life. The participant is reading in a literary manner, making literature out of the news.

Additionally, there was one participant who continued to apply the default attitude of certainty that she had displayed in response to the news article, in her reaction to the poetry:

Certainty in News Article Responses	Certainty in Poetry Responses
I think this case has provoked a lot of questions within charities about	Again, this poor woman is obviously suffering from depression, extraneous

who they should repeatedly contact asking for donations, but it was actually her depression and her history of depression that was actually the cause of her death. (A8)	depression provoked by her husband leaving and whatever family troubles had led to her husband going away, but she obviously was full of kindness because he makes reference to the kindness and he obviously has a lot of compassion for her which is nice. He feels sorry for this poor woman who was obviously very nice to him. She obviously had a big effect on him. (A8)
--	---

Her over-certainty is signalled here by the repetition of ‘actually’ in the first example and ‘obviously’ in the second. No other participant continued to display such levels of certainty – or repetitiveness – in response to the poetry and instead a more imaginatively uncertain mode was prevalent across all nine remaining transcripts.⁹⁰

In addition to analysing the frequency of a selected number of linguistic markers of certainty and uncertainty, one way of beginning to quantify levels of imaginative engagement with the text was to isolate and compare the range of verbs used across the two sets of transcripts. Lexical richness, and in particular, verbal diversity has been recognised as an indicator of creativity, fluency and flexibility.⁹¹ Research has also found a positive correlation between verbal fluency and well-being.⁹² Because ‘I’ is used with almost equal frequency in the news article and poetry responses, in this analysis the range of verbs used in the first person were specifically selected for comparison. The following figures shows the difference in the variety of verbs used within the two sets of transcripts:

⁹⁰ The lack of direct quotations used by participant A8 – as indicated in the graphs in section 4.2. of this analysis – supports the position that her response lacked imaginative engagement.

⁹¹ Paul J. Silvia, Roger E. Beaty, and Emily C. Nusbaum, ‘Verbal fluency and creativity: General and specific contributions of broad retrieval ability (Gr) factors to divergent thinking’, *Intelligence*, 41.5 (2013), 328-40.

⁹² Nicola Gates, et al., ‘Psychological well-being in individuals with mild cognitive impairment’, *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 9 (2014), 779-92 (783).

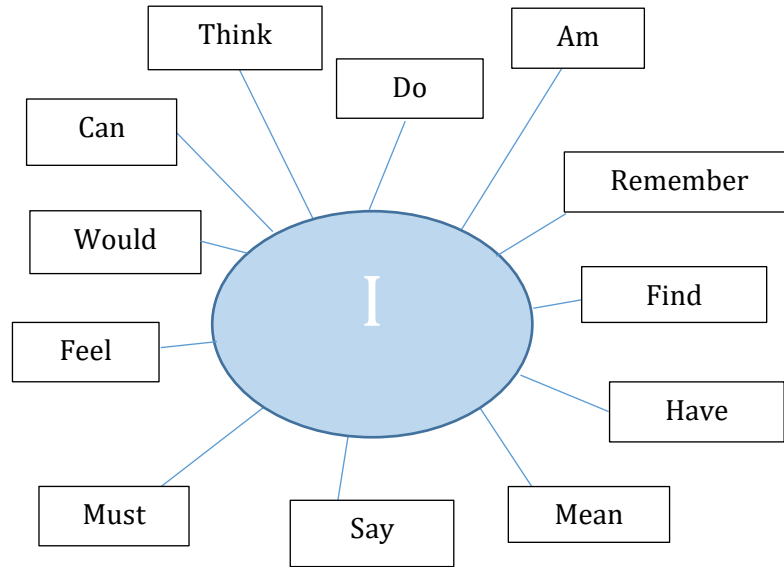


Figure 8: Verbs used in the first person in the news article responses.⁹³

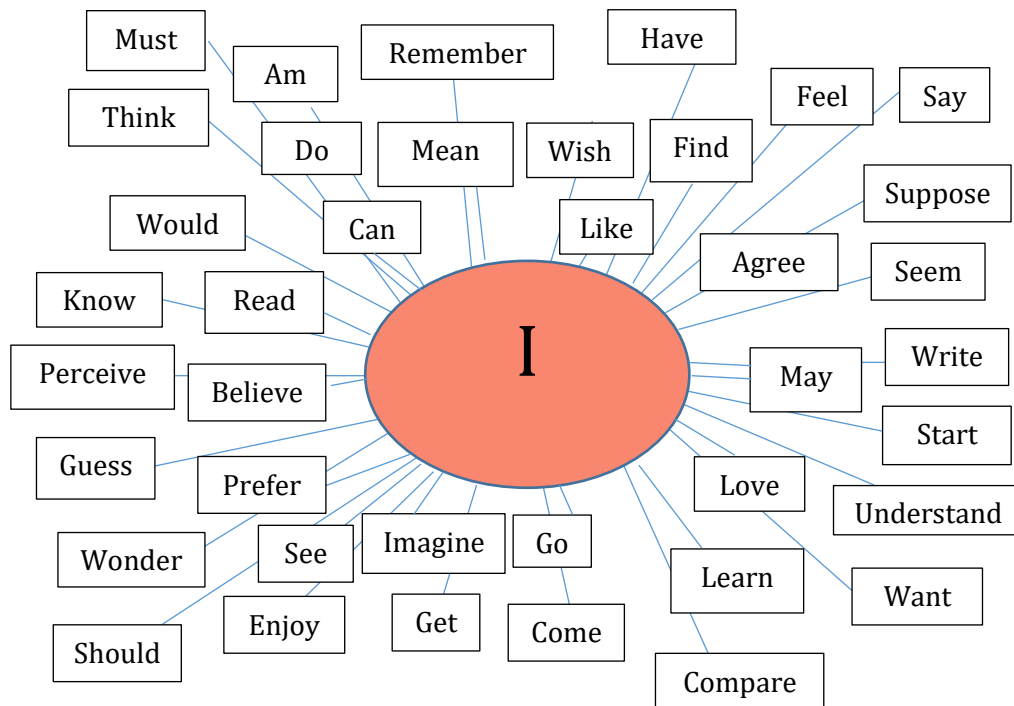


Figure 9: Verbs used in the first person in the poetry responses.

⁹³ Positive and negative forms of each verb, in the present and past tenses are combined in the analysis here, eg. Do = Do / Do not / Don't / Did / Did not / Didn't.

- Only twelve verbs are used in the first person across the entirety of the news article responses. In contrast, thirty-nine verbs are used in the first person in the poetry responses.
- The verb 'think' dominates both sets of transcripts. In 27% of cases where 'I' is used in the news article responses it is followed by the verb 'think', while in the poetry responses the figure is 30%. In 75% of the instances where 'I' is used in the news article responses it is followed by one of four verbs ('think', 'do', 'am', 'remember') while in the poetry responses the top four most frequently used verbs ('think', 'do', 'am', 'like') make up 57% of the cases where 'I' is used. Therefore, participants are using a smaller number of verbs more often in response to the news article and a larger range of verbs in response to the poetry.
- All twelve of the verbs that are used in the first person in the news article responses can also be found within the poetry responses, yet in the poetry responses an additional twenty-seven verbs are used that are not found within the news article responses.
- The verb 'imagine' does not occur in any form in response to the news article and nor do the verbs 'like', 'love', 'agree', 'enjoy', 'prefer', 'suppose', 'perceive', 'wonder', 'compare', 'guess', 'wish', 'start', 'learn', 'read' or 'write'. These are all verbs which would be useful for emotional or imaginative thinking and their absence from the news article responses and presence within the poetry responses supports the view that the poetry is encouraging more imaginative thinking from participants.

Participant A6 provides what is perhaps the best example of 'imaginative uncertainty' in her response to the final lines of the second extract of poetry, using a range of verbs and constructions that are not found in responses to the news article:

Imaginative Uncertainty in Poetry Responses

Her eyes are down, she doesn't look up, so again I've got the image of a downcast, lonely old woman. Ohh it's really sad. But she sounds really generous, 'when she at her table gave me food, / She did not look at me'. So she doesn't even make eye contact with people, she is that alone in her grief, but obviously she's giving people food, there is some interaction there. She is generous, she sounds like a good person. That line makes me think that oh she is feeding this guy who has come to her cottage, she gives food and she is generous but she does not even want to look up, she is so deep in her grief I think. Her grief has isolated her so much that she can't even look at anybody else, she's just, I don't know, functioning but asleep. I've got a picture of her, she is in her mid-sixties, she is wearing grey, living in this isolated cottage, her eyes are down. I imagine her being very very thin and dour looking. Other than her eyes looking down, there is no physical description of her, that is just my interpretation of her and of what grief has done to her or what this abandonment has done to her. It has left her half-alive, half-awake. (A6)

This reader has shifted the past tense of the poem into the present tense so that 'her eyes downwards were cast' has become 'her eyes are down' and 'she did not look at me' has become 'she doesn't look up'. These grammatical readjustments suggest that the reader is imaginatively re-living the lines in the present. Constructions like 'I've got the image', 'I've got a picture of her', 'my interpretation of her' and 'I imagine her' all provide evidence to support the argument that the literary texts are triggering this reader's capacity for producing mental imagery. These are all constructions that do not occur in responses to the news article. This suggests that the ability to visualise the subject of a text may be a particular feature of literary reading and it is this triggering of mental imagery which may lead readers towards more imaginative, exploratory and personal reflection.

4.5. Looking on the Bright Side vs. Looking Back and Thinking Again

Participants often appeared to be attempting to extract a positive message from the news article. They appeared to be keen to move on from the tragic reality of Olive Cooke's life and seemed to display an insistent need to re-interpret her story and grasp at any form of consolation that they could find within it:

Looking on the Bright Side in News Article Responses
My overall thought on reading the article was one of sadness at the circumstances of the elderly woman, but also reflecting on her long years of service, seventy-six years to the Royal British Legion which was inspiring. (A2)
It's a very say case, erm, a ninety-two year old, I mean she probably didn't have an awful lot longer to live but it is very sad and if it has promoted or provoked some work being done by charities about how they actually raise their money, then perhaps some good has actually come out of it. That's kind of the main point of it for me, but she's certainly had a good life and she's made a big contribution and I think that her life should be celebrated. (A8)

In these two examples 'but', 'perhaps' and 'if' appear to be being used to shift towards positivity and transform the traumatic content of the article into something more palatable.

After reading the poetry, three participants (A4, A6 and A7) chose to look back and think again about the news article. In doing so they were able to revise their initial overly certain, reductive or falsely optimistic responses to the text. In the cases where this happened, it was as if the poetry – and specifically the second extract of poetry relating to Margaret – was demanding that they turn back and reconsider the life and death of Olive Cooke. The contrast between participant A6's initial reaction to the news article, and her re-assessment of it after having read the poetry is particularly striking evidence of this argument:

Looking on the Bright Side in the News Article Responses	Looking Back and Thinking Again
Yeah, it's a sad story isn't it? But you think, well she's ninety-two, so that's a long long life. (A6)	I think reading the two Wordsworth pieces and then thinking back to the original article about Mrs Cooke - Olive Cooke - you see I'm noticing the name now, after the last piece and Margaret I'm taking notice of the name now. Looking again, Mrs Cooke was identified by her grandson so she obviously had a family, so even though before I said that she was lonely after her husband died in the war. Maybe she remarried, but it

	doesn't say anything about that. She was depressed at being old. She strikes me as a lonely figure . . . But I see some similarities in some of the themes between the news article and the second Wordsworth piece. (A6)
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Having read the poetry she begins to reimagine the emotional reality of Olive Cooke's story from out of the impersonal flatness of the news format.⁹⁴ While in the news article responses Mrs Olive Cooke is named only once by a single participant, in the places where, after having read the poetry, participants begin to re-consider the news article, she is named thirteen times. As participant A6 herself notes, it seems to be the poetry which is causing participants to name and notice Mrs Cooke in a way that they had not previously done.

Participant A5 was the one person who appeared to maintain a particularly distinctive tendency to 'look on the bright side' when reading the poetry, just as she had done when reading the news article.

Looking on the Bright Side in News Article Responses	Looking on the Bright Side in Poetry Response
<i>But</i> yeah I think it's a moving story and a sad story, <i>but</i> then it's a nice story that she actually collected for the Poppy Appeal for all those years, for 76 years, and that's most of her life and she did that every year. So obviously the charities have, well the Poppy Appeal has benefited from her helping that. (A5)	I would rather look on the bright side, I think that's just me generally. I feel as though it's deep, well, very deep. <i>But</i> yeah I do like the end where it goes a bit brighter and there is a rainbow. (A5 – First extract of poetry)
	Obviously she was caring, <i>but</i> did she have happy times? Because from the pedlar's point of view she always looked a bit downtrodden and a bit depressed, but then she might have had happy times. (A5 – Second extract of poetry)

⁹⁴ Further example of 'looking back and thinking again': 'That's really similar to the first newspaper article, because this is a woman whose husband died and she's a good woman, she's been really sad since her husband [. . .] well, she was abandoned by him, but I think that would be the same feeling really, except she doesn't know and she's waiting for him' (A7).

The repeated 'buts' are being used across all three examples to shift towards a more upbeat tone. This approach was not however characteristic of the poetry responses. The remaining nine participants made no attempt to put a positive spin on Margaret's life, and as previously stated, after reading the poetry, three participants made a reassessment of what they then took to be their previously over-simplistic responses to Olive Cooke's life by thinking about her again in parallel to Margaret. Participant A4 provides the best example of this. By blending together the lives of Olive Cooke and Margaret he is able to use the poetry as a trigger for more imaginative thinking about the news article:

Looking Back and Thinking Again

What person would somebody like Olive Cooke not have looked at? Whether it must have felt extremely awkward to see somebody who was of the same age as her husband, or somebody for whatever reason, resembled her first husband. I would in those situations, be somebody who would cast my eye downwards for there would be some kind of emotional swing hitting me . . . The idea of being asleep clearly and musing, 'To human life when he shall come again / For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved / Your very soul to see her', um anyway, if you link that to Olive Cook, maybe again there is this link to the life lost, again her husband. It's not said, it would not really find a place in a newspaper article, but we do not know whether her father had been injured in the Great War, whether he died soon after, whether he was still alive when her own husband was killed in action, we do not know that. But either of these people, coming back, are haunting her in her sleep, so it could be possible, its mere speculation. But if you put these two texts side by side, nothing but that can be done. (A4)

The poetry holds within it a reminder of what the news article does not have a place for, namely the layered experiences of loss that have made up Mrs Cooke's life. Despite everything that 'we do not know' about Olive Cooke's life, this participant comes to know her imaginatively by blending her into the poetry. The suggestion here is that it is the poetry which causes this participant to think more deeply about Olive Cooke's psychological state in a way that the news article itself did not. Participants were not instructed to think back to the newspaper article after reading the poetry, it was an instinctive backwards move made by three of the ten participants. In the places where this 'thinking back' happens, participants appear to show some recognition of the limits of

what can be contained within a news article and - it can be argued - it is the poetry which then serves to stretch those limits.

4.6. Follow-up Task

Seven days after the initial reading task, all ten participants were sent a follow-up exercise via email to complete. In this exercise they were asked to:

- Write down everything that they could remember about the news article and the extracts of poetry that they had read a week earlier.
- Read the extracts of poetry for a second time.
- Write down any second thoughts or new ideas that they had about the texts.

The aim of this task was to discover whether reading the extracts of poetry had had any kind of sustained impact on readers and to determine whether the particular thought-processes that participants had demonstrated after their initial reading of the poetry would be replicated or somehow altered by a second reading.

4.6.1. Recalling the Texts

Participants generally wrote more when recalling the content of the poetry extracts than they did when trying to remember the news article. The following table shows the number of words that each participant wrote in this first section of the follow-up task:

Participant	Number of Words in News Article Recall	Number of Words in Poetry Recall
A1	89	277
A2	77	97
A3	15	83
A4	125	198
A5	28	71
A6	61	48
A7	91	93
A8	43	60
A9	21	47

A10	36	49
Total	586	1023
Average	58.6	102.3

Table 4: Length in words of participant recall of news article and poetry extracts.

On average, participants wrote almost twice as much about the poetry than the news article. When recalling the news article, participants tended to revert to the summary mode that they had used in their initial verbal response to the text, yet were able to remember more detail about the poetry. Some discrepancy was to be expected here as participants were recalling two extracts of poetry and only one news article. Contrasting responses from participant A3 provide evidence to support this position:

Summary Mode when Recalling the News Article	The Sustained Effect of Active Reading when Recalling the Poetry
I think it was about an old lady passing away, I don't remember anything else. (A3)	I remember the word 'heart'. I think it was about a woman who waited years for her husband to come home but he never did and the writer was visiting this woman years later and felt that she was distant because of this unfulfilled waiting, and the writer felt uncomfortable sat at the table being served by this woman because it was similar to the scene that never happened with her returned husband. And I think I remember her turning away from him. (A3)

While she can hardly remember anything about the news article, particular details of the poem seem to have stuck in participant A3's mind. This supports the argument that some of the work of 'active reading' done during the first session has had a sustained impact.⁹⁵ Participant A3 is not only recollecting the

⁹⁵ Further examples of the use of 'summary mode' when recalling the news article: 'I don't really remember the news article. Was it about someone dying alone? I do think it was rather sad' (A8). 'Elderly lady, Bristol area, over 90 years, took her own life, felt under pressure to subscribe to multiple charities' (A10). 'I can't recall the news article but do remember both poems. This tells me that poetry sticks in my mind as it paints a picture in its description' (A5). Further examples of the effect of 'active reading' when recalling the poetry: "Heart" and "soul" are

poem here, she is re-interpreting the text as she remembers it. The idea that ‘the writer felt uncomfortable sat at the table being served by this woman because it was similar to the scene that never happened with her returned husband’ is a new and imaginative thought. This suggests that after only a single reading of the poem, seven days previously, a deep understanding of the text has been retained by this reader, and is very different to the summary mode that is displayed by participants in both their initial responses to and recollections of the news article.

4.6.2 Re-thinking the Poem after a Second Reading

In the second part of the follow-up activity, participants re-read the two extracts of poetry and were then asked to write down any thoughts or ideas that they now had about the texts. Participants again displayed some of the characteristics identified within their first spoken responses to the poetry in these second written responses, namely ‘active reading’, ‘imaginative uncertainty’ and ‘emotional focus’. Rather than simply replicating their initial comments about the poetry, certain participants wrote down new thoughts in the follow-up task. After re-reading the first extract of poetry, participant A3 wrote of the pedlar:

Second Reading of Poetry
It’s about him coming to life, not the coming to life which happens at some point between conception and birth but the other coming to life which happens, sometimes multiple times, to people during their life. When things suddenly become clearer, and yet the clarity and awakening to ‘the glorious universe’, a heightened awareness of his existence in the world, is also an awareness of the inadequacy of this awareness. (A3)

This participant quotes directly from the text, uses the words ‘sometimes’, ‘yet’ and ‘but’ and constructs long sentences with multiple clauses in order to express subtle new thoughts about the text. These are not linear or binary thoughts; this is an attempt to describe complicated grey areas and simultaneities. This participant appears to have continued to demonstrate -in

two keywords which appear in both poems’ (A4). ‘The poem says the woman ‘sleeps’ and hopes to wake up to see the face of the man’ (A1).

writing - the characteristics of literary thinking which were identified in both her own and the wider group's initial verbal responses to the poetry.⁹⁶

4.6.3. Shifting Away from Defaults

There are three participants who had initially responded to the poetry with the same default attitudes that they had displayed in their responses to the news article.

- Participant A2's responses had all been particularly distracted.
- Participant A8 had consistently shown a tendency towards over-certainty.
- Participant A5 had repeatedly tried to extract a positive message from each text that she read.

During the written follow-up task these three participants did appear to begin to shift away from their default positions.

▪ A2 – Distraction:

First Reading of News Article	First Reading of Poetry	Second Reading of Poetry
The image of the poppy seller reminded me of, there's quite a famous picture of in Victorian London a young girl who is a flower seller, and in the background you can see a policeman - that reminded me of that. (A2)	There is a famous portrait of Elizabeth I when she is old, in perhaps 1600, before she dies in 1603 and she is holding her head in her hands and there is a skeleton behind her and other images. (A2)	He almost feels the resolution of his inner turmoil – 'the turbulence' – externally, 'communing with the glorious universe' to secure 'repose [...] the peace required', he is seeing light at the end of the tunnel. (A2)

⁹⁶ Further example of 'rethinking the poetry': 'The second poem prompts me to think of the news article, even though I haven't re-read it. The sadness and loneliness and suffering, this poor woman abandoned, waiting for her lover to return. Again I think about her goodness and generosity. Not sure I noted the repetition of 'human' in three lines. I thought more about this on the second reading, what it means to be human and human behaviour' (A6).

In the written follow-up task, participant A2 was uncharacteristically focused. He quoted extensively from the poetry and as such, no longer wandered away from the content of the text.

▪ **A8 – Certainty:**

First Reading of News Article	First Reading of Poetry	Second Reading of Poetry
I think this case has provoked a lot of questions within charities about who they should repeatedly contact asking for donations, but it was actually her depression and her history of depression that was actually the cause of her death. (A8)	Again, this poor woman is obviously suffering from depression, extraneous depression provoked by her husband leaving and whatever family troubles had led to her husband going away, but she obviously was full of kindness because he makes reference to the kindness and he obviously has a lot of compassion for her which is nice. He feels sorry for this poor woman who was obviously very nice to him. (A8)	Having re-read the extract I still found it somewhat self-contradictory and confusing, although it did seem to suggest that concentrating on natural forces could quiet his own mind. (A8)

The qualifying terms ‘somewhat’ and ‘although’ are small indicators that support the position that after a second reading, the default mode of certainty that was so apparent in the initial responses to both the news article and poetry, is beginning to break down.

▪ **A5 – Looking on the Bright Side:**

First Reading of News Article	First Reading of Poetry	Second Reading of Poetry
But yeah I think it's a moving story and a sad story, but then it's a nice story that she	Obviously she was caring, <i>but</i> did she have happy times? Because from the pedlar's point	I felt sad and jaded when reading them and felt the depression and angst in the author's words,

actually collected for the Poppy Appeal for all those years, for seventy-six years, and that's most of her life and she did that every year. So obviously the charities have, well the Poppy Appeal has benefited from her helping that. (A5)	of view she always looked a bit downtrodden and a bit depressed, <i>but</i> then she might have had happy times. (A5)	especially in the first. In the second I felt sad and wished that the woman had had a happier life, which I'm sure she did at some point. I think the words conjure up strong images and the feeling of despair which to be honest, personally I don't like the feelings it stirs up in me. It's not the type of passage I prefer to read as even though it conjures up a scene in my head, it's a sad scene. I feel the author clings to the negative rather than the positive. (A5)
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During the follow-up task participant A5 initially displayed her default trait of 'looking on the bright side' by insisting that Margaret must have had a happier life, 'at some point'. However, as she progresses, her default mode appears to falter. By recognising her dislike for the 'strong images and feelings of despair' that the poetry stirs up within her, rather than immediately attempting to disregard or transform them into positive images, she is making a small but significant readjustment.

4.7. Conclusion

The shift from 'summary mode' to 'active reading':

- Participants tended to speak for longer and in more detail about the poetry than the news article.
- Participants quoted extensively from the poetry itself within their responses yet very rarely made specific reference to words within the news article.
- When speaking about the poetry, participants continued to puzzle through some of the difficulties or ambiguities within the texts and in these cases appeared to use quotations from the poetry in their

responses to make the lines live again for a second time as they actively thought a way through them.

- The familiarity of the news article format and the surface simplicity of its language and content meant that participants felt confident that they could understand it without having to read the text attentively. In contrast, poetry was more unfamiliar to the participants, the language initially appeared more difficult and the extracts that they were given to read only contained fragments of a much larger narrative. Consequently, it can be argued that the poetry demanded attentive, considered reading.

From 'distraction' to 'emotional focus':

- Participants tended to become distracted when speaking about the news article. They drifted away from the core content of the article, became preoccupied with inconsequential details within the text or cut their responses short as they ran out of interest in the article.
- In contrast, participants appeared to express feelings of emotional connection or recognition as they spoke about the poetry and as such demonstrated a greater degree of focus in their responses to the extracts from 'The Ruined Cottage'.
- Despite the emotive content of the news article, participant responses were generally unemotional.
- Participants did not make links between their own personal experiences and the news article in the way that they did in response to the poetry. This is evidenced by the frequent use of the verb 'feel', the noun 'feeling' and the pronouns 'me' and 'myself' in the poetry responses in comparison to their scarcity in the news article responses.

From 'certainty' to 'imaginative uncertainty':

- Participants seemed to have no difficulty understanding the content of the news article and their responses were therefore confident and often opinionated.

- Words identified as markers of certainty occurred with greater frequency in responses to the news article compared to the poetry responses (eg. actually, really).
- In contrast, participants were less practised in reading poetry and were initially doubtful about their ability to understand the texts that they had been given. Words identified as markers of uncertainty occurred with greater frequency in the poetry responses compared to the news article responses (e.g. if, sort of, maybe).
- The levels of certainty displayed in the news article responses had a tendency to limit or cut short participant responses.
- The 'certainty' that participants displayed when speaking about the news article was largely replaced in the poetry responses with 'imaginative uncertainty'. It was this 'imaginative uncertainty' that appeared to become a tool for getting closer to the less explicit meaning held within the poetry.
- Participants seemed inquisitive and contemplative in their responses to the poetry in ways that they had not been when speaking about the news article. A broad range of verbs were used in the poetry responses which were not found in the news article responses. These verbs provide evidence for the different kinds of thinking that was occurring within the poetry responses (e.g. suppose, perceive, wonder and speculate) and supports the view that more imaginative mental processes were being triggered by the poetry but not by the news article.
- Participants frequently made connections as they were reading the poetry, often prior to quite knowing the meaning of the texts. Not knowing seemed to trigger more imaginative thinking than too easily knowing did.

'Looking on the bright side' and 'looking back and thinking again':

- Participants appeared to display a tendency to 'look on the bright side' in their responses to the news article. This meant that they seemed to attempt to extract some 'positive' message from Olive Cooke's life so as to distract from the tragedy of her suicide. This tendency can be

evidenced by the way in which the conjunctions ‘but’, ‘or’, ‘maybe’ and ‘perhaps’ are used to turn sentences towards more ‘positive’ conclusions instead of signalling uncertainty.

- Three participants reassessed the news article after reading the poetry. By speaking about the life of Olive Cooke in relation to the life of Margaret in ‘The Ruined Cottage’ these participants appeared to begin to think about the emotional content of the news article in a way that they had not previously been able to. Within these second thoughts about the news article the characteristics of ‘imaginative uncertainty’ and ‘emotional focus’ that had been triggered by the poetry can be identified and are being used to reflect back on the non-fiction account of Olive Cooke’s life.

Follow-up task:

- Results of the follow-up exercise that was completed seven days after the initial reading task suggest that participants found it more difficult to recall details about the news article than the poetry extracts. This supports the position that attentive ‘active reading’ helps participants to remember a text.
- In their written responses to the poetry, participants again demonstrated the characteristics of literary thinking that had been identified in their initial verbal responses.
- In certain cases the process of re-reading and writing appeared to allow for greater contemplation and for the development of new ideas.
- In three particular cases the follow-up activity seemed to lead participants to begin to shift away from unhelpful default positions and automatic modes of thought.

4.8. Limitations and Implications

- One limitation of this study was that participants were given one news article and two extracts of poetry to read, potentially resulting in richer and more detailed responses to the poetry. It may be useful to repeat the experiment using one single short poem or extract of poetry rather than

two, to compare results across the two designs. However, in this instance it was deemed necessary to give participants two extracts of poetry so as to allow them to become more comfortable with this unfamiliar and difficult format and to counteract their inevitable familiarity with the news format. The news article is 268 words long and the combined length of the two poetry passages is 300 words. This minimal difference reduces any bias created by the fact that participants were given only one news article and two passages of poetry to read.

- In their initial questionnaires, all ten participants reported that they regularly read for pleasure - as would be expected from people who had responded to an advertisement about a study on reading. Half of the participants stated that they specifically read poetry for pleasure. Three participants had studied English Literature at degree level and had studied Wordsworth's poetry, although none had previously read the specific poetry being used in this task. Any future experiments could target recruitment at non-readers, advertise within the wider community and offer participants financial reimbursements in order to increase the variety of people taking part. The approach chosen for this study was used to speed up the recruitment process and every effort was taken to ensure that advertisements reached students and staff from across a wide variety of academic and non-academic departments within the university.
- A cross-over design could have been implemented so that half of the participants read the news article first and half read the poetry first. This would have limited any bias created by order effects. In this study, reading the news article first did not seem to influence the way that participants read the poetry. However, after reading the poetry, certain participants did go back and re-think their initial responses to the news article.
- In order to be able to collect more accurate and useful quantitative data for statistical analysis it would have been helpful if a greater number of people had taken part in this study. However, a larger group would have made qualitative analysis less successful.

- It was important not to expect participants to spend time doing anything other than tasks which would contribute to answering the study's explicit research aims. The purpose of the follow-up task was to examine any differences between each participant's first and second reading of the poem, therefore it was not deemed necessary for participants to also re-read the news article. In future studies it may be preferable for participants to attend a second session in person and verbally to answer the follow-up questions. In this case it was more convenient and efficient for participants to complete the second stage of the study via email, and this ensured that there was a 100% rate of completion for the entire study. A written rather than verbal follow-up task was also chosen in order to provoke thoughtful and carefully considered responses during this second, contemplative stage of the task.
- The potential limitation of researcher bias was mitigated in this study through a thorough process of cross-referencing themes to ensure that they did not overlap or misrepresent the data. Researcher bias could have been reduced further if all data was cross-checked by an independent group of researchers.
- Despite these limitations, the results of this study give some indication that reading poetry can trigger greater levels of emotional focus, attentiveness and imagination than reading a news article and suggest that further research is required on how literary texts can be used to stimulate particular human capacities and qualities of thought.
- Future studies could compare responses to different kinds of literary texts, look at the impact of engaging with longer poems or prose works over a sustained period and focus in much greater detail on the four main themes noted here and the ways in which they interact.
- The four main characteristics identified in participant responses to the poetry often overlap and interact with one another. For example, greater emotional focus can lead to an increase in active reading. Active reading can in turn lead to heightened emotional focus and encourages more exploratory, imaginative uncertainty. It is important to note that participants were not simply demonstrating these particular modes of

thinking in isolation. When reading the poetry, participants started to demonstrate several, if not all, of the characteristics in combination. It is poetry’s capacity to trigger this complex *blend* of responses which may have particularly important implications for its potential therapeutic usage.

4.9. Introduction to Experiment B

Advertisements were displayed across The University of Liverpool campus and in public libraries in Liverpool and London in order to recruit **eighteen** participants for this experiment (see Appendix K for study advertisement). The only requirements for inclusion in the study were that participants should be at least eighteen years of age and fluent in English. The group that was recruited were aged between nineteen and seventy-one and consisted of eleven females and seven males (see Appendix L for full breakdown of participants).

4.9.1. The Study: Method

- 1) All potential recruits were sent an information sheet about the study (see Appendix M) and invited to complete a consent form (see Appendix D) and a short questionnaire about themselves and their reading habits (see Appendix E).
- 2) Participants were then divided into **three groups**. Age, gender, profession, education and reading habits were taken into account during the allocation process and every effort was made to create balanced groups so as to reduce the effects of individual differences on the results of the study.

GROUP ONE	
Eight participants (B1 – B8)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The group were given a ‘poetry diary’ containing a copy of Wordsworth’s ‘The Ruined Cottage’. ▪ The 1009 line poem had been split into fourteen sections of approximately seventy lines each. ▪ They were asked to spend thirty minutes per day for fourteen consecutive days reading a section of the poem and writing about anything that seemed important to them within it. 	

GROUP TWO
Eight participants (B9 – B16)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The group were given a blank notebook and asked to spend thirty minutes per day for fourteen consecutive days writing about anything that they felt to be important to them. ▪ This group were not asked to read any poetry.

GROUP THREE
Two participants (B17 & B18)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The group were asked to complete both tasks. ▪ They were given the poetry diary exercise to complete first because it was judged to demand greater levels of concentration and motivation due to the unfamiliar reading material. ▪ One month later they were given the second diary task to carry out.

3) After completing their tasks, each participant in every group was given a second short questionnaire to fill out (see Appendix N).

4) **Two weeks later** they were each invited to attend an interview.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one and two hours.

Interview discussions can be divided into three general sections:

- a) The experience of doing the task.
- b) Re-reading extracts of the poetry and/or diaries that are judged by the researcher and/or the participant themselves to be particularly salient, in order to reappraise initial written responses.
- c) The longer term impact of the task on participants.

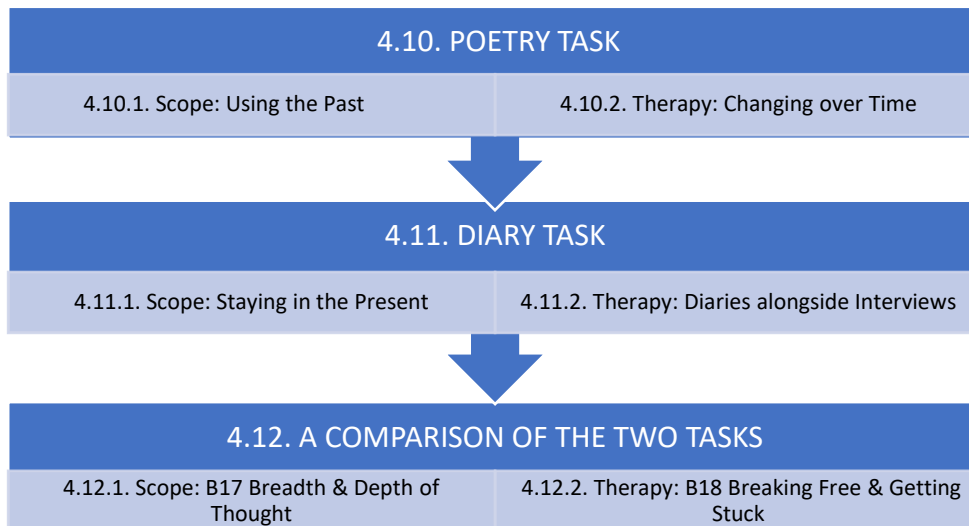
4.9.2. The Analysis

- 1) Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data collected in this study.
- 2) The characteristics of each diary were identified and distinctions were made between the two sets of diaries (those with and without any poetry stimulus).

- 3) The most salient themes were clustered together, checked against one another to minimise overlap and checked against both the original data and previous research in the field.
- 4) Themes were checked against each participant's own analysis of the most salient moments within their own diaries, as discussed during the interview stage.
- 5) The full texts of four of the participant diaries (B3, B13 and both of participant B18's two diaries) were given to three post-graduates trained in qualitative analysis (a Ph.D. student in Psychological Sciences, a Ph.D. student in Public Health and a Research Assistant in Clinical Psychology) to cross-check themes and help to mitigate against researcher bias (see Appendix O for an example of independently annotated text). Their annotations were tabulated and categorised into themes which were then verified by each cross-checker during a follow-up meeting.

Diary writing is an established therapeutic tool which has been identified to improve mood and well-being in a number of studies.⁹⁷ The aim of experiment B was to investigate the effects of diary writing, when combined with the slow, careful reading of poetry. The results of this study are divided into three sections, thus:

⁹⁷ 'Since 1986 dozens of studies have demonstrated that writing about emotional upheavals can affect people's psychological and physical health. The typical disclosure studies require participants to write for 3-5 days for 15-30 minutes per day about either emotional or superficial topics. The writing intervention has been shown to reduce physician visits for illness, improve medical markers of health, bring about higher grades among students, and result in higher re-employment rates among adults who have lost their jobs.' James W. Pennebaker, Matthias R. Mehl and Kate G. Niederhoffer, 'Psychological aspects of natural language use: Our words, our selves' in *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54 (2003), 547-77 (567); hereafter cited as 'Pennebaker'.



In each section ‘scope’ refers to the scale and range of thinking that is triggered by each task, while ‘therapy’ refers to the aspects of each task that hold some therapeutic potential. Within each sub-section, evidence will be presented through a series of case studies.

4.10. Poetry Task

4.10.1. Scope: Using the Past

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the poetry diaries is the extent to which each participant writes about his or her own past in response to the poem. This was corroborated by the group of three independent cross-checkers who noted, ‘The poem acts as a trigger for memories’, ‘The poetry stimulated memories’, ‘Diaries contain very detailed and emotive memories’, ‘Participants reflect on the poetry in relation to their own lives, especially with a focus on memory’. The poem appeared to encourage participants to write about the whole span of their lives, but also within that span, to focus with great specificity on particular experiences, usually from their childhood, and despite the poetry itself not being about childhood.⁹⁸ This first section of analysis will provide evidence to

⁹⁸ This finding has some relation to research into autobiographical memory which has identified a negative correlation between memory-specificity and depression. F. Raes, J.M.G. Williams, and D. Hermans, ‘Reducing cognitive vulnerability to depression: A preliminary investigation of memory specificity training (MEST) in inpatients with depressive symptomatology’, *Journal of Behaviour Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 40 (2009), 24-38.

Tim Dalgleish, et al., ‘Reduced specificity of autobiographical memory and depression’, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 136.1 (2007), 23-42.

support the position that the poem triggers memories and will explore how these memories affect the reader's relationship with the poem. But more significantly it will consider how reader's representations of their memories alter over the course of the fourteen-day task. Three examples will show different readers' varying positions on a spectrum which spans between the text and themselves: at certain points memories exist in isolation, distinctly separate from the text, while at others, the text and the life of the reader begin to merge and thus to be read and written about through a mutual understanding of the other.

▪ **B18 - Triggering Memories:**

Certain words within the poem appeared to trigger specific memories for participant B18 which initially helped her to develop a personal understanding of a complex and unfamiliar piece of poetry. However, as the task progressed and she seemed to become more deeply engaged with the poem, memories became places of live, shared feeling and indicated a growing sense of convergence between reader and text:

Participant B18	
Day Two	
<p>He, many an evening, to his distant home In solitude returning, saw the hills Grow larger in the darkness; all alone Beheld the stars come out above his head, And travelled through the wood, with no one near To whom he might confess the things he saw. So the foundations of his mind were laid. In such communion, not from terror free, (l.126-133)</p>	<p>When I was young – probably from the age of seven, I often returned home from evening activities alone. The most memorable was from Brownies / Guides. The way home was often in the dark and the streets were very quiet. There was one particular part which filled me with 'terror' every time. It was only a low wall around the back of the chapel, but I always imagined someone / something lurking behind the wall who would jump out on me. My heart would be in my mouth as I passed every time. I never told anyone about it when I was young. When I see the word 'terror' this is the feeling I remember.</p>

Day Nine	
<p>This tale did Margaret tell with many tears: And, when she ended, I had little power To give her comfort, and was glad to take Such words of hope from her own mouth as served to cheer us both. But long we had not talked Ere we built up a pile of better thoughts, And with a brighter eye she looked around As if she had been shedding tears of joy. (l.721-728)</p>	<p>I've been in this situation. I remember one time in particular – when I told a friend news about my son, I remember telling her 'with many tears' – but by the end after I had told her everything, although she was upset, we then started talking about things in a more cheerful way – just as they do in the poem. It's as if unloading the story onto someone else gives the storyteller a period of relief and you almost immediately feel more cheerful. You make someone very sad with your story – but then you have the resources to try and cheer them up. It's strange.</p>
Day Ten	
<p>I have slept Weeping, and weeping have I waked; my tears Have flowed as if my body were not such As others are; and I could never die. (l.808-911)</p>	<p>This description of crying is wonderful. When you think that because you have cried so much you should be dead, and because you're still alive – your body can't be normal.</p>

It is the words 'terror' and 'in solitude returning' which appear to lead participant B18 to write on day two about this specific childhood memory of 'returning home [...] alone'. She aligns herself with the poem and refers back to it in the middle of her memories, therefore maintaining a balance between text and self.

On day nine she shifts from writing in the first person about her own life experiences to using the second person plural 'you'. This move from singular to plural, individual to more communal, suggests a swing on the reading spectrum away from the separate self and towards a blend of self and text. While she begins by writing in the first person about a parallel experience from her own life - related to her own son - this is not detached autobiography. She integrates the quotation 'with many tears' into her own story and refers back to the poem. She is keen to re-inforce the link between herself and the text, writing that she

and her friend had reacted 'just as they do in the poem'.

That she again switches from using 'I' to 'you' on day ten supports the position that she is thinking now beyond the 'I', seeing as she does that her own particular experience belongs to something bigger than her individual self. Text and self once again converge as the plural pronoun 'you' holds together both the reader's and Margaret's feelings.⁹⁹

▪ **B1 - Parallel Poetry:**

Participant B1 did not enjoy the poem and throughout much of the task he wrote about his own life, largely detached from the text. Filling out his post-task questionnaire, he apologised for being overly personal in his diary entries but said 'it's the only way I could have anything to say'. He primarily wrote about his past, and memories appeared to be triggered - sometimes tenuously - by single words or images within the text of the poem. For example the lines, 'Beside yon spring I stood, / And eyed its waters' (l.484-5) led him to write, 'By a very long stretch of the imagination I am taken back to a spring and a deep swimming pool somewhere in Queensland Australia'. Scattered amongst the fragmented recollections of past travels - of which the diary mainly consists - there are repeated references to the participant's recently deceased parents. Over the course of the task he begins to weave a fragmented eulogy to his parents into his diary entries, which runs in parallel to the poem's eulogy to Margaret and which stands out as distinctly different in tone from the majority of this participant's recollections:

⁹⁹ In response to the lines 'A human being destined to awake / To human life, or something very near / To human life, when he shall come again / For whom she suffered' on day twelve of the task, participant B7 similarly used the plural pronouns 'you' and 'we':

'In a small way it is like this after every momentary or temporary crisis we suffer. We move through the days or hours, feeling completely separate from the rest of human life - from the world of ordinary vitality, from other people living their lives. We are in another place. Reminds me of the words of a friend about depression, that when you are in that place, you believe that everyone else around you must know some secret about living that you just don't know. That there is a secret about how to stay alive and you just can't remember it.'

Participant B1	
Day Two	
<p>And some small portion of his eloquent speech, And something that may serve to set in view The feeling pleasures of his loneliness, His observations, and the thoughts his mind Had dealt with – I will here record in verse; (l.98-102)</p>	<p>When my father died it was given to me to compose and deliver his eulogy. I spent three days writing a potted history and a list – poem of sorts, of favourite memories and sayings. It was very emotional and this small passage takes me back to that sad time.</p>
Day Seven	
<p>“I see around me here Things which you cannot see: we die, my Friend, Nor we alone, but that which each man loved And prized in his peculiar nook of earth Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon Even of the good is no memorial left.” (l.469-474)</p>	<p>“Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust” the preacher intoned above my parents’ graves. It’s a reminder that nothing lasts forever, not even this planet and all that’s on it. Only the atoms will remain, lost in space.</p>
Day Fourteen	
<p>I have heard, my Friend, That in yon arbour oftentimes she sate Alone, through half the vacant sabbath day; And, if a dog passed by, she still would quit The shade, and look abroad. On this old bench For hours she sate; and evermore her eye Was busy in the distance, shaping things That made her heart beat quick. (l.914-921)</p>	<p>Reminds me of my parents sat in their favourite chairs, the hours, days, weeks and months and finally years sat in chairs, watching TV, reading newspapers and magazines, and waiting for visitors, especially family. Waiting for human contact, to engage in conversation, to attend their needs, to brighten their day.</p>

And when they, Whose presence gave no comfort, were gone by, Her heart was still more sad. (l.931-933)	In contrast to above, my parents disappointment when my visits ended. They became downhearted, especially my mother, who usually begged me to stay for just another day. This is in contrast to the passage where the woman clings to the past and hopes for a long lost loved ones return, whereas my parents hoped that the loved one remain.
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Participant B1 appears to be writing and thinking here, if not directly about the poem, then in the space created by the poem. It is on day fourteen, at the end of the task, that he uncharacteristically refers back to the text, ‘in contrast to the passage’, and in this instance it is as if he is writing not just about his own self in parallel to the text, but that he is feeling the kindred difference between his own experiences and the text.

- **B17 - Blended Thinking:**

From the first day of the task, the poem reminded participant B17 of his own past. He felt a strong sense of correspondence between the character of the pedlar and his own former best friend, immediately feeling that the poet was addressing him directly and articulating feelings that he himself had not always been able to articulate. Yet he was also concerned that he was somehow manipulating or ‘using’ the text by making his responses all about him:

Participant B17
Day One
I remembered John, my great school friend who popped into my mind half way through the reading. It really was my ‘best delight to be his chosen comrade’. His friendship fed my soul and was as cool as refreshing water. I had never experienced that feeling with a man before, or since, and in a way, I’m pleased about that as it makes it even more special. It ended badly of course, but the early times were wonderful.
Day Two
This seems to be talking directly to me, the poet seems to have been there when I grew up, hiding behind a rock, observing my every movement and

thought. He has given voice to my confused suspicions and vague imaginings, but I also feel guilty and self-centred for feeling like this. The poet makes me feel like he is my ally, someone like John.

Day Three

The words constantly make me think of myself and my past. They ring so true, it's like I've been there. The poet seems to be talking about himself and his childhood and what made him a poet which beautifully illustrates to me the feelings that I have no words for. This poem makes me feel less alone. I feel this poem is like a true friend.

The poem became a companion in thinking for this reader, offering up a new language with which to think about his own past. However, on day eleven, in response to the section of the poem where the pedlar recounts his final meeting with Margaret, there was a distinct shift in the tone of participant B17's diary. This is the only occasion where he wrote about his current, pressing concerns. In every other diary entry he focused on memories of the past:

Participant B17

Day Eleven

And when,
In bleak December, I retraced this way,
She told me that her little babe was
dead,
And she was left alone. She now,
released
From her maternal cares, had taken up
The employment common through these
wilds, and gained,
By spinning hemp, a pittance for herself;
And for this end had hired a neighbour's
boy
To give her needful help. That very time
Most willingly she put her work aside,
And walked with me along the miry
road,
Heedless how far; and, in such piteous
sort
That any heart had ached to hear her,
begged
That, wheresoe'er I went, I still would
ask

I missed yesterday, my wife was ill
and I couldn't concentrate, for a
few short hours I felt some pangs
of sadness and worry that my
imagination magnified into a
monster which was too close to the
poem, she was suffering and I was
helpless. There followed a night of
fitful sleep and worry about my
son and my inadequacies as a
father, followed by a morning of
relief and business as usual, and
back to the poem. It was like my
life was giving me a little snippet of
insight into the poem, a warning of
what could happen to anyone at
any time. The Wanderer comes in,
is sad, and then goes again, then he
comes back, sympathises, and then
goes again. Each time he comes, it
gets worse, he agonises and he
goes again, back to his life of

For him whom she had lost. We parted then - Our final parting; for from that time forth Did many seasons pass ere I returned Into this tract again. (l.893-910)	roaming. He cannot get drawn too deeply in. He feels helpless and he has to get away. My life is intruding into this poem, my son's birthday, my feelings about him, my wife's worries about him, the Wanderer, Margaret and her absent husband, the dead baby all seem part of the same poem - poetry and reality mixed up.
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Participant B17's present appears to infiltrate his reading of the poem and as it does so he begins to speak about the poem in the present tense: 'He cannot get drawn too deeply in. He feels helpless and he has to get away'. In these places it becomes less clear whether he is speaking about the pedlar or about himself or both, thus supporting the position that poem is no longer distinctly separate from the reader. In the final sentence of this diary entry the sense that a process of blending is taking place between poem and reader is most evident. The syntax breaks down into a 'mixed up' list of people and feelings that belong partly to the external life of the reader and partly to the internal world of the poem, and which are then drawn back together with 'all seem part of the same poem', so that they then co-exist in a third, shared space between the text and self. This kind of blended thinking is the product of slow, immersive and regular reading over an extended period of time and provides evidence of the reader's growing attunement to the text.

4.10.2. Therapy: Changing over Time

Over the course of the task participants appeared to adjust the ways in which they were reading, writing about and relating to the poetry, in order to meet the challenges that the poem was placing upon them. The shifting ways in which the previous three participants wrote about their memories in relation to the poem are reflective of this broader trend. Reading 'The Ruined Cottage' did not simply consolidate what participants already knew or felt, although in certain cases the first step towards a deeper understanding of the text came from readers recognising their own selves within it and as previously discussed, matching their own memories onto the poem. The length, complexity and unfamiliarity of

the poem, as well as the task's specific demand to read it slowly over fourteen thirty-minute sessions, made this a difficult and in some ways disruptive exercise for many, if not all participants. It was not a task that could be easily absorbed into the routine of a person's life. The structure of both the task and the poem challenged default habits of thinking and in certain cases the content of the poem also tested participants' established beliefs about themselves and those around them.¹⁰⁰

▪ **B3 - From Academic to Emotional:**

Participant B3 is the head teacher of a secondary school, she teaches English and has studied English literature to post-graduate level. She is familiar with the poetry of Wordsworth and in her initial diary entries she frequently referred to what she had formerly learnt about Wordsworth at university. However, over the course of the task participant B3 appeared to move away from her default 'academic' mode and shifted to a more personal way of reading and writing:

Participant B3	
Day One	
'Twas summer, and the sun had mounted high: Southward the landscape indistinctly glared Through a pale steam; but all the northern downs, In clearest air ascending, showed far off A surface dappled o'er with shadows flung From brooding clouds; shadows that lay in spots Determined and unmoved, with steady beams	I think that the description of the sun alongside the 'brooding clouds' description, with the impact of both together on the land, creates a metaphor for the world that I remember from my uni days that this poet inhabited - beauty of nature but something 'brooding' around the corner. I can't remember the detail now of the whole perspective he had, but I have a sense that the man lying so relaxed may face disruption like that the world faced then and certainly faces now.

¹⁰⁰ Two participants reacted particularly negatively to the text and demonstrated no such change in attitude over the course of the task. Participant B5 resolutely focused on what he disliked about the poem in each diary entry, 'I find the extremely long sentences breathless and quite unpleasant to read. Whilst there is a lot of punctuation, the thought or thrust seems to ramble on so long.' (Day Two). Participant B4 repeatedly wrote about the gender imbalance that she had perceived within the text, 'The poet puts the woman in a powerless position. The main player tells his version of her story to the next generation. This is problematic' (Day Nine).

Of bright and pleasant sunshine interposed; (l.1-8)	
Day Seven	
<p>Stooping down to drink, Upon the slimy foot-stone I espied The useless fragment of a wooden bowl, Green with the moss of years, and subject only To the soft handling of the elements: There let it lie – how foolish are such thoughts! Forgive them; - never – never did my steps Approach this door but she who dwelt within A daughter's welcome gave me, and I loved her As my own child. Oh, Sir! The good die first, And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust Burn to the socket. Many a passenger Hath blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks, When she upheld the cool refreshment drawn From that forsaken spring; and no one came But he was welcome; no one went away But that it seemed she loved him. She is dead, The light extinguished of her lonely hut, The hut itself abandoned to decay, And she forgotten in the quiet grave. (l.491-510)</p>	<p>I don't like the thought of the wooden bowl fragment, all mossed over now Margaret is dead. I have a hard time with mortality at the best of times and at the moment the dog [has died], Mum's op, it's all slightly worse. My oldest friend's mum has just been diagnosed with breast cancer too and her husband always did wood turning, so all of a sudden it's one of their old bowls.</p>

A member of the cross-checking group noted participant B3's repeated references to her 'uni days' and commented that 'this is a key part of the person's narrative that they draw on'. This commentator also identified the clear shift in tone that occurs towards the middle of this participant's diary

entries, 'The writing has changed from earlier entries, it sounds almost poetic. The poem seems to be influencing the reader in a reflective way, which is influencing how they see the world, maybe this is coming through in their writing'. Within the poem the 'useless fragment of a wooden bowl' stops the pedlar in his tracks and here it triggers a similar mental jolt for this participant. She finds it difficult to read this passage as concerns about her family press upon her and infiltrate the poem. In her mind the broken bowl has become a handmade wooden bowl belonging to the father of her oldest friend. This is an act of imaginative transfer and blended thinking.

During her interview, participant B3 was asked about the changes that had taken place for her over the course of the task. She had noticed, as she was writing, that she was beginning to think about and respond to the poem in a different way and had felt the benefit of this change. In all subsequent examples the interviewer is indicated by bold type:

Participant B3
Interview
<p>When I was putting the task together, I wanted to create a space that was outside of normal life.</p> <p>Exactly</p> <p>I don't know if that worked for you?</p> <p>I think the trouble with me . . . well it did. It absolutely did is the first answer. But I have to consciously allow myself to do that, and that's something about me, it's nothing to do with you or the task or anything like that, because for a start, well I'm an English teacher for a start, so before you know you start going into the tried and tested ways of reading and analysing that you have learnt to do for a really long time and that you have asked young people to do for years and I liked it for that because I found that I was able to stop doing that as I went through. Initially I was doing that, I was very much trying to find the answer to what stuff meant and in that, do you know what I mean? In that kind of English student kind of way, I was definitely, that's where I defaulted to because if I see a poem that's what I do, like a dog running for a bone - the same process. Whereas as it went through, you probably can tell in the writing, I was much more personally connected to the poem and finding, as you say, space to think. It's a combination not just of the task but of the subject matter as well. It's the poem that takes you there actually, because some poems I might never have done that, I might have carried on trying to</p>

analyse.

I think the points that were most interesting for me to read were when your knowledge and understanding of Wordsworth or literature falls away.

Yeah, absolutely.

They were the most interesting points and as you've said already, a more direct, personal connection comes through at those points.

Yeah and I liked the fact that I couldn't remember very much what I used to know. I kind of knew some headlines, but I couldn't really remember any detail. But actually that was really good because to start with I thought I'd be putting it through a filter from my undergraduate days, which as you said, initially I started to do a bit, but I actually couldn't do that - I couldn't remember anything and it was better that I couldn't. I stopped trying to remember and it was even better.

One of the key places in participant B3's diary occurs on day seven, as she is involuntarily jolted into a more vulnerable, emotional position by the description in the poem of Margaret's overgrown garden. No longer writing as a 'teacher' or a 'student', she instead begins simply to respond to the poem as a daughter coming to terms with her mother's recent cancer diagnosis:

Participant B3	
Day Seven	
It was a plot Of garden ground run wild, its matted weeds marked with the steps of those, whom, as they passed, The gooseberry trees that shot in long lank slips, Or currants, hanging from their leafless stems, In scanty strings, had tempted to o'erleap The broken wall. [. . .] "I see around me here Things which you cannot see: we die, my Friend,	I had quite a shock then, reading a description of the overgrown garden, with words like 'matted', 'leafless', 'long lank', 'scanty strings' leading then into the man saying what he says about death, and all that we 'prize' changing and going with us as we die. I wasn't wanting to think about that, as mum prepares for her op. I'm thinking about gentle pauses, her lovely garden staying just fine at home for her while dad waits for her to recover and all proceeding forward as it should. I am also a little repelled by the idea that

<p>Nor we alone, but that which each man loved And prized in his peculiar nook of earth Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon Even of the good is no memorial left.” (l.452-474)</p>	<p>there’s no ‘memorial left’ even of good.</p>
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She finds the passage uncomfortable to read but it is the shock of being faced by this image of decay that forces her to drop her previous detached, academic default mode. The poem leads her to consider what – in the aftermath of her mother’s cancer diagnosis – her mind had been working hard to avoid. In this case, her requoting of words from the text is a good thing to come out of her student / teacher experience as it creates a more focused, live reading of the poem. Two weeks later at her interview, I read aloud this same passage of poetry about Margaret’s overgrown garden and participant B3 spoke again about the fear that it had initially triggered in her:

Participant B3
Interview
<p>Not wanting anything to alter or adjust at all and how like the processes of nature happen anyway no matter what you do and that is quite scary. I’ve found that, I like that, I really love that passage and I really connected with that passage but at the same time it showed a really powerful advancing of time and nature that is a little bit scary, especially if you are faced with illness at a particular point. The garden itself reminded me of where we lived as kids, they or we had a big garden and I imagine it like now, I imagine it like that, even though they don’t live there now. I imagine that if they did, that if mum, I mean mum’s getting better, but if she wasn’t there would be that sense of that happening there, and how sad that is. I think that that is a really overwhelmingly sad passage, really powerfully, really powerfully. And how when you go and revisit places, I don’t like going and revisiting places particularly because I often find that the experience that you had is altered and not always in a good way. I think that is why that spoke to me as well really strongly in terms of mum’s illness, because I don’t like going back to where we lived as children in case it’s all gone wrong. You know that sort of idyllic quality is gone.</p>

Reading can perhaps be one way of imaginatively restoring a place that cannot be returned to in reality. Here in the interview, after a second reading of the

text, participant B3 is reading and relating to the text in a very different way to how she had in the first half of her diary. Reading appears to have become an intensely imaginative process, and as one cross-checker noted, the poem is beginning to offer ‘an interesting way of finding meaning and understanding what we are facing in our lives right now’.

▪ **B6 - Less is more:**

For the first two days of the task participant B6 wrote long descriptive summaries of the poetry that he had been reading. However, on day three he abruptly changed his approach to the task. He stopped paraphrasing the poetry and instead began to write much briefer notes about how the task was making him feel and what he was learning from it. After changing his stance on the third day, participant B6 went on to write about deeply personal topics. In particular, he wrote about the different experiences of grief that he and his mother had gone through after the death of his father:

Participant B6	
Day One	
Mine was at that hour Far other lot, yet with good hope that soon Under a shade as grateful I should find Rest, and be welcomed there to livelier joy. (l.17- 20)	In the second part he meets his friend and you're given the sense of relief that his journey has come to an end and that his eagerly anticipated meeting has arrived. There is a real sense of affection growing and intrigue as to who this man is and the nature of their relationship. Even in the previous passage 'be welcomed with livelier joy' indicates his excitement.
Day Three	
But he had felt the power Of Nature, and already was prepared, By his intense conceptions, to receive Deeply the lesson deep of love which he, Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stop thinking / being so analytical – feelings / instincts are real and important. - I feel I must take this on board?

To feel intensely, cannot but receive. (l.191-196)	
Day Twelve	
Her infant babe Had from his Mother caught the trick of grief, And sighed among its playthings. (l.868-870)	<u>Grief is Contagious.</u> - It seems strange to me that she would seem so affected by her husband's grief yet so unaffected by the death of her child. Or I suppose her husband's death had so affected her that the remainder of him (her child) was a burden. - Makes me jealous of that kind of love. You want to scream at her "pull yourself together" which makes me feel as though I'm unsympathetic and dead inside myself. This poem has made me think about myself as someone who may have been affected by grief unknowingly.

On day twelve participant B6 is writing simultaneously about both Margaret and his own mother, about Margaret's husband and his own father and about Margaret's child and his own self (as 'remainder' rather than 'reminder' of the father). The poem is allowing him to get close to his own parallel experiences and to think and say what would be difficult - if not impossible - for him to say to his mother, 'Pull yourself together' or 'I'm jealous of that kind of love'.

During his interview - which took place two weeks after the completion of the reading diary - participant B6 spoke about his conscious decision on the third day to shift away from his default tactic of superficial description and towards a more emotional approach:

Participant B6
Interview
I wanted to ask you about that shift that you have just mentioned from the first few days where you were very descriptive to when you later became much more emotional and personal. You said at the end that it became harder when you started doing that, but also much more rewarding.

Yes, definitely. Well at first I wanted you to be impressed by me. I was writing in my best handwriting, in straight lines, I was worried in a very naïve young way about making it look like I'd really put in the effort. Then I then just thought, you know what actually I can't not . . . I'm just describing the poem rather than doing anything of any difference. I'm basically rewriting it in a really stupid way. And then I was like, this is stupid, I'm going to try and get the best from it. And I did. I think that from the look of it, the more I absorbed the less actually I wrote down.

So it was a conscious decision to do that then? You thought, stop describing and start talking about how this is making me feel?

I can remember on like the third day, I read back, there wasn't long into it I thought this is ridiculous, I read back the first one and I thought, this is just a complete waste of time. I was like, she doesn't want this. I did think she doesn't want this. I'm gonna have to start bullet-pointing it. I was slightly worried that you might think I had been too lazy to do it. But I thought, I'm getting as much down doing bullet points as I am sentences. You know, in terms of emotional delivery, I think I put more down after that point because I wasn't going sentence by sentence.

I liked how you started using bullet points and numbering things and putting boxes around things and highlighting things you'd written. It's like you are homing in on the really important bits.

This participant quickly realised that his default mode was inadequate. As his responses became increasingly personal the diary entries became significantly shorter and more fragmented. All the unnecessary paraphrase was stripped away and instead he appeared to focus on the task of getting closer to the emotional core of the poem.

During his interview participant B6 spoke again about how reading the poem had led him to think about his own grief in a way that he might otherwise have avoided:

Participant B6
Interview
<p>You wrote in a few places about being 'unknowingly' affected by grief, what did you mean by that?</p> <p>Yes. Because I only have become a little more tolerant of talking about my own father in the last I would say year or so. Because I never really liked</p>

talking about it or anything else and I can't say I was consciously affected by it at the time. It was not, because in the poem I know it talks about this old woman, and I very much saw my own mum in it. Because she is not the same woman . . . even now. She is nowhere near what she was. And that was what kind of . . . I can see how I'm probably a bit more severe in my own nature because she was so miserable. Because I was quite happy go lucky really before that . . . you know . . . because I don't like saying it was . . . you know because I can't say I ever got on with him, I can't say I ever really liked him, I can't say it was a big loss personally. It was just that thing of how it affected my mother and subsequently how that affected me. Because that was in the poem, I think I just couldn't not write what I wrote.

This participant's feelings hang unspoken in his pauses and behind his negative sentences, for he finds it easier to say what it is that he can't say - 'I can't say I ever got on with him, I can't say I ever really liked him, I can't say it was a big loss personally' - than explicitly to say what it was that he did feel towards his father. The final double negative, 'I just couldn't not write what I wrote', suggests the struggle taking place between wanting to articulate his feelings, being pushed into certain thinking areas by the poem and his habitual instinct to avoid the topic.

▪ **B18 - Wise Passiveness:**

While the poem seemed to offer participants B3 and B6 new ways of thinking about their past or present difficulties, it seemed to give participant B18 a new way of thinking about her future; as one cross-checker simply noted, 'she learnt a lot from the poem'. The character of the pedlar had initially caused much confusion and annoyance for this reader, particularly on the fifth day of the task:

Participant B18	
Day Five	
From his native hills He wandered far; much did he see of men, Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits, Their passions and their feelings; chiefly those Essential and eternal in the heart, That, 'mid the simpler forms of rural	I think this passage annoys me - he didn't live as a hermit - which I can understand would mean he had a life communing with nature - but 'Much did he see of men'. Does the word 'see' mean he didn't get involved - just stayed outside - observing. Because I believe that life is all about making mistakes

<p>life, exist more simple in their elements, And speak a plainer language. In the woods, A lone enthusiast, and among the fields, Itinerant in this labour, he had passed The better portion of his time; and there Spontaneously had his affections thriven Amid the bounties of the year, the peace And liberty of nature; there he kept In solitude and solitary thought His mind in a just equipoise of love. (1.340-355)</p>	<p>and learning from them, and that sometimes involves trusting or getting involved too closely with people, and that can mean upsets, unhappiness, problems and by learning to cope with the different emotions which lead from these situations we become wiser. He seems to have achieved wisdom in a different way. Maybe quite a selfishly indulgent way. Yet he seems to have approval from all around him. I read it through and wonder what kind of man I am expected to imagine. I cannot put all the descriptions together and imagine a person like this.</p>
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The pedlar does not appear to fit any of the pre-existing templates that this participant holds within her mind. He does not match up to her ideas of what a friend is, what a wise person or good person is, yet the poem is telling her that he is all of these things. She cannot imagine him, she cannot understand him and she cannot understand other people's reactions to him. It was only after completing the whole task that participant B18 began to think again about her reaction to the pedlar.¹⁰¹ Responding in the post-task questionnaire to the question 'Did you make any discoveries during the task?' she wrote, 'The first discovery which was very unexpected was that I had very strong feelings which were negative towards the main character - the old man. The poem was telling me how wise and kind and gentle he was, how he had sorted himself out completely by immersing himself in the power of nature, yet I felt little empathy with him and felt him cold and distant when he recounted the story of Margaret, mainly because he didn't involve himself practically in helping her when she was in trouble. This leads to the second unexpected discovery - which was that

¹⁰¹ Participant B8 demonstrated a comparable shift in attitude towards the pedlar, writing on day one: 'He does NOT DO A THING TO HELP THEM! I truly dislike it when people talk, talk, talk about human misery, but do not move a limb to help someone overcome their misery. What a weak person'. However, by day fourteen they stated that 'All in all I admire the pedlar's take on life and suffering'. In her interview, this reader commented, 'The poem made me discover how judgemental I am, which I shall try to change. He's only human, I shouldn't perhaps have been so mad with him for being so passive with Margaret.'

my very strong instincts to 'help' people needed scrutinising [. . .] I must realise that I can't make things better by my 'helping' attitude'. During her interview two weeks later, she spoke again about her initial reaction to the pedlar and how being faced with such an unrecognisable character had triggered a shift both in her way of thinking and her way of approaching certain problems in her own life:

Participant B18
Interview
<p>How did you initially feel about the character of the pedlar?</p> <p>I think it was really difficult because it was as if he was being revered as this really wise person. He is made welcome everywhere, everyone is happy to see him, but I just felt as if he was acting in an almost very superficial way as far as my standards go. Yeah, I just found that almost impossible to understand how those two things could go together, being wise and not getting involved when you come across people, just observing them. But yes, it has given me a new pathway for thinking really, it's very hard, it's a very hard path to follow, but it's also a very good path to follow, definitely for me anyway.</p> <p>You wrote in the questionnaire that you completed at the end of the task, 'I have a new idea how to face grief and sorrow now and I will experiment with it'</p> <p>Definitely sorrow, definitely things that are going wrong. To be that . . . to feel that detachment. To feel empathy, but not to feel too much, to be realistic as well, to be far more realistic. To look after myself as well as worrying about a situation. I've felt, I've built up a picture of myself which is wrong and I've had to change it dramatically over the last five years. And it was like, that I'm a really good helper, I love helping people, I'll go out of my way to help people and people like me to help them. And . . . I got into a situation where that was making me ill, I had to stop and think, and I've had to partially, I've partially undone that a little bit and this poem has made me realise that I need to go further, I've got to go even further, I've got to get rid of the idea that I need to go around helping people all the time. I've got to completely undo it, it's really unnecessary and it's really not good for you.</p> <p>When you said that you need to change your idea of yourself as 'the helper' do you think you have to replace that with something else?</p> <p>No, no I don't think so. Because by being a helper, you are also a controller. It is a way of controlling people and I really want to get away from that, from</p>

that part of me. I want to get rid of that part of me now. So no, I don't want to replace it with anything.

This supports the position that the poem has challenged this participant's understanding of what 'help' can look like and has lead her towards a more Wordsworthian stance of 'wise passiveness'. Having originally harshly judged the pedlar for not giving Margaret any practical support, she comes to see him as somebody from whom she can learn. After spending a life-time building up a 'picture' of herself that has proven to be damaging, she begins here to strip away constraining ideas of herself, casting off the role of 'helper' which is synonymous for her with the role of 'controller'. The final assertion, 'I don't want to replace it with anything', suggests that she has realised the need to try now to exist in her own bare vulnerability.

4.11. Diary Task

4.11.1. Scope: Staying in the Present

While participants taking part in the poetry task wrote extensively about their pasts, those in group two who were writing diaries without reading any poetry, focused overwhelmingly on the present. These diaries lacked breadth and depth, as noted by the group of independent cross-checkers who stated, 'Diaries are not as emotionally deep', 'Participants struggle to think so much about what is important to them', 'Diaries are less reflective and cover a less diverse set of topics', 'Diaries are event driven, the main themes are: work / life balance, exercise, family, daily routine, anticipation / anxiety', 'Participants wrote about things that were happening in their life currently', 'Participants did not delve into past memories in the same way'.

▪ B12 - Daily Life:

The majority of the diaries in this group contained prosaic accounts of participants' daily lives. The tone of these diaries was casual and chatty. Participant B12 serves as a representative example of this set of diaries which focused on family life, work concerns, leisure pursuits and current affairs (Diaries B11, B14 and B16 will not be discussed separately). There was no change in the language, tone or scope of topics that participant B12 wrote about

over the course of the two week exercise. However, during her interview she still described the task as having been ‘therapeutic’. Despite having written a prosaic and unemotional diary, she had found the process of sitting down in private each day for half an hour to slowly and silently write about what had been happening in her life to have been beneficial:

Participant B12
Day Seven
Had a fantastic day! Not done anything like bike mechanics before but I really enjoyed it. It was something my hubby wanted to do but because I’m scared to go out on my own on the bike in case I get a puncture, he enrolled me on it.
Day Ten
Well today has been a busy day and all that’s on the news – TV and radio – is politics. I think it’s getting to most people now, all the bickering, back-stabbing and in-party fighting – and these people want to govern our country.
Interview
I don’t know if it’s just the modern world where you just rush from place to place and you never just sit down with a blank page in front of you and just think. I’ve always enjoyed writing and I’ve never really done anything with it, so it was nice just to sit down and write. Yeah, I think it was just that putting things down on paper.

Regardless of the content of the diary, the task appeared to force this participant to fit a short period of quiet contemplation into her daily routine, giving her what was perhaps a rare opportunity to ‘just think’.

▪ **B13 - Avoiding the Past:**

At several points in her diary and during her interview participant B13 expressed a dislike for her own tendency to want to look back and think about the past. In her writing she seems to be both drawn to the past and fearful of the dangers of regret. At interview, she described how she had refrained from re-reading any of her diary entries for the same reason that she had tried to stop herself from looking back over her own past:

Participant B13
Day Eleven
As I get older I seem to look back more and think about choices made as a young person. I mustn't allow myself to wallow in the past - cannot change the past / turn the clock back.
Day Twelve
I rang my niece earlier to wish her luck for her new start in London on Sunday. I saw her when she was just twenty-four hours old - the first niece / nephew in my family - she is sensible and I hope he settles in soon and makes friends. She means a lot to me. I found some old pictures of her and emailed these around the family. I shall be thinking of her a lot over the next few weeks as the new intake starts at the University. I used to find this a difficult time of year, thinking back to when I started and how it could have been different, but I don't feel like this now. It has happened and I have to make the most of the situation I'm in now.
Interview
<p>There could be two consecutive days where I've written exactly the same thing because I didn't ever go back because I don't really like going back on things, so I just left it alone.</p> <p>You also wrote somewhere, 'I mustn't allow myself to wallow in the past. You can't change the past. You can't turn the clock back.'</p> <p>Yes, I try not to but sometimes it does happen. Yes, it's true. I try not to. You've made a decision or somethings gone wrong years ago. You just have to get on. You can't unpick something that has happened years ago, like to my brother five years ago, you can't say . . . you have to just move on.</p>

Her conscious mind tries to stop herself from looking back and trying to amend the past in some way, and this part of her is perhaps most dominant during the interview stage. In the pause after 'you can't say' she abruptly stops herself from articulating what it is exactly that it is now too late to say to a brother who fell into alcoholism after the death of his wife. But within the diary itself, where her unconscious mind seems to surface, she finds that she cannot stop herself from looking back into the past, she cannot simply, 'leave it alone', 'get on' or 'move on'. On day twelve there is no linear progression from the past to the present to the future, instead fragments of each are mixed together, creating a more accurate representation of what thinking and feeling across time is really like. There are a whole series of shifts in this passage: she begins by looking to the

future, then flips backwards in the second sentence to the birth of her niece, before switching to the present and then moving into her own past experiences and difficult memories of starting university. Here the past does not belong to a separate mind compartment that can be cut off from the present or the future. Instead participant B13 appears to be able to look backwards here without regret and without needing to amend the past, while simultaneously looking forwards into the future and existing in the present.

▪ **B9 - Writing vs. Speaking:**

Participant B9 primarily wrote about his daily life in his diary, but during his interview he began to discuss a particularly important period from his past. When asked whether he had ever kept a diary before, he began to speak about a six month period, twenty-five years previously, when he had written a diary whilst travelling in Alaska. Being in Alaska had been a transformative experience for him and during the interview he talked at length about what he had experienced there, becoming more and more expressive:

Participant B9
Day Two
I was thinking how important tomorrow is – referendum day! Not sure if most people grasp how big a deal it is – well that’s what they say. I don’t think the world would end if we voted to leave. I was listening to the radio and its funny how many people call in to talk about the ‘good old days’.
Day Thirteen
Last Tuesday was so hot I took off after work to go for a swim in a lake. It was wonderful and not too cold at all! It proved to me that I can just go for an evening and still get back in time for bed at a reasonable hour. I’d wanted to camp but the tent I had was broken so I headed home. Can’t wait until I can get back there again.
Interview
That Alaskan experience was a massive life-changing thing. It was a massive smack in the face really. I’d done walking in the UK, in the Lake District and Wales, but when I went to Alaska, it was so extreme, it was so big and so wild and so dangerous. It was a massive learning curve. When I came back and went to the Alps a year later, I remember thinking it was so small. I’m very aware that there was a massive spiritual element to the experience as well. The nature contact was so so strong as if it was pushing onto you. It was

almost as if - for me anyway - it was imposing, it was a threat, nature was so strong and all the senses were just impacting on you all the time. It was just so dramatic and so beautiful and so wild and so empty. It was such a life-changing experience, it was the big moment of my life, so I don't always want to talk about it. I think about it quite a lot though because it was such a big thing really.

It was during the interview stage, in conversation with a stranger, that participant B9 began to open up about this 'big moment of my life' in a way that he had not done at all within his diary. He started to reveal and also to revel in stories from his past that were particularly important to him, while in writing he had focused entirely on the small, prosaic details of his daily life. Participant B9's writing feels close to chatty speech in much of his diary, but the interview – during which he actually does speak - appeared to create the space for him to discuss more meaningful subjects and to consider the wider span of his life in a way that the diary had not.

4.11.2. Therapy: Diaries alongside Interviews

▪ B13 - Clarity of Thought:

The interview stage of this task proved to be particularly important for several participants in group two. In conversation with another person, they were able to demonstrate greater levels of self-awareness and to clarify and build upon what it was that they had gained from the writing exercise. Participant B13 is a fifty-three year old woman with five siblings who repeatedly returned to the subject of her family within her writing, as corroborated by the cross-checkers, one of whom noted that she was 'very much focused on daily routine and life events on the horizon, or worries about family and reflections on how life's events can shape a person':

Participant B13
Day Four
My mum was widowed young and my brother's wife died of cancer at thirty-nine. I wonder how I would cope - someone just not being there anymore. I've been married for more than half my lifetime and I just couldn't think what life would be like on my own. The loss of security / doing things together / doing things apart but there at the end of the day at home. I'd like to think that I

could be strong - but you just don't know. My brother had some sort of crisis and is now an alcoholic, life can be very hard and the repercussions tough.

Day Fourteen

I will be happy to see my mum and two brothers tomorrow, it'll be good to catch up. I have a work related task to do and one brother will help - although mundane I know he will be happy to help. I'll buy some food for him as 'payment' and it won't seem like charity - he has to keep his self-respect. He has had a lot of problems and I, well all of us try so hard to boost his confidence and make his life a little easier. It can be wearing at times but family is something not to be taken lightly. It can be tense when we are all together on holiday but when push comes to shove family comes first.

Interview

Had you not realised how much you think about your family?

Yeah, I hadn't realised. Because we have had some problems. I'm one of six and my youngest brother has had some problems, and it's been going on for years and he seems to be . . . it's . . . well sometimes it's a bit of a pain to just have to think about them all, but actually you have to support them and you expect that from them if you needed it. So yeah, I didn't realise because I don't really think that I am that close to the members of my family, but maybe I am more so than I thought, you know I expect more from them and I want them to expect that back from me because it's family. It did hit home a bit more than I had realised. I think it crystallised my ideas about my family and how important they are.

Her deeply-held concern for her family keeps surfacing as she writes, revealing something about her own core feelings that she had not previously – or consciously – known to be true. Writing a diary helped her to see herself with greater clarity:

It was good for me to do because it brought some things into focus. It was good at the end of the day to think about some things that had happened and to get some separation from life. Actually I've missed it. I've sort of missed having to sit down and separate myself from what's going on.

When asked whether the interview stage had added anything to her experience of writing the diary, participant B13 said, 'It helped me to explain it, say it out loud. It is one thing to write, but another to actually say it'. In speaking she was able to cash in on the discoveries she had made whilst writing. It is at the interview that participants come into connection with another person, unlike in

the poetry task, where they were writing in parallel to and in communication with another person – namely Wordsworth or his textual people – right from the beginning of the task, and where the interview stage did not appear to serve such a significant function for the participants themselves.

▪ **B15 - Seeing Yourself from the Outside:**

Participant B15 wrote a highly confessional diary in which he described - at great length – his past and present struggles with depression. He had volunteered to participate in the study with the explicit hope that writing a diary would be therapeutic for him in some way. Throughout the diary entries his tone is self-critical as he focusses almost exclusively on his problems, mistakes and anxieties. He writes about putting his Ph.D. studies on hold and taking a job at a postal sorting office and this punishing workplace provides the backdrop for much of the diary:

Participant B15
Day Two
The sorting job is exactly the kind I was looking for. It is menial, low-skilled, at nights, with absurdly long commuting. This serves as a punishment for my errors. I was however expecting it to be harder, more exhausting, stressful, fast-paced, challenging.
Day Thirteen
This week, a friend told me not to admit to anyone about my depression and treatment as it could make me a scapegoat or a psycho in the group. Perhaps I was too eager to tell everybody. He had also said that perhaps one in five people in this country are on antidepressants, but it is not something that anybody would admit. Yesterday a man at work admitted to having had clinical depression a few years ago, so I looked for an opportunity to admit my problems to him. However, the guy cringed and appeared uninterested when I told him.

Participant B15 is almost compulsively confessional in his diary, as if lacking any instinct for self-preservation. On day thirteen he shows his eagerness to communicate to somebody just what he was going through and to find some companionship through confession. At first, this participant seems to be using the diary to collect together evidence to support his own negative beliefs about himself and as he is writing there is nothing to stop him from doing this. When

asked what he had learned from writing the diary, he responded simply, 'That I am a really uninteresting person'. Yet, during his interview, he spoke about how the diary had helped him:

It was another opportunity to look at the inside, a bit at least, from the outside, so yes definitely it was useful. It did enhance my view of myself. So yes, I think it was really helpful.

The diary task appeared to help participant B15 to split himself and then to look in at himself from the outside. This is connected to participant B13's description of writing being a way to 'get some separation from life'. But while writing helped participant B13 to clarify how she saw herself in relation to the outside world and the people around her, for participant B15 writing provided a way of bringing greater clarity to his internal world. When asked whether the task had helped him with what he had described in the diary as 'an inability to understand the difference between thinking and overthinking' participant B15 said:

Participant B15
Interview
Writing the diary does help you not to overthink, partly because it takes so much time. I couldn't manage writing down everything I was thinking, so I was just touching on one problem in each entry. I think writing can definitely help to avoid overthinking, you have to turn what could have been murky as a thought, into a phrase. You have to structure the problem. The practical problem that writing is much slower than thinking forced me to focus on one main line of narrative, it limits digressions and deflections, and even when they appear, it's easier to look back at the text and return to the main line of thought. Loudly admitting a problem or concern can help to find an immediate solution. This actually reminds me of the method of psychodynamic psychotherapy that I took in the past. At first I got annoyed when I was saying a lot about my problems but finding the therapist was silent, not commenting at all or maybe only saying a few words after minutes of silence. Later I realised that just expressing my problem made me think about it in a different way, I was trying to guess what the other person might be thinking. As a result, I often find new ideas about my problems after a period of silence. Even if I'm writing for myself, I am thinking what a reader might think, so I am thinking in a different way.

This supports the position that the writing process helped participant B15 to change the way that he was thinking and to limit his tendency for rumination. Writing helped to clarify his thoughts, turning ‘murky’ ideas into distinct phrases, shaping and structuring his thinking. The pace of writing forced his mind to slow down and focus on one single ‘main line of narrative’, simplifying his overcomplicated thought-processes and cutting back on ‘digressions and deflections’.

Participant B15 compared this task to previous experiences of psychotherapy by connecting together the act of writing on the blank pages of the diary with speaking into the silence of the therapy room. In both cases there is somebody listening to and observing him from behind the silence, either the therapist or a real or imagined reader. It is the silence – or in the case of the diary, the blank page – which gets participant B15 out of his own mind and into the mind of his observer, as it encourages him to start imagining what another person might be thinking about him.

The interview stage was particularly significant for participant B15: ‘The interview massively contributed to the process of writing a diary. Having my writing explored by you and discussing it with you in an unrushed atmosphere offered me an unusual, precious, unbiased, external perspective of my deeper thoughts’. During the interview stage, participant B15 was no longer simply imagining ‘what a reader might think’; he was faced with his actual reader and had to listen to them reading his own words back to him, which by extension also turned him into his own reader. While for other participants this process of re-reading seemed to have only served as a way of jogging their memories about what they had written, participant B15 responded strikingly to having a passage of his own diary read back to him:

Participant B15
Interview
<p>Ok, I’m going to read the bit you mentioned earlier where you were at work and were trying to stop yourself from crying in front of everybody.</p> <p>Oh that was really a hard moment. Oh this was actually quite a dramatic thing. This was well, the tip of the iceberg of my feelings.</p>

'She opened the truck bay gate and went for her break without setting the platform. I was busy talking with a mate and my trolley fell into the gap. She was recalled and reluctantly finished the setting while I dragged my trolley and hid far from her, blushing with shame. I carried on working with eyes full of tears, I struggled not to actually start crying. I decided I could not hide in the toilet, I had to do the work. I kept making errors and I was mortified that apparently I am too stupid to even push a trolley. For the rest of the shift I was on the verge of crying, trying to put on a sardonic smile. A mate asked if I am ok and later even the girl asked if I am managing, when she declined my question, if it is in doubt, I said: yes, it apparently is. I started to tell her that it had not been a good day, but then we were separated. What is the actual difference between managing and not? I have not thrown myself at the floor crying, and I have said that I am managing, but this is not a real difference. It is just that I could not say that I am not managing: It is not a conventionally accepted answer to such a question. I realised I am actually happy and grateful for her caring question. Had I planned it deliberately, this would have been a gross manipulation. It was however a sincere and genuine cry for sympathy.'

Oh yes, this was actually quite an emotionally packed moment. Yes, I was actually heading to the staff room but I thought if everyone saw that I was crying and upset, it would be making a scene. Everyone would think, 'He went somewhere to cry'. Sitting with the others and trying not to cry would be the better thing to do. Yeah, it was . . . I was helpless. It would be worse to hide though. I have been thinking about working in a café, but it's obvious to me now that I couldn't work in a café having this problem, I couldn't start crying if I had to serve customers. This made it clear that I shouldn't think about working in a café and that hiding in a warehouse job is a good place for me.

How did it feel hearing me read your diary?

It felt better actually . . . yes.

Why do you think that?

Let me think . . . the fact that somebody deemed it interesting has changed how I feel about it. Well, this was a bit of a dramatic moment. It wasn't like I structured what I wrote, I had some points and then it just flowed, what I had to say. This was an important thing for me, it doesn't sound that boring like the other parts. Obviously I have a bias from having also lived this life.

It was a difficult moment and as interviewer I felt concern that hearing the passage read aloud would lead to the participant becoming engulfed again in the initial feelings of despair that the incident had triggered. But, hearing his own

words being re-read by somebody else appeared to provide participant B15 with another, arguably superior way of seeing himself from the outside:

Participant B15
Interview
<p>Does hearing it again help to process the experience in any way? You lived it, then you wrote about it, then I read it, now we are here talking about it.</p> <p>Yes, actually I am quite surprised about how much we have really processed it. I'm really glad, I'm really happy that this has happened. Actually I am impressed, I didn't expect it to look like this. I thought I would submit the questionnaires. I wasn't thinking that the text would really be read at all. I'm grateful for this study, for this therapy for me.</p> <p>Can you imagine that this diary was written by somebody else and not you, what would you think of this person? What advice would you give them?</p> <p>That's a good question, I'm not sure.</p> <p>Would you want to be his friend?</p> <p>Yes . . . but I would be a bit irritated by his . . . I would struggle. He wouldn't be very interesting</p> <p>What advice would you give this person?</p> <p>I don't know . . . I don't know . . .</p> <p>Imagine if you had a son and your son had written this diary. If you read it, do you think you would agree with him and say, 'yes, you do deserve to be punished'?</p> <p>Perhaps not. I would tell him to try to look for a better job, to go to the gym, to read some books. That's actually a hard thing. I'm thinking of my own father and I don't see him as a good role model. I think a lot of what I am doing is trying to make myself different . . . well, it's not like he was horrible, but he was very structured. I'm uncomfortable about my own father and I wouldn't want to be such a father to my own son. Well, maybe it's hard to . . . I think maybe only a small minority of people would think differently, but it is still a challenge. The challenge to be different, in some meaningful way, to your parents.</p> <p>Well, sometimes I have to stop and remind myself to care for myself. I wouldn't mistreat my daughter if I had one, so why am I mistreating myself? I wouldn't speak to a friend like that, so why am I speaking to myself like that? I think that's why I was asking you, what advice you would give this person if it wasn't you, because it's very easy to be hard</p>

on yourself but it's sometimes harder to be hard on somebody else outside of you.

I see. I haven't thought about this, in this way. This is a good thing to hear and to think about. I will try to remember this.

Participant B15 is beginning to see how he might separate the version of his self that is inside the diary from the self that is on the outside reading the diary, and to find some room to manoeuvre in the space between these two selves. Writing can perhaps lead to the development of more objective and less punishing attitudes by creating a way for somebody to look in at themselves from an external perspective, particularly when combined with a secondary process of being read.¹⁰² The combination of diary and interview resembles certain 'two chair' therapeutic interventions, in that it encourages participants to change perspective and to see themselves from the outside. 'Two chair' psychotherapeutic techniques allow patients to physically move between two chairs and as they do so to take on different mental positions. Sitting in one position they have the chance to speak to a person or a part of their own self that they imagine to be sitting in the chair opposite; then by moving to sit in that opposite chair they can embody the person or part of themselves that they have been addressing and begin to view themselves from that alternative perspective.¹⁰³

4.12. Comparison of the Two Tasks: B17 and B18

Participants B17 and B18 were asked to complete the diary task one month after they had finished the initial poetry task. These two participants therefore followed a ten week programme:

¹⁰² The participant is beginning to show a greater capacity for perspective taking. Daniel C. Batson, et al., 'Perspective taking: Imagining how another feels versus imagining how you would feel', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23.7 (1997), 751- 8.

¹⁰³ S. H. Kellogg, 'Transformational Chair-work: Five ways of using therapeutic dialogues', *NYSIPA Notebook*, 19.4 (2007), 8-9.

S.C. Paivo, and L.S. Greenberg, 'Resolving "unfinished business": Efficacy of experiential therapy using empty-chair dialogue', *Journal of Counselling and Clinical Psychology*, 63 (1995), 419-25.

Week 1 - 2: Poetry Task
 Week 3: Break
Week 4: Poetry Task Interview
 Week 5 - 6: Break
Week 7 - 8: Diary Task
 Week 9: Break
Week 10: Diary Task Interview

4.12.1. Scope: B17 Breadth and Depth of Thinking

During the poetry task participant B17 had identified strongly with the poem and had appeared to demonstrate a degree of blended thinking in his writing. As the task progressed the poem seeped into his life and his life began to infiltrate the poem. This participant wrote almost exclusively about his past during the poetry task. In contrast, during the diary task he wrote exclusively about the present, focusing primarily on family life, his work and daily routine, just as the majority of participants who completed this exercise had also done:

Participant B17
Day Twelve
Saturday is always a bleary-eyed day for me. A day of rest after the week's exertions. Lots of newspaper reading and drifting around supermarkets like a wandering ghost. I love this domesticity, with my wife leading me, doing ordinary, everyday things, just like everybody else and I love being with my wife.

The writing in many of these plain diaries, including this one, seems closer to speech, yet the act of inscription – almost regardless of content - turns what is seemingly prosaic into something that is potentially therapeutic. During his interview participant B17 said of the second task, *'It felt good to put some things down on paper rather than just thinking about it. It's good to put some things down'*. Arguably, writing served as a way to solidify thoughts, as previously noted in relation to participant B12 who found 'just putting things down on paper' to be therapeutic.

Participant B17 is an artist and a large proportion of his diary focused on the progress of his latest painting, a portrait of his son:

Participant B17
Day Eleven
In my studio I continued the drawing of my son, doing his hands and knees and legs. It's just his face left now, his look of confusion which saddens me, but will my emotion make it a better painting? I don't know. Perhaps I've had a very decadent life. I've also got the baby to draw, I've never drawn a baby before. It's funny that all the emotional charge that the image of my son has for me, maybe the unknown child could end up as the most powerful part of the painting, who knows?

During his interview participant B17 spoke at greater length about the importance of the 'unknown' in his work:

Participant B17
Interview
I keep going on about this but when I'm painting what to me is important and the things that I feel are really working well or really have some meaning are the unconscious stuff or accidents and I can't do that in writing, I wouldn't know how to start, I wouldn't be able to do that. In painting these things occur through the action of painting which in some way connect with something that is not really conscious, but which makes sense to me in another way. Those are the bits that are most interesting to me in anybody's work. For me, painting is the only way that I can get to those small places that are unexpected and not contrived.

This was not something that the diary enabled him to do and he found himself frequently confined to writing about more prosaic topics:

I couldn't express myself fully [. . .] I could only be superficial, I could only write about things that I know about and sometimes I paint about things that I don't even know about, I don't know where they come from.
--

During his second interview, participant B17 compared his experiences of both tasks:

With the poem I was dealing with other people's thoughts and words, I had to decipher those words, I had to make sense of them, whereas when I was doing the diary, they were my own thoughts, I knew exactly what I was thinking, it was just a matter of writing them down. There were different problems for each one.

In this diary you only wrote about things that were happening in the present, whereas in the poetry diary you wrote almost exclusively about the past.

But again that was because with the poem I was dealing with other people's words and the words were conjuring up memories, I wasn't dealing with my own words and my own words could only conjure up what I could see in front of me in the present, whereas I was reading Wordsworth's words and he was talking about something else and that set my memory going. The poem didn't make me feel anything about what could happen in the future or what was happening to me now, it only made me think about the past. The poem made you think about your whole life, not just what happened today and once you start thinking about your whole life, you start to go much deeper don't you. You start to think about the things that are really stuck in your mind from fifty years ago or more. Whereas a diary I think is much more superficial. There was much more scope for deep thinking with the poem. You can't help getting into a deeper level you know.

Participant B17 had struggled to get beyond the surface detail of his immediate surroundings and daily experiences when he was writing his second diary. In contrast, during the poetry task, the poem itself appeared to have taken him out of the present and into deeper and often unexpected areas. The poem seemed to expand the scope of participant B17 thoughts and guide him beyond conscious thought and into areas of perhaps only partially known but deeply held memory and feeling. This is connected to the way in which the interview stage had encouraged participant B9 to speak about his whole life, while he had only written in his diary about his present. In this respect the dynamic of the interview stage of the diary task more closely resembles the reading and writing stage of the poetry task. The interview elicited more from participants than the solitary task of writing in the diary had, just as the poetry elicited more from participants than writing daily without a stimulus had.

4.12.2. Therapy: B18 Breaking Free and Getting Stuck

During the poetry task participant B18 had initially found the character of the pedlar difficult to understand or accept. However, as the task progressed her attitude shifted and she began to take on board the more Wordsworthian approach of 'wise passiveness' that the pedlar advocates. One month after completing the poetry task participant B18 began the diary task. She wrote six

entries over a period of fourteen days with an eight day pause between the fourth and fifth entries. She felt unable to continue the task beyond this point and submitted her six diary entries before being interviewed two weeks later. The six diary entries are full of anxiety and raw emotion:

Participant B18
Day Five
On Thursday I started off feeling quite anxious. I started worrying about going down to look after my mother. I booked the bus so it made the event more real. Then in the afternoon I spoke to my mother. She wanted to talk for ages. The way my mother was talking to me made me feel quite repulsed, it's like I'm suddenly her favourite child, after only a few weeks ago I wasn't good enough to look after her. So when I lay down to have a sleep, my thoughts were very dark. I was thinking that when my mother dies, I wouldn't go to the funeral. I didn't want to be with my family. I decided that I had been in touch too much recently with my family. My family is TOXIC.

In the post-task questionnaire participant B18 explained why she had needed to stop writing the diary, 'By writing about things as they are actually happening it has felt like I'm talking about them too early - even if I've written about them one or two days later. So I have to stop. I hope you understand. I found it difficult to share when the emotions I was experiencing were so raw. It made me feel vulnerable and wasn't the way I would normally resolve my problems'. She felt as if she had been setting down her feelings prematurely by writing them down in the diary. During her interview she confirmed this:

Did it feel a bit too permanent when you wrote something down in the diary?
Yes, exactly, because I know that they are temporary feelings. After it had been written and sent off and read, I could be feeling much better, but I had no way of saying that's all gone now.

The interview did however provide participant B18 with a second chance to readdress the perceived permanency of what she had written: 'It was good to talk in person about the struggle I'd had in writing the diary and to think about it again with some hindsight'. The interview stage appeared to create the opportunity for this participant - who had struggled to write the diary - to say in a different way what it was that she had not been able to write. During the

interview participant B18 was able to redeem something 'good' from the task. After the rash, raw, primary emotion of her diary, the interview seemed to create the chance for secondary, contemplative and more objective thinking. It was during the interview that participant B18 described the gradual, internal process that she had learnt to rely on as a way of stripping back her problems and calming her more extreme, primary emotions. This was a strategy that she much preferred to the overly conscious permanency of writing:

Even if the problem is still there, you do, after a few nights, gradually, gradually, gradually, especially after a few nights you gradually feel like you can cope with a problem. And then it's almost like seeing like you say, the bare bones, it's like seeing the skeleton of the problem and you can deal with it. Instead of having all the crying and the worrying you know, that's all kind of calmed down and then, ok this is the problem, the problem is still there but look I'm still alive. I'm still ok, in a way. Let's see what's going to happen next.

By writing down what she was feeling before this process had had a chance to take place within her, participant B18 found herself trapped within a cycle of rumination. This was quite unlike participant B15 who had found writing to be an effective tool for reducing rumination and who –as previously discussed – spoke at interview about how the slow pace of writing had limited his own capacity for 'digressions and deflections' and had helped him to focus on 'one main line of narrative'. In contrast, writing did nothing to help participant B18 get out of her spiral of negative thinking:

I latch onto small things and turn them into big dramas in my head. And I know that, it just happens over a period of a few weeks if I haven't had anything positive to change the way I'm feeling then I carry on thinking in a negative way, and a more and more negative way.

Unlike participant B10, who had struggled with the task and refused to submit her final diary, fearing that she had produced an 'untruthful' account of herself,¹⁰⁴ participant B18 explained during her interview that while she had

¹⁰⁴ Participant B10 completed her diary yet was not willing to submit it for analysis. Instead, she agreed to be interviewed about her experience of doing the task. During her interview she explained why she had not wanted her diary to be read:

I did stick to the instructions rigidly, and I did want to give it time - two weeks wasn't it? - to see if you know, anything shifted or became valuable. Oh, and that's right, I'd been asked to

found it damaging to write about her raw emotions as they were unfolding, there was no alternative for her than to be truthful:

I couldn't not write what was happening to me, I couldn't not write the truth, I couldn't just write little bits of news of what was happening to me that day because I didn't want to be dishonest and superficial.

Towards the end of her second interview, participant B18 compared the two tasks:

Well the poetry task was very structured. It focused you on what was being said in the poem, so it focused your mind on things that were not necessarily happening at the time, it focused . . . well, it brought up a lot of memories, and it kind of kept you thinking outside yourself in a way, you were trying to understand the poem, you were studying the poem and trying to get out of the poem as much as you could. I liked doing it and it was a real challenge. Writing the diary wasn't a challenge, it didn't have that feel at all.

do a similar thing before, I think about eight or nine years ago, I went to a counsellor for a little while and she did sort of CBT stuff and I dunno, talking therapies, chatting, she had given me something similar to do. It was first thing in the morning, before you do anything else, you give yourself half an hour and you just write whatever's in your head, and then you just tear it up and throw it away, you don't keep it or look back at it. It's just kind of like a flushing out exercise. I remember thinking about that a little bit as I was doing this. So, I did stick with it, but to be honest I found it terribly unhelpful and I can't really pinpoint why. There was this awareness in me of having to write about something important, which I did give a lot of thought to. I felt like I was going backwards, almost through a mental filing cabinet to find stuff and to be honest it felt like I was making it up. It felt like I was telling a story and through the writing it felt like it was out of date and untruthful. I remember writing actually, I have kept it, even though I've said you can't have it. It's not just me being terribly private, it didn't feel truthful and it didn't feel like I was doing anything worthwhile [. . .] I did try to write about stuff that I enjoy, because that's important - where I find joy and pleasure - but it just felt a bit silly, maybe a bit forced [. . .] wrong is I guess the best word I can come up with, and almost like it felt forcibly revealing, not of any fact that I'm ashamed of, just that I wouldn't want to show myself doing something that didn't feel truthful and didn't really give me anything. I wouldn't want to give that to someone. Invasive isn't the right word, but I think I would feel exposed in some way.

Participant B10 had felt pressurised by the requirement to write about something 'important' and was concerned that what she had chosen to write about seemed forced or untruthful. Unlike her previous experience of 'therapeutic writing' as part of a programme of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, where writing was used to 'flush out' mental clutter and nothing she wrote was ever re-read or kept, this diary felt worryingly permanent. She did not withhold her diary because it was too revealing but because she felt that it revealed an untruthful version of herself.

Participant B18 had not got stuck within her habitual cycle of rumination and negative thinking when she was working on the poetry task because the poetry 'kept you thinking outside yourself in a way', but during the second diary task, without the poetry to help her to alter her perspective, she got stuck back inside herself within that cycle of rumination.

4.13. Conclusion

- This study produced evidence that suggests that the poetry triggered particular capacities and qualities of thought that are not necessarily available elsewhere in everyday life and which do not seem to be triggered by mere information processing.
- The poetry used in this experiment appeared to take participants quickly into the thick of their inner, emotional lives and led them to instinctively explore areas of emotional depth and complexity, to shift between different mental positions and to demonstrate different degrees of mental blending and thus move away from automatic or default mode and towards potentially healthier patterns of thought.
- In accordance with Wordsworth's commitment to the avoidance of emotional wastage, several participants who read 'The Ruined Cottage' seemed to transform their own fixed ideas or unprocessed traumas, not getting rid of emotional matter as Stoic therapy would demand, but instead putting it to some use within their own minds.
- The poetry appeared to take participants out of the present moment making them think about the wider span of their whole lives. The poetry triggered memories and therefore seemed to transport participants into more unconscious or unexpected areas of thinking as they wrote. They appeared to be guided by the poem to reflect upon parts of their lives that those who were writing diaries without any literary stimulus did not think about, in particular, specific moments from their childhoods.
- The evidence of this study suggests that the poetry introduced certain participants to different ways of thinking, for example participant B18 met with ideas of wise passiveness within the poem which were completely contrary to her usual way of being. The poem appeared to

have a widening effect on certain participants' thinking. In contrast, participants working on the diary task could only really think about what was immediately around them or what they already knew or thought. They appeared less likely to have new thoughts or new ideas when writing the diary and less likely to change their ways of thinking over the course of the task.

- The interview stage of the diary task often seemed to help to elicit more from participants than writing the actual diary had. During the interviews, participants spoke about much more than just their daily routines. They often began to talk in detail about the past and about the wider span of their whole lives. They gave more of an overview of their lives during the interviews, whilst in the diaries they had mainly written from within their own small, daily concerns. At the secondary stage of the interviews, thoughts which had become their text had to be translated back into speech and shared or exchanged in some way with another person. The interviewer, when reading the diaries, enabled participants to consider what they looked like from the outside and to embody that external perspective. This suggests that participants were no longer thinking and writing in isolation, and that they could therefore begin to see themselves through the eyes of their reader and to also become their own readers.
- Several participants taking part in the diary task found it difficult to get out of their repetitive or self-critical thinking habits (namely participants B18 and B9). Participant B17 also described how he had only been able to 'write about things I know about' during the diary task and yet had been surprised during the poetry task by the unexpected memories that the poem had triggered. Both tasks are however most successful when they allow participants to gain a wider perspective, shift their mental positioning and to revise their view of themselves.
- In the poetry task there appeared to be an exchange and a conversation taking place between the poem and the reader. Both tasks seem to work best where there are exchanges taking place, or where more than one mind is at work. At the interview stage of the diary task there is much

greater opportunity for this to happen than at the initial writing stage.

The interview therefore seemed to be more significant to participants taking part in the diary task than to those who had done the poetry task.

- There are successful places within the diaries themselves, namely those belonging to participants B13 and B15, which provide evidence to support the position that a process of mental separation is occurring and that participants are beginning to see themselves from the outside in ways that are helpful rather than merely distanced. Rather than exchanges occurring between two people (the poet and reader or the participant and interviewer) there are moments of exchange within these diaries between two parts of the same person.
- Both the poetry task and the interview stage of the diary task contain a second voice and in this respect they are connected to the dynamic of psychoanalysis. In an interview in which the psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips discusses the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis he describes the importance of two minds working together, 'In conversation things can be metabolized and digested through somebody else — I say something to you and you can give it back to me in different forms — whereas you'll notice that your own mind is very often extremely repetitive. It is very difficult to surprise oneself in one's own mind. The vocabulary of one's self-criticism is so impoverished and clichéd. We are at our most stupid in our self-hatred' (*Paris Review*). The literary form that Adam Phillips identifies as closest to psychoanalysis is the essay, and for him the most important quality that writing an essay calls for in a person is 'to be reflexively self-revising' (*Paris Review*). Participants in all groups were allowed to write about almost anything that they wanted to, yet for some participants the act of writing felt too permanent to allow self-revision to happen. Instead evidence suggests that it was the help of either the poetry - which appeared to take readers out of their own daily, habitual thinking patterns - or the interviewer, which allowed these moments of 'reflexive self-revision' to take place, which were often also moments of surprise for participants.

4.14. Limitations and Implications

- An independent measures design was used for this study to prevent order effects that could potentially have been caused by participants completing one task after another. This type of design eased recruitment by reducing the amount of time and work required of each participant and helped to increase the quantity of data collected. In a cross-over or repeated measures design participants would have had to commit themselves to spend twice as much time on the study in order to complete both tasks, potentially resulting in participants dropping out, losing motivation or failing to comply with the requirements of the study. The third group, consisting of two participants who did both of the tasks was however included in the study to mitigate against the limitations of an independent measures design - namely the problem of participant variables - and allowed for some initial direct comparisons to be made between the two different tasks.
- Although participants were asked to spend fourteen consecutive days on their task, this did prove difficult and the majority of people across all groups needed longer to complete the work. Participants in group one took eighteen days on average to complete the fourteen sections of poetry, although participant B2 spent three months in total intermittently working on the task. Participants in group two took twenty days on average to complete the required fourteen diary entries. Participant B18 did not feel able to complete the required fourteen entries and instead submitted her diary after seven days. Participant B10 completed the task but was not willing to submit the diary she had written for analysis, and was instead simply interviewed.
- One limitation of this study was that only two participants completed both diary tasks, while the remaining sixteen participants completed either the poetry diary or the plain diary task. A repeated measures design could have been used instead, with half the participants completing the poetry diary first and then the plain diary task, while the rest of the group completed the two tasks in the reverse order. However, it would have been much harder to recruit and retain participants for

such a study and to ensure that participants remained focused and committed to writing on a daily basis for twice as long as in the current study.

- Quantitative analysis was not used to interpret the results of this experiment because the data that was collected was so varied, detailed and in many cases extremely nuanced. Thematic analysis as well as literary analysis was deemed much more useful in dealing with this kind of data.
- To mitigate against researcher bias, a cross-checking group of three post-graduates from The Institute of Psychology, Health and Society independently analysed a selection of the data collected in this experiment. It would have been preferable for a larger group to have looked at the entirety of the data, but time constraints and work load pressures on the group had to be taken into account. A larger group could have included those with specific clinical experience (e.g. a psychoanalyst or a cognitive behavioural therapist) who could have commented specifically on the potential therapeutic implications of the study.
- In a range of cases, the poetry diaries very quickly and easily led to participants thinking more deeply about their lives, casting off default modes of thinking and displaying a different quality of thought. Future research studies could further investigate the potential therapeutic effects of the poetry diary task on specific groups of people (i.e. those suffering from depression, the bereaved). Additional studies could also look at responses to the poetry diary task in comparison to a range of other CBT or mindfulness exercises, with the aim of developing the poetry diary into a practical therapeutic tool. In such studies, wellbeing or depression scales could be used to provide quantifiable evidence of any therapeutic impact or changes in participants' mood over time.

5.

George Eliot: A Novel Therapy

This chapter establishes the connections between George Eliot and Wordsworth, focusing in particular on her first three novels: *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*, all of which can be read as prose transmutations of Wordsworth's poetry.

A second relationship – that of George Eliot with the new discipline of psychology - is then examined, with a focus on the ways in which her realist novels can be considered as literary translations of this new science. D.H. Lawrence said 'It was George Eliot who started it all [. . .] It was she who started putting all the action inside'.¹⁰⁵ This chapter argues that George Eliot's pioneering inward turn is psychology in action, and more specifically, a kind of psychology that can only exist because she is a novelist.

A third practical experiment follows, exploring the effects of George Eliot's density and mobility of thought upon a group of modern readers.

Finally, George Eliot's own model of therapy is examined, in light of the thoughts and evidence gathered in the previous sections. It is a model informed by the philosopher Spinoza and most clearly set out in her final two novels *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.

5.1. George Eliot and William Wordsworth

In *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, Stephen Gill describes George Eliot as 'Wordsworth's ideal reader',¹⁰⁶ so in-tune was she to the poet's ideas. In turn, while working on *Silas Marner*, George Eliot imagined Wordsworth as her own ideal reader, admitting in a letter to her publisher that 'it was not a story she believed anyone would be interested in, but myself, (since William Wordsworth is dead)' (*WV*, p.161).

¹⁰⁵ Michael Black, *D.H. Lawrence: The Early Philosophic Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.12.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and The Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.147; hereafter cited as *WV*.

This sense of concordance with Wordsworth had been a steady feature in George Eliot's life, from her youth, when she first read his poetry. In 1839, on her twentieth birthday, the then Mary Ann Evans wrote of her admiration for 'our incomparable Wordsworth' in a letter to a friend, remarking that, 'I have been so self-indulgent as to possess myself of Wordsworth at full length, and I thoroughly like much of the contents of the first three volumes [. . .] I never before met with so many of my own feelings, expressed just as I could like them'.¹⁰⁷ In Wordsworth she had found a compatriot in feeling. Margaret Hamans states, 'Had there been no Wordsworth, Eliot would still have discovered for herself what are commonly taken to be their shared beliefs in the value of childhood and rural life and in the necessity of constant interchange between feeling and knowledge'.¹⁰⁸ She argues that Wordsworth's poetry deals in foundational truths which belong deep within human roots and are already known at some level by many of his readers. The relationship between Wordsworth and George Eliot is therefore not simply one of linear transfer or passive inheritance from the poet to the novelist, and is all the more Wordsworthian in nature because of this. For as we have seen, Wordsworth did not believe in mimetic followers, or in the possibility of a literal handing on of messages and meanings. Nonetheless, his work as summarised in the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' did create a revolution in relation to art's relation to common life. In that sense George Eliot was indeed his prose successor in the name of realism – in its aspirations in both depicting and in turn having an effect upon ordinary existence.

In her first three novels, George Eliot announced herself as a descendent of Wordsworth and committed herself to the principles that he set out in the great Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*: 'The principal object then proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men' ('Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*', *Prose*, i, p.123). George Eliot shared Wordsworth's conception of what literature

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Pinney, 'George Eliot's Reading of Wordsworth', *The Victorian Newsletter*, 24 (1963), 20-2 (20).

¹⁰⁸ Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.121.

‘really’ should be for and what it should contain. Prior to writing her first novel she had asserted her own belief in the importance of ordinary lives and voices in her collection of short stories *Scenes of Clerical Life*: ‘Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones’.¹⁰⁹

George Eliot published *Adam Bede* in 1859, yet set her novel sixty years earlier in 1799. Her characters are therefore contemporaries of the younger Wordsworth and inhabit the same world as the characters of his early poems. 1799 was the year after Wordsworth and Coleridge published their first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. In *Adam Bede*, Captain Arthur Donnithorne offers his opinion of the revolutionary collection of poems. In doing so he becomes one of the part-disparaging, part-baffled readers that Wordsworth addresses in his preface, ‘they will look around for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title’ (‘Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*’, *Prose*, i, p.123):

I’ve got a book I meant to bring you god mamma. It came down in a parcel from London the other day. I know you are fond of queer wizard-like stories. It’s a volume of poems, *Lyrical Ballads*: most of them seem to be twaddling stuff: but the first is in a different style – *The Ancient Mariner* is the title. I can hardly make head or tail of it as a story, but it’s a strange striking thing.¹¹⁰

Arthur’s dismissive comments mark him out as non-Wordsworthian. This is an early warning-sign within the novel. His inability to grasp the meaning and value of these poems of ordinary people foreshadows his later inability to see his lowly lover Hetty as much more than an exciting amusement.

Significantly, George Eliot read *The Excursion* twice whilst writing *Adam Bede* and begins the novel with an epigraph from Book VI of the poem:

¹⁰⁹ George Eliot, ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton’, in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), ed. by Graham Handley (London: Everyman, 1994), p.41.

¹¹⁰ George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859), ed. by Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2001), pp.59-60; hereafter cited as ‘*Adam Bede*’.

So that ye may have
Clear images before your gladden'd eyes
Of nature's unambitious underwood
And flowers that prosper in the shade. And when
I speak of such among the flock as swerved
Or fell, those only shall be singled out
Upon whose lapse, or error, something more
Than brotherly forgiveness may attend. (*Excursion*, VI, 651-8)

After Shakespeare, Wordsworth was the writer that George Eliot most commonly drew upon for epigraphs and mottos for her novels. By collecting together the guiding voices of those authors who had come before her and placing them within her work in this way, she builds the sense that her novels are part of a much larger collective endeavour at thinking. By beginning her first novel with these lines from *The Excursion*, George Eliot places her story within the same half-obsured shade inhabited by the ordinary people who meant so much to Wordsworth. These lines are spoken by Wordsworth's pastor as he guides the pedlar, poet and recluse around his churchyard, telling the stories of the people buried there, including that of Ellen the young woman deserted by her lover when pregnant and now buried alongside her dead child. The story of Ellen resonates with that of Hetty in *Adam Bede*, a young woman also abandoned by her lover when pregnant, and eventually sentenced to death for the murder of her new born baby. 'Something more' than merely 'forgiveness' was needed in such extremity.

In his Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explained why the modest and often ignored lives of ordinary people were so important to him and how – through them – he was able to get closer to the 'elemental feelings' and 'primary' forces that he believed to be at the core of all humans, in contrast to the secondary language and secondary consciousness in which they were too often masked:

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and

more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. ('Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*', *Prose*, i, p.125)

Wordsworth's insistence on an almost prosaic bareness and simplicity of expression within his poetry was in part due to his commitment to bringing these 'elementary feelings' to the foreground, in opposition to the fancy artifice of conventional 'poetic' discourse.

George Eliot's second novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, was published in 1860 and has been described as 'her most Wordsworthian novel' (*WV*, p.157). The story of Maggie Tulliver explores the deep-rooted ties that are forged in childhood and which continue, amidst disruption, to resonate throughout adulthood. In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot takes what Wordsworth identified in *The Prelude* as the 'first born affinities that fit / Our new existence to existing things / And in our dawn of being, constitute / The bond of union betwixt life and joy' (*Prelude*, I, 586-9) or in 'Intimations of Immortality' as 'those first affections / Those shadowy recollections' which 'Are yet the fountain-light of all our day / Are yet a master-light of all our seeing' ('Intimations of Immortality', *PW*, iv, l.149-53, p.283) and charts their growth and development over time within Maggie Tulliver's mind, beyond those first stages.

The novel begins with a neo-Wordsworthian narrator – akin to George Eliot herself – standing on a bridge beside the river Floss, looking across at the mill that Maggie and her family once lived in, remembering and calling back into being the past world in which the events of the novel, that are yet to be told, take place:

Just by the red-roofed town the tributary Ripple flows with a lively current into the Floss. How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low, placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving. I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge. And this is Dorlcote Mill. I must stand a minute or two here on the bridge and look at it, though the clouds are threatening and it is far on in the afternoon. Even in this leafless time of departing February it is pleasant to look at – perhaps the chill damp season adds a charm to the trimly kept, comfortable dwelling-house, as old as the elms and chestnuts that shelter it from the northern blast.¹¹¹

This wandering narrator is reminiscent of both the poet and the pedlar in ‘The Ruined Cottage’, two characters who are moved by the specific power of the place in which they find themselves, to tell stories of the past. The epigraph to *Adam Bede* explicitly positioned that novel within the ‘shade’ of ‘nature’s unambitious underwood’, and here, on the opening page of *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator’s gaze falls upon ‘the elms and chestnuts’ which ‘shelter’ the family home, placing the novel within that same Wordsworthian space. The river is a continuous force that runs throughout the novel, spanning past and present. In this place these basic elements of water, stone and trees constitute a language that provides a direct route back into the past. With each repetition of ‘I remember’, deeply held feelings are surfacing, the past is reclaiming this space and reasserting its claim on this person’s emotions, creating in this pause an almost trance-like state of contemplation, ‘I must stand a minute or two here on the bridge and look at it’.

In the same way, the childhood experiences of Maggie and Tom Tulliver have a foundational power and leave an imprint on them that is distinctly Wordsworthian:

Life did change for Tom and Maggie, and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always

¹¹¹ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), ed. by A.S. Byatt (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), p.1; hereafter cited as ‘*The Mill on the Floss*’.

make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it – if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves on the grass, the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows, the same redbreasts that we used to call ‘God’s birds’ because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known and loved because it is known?

The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyes speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet – what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home scene? These familiar flowers, these well remembered bird-notes, this sky with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows – such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. (*The Mill on the Floss*, p.38)

Maggie’s childhood relationships – both with people and the natural world – form a template or touchstone which inform the rest of her life. The small details of the natural world, which return again and again, become lodged in the psyche, ‘the same flowers that come up again every spring [. . .] the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows, the same redbreasts’. The repetitions of nature provide a child with the first model of continuity within change and as such, one of their first models of love. These tiny details of nature are experienced in childhood on a grander scale, felt as they are with ‘tiny fingers’. They become an integral part of each person and are the building blocks out of which personal thinking can develop, ‘such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language laden with all the subtle inextricable associations’. The shift in this passage from the specifics of Tom and Maggie’s childhood experiences back to the wider, plural perspective of the voice which

opened the novel, leads to this general and distinctly Wordsworthian principle of the rooted growth of the human imagination.

But as George Eliot's characters change from children into adults, Wordsworth's elemental view of the world comes under strain. The foundations that were laid in Maggie's childhood are tested, and the original template of love that she learnt from nature as a child is overwhelmed by a tangle of complicated and competing forces and feelings. George Eliot's prose representation of the thick, complex density of adult life is a departure from Wordsworth's bareness of expression and is a characteristic which takes her deeper into the realm of inner psychology. Yet still in this shift George Eliot does not relinquish or replace Wordsworth's primary forces. They remain embedded within her characters, struggling for the expression of their birth-right, but becoming messily compounded with all the accumulated matter of adult life.

So it is that in book 3, entitled 'The Great Temptation', Maggie tries to disentangle herself from an impossible love affair with Stephen Guest. He is a man expected to marry Maggie's cousin Lucy, and Maggie is herself virtually engaged to her childhood friend Phillip Wakem – this is the crucial second stage in love and life:

She was silent for a few moments, with her eyes fixed on the ground; then she drew a deep breath and said, looking up at him with solemn sadness, 'Oh, it is difficult – life is very difficult! It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling; but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us – the ties that have made others dependent on us- and would cut them in two. If life were quite easy and simple, as it might have been in paradise, and we could always see that one being first towards whom – I mean, if life did not make duties for us before love comes, love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other. But I see – I feel it is not so now; there are things we must renounce in life; some of us must resign love. Many things are difficult and dark to me, but I see one thing quite clearly: that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural, but surely pity and faithfulness and

memory are natural too. And they would live in me still and punish me if I did not obey them. (*The Mill on the Floss*, p.461)

There are fleeting moments of simplicity during Maggie's childhood when it feels as if she is in paradise, such is the natural ease with which she loves her brother, her father and her cousin Lucy. But in adulthood, there are no simple relationships. The direct lines that connect people together have become tangled up and a complicated series of equations have replaced the basic bonds of Maggie's childhood: later feelings continually 'come across' the early straight lines of her relationships. The syntax, the story and the inter-relations all become more and more complex until the very web of *Middlemarch* is the culmination. Maggie cannot be a sister to Tom or a cousin to Lucy or a friend to Phillip if she is to be the wife of Stephen. Those first three relationships are so deeply rooted in her childhood, they form the very foundations upon which her life has been built, that to jeopardise them would be to put her own psyche in jeopardy. While Stephen tries to argue that their love should have a natural supremacy over the conflicting claims of other people's feelings, for Maggie, love does not exist in isolation. There are relations and claims 'before love comes'. In the adult realm her love for Stephen is bisected by pity and faithfulness for Lucy and Phillip, and these feelings are as equally rooted in nature as love itself and therefore equally impossible for Maggie to dismiss. 'Love is natural', but in the adult world of George Eliot's prose, the sentence cannot end there, and 'but surely [. . .] too' insists that the full difficulty of incompatible realities be faced. This is a sign of George Eliot's need for a complex syntax.

5.2. George Eliot and the New Discipline of Psychology

George Eliot was closely associated with several prominent thinkers who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, played an important role in the development of the newly emerging discipline of psychology.

Alexander Bain was a leading mathematician, linguist and empirical philosopher who published *The Senses and The Intellect* in 1855, *The Emotions and The Will* in 1859 and founded the psychology journal *Mind* in 1876. Bain was an associate of John Stuart Mill, George Eliot and her partner George Henry Lewes, and a leading proponent of the formal study of everyday human

behavioural patterns and experiences. He wrote for the Millite *Westminster Review*, a radical magazine which from 1851 - 1854 was effectively edited by Mary Ann Evans before she became George Eliot.

Herbert Spenser was a philosopher, biologist, political theorist, editor of *The Economist* and friend of George Eliot. He also wrote for *The Westminster Review* and in 1885 published *The Principles of Psychology* in which he argued that the mind was subject to the laws of nature and should be studied as part of a broader biological and evolutionary framework.

George Henry Lewes was a literary critic and scientist who wrote the five-volume study *Problems of Life and Mind*, the final two volumes of which were edited by George Eliot after her partner's death.

The careers of each of these three individuals spanned across different specialities, contributing to the still relatively uncircumscribed nature of psychology as it took on an emergent identity in the nineteenth century. Rick Rylance in *Victorian Psychology and British Culture* summarises, 'Economists, imaginative writers, philosophers, clerics, literary critics, policy makers, as well as biomedical scientists contributed to its formation. It was an unshapely, accommodating, contested, emergent, energetic discipline filled with dispute and without settled lines of theory or protocols for investigation'.¹¹²

George Eliot played an important role in shaping this still porous field of human enquiry while also absorbing elements of the new scientific language back into her own novels, described by herself as 'experiments in life'.¹¹³ Sally Shuttleworth sets out George Eliot's unique position at the time, at the junction between scientific and literary thinking, 'She brought to her writing a breadth of knowledge of contemporary social and scientific theory unmatched by any of her peers. Scientific ideas did not merely filter through into the metaphors and images of her work; in constructing her novels she engaged in an active dialogue with contemporary scientific thought'.¹¹⁴

In a letter to her publisher written in 1860, George Eliot described

¹¹² Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.7; hereafter cited as 'Rylance'.

¹¹³ George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78), vi, p.216; hereafter cited as *GEL*.

¹¹⁴ Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.ix.

writing *The Mill on the Floss* in order to meet her own need for 'a widening psychology' (*GEL*, iii, p.318). The novel demonstrates just what was at stake during these early stages in the development of a language for the half-hidden mind. Maggie battles against and suffers under the narrow, straight-lined rigidity of those around her, particularly her brother Tom. She is confined by his mental smallness which cannot see beyond black and white binaries and which crushes all the complicated compounds of Maggie's emotional life. For Maggie, who is a version of George Eliot's own childhood self, psychology is not an abstract, theoretical discipline, but rather an urgently needed tool for living. George Eliot writes in defiant opposition to the restrictively narrow ways of thinking that dominate in the outside world and which leave Maggie ostracised by society and disowned by her brother in book 7:

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality, –without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human. (*The Mill on the Floss*, p.510)

As a novelist, George Eliot's most important contribution to the urgent struggle for a wider psychology was the development of a syntax complex enough to trace the intricacies of both conscious and sub-conscious mentality with self-checking movement between particular and general, general and particular. For while general maxims attempt to super-impose a narrow set of principles onto people, George Eliot's syntax instead allows the full complexity of individual lives to emerge.

In chapter 5 of book 5, Tom discovers that his sister has been secretly meeting with Philip Wakem, the son of the hated lawyer who is blamed for the bankruptcy of the Tulliver family. After the initial awful confrontation where Maggie is forced by her moralistic brother to renounce Philip, all of her compressed feelings burst out of her:

Tom and Maggie walked on in silence for some yards. He was still holding her wrist tightly as if he were compelling a culprit from the scene of action. At last Maggie with a violent snatch drew her hand away, and her pent-up, long-gathering irritation burst into utterance.

‘Don’t suppose that I think you are right, Tom, or that I bow to your will. I despise the feelings you have shown in speaking to Philip; I detest your insulting unmanly allusions to his deformity. You have been reproaching other people your whole life; you have been always sure you yourself are right; it is because you have not a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than your own conduct and your own petty aims.’

‘Certainly,’ said Tom coolly. ‘I don’t see that your conduct is better, or your aims either. If your conduct, and Philip Wakem’s conduct, has been right, why are you ashamed of its being known? Answer me that. I know what I have aimed at in my conduct, and I’ve succeeded; pray, what good has your conduct brought to you or anyone else?’

‘I don’t want to defend myself,’ said Maggie, still with vehemence; ‘I know I’ve been wrong – often, continually. But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had them.’ (*The Mill on the Floss*, p.354)

Maggie condemns Tom’s small-mindedness and through a process of complex checks and balances, shows her own need for a larger mental capacity that at once can take in the mind of somebody outside of her, whom she loves, and criticises, and feels criticised by, and still can transcend that other’s narrowness, without herself having Tom’s assurance of self-justification. Tom tries to take back control of his sister as ‘culprit’ and re-impose the hard logic of what Maggie sees as a language of reproach and certainty. But Maggie rejects his black-and-

white understanding of moral right and wrong and refuses to take on the role of defence in response to his attack: 'I don't want to defend myself'. The syntactical hinge 'but yet' opens up a space for Maggie to think within that is so much wider than Tom's narrow 'If [. . .] why' formulation allows. It is George Eliot's syntax, at once despite and because of the character's felt flaws, which enables Maggie to have the vitally important, complicated final thought of, 'sometimes when I have done wrong it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had them'. This thought cuts across Tom's narrow rules and discovers a link between 'wrong' and 'better' that his mind could never have found.

*

In the nineteenth century there was a collective and profound mental shift away from religious frameworks of thinking. It was as if psychology had to become instead the holding-ground for human needs and difficulties in the post-religious space. One of the primary challenges that the new psychologists faced was how to re-home the old forms of truthfulness and counsel that had been embedded for millennia within religious practice and to develop secular translations of or alternatives to those religious rituals such as confession and prayer which had previously served such a crucial psychological purpose.

In *Adam Bede*, the gap that has been created by the shift from formal religion to modern psychology is felt keenly when Arthur visits the pastor Mr Irwine in an attempt to confess his relationship with Hetty. In place of the old confession box, Arthur finds himself seated informally at the modern breakfast table:

Still, there was this advantage in the old rigid forms, that they committed you to the fulfilment of a resolution by some outward deed: when you have put your mouth to one end of a hole in a stone wall and are aware that there is an expectant ear at the other end, you are more likely to say what you came out with the intention of saying than if you were seated with your legs in an easy attitude under the mahogany with a companion who will have no reason to be surprised if you have nothing particular to say. (*Adam Bede*, p.147)

There is for Arthur now no formal discipline, no ritual commitment to continue with what he had intended:

Arthur was anxious not to imply that he came with any special purpose. He had no sooner found himself in Mr Irwine's presence than the confidence which he had thought quite easy before, suddenly appeared the most difficult thing in the world to him, and at the very moment of shaking hands he saw his purpose in quite a new light. How could he make Irwine understand his position unless he told him those little scenes in the wood; and how could he tell them without looking like a fool? And then his weakness in coming back from Gawain's, and doing the very opposite of what he intended! Irwine would think him a shilly-shally fellow ever after. However, it must come out in an unpremeditated way; the conversation might lead up to it. (*Adam Bede*, p.153)

'No sooner [...] than' Arthur walks into the meeting with Mr Irwine, he begins his attempt mentally to extricate himself from his inner promise. It becomes not theological but psychological, not binding in advance but shiftable 'at the very moment'. Arthur is no longer faced with the anonymous security of a confession box, where he would have remained unknown and would not have had to see who was listening to him. The familiar, casual atmosphere of the breakfast table makes it both harder for Arthur to confess and easier for him to avoid confession, for 'how could he make Irwine understand his position unless he told him those little scenes in the wood'. It is these small details, delivered with the secrecy of free indirect discourse, that pile up in a series of repeated 'ands' that take Arthur further and further away from the sticking point until the big admission is made impossible for him. 'Unless', 'until', 'without' are little flinching words struggling against seeing it through to the truth. It is this change of scale, when the big is lost within the small, and the small needs to be seen in the light of the big that is hidden within it, that constitutes George Eliot's contribution to realist psychology. And it is a contribution that can see psychology itself as a terrifying alternative to older versions of truth. God is not real for Arthur in this moment, and instead he faces only the relaxed physical form and the outstretched hand of Irwine, banishing the thought of any reality

which is not there immediately present.

At the next moment Irwine looks 'straight' at Arthur in order to create a 'direct' line of communication between them, but Arthur breaks the circuit with an instinctive, physical reflex action of 'shrinking back' just when he is 'on the brink' of opening up. The 'shrinking back' is a movement away from contact with another person, but also a shrinking in – a diminishment or narrowing of himself in the very avoidance of that reality of truth which George Eliot exists to represent. The outside space where the confession should take place ought to be able to compete with Arthur's inner fear and in its formality make it more frightening not to confess than it would be to confess. It is only when this tipping point is passed that the words will come out. But here in a more modern world that formal point is evaded through psychological defences that seem a mere screen, 'it would quite mislead Irwine – he would imagine there was a deep passion for Hetty, while there was no such thing' (*Adam Bede*, p.157). Arthur turns from inner truth to evasive social appearance. His reputation is at stake and saving that reputation suddenly feels more important than saving the best part of himself that he had originally set out to secure. It is this indistinct, hidden movement of Arthur's mind - backwards and away from the helping hand that is stretched out before him - that marks a turning point in his life, although the effect of this slightest of mental shifts could never have been known to Arthur at the time. It is only George Eliot, outside his mind, but also able to enter into it, who can see this almost imperceptible movement and recognise what is at stake. It is only George Eliot, sited outside of time, who is able to see the span of Arthur's life and trace backwards to this indistinct place where an instinctive reaction - or is it inaction - changes his course. Arthur only ever reaches that terrible illumination later in the novel when he sees in the face of Adam, momentarily, the thought that what he has done is irrevocable: 'All screening self-excuse, which rarely falls quite away while others respect us, forsook him for an instant, and he stood face to face with the first great irrevocable evil he had ever committed' (*Adam Bede*, p.271).

Two hundred pages later - after Hetty has been arrested for the murder of her new-born child - Irwine sees in retrospect the earlier lost opportunity for Arthur to confess. In the light of the unfolding tragedy, Irwine is now able to see

what had previously been obscured, namely the internal struggle that had played out within Arthur as he had stood before him at the breakfast table:

It was a bitter remembrance to him now – that morning when Arthur breakfasted with him, and seemed as if he were on the verge of a confession. It was plain enough now that he had wanted to confess. And if their words had taken another turn . . . if he himself had been less fastidious about intruding on another man's secrets . . . it was cruel to think how thin a film had shut out rescue from all this guilt and misery. He saw the whole history now by that terrible illumination which the present sheds back upon the past. (*Adam Bede*, pp.365-6)

George Eliot forces her characters to have these second moments of 'terrible illumination'. That almost imperceptible turning point when Arthur shrank back from confession cannot be left to pass unnoticed even when it is too late: there is a turning back now instead, in hindsight. Consequences will always return, especially if in the first instance characters seem to have managed to avoid them. George Eliot's use of forward-backward switches is one way in which she attempts to foster in her reader's minds that crucial mental foresight in which her characters are often psychologically lacking. It is as if unable to help her characters, George Eliot instead offers to her readers in the outside world that which might have prevented or mitigated the internal tragedies of the novels. Irwine has failed to be able to fulfil his responsibilities as confessor and unknowingly left it up to chance to determine the direction of a conversation that needed the structure of the religious ritual to guide it. If we no longer have these religious rituals at our disposal – nor the physical spaces in which they took place – some alternative way must be found of meeting the need to confess in advance of sinning further, a need that contains within it simultaneously a revulsion towards that very thing that is most necessary.

While Irwine fails as a confessor, it is Dinah - towards the end of the novel - who next takes on this role on behalf of George Eliot and succeeds. The non-believer Eliot calls on Dinah to make it possible for Hetty to confess by restoring to Hetty's prison cell the religious ritual of direct confession. Hetty is sitting alone and unmoving in the near darkness of her cell - just days before her

execution is planned - when Dinah enters and begins the difficult job of bringing her somehow back towards human life through confession: 'They stood so a long while, for neither of them felt the impulse to move apart again. Hetty, without any distinct thought of it, hung on this something that was come to clasp her now, while she was sinking helpless in a dark gulf' (*Adam Bede*, p.401). As Dinah 'clasps' Hetty she becomes her physical as well as psychological prop and it is as if the two women fasten themselves together and blend into one 'indistinct' creature. Hetty is instinctively drawn towards this human contact even before knowing who or what the 'something' that is coming towards her is. Dinah's support does not alter the desperation of Hetty's situation, but by reaching out for and reciprocating this simple human contact Hetty begins to become more of a human again, although with no simple, complete or miraculous cure for her suffering. While Arthur avoided the compulsion to confess which emerged from his own better self, Hetty – guided now by Dinah – is able to finally and fully confess the sins that resulted in part from Arthur's own failure. Her confession is unusually direct. For in this most extreme of situations, at the very end of her life, there is both nothing to be gained and nothing more to be lost for Hetty. For George Eliot, the task was to create the intensity of feeling that would allow a person to stop avoiding the reality of truth and to say everything out loud, without them having to actually be in extremis as Hetty is:

'Dinah,' Hetty sobbed out, throwing her arms round Dinah's neck, 'I will speak . . . I will tell . . . I won't hide it anymore.'

But the tears and sobs were too violent. Dinah raised her gently from her knees, and seated her on the pallet again, sitting down by her side. It was a long time before the convulsed throat was quiet, and even then they sat some time in stillness and darkness, holding each other's hands. At last Hetty whispered – 'I did do it, Dinah . . . I buried it in the wood . . . the little baby . . . and it cried . . . I heard it cry . . . ever such a way off . . . all night . . . and I went back because it cried.' (*Adam Bede*, p.405)

As the cell becomes increasingly dark it becomes more and more like the old confession box with its bare walls and total anonymity. What happens in the

dark cell between Dinah and Hetty is hardly possible in a modern secular setting.

What George Eliot requires from herself and from her readers is the almost impossible demand on unsupported human nature to face squarely this post-religious dilemma without resorting to fantasies of easy cure:

I might refashion life and character entirely after my own liking; I might select the most unexceptional type of clergyman and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions. But it happens, on the contrary, that my strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (*Adam Bede*, p.159)

Realism is not simply an aesthetic or intellectual choice for George Eliot, nor is it an easy choice. She is morally compelled to write in this way against easy morality. It takes George Eliot's 'strongest effort' to fulfil her responsibility to tell the truth about human life, and in particular the parts of life about which human beings struggle the most to tell the truth. In the midst of judgment she forgives her characters what they cannot be, but she cannot allow herself to evade what they cannot face. And at least being a writer gave her the strength and position to do what her own characters could not, and what she knew she herself could not do in their place. It is both despite and because of her characters' frequent inability to act as witnesses to their own lives that George Eliot's testimony cannot ever falter: she *hears* what it is her characters cannot say, save sub-consciously, unconsciously, despite themselves. It is not as critics have sometimes argued previously – that she simply lays down explanatory and didactic explanations alongside her characters, as though she were herself no more than another version of those men of maxims she hates. But just as she writes in *The Mill on the Floss*, 'Watch your own speech and notice how it is guided by your less conscious purpose' (*The Mill on the Floss*, p.471). So she

watches the characters of her own creation and feels what they stand for return upon her for further interpretation. It is this to and fro process of mirroring – far more complex a series of reflections than the word might otherwise suggest – that I need to examine in what follows for the rest of this section.

All this is the work of translation by the figure called George Eliot in the midst and at the apex of the novels – a super-mind seeming to transcribe the unspoken inner processes of her creatures into a language of seriousness that they themselves dared hardly admit or confess to. Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by Mary Ann Evans before ever she became George Eliot, is the great work concerning the processes of translation. There Feuerbach wrote, 'Religion is human nature reflected, mirrored in itself'.¹¹⁵ It was he who saw in the unconscious human creation of God precisely the creative process that was key to the creative power of George Eliot herself: 'Man – this is the mystery of religion – projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject' (Feuerbach, pp.29-30). What George Eliot did was to take the step into secular consciousness: to project out of her experience and imagination the creation of characters who seemed to become, at best, autonomous in respect of their creator; then to receive back from them the thoughts they did not want, the thoughts they made her have in their place, such that George Eliot becomes the inner God of the novel. What I want to demonstrate from just two examples from *The Mill on the Floss* is George Eliot's creative process of projection and interjection in action.

In book 1, chapter 5 of *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie has hid in the attic, upset that Tom is angry with her for letting his pet rabbits die of neglect while he was away at school:

It was Tom's step, then, that Maggie heard on the stairs when her need of love had triumphed over her pride and she was going down with her swollen eyes and dishevelled hair to beg for pity. At least her father would stroke her head and say, 'Never mind, my wench.' It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love – this hunger by which nature forces us to

¹¹⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), trans. by George Eliot (New York: Prometheus, 1989), p.62; hereafter cited as 'Feuerbach'.

submit to the yoke and change the face of the world.

But she knew Tom's step, and her heart began to beat violently with the sudden shock of hope. He only stood still at the top of the stairs and said, 'Maggie, you're to come down.' But she rushed to him and clung round his neck, sobbing, 'Oh, Tom, please forgive me – I can't bear it – I will always be good – always remember things – do love me – please, dear Tom!'

We learn to restrain ourselves as we get older. We keep apart when we have quarrelled, express ourselves in well-bred phrases, and in this way preserve a dignified alienation, showing much firmness on one side and swallowing much grief on the other. We no longer approximate in our behaviour to the mere impulsiveness of the lower animals, but conduct ourselves in every respect like members of a highly civilized society. Maggie and Tom were still very much like young animals, and so she could rub her cheek against his and kiss his ear in a random, sobbing way; and there were tender fibres in the lad that had been used to answer to Maggie's fondling, so that he behaved with a weakness quite inconsistent with his resolution to punish her as much as she deserved; he actually began to kiss her in return and say, 'Don't cry, then, Magsie – here, eat a bit o' cake.' (*The Mill on the Floss*, pp.35-6)

The passage begins with a novelist's particulars: Maggie in the attic, listening to her brother approaching, but then it shifts in the third sentence to a different mode in which George Eliot herself becomes as a presence in the book. 'It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love – this hunger by which nature forces us to submit to the yoke and change the face of the world' is a sentence that exists on a different level of thought, it is the voice of George Eliot as human psychologist. In this third sentence, Maggie's individual predicament, 'her need of love', shifts to become '*this* need of love'. A general human need emerges out of the first individual feeling as George Eliot maps her own experiences, both as a child and now as an adult, onto all that Maggie is suffering under. The second, adult mode is not a detached commentary of Maggie's childish state, instead the second mode emerges out of the first as George Eliot sees her feelings mirrored in this version of the child that she once was. This is the great Wordsworthian law that

George Eliot inherited, that 'the child is father of the man' ('My heart leaps up', *PW*, i, l.7, p.226) and that an adult who forgets his or her childhood has grown only by denial not by organic development.

The new paragraph marks a further shift – a third - as the narrative goes back to Maggie in the attic. There is a return from the general to the particular again, as they test one another, combining and interacting in an attempt to utilise the full resources of the human mind. Maggie's desperate plea, 'Oh, Tom, please forgive me – I can't bear it – I will always be good – always remember things – do love me – please, dear Tom!', is not initially answered by her brother. If a cry for help goes unanswered in a George Eliot novel, it is as though George Eliot herself is summoned to hear it and speak to it instead, albeit from a separate invisible level distinct from that of the characters themselves. Her adult calm contrasts with Maggie's dramatic outburst, but what follows is not a voice of superior wisdom. The movement from child to adult is compressed into the transition from one paragraph to the next, but it is not true adulthood. George Eliot herself will not speak out of that false growth, or 'dignified alienation', by which adults hide from themselves that they are actually only 'children of a larger growth' (*GEL*, i, p.23).

In the fifth switch of the passage, beginning 'Maggie and Tom were still very much like young animals', the 'impulsiveness of the lower animals' is re-activated in Tom. It is the word 'fibres', so often used in George Eliot as the deep physiological basis of emotional memory, that makes an instinctive sympathy spark back into life between the two young sibling animals at an almost cellular level.

In book 3, chapter 6, this process of two-way mirroring or translation, is manifest. Here the teenage Maggie sits crying after another disagreement with her brother:

In books there were people who were always agreeable or tender, and delighted to do things that made one happy, and who did not show their kindness by finding fault. The world outside the books was not a happy one, Maggie felt; it seemed to be a world where people behaved the best to those they did not pretend to love and that did not belong to them. And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie? Nothing but

poverty and the companionship of her mother's narrow griefs – perhaps of her father's heart-cutting childish dependence. There is no hopelessness so sad as that of early youth, when the soul is made up of wants and has no long memories, no superadded life in the life of others, though we who look on think lightly of such premature despair as if our vision of the future lightened the blind sufferer's present.

Maggie in her brown frock, with her eyes reddened and her heavy hair pushed back, looking from the bed where her father lay to the dull walls of this sad chamber which was the centre of her world, was a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of a home in it.

No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it. (*The Mill on the Floss*, p.238)

George Eliot shifts into free indirect discourse in the sentence, 'And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie?'. The question half expresses what Maggie feels in the despair of her young inner psyche and half consists of what George Eliot feels in her accompanying cry of sympathy – the two sit alongside each other. Free indirect discourse is a mode which allows George Eliot to blend her own mind with Maggie's and to bridge the gap between Maggie 'in the book' and the novelist representing in her readers 'the world outside the books'.

It is George Eliot's ability to move in and out and across different mental planes in her writing that gives her the 'superadded life' that Maggie lacks. As she wrote in a letter to her friend John Sibree, 'Creation is the superadded life of the intellect: sympathy, all embracing love, the superadded moral life' (*GEL*, i, p.251). George Eliot not only added Maggie Tulliver to the memory of Mary Ann Evans but also added George Eliot herself to the plight of both. But rather than a linear progression from childish experience to adult explanation, there must be another turn, back again into the thick of the child's experience. Again, this is the Wordsworthian law, to counterbalance the danger of the adult mode taking the

child's reality too lightly. But it also exists to put the adult thoughts back to use within Maggie's predicament: If Maggie has an ear romantically straining after the music that might make life more complete, if she blindly yearns to see the links that would hold life together as a whole, then the mature version of that ear is George Eliot's, hearing those inner cries, and the mature version of that occluded vision is the attempt by George Eliot to steer a complex syntax through the twists and turns of life's passage.

In the final sentence of the passage there is a further turn, back to the adult voice of George Eliot the psychologist, 'No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it'. This final thought is not superimposed by the wiser adult voice, it emerges out of the process of feedback between child and adult mental positions that came before it and is an adult version of the initial childish sense of discrepancy felt by Maggie between what is 'in books' and in 'the world outside books'.

This thesis is arguing that since the modern switch-over from religion to psychology, certain gaps have been left unfilled, certain human needs have been left unmet, and it is the arts - and here specifically literature - that can in some way fill those gaps, spanning as it does the space between religion and psychology. It is the novel itself that George Eliot is offering up as a secular version of the confession or witness box. For although the presence of George Eliot alongside her characters cannot possibly be known by the characters themselves and cannot enter the book to help them, that presence affects a different community - the community of readers. It is the creation of George Eliot herself that is the greatest creation of her novels. For this is the embodiment of the idea that there is someone who listens to human characters, who tries to speak to their thoughts, after the death of God and despite the characters themselves not knowing of course of her existence. I seek to show in my next section the way in which readers become a version of George Eliot, in involving themselves in the reading of fiction, in a way that becomes a subtle therapy.

5.3. An Experiment in Reading *Silas Marner*

Leading on from the conclusions of experiments A and B in chapter four, this third experimental study will look to test whether reading and writing about literature can serve as a way for one person to internalise the psychological work of dialogue that is otherwise carried out between two people during conventional therapeutic interventions.

5.3.1. The Study: Method

- 1) **Four** participants from the pool of twenty-eight people who had previously taken part in either experiment A or B were recruited to take part in experiment C (see Appendix Q for breakdown of participants).
- 2) Each participant was given an information sheet about the study (see Appendix R), and asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix D).
- 3) Participants were asked to read chapters **3** and **9** of *Silas Marner* and were then instructed to write **two letters**, each with a minimum length of 150 words:

	From	To
Letter One	The reader	A character
Letter Two	The character who received letter one	Either the reader or George Eliot

The letter writing process was repeated after participants had read chapters **13** and **18**:

	From	To
Letter Three	The reader	A character
Letter Four	The character who received letter three	Either the reader or George Eliot

- 4) Immediately after completing their **four letters**, participants were asked to read through what they had written and to write down whether any aspect of the reading or writing process had seemed particularly significant to them.

5.3.2. The Analysis

- Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data collected in this study.
- Initial analysis identified distinctions and commonalities between the sixteen letters. These were clustered into the most salient themes.
- Themes were checked against one another to minimise overlap, checked back against the original data to ensure accuracy and checked against participant's own written analysis of the task in order to reduce researcher bias.
- The letters were given to a group of three post-graduates from the Institute of Psychology, Health and Society to cross-check themes and mitigate against researcher bias (see Appendix S for an example of the independently annotated text). Their annotations were tabulated and categorised into themes which were then verified by each cross-checker during a follow-up meeting.

The only requirement for inclusion in this study was that participants must have previously read the novel in full, because although this experiment focuses on four specific chapters of *Silas Marner* it was important that participants had a sense of the whole text. In initial trials, those who had not previously read the entire novel and were given only short extracts to read found it too difficult to develop any depth of feeling or understanding of the characters.

This experiment was designed to build upon the previous work of this chapter by examining whether readers can in some way replicate or participate in the process of projection and feedback that takes place between George Eliot and her characters. If George Eliot can be considered as a 'super-psychologist', she can also be considered as a 'super-reader' and this experiment aims to locate and to cultivate the most George Eliot-like parts of readers. The dual reading and writing task asks participants to project an aspect of themselves out into a character of the novel and then to imaginatively listen to that character speaking back to them. It is an experiment which aims to discover how George Eliot's mobility and breadth of thought impacts upon her readers and to find out whether reading George Eliot's writing can in some way expand her readers' own mental capacities.

There is a shift in methodology here, away from the *intra-personal* method of experiments A and B, where participants were writing and speaking largely from within their own perspective, and towards an *inter-personal* approach, as participants were asked to write letters from the perspective of different characters within the novel. This shift not only reflects a shift from poetry to novel but corresponds with George Eliot's own concern for a wider community of lives which encompasses both the characters within her novels and the readers on the outside of her novels. Experiment C was designed to encourage increased risk and creativity, but also importantly, to reduce participants' sense of self-exposure.

Letter writing is a technique that is used as part of a range of psychological therapies, including Narrative Therapy. Letters are commonly written to the patient by both the patient and therapist, with the aim of externalising a patient's problems, increasing their sense of agency and turning the therapeutic process into a more collaborative effort.¹¹⁶ This reading and letter-writing task had no explicit therapeutic aim; however the format was chosen to encourage extended reflection and create a more authentic, active engagement with the text. This study was designed with Montaigne's experimental writing in mind. It also relates back to Seneca's letter writing, particularly in the light of previously discussed recent scholarship which has suggested that Seneca was writing his letters to a version or aspect of himself. Additionally, the novel form itself has some of its origins in the epistolary forms of Samuel Richardson whom George Eliot admired.

Silas Marner tells the story of a lonely weaver suffering from past betrayals and living in an almost comatose state of semi-existence, who is brought back to life by the arrival of a mysterious, abandoned baby, whom he adopts. The novel's epigraph is taken from Wordsworth's poem 'Michael': 'A child, more than all other gifts / That earth can offer to declining man, / Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts' ('Michael', *PW*, ii, l.146-8, p.85).

Silas Marner was chosen here for two reasons. One because it is *Silas Marner* which follows most closely in the tradition of Wordsworth described in

¹¹⁶ Mary Ann Majchrzak Rombach, 'An invitation to therapeutic letter writing', *Journal of Systematic Therapies*, 22.1 (2003), 15-32.

section one; two because in the to-and-fro interaction between Marner and the baby Eppie, after Marner's psychological trauma, there is the combined force of Wordsworth and of Feuerbach: the child giving to the adult what the child herself could not know in her unconscious innocence but which the adult could not have without her. It is this process of mental exchange that is examined and put to the test in this third reading experiment.

What is more, at the same time that George Eliot was writing *Silas Marner*, she was reading the proofs to Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* and George Henry Lewes' *The Physiology of Everyday Life*. The influence of the emerging discipline of psychology, and in particular new ideas about different levels of consciousness, and the relationship between psychology and physiology, can be traced within the novel in the parallel stories of Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass, the adoptive and biological fathers of the baby Eppie.

Chapters 3, 9, 13 and 18 were selected for participants to read as part of this study because, alongside Silas himself, they focus considerably on the life of Godfrey Cass, a man who is stuck in the thick of a post-religious world of psychology, struggling with guilt and problems of confession. Godfrey's difficulties are related to both Arthur and Hetty in *Adam Bede* and, harnessing the power of George Eliot's penetrative psychological criticism, exist in testing contrast to Silas' softer story of redemption. (See Appendix P for a summary of the four chapters used in this study).

The results of this analysis are presented in three sections:

5.3.3. A Sense of Kinship

5.3.4. Writing to the Author

5.3.5. A Different Perspective

5.3.3. A Sense of Kinship

The first decision that participants had to make was to which characters they were to write their letters. Then they had to determine whether that character should respond back to themselves or to George Eliot the novelist. The following table sets out to whom and from whom each letter was written:

Participant	Letter one From → To	Letter two From → To	Letter three From → To	Letter four From → To
C1	Reader → Squire Cass	Squire Cass → George Eliot	Reader → Godfrey	Godfrey → Reader
C2	Reader → Godfrey	Godfrey → George Eliot	Reader → Godfrey	Godfrey → George Eliot
C3	Reader → Godfrey	Godfrey → George Eliot	Reader → Godfrey	Godfrey → Reader
C4	Reader → Snuff the dog	Snuff the dog → Reader	Reader → Dunstan	Dunstan → Reader

Table 5: The sender and recipient of each letter.

Of the sixteen letters that were written in total by the four participants, ten were addressed to or written from Godfrey. This is understandable as he is the dominant character in all four of the chapters that participants re-read during this study. Most participants described their choices as motivated by a sense of kinship with their chosen character and those who wrote to and/or from Godfrey described some feeling of affinity with his internal conflict, sense of guilt and struggle with confession:

C1 Letter three: Reader to Godfrey	C2 Commentary	C3 Letter one: Reader to Godfrey
I feel a connection to you and those inner struggles you have faced.	I felt a strong connection with Godfrey as a mother of a son who has gone astray.	It's painful to read because it feels familiar. I feel that George Eliot is showing us both that we are part of something beyond what feels so painfully ours alone [. . .] Maybe company will lessen the sense of being alone in our foolishness – make it more forgivable and part of a greater pattern.

Participant C3 appeared to see some use in the shared feeling of troubled kinship and wrote as one struggling human being to another using the pronouns 'us', 'we' and 'our', favourites of George Eliot herself. During the cross-checking process, independent researchers identified this sense of kinship between readers and the characters that they had chosen to write to, noting that, "The reader has clearly connected with the character", "The reader connects with

Godfrey's experiences and his emotions resound deeply in them' and in relation to participant C2, 'She wishes to do more than just read the story, she wants to have a deeper understanding / insight / connection. The reader wishes to nurture Godfrey'.

Participant C4 did not write any of his letters to or from Godfrey; instead after reading chapters 3 and 9 he chose to write to and from the perspective of Godfrey's dog, and after reading chapters 13 and 19 he wrote letters to and from Godfrey's dead brother Dunstan. In his commentary participant C4 explained these unusual choices, noting that he had also considered writing a letter to Godfrey's unclaimed baby:

C4 Commentary
The dog, the baby and the dead man, what's the connection for me? I suppose they are all unable to speak, all inscrutable in their own way [. . .] The dog, the baby, Dunstan, I could identify and feel sympathetic towards. I wanted to try and give them an opportunity to say something about themselves [. . .] I thought about Dunstan lying there dead in the stone pit while all these things were happening, the elephant in the room. The idea of writing to and from a dead, unlamented man was irresistible.

Participant C4 chose these silenced characters to give extra voice to and saw the task as an opportunity to get into unusual perspectives in an imaginative and almost playful manner.

5.3.4. Writing to the Author

In all four of the letters that were addressed to George Eliot, the novelist is considered to have a god-like perspective and understanding of the characters' internal lives, like a sort of super-counsellor. This was corroborated by one cross-checker who commented on participant C3's letter to George Eliot, 'The first paragraph feels like a conversation with a higher being (God)'. In several of the letters to George Eliot a certain resentment is imagined to exist within characters towards the all-seeing novelist:

C1 Letter two: Squire Cass to George Eliot	C3 Letter two: Godfrey to George Eliot
What am I to make of it all? This is why I am writing to you: I am deeply disturbed, as I have said, and crave guidance from you. You must tell me	I wish you didn't have such a view. By being forced to look at myself I seem to suffer more than if I were just left to the business of living. I am angry at

what to do [. . .] You have the power to fix this. What could possibly be stopping you? And as for Dunstan, he will never listen to me and you know it. Do something for him.	you for being able to see my mistakes, it only makes me feel all the more stupid. Why didn't I see this coming? Where was that clarity, that overview, when I was so desperate?
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In participant C1's second letter, Godfrey's father angrily demands help from the author. This fantasy is something that the realist novel cannot itself fulfil, for there are no simple solutions and there cannot be an easy way out. In contrast, in participant C3's second letter, Godfrey is angry and ashamed that George Eliot is able to see all that he most really and truly is. It is as if in reading the novel for himself, through this imaginative letter writing process, Godfrey has seen too late – through George Eliot's eyes – what he wishes he could have already been able to see for himself. There is no clear or formal distinction between reality and fiction; and the author in the midst is seen as someone who can help not only the character within the internal reality of the novel, but also the reader on the outside.

In participant C2's second letter, Godfrey pleads with George Eliot to help him; however, by the fourth letter – which was written from the perspective of the older Godfrey – he is no longer a helpless supplicant. This is suggestive of an important shift over imagined time here as Godfrey becomes a conscious actor in his own life:

C2 Letter two: Godfrey to George Eliot	C2 Letter four: Godfrey to George Eliot
Why have you given me such a huge problem with no one to turn to for advice? [. . .] Please send me a solution.	I wrote to you sixteen years ago when I was a bitter and angry young man. I railed against you for dealing me such a bad hand of cards and I asked you to send me a solution. I realise now that there have been times in my life when I have been given choices by you to do the right thing [. . .] I am grateful to you for not imposing your solution on me.

Participant C2 appears to demonstrate not only the capacity to imagine the mental state of a person other than herself at one particular point in time, but also imaginatively to shift with that other person over time into a new perspective. After reading this participant's letters one cross-checker noted that

'It is interesting that the reader can flip perspectives and understand the complexity of his situation. They've understood the problem from different perspectives really well – interesting, not a lot of people can do this in everyday life. The fourth letter is very different to the previous one written in this way. There is a much greater sense of maturity. There is an understanding of the growth and complexity of the character. They must have quite a deep connection with the character for them to understand it in this way'. Once again, these initial mental shifts are important, even if they are not fully cashed in. It is simply important in the first instance to make the mental shift which gets the reader into the right kind of thinking space.

5.3.5. A Different Perspective

- **Case Study C1:**

Participant C1 wrote to and from Godfrey in her third and fourth letters and identified with both his guilt and his struggle to confess. In her third letter she described an act of betrayal from her own past that she had struggled to come to terms with:

C1 Letter three: Reader to Godfrey
Many years ago – almost ten years it must be – I did something which seemed, and still does seem so opposite to the character I believe I am, and would have others believe in, that I quite simply could not accept or own it. I was unfaithful to a partner. I felt terrible for having done it, but even more so for the prospect of telling my partner about it and in the end I couldn't. I went half-way to a confession, told a half-truth which eased some of the pressure and guilt and, so I told myself, saved my partner from the pain of the full truth. It saved me, in that moment from the pain of the full truth – and from the consequences of it.

This letter illustrates some of the secret dangers of giving yourself too narrow a remit to exist within, or of conceiving of yourself and your life in terms of a conventional narrative. The point at which a person might suddenly have to face the reality that who they are and what they are capable of does not fit neatly into the story that they might have told themselves about themselves, becomes a real crisis point. It is this kind of psychic narrowness that George Eliot is fighting against within her novels, and it is a concern central to the whole of this thesis. Free indirect discourse in the novels is the language of this suppressed

consciousness, either seeking to break the bounds or hide within them.

In chapter 13 of *Silas Marner* Godfrey tries to persuade himself – just as participant C1 had done ten years previously – that not confessing would protect not only himself but also the person that he had secretly betrayed. The four small words that participant C1 inserts into her letter to Godfrey, ‘so I told myself’, signal that she has now realised the flaw of self-deception in that secret logic. It is a realisation that Godfrey too will reach, sixteen years later in chapter 18 of the novel.

In her commentary, participant C1 explained why she had chosen to write in this manner to Godfrey:

C1 Commentary
I found out what it was that connected me with this character and I simply went straight to that. It felt right then to write back to myself and I realised that although I was writing as someone else, at points in the letter, I was also writing as myself, speaking to myself.

One such point is in letter 4 where – writing as Godfrey – she appears to be speaking to herself in a way nonetheless different from the self-deceptive ‘told myself’ of the past:

C1 Letter four: Godfrey to Reader
I think you can and must forgive yourself for that incident you speak about [. . .] Perhaps you already have forgiven yourself, but did not like to say and thought you should still blame yourself. Do not.

The final two words of this passage, ‘Do not’, are a direct order given to this participant by herself: it is here that the turn from ‘*writing as myself*’ to ‘*speaking to myself*’ can be felt. She is not simply saying something to herself as she did in her time of real-life guilt: with greater shifts of level and position, she is now writing as Godfrey (or her version of him, from her perspective as a sort of would-be George Eliot figure of counsel) speaking to herself. Nonetheless, while participant C1 may have felt as if she was thus occupying two positions, her own perspective still tends to dominate all of her letters. She does not quite manage to get out of herself and into Godfrey’s mind, for Godfrey is all too prone to forgive himself anyway and hardly needs this encouragement. The letters therefore become arguably too self-confirming and too self-forgiving as she is simply repeating back to herself things that she already knows and believes.

While self-forgiveness and self-acceptance would be encouraged by modern psychological therapies, these letters demonstrate how a kind of self-acceptance that is too easily won might shut down the possibility of genuinely therapeutic and more difficult thinking, and instead allow us still to hold onto narrow or neat conceptions of ourselves even in repentance.

▪ **Case Study C4:**

In his letter to Godfrey's dead brother Dunstan, participant C4 wrote:

C4 Letter three: Reader to Dunstan
<p>Dear Dunstan, Unsung hero, The catalyst for things to happen, Lost faith in your family early, Saw through their hypocrisy, Became a rebel, lost your faith, You were forgotten and not missed.</p> <p>These were the words I wrote while thinking about you on the bus going to work today. I wanted to write to you because I feel you had an unhappy life and now you are dead and seemingly mourned by no-one. You fell in the stone pit and for sixteen years you laid there, wedged between two great stones, an unloved brother. What a terrible disgrace you brought to your family. What was it like to lie there for sixteen years, unloved?</p>

In response to this letter Dunstan replied:

C4 Letter four: Dunstan to reader
<p>Where do I begin? I'm in a timeless land without boundaries. I have no memories, only vague feelings that something happened. Only doubt exists here and yet I am here [. . .] You must realise that you are not writing to me but to yourself who is pretending to be me, you and I are the same person. We do this when we pray maybe, and who knows the power that has. Not I.</p>

Unlike participant C1 who had felt as though she was simultaneously 'writing as someone else' and 'as myself', when she was often still only really writing as herself, here in participant C4's fourth letter the opposite seems to be happening. This participant is writing as Dunstan, warning himself that 'you are not writing to me but to yourself who is pretending to be me'. It is as if he is trying to remind himself that there is only one mind at work here but doing that through Dunstan in a complex and self-checking way, creating a double perspective in the very act of querying its veracity.

In therapeutic letter-writing programmes, patients write to themselves in order to externalise problems that are often lodged deeply within themselves. Here – without any prompting, other than from the text itself – participants appeared to have found themselves either writing to themselves or writing to elements of their own selves that they saw lodged within certain characters within the novel. In doing so, they provide evidence to support the position that they were able to create the beginnings of a therapeutic dialogue with their own selves, by themselves, without writing simple mono-logic confession. ‘Examine your own speech’, George Eliot’s advice in *The Mill on the Floss*, is implicitly followed here in a two-way movement related to Feuerbach’s process of putting out and taking back. Even though participant C4 does not demonstrate any radical new thinking in his letters, the initial step of opening up a line of communication with the self by accessing a widening external perspective is important.

▪ **Case Study C3:**

Participant C3 had previously taken part in experiment B of this thesis, where she had written a diary but had refused to submit it for analysis at the end of the task. Here in experiment C she had no such problem submitting her letters. This task was less explicitly about the participants themselves. The primary focus was on the literature and therefore, in this case in particular, the participant felt less exposed by what she had written, even when she began writing about more personal details. The task appears to have become a kind of therapy by stealth. Writing a diary as part of experiment B had felt dauntingly permanent to participant C3, as if she were setting down a version of herself in stone that could not possibly be a truthful representation. In the letter-writing task a dialogue built up between this participant and the people to whom she was writing. This is a form of writing that more closely resembles speech than inscription and as such seemed to be a less worrying challenge for this participant.

In her third letter, participant C3 wrote about her personal connection to Godfrey:

C3 Letter three: Reader to Godfrey

I want to judge you, but something happens in me when I go to that feeling. I am so sad about it all. I feel sad for all of us [. . .] I am saddened for you - for me - next to Silas who seems to love before anything else. I myself have told half-stories, even in the moment of confession or at the point of being found out.

Her own struggles with confession lead her to take a more compassionate stance towards Godfrey which in turn implicitly leads her to judge herself less harshly. The addition of 'for me' at the end of the clause 'I am saddened for you' is a small moment of sudden self-directed compassion and evidence of a participant writing in some way back to themselves at the same time that she is writing to one of the characters within the novel. Participant C3 demonstrates a mobility of perspective here in the swift, informal shift between pronouns, from 'I' to 'you' to 'us', then unpacked into 'you' and 'me'. The 'us' in particular suggests that a more complicated dialectical relationship is being built between the reader and the novel that goes beyond simple one-way empathy. Participant C3 was the only person who brought Silas Marner into comparison with Godfrey within her letters, as she does here with the insertion of 'next to Silas'. By placing alongside one another the stories of these two men who are both fathers to baby Eppie, one biological and the other adoptive, George Eliot was tacitly demanding that such a comparison be made

In her final letter, written from Godfrey to herself, participant C3 produced what is arguably the richest and most complicated of all sixteen letters submitted. This was corroborated by the independent cross-checkers, one of whom commented that 'this letter shows the complexity of humans and recognises that we have many different levels to us in many different situations':

C3 Letter four: Godfrey to reader

Writing this – and reading my story with you – I am being taken back to conversations with my father. Particularly the desire for discipline that though vague I do remember. All this feels connected to that. I love only Nancy, but my love for her seemed at some point to need things hidden, though now I see that – in a way I can't quite put into words – it is the discipline I have always needed, but not allowed myself to want. After all, was it not her that prompted me to tell all in the end? Was it not the thought of myself seen through her eyes – her look – that made me need to be true? It is as if I am only the man who I want to be when I imagine who I am through

Nancy. She seems to have a better sense of things, she has never behaved in a way that she would wish or need to conceal. It feels sometimes as though I borrow myself from Nancy. I think perhaps, reading your letter to me, that you feel more like me than you do Nancy. You seem to want to distance yourself from me, but cannot quite. I can understand that and am oddly reminded of how, even now, I wish to distance myself from Molly. It is strange how, by being pushed to do what I always wanted least, I feel larger than I did. I could not have imagined quite how things would play out, how different Nancy was to how I predicted.

Participant C3 shifts out of herself and into the mind of Godfrey in this letter. But also, as she writes from his perspective, she is making a second and then third imaginative leap from his mind out into Nancy's and then back again: 'Was it not the thought of myself seen through her eyes – her look – that made me need to be true? [. . .] It is as if I am only the man who I want to be when I imagine who I am through Nancy [. . .] It feels sometimes as though I borrow myself from Nancy'. She is not writing as herself here but as Godfrey, sitting in parallel to herself. Rather than taking over his world with her own perspective – as participant C1 often did – Godfrey instead draws her into the periphery of his world, he is 'reading my story with you'.

While other participants – namely C2 and C4 – demonstrated mental shifts within their letters, it is participant C3 who goes one step further and begins to produce the kind of rich content and density of thought that was unrealised in other participants' letters. By getting outside of herself and becoming involved in the dense overlapping layers and multiple viewpoints of the realist novel itself, participant C3 widens and deepens the possibilities for herself and is able to activate new thoughts. These new, surprising thoughts surface at the end of the passage and are signalled by the words 'strange' and 'oddly'. These are the places where the now blended consciousness of participant and character has effected some kind of realisation of kindred singularity and shared psychology. For in the construction, 'You seem to want to distance yourself from me, but cannot quite. I can understand that and am oddly reminded of how, even now, I wish to distance myself from Molly', there is a recognition of something that is crucial to George Eliot: namely, that 'I' – and all the complexity of my individual psychology – am one of many, and that 'you' have an individual psychology of your own that is just as complicated as my

own.

These findings relate to research that has identified a positive correlation between reading literary fiction and Theory of Mind.¹¹⁷ Theory of Mind is the ability to attribute mental states to other people and is a skill that is typically developed during early childhood: 'It is mind reading, empathy, creative imagination of other's perspective; in short, it is simultaneously a highly sophisticated ability and a very basic necessity for human communication.'¹¹⁸ In *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, Lisa Zunshine argues that reading fiction allows us to test, hone and also to relish the flourishing of our Theory of Mind skills.¹¹⁹ While it could be argued that case study C3 is purely a demonstration of an ordinary, adult capacity for Theory of Mind, the notable feature of this participant's final letter is her shift beyond one-directional empathy. Rather than simply demonstrating an ability to understand and embody the mental state of a fictional character outside of herself, she uses that new-found perspective to look back - with a degree of understanding and compassion - at her own self: 'I think perhaps, reading your letter to me, that you feel more like me than you do Nancy. You seem to want to distance yourself from me, but cannot quite. I can understand that'. The argument being presented here is that this is an example not simply of Theory of Mind, but of multi-directional thinking which enters into the mind of another, and then reflects that external perspective back into the individual's own mind, to enhance their own sense of self. Readers find that the texts also seem to have an empathy for them, or a version of themselves, creating an area of emotionally resonant engagement that also enables self-reflective and even self-critical thinking within a form of non-psychological therapy

¹¹⁷ David Comer Kidd, and Emanuele Castano, 'Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind', *Science*, 342 (2013), 377-380.

P. Matthijs Bal, and Martijn Veltkamp, 'How does fiction reading influence empathy? An experimental investigation of the role of emotional transportation', *PLoS ONE*, 8.1 (2013), 1-12.

¹¹⁸ Paula Leverage, Howard Mincing et al. ed. *Theory of Mind and Literature* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011), p.1.

¹¹⁹ Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 2006), p.19.

5.3.6. Conclusion

- The epistolary form of the experiment seemed to minimise self-consciousness or hesitancy as it felt less like a formal, academic task. Letters averaged at 511 words each, much longer than the 150 word minimum requirement per letter set out in the instructions given to participants at the beginning of the task.
- Throughout the task participants appeared to demonstrate – to different degrees of success – an ability to get outside of themselves and into somebody else’s mind through the action of reading and writing. They were then able to look back at themselves through the eyes of the external character, while also still writing partly as themselves. It is argued that these are complex and important mental shifts that can potentially trigger wider, deeper and denser thinking.
- The letter-writing task set up a whole series of potential relationships between reader, character(s) and novelist, and as such created the conditions for a more complex circuitry of thinking to develop. This helps to illustrate the psychological processes that are demanded of the reader by the realist novel and which exceed simple one-way empathy. In Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* he describes thought as ‘a two-fold process’ and explains how religion functions as a form of self-reflexive thinking, ‘Man first of all sees his nature as if outside of himself, before he finds it in himself. His first nature is in the first instance contemplated by him as that of another being’ (Feuerbach, p.13). The realist novel meets the need that we have – in a secular world without the all-knowing mind of God – for more than one mind to be at our disposal in order for us to be able to think. By changing perspective, through the imaginative act of reading and writing, participants can access a whole repertoire of thoughts that they didn’t previously have so available within them. The outside can be drawn back inside so as to get something inside that was not consciously there initially, ‘Thought originally demands two. It is not until man has reached an advanced stage of culture that he can double himself, so as to play the part of another within himself’ (Feuerbach, p. 83).

- It is argued that in participant C3's final letter she draws back into herself the density of thought of the realist novel and illustrates the richness of thought that can potentially come out of the widening mental shifts that are triggered during reading. She is for that moment a practical psychological novelist. The evidence of this study supports the position that in certain cases and to differing degrees, the literary stimulus did seem to be expanding readers' capacities to hold and to shift between multiple different perspectives. Through a combination of attentive reading and imaginative writing, readers were able to enter into and become a part of the rich web of connections contained within the realist novel.

5.3.7. Limitations and Implications:

- One limitation of this study was the small sample size. Only four people were recruited for this experiment because it was deemed necessary that participants should have already read the novel. Future studies could begin by asking participants to read the whole novel if they had not already done so, or alternatively, a short story could be used as the literary stimulus, allowing participants who had no prior knowledge of this particular text, or those who did not generally read for pleasure, to be included in the study.
- By only recruiting people who had previously read the novel, this study only included people who had prior interest in and experience of classic literature. Future experiments would aim to include participants with a much broader range of reading histories, including non-readers. In this study, in order to speed up the recruitment process participants were enlisted from the pool of people who had already taken part in either experiments A or B. In future it would be preferable to recruit from the general population so as to include a greater diversity of participant and to remove any possibility of order effects.
- In this study participants were not given the opportunity to write letters directly to George Eliot, or to write from George Eliot back to themselves or to their chosen characters. Future studies could explore what happens

if these different combinations were permitted. In this study, strict limitations were enforced due to the small sample size and the need to have comparable data across the group.

- Subsequent experiments could be adapted to ensure that the instructions do not limit participant's engagement with the text: by asking participants to select one particular character to write to perhaps they were implicitly being discouraged from considering the wider formal community of lives that make up such an important part of the novel.
- Quantitative analysis was not used in the analysis of the data collected in this study, again due to the small sample size and also because of the literary nature of the data itself which was much more suited to qualitative analysis. In order to reduce researcher bias in future studies, a larger and more varied group of researchers could be recruited as independent cross-checkers. Participants could also be interviewed to provide their own independent analysis of salient moments within their own letters.
- Narrative therapies and modes of analysis have become increasingly popular within the discipline of psychology. However, the problem with many of these trends is that they often mistakenly understand a narrative to mean an episodic, linear structure that has a definite beginning and end. There is a mistaken belief that a person must be able to tell the story of their life in order to live it and even more so that the story that they tell should be episodic and linear and somehow conclusive. However, the fundamental oversimplification of what a narrative is means that through these stories we can only ever come to understand a simplified, single, flattened out version of ourselves. Galen Strawson has argued persuasively in his essay 'Against Narrativity' that the prevailing belief that an ability to construct an episodic narrative about yourself is a possible marker of health is a restrictive and damaging trend in psychology.¹²⁰ George Eliot offers an alternative to this false understanding of what a narrative can be and what it can do.

¹²⁰ Galen Strawson, 'Against Narrativity', *Ratio*, 17.4 (2004), 428-52.

The most important implication of this experiment is that, in its most successful places, it demonstrates how literature could form the basis of therapeutic interventions or aids which did not stick rigidly to limiting narrative theories.¹²¹

5.4. George Eliot's Therapeutic Model

The final section of this chapter will characterise the therapeutic model implicitly contained within George Eliot's later fiction. First, it will look at the influence of the seventeenth century philosopher Baruch Spinoza on George Eliot, particularly in relation to the archetypal realist novel *Middlemarch*. Second, it will focus on George Eliot's final novel *Daniel Deronda* and explore the relationship between Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth as a therapeutic case history and practical exemplification of George Eliot's therapeutic significance.

5.4.1. George Eliot and Spinoza

George Henry Lewes published an article on 'Spinoza's Life and Works' in *The Westminster Review* in 1843 and again in 1866 he wrote on Spinoza for *The Fortnightly Review*. In 1856 Mary Ann Evans finished working on a translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*, although it remained unpublished until 1978.

Spinoza's *Ethics* sets out a philosophy of the emotions that is written in the style of a geometric treatise. In it he acknowledges 'only three primitive, or primary emotions, namely, pleasure, pain and desire'.¹²² In a forty-eight point list of 'definitions of the emotions' he then classifies all of the secondary feelings compounded out of these three primary elements:

14. Confidence is pleasure arising from the idea of something past or future, concerning which all cause of doubt is removed.

15. Despair is pain arising from the idea of something past or future, concerning which all cause of doubt is removed. (Spinoza, pp.143-4)

¹²¹ Josie Billington, 'Telling a New Story: Literary Narrative and Narrative Medicine', in *Is Literature Healthy?*, The Literary Agenda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.47-85.

¹²² Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677), trans. by George Eliot (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1981), p.141; hereafter cited as 'Spinoza'.

There is a logical exactness to Spinoza's definitions which turns the emotions from vague or messy personal sensations into distinctly knowable phenomena. Each point in his list is like a mathematical equation for the creation of an emotion. There is something austere and comforting in recognising that emotions too must comply with a kind of logic and consequently, by analysis, can be brought under a degree of control. For Mary Anne Evans it must have felt like a turn inside-out, from the near chaos of subjective experience to the possibility of a more objective understanding. That possibility itself enabled and demanded a more impersonal form of mind to work within and upon the realm of personal experience.

If the whole range of our emotions can be understood as a series of compounds that are created by adding to or subtracting from the basic original building blocks of pleasure, pain and desire, it begins to be easier to see how one feeling could be turned into another: 'Hope is nothing else than an intermittent pleasure arising from the image of a past or future thing, concerning the issue of which we are doubtful; fear, on the contrary, is an intermittent pain also arising from the image of a dubious event. If the doubt connected with these emotions be removed, hope becomes confidence and fear becomes despair; that is to say, joy or sadness arising from the image of a thing which we have feared or hoped' (Spinoza, p.108). It is not that doubt itself has any intrinsic positive or negative value; the effect of doubt on the mind is instead determined by how it interacts with the other component parts that are present at the time.

Spinoza's *Ethics* challenges the restrictive binary categories of negative and positive, good or bad emotions:

As to good and evil, they also indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are simply modes of thought or notions which we form from a comparison of individuals. For one and the same thing can be at the same time good, bad, evil and indifferent [. . .] By good I understand that which we certainly know to be useful to us. By evil I understand that of which we certainly know that it hinders us from participating in some good. (Spinoza, pp.155-6)

Spinoza is neutrally concerned with the human usefulness of thoughts and feelings in terms of 'conatus' – survival and flourishing. Emotion is 'a confused idea': rational thought helps to undo the psychological confusion and make the idea within the emotion become what he calls 'adequate', that is, clear not confused, actively thinkable rather than passively suffered. Otherwise, we are stuck with 'inadequate ideas' which are not useful to us: 'As long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of nature, it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies' (Spinoza, p.51). Inadequate ideas prevent us from attaining any true understanding of our lives. Without adequate ideas, our emotions remain as things which happen to us, that we must suffer rather than understand or in any way master.

Spinoza's philosophy is related to Stoic thought, in that it demonstrates how it is possible to alter the character of the mind by taking control of the emotions. In *Spinoza and the Stoics*, Fermin DeBrabander states that 'Spinoza's most notable Stoic trait is his psychotherapy'. He argues that Spinoza shares the Stoic belief that 'The passions, i.e. irrational judgements, are in our power to manipulate, and consequently [...] therapy involves their manipulation'.¹²³ But while Stoic manipulation would generally mean discarding emotions, Spinoza's *Ethics* shows how emotions can be deconstructed and then reconfigured, turning irrational emotional matter into something vital that can serve us.

The single mention of the Stoics in the *Ethics* makes clear how much Spinoza believed his philosophy of the emotions differed from Stoicism: 'I shall treat only of the power of the mind, or of reason; and I shall mainly show the extent and nature of its dominion over the emotions, for their control and moderation. That we do not possess absolute dominion over them, I have already shown. Yet the Stoics have thought that the emotions depended absolutely on our will and that we could absolutely govern them' (Spinoza, p.160). Spinoza is therefore the third figure in this thesis to adapt and moderate Stoic thought, after Montaigne turned Stoic philosophy into something more humanly and individually practical and Wordsworth, who used elements of

¹²³ Firmin DeBrabander, *Spinoza and the Stoics: Power, Politics and the Passions* (New York: Continuum, 2007), pp.25-27.

Stoicism in his poetry, but again adapted its rigid tenets into his own philosophy of transmutation.

While Spinoza had an important impact on Victorian free-thinkers such as George Eliot, James Froude, Matthew Arnold and William Hale White, his work gained further influence near the end of the nineteenth century when it was read by Sigmund Freud and became highly valued by the psychoanalysts of the early twentieth century. Although Spinoza is not mentioned directly in any of Freud's published writing, he was given the title of 'the philosopher of psychoanalysis'¹²⁴ by Freud's contemporary Lou Andreas-Salomé. In *Emotion, Thought and Therapy*, Jerome Neu argues that 'Spinoza provides a philosophical foundation for much in Freud'.¹²⁵ Spinoza's philosophy of the emotions created a means of knowing more precisely what our thoughts and feelings consist of and consequently, how it might be possible to change their composition in a two-stage process that forms the basis of modern psycho-dynamic treatments, 'Making the unconscious conscious may be compared in some ways with transforming confused ideas into adequate ones. Correcting our understanding can contribute to correcting our emotional disorders' (Neu, p.151). Spinoza's philosophy thus acts as a bridge stretching back in time to Stoicism and forward towards psychoanalysis and modern-day psychological interventions. In addition to Freud's reading of Spinoza, it is important to note that Freud also read and gifted copies of George Eliot's novels to his family and friends. In a letter written in 1885 to his then fiancé Martha, he described having his four volume copy of *Middlemarch* on his desk as he worked. Freud told his friend and fellow psychoanalyst Ernest Jones that *Middlemarch* had 'illuminated important aspects of his relations with Martha'.¹²⁶

In a letter to her friend Charles Bray, George Eliot wrote of her own sense that a conventional translation could never be an adequate means of expressing Spinoza's philosophy:

¹²⁴ Lou Andreas-Salomé, *The Freud Journals*, trans. by Stanley A. Leavy (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), p.75.

¹²⁵ Jerome Neu, *Emotion, Thought and Therapy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p.151; hereafter cited as 'Neu'.

¹²⁶ S.S. Prawer, *A Cultural Citizen of the World: Sigmund Freud's Knowledge and Use of British and American Writings* (London: Legenda, 2009), p.73.

What is wanted in English is not a translation of Spinoza's works, but a true estimate of his life and system. After one has rendered his Latin faithfully into English, one feels that there is another yet more difficult process of translation for the reader to effect, and that the only mode of making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them, and give an analysis. For those who read the very words Spinoza wrote there is the same sort of interest in his style as in the conversation of a person of great capacity who has led a solitary life and who says from his own soul what all the world is saying by rote; but this interest hardly belongs to a translation. (*GEL*, i, p.321)

The 'yet more difficult process of translation' that is required to be done is the translation of Spinoza's theory into modified practice. It was through George Eliot's realist novels that she was able to create a different kind of translation of Spinoza's philosophy, in which his geometric definitions were transformed into the imaginative depiction of real people, in real minds and real bodies.

Middlemarch is perhaps the best example of George Eliot's implicit translation of Spinoza's philosophy into realist fiction due to the dense mass of human life that it contains and the broad spectrum of emotions that its characters experience. In *Middlemarch*, the capacity of different characters to think adequately varies wildly. The young, newly married doctor Tertius Lydgate is one example of a character who often struggles in this respect.

In chapter 64 Lydgate is overcome by debt and unable to face the reality of his marriage after an argument with his wife Rosamond:

His marriage would be a mere piece of bitter irony if they could not go on loving each other. He had long ago made up his mind to what he thought was her negative character – her want of sensibility, which showed itself in disregard both of his specific wishes and his general aims. The first great disappointment had been borne: the tender devotedness and docile adoration of the ideal wife must be renounced, and life must be taken up on a lower stage of expectation, as it is by men who have lost their limbs. But the real wife had not only her claims, she had still a hold on his heart, and it was his intense desire that the hold should remain strong. In

marriage, the certainty, 'She will never love me much,' is easier to bear than the fear, 'I shall love her no more.' Hence, after that outburst, his inward effort was entirely to excuse her, and to blame the hard circumstances which were partly his fault.¹²⁷

The two utterances, 'She will never love me much,' and 'I shall love her no more' belong to Lydgate's subconscious mind and are embedded here within George Eliot's free indirect discourse. They have never been spoken by him and he would never want to hear them out loud, but some deeper part of his mind has already weighed them against one another and chosen the disappointment of 'never [. . .] much' over the worse pain of 'no more'. When her characters are unable to think the necessary and saving thoughts for themselves, George Eliot must intervene and, in the detached mind-space created by free indirect discourse, enable thoughts to exist that characters cannot bear to have for themselves. The degree to which characters are consciously involved in the thinking that takes place through free indirect discourse varies, but throughout the novel it provides a model of what the kind of semi-detached clarity of thought that Spinoza advocated might look like. This becomes in George Eliot's work not a reductive, cold or narrow kind of rationalism however: in many cases, free indirect discourse reveals more thoughts than can be easily held within one single mind.

Free indirect discourse becomes here a holding-ground for thoughts that are too painful to be put to use by a character and yet too important to remain obscured and unused within their subconscious. If Lydgate were to read this passage, as in one of the practical experiments I have devised for readers, he would have to look at and hear from the outside the voices of his deepest interior as it balances the two terrible choices of 'She will never love me much,' and 'I shall love her no more'. It would hurt him to see secret psychological thinking turned into written thought and made visibly substantive on the page. But Lydgate is unable to look in at himself and his wife from the outside, while he is in the thick of the trouble itself. This inability is at once a form of survival by the perseverance of 'conatus' and even so a form of continued and distorted

¹²⁷ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1872), ed. by David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p.613; hereafter cited as *Middlemarch*.

inner suffering. That doubleness is George Eliot's domain.

The psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas writes in *The Mystery of Things* that, 'Self-experiencing is a palimpsest of many elements: conscious thought, inarticulate forming ideas on the margins of consciousness, unconscious disseminations, images which pass by in incomplete form, polysemous words pregnant with meanings, somatic drives, body memories, body attitudes and intersecting engagements. It seems to help us to think some of this to bifurcate the mind in two: a thinking part that addresses a naïve self as listener and a listening-experiencing self that emotionally and intuitively tests thoughts'.¹²⁸ Free indirect discourse reveals some of the different layers of that palimpsest. It allows for 'inarticulate forming ideas' within a character to surface and be formed instead by the consciousness of the author. It also demonstrates some of the saturated thickness of thoughts as they really exist but in a way we can rarely manage to get hold of in their entirety. A 'thinking part' addresses a naïve listening self, which then becomes - through the process of listening - what is effectively a third experiencing self that puts the initial thoughts to the test. But few characters in *Middlemarch* beside Dorothea Brooke can manage this process. Instead it is the author and the reader who must take on these different mind roles. George Eliot translates Lydgate's rough, deep approximations of feeling into language that can be seen and listened to, if not by Lydgate himself then instead by the reader who must then stand in for the character's absent 'listening-experiencing self'.

Dorothea is the one character in *Middlemarch* who is able to think more adequately. She is the character most able to exist simultaneously within her predicament and also to step outside of it. In chapter 42, after a dispute with her husband, she gradually shifts from a position of childish, frustrated pain to one of disinterested 'resolved submission'. During this transition, free indirect discourse is transformed by George Eliot to create a means for Dorothea to move consciously from inside her troubles to a view of them as though from without:

¹²⁸ Christopher Bollas, *The Mystery of Things* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp.79-80.

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. Now she said bitterly, ‘It is his fault, not mine.’ In the jar of her whole being, Pity was overthrown. Was it her fault that she believed in him – had believed in his worthiness? – And what, exactly, was he? (*Middlemarch*, pp. 399-400)

Dorothea’s initial direct speech contains short, stunted thoughts that are angrily caught within the immediate hurt of her present moment: ‘What have I done – what am I – that he should treat me so?’. This disjointed inner dialogue of hopeless questions and despairingly rigid answers displays a narrow, black-and-white way of thinking. Dorothea repeats the word ‘never’ three times and frames her opinions as unquestionable facts. But the first critical move in this passage is when Dorothea begins to ‘hear herself’. When she hears - on the inside – the inadequacy of her own external voice, Dorothea ‘checks herself into stillness’, pausing the cyclical to-and-fro movement of her initial fretful rumination. The stilling of this movement is the first step, even if it is not immediately replaced by more adequate thinking. The free indirect discourse that follows is still dominated by Dorothea’s childish, hurt voice. ‘Never’ is repeated three more times and a sense of hopelessness persists rather than any real sense of objectivity. It is her husband’s rejection of her sympathy that forces Dorothea to stand apart and ‘survey’ him in the wrong (because alienated) kind of externality. A kind of internal direct speech bursts out within this initial passage of free indirect discourse. ‘Is he worth living for?’ and ‘It is his fault not mine’ are the internal equivalents of those first indignant spoken words that

Dorothea had tried to 'still', for she cannot yet get out of this way of thinking. In the final long sentence of this passage, Dorothea remains bitterly angry and stuck within her own sense of personal injury. But the syntax allows for a potentially more difficult thought to surface if it could be asked in full disinterested seriousness, 'what, exactly, was he?'

It is later, as night falls, that the real shift in thinking happens for Dorothea and she reclaims that 'best soul' which she has had to lock away within the pain of her marriage. The stillness turns into a fuller motionlessness:

Dorothea sat almost motionless in her meditative struggle, while the evening slowly deepened into night. But the struggle changed continually, as that of a man who begins with a movement towards striking and ends with conquering his desire to strike. The energy that would animate a crime is not more than is wanted to inspire a resolved submission, when the noble habit of the soul reasserts itself. That thought with which Dorothea had gone out to meet her husband – her conviction that he had been asking about the possible arrest of his work, and that the answer must have wrung his heart, could not be long without rising beside the image of him, like a shadowy monitor looking at her anger with sad remonstrance. It cost her a litany of pictured sorrows and of silent cries that she might be the mercy for those sorrows – but the resolved submission did come; and when the house was still, and she knew that it was near the time when Mr Casaubon habitually went to rest, she opened her door gently and stood outside in the darkness waiting for his coming upstairs with a light in his hand.

(Middlemarch, pp.400-1)

That is the role of thought: to transform as far as it can the quantum of sheer life-energy that can take one form or another. 'Resolved submission' may not be the magical thinking of a cure but is not just submission here either. It is an active rather than a passive act, returning to the situation from a higher level of resolution, one that demands as much force and effort as an angry attack would have cost Dorothea. '*That thought with which* Dorothea had gone out to meet her husband' has become an autonomous thing here, produced by her mind but

now somehow apart from her. It is this imaginative 'conviction that he had been asking about the possible arrest of his work, and that the answer must have wrung his heart' that guides her now towards the state of 'resolved submission' that Spinoza would surely deem to be a more adequate mode of thinking.

It is the thought which must come first and which creates her – the thinker – rather than her self, rashly, angrily and narrowly determining her thoughts as she did in the immediate aftermath of the argument with her husband. The adequate thought now guards over the other parts of Dorothea's own mind, acting as a 'monitor'. The 'monitor' is like the role that George Eliot herself takes on within the novel, on behalf of her characters, yet here Dorothea is able to do it for herself and in so doing achieves something like the perspective of the novelist, seeing as though from the outside right into herself. This is an important mental evolution for Dorothea and it is particularly important for George Eliot to pick up and hold onto the good things like this that her characters' brains and minds can manage. She must make sure that the good thought is not wasted or left hidden in the unconscious. George Eliot - and more broadly literature - must offer a holding-place that can turn individual mental evolutions into the possibility of communal human blueprints for thinking.

5.4.2. A Case History: Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth

▪ Diagnosis:

A number of literary critics and psychologists have studied Gwendolen Harleth as a psychological case history and interpreted her relationship with Daniel Deronda as a therapeutic exchange. The psychiatrist T. S. Clouston (1840-1915) drew one of the earliest definitions of female adolescence from the character of Gwendolen and wrote of George Eliot, 'This authoress is by far the most acute and subtle psychologist of her time, and certainly the character I have mentioned is most worthy of study by all physicians who look on the mind as being in their field of study or sphere of action'.¹²⁹ In 1999, the literary critic Bernard J. Paris guest edited an issue of *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* which explored psychoanalytic approaches to George Eliot and contained two essays on *Daniel Deronda* by the psychoanalysts Carl Rotenberg and Margot

¹²⁹ T. S. Clouston, *Clinical Lectures on Mental Disease* (New York: Lea Brothers, 1897), p.592.

Waddell. In Rotenberg's essay he diagnoses Gwendolen as suffering from 'foreboding, depression, dream-like states, symptomatic impulses to destructive acting out, murderous dreams, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, manifest anxiety, and obsessional self-recrimination'.¹³⁰ He asserts that 'George Eliot was a proto-psychologist who, decades prior to the development of psychoanalysis, had a remarkable understanding of how a treatment relationship works' (Rotenberg, p.269). This final section of chapter five will look in greater detail at how the 'treatment relationship' between Daniel and Gwendolen functions and what it tells us about George Eliot's own particular model of what we have come to think of as therapy.

In *Daniel Deronda* it is Gwendolen who suffers most from inadequate egoistical thinking and from the feeling of discrepancy between who she is, how she sees herself, and how she would like other people to see her. Gwendolen's psychological predicament is laid bare in the places in the novel where these gaps and dissonances become most apparent. When the wooden panel in the drawing room covering a ghostly portrait that has previously frightened Gwendolen suddenly flies open again while she is in the middle of a group performance of a scene from *The Winter's Tale*, her terrified shrieks reveal a part of her character that does not correspond with her norm:

She wondered at herself in these occasional experiences, which seemed like a brief remembered madness, an unexplained exception from her normal life; and in this instance she felt a peculiar vexation that her helpless fear had shown itself, not, as usual, in solitude, but in well-lit company.¹³¹

The difference between her 'normal' public persona and this other strange thing that has come out of her is too difficult to reconcile: she can barely recognise it as belonging to herself, calling it 'itself'. It is Daniel Deronda who throughout much of the novel urges Gwendolen not to diminish her sense of what modern

¹³⁰ Carl T. Rotenberg, 'George Eliot – Proto-Psychoanalyst', *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 59.3 (1999), 257-70 (260); hereafter cited as 'Rotenberg'.

¹³¹ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), ed. by Graham Handley (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1988), p.51; hereafter cited as *Deronda*.

psychologists would call cognitive dissonance,¹³² but rather to heighten it so as to widen 'the narrow round' (*Deronda*, p.387) of her life and explore the conflicts within it.

But a template or model of what we might call alternative therapy is also established in the novel when Gwendolen - faced with poverty and imagining that one way out for her would be to become a performer on the stage - invites the German musician Klesmer to her home. Rather than the encouragement that she expected from him, she receives scathing judgement. Klesmer refuses to lessen Gwendolen's painful sense of inner discrepancy, as Daniel too will refuse to do later in the novel. He will not tell her that she will be able to improve her skills and reach the standards of a true artist. He will not lower his standards to something closer to what she could attain and he will not - in an act of false kindness - hold back from the truth, once she has asked for his judgement:

Gwendolen had never in her life felt so miserable. No sob came, no passion of tears, to relieve her. Her eyes were burning; and the noonday only brought into more dreary clearness the absence of interest from her life. All memories, all objects, the pieces of music displayed, the open piano - the very reflection of herself in the glass - seemed no better than the packed-up shows of a departing fair. For the first time since her consciousness began, she was having a vision of herself on the common level, and had lost the innate sense that there were reasons why she should not be slighted, elbowed, jostled - treated like a passenger with a third class ticket, in spite of private objections on her own part. She did not move about; the prospects begotten by disappointment were too oppressively preoccupying; she threw herself into the shadiest corner of a settee, and pressed her fingers over her burning eyelids. Every word that Klesmer had said seemed to have been branded into her memory, as most words are which bring with them a new set of impressions and make an epoch for us. (*Deronda*, p.223)

¹³² Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

Gwendolen is not allowed to escape Klesmer's judgment and even after he has stopped talking and left her home, his words are 'branded' upon her. She cannot forget them as she has often tried to forget or ignore the warnings produced within her own mind. Gwendolen needed somebody on the outside to destroy her false 'ideal' conception of herself and force her to widen the range of ways in which she is able to think about who she is. It would have required an act of almost mental self-harm to tear down one version of herself, to reveal another fragile new self beneath, even had she been willing. These two figures of counsel, Klesmer and Deronda, act entirely independently of one another in the novel, but together they establish a pattern of a particular kind of therapy which does not – in the first instance – feel particularly or conventionally therapeutic.

- **Therapy:**

For Rotenberg, the 'treatment relationship' between Daniel and Gwendolen closely resembles that of a psychoanalyst and his patient: 'In psychoanalysis, there are three aspects of the transference relationship: 1) the past repeating itself in the present relationship; 2) a newer present expressing itself in place of past relationships; and 3) a damaged self-seeking transformation. All three elements are present in the Gwendolen-Daniel relationship, which 'has a healing effect on Gwendolen and holds out the promise of a better future for her' (Rotenberg, p.266). Margot Waddell similarly claims that the mental shifts of the novel can be mapped onto the processes of psychoanalysis: 'Through a complicated process of mental association, Deronda becomes an aspect of Gwendolen's conscience. He becomes a superego figure who fully incorporates the ego-ideal. Quite apart from what he independently stands for, Gwendolen projects onto him an area of herself which is later reintegrated only when she is ready to assimilate, or to introject, those wiser and more tolerant elements which are largely represented in his nature'.¹³³ However, Bernard J. Paris, also a historian of psychoanalysis, does not accept these assertions, instead arguing that 'Deronda is more like a clergyman than a therapist [. . .] I am amazed that so many commentators have seen his ministrations as precursors of

¹³³ Margot Waddell, 'On Ideas of 'the Good' and of 'the Ideal' in George Eliot's Novels and in Post-Kleinian Psychoanalytic Thought', *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 59.3 (1999), 271-86 (277).

psychotherapy'.¹³⁴

Daniel and Gwendolen do develop an unorthodox relationship which is difficult to pin down. He becomes a confident, confessor and therapist to her: a blend of priest, psychoanalyst and potential lover. Critics of the novel fail in their reading when they refuse to acknowledge the human multiplicity of this informal relationship, arguing that it is instead only one thing. In chapter 35 Gwendolen attempts to decipher what it is that they are to one another and what it is that she wants from him:

'I wish he could know everything about me without me telling him', was one of her thoughts, as she sat leaning over the end of the couch, supporting her head with her hand, and looking at herself in the mirror – not in admiration, but in a sad kind of companionship. 'I wish he knew that I am not so contemptible as he thinks me – that I am in deep trouble, and want to be something better if I could! Without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume, her feelings had turned this man, only a few years older than herself, into a priest. (*Deronda*, pp. 368-9)

Gwendolen craves a confessional relationship with Daniel, whilst wishing away the difficulty of the actual act of confession. It is something closer to the relationship that George Eliot has with her characters that Gwendolen is imagining, whereby Daniel would have a kind of direct, psychic access into her mind, 'knowing everything [. . .] without me telling him'. Yet the subconscious thought of the inserted clause 'only a few years older than herself' signals the ever present, implicit sexual tension that runs beneath the surface of her blended relationship with Daniel.

Two hundred pages after Gwendolen first turns Daniel into a priest within her mind, he explicitly rejects that position within his own:

She was bent on confession, and he dreaded hearing her confession. Against his better will, he shrank from the task that was laid on him: he wished, and yet rebuked the wish as cowardly, that she could bury her

¹³⁴ Bernard J. Paris, *Rereading George Eliot: Changing Responses to her Experiments in Life* (New York: University of New York Press, 2003), p.164; hereafter cited as 'Paris'.

secrets in her own bosom. He was not a priest. He dreaded the weight of this woman's soul flung upon his own. (*Deronda*, p.591)

These are not feelings to which any therapist might easily admit, but without a clearly bounded role or vocation for so long in this novel, there are limits to what Daniel can do for Gwendolen and to what he can bear. Gwendolen's soul is a 'weight' that is 'flung' at Daniel's own with a painful force. He doesn't have a religion or an institution to help him bear it as a function rather than as a personal relationship. The use of the impersonal 'this woman' turns Gwendolen back into a stranger here, for despite their periodic, emotional encounters there is no conventional basis to their relationship. Navigating this strange secular relationship that exists without normal boundaries or foundations becomes increasingly painful for each of them and makes the therapeutic relationship complicated and difficult.

In her distress, after getting married to a man she had previously committed herself not to wed, and faced with his emerging cruelty, Gwendolen seeks out Daniel to help her. Entering the library in which he sits working, the room takes on the atmosphere of a confessional 'private chapel' (*Deronda*, p.385). Her own small mind is unable to think a way out of her troubles but she looks to his larger mind to help her to have the harder thoughts that she would be unwilling to think alone:

'I *am* selfish. I have never thought much of anyone's feelings, except my mother's. I have not been fond of people. But what can I do?' she went on, more quickly. 'I must get up in the morning and do what everyone else does. It is all like a dance set beforehand. I seem to see all that can be – and I am tired and sick of it. And the world is all confusion to me' – she made a gesture of disgust. 'You say I am ignorant. But what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?'

'This good,' said Deronda, promptly, with a touch of indignant severity, which he was inclined to encourage as his own safeguard; 'life *would* be worth more to you: some real knowledge would give you an interest in the world beyond the small drama of personal desires. It is the curse of your life – forgive me – of so many lives, that all passion is spent

in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it. (*Deronda*, p.387)

Gwendolen's thoughts are pre-determined by her situation and have a determinedly narrow certainty. Her language is rigid and leaves her with no room to manoeuvre: 'I am', 'I have never', 'I have not', 'I must'. She is thinking in those anti-imaginative, normal terms, which sweepingly reduce 'anyone', 'everyone else' and 'all that can be' to something worthless. But Daniel demonstrates to Gwendolen how a thought that is inadequately narrowing can be turned on its head, her 'unless life were worth more?' is turned into his 'would be worth more to you'. Daniel's syntax - in contrast to Gwendolen's - is not linear or fixed or contracting, but expansive. The final sentence of the passage is long and twisted: 'It is the curse of your life – forgive me – of so many lives, that all passion is spent in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it'. It is by a syntax that *wants* a larger home for 'it', so that the thoughts can create the self rather than the normative self controlling the thoughts in a self-diminishing cycle. Daniel's judgement hits Gwendolen like a physical force. So much is about a necessary pain in this novel:

For a moment she felt like a shaken child – shaken out of its wailings into awe, and she said humbly -

'I will try. I will think.'

They both stood silent for a minute, as if some third presence had arrested them – for *Deronda*, too, was under that sense of pressure which is apt to come when our winged words seem to be hovering around us. (*Deronda*, p.388)

In contrast to the complicated formulations and fluid syntax that George Eliot often uses to contain big, important thoughts, here the opposite is true and Gwendolen's utterance, 'I will try. I will think', is stripped back to the simplest, barest components. This is the start of 'trying' to think without a pre-set framework for Gwendolen: the repeated 'will' of these two sentences, no longer merely wilful, marks a shift from the present to a possible future. She is trying to become the thinker of the thoughts he has helped give her, trying to turn that thinker into a character who can go on from thinking itself to further

embodiment in the world.

Daniel too is shaken by what has happened between himself and Gwendolen, and it is in these silent places, after speech, where what is going on feels like something bigger than the characters can hold within or between themselves. Here it is that 'some third presence' emerges, to still again, to make motionless, to arrest. George Eliot is the usual articulate version of that third presence which comes into being in these places when some even bigger consciousness is needed.

Daniel's form of therapy is often riskily close to causing or exacerbating trauma, and when he speaks again after that initial aggressive jolt of judgement, his tone is softer. But he still insists that pain is an unavoidable part of the process of widening that Gwendolen must endure:

'Take the present suffering as a painful letting in of light,' said Deronda, more gently. 'You are conscious of more beyond the round of your own inclinations – you know more of the way in which your life presses on others, and their life on yours. I don't think you could have escaped the painful process in some form or other.'

'But it is a very cruel form,' said Gwendolen, beating her foot on the ground with returning agitation. (*Deronda*, p.388)

This version of 'letting in light' is not like drawing open the curtains; it is a painful, violent tearing open. But this is what is required in order to create room for all the thought-material that Gwendolen needs to have in her mind, other than her own ego. Then Gwendolen would be able to come to know the real edges of herself, the places where 'your life presses on others, and their life on yours', the points at which ego disintegrates and people begin to blend. Just as unavoidable as the painful process that Gwendolen must endure is her resistance to it, and her final statement, 'But it is a very cruel form', is a return to the fixed language of child-like objection and complaint that she began with when she asked in the wrong tone 'But what can I do?' and 'But what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?'. What is present here in George Eliot's realism are the demands of what Freud was sternly to call the reality principle, namely the belief in the emergence of a governing mental

capacity that works to forgo instant gratification and regulate the opposing and pre-existing 'pleasure principle'.¹³⁵

Widening the gaps between the different parts of ourselves is counter intuitive and contrary to what modern psychological therapies might try to do in seeking to lessen cognitive dissonance. It would be easier if we could have single, consistent and fixed characters, but in the painful and even aggressive process of widening which takes place within the novel, and which at certain points of extreme crisis is as close as could possibly be to cruelty. There is no let off from suffering, only the need for its conversion:

'Turn your fear into a safeguard. Keep your dread fixed on the idea of increasing that remorse which is so bitter to you. Fixed meditation may do a great deal towards defining our longing or dread. We are not always in a state of strong emotion, but when we are calm we can use our memories and gradually change the bias of our fear, as we do our tastes. Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like the quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it like a faculty, like vision.' (*Deronda*, p.388)

'Turn your fear into a safeguard' is an utterance Gwendolen has to hear repeated again and again in her mind through what follows until it turns from an abstract piece of advice into a part of her own mental armoury. With each repetition of Daniel's urgent words George Eliot is facing the problem – too often ignored by conventional self-help books - of what to do with counsel that you know to be theoretically valuable but do not know how to make real. As Gwendolen returns again and again to Daniel's advice she is struggling to enact that crucial 'turn'. It is as if her mind knows that this is important counsel and yet unable to put it into action instead keeps hold of the sheer words and keeps repeating them until they can be put to use.

It is one hundred and fifty pages after Daniel first gives his advice that the pair meet again and Gwendolen admits the difficulty that she has had putting his words into reality: 'I wanted to tell you that I have always been

¹³⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), xviii, pp.7-64.

thinking of your advice, but is it any use? – I can't make myself different, because things about me raise bad feelings – and I must go on – I can alter nothing – it is no use' (*Deronda*, p.521). Daniel's insistence that gradual internal change is possible for Gwendolen proves at first to be too far from the reality of what she feels within. She remains rigidly fixed in one position and has no sense of even slow or partial agency over her own self. Rather than the mental evolution that Daniel had proposed, Gwendolen sees only a stagnating continuation of the same patterns of behaviour playing out ahead of her. Yet despite this insistent fixed belief that 'I can alter nothing', Daniel's advice continues to reverberate through her mind. She is 'always' thinking if it; all those verbs - 'turn', 'keep', 'use', 'change', 'take', 'make' - are gradually bedding down within her mind. Even if the conscious part of her brain thinks 'it is no use', another part of her has insisted on keeping hold of the words.

When Gwendolen finds herself confined on a yacht, sailing on the Mediterranean Sea with her detestable husband, Daniel's words circle back around her mind. It is here - in the thick of psychological struggle - that Gwendolen perhaps comes closest to what Freud - in the essay 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' - called the 'arduous task' (*RRWT*, p.155) of 'working through':

She remembered Deronda's words: they were continually recurring in her thought - 'Turn your fear into a safeguard. Keep your dread fixed on the idea of increasing your remorse . . . Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you.'

And so it was. In Gwendolen's consciousness Temptation and Dread met and stared like two pale phantoms, each seeing itself in the other - each obstructed by its own image; and all the while her fuller self beheld the apparitions and sobbed for deliverance from them.

Inarticulate prayers, no more definite than a cry, often swept out from her into the vast silence, unbroken except by her husband's breathing or the splash of the wave or the creaking of the masts; but if ever she thought of definite help, it took the form of Deronda's presence and words, of the sympathy he might have for her, of the direction he

might give her. It was sometimes after a white-lipped, fierce eyed temptation with murdering fingers had made its demon visit that these best moments of inward crying and clinging would come to her, and she would lie with wide-open eyes in which the rising tears seemed a blessing, and the thought, 'I will not mind if I can keep from getting wicked,' seemed an answer to the indefinite prayer. (*Deronda*, p. 577)

Gwendolen is trapped within the narrow physical space of a boat, stranded in the middle of a huge expanse of sea and suffering under the power of her husband. As any psychologist can see, she now has lost all agency over her own life, is desperate somehow to rid herself of this life, this marriage, or even (such is the Temptation) this husband. It is now that the 'turn' begins to happen within her. With the four small words, 'And so it was', George Eliot switches into Gwendolen's suddenly heightened consciousness. The space inside her mind feels big and, in some different dimension, matches the wide external space of the sea in which she is stranded. 'Temptation and Dread' are two versions of her anxiety about the future. Inside her mind they have turned into weird, ghostly figures which she has to watch battling against one another. It is only when they give way to the 'form' of *Deronda* that she can even begin to provide her own thoughts to her cries. When Gwendolen's own thoughts are 'inarticulate prayers', Daniel's words, embedded through repetition into her own mind, give her a language and a purpose with which to go on.

The therapeutic role that Daniel fulfils for Gwendolen, and which I am arguing that George Eliot fulfils for her readers, is that he gives her thoughts that her own mind could not – while in turmoil – construct for itself. The new widening idea that guides Gwendolen must come from a demanding 'help' from the outside; this is the classic purpose of therapy and is why an analyst is needed in the therapy room to think out the thoughts about a patient's life that they cannot think for themselves.

▪ **Outcomes:**

At the very end of chapter 56, on the night following her husband's death, Gwendolen admits to Daniel what happened on the boat, how her husband's accident seems nonetheless a form of wish-fulfilment for her, how she never

lifted a finger to save him from drowning. Faced with this confession, Daniel does not take a merely conciliatory approach to Gwendolen:

Deronda could not utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion to her worst self - that thorn-pressure which must come with the crowning of the sorrowful Better, suffering because, of the Worse. All this mingled thought and feeling kept him silent; speech was too momentous to be ventured on rashly. There were no words of comfort that did not carry some sacrilege. If he had opened his lips to speak, he could only have echoed, 'It can never be altered - it remains unaltered, to alter things.' But he was silent and motionless - he did not know how long - before he turned to look at her, and saw her sunk back with closed eyes, like a lost, weary, storm-beaten white doe, unable to rise and pursue its unguided way. (*Deronda*, p.597)

George Eliot demands the harder and the deeper thought. There would be something sacrilegious in trying to cut short too easily Gwendolen's suffering: it would be a form of untruth, incompleteness and wastage. Her suffering cannot be betrayed or dashed away by easy or reductive words of comfort. For George Eliot the process of becoming a better self requires humans to hold on to and even increase that painful, piercing sense of aversion to the worst self. It would be completely counterproductive to try to repackage, diminish, or make amends with that sense of aversion, for the processes of self-acceptance and self-forgiveness can all too easily become acts of appeasement with our worst selves. Instead, the aim for George Eliot is to find a place where that original, highly charged, powerful material can fit and be put to best use.

Throughout *Daniel Deronda* Gwendolen spends much of her time and energy dreading that something terrible will happen in the future. After her husband's death, she becomes consumed by guilt at the terrible thing that has now happened in the past. As such, she struggles to have either a genuine present or indeed a genuine future. The idea of a genuine future was something that George Eliot was concerned with throughout her whole career. The first original work that she planned but never managed to write was a book called *The Idea of a Future Life* and her interest in both individual and communal

futures persisted. Gillian Beer argues in *Darwin's Plots* that 'The book remained unwritten but its concerns were never abandoned [. . .] the topic continued to preoccupy George Eliot throughout her working life and it found its most intense form in *Daniel Deronda*'.¹³⁶ The idea of a future life can be mapped onto Freud's third stage of psychoanalysis, that of 'working through', for it is at this stage that a patient's deepest resistances - as manifested in their repetitions - can be overcome. It is these resistances which prevent the emergence of a genuine future by instead continually projecting forward a repeated version of the past.

The final page of *Daniel Deronda* contains the letter that Gwendolen sends to Daniel on his wedding day when he is to be married to another woman, and thus tentatively looks towards their own now very separate futures. That separation is crucial: again, painful and yet necessary to Gwendolen's adulthood. Critics have used this letter as evidence both of Gwendolen's growth and of her decline. For the psychoanalyst Bernard Barnett, the letter 'speaks of her determination to make a new beginning',¹³⁷ while alternatively, the literary critic Elizabeth Daniels has written that Gwendolen is 'Not free of the guilt of her past, [but] weak from the chaos of her inner turmoil, with no sustaining dream of the future [. . .] left in a state of collapse – a pitiable bundle of conflicts'.¹³⁸ In her essay 'The Spoiled Child: What Happened to Gwendolen Harleth?' Margaret Reimer argues that 'The conclusion of the novel gives scant evidence of transformation in Gwendolen. Despite her pledge to live and 'be better', her future appears bleak'.¹³⁹ The biographer and novelist Diana Souhami published a reimagined version of *Daniel Deronda* in 2014, entitled *Gwendolen*. She concluded this novel by turning Gwendolen into a suffragette, in an attempt to give her a more conventionally satisfying future: 'Eliot abandons her and sends her back home having had a disastrous marriage and been abandoned by

¹³⁶ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), p.171.

¹³⁷ Bernard Barnett, *You Ought To! A Psychoanalytic Study of the Superego and Conscience* (London: Karnac, 2007), p.83.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Daniels, 'A Meredithian glance at Gwendolen Harleth', in *George Eliot: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, and Rosemary T. Van Arsdell (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp.28-37 (p.35).

¹³⁹ Margaret Reimer, 'The Spoiled Child: What Happened to Gwendolen Harleth?', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 36 (2007), 33-50 (50).

the man she loves. My first instinct was to try to help her [. . .] to rescue her. Or put her on the path to rescue'.¹⁴⁰ Bernard J. Paris seized upon the ending of the novel as proof that any perceived therapeutic exchange between Daniel and Gwendolen had failed: 'Deronda certainly plays an important role in Gwendolen's psychic life [. . .] but I do not think that he helps her to find effective coping devices or leads her in the direction of psychological health. After Grandcourt's death, Gwendolen becomes even more dependent on Deronda; and, despite her brave words, her prospects after his departure seem very bleak to me' (Paris, p.159).

The novel's deliberately open ending has caused concern amongst critics and psychoanalysts who find it difficult to accept that we can never know with any certainty what will now happen to Gwendolen. However, this uncertainty cannot be used as evidence that Daniel's therapy has failed. For by refusing to give Gwendolen a definitive resolution or single, fixed role, George Eliot is instead giving her the difficult reality of a genuine future, one, that is to say, unknown and beyond fiction. I would argue that Gwendolen's final letter contains small but significant signs of the important mental shift that has taken place within her over the course of the novel:

Do not think of me sorrowfully on your wedding day. I have remembered your words – that I may live to be one of the best women, who make others glad that they were born. I do not yet see how that can be, but you know better than I. If it ever comes true, it will be because you helped me. I only thought of myself, and I made you grieve. You must not grieve any more for me. It is better – it shall be better with me because I have known you. (*Deronda*, pp.694-5)

The insertion of the small words 'yet' and 'ever' turn the despair of present uncertainty ('how') into something that 'may' be, perhaps without a name, only a grammar. In her final sentence Gwendolen corrects herself from saying simply

¹⁴⁰ Cole Moreton, 'Author Diana Souhami: 'Why I 'rescued' a character left in the lurch by George Eliot', *Independent*, 13th September 2014, < <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/author-diana-souhami-why-i-rescued-a-character-left-in-the-lurch-by-george-eliot-9729873.html> > [accessed 11th November 2017].

'it is better with me', which would have been too much like an insincere reassurance out of step with the determination of the novel to transcend kindness, and a sacrilegious attempt to satisfy Daniel. Instead she adds the words 'it shall be', in recognition that she is not yet, but can envisage a future when she 'may' be. This final letter sits in stark contrast to Gwendolen's earlier assertions at the beginning of her relationship with Daniel: 'I can't make myself different [...] and I must go on – I can alter nothing' (*Deronda*, p.521). Now, by imagining him thinking of her, him not wanting her to be sorrowful, and her not wanting him to think her sorrowful, she is able to make herself less so. It is a complex to-and-fro, as complex as any syntax. Even now that he is absent, he safeguards the best part of her, as George Eliot does more widely for all of her characters. This relationship mirrors the potential therapeutic relation that exists between a book and its reader, which has been modelled throughout this thesis in the interlinked relationships between different readers and writers.

Rather than providing Gwendolen with an explicit cure or solution or resolution, Daniel – as George Eliot's closest representative within the novel – has given her the capacity to inhabit more complex constructions. She exists now, not as a singular, fixed entity – as the critics who are so keen to place her back within a defined role would have it – but in the grey areas of 'may', 'yet', 'if' and 'shall'. While it is perhaps easier to judge the outcomes of any therapeutic exchange in terms of conventional markers of success or failure, success cannot simply mean a score on a well-being scale. In these rigid terms, the literary model of therapy which this thesis is advocating might produce outcomes which could initially look like failure. However, despite the apparent 'bleak' uncertainty of Gwendolen's prospects, by looking at her very syntax it is possible to see how she now has the capacity for two-way blended thinking: she is seeing herself through the expansive view of a mind outside herself, absorbing back into herself an aspect of that mind, and able now to release herself from the narrowness of seeking an immediately fixed, definite solution or cure for her life.

6.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the ways in which literature serves as:

- A repository for containing and exploring complicated emotional human matter
- A therapeutic and contemplative aid
- A place for and trigger of particular kinds of 'literary thinking' that, being of value to human survival and flourishing, can be hard to come by and difficult to preserve elsewhere in the modern world.

It has shown how non-contemporary languages and the ways of thinking implicit within them have been vitally preserved, transferred and adapted by humans, across time, through the evolving needs and strategies of human thinking within the processes of reading and writing.

This conclusion seeks to consolidate a new approach towards thinking about what a literary-based form of unformalised therapy is and can be by focusing on four particularly important aspects of what I have called 'literary thinking' involved throughout the chapters of this thesis. It is these four crucial elements that I want to bring together and emphasise here:

- 1) Blending
- 2) Widening
- 3) Re-positioning
- 4) Reappraising

If these are prime constituents of therapeutic progress, then by therapy, I mean here any tool or process that aids us to make psychological progress, and by progress, I do mean not, over-literalistically, merely forward movement in a straight line, but rather the development of complex and flexible shapes in which to do thinking in the midst of dilemmas. In their role within this development, these four inter-related functions have been shown in action not only within individual chapters, but in the interrelations across chapters

between different writers, and in the practical examples of the modern-day readers who took part in the study's reading experiments.

1) Blending:

The concept of elemental blending sits at the heart of the Stoic cosmology, and Seneca's writing – when considered as a whole body of work – demonstrates the danger as well as the potential held within a fluidly inter-connected universe where no-thing and no-body stands in singular isolation. The capacity to hold a blend of more than one thought within our minds is central to developing healthier modes of being, even and perhaps especially in relation to material that feels far from safe.¹⁴¹ This thesis has argued that literature's particular therapeutic contribution is in its ability to model and to trigger different versions of blended thinking within readers' minds, especially in the blended inter-relation to-and-fro between text and reader, and including areas in between simple good or bad, safe or dangerous. Through a literary language, that blended area that exists for a reader between life and text is a trial model for thinking about real life without full and helpless exposure but without unemotional withdrawal. Serious reading of serious literature gives readers access to a blend of more thoughts than one single mind can either produce or hold within it, particularly during times of trauma.

This thesis has also shown how different writers have absorbed and adapted the work of those who came before them, to create a blend of stored human thought. This further development of blending through reading and writing is shown in action in Montaigne's personalised use of Seneca and then again the experimental work of the fourth and fifth chapters in which modern readers, engaging with the writing of Wordsworth and George Eliot, instinctively began to create and inhabit blended mental spaces. This was a process from which, for the most part, they seemed to benefit greatly, in following the creative mental leads implicitly left by the selected modellers in

¹⁴¹ Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner set out the argument that 'conceptual blending [. . .] is responsible for the origins of language, art, religion, science, and other similar human feats, and that it is indispensable for basic everyday thought as it is for artistic and scientific abilities' in *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Perseus Books, 2002), p.vi.

this thesis - Montaigne, Wordsworth and George Eliot. For reading gives people the opportunity to think with the power and scope of more than one mind, enlarging our own capacity for thought beyond the limits of the single selves that we have partly constructed for ourselves, or the seemingly fixed circumstances that we inhabit.

If we are to have any chance of making sense of the reality of our lives, we need ways of thinking that can match the continually shifting blends and compounds of feelings and experiences that we face. While modern psychology has attempted to develop replicable solutions to human suffering, therapies that overgeneralise or oversimplify their restrictively named subjects risk diminishing the complexity and multiplicity of individual lives and individual blends or compounds. Literature is by its very nature a richly linguistic product of that complexity and multiplicity and as such it can aid us in places that formal psychology – in its current form – cannot always reach.

2) Widening:

This thesis argues that literature offers readers a means through which they can widen their own mental capacity, stretching the space within which they are able to think. It began by looking at Stoic philosophy and its version of therapy which advocates the elimination of damaging emotional material from our lives. But literature exists not by exclusion or subtraction but by creating through its forms an inclusive holding-ground for the freer exploration of powerful emotional material. While in normal, everyday life it is difficult to escape narrow, linear, black-and-white frameworks and their repetition, literary forms contain within them a set of distinctly different blueprints. For example:

- The vast scope of a Senecan tragedy creates a wide external space within which emotional forces that exist internally, within our minds, can be seen playing *out* in full.
- Montaigne's essay form offers a model of wide-ranging mental flexibility, related to his own reading and thinking, in which there are no pre-set routes and where self-revision is always possible.

- Wordsworth's use of lineation creates a circuitry on the page which demands to be matched within the extended mind of the reader, opening up unrealised internal spaces.
- George Eliot's syntax exists to accommodate all the rich density of reality and to create beyond ego a certain extended mental width for her characters, and for readers made imaginatively sympathetic to them, often when the characters are least able to create it for themselves.

In the reading experiments, literature's specific capacity for triggering an excited degree of mental widening is demonstrated in the places where participants shift out of their default modes, re-think their lives and past experiences, and managing to get outside of their own minds, see themselves from different perspectives.

3) Re-Positioning:

Implicit in points 1 and 2 above, the ways in which literature can help readers mentally to re-position themselves have emerged as an important finding within this thesis. Re-positioning yourself and / or the emotionally charged material under which you might be suffering is not to seek a cure or an explicit solution, instead it is an attempt to minimise the wastage of trauma and to reconfigure it (as art itself can) into something that can be of act or service.

When Seneca wrote to his mother to comfort her while he was in exile, he was struggling to reconcile his dual positions as both the cause of her troubles and the possible source of relief. He was also struggling to reconcile the general precepts of Stoicism with the particulars of his individual reality. The difficulty and also the necessity of inhabiting multiple psychological perspectives recurs throughout the thesis. George Eliot's capacity to shift between different mental positions – between the general and the particular as well as between different character centres – offers perhaps the clearest demonstration of how literature can create greater imaginative mobility within the width discussed above. Across each of the chapters, syntax and a strong language are shown again to be a tool for the re-configuration of thoughts and the re-positioning of the self.

In the experimental sections of the thesis certain participants

demonstrated how reading and / or writing provided them with a route out of their own singular, fixed positions, allowing them – in certain places – to look back at themselves from the outside.

4) Reappraising: revising and going back over

The revisionary modifications to Stoic thought made by Montaigne, Wordsworth and (for George Eliot) Spinoza have lead towards an implicit model of therapy which no longer seeks merely to withdraw from or diminish emotional trauma. Instead, acts of returning, and rethinking within places of deep emotional richness have been shown to be crucial processes.

As a holding-ground for emotionally charged human material, literature serves (as said above) to prevent wastage, and while there can perhaps be no cure or solution to a trauma, the very capacity to hold onto something of it until it can be better placed, used or accepted is important. Without these holding-grounds for reappraisal, it is difficult to avoid becoming caught up in damaging cycles of rumination.

The literary models of this thesis provide an alternative version of going back over, or looping back into, that is not rumination. They also demonstrate a version of progress that is not merely forward motion. The capacity to go backwards must be acknowledged as a part of progression, and not simply seen as a feature of failure through regression or stuckness. Going back with added levels of understanding may be far more significant than simply trying to ‘move on’. In the reading experiments, certain participants again instinctively demonstrated a capacity for self-revision, re-thinking, and backwards-reflection, that was being triggered by the literature that they were reading.

These four elements have a crucial relation to the capacities found within a literary language. This thesis has argued that literature offers readers a language which can serve as an alternative or challenging addition to formal psychological therapies or theories. It is a language which is distinctly difficult – and necessarily so – in order to counter the over-familiar superficiality of much ordinary discourse. This (in particular in Wordsworth as poet and George Eliot as novelist) is an extraordinary language for ordinary people and ordinary lives. While a difficult language poses the risk of alienating readers or leading quickly

to dismissal or distraction, in the reading experiments of this thesis it is the difficulty of the literature given to participants within what are nonetheless powerful emotional areas that appears to have been a crucial trigger of:

- Spontaneity
- Attentiveness
- Speculative thinking
- Greater depth and range of thinking

Easier reading material or tasks that merely required information-processing tended to allow participants to remain within their practised default modes and to be over-certain, opinionated or distracted in their thinking.

This thesis makes and supports the claim that we need a language within which we can recognise ourselves and which – through the mirroring processes of reading and writing – can recognise us. For it is difficult, if not impossible, to know what or who you are and how you feel (at least consciously) until you see it written – in some form - outside of yourself. It is then that it becomes possible to place that conscious knowledge back into yourself. This is what it means to find a language with which to think. That language – if it is to be effective – must have the requisite complexity, density and richness to bear witness to and record the difficult complexity of real life.

In a thesis in which individual specifics counter over-generalized theories or ruminations, I end with one final example. In *A Fortunate Man*, John Berger gives an account of the work of a country doctor which provides a useful example of how literary language and literary thinking can be applied within the practical world of the doctor. It is an account that has proved foundational in its influence on a generation of GPs interested in a more holistic medicine.

Berger describes the role of the doctor – in particular when treating a depressed patient – as first of all to recognise the sick man, but also to be a person in whom the sick man can recognise himself:

If the man can begin to feel recognised – and such recognition may well include aspects of his character which he has not yet recognised himself – the hopeless nature of his unhappiness will have been changed: he may even have the chance of being happy [. . .] How does a doctor begin to

make an unhappy man feel recognised? [. . .] The recognition has to be oblique [. . .] This can be achieved by the doctor presenting himself to the patient as a comparable man. It demands from the doctor a true imaginative effort and precise self-knowledge. The patient must be given a chance to recognise, despite his aggravated self-consciousness, aspects of himself in the doctor.¹⁴²

The argument of this thesis is that literature can and does play an analogous and therefore therapeutic role of oblique recognition, standing before the reader in a way that is related in its own medium to how an imaginative doctor stands before a needy patient.

Practical Objectives: I want to close with some suggestions as to the further implications as possible real-world aims:

- To test the applicability and practical therapeutic uses of the ideas explored within this thesis through the development of a series of pilot studies looking at the effects of private reading on a range of different populations.
- To encourage the incorporation of literary training and literary thinking into the education and practice of clinical psychologists.
- To develop an effective literary intervention that would act as an aid for deep thinking and a supplement to existing therapeutic treatments.

This intervention might include elements of established psychological therapies in that it would:

- Create a space for self-examination and contemplation.
- Accept complexity and difficulty rather than driving towards simplification and too easily-won solutions.
- Seek resolutions that are not cures.
- Establish a testing-ground in which it would be possible to stay *in* and work *through* difficulty, rather than withdraw from or get rid of it.
- Create a process of two-way exchange and reciprocal listening whereby more than one mind is being put to service.

¹⁴² John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Fortunate Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) pp.75-6

Appendices

Experiment A:

Appendix A: Study Advertisement

The Centre for Research into Reading, Literature & Society

The Institute of Psychology, Health & Society

Research into How Readers Respond to the Poetry of William Wordsworth

We are seeking volunteers to take part in a Ph.D. study looking at how different people respond to the poetry of William Wordsworth.

The study will involve attending a **one hour session** on campus that will be arranged to fit your availability.

During the session you will be given certain extracts of poetry to read and respond to in private.

Participants must be fluent English speakers.
No previous experience or study of literature required.

All ages and disciplines welcome.

If you are interested, please contact Kelda Green at k.l.green@liv.ac.uk for more information.

Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

Appendix B: Breakdown of Participants

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	AGE	M/F	PROFESSION	DO YOU READ FOR PLEASURE?	DO YOU READ POETRY?	HAVE YOU EVER STUDIED WORDSWORTH?
A1	22	M	ACCOUNTING STUDENT	Y	Y	N
A2	37	M	POLITICS LECTURER	Y	N	N
A3	27	F	ENGLISH STUDENT	Y	Y	Y
A4	45	M	LINGUISTICS LECTURER	Y	Y	Y
A5	45	F	UNIVERSITY ADMIN	Y	N	N
A6	43	F	MEDICAL EDUCATION LECTURER	Y	N	N
A7	45	F	PUBLIC HEALTH POST DOC.	Y	N	N
A8	61	F	RETIRED YOUTH WORKER	Y	Y	N
A9	46	M	ESL TUTOR	Y	Y	Y
A10	53	F	UNIVERSITY ADMIN	Y	N	N

Appendix C: Information Sheet



Research into How Readers Respond to the Poetry of William Wordsworth: Information for Participants

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide to participate, please read through the following information in order to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please do take your time to read all the following information and feel free to ask any further questions that you may have.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to discover how different readers approach and respond to the poetry of William Wordsworth.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

Ten participants from across the University have been invited to participate, regardless of current discipline or previous reading experience. The only requirement to taking part is that you are a fluent English speaker.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be required to attend a **one hour session** that will take place in The Sidney Jones Library on the University campus and will be arranged to fit your schedule. At the session, you will be asked to:

- Fill out a short pre-task questionnaire to confirm certain basic details about yourself.
- Read a short newspaper article and record into a Dictaphone your initial response to it.
- You will then be given two poems and asked to record yourself reading the poetry aloud.
- Once you have read the poetry you are asked to record your initial, instinctive responses to it.

You are encouraged to speak about the poetry in as much detail as you wish and in any way that seems right to you. You will be given a short questionnaire to fill out 7 days later, asked to read the same poems again and write down any further responses to them.

The research is being carried out by Kelda Green a PhD student from The Centre for Research into Reading (CRILS), Literature and Society - which is part of The Institute of Psychology, Health and Society.

Are there any disadvantages, risks or benefits to taking part?

There are no perceived disadvantages or risks to taking part in this research. However if you feel any discomfort or disadvantage at any point please do let the researcher know immediately. There are no specific intended benefits or reimbursements for taking part but you will hopefully find the task to be a pleasurable experience and your contribution to this PhD project will be greatly valued.

Will my participation in this study be kept confidential?

Yes, your participation will be kept confidential. All information provided by you will be anonymised. Your name or any identifying details will not be used. Data will be collected through a combination of questionnaires and audio recordings. These will be securely stored either in a locked filing cabinet on campus or on the Universities secure server in a password protected folder. Data will only be used for this particular project and will only be accessed by the researchers at CRILS. All data - excluding personal contact details - will be securely stored for 10 years, in line with The University of Liverpool's Research Data Management Policy, after which it will be destroyed.

What will happen to the results?

The results of this study will be used as part of a PhD project that is looking at the therapeutic potential of literature. After completion a copy of the thesis will be available in The University library. You will not be identifiable in the final thesis.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You may stop taking part in the research or withdraw your results at any point without explanation. If you wish to stop participating please inform the researcher. **What if I am unhappy or there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting The Director of CRILS and Principal Investigator, Professor Philip Davis (see below for contact details) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make. If you have any further questions please contact Kelda Green: k.l.green@liv.ac.uk

[The Institute of Psychology, Health & Society,](#)

[The University of Liverpool,](#)

[Waterhouse Building \(2nd Floor Block B\)](#)

L69 3GL

11th March 2016

Appendix D: Consent Form (Used in Experiment A, B and C)



Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research

Research into How Readers Respond to the Poetry of William Wordsworth

Project:

Researcher:

Kelda Green

Please initial
box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 11th March 2016 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
4. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.
5. I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the sole purpose of analysing responses to the texts provided.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name

Date _____

Signature

Name of Person taking consent

Date _____

Signature

Principal Investigator:

Name: Professor Philip Davis
Work Address: 213 Whelan Building, The University of Liverpool,
Floor),
Brownlow Hill, L69 3GB

Student Researcher:

Name: Kelda Green
Work Address: Waterhouse Building (Block B, 2nd
The University of Liverpool, L69 3GL

Appendix E: Pre-Task Questionnaire (Used in Experiment A, B and C)

Age:

Gender:

Profession /Current Course of Study:

Have you ever studied literature and if so to what level?

Have you ever studied or read the poetry of William Wordsworth?

What are your hobbies and interests?

Do you read for pleasure and if so how often?

What is your favourite book?

Do you ever read or write poetry, if so please specify?

Appendix F: Passages Used in the Study

Passage One - News Article

BBC Regional News:

Olive Cooke death: Poppy seller had depression, inquest hears

A ninety-two year-old woman who was found dead in the Avon Gorge had "long term issues with periodic depression", an inquest has heard. Olive Cooke was one of the UK's longest-serving poppy sellers and had collected money in Bristol for the Royal British Legion for seventy-six years. Media coverage of her death focussed on suggestions she had been overwhelmed by junk mail from charities. An inquest into her death was opened and adjourned until the 16th of July. Avon Coroner's Court heard that Mrs Cooke was pronounced dead at 18:20 on the 6th of May by a paramedic and was formally identified by her grandson. She had complained to her local newspaper last year about the amount of requests for donations she was receiving. A friend told the BBC that while he would not blame her death entirely on charities "pestering" her, she had been "under pressure". Coroner's officer Linda Grove told the hearing: "This lady had long term issues with periodic depression and low mood." Her family said the charity requests, while "intrusive", were not to blame for her death. They said she had left a note to explain the reasons for her death which had mentioned depression and being elderly. Mrs Cooke, from Fishponds, started selling poppies at the age of sixteen as her father was an active Royal British Legion member having served in World War One. She said it took on new meaning for her when her first husband was killed in action in World War Two.
20th May 2015 Bristol.¹⁴³

(268 words)

Passage Two – Extract from 'The Ruined Cottage'

And thus before his eighteenth year was told,
Accumulated feelings pressed his heart
With still increasing weight; he was o'er-powered
By Nature; by the turbulence subdued
Of his own mind; by mystery and hope,
And the first virgin passion of a soul Communing
with the glorious universe.
Full often wished he that the winds might rage
When they were silent: far more fondly now
Than in his earliest season did he love
Tempestuous nights - the conflict and the sounds
That live in darkness. From his intellect
And from the stillness of abstracted thought He
asked repose; and, failing oft to win
The peace required, he scanned the laws of light
Amid the roar of torrents where they send From
hollow clefts up to the clearer air
A cloud of mist that, smitten by the sun,
Varies its rainbow hues. But vainly thus,
And vainly by all other means, he strove
To mitigate the fever of his heart. (*Excursion*, I, 280-300)

(158 words)

¹⁴³ 'Olive Cooke death: Poppy seller had depression, inquest hear', *BBC News*, 20th May 2015
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-32810487>> [accessed 15th January 2016].

It would have grieved
Your very soul to see her. Sir, I feel
The story linger in my heart; I fear
 'Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
To that poor woman: - so familiarly
Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
And presence; and so deeply do I feel
Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
A momentary trance comes over me;
And to myself I seem to muse on One
By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
A human being destined to awake
To human life, or something very near
To human life, when he shall come again
For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
Your very soul to see her: evermore
Her eyelids drooped, her eyes downwards were cast;
And, when she at her table gave me food,
She did not look at me. (*Excursion*, l, 815-833) (142 words)

PARTICIPANT	LENGTH OF RESPONSE TO NEWS ARTICLE	NUMBER OF WORDS QUOTED FROM NEWS ARTICLE	LENGTH OF RESPONSE TO POETRY EXTRACT ONE	NUMBER OF WORDS QUOTED FROM POETRY EXTRACT ONE	LENGTH OF RESPONSE TO POETRY EXTRACT TWO	NUMBER OF WORDS QUOTED FROM POETRY EXTRACT TWO	LENGTH OF COMBINED POETRY RESPONSES	NUMBER OF WORDS QUOTED IN COMBINED POETRY RESPONSES
A1	223	0	713	58	708	80	1421	138
A2	314	0	501	30	504	65	1005	95
A3	137	12	250	41	338	63	588	104
A4	326	0	572	9	346	133	918	142
A5	257	9	333	23	563	0	896	23
A6	337	3	54	34	1156	64	1710	98
A7	112	0	135	17	128	0	263	17
A8	198	0	225	2	335	10	560	12
A9	284	0	195	11	256	29	786	40
A10	215	0	194	10	161	22	355	32
TOTAL	2403	24	3672	235	4495	466	8164	701
AVERAGE	240	2.4	367	23.5	449	46.6	816	70

Appendix H: Response Length T-Test Results

[1] "overall length"
 [1] "mean response length of article: 240.3 | mean response length of poems: 850.2"
 Paired t-test
 data: x2[, 1] and x2[, 4]
 t = -4.7793, df = 9, p-value = 0.001002 alternative hypothesis:
 true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence
 interval:
 -898.5818 -321.2182 sample
 estimates:
 mean of the differences -609.9

Appendix I: Word Frequency Table

WORD	NEWS ARTICLE / POETRY RESPONSES	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY
I	N	9	7	6	3	5	18	4	6	13	6	77	3.2%
	P	22	21	12	25	34	68	11	23	22	5	243	3%
Me / My / Myself	N	1	6	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	12	0.49%
	P	10	10	4	8	13	15	0	2	6	1	69	0.85%
Think / Thought	N	3	1	2	0	1	5	1	7	5	1	26	1.08%
	P	10	5	6	2	17	27	4	0	8	1	80	0.98%
Feel / Feeling	N	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.04%
	P	2	3	2	3	6	8	1	2	0	1	28	0.34%
Actually	N	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	4	1	0	9	0.37%
	P	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	7	0.09%
Really	N	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	0	6	0	12	0.49%
	P	0	5	6	0	1	5	9	3	3	0	32	0.39%
Obviously	N	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	5	0.20%
	P	1	0	0	0	3	5	0	7	2	1	19	0.23%
But	N	1	3	1	0	4	4	1	3	2	2	21	0.87%
	P	12	9	2	10	14	16	6	0	1	5	75	0.92%
Or	N	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	1	4	0	12	0.49%
	P	8	9	3	6	6	11	0	2	1	2	48	0.59%
If	N	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	1	7	0.29%
	P	10	3	8	0	0	6	1	2	3	1	34	0.41%
Just	N	0	0	0	0	5	3	2	0	0	0	10	0.42%
	P	3	2	6	4	1	18	1	0	2	4	41	0.50%
Sort of	N	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0.08%
	P	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	10	0.12%
Some	N	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	8	0.33%
	P	5	7	11	11	0	14	1	0	3	4	46	0.56%
Maybe	N	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	6	0.25%
	P	5	5	1	5	1	7	0	2	1	0	27	0.33%
Perhaps	N	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	0.12%
	P	0	7	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	10	0.12%
?	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0.08%
	P	0	0	6	2	1	5	0	1	0	0	15	0.18%

Appendix J: Word Frequency T-Test Results

<p>[1] "I" [1] "meanN = 0.0328 meanP = 0.0287"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = 0.78621, df = 9, p-value = 0.4519 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.007793454 0.016096304 sample estimates: mean of the differences 0.004151425</p>	<p>[1] "me" [1] "meanN = 0.0044 meanP = 0.007"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -1.4009, df = 9, p-value = 0.1948 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.006833436 0.001606666 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.002613385</p>
<p>[1] "think" [1] "meanN = 0.0117 meanP = 0.0087"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = 0.7, df = 9, p-value = 0.5016 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.006503214 0.012331401 sample estimates: mean of the differences 0.002914093</p>	<p>[1] "feel" [1] "meanN = 3e-04 meanP = 0.0033"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -5.3094, df = 9, p-value = 0.0004878 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.004229711 - 0.001702272 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.002965991</p>
<p>[1] "actually" [1] "meanN = 0.0049 meanP = 0.001"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = 1.7102, df = 9, p-value = 0.1214 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.001259721 0.009066182 sample estimates: mean of the differences 0.003903231</p>	<p>[1] "really" [1] "meanN = 0.007 meanP = 0.0063"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = 0.27828, df = 9, p-value = 0.7871 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.005023713 0.006433102 sample estimates: mean of the differences 0.0007046945</p>
<p>[1] "obviously" [1] "meanN = 0.0017 meanP = 0.0025"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.49951, df = 9, p-value = 0.6294 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.004087426 0.002608814 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.0007393061</p>	<p>1] "but" [1] "meanN = 0.0089 meanP = 0.0095"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.21332, df = 9, p-value = 0.8358 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.006557546 0.005427396 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.0005650754</p>

<p>[1] "or"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 0.005 meanP = 0.005"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.0080613, df = 9, p-value = 0.9937 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.004588945 0.004556356</p> <p>sample estimates: mean of the differences -1.629483e-05</p>	<p>[1] "if"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 0.0028 meanP = 0.0041"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.80835, df = 9, p-value = 0.4397 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.005100349 0.002414893</p> <p>sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.001342728</p>
<p>[1] "just"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 0.0046 meanP = 0.0048"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.057144, df = 9, p-value = 0.9557 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.006919885 0.006578895 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.000170495</p>	<p>[1] "sortOf"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 7e-04 meanP = 0.0012"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.57687, df = 9, p-value = 0.5782 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.002469230 0.001465768 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.0005017311</p>
<p>[1] "some"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 0.0034 meanP = 0.0068"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -1.3344, df = 9, p-value = 0.2149 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.009326031 0.002405828 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.003460102</p>	<p>[1] "maybe"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 0.0025 meanP = 0.0026"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.046149, df = 9, p-value = 0.9642 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.002876710 0.002761683 sample estimates: mean of the differences -5.751316e-05</p>
<p>[1] "perhaps"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 0.0011 meanP = 0.0011"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = 0.099396, df = 9, p-value = 0.923 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.001293859 0.001412785 sample estimates: mean of the differences 5.946291e-05</p>	<p>[1] "?"</p> <p>[1] "meanN = 0.001 meanP = 0.0018"</p> <p>Paired t-test data: x and y t = -0.57133, df = 9, p-value = 0.5818 alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: -0.004020887 0.002399391 sample estimates: mean of the differences -0.0008107483</p>

Experiment B:

Appendix K: Study Advertisement



The Centre for Research into Reading, Literature & Society

The Institute of Psychology, Health & Society

Research into How Readers Respond to the Poetry of William Wordsworth

We are seeking volunteers to take part in a study looking at how different people respond to the poetry of William Wordsworth.

The study will involve spending **30 minutes per day for two weeks** either writing a diary or reading the poetry of Wordsworth and then completing a **Reading Diary**.

Participants must be fluent English speakers.

No previous experience or study of literature required.

If you would like to participate in the study or to find out more please contact Kelda Green at k.l.green@liv.ac.uk for more information.

Participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

Appendix L: Breakdown of Participants

GROUP 1: POETRY TASK

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	GENDER	AGE	PROFESSION	DO YOU READ FOR PLEASURE?	DO YOU READ POETRY?	HAVE YOU STUDIED ENGLISH LITERATURE?	HAVE YOU READ WORDSWORTH'S POETRY?
B1	M	71	RETIRED TEACHER	YES	YES	O-LEVEL	NO
B2	F	43	HOUSEWIFE	YES	OCCASIONALLY	A-LEVEL	NO
B3	F	43	HEADTEACHER	YES	RARELY	MASTERS	YES
B4	F	41	CHARITY MANAGER	YES	YES	A-LEVEL	NO
B5	M	25	PHD STUDENT	YES	OCCASIONALLY	GCSE	NO
B6	M	26	WAITER	YES	VERY RARELY	GCSE	NO
B7	F	27	WAITRESS	YES	YES	MASTERS	YES
B8	F	23	UNEMPLOYED	YES	YES	MASTERS	YES

GROUP 2: PLAIN DIARY TASK

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	GENDER	AGE	PROFESSION	DO YOU READ FOR PLEASURE?	DO YOU READ POETRY?	HAVE YOU STUDIED ENGLISH LITERATURE?	HAVE YOU READ WORDSWORTH'S POETRY?
B9	M	46	TEACHER	YES	YES	MASTERS	YES
B10	F	31	CHARITY WORKER	YES	YES	MASTERS	YES
B11	F	19	STUDENT	YES	RARELY	A-LEVEL	NO

B12	F	45	MARKETING MANAGER	YES	RARELY	A-LEVEL	SMALL AMOUNT
B13	F	53	UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR	YES	RARELY	O-LEVEL	YES
B14	M	27	PERSONAL TRAINER	YES	NO	GCSE	NO
B15	M	31	PHD STUDENT	YES	NO	GCSE	NO
B16	F	21	STUDENT	YES	RARELY	GCSE	NO

GROUP 3: BOTH TASKS

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	GENDER	AGE	PROFESSION	DO YOU READ FOR PLEASURE?	DO YOU READ POETRY?	HAVE YOU STUDIED ENGLISH LITERATURE?	HAVE YOU READ WORDSWORTH'S POETRY?
B17	M	65	ARTIST	YES	YES	O-LEVEL	A SMALL AMOUNT
B18	F	61	TEACHER	YES	OCCASIONALLY	O-LEVEL	A SMALL AMOUNT

Appendix M: Information Sheet (The following alterations were made to the full information sheet shown in Appendix C)

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to discover how different readers approach and respond to the poetry of William Wordsworth.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

Eighteen participants from across the general public have been invited to participate. The only requirement to taking part is that you are a fluent English speaker.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to take part in this study you will firstly be asked to fill out both a consent form and short pre-task questionnaire to confirm certain basic details about yourself. You will then receive either a plain notebook or a notebook in which a poem by William Wordsworth called 'The Ruined Cottage' has been printed. If you receive the plain notebook, you will be required to spend thirty minutes per day, for fourteen days, writing about anything that seems interesting or important to you. If you receive the notebook that contains the poetry, you are asked to spend a minimum of thirty minutes per day, for fourteen days, reading a section of the poem and keeping a diary of your responses to what you have read.

Ideally you are requested to complete the task over fourteen consecutive days, however we understand that this may not always be possible.

When you have completed the task, please fill out the exit questionnaire at the end of the diary and return the whole pack in the pre-paid envelope supplied. You will be invited to participate in an informal interview -which will be audio recorded - to further discuss your completed diary within three weeks of completing the task.

The research is being carried out by Kelda Green a PhD student from The Centre for Research into Reading (CRILS), Literature and Society - which is part of The Institute of Psychology, Health and Society.

Appendix N: Post-Task Questionnaire

- 1) How did you feel about undertaking the task?
- 2) How did your feelings change over the course of the task – if at all?
- 3) Did you make any unexpected discoveries over the course of the task?
- 4) Would you consider the task to be therapeutic in any sense?
- 5) Did your attitude to reading, writing or poetry change after completing this task? 6) Do you have any other comments of feelings about the task?

Appendix 16: Example of Independently Annotated Text

DIARY ONE

FEMALE 43 YEAR OLD HEADTEACHER

Day 1)

I've never read this poem which I'm really happy about. I'm reading the first section on a relaxing afternoon, in a lovely B&B and can hear the sea through the window, see a pleasant sky and hear children playing, and so I reminded myself a bit of the person lucky enough to be 'half conscious of the soothing melody' of the wren, so relaxed he doesn't even need to take comfort in the birdsong. I think that the description of the sun alongside the 'brooding clouds' description, with the impact of both together on the land, creates the metaphor for the world that I remember from my Uni days that this poet inhabited - beauty of nature but something 'brooding' around the corner. I can't remember the detail now of the whole perspective he had, but I have a sense that the man lying so relaxed may face disruption like that the world faced then and certainly faces now. I thought, from about line 22, that the speaker was female; I pictured her as a rural, working class type figure from the references to 'toiling', 'languid' and the weakness of her (I thought) arm when trying to bat away the insects. It's an interesting opening in the sense that there are two descriptions of men of different ages in repose, relaxing, but the older man on the cottage bench with the staff who the day before had been facing the sun gives me a feeling of certainty, of taking a secure stance in the world where the first one struck me as being detached from it, deliberately. This was confirmed for me by his description of him as water in a drought, as wise and interesting, from the 'native hills' that sense of certainty and longevity in the world. There is a feeling of sadness from the speaker, from the way he is walking, the way he is looking back at his relationship with the older man with such nostalgia. It makes me think he is lonely and maybe hasn't found fulfilment.

Day 2)

I love the lines, 'Strongest minds / Are often those of whom the noisy world / hears least' because I just can think of so many people where that's true. I was looking at photos on Facebook just before starting to read, of a chap who this is so true of, and is a lovely Grandad, having been an awesome Head of English and Senior Teacher looking after 100s, but he could have run countries with his strong mind. I was pleased when I read that line as I'd slightly fought my way through the previous twelve, because of the long sentence, something I remember thinking as a Uni student. Rereading I quite like 'a nice backwardness afraid of shame', capturing that hesitancy we can all have to justify not doing / saying / learning things. The capitalisation of Nature and Muses and Time elevate the man's status and makes me again ask what it is about him that will be so remarkable and why the speaker thinks so - it makes me admire him but wonder why.

The pastoral description of the man's early life presents him as a stoical boy and one keen to learn, prepared to have to pass through horrid weather and difficult terrain for an education, combining the landscape and coping with the landscape, with training the mind. I think I remember this was a theme for Romantic poets; I used to enjoy learning about this relationship between the brain and nature, it was one I could identify with. It's very interesting to think of there being 'An active power to fasten images / Upon his brain' whether the images be nature or anything else, and it makes me think about the power of the memory as something you can activate through amazing experiences if you do it consciously. I shall try to do that, in fact I've been trying to do it as we've been going on various walks and hikes lately.

He describes him as a boy of massive imagination, prompted by nature, and he gives nature a kind of Wind in the Willows Wild Wood feeling when he says 'no one near to whom he might confess the things he saw' and he operates as a 'lone wolf'.

 **melissa Chapple**
Excitement: for a new experience.

 **melissa Chapple**
Mindfulness: Attentive to own surroundings – similar to that done in the first day of the poem.

 **melissa Chapple**
Self-reflection: Direct relation to self, metacognition.


 **melissa Chapple**
Self-reflection: Relation to own life events

 **melissa Chapple**
Excitement: Further excitement of something new.

 **melissa Chapple**
Imagination: Forming ideas of characters and taking control of some of the poetry.

 **melissa Chapple**
Self-reflection: Different type – this time more a reflection of inner feelings that likening to self and experience.

 **melissa Chapple**
Character reflection: ~~metacognition~~ from alternate side.

 **melissa Chapple**
Character reflection: Of character feelings, similar to how was done in regards to the ~~self earlier~~.

 **melissa Chapple**
Metacognition: own thoughts on character.

 **melissa Chapple**
Metacognition: Relation to others

 **melissa Chapple**
Processing issues: Difficulty with the poem structure.

 **melissa Chapple**
Clarification

 **melissa Chapple**
Metacognition: reflection of self, others and characters

 **melissa Chapple**
Character reflection

 **melissa Chapple**
Self-Reflection: Notably similar to the last character reflection – both look at relationship to learning

 **melissa Chapple**
Self-Reflection and Mindfulness: falls in to both – using poem to reflect and build on self, through use of mindfulness of surroundings.

2

Experiment C:

Appendix P: Summary of Chapters Used in the Study

- Chapter 3: Godfrey begins the novel in a seemingly impossible situation. He is being blackmailed by his brother Dunstan and is torn between confessing to his father that he has secretly and regretfully married a woman called Molly Farren, or remaining silent, in hope of somehow in future marrying his new love Nancy Lammeter.
- Chapter 9: Godfrey makes a partial confession to his father and reveals that he has lost £100 of the squire's money, that Dunstan has gone missing and that one of their horses has been killed. But he fails to confess anything about his secret marriage.
- Chapter 13: Silas Marner finds the child in his cottage after he is struck by a cataleptic fit and then discovers its mother Molly Farren in the snow outside. He carries the child to the squire's house to get help. Godfrey recognises the baby as his own child but does not claim it and instead travels back to Silas' cottage to make sure that Molly is in fact dead and that his secret can remain intact.
- Chapter 18: Takes place sixteen years later and it is here – after Dunstan's dead body is found and he is exposed as the thief that stole Silas Marner's fortune – that Godfrey reveals his whole secret to his second wife Nancy.

Appendix Q: Breakdown of Participants

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	AGE	PROFESSION	DO YOU READ FOR PLEASURE?	HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY STUDIED ENGLISH LITERATURE?
C1	F	27	WAITRESS	YES	MASTERS
C2	F	61	TEACHER	YES	O-LEVEL
C3	F	31	CHARITY WORKER	YES	MASTERS
C4	M	65	ARTIST	YES	O-LEVEL

Appendix R: Information Sheet (The following alterations were made to the full information sheet shown in Appendix C)

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to discover how different readers approach and respond to the writing of George Eliot.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

Four participants have been invited to participate. The only requirement to taking part is that you are a fluent English speaker and have previously read the novel *Silas Marner* by George Eliot.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be required to re-read four chapters of *Silas Marner* and write a series of 4 letters in response to your reading. The research is being carried out by Kelda Green a PhD student from The Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society (CRILS) - which is part of The Institute of Psychology, Health and Society.

Appendix S: Example of Independently Annotated Text

PARTICIPANT ONE: LETTER ONE - WRITTEN FROM THE PARTICIPANT TO A CHARACTER IN THE NOVEL

Dear Godfrey, *emotional connection with the character*

understanding his situation, empathising I feel very sorry for you, and for the predicament you have found yourself in. You are only 26, and yet you have already learnt that 'early errors carry hard consequences'. Since your mother has died you have been brought up in a cold, unordered masculine world, with little to do and no purpose to your life. Yours is 'an essentially domestic nature', but you have found the good you prefer difficult to pursue. Your brother Dunstan has tricked you, and now has power over you, and combined with your own folly, this fills you with anger and resentment. You know that if you confide in your father that will be the end of your life as you would like it to be, with Miss Nancy Lammeter providing you with 'an invitation to industry, sobriety and peace'. I can see how the idea that a woman can change your ways by providing you with 'tender permanent affection' has been easy for you to latch onto, as you have not experienced this from your mother. You also have not received much structure and guidance from your father during your formative years – even though he believes he has been 'too good a father to you all'. *relating to this* I admire you for going to your father and confessing about the £100 rent that you gave to Dunstan. During that conversation your father showed 'a sudden acuteness which startled you' when he said 'You've been up to some trick, and you've been bribing Dunsey not to tell'. This is going to make it easier for what you have to do next. I think you must tell your father about your marriage and face the consequences of your actions. He already suspects something is wrong and if you throw yourself on his mercy, *explaining and appreciating the importance of honesty* tell the truth, even about Dunstan's part in the plot, and then offer to make amends in any way your father chooses, *wanting to resolve the situation for Godfrey* you have a chance of salvation. Any other route is going to lead to more lasting unhappiness and will continue your 'vicious folly'. Your father has struggled since your mother died, with his grief and with his business. He may appreciate the offer of a man, one of his sons, to help him. Practise what you are going to say to him. Be prepared to face the consequences – whatever they are, and be prepared to work hard for the future you want for yourself. Good luck.

Reader

This letter is full of encouragement and advice, the reader has clearly connected with the character and seeks to empathise and understand his situation. The reader appears to be expressing concern, and wants to provide an answer to help ease the situation that Godfrey is in.

Bibliography

The first section of the bibliography consists of (1.1) the primary works belonging to the four central literary figures of the thesis and (1.2) the primary works of psychology, philosophy and literary criticism which were instrumental to the development of its argument. Secondary works are presented in three further subsections:

- 2.1. Secondary Works of Literature and Literary Criticism
- 2.2. Secondary Works of Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics
- 2.2.1. Systematic and Literature Reviews

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