

Hearing Voices, Telling Tales:
An exploration of the move from page to stage in the work of
Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch 1998 - 2018

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DECLARATION

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Abstract

The creative component of this submission of a PhD by Published Works consists of six poetry publications of which I am the sole author: my first pamphlet, *Stranded on Ithaca* (Bradford: Redbeck, 1998) which was winner of the Redbeck Press 1997 Pamphlet Competition, my first full-length collection, *Rockclimbing in Silk* (Bridgend: Seren, 2001) for which I was awarded an Arts Council Bursary, my second collection *Not in These Shoes* (London: Picador, 2008) which was shortlisted for Wales Book of the Year, *Banjo* (London: Picador, 2012) which was shortlisted for the Roland Mathias Poetry Prize, a pamphlet *Lime & Winter* (Presteigne: Rack Press, 2014) shortlisted for the Michael Marks Award and my newest sequence *Ling Di Long* (Rack Press, 2018). Also included is a performance piece *Tango in Stanzas* written after winning an Arts Council Creative Wales Award 2015.

The critical component consists of an overview that demonstrates how my twenty years of creative work have both coherence and progression, comprising a substantial and original contribution to contemporary poetry. The essay locates part of this originality in a distinctive approach to embodying presence on the page as well as on the stage, and is in part a response to the way discussions around voice sometimes view the poet's voice on the page and the poet's voice on the stage as separate entities. The approach of voice coach Kristin Linklater is used as the lens through which to show how becoming a performer, rather than a reciter of my work, has changed not only the way I give readings, but the way I write. Twenty years ago when my work was first published I composed on the page, now I start from the stage in that I allow my body to have a say in the direction any new poem of mine is taking. One of the questions addressed in this thesis is the relationship of body to voice and how, through inhabiting their body the poet can inhabit the poem, which in turn enables the audience to inhabit the moment of the poem. The role played by space and memory in enabling me to inhabit both places and characters is considered in this discussion. Recent debates behind voice in poetry are analysed so as to identify where my work sits along the spectrum of performance poetry.

Examining the work of the theatre director who was one of the influences on Linklater, Konstantin Stanislavsky, and specifically his concern to make something real happen on the stage through speaking with our full range of emotions, I ask how being emotionally open on the stage enables me to be in a place of both vulnerability and power. I argue it is this dynamic between vulnerability and power that allows the audience to empathise with me and the characters I portray, and that it is this which creates presence on the stage. I demonstrate how I have learned to make this dynamic alive back on the page and conclude that the voice on the page has to be as convincing as the voice on the stage in order for audience and reader to experience the presence of a character.

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Introduction

In this thesis I will show how my fascination with performance over the last twenty years has impacted not only on the way I speak my poems at readings, but on the composition of my new work. Learning to inhabit the poem, which became possible after learning to inhabit my body, has been a key aspect of this. Inhabiting a character in a particular space (be it a room or a garden) often through inhabiting a memory (my own or an historical memory) has been another contributing factor. This account of how I inhabit my body when performing and composing poems offers a new and original understanding of the relationship between voice on the page and voice on the stage. The catalyst for this exploration was a desire to make something real happen on the stage when the poems are read out. By the phrase ‘make something real happen on the stage’ I mean speaking my work in a way that engages with the full range of emotions available to the human voice rather than the disengaged tone I used to have, known as ‘the poetry voice’ which Kate Kellaway eloquently described in *The Guardian* on 1st August 2017 as ‘the wistful singsong that has become chronic at poetry readings’.¹ Rather than there being anything ‘wrong’ with my voice, the discovery of a wider vocal range to convey the story of each poem turned out to be more satisfying for both me and my listener. Instead of speaking my poems like a running commentary, I wanted to be swimming in the river of the poem, and one way of doing this I discovered, is to be connected to physical feeling.

Before I met voice coach Kristin Linklater in 2012 and read her book *Freeing the Natural Voice*² I had not realised the extent to which speaking is a physical act engaging the senses and the emotions as well as the breath. I wasn’t aware that I had been using my voice in a largely utilitarian way up until that point. After a number of sessions at the Kristin Linklater Voice Centre (KLVC) I developed a greater understanding of the way in which the voice is a mirror for what is going on in the body and that it might be useful for my reading style were I to inhabit my body more. This discovery that the voice has psycho-physical properties has been the biggest single development in my life as a writer.

¹ “My particular pet hate is the way poets meaninglessly turn the last words in each line upwards to sound like a question that did not need to be asked.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/01/kumukanda-by-kayo-chingonyi-review-poet> accessed 30th August 2017

² Kristin Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1976) where ‘freeing’ refers to letting go of habitual defensive tensions in the breathing and vocal-tract musculature.

Psycho-physicality means that what is experienced internally is translated into an outer expression, and conversely what the body manifests physically has a direct affect on the psychological landscape.³

Using suggested Linklater techniques I began to sense in my body how voice is as revelatory of character as words, and to feel my voice resonating in my bones as well as coming out on my breath. It was a relief to discover that a choice can be made between intoning poems in a dull, monochrome way and engaging with and speaking using the full range of emotions that are available to the human voice: happiness, fear, anger, sadness. To do this I needed to take away the wall I'd put between myself and the poems and to mean what I said; to inhabit my poems by being present to the audience and being present to the poem. The idea was scary. However the reasons for getting to know my voice outweighed the fear of what might happen when engaging with the process. This psycho-physical information wasn't something I read in a book or online; rather it was (and continues to be) a process developed over five years by speaking my poems from new physical positions or by influencing my voice through imagery (either images from my poems or images of my breathing musculature). Feeling my voice in my body is what made me want to write this thesis.

Inhabiting my body more fully when giving readings led to wanting to more fully inhabit my characters, and in so doing to create as powerful a presence in my writing as on the stage. I was excited to realise that this might lead to changing the way I write, so that instead of writing about a certain character, I started to channel the character's voice through my own so that I might become the character. Channelling a character means experiencing in one's body the possible feelings any particular character (e.g. Lord Nelson, Tarka the otter) may have experienced and letting those feelings come out on one's breath. If the words of whatever poem I was composing weren't convincing as I spoke them in draft on the floor, I changed the poem. In this way I began to allow my body as well as my brain, to participate in the composition process.

The research questions for understanding and exploring this development in my work over the twenty years since my first pamphlet was published are:

³ Bella Merlin B, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007) p. 18

1. **Lived experience:** how is authorial presence made manifest in the writing and speaking of my poems?
2. **Form and design:** to what extent can the process of crossing from page to stage be seen as a form of translation?
3. **‘Naturalism’ and ‘realism’:** what is the relationship between these terms in relation to authorship, embodiment and performance?

By the term ‘authorial presence’ I mean the presence of a speaker (whether on the page or on the stage) with whom the reader or listener can identify as a human being whose emotions (e.g. anger, joy, fear, excitement) are communicated as powerfully through the voice on the stage as through the voice on the page.

In considering the process of crossing from page to stage and back as a form of translation, I limit my discussion to four areas drawn from my own lived experience. I outline the aspects of each area that I have translated into my own practice: firstly the use of space in the design of the village of Portmeirion, secondly the handling of space in garden design, thirdly the use of colour and line in some paintings, and fourthly my experiences of working with textiles which has enabled me to consider what aspects I might translate from weaving and dyeing to inform my own writing. Translation could also be said to play a part in the way Kristin Linklater’s approach to voice work has impacted on my spoken and written work: I ‘translate’ some elements of Linklater work into my own creative practice so that when I compose new poems I now ensure that each speaker (on the page and on the stage) stays present to the vagaries of the moment with the result that each character embodies a balance between vulnerability and power, a balance that I then aim to make visible in my rendition of the voices of these speakers when I give readings.

By realism I mean inner participation by the poet who might find from within themselves a more interesting performance by investing in the character during the act of composition as well as when speaking what the character says. I have discovered that if I remain aware of what is happening inside my body and allow this to play a part when I am writing or speaking my character’s words, then it can be more enjoyable for both me and the audience. By naturalism I mean representing images and passions in the poems, rather than living them out on the page and stage: reciting them without the psychological commitment or participation behind the words. An example of naturalism

would be me reading poems out like a bus timetable without putting myself into the shoes of each character and aiming to speak from the situation each character finds themselves in with all the attendant emotions. Rather than representing images and passions when I speak my poems, my aim is to recreate those images and passions. This may enable the audience to play an active part in the creative process by having the opportunity to believe in the possibility of what they see on stage. Merlin (2003) notes that Stanislavsky's Grisha is an example of a 'representational' actor whereas Tortsov looks for the actual recreation of those images and passions. Grisha deals in appearances; Tortsov seeks realities. For Grisha the audience are onlookers; for Tortsov, the audience are an active part of the creative process, "because they *believe* in the possibility of what they see on stage."⁴ One way of creating authorial presence on the stage might be to re-live all the moments of the poem with the audience. Recitation doesn't involve re-living or inhabiting an experience. It is a form of parroting out texts without committing yourself internally to the content. I have discovered that allowing the words to play me rather than the other way around is a far more rewarding experience both when giving readings on stage and when composing new work.⁵

The essay will argue how becoming a character (with the various changing emotions and feelings that any character might experience for the duration of the poem) on the stage not only altered the way I give poetry readings, but fed back into my composition process on the page. The answers to the three research questions will demonstrate how the publications and performance piece under consideration contribute to new knowledge in the field.

The works used to investigate the research questions have been listed above in the abstract. *Stranded on Ithaca* (1998) is primarily a collection relating to painters and their subjects. Both *Rockclimbing in Silk* (2001) and *Not in These Shoes* (2008) are written in a range of voices that evidence a move toward writing in the form of poetic monologues. They are also the collections that most demonstrate a willingness to take risks either with language (by experimenting with the surreal) or with form (by using cynghanedd⁶ in English). *Banjo* (2012) and *Lime & Winter* (2014) are themed collections, characterized

⁴ Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 60

⁵ 'Let the words play you' Peter Brook

⁶ Cynghanedd is a method of sound patterning in a line using alliteration and rhyme, which can be demonstrated in various metres: there are four main types: cynghanedd groes (cross-harmony), cynghanedd draws (partial cross-harmony), cynghanedd sain (sound-harmony) and cynghanedd lusc (drag-harmony).

by the exploration of one subject from a variety of angles through the testimony of unheard voices from a particular period in history. *Banjo* looks at three Antarctic expeditions from the turn of the last century with a focus on the role of music and theatre in keeping the crew's spirits up during the various trials they encountered; the poems in *Lime & Winter* are situated in cotton and wool mills 1870 – 1970 and use the tools and techniques of the trade (looms, shuttles, double-warping) as metaphors through which to heighten the tension in each speaker's story. *Ling Di Long* (2018) is a sequence which celebrates walking.

The final item in the submission is *Tango in Stanzas* (2015), a performance piece which was the outcome of a competitive Arts Council Creative Wales Award, granted to mid-career artists to enable them to investigate their current practice by challenging themselves through collaboration with other art forms. *Tango in Stanzas* involved working with a tango dancer, an accordionist and a theatre director. Whilst this text was described as a 'performance piece' when it was recorded at its only public performance (17th October 2015) it was and remains a window onto a workshop which both sheds light onto and interrogates my creative practice through using the rhythms of tango to write longer lines (tango phrases being 16 or 32 beats per line).

These seven works have reached a wide audience and some are recognised by critics and other writers as outstanding examples of poetic monologue. Each of the works contributes to discourses around the subject of voice, and engages with notions of stage and performance. I will consider my work and its contribution to these two distinct but interlinked disciplines. Both voice and stage are of course international but for the purpose of this thesis I am considering them within a British context.

Throughout this thesis I will follow a rough chronology from my first publication in 1998 to my most recent in 2018. My fascination with English and French poetry as a teenager was taken to a new level when at the age of 18 I went to Cambridge University to study Greek and Latin at the encouragement of my Classics teacher, Dr. Byron Harries at Coedcae Comprehensive School in Llanelli. At Newnham College I learned to reflect on how epic poems were constructed in such a way as to enable them to be re-told and shared. This led to a consideration of what happens when texts are memorized and how their structure and content might impact on one's own creative work. By internalising the lines of some of the poems I was studying by Latin elegiac poets Tibullus and Catullus,

the line and sentence structures seeped into my student creative work. The patterning of Latin elegiac love poetry (for example its ‘golden lines’ where the line mirrors out from the central caesura⁷) led me to experiment with how some of these effects could be re-created in my mother tongue (English). In my poem ‘On The Road’ which examines the life story of Madame Tussaud⁸, I tried to use this mirroring device in English

To make the dead appear living, the living dead
without quite meaning to, is a skill I can’t yet/take in

so as to visually represent Madame Tussaud’s actions. Professor Mary Beard taught me to think about the context and angles out of which the speakers of short lyric poems were writing, and to reflect on the voices that are less visible in the texts and on the objects such as pithoi (vases) and stele (grave slabs) that are left to us: the voices of women (apart from Sappho), the illiterate, the poor. It was these voices I wanted to represent in my own work by inhabiting hidden characters and bringing them to light, even if in some cases the voices belonged to inanimate objects, such as in ‘Farmyard Mirrors’ in my first collection *Rockclimbing in Silk* (p. 33) where I examine what it might be like to see from the point of view of mirrors stuffed into hedges rather than from the point of view of the car driver (who is also looking into the rear view mirror).

What I hadn’t anticipated is what began to happen to my own poetic voice once I started inhabiting a spectrum of characters both historical and imaginary; nor did I realise this marked the beginning of my fascination with the stage.

Any investigation of how an encounter with the Kristin Linklater Voice Centre changed not only the way I perform but the way I write, will of necessity involve a look at the steps along the way. I therefore group my analysis in Chapter 1 around four key influences in the development of my work: Portmeirion, garden design, textile collections and visualizing poem as painting. These influences interconnect both with each other and with my early fascination with the patterning of Latin poetry. The aspect

⁷ Paene insularum, Sirmio, Insularumque/ ocelle (Catullus 31)
in me tela manent, manet et puerilis imago:
sed certe pennas perdidit ille suas; (Propertius II.12)
Mīlitat omnis amans, et habet sua castra Cupīdō;
Attice, crēde mihī, mīlitat omnis amans.
quae bellō est habilis, Venerī quoque convenit aetās:
turpe senex mīles, turpe senīlis amor (Ovid, Amores 1.9, lines 1-4)
⁸ *Ling Di Long* (Presteigne: Rack, 2018) p. 5

that each of these elements has in common with Latin poetry is organisation in the mapping out of the landscape/canvas/page which, in its very order, can provide the ground for risk taking and a swerve away from order so as to take the reader or viewer by surprise. Importantly, each of these influences is also the locus for ‘stage’ in my development as a writer, not only a stage/area on which poems can be performed, but a stage/arena on which they can be conceived.

Notions of stage-setting, what counts as stage and where stage can be created and how that space can be inhabited by a character have been crucial to the journey from page to stage. My first visit to Portmeirion in my twenties played a key role in influencing the way I approached my first collection, *Rockclimbing in Silk*. I will show how not only risk taking in the stylistic creation of the village, but also the playfulness and ideas of stage-setting that I saw at Portmeirion informed both my first and second collections.

Risktaking and playfulness are two aspects that run through the Linklater approach: do I dare to listen to my body and allow the heart brain and the gut brain to inform my poem as much the skull brain? Do I dare to play with particular forms? Do I dare to speak certain ideas?

Designing gardens and reflecting on what to reveal when, and what to leave out is the second aspect that I have translated into individual poems as well as sequences, resulting in a move to themed collections. I will give examples from both *Banjo* (2012) and *Lime & Winter* (2014) at this juncture.

The third key influence on my work is (what I now realise as) an ability to visualise a poem as if it were a painting. By this I mean thinking like a painter in terms of the process, in the way I put the story onto the canvas of the page. I don’t mean that I write in a ‘painterly’ way. My poems are not full of splashes of imagery or colour, rather they are constructed block by block in the way some artists approach canvases. This process is not immediately visible because all the elements have been woven together so as to render any joins invisible. I visualise a poem as a painting when I construct it in such a way that I translate line in painting into texture in the poem, geometry in painting into movement in the poem, colour in painting into form in the poem, and tone (by which I mean use of light and dark) into rhythm in the poem.

Thinking about textile collections as if they were poems on pages is the fourth aspect that influenced the direction of my work. This interest crystallised during a residency at the

National Wool Museum in Drefach Felindre where the opportunity to research and develop my fascination with a Japanese system of dyeing cloth known as ‘Shibori’ or ‘tie-dye’ in the West⁹ enabled me to focus on the idea of ‘memory on cloth’. Reflecting on how exhibitions of cloth can act as group memories either of a specific moment in history or of a specific industry was the catalyst for translating something of Shibori into a handful of the poems in *Banjo* and *Lime & Winter*.

Chapter 2 discusses the work of Kristin Linklater, taking into consideration the possible influence on Linklater of Russian theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky, specifically his desire to ‘make something real happen on the stage’. There is no accurate way to capture work about the body since the understanding of it happens while experiencing it. However I hope these reflections will give a sense of the shift in myself as a writer through my exploration of this work. ‘Speak from your pips’ Linklater has said that her former voice teacher at the London Academy of Music and Drama, Iris Warren¹⁰ used to tell her students: that if they thought of themselves as an apple, then they should speak from their core, by which I understand her to mean not only the core of oneself (i.e. speaking from a true place) but more literally to speak as if one is an apple, to speak in an ‘appley’ way, so that what is being said is more convincing on the stage.¹¹ I will show how this idea has impacted on my performances and my experience of presence on the stage by enabling me to inhabit an apple, an ape or an avalanche.

I will ask how being emotionally open on the stage enables me to simultaneously be in a place of vulnerability and power, to move almost without effort from one state to another. During exercises at the KLVC and during recent poetry readings that I have given I have observed how this openness of my body might allow the audience to empathise with me and with the characters whose shoes I am speaking from. I argue that it is this dynamic

⁹ My research into tie-dye was sparked by my mother’s experiments with this form in the 1970s when she was an artist and art teacher.

¹⁰ ‘I started teaching in 1958 at LAMDA under the tutelage of a woman named Iris Warren who had developed her own approach to voice training. She was interested in the emotional roots of voice and she was opening up a new world of exploration in a profession that had clearly defined its aesthetic parameters.’ Kristin Linklater, ‘The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1, 2016, p. 58

¹¹ In Chapter 4 of Stanislavsky’s *An Actor Prepares* (p. 65) an exercise is set up in which Paul, one of the actors under discussion, has to imagine himself as an oak tree. I find it interesting that Stanislavsky deliberately chooses something passive, an oak tree (rather in the same way that Warren chose an apple) to illustrate that even in the most improbable of situations a vibrant imagination will arouse a desire to speak.

between vulnerability¹² and power that contributes to the presence of the author (a sentient human being with human emotions recognisable to other humans who are present) on the stage and on the page. As readers we empathise with flawed characters because we recognise some of our own flaws in those characters. In the same way audiences sometimes empathise with apparent vulnerability seen in the showing of emotions on the stage e.g. crying with sadness, laughing with joy, incandescent with rage because people often recognise their own human feelings. Anybody who has seen me speak my poems will have witnessed the way in which I enjoy shifting between emotions of sadness, joy, surprise, anger on the stage (vulnerable in the present moment) and this in itself indicates that I am in charge of what's happening (powerful in the present moment). I will analyse how the idea of 'the swing' which is at the centre of the movement work of Trish Arnold, impacted on the way I go from one moment, one image, one line of the poem to the next so that the rhythm of the poem remains fluid. Translating Trish Arnold's swing into my own practice helps me as the writer to create authorial presence by remaining open as to how just before the moment of release (of the upward swing of the arms) I might be in a place of possibility in which I can be creatively open as to how I might speak or write the single or various emotions that occur in any given character or poem.

In responding to my research questions the account that follows necessarily places my own work in dialogue with that of others. In order to assess its contribution to the field of poetry and performance Chapter 3 analyses the extent to which putting performance as central to the composition of new poems defines my work as performance poetry by comparing my practice with the approach of other performance-centered poets. An examination of my collections through the historical research required to write the poems will form part of this investigation. Particular attention will be paid to *Banjo*, thinking about character, speaker and narrator, and reflecting on voice as witness to historical moments. I will offer an understanding of how writing and performing in the voice of someone from history gives witness to moments from the past by channelling them in my body in the present. I'll discuss the way gender was a catalyst in deciding to write a collection that is populated by men's voices following a negative review by a female poet. This chapter will include a brief reflection regarding the merits of filming oneself for YouTube and whether this is a liberating tool for poets who are women.

¹² literally = woundedness, Latin vulnera = wounds

Chapter 4 gives an overview of the impact of my published and performed work as well as my workshops.

In the conclusion I summarise how the creative component of this submission (six publications and a performance piece) together with this essay, which is a reflection on the role of voice in my creative practice, together provide a contribution to new knowledge. I argue that ultimately the writer has to be just as present on the page as on the stage, and that suggest that presence in poetry, whether performed or not, is the most powerful aspect of any work.

Chapter 1: Setting the scene - four key influences on the road from page to stage

This chapter looks at how each of the following four factors was a marker on the road from page to stage in my development as a poet: Portmeirion; gardens; textile collections; canvases for painting. Through a discussion of space and memory I will show how each of these four factors underpins the way the characters in my books have been embodied on the page and on the stage during the last twenty years. Each influence (which is connected to either stage or page) has provided me with a catalyst for taking risks with language, content and form. Risk taking is an important point to consider in this thesis, because without a curiosity to try things out, I would not have gone to Orkney to work with Kristin Linklater and discovered the impact that finding my natural voice would have on both my performing and writing. By ‘natural voice’ I mean after stripping away years of inhibitions and tensions developed during childhood social experiences in whatever new place I found myself, where I felt I ought to speak in a certain way, or not speak at all in case I had the ‘wrong voice’.

It could be argued that these four elements might constitute a synaesthetic approach to writing and speaking; by synaesthesia I mean a blending together of different senses when creating and speaking a poem, so that for example, hearing a seagull might induce the visualization of the colour blue which might impact on the how the next line of the poem is written or spoken.

Each of these four factors are of course interlinked: Portmeirion is not only about building but is set in and against a landscape; gardens have played an important role in the development of painters; textiles are not simply patterns but can be worn or used as curtains or bedspreads and, as such tell a human story. Any space which appears to be a stage set, where something is about to happen, is a space about which I can start writing or on which I can start performing, for example a restaurant at the beginning of service.¹³

¹³ The two-Michelin starred restaurant *L’Enclume* in Cartmel is fascinating because rather than reading from the menu and then ordering, the waiter talks about what is on the menu in the manner of a conversation when diners arrive. Guests are given the menu in a sealed envelope once the food is on the table. Lucy Lovell reviewed it on 1st September 2016 for the *Manchester Evening News*,

Portmeirion as Stage

August 1994 was the first time I attended a course at the newly-opened Writers' Centre for Wales, Tŷ Newydd in North Wales, the place where in my twenties I was encouraged by poets Jo Shapcott and Robert Minhinnick to take my work seriously. Before I returned home I visited Portmeirion, the village on the North Wales coast designed and built after the First World War by the architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis. Clough (as he preferred to be known) was someone who was prepared to take creative risks in order to entertain, excite and disturb the viewer. By risk taking I mean bringing bits of buildings together from different places¹⁴ and mixing up them up with newer styles resulting in a spectrum of different discourses. Portmeirion is composed of layers of allusions, be they geographical (Sorrento, Portofino), architectural (Georgian, Victorian) or literary (Alice in Wonderland).

As much as anything from the writing course, it was the vision of this man who engaged with creative risk that I took back home with me from north to south Wales. The way Clough handled vistas at Portmeirion gave me permission to think about story, pacing and revelation within both individual poems and collections and how these spaces, these stages could be inhabited by the characters I create. At Portmeirion Clough plays with depths, with multiple places to go and this struck me as an enjoyable thing to do in my work, not just by entering into different historical events but by interacting with a variety of discourses. For example my poem 'Vive La Resistance' (*Banjo*, p. 7) set in France during the Second World War plays firstly with gender (a male parachutist slowly understands what it's like to be a woman as he drags the long dress of his parachute behind him through a field of corn); then the poem plays with Chagall paintings where a man or a man and a woman, or a man and animal are flying through the sky above a

Even menus don't interfere with the dining experience at *L'Enclume*. Ordering is a minimal, sensory experience too, as you listen and learn about the menu from your server.

¹⁴ Portmeirion is full of 'ghosts' of buildings that have been rescued from being demolished in different parts of the country, for example the Jacobean plaster ceiling from Emral Hall in Flintshire and the Bristol Colonnade from Arnos Court. These old buildings have brought with them something of the aura of their original context – to create a collage which encourages imaginative investment by the viewer.

town; thirdly the poem plays with the ballad form in the manner of Robert Service.¹⁵ In ‘Hong Kong Mah Jong’ (*Banjo*, p. 11) I play with both the form of a travelogue and a game of Mah Jong: there are seven stanzas of eight lines that recount observations of Hong Kong and what it reminds the speaker of, interspersed by couplets between the stanzas in which the speaker analyses how the game is progressing.

I saw Portmeirion not only as a stage¹⁶ on which to speak but as a stage I might inhabit by populating it with characters whose lives I could temporarily slip into and talk from.¹⁷ It felt like a backdrop against which something was about to happen. And this is what excited me, because a place where something is about to happen is the beginning of a poem. Indeed Clough himself describes Portmeirion¹⁸ in theatrical terms as a stage set ready for action:

Colourful movement up and down the flights of steps and along the vistas is definitely essential for their full and proper display; this artificial landscape is only alive and meaningful when it is being used.

One speaker from my first collection in a poem titled ‘Mona’ (p. 16) is the Mona Lisa who talks not only from the position of the painting (on a wall in the Louvre) but from the position of one who is in a landscape that forms the backdrop against which her message is framed. In the poem ‘Père Lachaise’ from the same collection (p. 43) the stage is set in stanza one (description of Pere Lachaise cemetery) for the speaker’s reflections in stanza two (the speaker’s reaction to being in the cemetery):

A tilting virgin offers me a snowball
as I pass but I
could never accept such transience in the palm.
Her eyes are sealed with lichen,
her smile bites a century’s feigned
indifference, and those cracked wings
ground her between inscriptions.

¹⁵ Robert Service, ‘The Shooting of Dan McGrew’ in *The Best of Robert Service* (Dodd, Mead & Company, reprinted 1953) p. 12

¹⁶ Portmeirion has been used as a backdrop for a number of films (*Kipps* by H.G. Wells, Alan Ladd in *The Red Beret* and Ingrid Bergman’s *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* as well as for the 1966 cult TV series *The Prisoner* starring Patrick McGoohan). Clough Williams-Ellis *Portmeirion: The Place and Its Meaning* (Portmeirion, 2014) p. 76

¹⁷ Other writers of course have found Portmeirion resonated with them: Noel Coward for example came to Portmeirion after his flat had been destroyed during the Blitz, and wrote *Blithe Spirit* there during the course of a week. I think the other-worldliness of Portmeirion and the ghosts of rescued buildings may have influenced Noel Coward’s use of a ghost figure in this play.

¹⁸ Williams Ellis, *Portmeirion: The Place and Its Meaning*, pp. 58-59

Risktaking in form

Clough's willingness not only to take risks with buildings and their setting, but also with language, stayed with me and impacted on my work. For example, he coined the term 'cloughing things up' to describe his process.¹⁹

In turn I too thought I could 'clough up' my writing by taking creative risks with both form and language. One of my early poems '71,200 Megalitres' from *Not in These Shoes* (2008) demonstrates a willingness to risk using a Welsh technique, *cynghanedd*, in English. The poem's title refers to the amount of water the UK government had decided in 1957 would be required to drown the village of Capel Celyn. The poem is written in the form of an *englyn* known as 'Englyn Unodl Union' made up of 30 syllables: 10 syllables in the first line, 6 in the second, 7 in the third and the fourth. As Mererid Hopwood notes in *Singing in Chains* (2004) it's a form that like a haiku, demands pithy expression and concise thinking.²⁰ Although my poem doesn't have the strict rhyme scheme you would expect of this measure in Welsh (where the second line must end in an unstressed syllable and the final pair of lines ends with a stressed syllable and the other with an unstressed syllable) it does employ a number of internal rhymes and end rhymes. It's a twist on *cynghanedd* in English. This can be seen in the first four verses in each of which I have highlighted the influence of *cynghanedd* on this poem,

The twelfth of August nineteen sixty-five:
the day my mother *cried*,
taken as a *child* to *file*
through Capel Celyn *valley*,

protesting, one final time. Four days on,

¹⁹ Marcel Theroux talks about this in an article published in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 16th April 2017: "He added character to his new buildings with a set designer's tricks, using paint effects to suggest the appearance of damp and age. He concealed functional elements with whimsical details, avoided straight lines where he could and created symmetry by painting on *trompe l'oeil* windows. He called this process "cloughing things up". <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/wales/articles/portmeirion-wales-the-oddest-holiday-village-on-earth/> accessed 17th April 2017

²⁰ Hopwood (2004), p. xiii

the flooding would begin.
The sun poured down, anglophone
onto six rows of onions

in the **garden** of Bryn Ifan. Upstairs
Betí Cae Fadog trimmed
geraniums, **unable**
to pack. The day following

The reason for choosing this particular form is because it seemed only a Welsh form would be appropriate for such subject matter where the speaker describes their mother's experience of watching the family home in the village of Capel Celyn being flooded to provide water for an English city, Liverpool.

In a programme on cynghanedd on BBC Radio 4 this year Mererid Hopwood told how it 'appeals to the heart as well as the head'²¹ and in the same discussion the Prifardd described how hearing lines in cynghanedd often results in a visceral response. What strikes me about these observations is how both poets refer to body parts (heart/head/visceral). My experience of working with Linklater is that the gut ('ta viscera' in Greek) and the heart are the places where I first feel the story of a poem.

Risktaking in language

Reflecting on risk taking in language (as opposed to in form in the example above) 'Deacon Brodie's Predecessors' from my first collection is perhaps the most surreal poem in my early work. Split into seven different parts it apparently makes no sense whilst retaining syntactical coherence in the manner of Lewis Carroll's 'The Jabberwocky',

Say it with airfields,
with moon-embossed noise.

Think lampshade, opaline
as an attic salver.

It was clear to prize-winning author and academic Patrick McGuinness who reviewed this book in *Poetry Wales*, that what marked it out was its creative risk-taking,

The most arresting aspect of this book is its willingness to take risks: it is inventive, quirkily learned (Rhydderch's poems are full of sidelong references to mythology or the Classics, to paintings and books), and lexically adventurous.

²¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b1pthy>

...A poem like 'Regency', for instance, shows how to be surprising and surreal while remaining tonally coherent:

*His tricorne tilted, black-masked in a silk frockcoat,
the Hawkman bears down on me across the hall: I flick open my fan
and remember what the glossators intimated*

about being mentioned in dispatches: east is east.

All proportion kept, Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch has written one of the finest collections (first or otherwise) to appear this year.²²

In 2013 the writer and critic Gareth Prior noted on his blog,

Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch has already established herself as one of the finest contemporary virtuosos of the dramatic monologue. Her last collection *Not in These Shoes*, was seriously good: one of those books that leaves you wowed and cowed and worrying that the writer will never manage anything quite that dextrous again. Her latest, *Banjo*, is better.²³

Prior uses the word 'worrying' to reflect an uncertainty as to whether the kind of creative risk taking with voice that he sees in *Not in These Shoes* can work again. Equally the critic and academic Alice Entwistle asks the question of *Banjo*, "Isn't there a risk that however rigorous or powerful your poem, you'll never compete with the sensationalism of their story?"²⁴

Entwistle's concern is with the use of a commonly-known story as content whereas Prior's concern is to do with the use of language. For me it is precisely at the moment of risk taking whether in terms of story or language, that the voice in the poem comes alive.

Playfulness as part of risk taking

Christopher Hussey uses the word 'play' to suggest that the visitor can be the author of their own enjoyment,

Theatrical? Why of course...here one lives in these little perching houses and makes one's own play out of the sea and mountains and idyllic surroundings.²⁵

²² Patrick McGuinness in *Poetry Wales* Vol. 37.3 Winter 2002

²³ <http://garethprior.org/in-different-voices-samantha-wynne-rhydderch/> accessed 17th July 2013

²⁴ Alice Entwistle, *In Her Own Words: Women Talking Poetry and Wales*, (Bridgend: Seren, 2014) p. 210

²⁵ Christopher Hussey 'Large Ideas for Small Estates', *Country Life*, (5th April 1930)

Indeed Clough himself talks about playfulness in this project. So does the architect Frank Lloyd Wright who visited Clough in Portmeirion in 1956.²⁶

Playfulness inspired me when I was beginning to take my writing seriously after that first course at Tŷ Newydd. By play I mean trying out different words next to each other to see how one can impact on the other words around them, experimenting with different voices and having a go to see whether this or that metre might illuminate a given subject. John Moat, notes that one of the reasons why he set up The Arvon Foundation with John Fairfax in the late 1960's was to give young people a way to play with words outside of the requirements of the school curriculum.²⁷ It is only now that playfulness is being more widely understood, often framed in the context of mental health and growth as a person. In a programme for Radio 4 on 12th November 2016 entitled 'Inner Child', British comedian Mark Watson discussed why more and more adults are turning to play, suggesting that making a fool of yourself or playing board games as an adult tends to show one has more empathy, adaptability, enthusiasm, optimism, flexibility and lightheartedness. Had I not been flexible and enthusiastic about trying out new ideas in relation to my voice, I would not have gone up to Orkney and lay on the floor while Kristin Linklater thumped my chest to release reverberations of sound.

Here are two examples of playfulness from my early work: firstly in terms of content in the poem 'Part of The Furniture' (from my first full-length collection *Rockclimbing in Silk*) and secondly in terms of the form of the poem 'The Four Seasons: An Exhibition of Chinese Painting' (from my second collection *Not in These Shoes*). In 'Part of the Furniture' the subject is a husband whom the speaker has embalmed and put in a glass case to ensure the subject can remain permanently in the position to which they have become accustomed. Lines 3, 4, 6, 7 and 12 are broken at a particular place so as to keep the reader waiting for the impact on the next line. The line breaks play with expectation versus prediction: each line generates a kind of expectation which is then subverted and then another which is again subverted. This strategy plays with readers and their ability to conceive of the world they are entering as one which works according to recognizably rational lines,

²⁶ "The purpose of the universe is play. The artists know that and they know that play and art and creation are different names for the same thing." (Williams-Ellis, 2014) p. 46

²⁷ John Fairfax and John Moat, *The Founding of Arvon* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2005), p. 21

Since I had him stuffed
and mounted in a glass case,
my husband has truly become
what he always was:
part of the furniture.

The poem 'The Four Seasons' (*Not In These Shoes*, p. 22) about a visit to an exhibition of Chinese painting at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, plays with the haiku form. The poem is divided into ten stanzas, each of which is a haiku with the traditional 5,7,5 syllables per line, with a number of end rhymes and pararhymes all the way through which serve to knit the ideas and the seasons together. The form of the poem is of course intended to echo Japanese poetry patterns and subject matter but then the speaker plays on this in the seventh stanza by introducing the speaker's lover who is flying off to Beijing, thereby introducing a conversational note not evident earlier in the poem,

What are they saying
those two walking in whispers
up to an ancient

temple through water-
falls in the Ashmolean
Beneath wisteria

a man plays a qin,

..... There you go.
You never can tell how it'll
all not work out. I

leave the seasons turn.
Outside in St. Giles, the trees
shake off autumn, burn.

Working with what you have

Being creative with the elements you have in front of you has always been part of my method as a poet. Gardeners do this too²⁸. Clough worked with the landscape that he had around him. Faced with two seemingly different worlds of North Wales and Italy it is hard to imagine how a village like Portofino might look convincingly Italian against the landscape of North Wales. It seems to me that what Clough has done is to examine the

²⁸ Gardener Beth Chatto, now in her 98th year has worked with the space, soil and climate where she lives in East Anglia in order to create a garden rather than bringing in hundreds of non-native plants or trying to force tropical plants to grow in her garden.

topography of North Wales and find the one place, the Dyfi estuary, that could pass as Mediterranean if framed in the right way. Similarly in order for a poem to be convincing it has to be framed in such a way that a reader is guided as they step into each stanza towards the revelation. For example prior to writing the sonnet 'Shaved' (*Not in These Shoes*, 2008) I had the following facts on the table in front of me:

- that the Russian Royal Family were held in captivity in 1917, murdered in 1918;
- that each of the children had their own photograph albums;
- that their mother kept a diary;
- that the girls had to be bayoneted because the bullets wouldn't go through their vests which had diamonds sewn into them.

The question is how to frame these facts into:

1. a narrative that is not merely chronological;
2. but also reveals each family member's own account (pictorially in albums or verbally in a diary);
3. and has a powerful ending.

Deciding to frame the narrative back from the bayonetting

It was necessary

to finish off the girls with bayonets; their corsets
laced with diamonds, had turned the bullets back.

meant that details about family life can build to the moment of tension (all the while retaining pararhymes at the end of each line). There is always the risk that this balance of facts or ideas might not work out in the creation of the poem, but it is precisely in this possibility that the moment of excitement lies, both in the poem and in the speaking of it on the stage.

Clough ran with what was already there to enable the place to become more itself, ironically by transforming the place into something else. This is an analogy for the way many writers work: translating the potential they see in an idea into something more striking than the original idea. On the rare occasion where one of my poems is based on experience it may turn out to be a more convincing 'account' than the original experience that inspired it. This I think is down to the alchemy of experience + imagination + other influences e.g. newspaper story possibly being received by the listener/reader as more

powerful than ‘the truth’. For example my poem ‘Table Manners’ (*Banjo*, p. 19) was based on a table etiquette course I attended in Cricket St. Thomas in Devon. The poem isn’t ‘about’ the course, but it uses key elements of the course (how to use a napkin, how to eat soup, how to place cutlery to indicate you’ve finished) not only as pegs on which to hang the comedy inherent in this type of the poem (think of all the stuff that could go wrong in fine dining scenarios...) but as a way of making the poem more convincing than the course. The space and the speaker that I inhabit in this poem are more real (for both writer and reader) than the event that inspired it.

Portmeirion is as much about playfulness and risk taking as it is about story and revelation. Each street corner, every archway in Portmeirion allows for the possibility that something might happen. Like a good story Portmeirion is structured through framing devices. Jan Morris noted in her talk on 16th September 2012 at the annual Portmeirion Festival that Clough was essentially a “vista-man” saying that she didn’t think he was a great architect but rather a masterly landscaper.²⁹ Garden designers too structure the story of individual gardens through framing devices.

Garden as stage set & garden design as analogy for the composition of a new poem

My fascination with gardens began between the ages of seven and ten when we visited a number of stately homes with knot gardens in the north of England where I then lived. Initially I was interested in the patterning, but then I came to see them as highly-constructed outdoor rooms that I might inhabit.³⁰ At that time (1973 -1976) I lived in a series of caravans in Lancashire. I had no bedroom or space of my own, everything in the caravan was communal. It was like living in the galley of a grounded ship. As a result two things happened to me at the same time: i) The organization of small spaces was something that I became adept in and ii) Spending time in larger spaces was crucial because these gardens and houses provided imaginary ‘playscapes’ or stages that held innumerable possibilities for action.

²⁹ “Up the road at his own home, Plas Brondanw, he could align his whole garden, magnificently on the peak called Cnicht, which was immediately behind his house.” Jan Morris quoted in Robyn Llywelyn, *Portmeirion* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2009)

³⁰ The verb inhabit: ‘habitare’ = the Latin verb ‘to dwell or live’, ‘inhabitare’ = ‘to live in’

In an interview with *Country Life* magazine Roy Lancaster says of his garden ‘It’s like a stage set and each plant plays a different character’.³¹ All gardens contain elements of storytelling, namely structure, revelation, mystery and suspense.³² Good garden design is all about concealing and revealing, showing off what you can do as a designer.

Observing the work of contemporary garden designers Andy Sturgeon, Cleve West and James Basson has enabled me to translate the way they handle structure, narrative and revelation into the way I approach writing my poems. I don’t know any other poet who currently draws on garden design methodology so as to translate something of this into the construction of individual poems and collections of poems, all the while reflecting on how this connects with their creative process. I therefore think this process and these reflections contribute to new knowledge in the field of performance and poetry.

After observing garden designers at work I began to challenge myself: firstly to have the ingredients (the basic ideas or given lines behind each poem or book), then to mix them up (by putting those ideas/words into the mouths of a variety of speakers of different genders from a spectrum of historical backgrounds) and in this way to evoke the period through individual detail (e.g. a poem on the printing press on Terra Nova) and unheard voices (e.g. the cook on Endurance) and to reveal (as Clough did by making use of the vistas at Portmeirion) the change that the speaker or protagonist is undergoing during the course of the poem, a change that might be experienced in the body by the reader/listener of the poem e.g. a shiver down the spine, a pang in their guts.

In an article entitled ‘Spadework’ published in *In Their Own Words: Contemporary Poets on Their Poetry*³³ I discuss the way the design of a garden can mirror the design of a poem. In the article I discuss a teaching tool which came out of my reflections on the connection between gardening and writing. I have used this tool with my students at UWTSO and in creative writing workshops from Montreal to Hong Kong over the last ten years:

I’ve learnt a lot about writing from gardening...I’ve learnt that if I am to use the space wisely I will need to divide it into layers. I do this too with my blank page. I think of each layer of the garden as a verse in a poem and as I immerse myself in constructing the narrative of the garden, climbing step by step from the lower terrace right up to the fourth, I am aware that each stage of the ascent must reveal

³¹ *Country Life*, March 29th 2017, p. 34

³² Anthony Noel, *Great Little Gardens* (London: Frances Lincoln, 1999)

³³ Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch, ‘Spadework’ in *In Their Own Words: Contemporary Poets on Their Poetry* ed. by Helen Ivory & George Szirtes (Cromer: Salt, 2012)

the right balance between atmosphere, mystery and suspense if the visitor is to be rewarded on the top terrace by the denouement: the panoramic view of Cardigan Bay.

The article examines the way verses in my poems function as different rooms (bearing in mind that 'stanza' is the Italian for 'room'). For the duration of the poem we live with the speaker or the narrator as they move through each room in the poem. An article about inspirational gardeners in *Gardening Which?*³⁴ discusses the design of the outdoor rooms at Vita Sackville-West's Sissinghurst³⁵ in terms of revelation.³⁶ Brenda Blethyn in her foreword to Anthony Noel's book *Great Little Gardens* (1999) underlines this link between stage and garden when she says of Anthony Noel whom she met at Guildford School of Acting where they were both students:³⁷

Tony's stages are not the theatres of Shaftesbury Avenue and Broadway, but the smallest balcony, rooftop or backyard. He brings [to his gardens] all the qualities I most enjoy in the theatre...glamour, mystery, drama, romance and humour...As in a good play, even the smallest parts are well cast, and they are always full of surprises and twists.

In every well-structured garden we are taken on a journey, a story is revealed to us around corners, between hedges, under bridges. *Banjo* is an example of a sequence where each poem takes us deeper into what the crew experienced as they would have lived it, revealing challenge upon challenge in layers through the collection: we start off with the obvious experiences of the spaces they inhabited (1. the dockside: loading of coal, provisions and pianos in the first poem in the Antarctic sequence 'Dissecting the Piano') and move logically to other factual but less well-known details (2. the ward room: editing of *The South Polar Times* in 'Printing Press', 3. the camp on the ice: George Marston's paints in 'Artist in Residence' having to be used for caulking the three rowing boats they were forced to use after *Endurance* sank, and 4. the path to the Pole towards the end of the book in 'Geology' which describes the rock specimens that were found with Scott and the polar party's bodies, who themselves had turned to rock in the temperatures). In the poem 'In Silver Bromide' (*Banjo*, p. 56) we see revelation as it is played out in an

³⁴ *Gardening Which?* December 1999, p. 48

³⁵ At Sissinghurst, Vita Sackville-West divided her garden into a series of outdoor rooms using tall yew hedges which she first saw at the garden at Hidcote. Roy Strong does this too at his garden, 'The Laskett'.

³⁶ "Each room reveals a new 'secret', another masterpiece of planting and design, small-scale or large, for a different theme or season. There is a cottage garden in reds and oranges and a walled rose garden. Her Hazel Walk, wonderfully yellow in spring, is not far removed from natural Kentish woodland. Thousands have copied her white garden." *Gardening Which?* December 1999, p. 48

³⁷ Anthony Noel *Great Little Gardens*, London: Frances Lincoln, 1999

individual poem, as opposed to in the layout of an entire collection. The poem's title refers to the process by which photographs were developed in the early part of the 20th century. The first two lines tell how Birdie Bowers was designated to pull the string to get the shutter to click.³⁸

The string is invisible which Bowers tugged
to include himself in the final photograph
of the five in furs beside a Union Jack's
slap in the face.

A few lines later it's revealed what became of this negative and that the only reason we can see this photograph now is because 'their bodies were sifted from the drifts/that held the tin cylinder of negatives' which I describe in the final line as 'a small black wound in all that white'. The movement from the type of selfie of the first line to the revelation of scale (in the black and white contrast of the landscape as well as the photograph) in the final line leaves us in no doubt as to the precariousness of finding the film of negatives at all.

Getting a part to stand for the whole: risktaking as choosing which section of the poem can stand for the whole

During the BBC coverage of Chelsea Flower Show in 2016, botanist and broadcaster James Wong asked the medal winners how they got the feeling of a particular landscape without copying it³⁹. When the garden designer Cleve West answered this question he noted that his garden (which was inspired by his memory of the ancient oak woodland on Exmoor National Park and featured 35 tons of stone) brought his vision of Exmoor where he grew up to the Main Avenue in Chelsea Flower Show,

I want to make a very contemporary space that acknowledges the memory of living in Porlock and on Exmoor. We've got all the ingredients: oak trees, stone, water and woodland planting. The trick is going to be to mix those up and make it a modern contemporary garden that evokes Exmoor without it looking like Exmoor.

I've underlined here the key words that relate to my own practice: to have the ingredients/ideas, then to mix them up using a variety of speakers/genders/time periods

³⁸ Bowers had been trained in how to do this by Herbert Ponting, who was not chosen for the final leg to the Pole.

³⁹ Chelsea Flower Show on BBC2 May 24th 2016

and in this way to evoke or create a memory of the period through details and unheard voices rather than tediously recount everything known about a subject.

Writing a poetry collection is a risky business, like building a garden. You might have a great set of ideas but on the ground or on paper they might not work out as you envisaged (due to weather, soil quality, time, budget). When as writers we work with well-known stories or moments from history like that of Scott of Antarctica or the French Resistance ('Vive La Resistance'⁴⁰) there is the question of which elements to choose to represent the story. Garden designer Matthew Stewart noted that with his Chelsea 2016 project he could not capture the scale of the diverse landscape of Yorkshire and put it into a 10m x 22m garden, but what he could do was identify the elements which made up that ruggedness and then choose one or two aspects to represent the entire landscape. Stewart described his entry during the BBC2 Chelsea 2016 coverage as 'a risk-intensive garden' and 'the bigger the risk the more there is to lose.' This resonated with me in terms of handling well-known stories or historical moments in verse: I had to ask myself what aspects of this well-known tale I could use which can stand for the experience as a whole, and how I might avoid making the collection fact-heavy. An example from my work where I make a 'slice'⁴¹ of one story stand for the larger narrative can be seen in the poem 'Bootlaces'⁴² where the bootlaces in the poem are used as an entry point for the reader to begin to take on board the difficulties endured by Captain Scott. He would dip the wick in spirit from the primus stove (not to cook with, because by now there was no food and he was too weak) but to write, knowing that he would not be leaving that tent. The detail of the bootlaces is unexpectedly linked to the writing of his diary and gives readers not only an idea of what was endured but also that one of Scott's final acts was writing. This poem contributes to a group of poems in my body of work that explore the theme of writing including 'Scribblemania'⁴³ (about the Bronte sisters) and 'Printing Press'⁴⁴ (about writing for and editing *The South Polar Times* on the Terra Nova).

⁴⁰ *Banjo*, p. 7

⁴¹ In L'Occitane Garden at RHS Hampton Court 2016, designer James Basson (who interestingly started off as a landscape painter) took the tone and texture of the landscape of Provence to give us a 'slice' of that wild landscape including almond trees that had been hacked about in order to show that this is a working landscape.

⁴² *Banjo*, p. 53

⁴³ *Not in These Shoes* p. 29

⁴⁴ *Banjo* p. 41

My poems are small spaces, on average 14-20 lines. How do we evoke a memory in a small space? Whatever I choose to be in the poem (details, anecdotes, quoted words) has to work hard. In the case of 'Ponting'⁴⁵ (which won second prize in the National Poetry Competition in 2011) elements have been selected from the Scott Polar Research Institute archive to convey what it was like to live with Herbert Ponting (the photographer on Terra Nova) both on board ship and at camp. The key focus of the poem is not to repeat facts we all know, but instead to:

- illustrate the importance of getting on with people when you live cheek by jowl with them (firstly on a boat for weeks on end and then on the ice for months under very trying conditions);
- be historically accurate to detail, but not to actual thoughts, which can be imagined when you've read enough (published and unpublished) diaries;
- showcase individual moments (e.g. vomiting on board and developing photos at the same time in two different bowls, Ponting training the Polar Party to take the shot at the Pole as he wouldn't be there).

As James Wong noted during his BBC2 coverage of the Chelsea Flower Show 2016, the hardest thing to achieve is to make the 'naturalistic look' look natural. Cleve West says that he approached this by not using native Exmoor planting ('because you can't better Exmoor') and he didn't want to create a mini-Exmoor, but rather by infusing the garden with something of his relationship to the landscape. In my work I wanted to show something of my relationship to the characters whose lives I inhabit in my writing. For example in 'Scribblemania' (*Not In These Shoes*, p. 29), I look at my relationship to the Brontës rather than talk 'about' them. I explore in the poem what it felt like as a child to visit the house of writers whose work I was familiar with, but was cordoned off from,

.....This
writing life
wasn't one I expected
to be roped off from

at seven when we
already lived it at home,
my sisters and I

Canvas as page

⁴⁵ *ibid* p. 46

The way I think about gardening is an extension of my creative practice. The place where I first understood this was at Monet's garden in Giverny in Normandy where it is clear that the artist was transposing what he did in his painting to his gardening: composition through planting rather than composition through painting. Similarly when the artist Gertrude Jekyll's sight weakened, she applied the principles of painting to colour and shape in the garden. This gave me new insight into my own creative practice because I already see the poem as a shape before I see it as words. I see each verse in the poem as a different colour before I see it as a word.

In his critical book *On Poetry* the poet Glyn Maxwell suggests that we squint at a poem first to think about what is being told by the shape alone.⁴⁶ Being short sighted, if I look at a poem at arm's length I cannot read the words – all I can see are the verses as blocks of different lengths. I already have a gut reaction⁴⁷ to the poem I'm squinting at. In my writing process I use blocks of different colour to represent not only different stanzas, but line lengths or tenses. When I sketch in the words, they are sketched as sounds rather than black and white marks on the page. Words that sound like the sounds come next. This is akin to what Robert Frost called 'the sound of sense'. Frost could hear a conversation in the next room, muffled through a wall, not be able to make out a single word and yet still understand what was going on. It's a synaesthetic approach to composition which keeps the lines very supple and allows me to be open to a spectrum of outcomes without tying the poem down too soon.

So where is this third key influence, this ability to visualize a poem as if it were a painting, visible in my work? I look at the blank page as if I were about to draw or paint a picture on it. For twenty minutes or so it is a canvas. Once the drawings and squiggles are down I am ready to add the notes. This turns the canvas into a map of how to get to the end of the poem. It looks like a puzzle with a few annotated clues, or like a map in another language, which may to a monoglot English speaker seem odd, but if you are used to moving between different scripts (Cyrillic in Ancient Greek) and languages (French, Welsh, Latin) then this is a backdrop which offers a wider set of possibilities for the writer. The whole time I can hear the poem in the room, although like Frost I cannot hear English words or indeed words in any language. I hear the intonation of voices,

⁴⁶ 'Earlier, I said it helps to mist one's eyes when first contemplating a poem, see what's being told by the shape alone.' *On Poetry* (London: Oberon, 2012) p. 94

⁴⁷ The idea of a 'gut reaction' will be explored more fully in Chapter 3

questions, exclamations, shouts of delight or distress. And what I hear makes complete sense to me in terms of intonation. This hearing of voices enables me to move onto the next step, which is to translate these heard voices into English and to blend them with the markings on the page. The blank canvas that becomes the page *is* the stage on which the poem begins to speak. It is crucial that I experience the canvas as stage because that word implies audience. The speaker of the poem is not speaking to themselves. They have something to share with an implied listener (or reader).

During a workshop in Manchester, Glyn Maxwell talked about metre as footstep, vowels as feelings and line as breath.⁴⁸ This language places us in the territory of the breathing, moving body. He gave the participants the first line and a half of Robert Frost's poem 'Acquainted with the Night'⁴⁹ which is written in pentameter in terza rima. Then he asked us to inhale the first line, and then to write the second line. I found this very interesting because it reminded me of what Linklater says about the importance of breathing in the image and letting the image come out on the breath. This proposition is also about inhabiting as far as possible the space the writer was in when they wrote those lines. Then Maxwell gave us the next line and a half and we had to write the rest of the line and so on all the way through the poem. This was useful because it taught me that when one is fed a shape and your pen hovers above the page as if you are the author of that poem (which for those fifteen minutes you are) of necessity you will look for words that fit the structure and content of the poem as you hear it.

Aspects from artwork that I have translated into my own practice might be said to be the rhythm, balance, movement and patterning that I can see in certain paintings. If we think of the point (which I define as a dot), line (which I define as a horizontal or vertical line), perspective (which I define as depicting volume and space on a flat surface), geometry (which I define as the properties, measurement of points, lines, angles and figures in space) and tone (which I define as shading from darker to lighter) of an artwork as a means of expressing particular aspects of reality or experience that the artist wants to convey, how might some of these elements be useful to the poet? I demonstrate using four examples from my own poems:

- Colour as form in both painting and poem;
- Point as movement in both painting and poem;

⁴⁸ The Poetry School in Manchester on 22nd July 2012 on the pentameter <https://www.anthonyburgess.org/event/poetry-workshop-glyn-maxwell/>

⁴⁹ Robert Frost, *West Running Brook* (Holt, 1928)

- Line used to express feelings and emotions in both painting and poem;
- Tone as rhythm in both painting and poem.

Colour as form

In the title poem from my pamphlet *Ling Di Long* (p. 11) the speaker tells how a sailor tripped on the gangplank back to the ship and fell into the freezing water of Boston Harbour leaving a Chinese parasol in his cabin bought for his wife in Liverpool; his death means that she now has to make a living by scraping barnacles from the ships that docked in Liverpool; inevitably at some point she found herself scraping barnacles from ships returning from Boston.

The poem is a sonnet divided into four 'blocks'. During its composition, each block was a different colour in my mind and the different colours of each stanza indicated a new movement in the narrative of the poem. Stanza 1 is a block of four lines in the colour blue (I didn't choose blue, blue chose me, perhaps because of the association with the colour of the sea) with different shades of blue to represent the different lines: the line endings 'step' and 'feet' are darker blue to represent firstly the missing of the step and secondly the distance the sailor fell. This distance is emphasized by the gap between stanza 1 and stanza 2. Stanza 2 is yellow (again, I didn't choose yellow, yellow chose me, possibly because of the association with the yellow of lights in the city on a night out) with each line a different shade of yellow with the line getting a darker yellow as it heads up to the crucial moment of the enjambed phrase 'between ship/and shore' down which the sailor fell to indicate that even the proximity of the ship to the shore couldn't save him; again the second line of stanza 2 the line becomes a darker shade of yellow as it heads up to 'for' at the end of the line, building to the intensity as to whom this parasol was for (his wife) at the beginning of the next line; similarly with line three, the yellow becomes yet again darker at the end of the line on the word 'effects' where it then reaches into the next line with their full postal address, thereby emphasising the pathos. The enjambment between stanzas 2 and 3 in which space the parasol is opened turn (in my mind) from yellow to magenta (I didn't choose magenta, magenta chose me, perhaps because of the memory of seeing that colour on a parasol) with a stronger magenta on the

word 'sing' at the end of line 1 of stanza 3 to emphasise the bird singing something that the wife could not hear 'to another'. Perhaps the strongest shade of magenta is for obvious reasons, at the end of stanza 3 with the word 'got' splitting the enjambed phrase 'the closest she got/to Boston',

For two-and-six she'd scrape barnacles from
every vessel that docked, the closest she got

to Boston, lowered in a rope seat, and in this act
of dangling, kept company, part of the way, with him.

Point as movement

The painting of dots (or points as in pointillism), and use of repeated colours in the form of dots, is for me analogous to using repeated monosyllabic or short words in a poem. To illustrate this I will use Claude Monet's *Field of Poppies*. The poppies (which I see as groups of points) close together at the top of the painting and then gradually separate and move further apart towards the bottom part of the picture conveying a feeling of rhythmic movement. They seem to cluster closer together as they approach eye level. Two figures inhabit this space (a woman and a child in each case) at the top of the rolling poppies and two at the bottom which seem to represent the beginning and end of this journey through poppies. These points appear in my mind when I write a triolet. For example the final poem in *Ling Di Long*, 'Under the Rubble' (p. 16) is a triolet which is a French fixed form composed of eight lines, using only two rhymes, disposed in the following scheme: ABaAabAB (where a capital letter indicates a repeated line). The repetition of the two lines AB at the end of the poem fulfil a similar function to that of the two figures (the taller on the right in both cases) at the beginning and end of the slope of poppies in that by the time our eye travels from the smaller (seemingly further) two figures to the larger (seemingly nearer) two figures in the painting something has shifted in our understanding of how these people (and we) are experiencing this rolling hill of poppies.

It's your dad, Bernie. I'll stay by your side
and hold your hand until they dig you out.

In the same way by the time our eye reads from the first two lines to the last two lines (which are the first two repeated), something has shifted in our understanding of what is happening to Bernie. Although the lines use exactly the same words, the punctuation has

changed by the end, and we realise in line 3 that there has been a bomb at school⁵⁰. There is also the shared memory between parent and child of climbing the mountain, Meelbeg, yet here the child is buried by a mountain of rubble. The monosyllabic words like points help to give the impression that the parent is talking slowly, to make sure that what they say is clear to the hearer, the (presumably injured) child. Although we have the same two lines at the end we know from lines 3-6 that the situation is changing even before our eyes: by the end of line six the child's fingers are white. The poem uses short words, frequent punctuation and a regular form and rhymes (IDE/OUT) to show that within a seemingly still picture there is some movement, and that the movement is the changing situation. It's probable that by the end of the poem the child is dead.

Line used to express feelings and emotions

The art critic Frederick Malins says of lines,

Lines can be active or static, continuous or broken, curved or straight, broad or delicate, light or dark.⁵¹

In his book *Understanding Paintings* (1980) Malins shows how the angular lines of Picasso's 'Weeping Woman' are used to convey disturbing emotions and discusses how the conflicting straight lines not only describe the grief of the woman but create emotional disturbance in the spectator. So how does this relate to my poems? The line break is of course one of the key differences between poetry and prose – where we break the line matters: we can use the line break to pace a poem (slow it down or speed it up) or we can use it to keep the reader guessing, to create surprise. By keeping the reader waiting as to what is coming at the end of the line we are adding to the build-up of emotion. The reader will already have invested in the character in stanza 1 and is (hopefully) concerned enough to read on to the first line of stanza 2 to find out what is going to happen. If we look at how the line break is used in my poem 'Singer'⁵² and in 'Saving The Plates'⁵³ we will see that in both cases it embodies the emotion experienced by the speaker. All the way through the poem 'Singer', not only are the line breaks

⁵⁰ This poem is set in Northern Ireland in the 1970s

⁵¹ Frederick Malins, *Understanding Paintings: The Elements of Composition* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1980) p. 26

⁵² *Lime & Winter* p. 8

⁵³ *Banjo* p. 58

already powerful⁵⁴ but even within the lines each one is broken and ‘jumps’ onto the next line. This is to indicate in the shape of the poem two aspects discussed in the content of the poem: firstly how a needle will jump on an LP if the record is dented, and secondly how memories return to us in unexpected and fragmented ways. The memories therefore are embodied in the jagged nature of the structure of the poem. In ‘Singer’ for example the line breaks in both the middle and at the end of the lines

of an old Singer sewing machine
cut me up.
 When I touched its jaw
I was back in a past
 where your father fixed
Singers on the fifth floor

are used to express the feelings of the speaker when they stumble across a sewing machine at an auction. Breaking the line in the middle helps to convey the emotions of the speaker, sparking an avalanche of memories (space 1 = the factory in Clydebank, space 2 = the recording of the LP, space 3 = the visit to Lisbon, space 4 = the tattoo parlour).

This use of line to express feeling and emotion plays out differently in ‘Saving The Plates’. The poem looks at what happened to Frank Hurley, the photographer on board *Endurance* as he tried to save as many of his plate glass negatives as he could before the ship sank. To indicate the feelings of desperation in this race against time, the poem employs one long line to impel the reader forward through four verses. This works in tandem with key line breaks in a number of places for example, **to escape/the sub-zero black water** and again **to skate/down the layers** and again **before/he was forced**. As in ‘Singer’, not only are the line breaks at the end of the lines used to express feeling and emotion, but the one long question that runs through this poem contributes to this, yet in the opposite way to in ‘Singer’, where the lines are broken in the middle.

Tone as rhythm

Tone in painting, as I understand it is used to simulate the effects of lighting by creating shadow to enable shapes to appear as if they had been modelled through the use of light

⁵⁴ possessions/of the recently bereaved
 seething with greed/at how little
 its litany/of needles
 why/you started singing

and dark. The way tone is used in painting inspired me to use it in a similar way in some of my poems by sketching out in pencil the lighter and darker moments in the poem. Here I think of tone as referring to the changing lighter and darker feelings of the speaker as they progress through the poem. This emphasis on lighter and darker feelings also plays a part on the impact of Linklater work on the composition and speaking of my poems as I discuss in Chapter 2. If I were to identify lighter and darker feelings in the body, I might suggest that the organ the heart feels lighter when we stretch up and heavier when we lean over. I suggest that tone in the poem might represent the moments which speaker and listener identify as darker or lighter.

For example if we were to visualize my poem ‘Willow Pattern’⁵⁵ as a painting (which is precisely what I did before I turned the sketch into words) it was shaded dark for the first two lines (broken plate), then darker (inability to mourn), then slightly lighter (writing, jasmine tea), much lighter at the beginning of the second stanza (walk, ferns) darker again at the end of the final stanza (candle wax has gone hard). What these shifting moments of light and dark in the poem do, seen first in pencil sketch and then translated into words, is give the poem a certain lilt or musical quality embedded in the interplay not only between words, but between moments of light and dark. How we bring these moments of light and dark out on the voice is something I will explore in Chapter 2.

Textile as page

The realisation that Monet paints the same garden again and again in different lights and from different perspectives⁵⁶ influenced my thinking about structuring sequences set in the same place, e.g. Antarctic expeditions portrayed in *Banjo* where characters are bound together by one voyage, or one expedition. When in 2012 the Leverhulme Foundation kindly granted me an artist in residence award to work at the National Wool Museum in Drefach Felindre in Carmarthenshire I realised I could write about those whose lives had as a group, been touched by the textile industry at different points in time across a variety of mills.

One of the reasons that I applied for the residency was because of my interest in textiles as holding, preserving and transmitting stories. Welsh blankets are of course prized items

⁵⁵ *Rockclimbing in Silk* p. 50

⁵⁶ By perspective I mean looking at one subject from different angles or points of view.

that are handed down in families. I began to think about the stories they might hold and this led me to start exploring how the eighth century Japanese art of Shibori is about imprinting memory on cloth – the cloth physically holds the memory of the ring or squeeze in the form of a pattern that has either been dyed or not dyed. The memory inhabits the cloth. Like blankets or textiles, poems can act as containers for memories (whether our own, or those of characters from history, or those of groups of workers in the same industry). The memory inhabits the poem. ‘Tie-dye’ is the popular translation for Shibori in the Western world. However this does not fully cover the diversity of techniques which have been developed or the degree of skill and knowledge required to execute them. In her book *Memory on Cloth: Shibori Now*⁵⁷ Yoshiko Wada defines Shibori as any process which leaves a memory or permanent record on the cloth, be it pattern or texture. The term comes from the Japanese verb root ‘shiboru’ meaning ‘to wring, squeeze or press’. Shibori is the act of compressing a cloth to create a ‘resist’, which is a set of patterns that are made through the use of rings that ‘resist’ the dye. I saw this as the cloth recording the pressure that was applied to it in the same way that form applied to a poem creates a pattern or texture in the language and thereby shapes the content, wringing out of it only the most powerful parts of the story that then become held in the form.⁵⁸ As a result of my research I wanted to write a collection of poems in each of which there is some kind of ‘resist’. In a poem a ‘resist’ can be interpreted as a particular form or metre, where the form puts a ‘pressure’ on the content, which as we noted in the discussion about Glyn Maxwell above, makes me work harder to find the right verb and to go somewhere in the poem that I might not have, had I not commissioned myself to work in this way. This ‘resist’/pressure makes not only the writer but the reader/listener work harder (because the writer has resisted the obvious direction in which the poem might go). This ‘resist’ can also work in writing by taking on a different gender, or channelling a character from an historical period. So in what way have I translated some aspects of Shibori into my work?

Themed sequences as group memories

Memory on cloth occurs when the cloth absorbs the dye (with pressure from the hand). I thought of this as an analogy for the way we might absorb memories of the dead and speak them as if they are our own. The page can hold the memory of the speaker of the

⁵⁷ Wada Yoshiko, *Memory on Cloth: Shibori Now* (Kodansha America 2nd edition, 2012)

⁵⁸ For example it is used in combination with heat setting on polyester to create a permanent texture made famous by the designer Issey Miyake.

poem. What's interesting is when they become collective memories embodied in groups of poems that recount experiences common to those who worked in certain spaces or industries.

In *Lime & Winter* the memory of one millworker (whose working experiences outlined here are common to the group) is used in conjunction with a well-known myth and compressed into 24 lines in the poem 'String Theory' (p. 4) where what is unsaid (undyed) is as powerful as what is said (dyed). In gardening terms, as Monty Don said on the BBC of Cleve West's Chelsea 2016 garden 'knowing when not to fill a space is the sign of a master at his peak'. The poem is crafted into three stanzas linked by the word 'string' which move from the speaker watching a boy flying a kite (stanza/room 1) to the speaker's mother, a former millworker who, like many millworkers died from 'kissing the shuttle' (stanza/room 2) to the boy visiting his father in Crete (stanza/room 3) with its echoes of the Daedalus and Icarus story. Again in *Lime & Winter*, the poem 'Winter' (p. 3) describes the common memory of the way frosted glass was used in this industry to prevent mill workers from becoming distracted.

Similarly in *Banjo*, examples of common memories can be seen in the poem 'The Minstrels at Minus Sixty' (p. 43). Here the speaker is the cook who recounts the regular theatricals which would take place on Scott's Discovery expedition which had its own theatre in a hut nicknamed 'The Royal Terror Theatre' on Ross Island in Antarctica. He showcases something of the experience of the entire group through one voice. In 'My Year Out' (p. 51) the speaker (Apsley Cherry Garrard, the youngest member of Scott's final expedition) talks about his experience as part of the group of two who found the bodies and as one of a group of men who shared a cabin, reflecting on what it felt like to sleep beside empty bunks i.e. the experience of a number of men is voiced through Cherry Garrard. I regard these poems as a way of passing on culturally inherited memories (even if I wasn't present in this place in for example, 1914) to a new generation via artifact or poem (or poem as artifact, something I will allude to in Chapter 4 when I outline the impact of my work).

In her 2016 catalogue Vanessa Arbuthnott talks about her *Artisan Collection* which was inspired by Shibori,

...my original designs were created by folding, shaping and compressing fabrics by hand and then immersing them in a traditional indigo vat. You can never totally control the process so the results are always unique and the designs only revealed when the fabric is unwrapped...this is the true joy of Shibori.⁵⁹ [my underlining]

Arbuthnott's words illustrate the element of risk (and therefore excitement) that is built into using this particular process. Being willing to take linguistic risks by translating elements from these four different disciplines into my own creative practice has been the hallmark of my journey on the road from page to stage.

A willingness to take risks with language as well as with ways of working in order to have more fun as a writer and to give the reader/listener a richer experience of the poem prepared the ground that enabled me to be open enough to consider what the Linklater approach might bring to my reading style. I was intrigued by the impact the Linklater approach began to have not only on what I had expected to change (my reading style) but also on what I had not anticipated might change (my writing practice). The next chapter considers how this came about.

⁵⁹ Vanessa Arbuthnott collection catalogue 2016

Chapter 2 – Voice on the Stage: making something real happen on the stage through the Linklater Approach

Legend has it that in the late thirties, Iris [Warren] was in love with a Freudian psychoanalyst in London... In any case, they were certainly talking a lot, and he said to her “you work on people’s voices, but I have some patients who are so traumatised that they cannot speak. They cannot find a voice and they cannot find words at all.” So he invited Iris to come in and work with his patients, and she taught them to relax in their bellies, to breathe, and lo and behold their throats opened up, words rushed out, tears rolled down their cheeks and they spoke their stories.⁶⁰

This anecdote by Kristin Linklater opens up the question that I want to address in this chapter, namely the relationship of body to voice for a poet such as myself who is working with words on the page as well as performing them. As I understand it, Warren had developed her approach to voice training from her belief that voice begins in emotional impulse and that if emotional expression is stifled then the voice is too. When West End actors came to her with problems of vocal strain in performance, Warren considered that their voices might not be connected to their emotions and that muscular effort was perhaps being substituted for emotional energy, which caused laryngeal tension. From her daily work with these actors Warren developed a series of exercises that came from inside out rather than outside in. She would say “I want to hear the person – not the voice.”⁶¹

Kristin Linklater studied at the London Academy of Music and Drama, and after a year working at The Byre Theatre in St Andrews was invited to teach alongside Warren as voice coach at LAMDA which is where she first came to use Warren’s exercises with

⁶⁰ Kristin Linklater in *Mosaic: A journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature* Vol. 44 no. 1, March 2011, pp. 1-45

⁶¹ Speech given by Kristin Linklater to the voice conference in Ravenna, Italy, La Voce Artistica on 20th October 2011 – text given to me by Françoise Walot of the Birmingham Conservatoire

voice students. In the sixty years since then she has added to them and expanded them to make them her own in her book, detailed in her book *Freeing The Natural Voice* (1976). In 1963 she went to the USA, initially for a year but stayed for fifty years teaching at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, at New York University Graduate Theatre Programme, Shakespeare & Company (of which she is the co-founder) in Lenox, Massachusetts, at Emerson College in Boston and finally as Professor of Theatre Arts at Columbia University in New York before returning to Orkney where she set up the Kristin Linklater Voice Centre in 2014.

Linklater has said that the only way an audience will see and hear and feel a scene is if the speaker sees and hears and feels it in front of the audience; to achieve this the speaker's voice would be better off revealing the scene rather than describing it.⁶² After attending KLVC courses credibility has become the number one attribute I seek in my voice rather than volume, musicality or audibility. In order to be credible on stage I have discovered that it's more enjoyable for me and the audience if I re-experience the poem as I speak it rather than simply reciting it or re-presenting it.⁶³ My aim is to show something real happening through the revelation of the story in my voice. By the phrase 'showing something real' I mean re-experiencing or re-living whatever range of emotions are in the poem. This chapter examines what happens when what is in the poem is allowed to be felt in the body, and then come out on the voice. This embodied, psycho-physical approach will be considered using the Linklater approach, the impact of the theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky on Linklater, and then by giving examples from my own work to show how this has changed the way I read out my poems. I will close this chapter by giving an example of how the Linklater approach has started to impact on my composition process. As part of this exploration I will acknowledge how the movement work of Trish Arnold, who was a colleague of Linklater's at LAMDA, has fed into both my readings and composition.

Bad Habits

⁶² Kristin Linklater, 'The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training' in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1 January 2016, pp. 57-70

⁶³ The theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky considered actors preventing any real emotion emerging on the stage to be just as much of a contortion of natural behaviour as those actors who tried to force their emotions out. (Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 44)

There is no accurate way to capture work about the body since the understanding of it happens while experiencing it, however I hope these reflections will give a sense of the shift in myself as a writer and performer through my exploration of voice work at the KLVC. The Linklater approach has offered me a way to rehabilitate the way I perform my poems, enabling me to look at speaking habits that I have developed over the years and to discard whichever patterns of thinking and speaking⁶⁴ are no longer useful by replacing them with ways that might be more fun for me to use and for the audience to listen to. Old habits of speaking might be ones in which I keep my jaw and breathing tightly under control that were probably useful to me as a teenager as a protective habit to say as little as possible so as to avoid being bullied because I always had the ‘wrong voice’ in whatever new school/place I moved to. These controls can turn into points of tension in the body that people use to keep what they want to say in. Many of us build tension in their bodies as children because we’ve learned it’s unacceptable to speak too loudly or to speak about certain topics or to speak in a certain way. Actor and Stanislavsky scholar Bella Merlin (2001) notes that ‘When we experience moments of great emotional tension, the muscles preserve the memory of the sensation more lastingly than they do with daily experiences.’⁶⁵ This means they are harder to identify and take considerable application to remove. Stanislavsky saw unnecessary physical tensions as substantial obstacles to creativity (Merlin, 2007, p. 32). I have exchanged these physical tensions⁶⁶ held in my body for the energy to write more powerfully and to live more fully.

Cutting myself off from what is happening in my body and from my emotions led to keeping my voice as low and dull as possible, both in daily life and in poetry readings so as to disguise any emotion. The ability to control emotion is of course useful in certain

⁶⁴ The tendency is to disconnect from a low breath (in the stomach area i.e. taking the diaphragm right down) and instead to use a ‘survival breath’ (i.e. just breathing from the chest). To try to get to the root of this we can observe how we breathe, and then see if we can locate the place where the tensions are. Through observing what is happening in our bodies we can stretch the musculature around the spine and reconnect the brain into the body through the spine.

⁶⁵ Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psychophysical Approach to Actor Training*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001) p. 13

⁶⁶ During his holiday in Finland in 1906, Stanislavsky came up with four steps that he calls the *inner creative state* stemming from the tools of *relaxation* and *attention*. He proposed that as an actor you need: i) to be physically free yet in control of your relaxed muscles; ii) to be infinitely alert in your attention; iii) to observe and listen to what’s going on around you – just as you would in real life – so that your onstage contact is as plugged in as it is in real life; iv) to believe in the *events* on stage. Merlin (2007) p. 51

situations⁶⁷ but it can congeal into an unconscious habit of concealing emotion regardless of the situation. The realisation through the Linklater work that this was happening left me with a desire to connect both myself and my listeners more closely to my work. At the same time I was afraid of doing this because, like many British people I veer in the direction of keeping a lid on emotions for fear of appearing vulnerable. I have discovered that through using Linklater exercises it is possible to keep the throat open and choose where the breath goes in the body; for example I have the choice to imagine that I am breathing down to my toes. If I do this, I experience my vulnerability as strength and emotions instead become a source of power because I'm no longer incapacitated by them. More excitingly, I can be in control of them to show what Lord Nelson or Gwen John or Captain Scott or myself or a 19th century millworker felt in any given moment, through re-living on stage the human experiences of joy, pain, happiness, anger and fear portrayed in different poems.

The understanding that none of us has to stay stuck on one emotional note when we speak (whether on the stage or not) and that we have the option of moving through a range of emotions in any text, poem or conversation enabled me to tap into an accessible emotional reservoir that I can draw on for giving performances and for writing new work.

Being aware of the whole body when performing means listening with my body and not just my head. When I experience thought in my body and in my breath, I am thinking and feeling the thing at the same time.⁶⁸ Merlin (2007, p. 163) notes how the solar plexus, the nucleus of nerve endings is located anatomically between the stomach and spine and that

You can actually feel that this area is your 'emotion-centre': we talk about butterflies in the stomach, or being sick with rage, or losing your appetite when you're passionately in love. In fact it's been scientifically proven that there are more nerve endings in your stomach than your brain: in other words, more processing of information takes place in the stomach area than in the head. Yet the intelligence of this area of the body is completely underestimated by most people who are inclined to think our rational brains do most of the decision-making in our lives.

'Psyche' (ψυχή in Greek) means both 'breath' and 'soul'. Linklater has noted that although a voice is forged in the body, it is set in motion by impulses in the brain "The

⁶⁷ 'What was once a short-term refuge from emotion can turn into a lasting kind of imprisonment' Guy Claxton in *Intelligence in The Flesh: why your mind needs your body much more than it thinks* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015) p.123

⁶⁸ Kristin Linklater, 'The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training' in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1 January 2016, p. 63

art of voice training implicates not only the physicality of the voice but the psyche of the voice which has an indivisible union with the body in its original meaning from the Greek of 'breath.'"⁶⁹

Bearing in mind there are 86 billion neurons in the skull brain, 100 million neurons in the gut brain and 40,000 neurons in the heart brain⁷⁰ the gut is not just a digestive system, but a place where emotions are registered. I have discovered that my breath can pick up and reveal emotions through my voice.

So how does the voice work? We have a desire to speak, then an impulse races from the skull brain to the body via the spinal cord, galvanizing the breathing musculature to bring in air, and simultaneously laryngeal muscles are galvanized to bring the vocal folds together so that their resistance to the outgoing air creates a vibration that is immediately amplified by surrounding resonators.⁷¹ Recent research has demonstrated that there is a stronger link between mind and body than has previously been thought. In the centuries since Descartes famously promoted the idea that the heart is basically a blood pump, proclaiming, 'I think, therefore I am' science has often overlooked emotions as the source of a person's true being. Van der Kolk's 2015 study looks at the effects of trauma on individuals and how one way of confronting the painful realities of life is by sharing them in our voices on stage. Van der Kolk remarks that as a culture we are trained to cut ourselves off from the truth of what we are feeling and he goes on to quote Tina Packer, founder of Shakespeare & Company, 'that training actors involves training people to go against that tendency, training them to feel deeply and "to convey that feeling at every moment to the audience, so the audience will get it – and not close off against it".'⁷²

Even modern neuroscience has tended to concentrate on the cognitive aspects of brain function, disregarding emotions. In *Descartes' Error* Antonio Damasio⁷³ challenges traditional ideas about the connection between emotions and rationality through a series of case studies demonstrating that emotions are not a luxury but essential to rational

⁶⁹ Kristin Linklater, 'The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training' in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1 January 2016, p. 59

⁷⁰ Linklater reminded us of this during the Poetry course 'From Haiku to Hopkins' 11-18 February 2018

⁷¹ Kristin Linklater, *The Art and Craft of Voice: How do we prepare for the shock of inspiration?* April 2015 – KL doesn't know where this was published

⁷² Van der Kolk (2015) p. 335

⁷³ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999)

thinking and to normal social behaviour. Guy Claxton (2015) draws on the latest findings in neuroscience and psychology to show how our bodies constitute the core of our intelligent life. Through both attending classes at the KLVC and through my research I have come to understand that what is happening in my body impacts on my voice.

“Who hasn’t been to a poetry reading and seen the happy, good-natured faces of the audience freeze into the required *serieuse* attitude when the poet strikes up? For some reason, the temptation to adopt the poetry-reading manner seems generally irresistible to poet and audience alike” says Richard Caddel in an article in an anthology about poetry readings published by Stride, *Words Out Loud* (2002).⁷⁴ It is this manner that I had adopted as both listener and performer. The Linklater approach has shifted me out of this habit by waking me up to other possibilities of expressing what I have written in my poems. So for example, with the word ‘staircase’ in my poem ‘The Stain’ (*Not In These Shoes* p. 4) I can allow the word to come out on my breath accompanied by the feeling that it creates in me when I think of particular staircases I have known in my life, to see the staircase with my breath, not just to hear the word with my ears. This has been key in me allowing my voice to be emotionally free.

The influence of Stanislavsky

Linklater is part of a major 20th century movement spearheaded by the Russian theatre director, Konstantin Stanislavsky who used his own experiences to give emotional power to the text performed. Stanislavsky began by challenging the repertoire of Russian theatre with its stilted performances⁷⁵. This worked in terms of results (exterior), but not in terms of engagement by the actors (interior). Stanislavsky realized this was just imitation, and it left him questioning when the actor ‘became’ the character (Merlin 2003, p. 6). From 1935 onwards Stanislavsky encouraged actors to do their research on the stage, looking into their own human lives for whatever information they needed to enable them to do

⁷⁴ Richard Caddel, ‘Developmental Thoughts on Poetry in Performance’ in *Words Out Loud: ten essays about poetry readings*, ed. by Mark Robinson (Exeter: Stride Publications), p. 11

⁷⁵ In a repertoire where melodrama dominated (Merlin, 2003, p. 6), the cast had for example to freeze the action when a star came on mid-performance in order to allow time for clapping and adulation. There would be very short rehearsal times (resulting in a lot of prompting). Stock canvas backdrops would be dragged from the store depicting dining rooms, gardens or parlours. (Merlin, 2003, p. 7)

what their characters were doing.⁷⁶ Instead of providing them with a shopping list of actions as he had with *The Seagull*, the actors were now expected to unearth the moments of ‘truth’ in the characters and action through their psycho-physical experience of being in the scene on the stage. This meant that initially rather than memorizing the words (in fact he forbade this) the actors would 1) improvise the words, 2) the director (Stanislavsky) would feed them the actual words from the sidelines and 3) the actors would finally know the words because they wanted those particular words to express the truth of that moment, rather than because they had memorized them (Merlin, 2003, p. 3). Linklater uses this method in her workshops where she asks students why they want to say this text or read that poem. She does this because their desire to share the text will inform how the student speaks the poem. Linklater then whispers the words of the text in through the ear⁷⁷ and the student speaks them, colouring them with intonation and emotion they felt when they first wrote the poem or decided to play Othello.

Realism versus naturalism

By realism I mean inner participation by the actor, where the actor believes in the character onstage so as to be more convincing for the audience; by naturalism I mean using a shopping list of actions (as above) but without having the psychological commitment behind it to back up what one’s doing, with the result that this can become mechanical. An example of naturalism, as I noted in the introduction would be me reading poems out like a bus timetable without putting myself into the shoes of each character and aiming to speak from where they are at.⁷⁸ This reflects Linklater’s observation that students can either do the exercises like a series of recipe instructions or they can pay attention to how the exercises impact on their body; they can live the exercises action by action, all the time observing their changing emotional state. Merlin (2003, p. 34) notes that the psycho-physical information that actors gleaned from experiencing scenes through improvisation was undoubtedly vital. It is this realisation that excited me and made me want to write this thesis.

⁷⁶ Merlin notes that this wasn’t a new idea: Meyerhold had used improvisations in the 1905 Theatrical Studio (2003, p. 30)

⁷⁷ Linklater whispers the words in as flat away as possible so that the student to choose how to colour the word themselves.

⁷⁸ Actress Alisa Koonen who worked with Stanislavsky said what was demanded of them was ‘not simply the mechanical execution of the task but also our inner participation’ cited in Worrall 1996 p. 186, itself cited in Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, London: Routledge, 2003 p. 24

The relationship between our physical lives and our psychological lives underpinned Stanislavsky's theories. "Stanislavsky's investigations into performance coincided with the climax to a debate which had been bubbling for centuries"⁷⁹ concerning the idea of 'truthful acting' and 'natural behaviour' on the stage. Bella Merlin (2007, p. 156) says that being emotional is really about being creatively responsive and openly playful. This resonates with me because since undertaking these letting go of tension in the body exercises, I have found myself more creative and more willing to be playful both in the writing and on the stage. Stanislavsky believed that if an actor regularly practised certain exercises (such as the ones I go on to outline in this chapter) the 'creative state' could become the natural state for the performer so that all such training becomes 'habitual' (Merlin, 2001, p. 301). And I have indeed found this to be the case. Stanislavsky was the first acting practitioner to look at what human beings do with their everyday lives and turn that into something systematic for the stage (Merlin, 2007).

What is there to gain from voice coaching?

A number of people have said asked me why I take voice coaching lessons when I already speak clearly. Whilst I can give a good, ready-made performance of many of my poems, these performances may lack inner content unless they are invested with the human responses that I had when writing the poems. A bit like Stanislavsky's actors, finding reasons in which I can fully believe when I read out each poem means my work can be alive (Merlin, 2003, p. 63).

Others have asked me whether voice training isn't artificial, how coaching could free a voice and whether these aren't just courses about projecting one's voice. What I have learnt is that it's not about projecting, but rather that it's about sharing what I'm thinking and feeling in any given poem on the stage through the freedom in my breath and my voice. 'Once you get down to free breathing, you get down to fear and rage. It's your messy personal emotions you must learn to accept and channel into your creative process

⁷⁹ Bella Merlin *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (Nick Hern Books: London 2007) p. 5. She goes on to talk about how eighteenth century British actor David Garrick shocked his public with realistic portrayals of swooning and sweating, while in France Constant Coquelin declared that 'Everything must spring from truth.'

so that you are a real person on stage' Linklater said in 1985 in an interview in the Yale School of Drama journal.⁸⁰

In a podcast on poet Mark McGuinness's blog, Linklater notes that we were all born with a free voice,

You've only got to listen to babies to know that they are not being coached into expressing their feelings...in order to adjust to society and to be acculturated into any community, family, school or surroundings, we have to put the lid on our free emotional expression and begin to be polite, to behave, to speak in the way that other people think we should speak, and that puts all sorts of stoppers onto the original human voice that are in the body in the form of tensions so the stomach begins to tighten up in order to hold onto breathing because the breathing will reveal emotion, the throat begins to tighten up in order to compensate for the lack of a free breath and in the course of growing up it's very likely that we lose contact with the true, free voice that is our birthright.⁸¹

The difference between coaching and what Linklater does is that in coaching, teachers work on the result, on the way people speak and try and make it better (go faster, go slower) which is a kind of 'managing' of the voice, whereas what Linklater does is to suggest getting rid of any inhibitions which manifest in physical tension so as to begin to explore the risky business of saying what we think and feel. Linklater has noted that her coaching doesn't focus on how people say something but on what they want to say and why. She asks her students to let that causal thought be the thing that activates the breath so that the picture of what the student wants to say can come out onto the voice. I've discovered that it is the desire to share the story of the poem that makes the poem louder, not me 'projecting' it.

By removing unhelpful blocks, I have become more able to listen: this mode of listening can only exist when writers are in a particular state of receptivity.⁸² One place where I have seen both myself and other poets in this state of receptivity is during the 'What We Should Have Said' performances, organised by Richard Douglas-Pennant and Roland Melia. I've performed with this ensemble four times with a mix of different writers and spoken word artists each time, but always with Richard Douglas Pennant and Stuart Silver as part of the team. Five or six poets are seated in a line on the stage. One poet will

⁸⁰ Susan Mason 'An Interview with Kristin Linklater' in *Theater* (Winter 1985) Yale School of Drama, Yale Repertory Theatre

⁸¹ <http://lateralaction.com/articles/freeing-the-natural-voice-kristin-linklater/> accessed 8th September 2017

⁸² Merlin (2007) p. 19

have been asked to kick off the event by reading one poem. Then any poet on the stage gets up and follows that with a poem that is similar in either theme or ideas. Within these guidelines and the rule being that if two poets get up then it is advisable to give way to the poet on your right, the event is completely improvised. Because the poets don't know in advance who might get up when, this improvisation makes what is happening on the stage alive for both the poets and the audience.

Our voices are more accustomed to being used for informational communication relating to everyday living rather than for imagistic or emotional content, which means that many of us have suppressed this side of our voices.⁸³ Linklater notes that “this utilitarian usage emphasizes the tunes of grammar and syntax more than the music of imagery”.⁸⁴ Using techniques to rediscover the range of tones and sounds and colours that I can bring to my voice has been an important journey for me. As part of this research, questions I have asked myself are: How can I say the words of my poems in front of an audience as if I am saying them for the first time? How can I re-create the conditions for surprise in my voice? In order to show how I achieve this I will examine my work under the following headings: body work, image work, colour work. These are all ways that any poet can explore to change their reading style. It's important to note that they are intended to be enabling rather than a rigid list of rules. The three are of course interconnected. I'll start with the body as that seems to me to be the primary one.

Body Work

If we have our own interpretation of how we think a poem should be said, and if we allow that to take over then the text might not be alive either for us as poets or for our audiences because what can happen is that we end up speaking the poem all on one note,

⁸³ “Actors have to have their full emotional range at their disposal for their art. The art of theatre demands that you allow your tears to flow, allow your rage full range, to feel whatever it is...so that you are in charge your emotions, your emotions are not in charge of you. A lot of people keep their feelings, their emotions under lock and key because they're terrified of them. They think that if they...let the feelings out then those feelings are going to take over and overpower them. And as long as that fear of the emotions is there then they are indeed dangerous. However if you let a little bit of emotion out just even in a sigh of relief, then another little bit of emotion out in irritation perhaps, another little bit out in an expression of pleasure then you start to exercise your emotions, to get interested in them, then you start to say to yourself this is what makes me a human being this full range of emotional existence.” <http://lateralaction.com/articles/freeing-the-natural-voice-kristin-linklater/> accessed and transcribed by SWR 8th September 2017

⁸⁴ Kristin Linklater, ‘The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1, January 2016, p. 66

with no variation in our voices to represent the different changes in tone in the text. I've discovered that revealing the poem line by line in my voice, rather than describing it, is more enjoyable. If I engage with the process I can taste the words on my lips, feel the reverberations in my bones, relax the muscles in my diaphragm and allow my body rather than my brain to indicate where the (emotionally-informed) emphases come from.

Like most people I tend to express myself in a signature dynamic that is my own personal prosody. By prosody I mean the pitch, tempo, volume, rhythm and intonation with which each of us speaks, all of which have been conditioned by the expectations of the society, schools, places and family in which each of us grew up. When I speak, my personal prosody can be superimposed on the poem, which is fine if it's already varied and interesting but less so if it is flat and controlled. One way to change this habit is to allow my body, not my brain, to have a say in my prosody. Like other students in the class I was encouraged to do this at a poetry and voice workshop at the KLVC⁸⁵ where I was given a haiku and asked to focus on the image in each line, only unfolding the haiku line by line rather like the game of consequences so that I could not go ahead of myself. For each of the three lines I was encouraged to find a different physical posture, one that might be outside my comfort zone and speak the line from that posture (but NOT to act out the poem). For stage two of this exercise I had to do away with the posture and instead transfer something of the emotion that I had spoken out of the posture, onto my voice. In this way I changed my prosody and allowed a different dynamic to emerge for different poems. Allowing my body to have a part in how I speak the words created the conditions to be surprised, and allowed my brain to begin to think differently about the way I might say these words. This can set up new tracks for the neural pathways about how any particular poem might be said. The poem I was handed (a translation of a 17th century Japanese haiku) was:

Poverty's child.
He starts to grind the rice
And gazes at the moon.

For the first line Linklater asked me to let the image of poverty to come into my body, and encouraged me to hold my belly to indicate for example, hunger or the distress at seeing a poor child. She then asked me to say the line. For the second line she suggested I could contort my upper body to one side to show the boring routine of a young child having to grind rice everyday and then for the third line she asked me what might happen

⁸⁵ December 2016 and February 2018

if this child suddenly saw the moon, usually associated with wonder and she encouraged me to raise my arm and to look over it at an imaginary moon before speaking the final line. When I did this series of body stances it changed the way I thought about the child's hunger and the child's wonder at the moon, and this came out on my voice.

To show how I translated something of this approach to speaking my own work I will use the example of my poem 'Curtain Call'⁸⁶. Initially when I read this poem out to Linklater before it was published she said it sounded as if I didn't care about the characters. I had a shock to realise that when I spoke the poem it wasn't having the impact I had intended when I wrote it. I was declaiming it in mournful tones because it tells the story of how the crew of Terra Nova had to shoot their horses before they started on the long journey across the Ice Barrier to the South Pole. It was supposed to be tragic and sad, wasn't it? Yes, said Linklater, but not all the way through; that in fact it's a series of ups and downs, that there's a lot of joy in the poem, that the first few lines are full of the excitement of testing things out, of fun; it's only after the first eight lines that the difficulties start to show. I wondered whether it mightn't be more interesting for the audience to be alive to the changes in the poem, from excitement to sadness line by line. I discovered that if I allow myself to speak using all two and a half octaves of my speaking range (the full range of sounds, tones and emotions in my voice) what happens is that my poem comes alive, as if I am saying these things for the first time.

Linklater suggested that one thing I could do to be alive to the range of sounds and tones in the poem was to play with the idea that the touch of sound lives in my tailbone. I can do this by getting on all fours, letting the tailbone drop, the belly drop, then my breath flies in and at the touch of sound the hum starts from my tailbone and moves along my vertebrae. Being on all fours on the floor and breathing the line out vertebra by vertebra from the tailbone as if each vertebra were a word in a sentence⁸⁷ shakes up my habitual way of speaking so that I don't speak it all on one note. It also enables me to live in each line of the poem moment by moment, so as not to give away the ending in my voice. By moving into different positions for each moment in the poem I can allow my body to have a say in how I speak each moment of the poem. 'Curtain Call' has a sad ending, but prior to that it is composed of observations (watching tea freeze, having to stop walking so you can hear what your colleague is saying), funny experiences (nursing Oates' foot

⁸⁶ *Banjo* p. 49

⁸⁷ This requires knowing the poem by heart or having the lines fed (whispered through the ear) to you one at a time by someone else.

on his companion's breast) and exquisite moments ("If I breathe near a sheet/of my diary the pencil slips/across its polished page"). These shifts in energy and emotion in the poem will be a lot less apparent if I speak them all on one note. Here are some of the positions that I tried out with each of the moments in 'Curtain Call'. None of these positions should be seen as prescriptive – they are simply suggestions that have worked for me, that may work for others and can be done in any order:

Moments in Curtain Call and possible body positions for each moment

"We've been taking it in turns" = lying down on the floor, speaking into the floor

"undo our shirts" = on all fours

"in minus seventy" = in the folded leaf to open up my back

"on our breasts" = in the squat position

"even laughing hurts" = hanging from my pelvis

"threw a cup of tea" = legs up against the wall in an L shape

"breathe near a sheet of my diary" = on my back, feet on the floor

"writing in a book of glass" = in the diagonal stretch

"play the game of statues" = in the banana stretch

"ruffling the mane of each pony" = in the foetal position

"before we shot them" = standing up with arms outstretched

"solidify to slabs of granite" = say whilst walking round the room so as to allow energy to bubble up from the floor

Given that I know this is a sad poem I could be tempted to say this poem in the same sad tone all the way through. If I do so, neither myself nor my listener will hear the differing shifts in emotion in the poem moment by moment, nor experience the movement from joy to surprise to fear to sadness which the crew members in the poem might have experienced. And if I find myself crying I don't have to stop: I can carry on speaking through the tears. In the UK we live in a society that has an aversion to crying – the tendency is to try to stop people speaking so that they can cry and then begin talking again once they've stopped crying. Linklater encourages her students to speak through the tears so as to harness the energy from whatever emotion they are going through into the service of the lines. This connection between reading out my poetry and the psycho-physical was new to me and altered not only the way I read out my work but started to impact on its composition.

Psycho-physicality means that what is experienced internally is immediately translated into an outer expression, and conversely, what the body manifests physically has a direct and acknowledged affect on one's psychological landscape.⁸⁸ As Merlin (2001, p.27) notes

the basis of psycho-physical acting is that inner feeling and outer expression happen at the same time. In other words, whatever emotion you may be experiencing, your physical response to that emotion is instantaneous. And vice versa: whatever physical action you execute, the inner sensation aroused by that action is instantaneous. That doesn't necessarily mean that if you feel upset you show sorrow, as we all know that in everyday life we often hide or disguise or deny our real emotions. What it does mean is that there has to be a genuine and dynamic connection within each actor between seen action and unseen sensation.

If I translate this to my own experience as a poet using some of the examples from either poems I wrote or ones I was handed to read out (as discussed above), this is what I have observed:

- i) interior to exterior: saying the words in the poem 'Curtain Call' and recalling what I meant when I wrote them immediately brings onto my voice firstly the joy (of discovering that tea can freeze mid-air) and then the sadness (of having to shoot the ponies who had been so loyal to them);
- ii) exterior to interior: when speaking out the haiku 'Poverty's Child', the physical pose that I chose to adopt for each moment in the poem drew (through muscle memory) a particular emotion out of my voice in each line: for example holding my stomach as if hungry brought something of the anguish of hunger to mind, which then coloured my voice when I spoke the first line about hunger; looking over my raised arm at the moon gave me a sense of wonder which I then allowed out onto my voice.

Before speaking 'Curtain Call' (and indeed any of my poems) I can remove any inhibitory defensive patterns of tension in my throat by warming up: this might include feeding in a sigh and then blowing raspberries, tasting the vibrations on my lips because vibrations love attention and then blowing them into the air. I also find that sighing and yawning encourages more breath to come into the body; through this I discovered that there is a link between my breath coming out and the word(s) that are being spoken on my breath. By letting go of the external controls I have in place when I read any poem and by using my body to inform the way I speak the lines of my poems, I let go of protective habits I've developed over the years, habits that were useful originally (e.g not

⁸⁸ Merlin (2007) p. 18

speaking because of a fear of being bullied) but no longer are. I've learnt to turn my jaw into a revelation area rather than a protective area. This hasn't happened overnight and I am still doing daily exercises to address these habits so that I can develop new ones that might be more useful to me. I've come to understand that it's important to detach the ear so that I'm not listening out for the result but instead am feeling the experience in my body. I can now see that the jaw won't let go until the breath takes over, which it will if I commit myself to that sigh.⁸⁹ On one of the KLVC poetry courses, Linklater paired up female students with male students to read out together Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem *The Leaden Echo*. I noticed that when I participated in this exercise my voice went down a tone or two, and my male partner's intonation went up – a good way of shaking one out of one's prosody.

How physical actions can help us give a truthful performance of a poem

Passionate about theatrical 'truth'⁹⁰, one of the biggest influences on Stanislavsky's performance style was the actor Mikhail Shchepkin who believed that the key to 'truthful' acting was to take one's examples from real life.⁹¹ And so began Stanislavsky's lifelong search for a rehearsal technique⁹² that would engage body, mind and emotions simultaneously,

His work in the early 1900s had convinced Stanislavsky that real human feelings were a vital part of good acting and that every gifted performer possessed the appropriate raw materials. It was just a matter of finding the 'right bait' to arouse them.⁹³

The right bait might be an affective memory but it might equally be a physical action that could put one in the frame of mind of grief, or anger or joy. So how do I find the right bait when reading out my poems? Linklater asked me in a workshop to read out Walt Whitman's poem *I Celebrate Myself*. In order to get the right bait for this, that is to put me into Whitman's frame of mind prior to reading out this poem, Linklater asked me to sit against a wall, with one knee up and one arm lazily lolling on that knee, and my head leaning against the wall, and then to imagine that I was sitting on a verandah on Long

⁸⁹ As Linklater notes in her classes, a deep sigh of relief comes from the intelligence of the sensory life in the middle of the body.

⁹⁰ Merlin (2003) p. 1

⁹¹ *ibid* (2003) p. 4

⁹² Stanislavsky didn't think that his 'system' was gospel but merely a tool to assist actors when they had trouble with a role. (Merlin, 2003) p. 25

⁹³ Merlin (2003) p. 28

Island. Changing my body stance gave me a new way to approach saying the poem. I don't usually say poems in that position so this opened me up to speaking these words slightly differently, more slowly as if I were chewing each word. In line with Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions, there is effectively an osmosis from the outer action (sitting with one knee up, arm on knee) to the inner sensation (I am feeling very relaxed, I don't care about anything, so what etc...). The result of taking this physical stance is that the body then informed my inner feeling which then had an impact on my voice and something of this inner feeling came out on the breath when I spoke the poem. I also came to understand that it's easier to memorize a text after it's been through the body first i.e. after I've tried out different physical positions for each image/moment in the poem. Merlin (2001, p. 15) notes that Stanislavsky maintained that 'if the performer actively *did* something and imaginatively *committed* to what he or she was doing, appropriate emotions would arise accordingly.' Doing has been the key to understanding for me.

When Linklater is looking at a poem in class, she starts not from the words but from the body. There are no tables and chairs in her studio, simply an empty hall. A lot of time is spent on the floor in various body positions or walking round the room in different ways, for example she'll say "choose an animal" e.g. a horse and ask us to walk around the room as if we are horses, then to greet somebody in a horsey way, then to stop being a horse but (and here's the thing) to allow something of that animal to remain in one's voice. I found this useful because it influenced my voice through the image of the horse.

Image work

One of the key things that has enabled me to change the way I read poems out has been to use my imagination. This might sound strange for a writer as obviously I am using my imagination when I write the poems. However my habit has been not to take that imagination with me onto the stage. Using the Linklater approach I've learned to influence my voice through imagery. I can do this if I take ownership of the poem by believing in the content of the poem. This enables me to be more convincing both on and off the stage. To do this I use both imaginative imagery and anatomical imagery.

Imaginative Imagery

Firstly I walk round the room, look at a physical object in the room and I breathe it in. I taste its corners and colours. Then I breathe it back to its place with a sigh. Something of my feeling for the object needs to come out on the sigh. I then do this with a word. So for example I might stop in front of a vase, breathe in the vase and what it means to me, then I will sigh the word 'vase' out on my breath. It's a short hop from sighing something out to saying something.

Next I imagine an object – I take any object (it could be a staircase, a vase of flowers, a window, a chair) and I swallow that word by breathing it in.⁹⁴ When I speak it out, I say it with something of the image on my breath, perhaps with something of what the scent of the flowers or the creakiness of the staircase means to me. In this way I am taking ownership of the image.

Next I translate this process to a word from one of my poems e.g. 'Émigré'. I swallow the word "steerage".⁹⁵ As I swallow it I take in what that image meant for me when I first wrote it. This means I think of my visit to the SS Great Britain in Bristol and the bunks in third class well below deck. Then I let the image swim inside me and then I breathe it out with some of the memories and emotions that that visit had for me. Obviously this is going to take ages if I do this with every word and clearly one has to be very committed to the process in terms of time if you want to free your voice.⁹⁶ I have observed that when I undertake this exercise that I am emotionally truer in my voice to the image. If I really want to communicate to my audience what the word 'staircase' means for me, I need to allow my voice access to the deepest part of me, the solar plexus, the largest single transmitter of emotion in the body, so as to articulate what the speaker of the poem says through the gauze of my own emotional experiences. As noted in the 'body' section

⁹⁴ Linklater will say over and over again in class 'Feed in the impulse for a deep, pleasurable sigh of relief' which is quite different from saying 'Take a big breath'. As Linklater notes, if you take a big breath you are using muscles to control; whereas if you feed in the impulse for a deep sigh of relief, your breathing muscles know what to do.

⁹⁵ *Banjo* p. 31

⁹⁶ 'This intense exploration needs the motivation of a worthwhile goal. For the actor that goal might be said to be honest speaking and the ability to communicate... the whole range of human experience from the most delicately beautiful to the most cruel, the ugliest extremity. This goal demands a conscious dedication to reconditioning neuro-physiological connections from brain to body to brain and back again to body. Training is available for such vocal and verbal authenticity but there are no quick fixes. We are re-routing causal impulses – restoring them to their original neuro-physiological pathways.' Kristin Linklater, 'The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training' in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1, January 2016, p. 60

above, it was in speaking my poem 'Curtain Call' that I first started to influence my voice by sending images from the poem down to my solar plexus.

Anatomical Imagery

I've discovered that if I talk to my body through images, be that visualizing a muscle or bone inside my body (e.g. my pelvic floor) or visualizing something from one of my poems (e.g. a boat or a jungle) this visualisation can change the way the words come out on my breath because I am connecting my breath to my imagination. Equally, from a physical point of view, if I picture that I have a long neck or that I have mouths in my back or (if I am in the folded leaf position) a mouth at the top of the neck or in my navel then it seems (in my imagination) that I have more air available in my body and that I have a bigger breath. Again, picturing air between each vertebra seems to give me more air to speak with, regardless of whether this is physiologically the case.

In terms of exercises to discourage students from anticipating the next word or line in a poem, students at the KLVC might stand in a circle and throw a ball to one another saying their favourite pudding (which they will have been told in advance) as they throw the ball, not after they've thrown it. The key is not to anticipate e.g. Emma's favourite pudding by saying it as if it's part of a list in a way that you want to get it over with. Instead it's more useful to see the puddings flying through the air as we say them with the ball, revealing in our voices the jelly shaking or the trifle with bits of cream fluffing off the top.

One of the exercises that most changed the way I speak out my poems was to read out Laurie Lee's poem *The Edge*. Linklater encouraged us to think vertically through the images in the poem so as to arrest our linear habit. We did this by picking out images (e.g. birds, bricks) and focusing on those, rather than on the metre or rhythm that is built into the poem. The rhythm of poems will always be there, like a series of gates for horses to jump across but how we as speakers of poems negotiate these gates is up to us. I could just read them as a pentameter di dum di dum di dum di dum di dum, or I could come at it with the emphasis in different places - on the images. This might have the effect of changing what the poem means to me (and therefore to the hearer). This exercise enabled me to go back to my poem 'Diet' from my pamphlet *Lime & Winter*, and instead of following what I might consider to be the rhythm of the poem on the page, I can cut

across that by focusing on the images (starch, dextrin, freezer, silverfish, historic houses, Andalusia) and what they mean to me. The impact of putting the emphasis on these words and what they conjure for me means that I have a different engagement with the text. The listener might hear that engagement and it could be that listeners experience the conviction in my voice if I do this.

I'm not controlling my voice when I picture the image in the poem or when I picture the open mouths on my back. The diaphragm is moving down and up inside the body regardless. As Linklater notes, it's a passive muscle. I can't tell my diaphragm what to do but I can influence my involuntary musculature by imagining images from the poem, through sensory images, through feelings, through picturing my anatomy.

Colour work

As can be seen from Chapter 1, metaphors relating to paint are an important part of my creative practice, so when Linklater asks people to 'paint the ceiling with their voice' I can visualise my voice as paint. Through this visualisation of a pot of paint in the pelvic floor I can paint the inside of my stomach orange, the ceiling purple, the back wall yellow, spatter the floor with green dots and the door in stripes. Then, using a number of pots in my belly I can visualise painting a rainbow from one side of the room to the other, or from the window to the end of the field, then painting a rainbow to someone on the other side of the room, then covering other students with rainbows as we all move around KLVC studio. By doing this I was able to see my breath as colour, with vowels as different colours.

One way of seeing vowels as different colours is through a learning tool called The Vowel Resonance Ladder (see Figure 1) so as to step away from (the relative safety of) the monotone 'poetry voice' which so many of us speak with at poetry readings. I have learned on KLVC courses that vowels and consonantal sounds originate and resonate in the bones. By using this vowel resonance ladder I have been able to explore a wide range of possible sounds that I can make use of when reading out my poems.

Figure 2 shows The Vowel Resonance Ladder that Kristin drew on one of our courses. The lower range is in blue and the higher range is in orange. If I superimpose this vowel resonance ladder on my own body starting with 'zoo' at the knees and 'ree' at the top of

my head it feels as if I've swallowed a pyramid of sound that moves vertically through my body. This allows the lines of my poems to weave in and out of each section of the pyramid. In my mind the lines of my poems are not straight – they are like plasticene and can loop between sections of the pyramid depending on which sounds are where. A poem printed on the page can appear anchored, but employing the Vowel Resonance Ladder combined with a use of colour can change the way I say a poem. Linklater notes⁹⁷ that she is not looking for 'correct' vowels but for the feeling of the different parts of the body resonating with the different frequencies on shifting planes of outgoing soundwaves. Interestingly Linklater says in this article that she designed the ladder as a way of enabling actors to understand range in the voice. As such this invention is an example of reflection in action.⁹⁸

Before applying this to one of my own poems during the February 2018 course, Linklater encouraged students to use the Vowel Resonance Ladder to say the following two verses that are written in nonsense language:

Zeegaw peggity wom.
Noo ra koobedee phasi,
daw bidi vaa kee flom
zoo quaa neytijee grahpi.

Flomzee wom neyti kaa.
Kaa noo brunjago crako.
Ssee kanjo krik krak vraa.
Klik vraa chenshiki brako.

I was asked to read out the poem above using the intonation from the ladder. Linklater asked each student to suggest a title for the poem, so I chose 'The Blackbird' because the alternating up and down sounds reminded me of the blackbirds and sparrows flying up and down from the trees and the roof to eat the seeds in my garden.

⁹⁷ Kristin Linklater, 'The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1, January 2016, p. 68

⁹⁸ Jennifer Moon, *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2000)

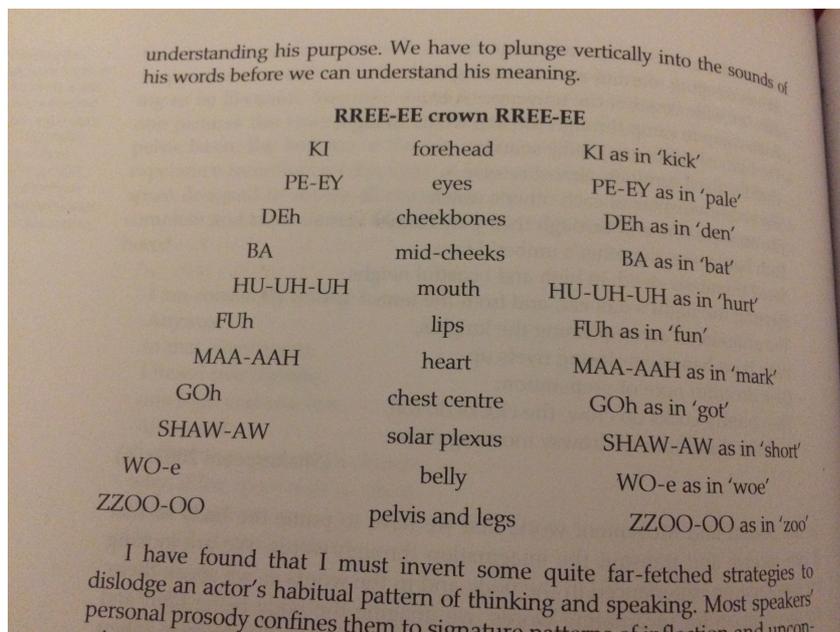


Fig 1. Vowel Resonance Ladder in 'The Art and Craft of Voice (and Speech) Training' by Kristin Linklater in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, Vol. 1, Number 1 January 2016 pp. 57 - 70

Another task in this particular workshop⁹⁹ was to say the following made-up poem titled 'Uffia', with a story in mind, aiming to use the Vowel Resonance Ladder as we spoke it. When I did this and read the poem out to the rest of the group I made sure I was going up and down the ladder where appropriate and saying it as if it worked syntactically, regardless of the fact I was not familiar with the vocabulary. What helped me with this was quickly imagining what might be going on in the poem.

Uffia

When sporgles spanned the floreate mead
and cogwogs gleet upon the lea,
Uffia gopped to meet her love
who smeeged upon the equat sea.

Dately she walked aglost the sand;
the boreal wind seet in her face;
the moggling waves yalpped at her feet;
pangwangling was her pace.

Here I imagined a lady called Uffia walking along the sand "to meet her love". I found that letting go of any external controls¹⁰⁰ I may have in place and replacing those controls with sounds from the vowel resonance ladder and seeing what the different colours and

⁹⁹ From Haiku to Hopkins Poetry Workshop at KLVC February 2018

¹⁰⁰ External controls, as I've noted earlier, are protective habits that many of us use to keep in what we want to say.

itches and tones from the ladder did for my voice has been a liberating and exciting vocal experience.

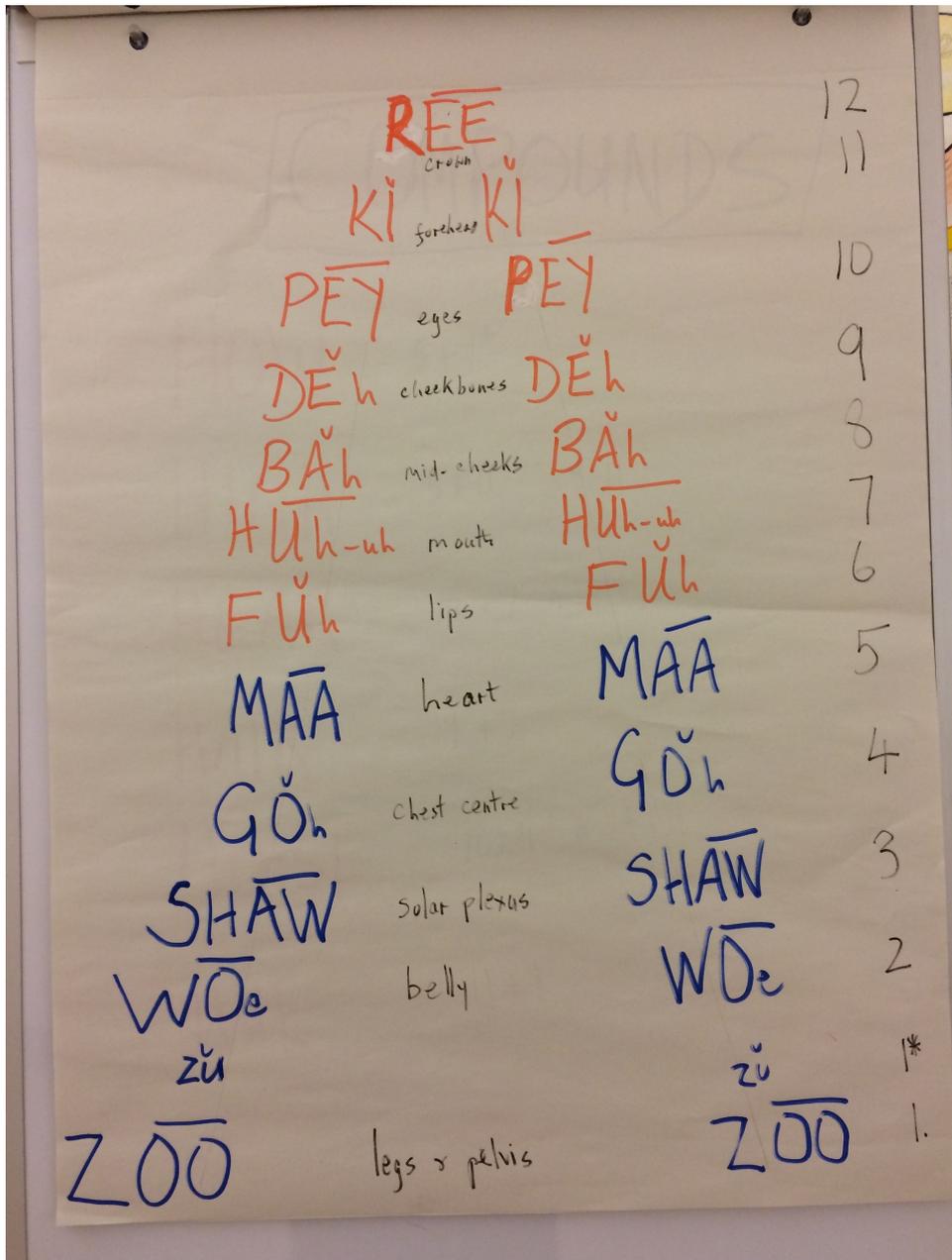


Fig 2. Vowel Resonance Ladder in colour where orange = the higher range and blue = the lower range

This combination of colour and sound chimed with me because as we have seen from Chapter 1, colour and sound have been central to my creative process over the last twenty years.

To give an example of how this impacted on the way I now speak my work, in my poem which explores the story of Madame Tussaud ‘On The Road’¹⁰¹ I used the vowel resonance ladder to highlight the ups and downs in Madame Tussaud’s journeys before she finally settled with her waxworks in Baker Street. I did this by putting certain words in the upper part of the vocal range, and others in the lower part thus:

Selected words from ‘On The Road’ that I might want to speak in the upper range (orange)

ri **sweet**
ki **skill**
pey **paper**
dey **dead**
huh **thir(ty)**
fuh **coun(try)**

Selected words from ‘On The Road’ that I might want to voice in the lower range (blue)

mah **cast**
goh **pop**
shaw **fall(en)**
woe **road**
zoo **you**

By making these conscious choices I discovered I was less likely to read the piece in a flat voice, or in a voice that always goes up at the end of the line, or to go back to ‘the poetry voice’, but instead I discovered that I could give texture and variety to my voice by using the Vowel Resonance Ladder.

Swinging through the line, swinging through the poem

A crucial tool which has helped me not to go too slowly when reading a line of poetry is Trish Arnold’s¹⁰² movement work. In Linklater work the breath and impulse colour the

¹⁰¹ *Ling Di Long*, p. 5

¹⁰² Trish Arnold was a ballet dancer who pioneered Pure Movement, a revolutionary alternative form of dance-teaching, specifically to help actors move naturally on both stage and screen to fit their role. Where traditional movement training might have involved fencing and dance, Trish developed a new way of working coupling physical movement with voice and breathing training. She based her method on what she called natural gravity swings, teaching actors how to move with ease and physical alignment, using their bodies to add more dynamic expression to their roles and scripts in order to add credibility to the mental or physical state of the character. It was often referred to as ‘The placing of the body in space.’

[http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/obituaries/15127069.Obituary -
Trish_Arnold_ground-breaking_dance_teacher/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/obituaries/15127069.Obituary_-_Trish_Arnold_ground-breaking_dance_teacher/)

vocal expression, whereas with Arnold the breath and impulse colour the physical expression. At the heart of Arnold's work is the swing. The swing is sweeping one's arms up, round in a circle and then back down again, using gravity to enable one to get from the beginning to the end of the swing. I took this action and applied it to my poems so as to enable me to swing through to the end of the line. I observed a tendency when I read the poem to speak very slowly to make sure people get what I'm saying. The problem with this is that I can sometimes lose the rhythm of what I'm saying. If I use Arnold's swing method, I have to swing through the line more quickly, because the swing has its own momentum, so I then swing with ease through to another line. The other thing about the swing is that the moment of suspension (i.e. before the swing releases through gravity down to the other side) is the creative point in the line. This moment of suspension before the speaker moves onto the next part of the poem or line, allows for both speaker and listener to remain surprised by what might come next. For me as both speaker and writer of poems this moment of creative possibility is a place of great excitement.

Translating the swing technique into my own practice helped me to swing with ease from one line to another and from one emotion to another, so that I don't become bogged down in one sad emotion or remain overwhelmed by the giggles. I can swing through to the next emotion and then onto the next. In connection with this it might be useful to look briefly at swinging through a story which I did on the 'Riverstories' course at the KLVC in April 2016.

Riverstories course: an example of the impact of the Linklater approach on the composition of new work

Riverstories is subtitled 'voice, text and character' and is a course which connects voice with imagination and memory by entering the back-story behind the text of each student's life in on-the-feet embodied visualizations of a river of life. The imaginative journey reveals significant events and turning points in each personal story. The process is then applied to the river of life of a character that the participant wants to play or write. By the end of the course, the character's life is vocalised in the form of a river-story. We were asked to bring a memorized speech from a play (most of the participants on KLVC

courses being actors) but I wanted to see how the course would affect my writing. I therefore didn't arrive with anything written, let alone memorised (with the agreement of the KLVC). I wanted to write in the voice of the artist Gwen John so rather than come with a prepared speech, what I did was come with various facts I knew about Gwen John, having memorized a couple of paintings after reading her letters. The only problem with this was that I had to write and perform the poem by the Friday of the week, whereas everyone else already had their text written and memorised even before they landed at the airport. The upside was that I knew something exciting would happen to the writing if I took this risky but creative approach.

Early on in the week we did an exercise in which as we threw a tennis ball one to another calling out our names with the ball. We were then asked to choose a Greek god/goddess and to throw the ball and say the name of the person we were throwing the ball to in that mode e.g. I chose Mars so I had to say the person's name in a warlike way. Then the whole class had to be their chosen god/goddess while throwing the ball, shifting every five minutes from opera, to film noir, to Shakespeare, to Brecht, to Ibsen, to Chekov, to Tennessee Williams as instructed by Kristin. Although this was outside my comfort zone, what it did was to enable me to be more flexible in going from one genre, from one century, from one voice to another. By the Tuesday session we were going through our own river of life, using six stepping stones (literally stepping across the room diagonally) using six catalysts including a sentence opener 'For me this was a time when', six words, a dialogue, a song, and finally a short poem. If I let physical actions inform how I say a poem or how I write a new poem, then what happens is that I keep my body more fluid so that my body is free to suggest whatever emotion it wants to bring to the next line.

What 'Riverstories' brought up for me was the memory of Cove Park, a writer's retreat in an isolated part of Scotland where two men tried to get into my cabin in the early hours of the morning. A terrifying experience but what was great about this course was that the stepping stones enabled me to move physically from the terror of that moment to an experience that was more joyful, to a different time which was sad, to yet another memory which was hilarious. Moving from one moment to another meant I couldn't get bogged down in retroactive emotion. The combination of imagination, physical action, embodiment, singing and forward motion made it a powerful psychological experience

and sparked new avenues into writing.¹⁰³ Merlin (2001) reminds us that the root of the word *emotion* is *motere*, the Latin verb to move, plus the prefix ‘e’ = to move away, that every emotion contains within it the possibility of action.¹⁰⁴

If our thoughts, feelings and actions are filtered through a moment in the life of whatever character we want to channel, what emerges is the poet marinated in the character. Myself and the character become two people speaking as one voice. Interestingly ancient Greek has a grammatical number in which a noun or pronoun can be used in the second and third person to refer to ‘you two’ called ‘the dual’ and this went through my mind when I was writing this monologue. Having gone through three days of exercises by day four, I was able to write the Gwen monologue and fascinatingly the voice that came to me was not Gwen’s but that of another woman whom she painted called Jeanne Foster which enabled me to start the poem with something that Jeanne said ‘She takes down my hair and does it like her own’¹⁰⁵. In this way I stepped into Jeanne’s shoes, not just Gwen’s and somehow seemed to step into their relationship after a hundred years.

By bearing in mind some of the questions that Stanislavsky considers useful before speaking a part in Chapter 4 of *An Actor Prepares*¹⁰⁶ (‘Who am I?’, ‘Why am I here?’ ‘Where am I?’) before writing my poem ‘Gwen’ I was able to drop myself right into the place where Gwen was (attic, Rodin’s studio, steps of The Grand Palais) and to speak from that place. As a result I was speaking and writing from that moment, I was present to that moment, asking myself what past circumstances led me to be there, and the answers to those questions then fed into the Gwen poem in addition to the points that came out of the stepping stones across the floor exercise.

To find the answers to these questions actors have to add something personal from their own lives to allow them to fulfil the objective.¹⁰⁷ When I asked these questions of myself as I wrote my ‘Gwen’ poem, I brought to the answers not only my own experience of

¹⁰³ Linklater noted in an email dated 21 April 2017 to Nina Perry, fellow course participant, that Peter Elbow, Jay O’Callaghan and Ira Progoff all contributed ideas to the Riverstories course which Linklater then drew together in collaboration with Mary King Austin in the 1990’s.

¹⁰⁴ Merlin 2001, p. 16

¹⁰⁵ Cecily Langdale & David F. Jenkins, *Gwen John (1876–1939): An Interior Life* (New York: Rizzoli) p. 41

¹⁰⁶ Konstantin Stanislavsky, trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, *An Actor Prepares* (London: Methuen, 1980)

¹⁰⁷ Merlin (2003) p. 49

living in attics in France in the 1990's, but also my mother's paintings. The more the answers to the questions are rooted in personal material (even when the text/poem is about a different subject) the more powerful will be the actor's imaginative connection with the given circumstances, and equally the more powerful will be the writer's connection with the given circumstances.

Tapping into one's own past or current emotional experiences and memories¹⁰⁸ doesn't necessarily mean dredging up times in life when we have experienced grief, or disappointment or jealousy or thrills. As can be seen from my analysis above of how I spoke the haiku 'Poverty's Child', powerful emotions can be stimulated by undertaking a particular body pose but they can also be stimulated by physically feeling a velvet glove or tasting a pickled gherkin. Our senses are a direct avenue to our imagination and to what Stanislavsky calls our 'emotion memory'. So if I want to make sure that my reading out of one of my poems is as convincing as it can be, I could indeed tap into emotion memory; alternatively, I could, before going on stage to speak or before writing in the voice of a particular character, externally mimic the physical actions of a person full of joy or full of distress. This in turn might invoke the emotions I was seeking, and these emotions could appear either on the stage in my reading of a text or in a poem that I am writing.

What I have been doing by using the Linklater exercises is to harness human responses and channel them into the artificial circumstances of the stage so that when I am speaking a certain poem, what is happening inside my body and what is happening outside my body take place simultaneously and truthfully. I hope that this practice that I have adopted will continue to evolve, informed by both my body and my stage readings.

¹⁰⁸ What Stanislavsky terms 'emotion memory' Merlin (2007, p. 142) or 'affective memory'. He was struck by the power past tense memory has on present tense experience, as well as by the power of the senses over memory itself. "Emotion memory describes the process of recalling situations from your own experience (including events that you've read about, heard about, or seen, as well as directly experienced) that are analogous to the character's situation. It involves the collaborative work of the imagination and all your senses (taste, touch, sight, smell and hearing) in the recalling of incidents. Finding an appropriate affective memory is a means of empathising with the contents of a play so that you can invest them with something from your personal landscape. This process of empathy should prevent your characterisations becoming clichéd and formal." Merlin (2003, p. 158)

Chapter 3: Performance Poetry or Poetry That's Performed?

I hope in this chapter to identify whether and where my work can be located along the spectrum of performance poetry. In so doing, it is my aim to contribute to the debate regarding the role of voice in poetry both on and off the stage. I will offer a general overview of some recent developments relating to poetry and performance that I have found particularly exciting. To contextualize my work within the spoken word scene I will give an outline of the work being done by poets I admire in the field of poetry and performance. A discussion of how research contributes to the creation of a credible voice both on page and stage will show how voice can bear witness to an historical event. I would like to suggest that not only are these reflections original but that they constitute new knowledge in the field.

The spoken word scene

Julia Novak (2011) notes how although fewer people may be reading poetry, more are attending festivals and slam events all over the country resulting in a 'willingness to concede to live poetry an aesthetic value independent of print.'¹⁰⁹ Marsh, Middleton and Sheppard concur that poetry readings have come to be an essential part of the writing and distribution of poetry over the last 40 years.¹¹⁰

Novak mentions some of the poets working in the second half of the twentieth century who regarded performance as a crucial aspect of their art, amongst them Dylan Thomas, who drew large audiences during his reading tours of the USA in the early 1950s. It's possible that Thomas could be seen as a forerunner to the rock and roll stars of the 1950s and 1960s,¹¹¹ garnering similar sized audiences. Novak includes in her discussion of literary currents the Beat Poets, who were influenced by Charles Olson's emphasis on the essential connection between verse and the human breath, and the Jamaican dub poets in Britain in the late 1970s and 1980s.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Julia Novak, *Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance* (Amsterdam - New York, 2011) p. 11

¹¹⁰ Nicky Marsh, Peter Middleton, and Victoria Sheppard "'Blasts of Language': Changes in Oral Poetics in Britain since 1965" in *Oral Tradition* 21.1 (2006): pp. 44-67, p. 46

¹¹¹ It's thought Bob Dylan was so inspired by Thomas he took his name

¹¹² Novak p. 15

The rise of poetry shows curated by contemporary poets such Tom Chivers, who is also a publisher and producer, might indicate that poetry is more at the heart of spoken word events now than at any time in the last century. His company ‘Penned in the Margins’ ‘produces live literature, theatre and cross-arts performances.’¹¹³ Similarly, Jaybird Live Literature is a London based company established in 2006 by Julia Bird, who works with writers, festivals and educators to devise ‘projects that entertain and edify’ whose ‘speciality is the poetry show’ touring theatres and arts centres.¹¹⁴ Her latest production *What Days We’re Having Now* is a live anthology of subtly theatricalised poems. Images scroll by like an Instagram feed: a flower pressed in a book, a cartoon frog, a stack of nachos cooked by a TV chef. In the case of both Chivers’s and Bird’s poetry shows, the focus seems not primarily to be on voice, but on interaction between the poets and other media.

Like me, poet Sally Read aims to get inside the head of the characters whose voices she adopts. On Michelle McGrane’s blog Read talks about the influence that watching Meryl Streep perform had on the way she went about composing her work:

Streep’s immersion in character, her Method, made me realize with a clang what I had to do: the dramatic monologue. The morning after I’d watched the film I wrote the lady’s, ‘Anna’s’, monologue in, of course, her own, fictionalized voice. Almost superstitiously, I collected Streep films—*The Bridges of Madison County*, *Plenty*, *The Hours*, *The French Lt’s Woman*. The subject matter wasn’t relevant: what struck me was her ability to get absolutely inside the psychological framework of a person—and particularly to find that one slash of grace within their character, the redemptive streak. This was not to let them off the hook or to sentimentalize them, but to give them the capacity of being understood.¹¹⁵

The capacity of being understood is an aim that Read and I have in common in the creation of character. We are however quite different as readers of our work. As a performer my style is closer to that of Hannah Silva whose poetry I have long admired. I have had the privilege of performing with Silva twice as part of the ‘What We Should Have Said’ ensemble. Her poems are as compelling on the page as on the stage. For example in her poem ‘Gaddaffi’ Silva takes the name of the former dictator starting with the line “I am not going to tell you my name” only to deploy it like a mantra through all five verses of the poem. The subjects of her poems and the way she brings them to life are gripping, using voice, theatre and media to engage the viewers. Unlike me, Silva knows all her work off by heart and to me this adds conviction to her voice. Her

¹¹³ <http://www.pennedinthemargins.co.uk/index.php/about-us/> accessed 10th July 2018

¹¹⁴ <http://www.jaybird.org.uk/about> accessed 10th July 2018

¹¹⁵ <https://peonymoon.wordpress.com/tag/sally-read-poet/> accessed 13th March 2017

performances are closer to theatre than mine in that she has performed in a number of one-person shows including *Schlock* which I saw at Aldeburgh in 2014 and a performance where she duetted with recordings of herself at Ledbury Poetry Festival in 2015, a show that was thoughtfully curated by Tom Chivers.

Kate Tempest effortlessly weaves between the genres of poetry and music, covering a range of themes, including superb contemporary retellings of Classical mythology in *Brand New Ancients* using rap-inspired rhymes (trolley/brolley).¹¹⁶ Tempest employs an intoned prayer-like approach which is mesmerising. In contrast to me she often performs with her eyes shut, for example in her rendition of *Icarus*.¹¹⁷ The photograph on the cover of Novak's book also shows a poet speaking with her eyes closed. One disadvantage of keeping one's eyes firmly closed when speaking to an audience means that it's harder to engage with others in the room and this changes the tenor of the experience for the viewer/listener. Occasionally Tempest's work has, like mine been described as 'confessional'.¹¹⁸ By 'confessional' I mean poems which readers/listeners think describes a true experience when they use the lyric "I". Whether the perception of telling the truth in poetry matters will be covered under the subtitle below 'What might contribute to a convincing voice'. Poet Kate Fox,¹¹⁹ in the context of a workshop she ran called a 'Toolkit' for would-be performers asserts on her blog that 'audiences respond to authenticity' which I interpret as meaning that audiences prefer poems that recount events that they believe happened to the speaker. I won't be using the word 'authenticity' myself because I don't find it helpful in this discussion, so if it appears in this essay it is only in quotations from other poets and critics. Again in the same article on her blog, Fox commends these 'fractured performances' to us because 'real fear is better than fake confidence'. This echoes my point in Chapter 1 about the power that resides in those who are willing to allow their vulnerability to be visible on the stage.

Another example of a poet whose work is as powerful on the page as the stage is Irish-born, London-based writer Martina Evans. Evans can speak her work by heart. Her style has had considerable influence on my own. I have seen Evans performing *Petrol* a number of times, talking to her audience as if they are in her front room. This chimes

¹¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10fCCesvQ1s> accessed 15th June 2018

¹¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yv5fggapRwQ> accessed 15th June 2018

¹¹⁸ <https://sabotagereviews.com/2018/03/06/what-cult-a-critical-engagement-with-watts-essay/> - essay by Katie Ailes 6th March 2018 on Sabotage Reviews website, accessed 10th March 2018

¹¹⁹ <https://katefoxresearch.wordpress.com/2016/02/04/finding-your-voice-fractured-performances/> accessed 30th January 2018

with the type of approach I have learnt at the KLVC, where rather than being lost in a reverie with closed eyes, I find it more rewarding to be looking at the audience as they experience what the speaker of each poem is saying. If I do this, I allow the audience to re-experience the text of the poem with me, as if they are participating in the event of the poem.

Poet Kei Miller describes in an article in *The Guardian* how he started off as a performance poet before he became a page poet, noting that he felt embarrassed at being crowned Manchester 2004 slam poetry champion: 'I am ashamed to have won that prize,' he writes, 'and truth be told, I am also ashamed that I am ashamed.'¹²⁰ This ambivalent attitude is not uncommon in the poetry world. Miller describes this position as 'a fight between the poet who does his best work standing up, who finds his greatest eloquence on stage, and the poet who does his best work sitting down, who finds his greatest eloquence on the page'. So is he a 'sit-down poet' who slams? Am I a slammer who likes the page?

Labels may be useful as short hand, but describing any writer as a 'YouTube poet' seems to me to confine them to one particular medium and possibly to reduce them as a creator when in fact it may be that they compose in a number of ways. I agree with poet Hollie McNish where she explains on her blog how she and other poets have been labelled as 'Instagram poets' or 'YouTube poets':

To call someone an 'instagram poet' makes me feel similar to the way I have been called a 'slam poet' for years simply because I have entered five poetry slams in my life. Or a 'youtube poet' because I have put poems onto youtube, These sort of titles are an obvious and easy way to belittle the writing simply for how it is shared. For me, social media platforms are about allowing people who cannot get to gigs or would not feel comfortable at them being allowed to have a look at my poetry if they want.¹²¹

Videos of me reading on YouTube have been taken and posted by both myself and by other poets or audience members. I'm not convinced this makes me a YouTube poet. What it does do however, is to show that like Hollie, I am willing to work across and within different media to enable my work to reach as wide an audience as possible via performances that are sometimes recorded and shared. Some of these performances have then been published while others remain as stage work, for example some of the poems

¹²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/28/kei-miller-productivity-linked-to-what-could-be-called-disability-adhd-forward-prize> accessed 19th April 2016

¹²¹ <https://holliepoetry.com/2018/01/21/pn-review/> accessed 1st February 2018

in *Tango in Stanzas*. I am not sure that sharing my poems on the stage coupled with a desire to do that in an effective way makes me a performance poet. After all, most poets write work that they want to share with others, whether through performance on the stage or through being read quietly from the page in one's head. This might be the moment to look at what happens when we publish poems that have previously been seen only on the stage or shared on YouTube.

Critical reception of performed poems that are then published

What are the methods used for evaluating whether a poem 'works' on the stage, and how much overlap is there between methods that are used to judge performed poems and published poems?

Novak (2011, p.48) outlines a useful methodological 'toolkit' for the analysis of live poetry by drawing together approaches from diverse disciplines concerned with speech and forms of cultural performance including paralinguistics, musicology, kinesics, theatre and performance studies and folklore studies. Her study aims to close the gap by introducing a methodology for the study of live poetry that will enable researchers to engage with the aesthetics of poetry in performance regardless of whether it is presented at a poetry slam or in a university lecture hall. She highlights one of the key challenges of scholarly occupation with live poetry (2011, p. 12): the lack of historical documentation and of a critical language. American poet Katie Ailes who is studying for her doctorate in English at the University of Strathclyde is developing a critical framework for the evaluation of spoken word poetry. Her thesis is titled 'The Performance of Authenticity in Contemporary UK Spoken Word Poetry'. In her PhD abstract Ailes defines 'authenticity' as "an inherently subjective....constructed, culturally conditioned quality which spoken word artists may consciously perform".¹²² On the Scottish Poetry Library website we are told that Ailes's thesis focuses 'on the performance of authentic selfhood in contemporary U.K. spoken word poetry.'¹²³ A slew of related research and critical questions connected to poetry and performance are clearly beginning to emerge across the work of several poets and writers working in the field, most particularly: what is 'authentic selfhood' (a phrase used on the Scottish Poetry Library website referred to above) and how does that differ from 'selfhood'? And how

¹²² <https://katieailes.com/phd-research/>

¹²³ <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poets/katie-ailes>

does it manifest itself in spoken word poetry? Is it through the body or the voice in the body?

Novak reflects that ‘the visible body can add another layer of meaning to the performed poem.’ Bearing in mind how the Linklater approach outlined in Chapter 2 has impacted on my use of body when composing, I wonder whether voice as well as body can add another layer of meaning to any performed poem? For example, if a poet taps into, rather than shuts off from access to their emotional reservoir when speaking a poem, this might add a useful dimension of conviction to the way they speak the poem, and consequently the ways in which it might be received by the audience.

The phrase ‘bringing something alive’ is often heard in discussions of performance poetry. In Chapter 2 I have outlined the different tools I dip into to bring a poem alive. They work on the stage for me, and they often work in enabling me to compose new poems. But rarely do these tools involve me memorising every single line of my poems. I may have memorised a couplet or a verse, but almost never the whole poem. I always have a book with me when I read. Instead, the idea of bringing something alive is for me about talking to the audience in a particular way: as if I am sharing something with a friend in the pub. This is an approach which Linklater encourages so as to prevent poets from becoming overly declamatory and putting on the I’ve-got-something-important-to-tell-you voice. Martina Evans (referred to above) speaks her poems in this intimate, confiding way which I more powerful than soapbox-type projecting or declaiming. Similarly, in her PhD in Creative Writing titled *Negotiations between the page, ear and eye: creating poetic texts for performance, radio and stage* (Lancaster University: 2010) Cath Nichols says that poet David “Harsent suggested that Larkin had wanted his readings, and his poems, to sound like ‘a chap chatting to chaps’.”¹²⁴

Hollie McNish is part of a poetry collective called *Point Blank Poets*¹²⁵ who state on their website that they ‘feel a passion for the power of words, in particular poetry, to add a dimension of empathy to situations.’ I think it’s fair to say that most poets want to create empathy when they write and perform. The question is, do they create empathy by

¹²⁴ “This particular phrase was based upon a comment Anthony Thwaite had once made...A man chatting to chaps is itself an adaptation of Wordsworth's comment that he wanted his poetry to sound like 'a man talking to men', so Thwaite presumably had this in mind, but was updating the phrase to sound more lax.” Nichols, p. 83

¹²⁵ <https://holliepoetry.com/point-blank-poets/> accessed 14th May 2018

appearing honest (and in what does honesty reside)? Or do they create empathy by performing the poems off by heart?

Performing poems off by heart can give an attractive ephemeral quality and make them sound as if they have just been thought up, which in turn makes them sound as if the event described actually happened to the writer. Sometimes it seems that that being able to remember a poem off by heart is in itself what is being judged rather than the actual content of the poem and the way it is crafted. Cath Nichols in her PhD notes how she “did not feel I was good enough at memorisation skills to get to the next level as a performance poet.”¹²⁶

So far there has only been one occasion where I have had to memorise poems for performance: when I worked with dancers and musicians on the Creative Wales piece, *Tango in Stanzas* (performed in Presteigne in October 2015). As part of this experimentation I collaborated with a tango dancer, Peter Baldock, theatre director, Pauline Walsh and accordionist, Guto Dafis. We met several times throughout 2015 to dance, discuss and experiment layering Welsh folk tunes with Argentine tango music. The aim of this was to echo the layering narratives of these two different cultures which took shape in four concertina books made with the help of bookbinder, Guy Begbie. The idea was to help both the artists and the viewers at the performance to engage with the folding and unfolding narratives within tango. Performing both the poem and the dance steps simultaneously drew me into new territory in which I had to reflect on the importance of pacing on the stage as well as the page.

As I was dancing the tango at the same time as speaking the poems I did not have a free hand to hold the text. Therefore I had to memorise them. During the rehearsals I pinned the poems to tango dancer Peter Baldock’s chest so that I could speak them and dance at the same time. Baldock noted during rehearsals that when I looked at him as I was speaking the poem ‘Hospital Tango’ which tells the story of a D-Day survivor in hospital in Northern France, this felt much more convincing than the original take on the performance where we practised it in a newsreader style voice as if I was imparting information (as suggested by one of the other creative collaborators).

¹²⁶ Nichols, p. 95

The seeming page/stage divide has been a key debate in the poetry world during 2018. In January this year, *PN Review* published an article by Carcanet poet Rebecca Watts titled *The Cult of the Noble Amateur*¹²⁷ in which she questioned why the poetry establishment seems to be in thrall to young, female performance poets. By way of example Watts reviewed a collection titled *Plum* by Hollie McNish which was published by Picador in 2017. *Plum* is an account of the joys and pains of growing up, interspersed with poems written during McNish's teenage years. In the essay Watts gave examples of the way in which some of the work in *Plum* seemed less crafted than she was expecting. A storm blew up on Facebook and Twitter¹²⁸ and in the media with participants defending McNish as if she had been attacked personally. When Watts spoke to Samira Ahmed on Radio 4's *Front Row* on 25th January 2018 she eloquently underlined how women had fought hard over the years for the right to use critical language when engaging in debates about craft and language. On the programme Watts was perceptive and thoughtful, pointing out how important it is to distinguish between the writer and the work, and that in the case of the author of *Plum*, the backlash on social media appeared to indicate that any kind of critique of the work was an attack on the poet.

This apparent censorship of a critical culture relating to spoken poems is disappointing because it closes down potentially fruitful debates about what works and doesn't work and why not. By discouraging critical discussion we risk alienating those who are new to poetry readings from reflecting on why they are touched by what they hear and what craft has been employed to achieve particular effects. Sadly censorship might also discourage poets from experimenting with different ways of honing their poems. On the Sabotage Reviews page Katie Ailes makes an important point when she notes that the lack of a rigorous critical discourse focused on contemporary accessible poetics 'has nothing to do with purported lack of craft and everything to do with our sphere's generally DIY, grassroots structure and thus the lack of institutional funding and academic critical attention.'¹²⁹ Ailes, who is doing vital work in developing a critical culture for spoken word poetry, agrees with Watts' argument that contemporary arts

¹²⁷ Watts, R, 'The Cult of The Noble Amateur' in *PNReview* 239 Volume 44 Number 3, January - February 2018 https://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/subscribe?item_id=10090

¹²⁸ A flavour of the debate on Twitter on 28th January 2018: @JTStone (to @KrisFernie's comment on Twitter "I fail to understand why the establishment of the poetry world can't accept spoken word artists appearing in print"): "Who's not accepting it? If it appears in print and you're given it to review, surely it's reasonable to put in words exactly what you think of it?"

¹²⁹ <https://sabotagereviews.com/2018/03/06/what-cult-a-critical-engagement-with-watts-essay/> accessed 7th March 2018

media subordinate the work in favour of focusing on its creator, especially if that creator is part of a group that ‘the media has clumsily reduced to their ethnicities, genders, and classes.’¹³⁰ The idea that the “I” of the poem and the author are one is not new, yet many poets would disagree that this is often the case, including me: for example, in my collection *Banjo*, I step into the shoes of a number of crew members of three Antarctic expeditions from the turn of the last century; in *Lime & Winter* I channel the experiences of mill workers past and present to bring those experiences to life; in *Ling Di Long* I explore a variety of experiences of walking from 1930 to the present day. In none of these collections am I solely writing about subjects and moments that are within my orbit of experience or lifetime. Instead I have had to bring a certain amount of research (reading, interviews, reflection) to bear on the crafting of the poems.

McNish’s poems have been gathered into a published collection and as a result are now being judged as a print publication, not as a performance. If those of us who are poets happen to have recorded a number of our poems and put them on YouTube and we then gather them into a collection and publish them with for example, Cinnamon or Parthian or Carcanet, we might reasonably expect, in addition to any comments people wanted to make on YouTube and/or social media, there to be some kind of review in poetry magazines, whether online or in print. Once my poem no longer exists only on the stage or only on YouTube, and instead is published in a print collection, then it is likely it will be judged on those terms rather than according to any spoken word rules (whatever they may be).

Writing in *The Guardian*¹³¹ McNish’s editor, Don Paterson notes that “Spoken-word poetry might ‘fail’ by Watts’ own favoured house rules but it has its own code by which it deserves to be judged – a distinct aesthetic partly borrowed from hip-hop... where ‘authenticity’ seems valued most of all.” By way of response, Francis Downes noted on Twitter on 30th January 2018 “Do I need the spoken word ‘code’ in order to be able to admire [McNish’s poem] ‘Embarrassed’? And why does it show her breast feeding inside a men’s toilets with urinals in the background? I would challenge McNish to give the date and time she did this. So for me, the video is not truthful. And that means the ‘poem’ is untruthful as well. It’s a pose.”

¹³⁰ <https://sabotagereviews.com/2018/03/06/what-cult-a-critical-engagement-with-watts-essay/> accessed 7th March 2018

¹³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/26/verses-spoken-word-row-poetry-young-female-poets> accessed 30th January 2018

What might contribute to a convincing voice?

Bonnie Greer describes Sally Read's work¹³² as "Direct, searing and very very truthful" How is it that honesty has come to be regarded as the aesthetic priority? Read's monologues are amongst the most powerful I have read regardless of whether they are true or not. The reason for this is that they embody an emotional truth in their telling which readers can relate to.

Katie Ailes suggests that the word 'authentic' could be used to refer to work that is perceived by listeners or readers as true, whereas 'honest' might refer to the intention of the writer when writing the poem.¹³³ She goes on to underline that contemporary spoken word practitioners are conscious that often

the primary 'critical' factor used to evaluate it is not any assessment of craft but rather the audience's perception of how 'authentic' a poem is. As Maria Damon wrote in 1998¹³⁴ in one of the earliest forays into criticism of contemporary performance-based poetry, "the criterion for slam success seems to be some kind of "realness"—authenticity at the physical/sonic and meta-physical/emotional-intellectual-spiritual levels."

'Is authenticity really valuable when 'personal expression' is so easily and so often falsified?' Mick James expounded on Twitter in January 2018 following the publication of Watts' article, 'If McNish were suddenly revealed to be the former head girl of Roedean, living on a trust fund with her hedge fund manager boyfriend in Mayfair that would be the end of her, and her poetry. No-one would ever read it or even think about it again. So what is its value apart from 'authenticity'?' This observation raises the question of what the signifiers are of whether something is true or not on the page, and how these differ from the signifiers on the stage of whether the events described actually happened. My understanding of the debate is that judging from the comments on social media it appears that poems spoken on the stage by the writer are more likely to be regarded by listeners as recounting an event the writer actually experienced than those that are read on the page.

¹³² <https://peonymoon.wordpress.com/tag/sally-read-poet/>

¹³³ "'Honesty' refers to a practice, whereas 'authenticity' refers to a perception" Katie Ailes <http://sabotagereviews.com/2018/03/06/what-cult-a-critical-engagement-with-watts-essay/>

¹³⁴ Charles Bernstein, ed., *Close Listening Poetry and The Performed Word* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p. 329

Honesty versus Craft?

For some, honesty is the yardstick of quality, for others craft. I firmly believe that poems can be both honest (in terms of being convincing) and crafted at the same time. How can we judge whether a poem is honest anyway? And why is that important? Is it honesty of subject matter? And what is that? I believe that honesty resides in taking ownership of your poem when you write it and when you speak it out. Taking ownership of a poem as a writer who then performs the written work means not distancing oneself from a poem emotionally. If as writers we distance ourselves from our own work this will be evident in our voices when we read them out, resulting in the poem appearing less convincing (even where it is so well crafted as to appear convincing on the page). The way to take ownership of the poem is by being prepared to take yourself back into the poem before speaking it out, asking yourself the question ‘why is it important to me to share this poem with people?’ In order to answer that question it’s often useful to go back to the mental space one was in when one decided to compose the poem: ‘why did I want to write this poem?’

In terms of how honesty has become an aesthetic priority, Katie Ailes looks at the apparent connection between honesty and lack of craft. She notes that she is not interested in arguing that McNish’s poetry is art, but rather in exploring ‘the cultural forces feeding into Watts’ argument that it is not.’ She notes that ‘the primary reason [Watts] views McNish’s and others’ poetry to be ‘artless’ is because she considers it ‘honest’ and thus lacking in craft.’ She goes on to say that the assumption that ‘work rooted in autobiographical experience – or rather, performing autobiography in a manner received by readers as ‘genuine’ – is artless is a tired assumption’. Having been, like McNish on the receiving end of this assumption myself, it was useful to read Ailes’ analysis. Poet Miriam Gamble in her review of my second collection *Not In These Shoes* on the Tower Poetry website in September 2008 asked for ‘A little decorum, please!’¹³⁵ Would anyone (man or woman) ask a man to show decorum, or is it something that is asked (expected?) only of women (by women as well as men)? What is decorum in poetry and how is it manifested? What counts as decorous subject matter? It’s not clear to me how writing about making apple pies, working as a waitress or wearing a backless dress (none of which I have had the good fortune to do) might be indecorous, especially

¹³⁵ <http://www.towerpoetry.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Tower-Poetry-50-reviews.pdf> accessed September 2008

as it seems that no subject matter is off limits nowadays. There isn't the time to explore this here but it could be illuminating to take Gamble's notion of decorum (whatever that may be) and apply it to *Plum*.

This response by a woman poet to another woman poet was partially behind my decision to write a collection largely in the voice of a range of different men, all of them dead and from another era (*Banjo* is written in the voices of men from three different Antarctic expeditions from the turn of the last century) so as to be less visible as a woman because the reviewer seemed troubled by my gender so I thought I would experiment by stepping into the shoes of speakers from different genders and time periods.

Gendered Voice: where is the place of neutrality and how useful is that?

Gendered voice, whether in poems written by a man poet in a woman's voice or by a woman poet in a man's voice (as in *Banjo*) is interesting when one thinks of stepping into another's shoes to give voice to their experiences mediated through our own experiences. Cath Nichols in her PhD¹³⁶ tells of how she created a drag queen character called Daisy Buttercup: a woman dressed as a man dressed as a woman, because she "wanted to destabilize the viewer's assumptions" which she describes as 'impersonation' (p. 93). She goes on to quote Deryn Rees-Jones,¹³⁷ who noted that Edith Sitwell chose particular costumes for her poetry readings in order to exaggerate gender and confound it. At the launch of *Banjo* in The Royal Hotel in Cardiff on 11th June 2012 I employed three male actors to dress up as Captain Scott's crew and perform poems from the collection. I wanted to explore whether it would make the poems more credible for the audience because they were being spoken by men, or less credible because they weren't written by the men who were speaking the words.

As well as dressing up as a man dressing as a woman, Nichols would sometimes perform in an old-fashioned sailor suit when reading from her collection *Sailor Boy Nancy*. When she stopped dressing up for readings Nichols discovered this had the advantage of allowing for a more "neutral positioning of my voice" so that "from this neutrality I could move between different historical periods, genders, and points of view"¹³⁸ but that it had

¹³⁶ Nichols, p. 93

¹³⁷ *ibid*, p. 92

¹³⁸ *ibid*, p. 98

the disadvantage of showing the poet as me...I wished my presence could be even more neutral, to the point where an audience might not consider that the poems must always arise from autobiographical experience. Moving the reader/ auditor beyond assumed autobiography is also a reason for my continued writing of sequences; the length enables more than one voice to be created and heard, and plural voices seem to remove the autobiographical assumption.

Nichols outlines a desire I share, namely 'to vanish into neutrality in order to foreground the work versus being costumed in order to remind the audience that the poet and performer are separate.' Like Nichols, I have found that the plurality of voices inherent in the sequence format means that the sequences in *Banjo, Lime & Winter* and *Ling Di Long* steer readers/listeners away from the assumption that every poem is autobiographical for the simple reason that I cannot be in all the locations, genders and historical periods explored at the same time. By shape shifting between genders and time periods I open up readers/listeners to the more interesting question of craft: how did the writer craft this poem to make it sound as if she had been there in 1902 in the body of man?

Nichols identifies these dilemmas in the performances of poets Stevie Smith, Edna St Vincent Millay and Edith Sitwell. She observes how this urge towards neutrality, or invisibility, is answered in part by radio, as the poet is no longer seen. This might explain my attraction to the medium. At the time of finishing writing this thesis (July 2018) I have been writing and recording a half hour programme for the *Between The Ears* series for Radio 3 to be broadcast on 24th November 2018. Its title is *The Milk Way* and it looks at how coastal erosion, eroding paths and an eroding way of life (the milk trail from Cardiganshire to London) have created the perfect habitat for dolphins to raise their young: silt from eroded paths provides increased feeding opportunities because dolphins echolocate to find fish hidden in the water that is murky due to slipping cliffs, opportunities for more income for the village due to increased tourist numbers, and for the artists who paint the paths to sell work that represents eroding paths and disappearing houses. There are three voices: a 17 year old girl leaving Aberaeron in 1964 to work in a London dairy, a 35 year old West Wales sea captain obliged to work in the London milk trade during The Depression in order to make ends meet, and the voice of The Path itself as it meanders along the coast and inland describing what it sees and overhears over the course of a century. A female actor has been cast as the girl and a male actor has been cast as the sea captain. I have been cast (by the programme's producer, Nina Perry) as the voice of The Path. The Path is a character who is not gendered, who slips in and out of

the path over a hundred year period and is not visible on a screen – my ideal role.

Exploring whether invisibility changes the way a character is performed enabled me to reflect on whether in this radio programme I am playing The Path, performing The Path, or acting out The Path. If I commission myself to write and speak from the shoes of a character from history then I see myself as playing with their experiences in order to bring them to life in the present for a new audience. ‘Acting out’ seems to me to have an element of exaggeration especially as it is a phrase composed of two words. Laura Severin in the chapter ‘Acting Out’ in her insightful study into twentieth-century British women poets in performance (2004) discusses how both Edith Sitwell and Stevie Smith adopted elaborate personas that allowed them to exist outside ‘normal’ femininity (Smith a child, Sitwell as queen).¹³⁹ ‘Performing’ covers acting a role as well as giving a poetry reading. I don’t see myself as an actor making dramatic body movements, but rather as someone who aims to put those movements into my voice. I do this because I have discovered from my experiments with the Linklater approach that it makes my experience of reading the poems more fun.

Pretending Impersonating, or Ventriloquising?

When writers step inside someone else’s experience are we impersonating them, is it a kind of ventriloquism or are we as poet Angela Stoner noted in her introduction to her reading in Penzance on 26th June 2018 ‘pretending’ to be someone else?

We can’t as writers sound honest or convince people that we have been present at a particular moment in history unless we immerse ourselves in diaries, photographs and letters from the time period under consideration. So I spent three weeks at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, reading, feeling and living with manuscripts in order to appear convincing on the page. Among the details I included were the fact that in addition to their stores and equipment, the crew packed a few bearsuits before leaving Britain so as to be prepared for crossing the Equator, which usually involved a ceremony for first timers who might be ducked in water, have their heads shaved and then be chased around the ship by bears. This is a tradition which I have celebrated in my poem *Crossing the Line*. My next task was to appear convincing on the stage, and I have detailed in Chapter 2 how I did this using KLVC training.

¹³⁹ Laura Severin, *Poetry Off The Page: Twentieth Century British Women Poets in Performance* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004) p. 44

What differentiates what I do from pretending, impersonating, ventriloquising or mimicry is that when I speak and then write in the voice of a character I merge myself with that character (be they historical or imaginary) for the duration of the composition and the performance of the poem. I channel the character through the gauze of my own experiences, some of which may overlap with the character, while other experiences will not. In order for me to do this, I don't just put on a 'funny' voice. Through research, reading and reflection I can go some way to imagining what it is like to be that person and to say the kind of things they might say or do. In order to become a character you have to understand them, to know what each character loved in life, whether they disliked macaroons or adored cress, whether they enjoyed making bread or feared heights. It is this depth of understanding of their character that enables writers to sound convincing on the page and on the stage.

In terms of the research that was required for writing *Banjo*, I decided to steer clear of the more well-known names and instead try out the mantle of other expedition members such as cooks (Thomas Clissold and Charles Green), photographers (Herbert Ponting and Frank Hurley), artists (George Marston and Edward Wilson) and doctors (Edward Atkinson and Edward Wilson) so as to enable me to structure a sequence from a multiplicity of crew voices and experiences whether that was editing *The South Polar Times* to playing football matches on ice floes. Hearing novelist Stef Penney speak about how she wrote *The Tenderness of Wolves* although she hadn't been to Canada, gave me the encouragement I needed to write the collection even if I couldn't afford to travel to Antarctica. Letters, diaries and photographs helped me to build up a picture of what had enabled the explorers to keep going. One of the aspects that struck me time and again was the role played by music, dressing up and the theatre during what has since become known as the heroic age of Antarctic exploration. What is given equal importance in this book is the desire to explore the expeditions not through heroic achievements, but rather through small moments of humour or tenderness. Encountering a photograph of the crew of Discovery in Discovery Point Museum in Dundee dressed up as black and white minstrels enabled me to reflect on the fact that a group of white men sailed and marched south to the coldest place on earth, and when they arrived they dressed up as black men and sang African American songs. The poems became not only testimony to this historical event but a journey of discovery for writer, speaker and reader into what this experience meant. Each poem might be described as an example of reflection in action.

I use voice in my poems (whether spoken or written) as witness to historical moments. In making the voice as alive as possible on the page (through using relevant detail) and as alive as possible on the stage (though sounding as if I've been there by aligning myself emotionally with the character) then the poet can make historical moments alive for listeners and readers who may never have been there or even heard of it. The poem therefore stands as the embodiment of reflection in action when the speaker, the writer, the listener and the reader reflect line by line on the experience embodied in the words on the page or in the voice on the stage.

Although I can't speak for them and I haven't asked them, all the writers I mention in the earlier part of this chapter give the impression that they have researched and reflected on the characters whose voices they speak in. As such their poems are also examples of reflection in action. It's interesting to see that Laura Severin concludes that her discussion with Liz Lohead (one of the subjects of her 2004 study into twentieth-century British women poets in performance) 'suggests that she does not totally inhabit a character in a revue performance, but only 'slightly perform[s]' them, thereby creating an emotional distance.'¹⁴⁰ This might indicate perhaps that there is a spectrum of ways in which we can inhabit characters. In performing and writing my work, my key aim is to create emotional intimacy between myself and the character so as to convey the character in as rounded a way as possible to the reader/listener.

Writing in the voice of historical figures requires a lightness of touch so that the poem does not become research-heavy. Had I not been as engaged as I was by this subject and its characters the poems would have ended up regurgitating the story, which would have been a waste of my time and the reader's. The poems are not simply an account of what happened; in every poem in the collection I have tried to inhabit each character because the better known the story, the harder it is for the writer to 'make it new.' For example, my poem 'Ponting', is not a poem 'about' an Antarctic expedition. Rather, it examines through language and form, the spectrum of experiences faced by photographer, Herbert Ponting both during his voyage south on the *Terra Nova* as well as on the ice. This ranged from vomiting in the ship's darkroom to training the explorers to take a photograph of themselves at the Pole without him.

¹⁴⁰ Severin, p. 76

I was interested in interpreting the expeditions at a double remove, not only from that of the one hundred years that stand between then and now but also from the remove of looking down the lens of the expedition's photographer or peering over the shoulder of the expedition's artist. When I sat in the little corner of the scientists' lab on *Discovery* (Scott's first Antarctic ship, now berthed in Dundee) in the very seat where Edward Wilson had painted his watercolours at five every morning during the winter months of complete darkness and wrote in his letters about his concern as to whether he was remembering colours accurately in this new life of darkness, I knew I had to take on the challenge of writing myself into these characters in the first person, to become the person holding the paintbrush.

Falsifying true events to make the poem sound truer

When I write a poem, my aim is to make the story and the characters ring as true as possible. I am less interested in whether the story is true or not, but rather in how compelling it is for the reader/listener and this usually means that it needs to sound emotionally true rather than be factually true. To achieve this I tweak events to ensure they are credible. For example in my poem 'Curtain Call', which was published in *Magma 52* before it was published in *Banjo*, although Captain Oates' foot was indeed badly frostbitten, the mention in my poem of the men attempting to warm up his foot actually happened to another man on a different expedition. The reference is taken from Scott's *Discovery* expedition, when the men on Officer Michael Barne's depot-laying sledge journey to White Island in 1903 successfully saved Seaman Ernest Joyce's frostbitten foot by taking it in turns to nurse it to their 'breasts'.¹⁴¹ I then blended this incident with another similar event described in William Lashly's *Terra Nova* expedition diary where he praises Officer Teddy Evans for suggesting that the seriously ill Lashly place his foot on Teddy's stomach to warm it up. I also used Teddy Evans's own comment on the same incident that 'there is something objectionable about a man's frostbitten clammy foot thrust against one's belly in the middle of the Great Ice Barrier with the thermometer at fifty below.'¹⁴² I melded these little-known incidents in the poem in order to make the one better-known incident more alive for the reader and for the listener.

¹⁴¹ Ann Savours, *The Voyages of the Discovery* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2001), p. 55

¹⁴² quoted by Diana Preston in *A First Rate Tragedy* (London: Constable, 1997), p. 208

My aim is to be a poet who is equally powerful on the page as on the stage, all the while observing how the body on the stage can inform and hone my work prior to it being written down. How people choose to label this is out of my hands. Being the character and sharing that with an audience in my voice on the stage and on the page has been a profound and enjoyable experience in my development as a poet during the last twenty years. I don't know any other poet who currently allows the body to inform the writing of a poem. This original method of composition, in addition to this thesis outlining my creative practice, is a contribution to the field in terms of new knowledge.

Chapter 4: Impact of Published Works

All seven of the works in this submission have gained significant critical attention in the form of reviews in the national press, in poetry magazines and in online media. A selection of reviews is provided in Appendix 3.

Some of the published works have been shortlisted for major prizes. *Not In These Shoes* was shortlisted for Wales Book of The Year 2009, *Banjo* was shortlisted for The Roland Mathias Prize 2013 and *Lime & Winter* was a finalist in the Michael Marks Awards at The British Library in 2014. In 2012 a poem from *Banjo*, 'Ponting' came second out of over 11,000 entries in the National Poetry Competition that year.

Together they have generated opportunities in print and broadcast media to speak to a wider audience about my work and its themes. Most recently I gave a TEDx talk at Aberystwyth Arts Centre on 21st October 2017 titled *A Journey With My Voice*, which has since been up put up on YouTube enabling it to reach a much wider audience than those who were in the theatre on that day. On November 24th this year my radiophonic poem *The Milk Way* will be broadcast on BBC Radio 3 to a regular audience of around 30,000 listeners. Through translation of individual poems into Dutch, Bulgarian, French, Mandarin, Polish, and most recently into Portuguese my poems have crossed boundaries I couldn't have imagined when I first started writing. I have received numerous invitations to read at most major UK literary festivals including Hay, Cheltenham and the Edinburgh Book Festival. A full list of performances is included in Appendix 1.

These seven works have also brought opportunities for public engagement outside the literary context. During 2012 I won a Leverhulme Writer in Residence Award to work at the National Wool Museum in Drefach Felindre where my remit was to write new poems relating to exhibits, objects and archives in the museum as well as to run workshops and organise readings to enable the public to become more aware of the work of the museum and to see it through a poet's eyes. A line from one of my poems in *Banjo* was included in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013 (low-pitched). During the Ceredigion Art Trail in 2013 I collaborated with artist Lilwen Lewis, hanging my books alongside Lewis's paintings, so that the viewer's first experience of the painting was through the words of the poems. By enabling the viewer to arrive at the painting by way of the book, I began to reflect on how the boundary between artifact and word had become blurred for me,

how word might be transformed into artifact. I was commissioned in 2014 by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution to write a poem to commemorate the centenary of the lifeboat in New Quay and the same year I was invited to work as writer in residence at the Dylan Thomas Boat house in Laugharne. My writers' retreat *Write By The Coast* where I mentor beginner writers was listed as one of the top ten creative breaks in Welsh Coastal Life magazine April 2017. In May 2017 one of the *Banjo* poems 'In My Arms' was published in the Antarctic Circle's South Pole-sium conference booklet.

There is also growing scholarly and pedagogic interest in my work and this has fed my own practice in teaching and curriculum design at UWTSD. In 2007 Ian Gregson included a discussion on my work in *The New Poetry in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press) describing it as "inventive and lively".¹⁴³ In 2012 University of Brighton BA History of Art student Ciara McLaughlin cited my poem 'Brighton West Pier' in an essay titled *How Brighton's dilapidated West Pier has become a modern day icon and source of inspiration*.¹⁴⁴ My poetry was the 'primary focus of one of the three main chapters that examined specific poets in the doctoral research of Bronwen Williams at Aberystwyth University.'¹⁴⁵ UWTSD Dyson Fellow in Poetry Professor Matthew Jarvis has published two essays on my work, one in *Devolutionary Readings: English-Language Poetry and Contemporary Wales* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017) and the other in *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008). After one of my recent performances (at Oxford on 30 May 2018 with the 'What We Should Have Said' team) Roland Melia wrote to me to say 'With many thanks again for your outstanding reading. Whatever is the thrust of your 'page versus stage study' it is paying a very big dividend.'¹⁴⁶ From the 2018-2019 academic year onwards I will be incorporating more voice work into my teaching.

As well as my teaching at UWTSD Lampeter I also teach part-time on the Master's programme in Creative Writing at Oxford University, run occasional workshops at Teifi Writers in Lampeter and act as mentor of Literature Wales. This year I was shortlisted for a Best Teacher Award by the UWTSD Student Union. I will end this short overview with a handful of recent unsolicited testimonials:

¹⁴³ I. Gregson, *The New Poetries* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 136

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Ciara McLaughlin 24th April 2012

¹⁴⁵ Email from Matthew Jarvis to SWR 24th May 2017

¹⁴⁶ Email to SWR from Roland Melia received at 10.27 on 20th June 2018

- Katy Birch, Lecturer in English Literature at Aberystwth University selected three poems from *Banjo* in her ‘reader’ for 17 and 18 year old students who are on an access course for undergraduate study.¹⁴⁷
- Dawn Smith, one of the former MA students at UWTSD said ‘All your insights have changed the way I think about my writing and about poetry.’¹⁴⁸
- Erica Statham, a former BA student wrote ‘I just wanted to say thank you for teaching me this year...your teaching really has been invaluable and useful to me.’¹⁴⁹
- Nick Dent, Professor of Philosophy at Birmingham University said of *Banjo* that it is ‘...full of the most delicate and beautifully caught things – most striking and memorable.’¹⁵⁰
- Ruth Baker who graduated with a first this summer: ‘I wanted to thank you as you have been a huge influence on my writing, especially of course my poetry. I had no intention of writing (or indeed interest in) poetry when I arrived at university until I reached your second year module – which I was very nervous about – I didn’t know if I could write poetry! To my delight I found I loved your teaching style and quickly grew in confidence and interest in writing poetry. Your sessions were so interesting and wide ranging and although it sounds cliché, I was enthused by the boundless possibilities of ideas and inspiration-prompts you provided us with – I realized that I was only limited by what I thought I could/couldn’t do, and in fact, anything was possible and I could write about anything I felt inspired by.’¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Email from Katherine Stansfield to SWR 14th August 2017

¹⁴⁸ Thank you card sent to SWR 17th October 2016

¹⁴⁹ Email from Erica Statham to SWR 22nd May 2010

¹⁵⁰ Email from Martin Pursey to SWR 24 January 2018

¹⁵¹ Email from Ruth Baker to SWR 4th May 2018

Conclusion

‘The voice reveals....character more than the words spoken because the voice is formed by breath and because breath is intrinsically connected to emotion. Emotion influences psychology, personality and behaviour’ says Linklater. She goes on to add ‘voice training for actors is not a matter of acquiring a skill. Voice *is* identity.’¹⁵² My experiments with Linklater’s work have led me to discover that being emotionally open can enable me to craft poems that sound honest on the page with the result that readers and listeners can identify with them.

Tracing the development of my work from page to stage since the publication of my first pamphlet twenty years ago has proved a fascinating experience for me. I have examined key factors that influenced me (outlined in Chapter 1), the encounter with Kristin Linklater (Chapter 2) which marked the beginning of a journey of exploration with my voice, and have analysed the critical culture that surrounds spoken poems (Chapter 3). Taken together this has led me to conclude that authorial presence in the writing, where the reader is drawn to the voice they read on the page, is just as crucial as presence on the stage, where the audience is held by the presence of a person speaking particular words which can sound as if they were written just for them.

The way that I create authorial presence on the stage is to turn my vulnerability in the exposed context of the stage into a place of power by using Linklater tools to think my breath into different parts of my body. In this way, being open to emotions as they arise becomes empowering rather than disabling if I can tap into them and put them to the service of the spoken poem. Encountering and sharing the deepest part of myself on the stage through speaking out the voices of characters of either or no gender, from a range of moments in history often enables the audience to empathise with me and with the characters I am portraying.

Phillip Zarilli has said that perhaps the most important legacy of Stanislavski is the idea that theatre-making is best when it is practised as an ever-evolving process of constant practical enquiry and reflection.¹⁵³ I am convinced that my explorations into the use of

¹⁵² Kristin Linklater, ‘The Importance of Daydreaming’ in *American Theatre* (January 2010) p. 43

¹⁵³ Phillip Zarilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009) p. 5

voice have and will continue to be an ever-evolving series of discoveries and insights that feed back into my writing, performing and teaching.

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Appendix 1 – ‘Gwen’ unpublished poem written during the KLVC Riverstories course April 2016

Gwen

She takes down my hair and does it like her own.
Gwen has me sit as she does and I feel her
absorb me as I twist in a wicker chair
in her garret in the rue du Cherche Midi. It's as if
I am the canvas and Gwen the paint. Yet here we are

one woman on the steps of the Grand Palais
at her first exhibition in Paris where people will sniff
the window of each portrait. Most of them
of me. What have we been doing that it has taken us
seventeen years to share this square of marble?

Shagging Rodin. Yes, Gwen was sitting for Auguste Rodin
while I was sitting for her. I couldn't tell her I too
gave way like clay beneath his touch. With Auguste
I shrank in the firing. With Gwen I expanded
in the drying. You have to allow one to three weeks'

dry time with oils. I can't get the smell of her linseed oil
out of my hair. Her sheen shines off me in every picture
here. But there's one missing: it's where a mother
and daughter in black walk back across a beach
from light into darkness at Tenby where she grew up,

the bay a palette of blue and yellow villas. Is Gwen
retracing her steps back to that day when
her mother's heart stopped in an attic
when she was eight and the paint ticked
from her horsehair brush like green blood?

Appendix 2: Collections of poems, published poems, commissions and awards

Collections and pamphlets by Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch

Ling Di Long (Presteigne: Rack Press, 2018)
Tango in Stanzas performance piece (Arts Council Creative Wales Award, 2015)
Lime & Winter (Presteigne: Rack Press, 2014)
Banjo (London: Picador, 2012)
Not in These Shoes (London: Picador, 2008)
Rockclimbing in Silk, (Bridgend: Seren, 2001)
Stranded on Ithaca (Bradford: Redbeck pamphlets, 1998)

Poems in journals/newspapers

Agenda, issue 45.4
Edinburgh Review, issue 132
Financial Times 21st June 2008
Agenda, issue 45.4
Independent 5th March 1999 and 24th June 2001
Magma, issues 49 & 52
New Welsh Review, issues 74, 75, 88, 93, 102
Planet, volumes 157, 163, 166, 176, 182, 191
Poetry Ireland Review, volume 62
Poetry London, issues 59, 67, 69, 78
Poetry Wales, volumes 33.2, 33.3, 34.1, 34.2, 35.2, 36.1, 36.3, 36.4, 37.2, 37.3, 38.2, 38.3, 38.4, 39.4, 41.4, 43.3, 44.1, 47.1
Plamak, volume 3-4, ed. G. Davies (2002) (edition of Bulgaria's leading literary magazine, devoted to writers from Wales)
Poetry International Web (August 2008)
The Lonely Crowd, issue 4 (Spring 2016)
The Other Voices International Poetry Project (July 2008)
Zyzyva (San Francisco Journal of Arts & Letters), No. 106, Spring & Summer 2016

Anthologies where Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch's work has been published

Abse, D (ed.) *Twentieth Century Anglo-Welsh Poetry* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004)
Clarke, G. (ed.) *Ten Poems From Wales* (Nottingham: Candlestick Press, 2013)
Davies, L. and Goodby, J, eds. *The Edge of Necessary: An Anthology of Welsh Innovative Poetry 1966 -2018* (Aquifer, 2018)
Fisher, M. (ed.) *Hwaet! 20 Years of Ledbury Poetry Festival* (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2016)
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Minhinnick, R. (ed.) *In Een Ander Licht* (Amsterdam: Wagner & Van Santen, 2001)
 Minhinnick, R. *Turning Tides: Contemporary Writing from Wales* (Wales Arts International, 2004)
 Paterson, D. (ed.) *Picador Poetry Twenty: Celebrating 20 Years of Picador* (London: Picador, 2017)
 Skinner, R. (ed.) *Vanguard No. 2 Poetry Anthology* (Vanguard Editions, 2016)
 Towers, K. (ed.) *Christmas Crackers: Ten Poems to Surprise and Delight* (Nottingham: Candlestick Press, 2017)
 Salzman, E. and Wack, A. (eds.) *Women's Work: Modern Women Poets Writing in English* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008)
The Forward Book of Poetry 2009 (London: Forward, 2008)
 Stephens, M. (ed.) *Poetry 1900-2000* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2007)
The Best of Poetry London (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014)
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 Wack, A. (ed.) *Pembrokeshire*, (Bridgend: Seren, 2018)
 Wack, A. (ed.) *Snowdonia* (Bridgend: Seren, 2018)
 One of the *Banjo* poems 'In My Arms' published in the Antarctic Circle's South Pole-sium conference booklet (May 2017)

Articles by Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch on creative process

Wynne-Rhydderch, S. 'Shaved: Appreciating and Teaching A Poem For EFL Students', *International Association of Teachers of English As A Foreign Language Newsletter*, Summer 2010
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 Wynne-Rhydderch, S. 'Spadework' *In Their Own Words: Contemporary Poets on Their Poetry* in by Ivory, H. & Szirtes, G (eds.) (Cromer: Salt, 2012)

Interviews

[Interview in with Katherine Stansfield in *New Welsh Review* \(May, 2012\)](#)
 Interview in with Alice Entwistle in *Poetry Wales* volume 48.2

Awards

2015 Arts Council Creative Wales Award
 2014 Michael Marks Award – shortlist
 2013 Wales Book of the Year – shortlist
 2011 National Poetry Competition – 2nd Prize
 2009 Wales Book of the Year – shortlist
 2007 Society of Authors Bursary
 2005 Hawthornden Fellowship
 1997 Literature Wales Bursary
 1982 WH Smith Young Writer of the Year – highly commended

Performances

Aberystwyth Arts Centre (8 November 2012, 29 May 2013 & 6 February 2014)

Amsterdam (November 2001)
 Arvon Centres: Totleigh Barton (8 Aug 2007 and 8 July 2009) & The Hurst (15 Feb 2006)
 Bath Literature Festival (5 March 2002)
 Birkbeck University of London (13 June 2012)
 Bodmin Moor Poetry Festival (27 May 2016)
 Budapest (British Council – June 2001)
 Buenos Aires (August 2001)
 Cardiff, International Poetry Competition reading (26 June 2013), at Little Man Coffee Company (13 April 2017), at Waterstone's (15 June 2017) at Chapter (3 May 2018)
 Cardigan Cellar Bar (26 April 2013 & 2 May 2014 & 26 Oct 2018)
 Centre for Lifelong Learning, Isles of Scilly (25 October 2005)
 Cheltenham Literature Festival (10 October 2012)
 Chepstow Poetry on The Border series (4 July 2009)
 Chepstow Drill Hall with Jackie Kay (6 July 2013)
 Concordia University, Montréal (British Council – 24 November 2008)
 Drefach Felindre, National Wool Museum (5 July 2012 & 30 April 2014)
 Durham Colpitts Poetry Group (13 March 2009)
 Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea (Sept 1995, Oct 1997, 8 June 2007, 2 July 2009, 28 April 2011, 7 Nov 2012, 11 Sept 2014, 7 Nov 2014)
 Dylan Thomas Boathouse, Laugharne (28 June 2014)
 Edinburgh International Book Festival (16 August 2008)
 Foyles Bookshop, London (11 June 2012)
 Hay Festival (May 2001, 25 May 2003, 29 May 2008, 25 May 2009 & 5 June 2012)
 Hong Kong Baptist University (8 April 2011)
 Jagiellonian University, Krakow (British Council – 1 December 2006)
 Jersey Arts Centre, Jersey (3 June 2015)
 Laugharne Weekend (9 April 2010 & 14 April 2012)
 Ledbury Poetry Festival (10 July 2005, 8 July 2012, 1 July 2016, 7 July 2018)
 London Book Fair (Parthian – 17 March 2003)
 London Dragon Hall Covent Garden (21 Jan 2014)
 London Free Verse Book Fair (30 September 2018)
 London Poetry Café (27 November 2017)
 London Welsh Centre with Rack Poets (19 Oct 2013)
 Machynlleth, Penrallt Bookshop (3 Oct 2013 & 4 Oct 2018)
 Marlborough College, Swindon (22 September 2001 & 23 May 2010)
 Merthyr, Imperial Hotel (24 September 2009)
 Monmouth, Rossiters Books (3 July 2012)
 Montréal Salon du Livre (British Council – 22 November 2008)
 New Quay, Ceredigion (Llanina Church 28 Aug 2012, Black Lion 15 June 2013 & 1 Nov 2014, Queens Hotel 1 Aug 2014)
 New York (YMCA National Writer's Voice: 19 October 2001)
 Northern Ireland (John Hewitt Spring Festival 17 May 2014)
 Oxford at Kellogg College (2 Feb 2017) and at Merton College (30 May 2018)
 Paris Salon du Livre (24 March 2002)
 Penarth Book Festival (30 October 2012)
 Penzance Poetry Parlour (26 June 2018)
 Poetry at Presteigne Festival (17 October 2015)
 Pontardawe Arts Centre (8 Sept 2009 & 10 March 2015)
 Presteigne, Red Parrot Poets (7 April 2014)
 Reading Café Poets (18 January 2008)
 Ruthin Library (5 June 2008)
 Solva at The Edge Festival (13 August 2017)

StAnza: Scottish International Poetry Festival (10 March 2013)
Titchfield, St Peter's Church (8 June 2013 & 16 Nov 2014)
Ty Newydd Writing Centre (15 Aug 2007, 4 June 2008, 17 Aug 2011, 22 April 2015, 16
March 2016)
Tywyn, Lantern Lit (20 Jan 2013)
University of Leicester International Study Centre (2 June 2009)
University of Ottawa (British Council – 21 November 2008)

Commissions

October 2017 TEDx talk 21st October 2017 (recorded in Aberystwyth) *A Journey With
My Voice*
August 2014 *The Slate Sea*: poems for anthology published by The Camden Trust 2015
February 2014 *Lifeboat*: poem commissioned to celebrate 150 years of RNLI in New
Quay
June 2001 *Rowndio'r Horn/Going Round the Horn* for BBC Wales Double Yellow
programme