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**Working class women's psychogeography in experimental  
poetry: the work of Geraldine Monk and Maggie O'Sullivan  
& floss**

Submitted by Sarah Louise Crewe for the degree of MA – R

Poetry as Practice

University of Kent

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## Introduction

For the working class woman – why poetry? It is often regarded as inaccessible, arcane, and, at worst, entirely irrelevant to the functioning of usual daily life. It is anything but a career choice, and for my own demograph, anything that is not bringing a boost to the family income is culturally frowned upon. Nonetheless, it is here in which a former journalism student found an outlet for creative writing that concerns the social, the personal and the political. The permission to write about my own surroundings, while giving due attention to a love of language that could never be expressed within the staid confinements of a typical news story.

Being working class is a socio economic position, coming from birth. The childhood experience of money, and hence opportunity, not being freely available is one that has a domino effect through young adulthood. For example, our parents cannot afford to pay our bills, or contribute towards rent and living costs, throughout our lives. They certainly cannot pay university tuition fees either, which I will discuss further on. While some may be able to climb the social mobility ladder, the experience of growing up without extra privilege is one that many (although there are always exceptions to every rule) will remember and be mindful of for the rest of their lives. There are many diverse life experiences that are categorised as working class, and it is important not to pigeonhole every single one of us into the urban, or social housing, bracket. However, I feel the definition of being without strong financial privilege from the very beginning is one that works sufficiently for the purpose of this thesis.

I began to re-engage with poetry when my son was a toddler, while i was a stay at home mum. I wanted to be able to read and write again, after years of a post-natal depression that was often incapacitating and hostile to any notion of self-improvement. Poetry pamphlets were a perfect entry back into considering written word as an artform, as opposed to a shopping list or something equally mundane. I could read 30 pages before finally going to sleep, or while my boy was in nursery for a few hours. Soon, it started to appeal stylistically as something that I could actually produce myself. It went from there.

It took years to develop my own poetic voice, and then years again to establish my own poetics. After exploring and attempting to create work on various subject matters, it became clear to me that there were certain themes that continued to display themselves in my work. Our little family – my husband, our son and I – relocated itself back to Liverpool after living in London for nine years. I discovered a love for my home city that I never even knew I was capable of. I started to explore old ground as the new. Not so much places that I frequented as a teenager, but those which I knew as a child, and what was left of so many sites that had now disappeared via demolition, renovation, and via the often contentious catchphrase of all town planning drafts, regeneration. I wanted to capture both the changes and the history of these places by writing about what I saw on my daily walks, albeit with a pram in tow.

I discovered that there was a word for the subject matter that captured me most: psychogeography. It was a delight to learn that my writing praxis was actually rooted in something vaguely intellectual. Unfortunately, the further I delved, the more I found that, like

most literary movements, it was dominated by men. Psychogeography, as defined by Guy Debord, is “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.”<sup>1</sup> In her book, *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*, Tina Richardson attempts to provide many definitions and various reference points for those who are new to the genre in her introduction. For the purposes of both this thesis and my creative sequence, the following is of particular use:

Psychogeography is about crossing established boundaries, whether metaphorically or physically, locally or globally.<sup>2</sup>

This sense of psychogeography as something that is adaptable and pliant for several sociological purposes is ideal in terms of its use for poetics. Yet in its historical context, the overarching common denominator, from Charles Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin, from Iain Sinclair to Merlin Coverley, is that the practitioners are male.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise helpful definitions of psychogeography as a starting point. Merlin Coverley proposes that it is a combination of the literary, new age ideas and avant garde practices.<sup>3</sup> The latter is clearly of relevance to the praxis of psychogeography within the context of innovative poetry. Yet if social class is brought into the equation, it is also clear how previously, psychogeography has suffered from a somewhat elitist, or at the very least, detached reputation. Richardson named Baudelaire as responsible for the image of the flâneur, the nineteenth century urban walker of Paris who was bourgeois, male and dandy.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to consider how this could be taken as a blueprint for the description of an avant garde poet well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century too. So, while I recognise the importance of Guy Debord and the Situationist<sup>5</sup> movement, the work of Iain Sinclair, Patrick Keiller and so on, what I have to offer in terms of perspective to this genre is significantly different if we are to cross the streams of gender and social class.

### **Innovative/Experimental Poetry**

Aside from becoming a poet at all, does anybody actually choose to be an experimental poet? A successful reading involves around 40 audience members. Book sales tend to reach the same figure. Few, if any at all, encounter it throughout their school education. Even at university level, creative writing departments are essentially their own dominions, and not all of those are welcoming to innovative practice. The prevailing work in terms of popularity

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Ernest Debord: *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* 1955.

<http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2> [accessed 1 March 2017]

<sup>2</sup> Tina Richardson: *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*, [London, Rowman&Littlefield International, 2015] p.2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pg 3.

<sup>5</sup> Avant garde movement led by Debord, Michele Bern stein and others, rooted in Marxism. Regarded modern capitalist society as “an organisation of spectacles: a frozen moment of history in which it is impossible to experience real life or actively participate in the construction of the lived world.” Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International In A Postmodern Age*, [London, Routledge, 1992] p.2.

continues to be that which at least attempts to rhyme, or to stick to a prescribed form that the media perpetrates as poetry. The experimental is the least likely form of poetry to be profitable, and suffers from a reputation of being inaccessible. But for poets themselves, perhaps the attraction is to be found in both its definition, and in the postulations of some who attempt to define it. In their introduction to *Other: British and Irish Poetry Since 1970*, Richard Caddell and Peter Quartermain provide a helpful definition of its opposite, the mainstream, as follows:

Generalisation about such (often nebulous) groups is fraught with difficulties, but it nevertheless holds that in each case the typical poem is a closed, monolineal utterance, demanding little of the reader but passive consumption.<sup>6</sup>

It is certainly fair to say that innovative poetry requires, or at the very least, hopes for, far more active participation from not just its readers, but also, its creators. It is also worth reflecting on the subtle nuances between the terms that are employed to describe non mainstream poetry, that is, between “innovative,” “experimental” and “avant garde.” Poets who consider themselves as the latter, should, by literal definition, be acting the vanguard of that which is different in the art form. However, avant garde is a phrase that is historically charged. When defining her Archive of the Now website, an online catalogue of non mainstream poetry recording, Andrea Brady states the following:

‘avant-garde’ is obviously written into the long history of European movements which confront bourgeois norms, and which work together collectively to drive art history forward: that’s not a wholly accurate description of much of this poetry either.<sup>7</sup>

Brady is right to accentuate this link between the avant garde and bourgeois convention. The relationship is almost symbiotic in terms of one feeding the content of the other. Yet to extrapolate further, it could also be argued that actually, the avant garde itself appears to be itself an essentially bourgeois, or at the very least, middle class, division of art. Finding a 20<sup>th</sup> century avant garde poet who would claim to be working class could be difficult. With this in mind, it seems inappropriate to use this definition not only to discuss my own work, but also to talk about working class women’s psychogeography within the context of non mainstream poetry. Therefore, I will be using the terms “innovative” and “experimental” throughout this thesis.

In an interview with Scott Thurston, Caroline Bergvall argues that the fundamental issues facing innovative poets are:

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Caddell and Peter Quartermain: *Other: British and Irish Poetry Since 1970* [Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1999] p.xv

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Brady in conversation with Rosheen Brennan.

[https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol\\_3\\_no\\_1/new\\_media/archive\\_ofthe\\_now/bradybrennaninterview.html](https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_1/new_media/archive_ofthe_now/bradybrennaninterview.html) [Accessed 24 March 2017.]

the role or function of poetry in the world today....how you locate yourself intellectually and culturally....innovation as lineage.<sup>8</sup>

This positions the poet as a kind of social commentator, an observer who, by placing themselves within the innovative framework, has a vested interest in anything that can be considered radical. To place another level of social responsibility on the shoulders of the experimental poet, the aim should be for us to look beyond the surface. To write between the prescribed lines. Women, especially working class women, with accents and a looser use of profanities to boot, are stereotyped, as writing about relationships, sex, motherhood and birth. But it needs to be asked, is this all we are? Furthermore, is this all our corporeal matter is reduced to? There is an absolute abundance of women poets writing about these topics. It is also imperative to recognise that while these are topics of importance, we are so much more than this. What we desire goes beyond the sexual, the maternal and a nature that may actually be considered as nothing more than Rousseauian<sup>9</sup> fantasy of women as child rearers and other stereotypical gender roles.

### **A word on the punk aesthetic**

Both stemming from the cities, punk and psychogeography complement each other well. Given that it began as a working class movement, punk also connects into my own poetics immensely. It could also be argued that the cut-up works of experimental poets in the 1970s reflect the counter culture and all its subversion. The cut-up poems of Maggie O'Sullivan, the work of Bob Cobbing and much of which the Writers Forum were publishing appears to be in tune with, or even, a precursor to, the radical shift that was taking place in music. Indeed, the British Poetry Revival seems to be concomitant to the political unrest and desire for change that was the mood of the epoch. For example, it is somewhat telling that a recording of Cobbing's work is to be found on the collection entitled *Poets Punks Beatniks and Counter Culture Heroes* on Apple Music. Cobbing and O'Sullivan physically created work entirely in keeping with the production values of punk zines such as *Shocking Pink* and *Sniffin Glue*. *Shocking Pink* featured work with felt tips, photocopiers and collage. One of the founding members, Sally O-J, describes it as follows:

We didn't know how to make a magazine. In those days we did all our own layout and everything: we did everything – took the pictures, wrote it, got the copy.<sup>10</sup>

This is strikingly similar to how Maggie O'Sullivan describes her working process with Bob Cobbing, outlined in my chapter on her work later on. Adrian Clarke also says of Cobbing's editorial days:

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from Scott Thurston's interview with Caroline Bergvall in *Talking Poetics – Dialogues in Innovative Poetry* [Bristol, Shearsman Books, 2011] p.80

<sup>9</sup> <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/educationgeneral/fl/Rousseau-on-Women-and-Education.htm> [Accessed 22 March 2017.]

<sup>10</sup> Cazz Blase: *A shocking shade of pink*. [https://www.thefword.org.uk/2011/08/shocking\\_pink/](https://www.thefword.org.uk/2011/08/shocking_pink/) [accessed 20 March 2017]

by the end there was just a narrow passage from the door round to the photocopier Piles and piles of subpublications, submissions [...] and loose sheets.<sup>11</sup>

The shared visual tropes between punk zines and Cobbing's Writers Forum work can also be observed when looking at the covers for the poetry publications they produced. Felt tip, pen, sketches, collage and bright yellow paints with red and black cuttings can all be found in abundance. Also, while experimental poetry may be in danger of springing out of academia only in these times, this was very much against the cheerfully anarchist spirit of what Cobbing's projects were about. He was even a part of the Antiuniversity, described as a short lived attempt at self organised education outside academia, in 1968.<sup>12</sup> It is easy to conclude that Cobbing would be somewhat dismayed by the dominance of academia within the social life of experimental poetry today.

### **Psychogeography as poetic praxis**

Tina Richardson has attempted to recapture the zine culture that plays such a pivotal role in psychogeography throughout the publication, *Stepz*, a collaboration with visual artist and fellow psychogeographer Ally Standing. The zine aims to restore the link between punk ethics and the more philosophical strands behind urban walking, or the *dérive* as the Letterist and Situationist International respectively would regard it. The second issue of *Stepz* curates the links between psychogeography in the North West and the writings of the punk poet John Cooper Clarke. My own work features in this publication, with a piece that juxtaposes two red light districts in Liverpool and Manchester. This piece is demonstrative of the lenses in which I consider psychogeography: that of belonging to the working class, and also that of the feminist. Usually, walks of this nature have informed my poetic praxis. In her book *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*, Richardson states that the collection of essays sets out to bring together the work of the contemporary psychogeographer who comes from a creative and literary background, with academics also working in this field.<sup>13</sup> Within the category of creative and literary, we can certainly carve out a successful space for poetry and poetics. Richardson goes on to describe psychogeography as a subjective response, with terms like "aesthetic" and "affect" as the bread and butter terms of the discipline.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, both of these cerebral consequences are extremely relevant to the response a poet aims for from their readership.

However, Richardson also makes the salient point that psychogeography tends not to be concerned with the rural environment. Within poetry, and especially the experimental, this tends to be in reverse. There is a danger, and an inherently classist one at that, of considering that which resides the city being too ugly, or simply not picturesque enough, to slide itself into the shape, or the subject matter of a poem in a way in which that celebrates, rather than denigrates, the subject. A counter argument to it is, must it be pretty at all? The language can

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<sup>11</sup> William Cobbing and Rosie Cooper: *Booooook: The Life and Work of Bob Cobbing*. [ UK, Occasional Papers, 2015.] p.38.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.144.

<sup>13</sup> Richardson, p4

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p5.



still be beautiful, even if the topic is urban decay. The dilapidated buildings in question might hold a plethora of happy memories for its former inhabitants, even if on first glance they resemble a demolition site. Considering psychogeography through a working class lens is a discipline that could be accused of nostalgia, which is something that experimental poetics seeks to avoid. Yet I believe it is possible to remain detached and impartially observe the destruction of communities as matter of fact without resorting to sentiment and excessive pathos. If the work of Laura Oldfield Ford is considered, then it could be argued that poetry, prose and working class psychogeography can work in tandem with each other extremely well. Oldfield Ford's zine, *Savage Messiah*, started in 2005, documents the changes that took place in London not just preparation for the 2012 Olympics, but also, the various shifts that occurred in the landscape in the twilight years of the 1990s Tory government, and the beginnings of Tony Blair's New Labour administration. It is produced as collage, illustrations and text. The latter being of special interest if the reader is looking for links to poetic language. The syntax could easily glide into any poem, as follows:

Mile End park, the Palm tree. Outside in violet shadows, his hand, a black tattoo.  
Red wine. Mirages on the canal. Drifting into sleep, dreams opalescent,  
erotically charged.<sup>15</sup>

Such use of colour and adjective belongs within any genre of creative writing, yet the short, sharp bursts can only serve to put the reader in mind of poetry. Oldfield Ford also makes explicit reference to poets and poetry throughout the work. In Issue 6 she mentions being in Royal College Street in St Pancras, where Rimbaud and Verlaine previously lived. She also adds the following quote from Walter Benjamin in the same issue:

Poets find the refuse of society on their street and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse.<sup>16</sup>

Yet the author has also rejected the idea that her work belongs in the canon of psychogeography, and for the purpose of this thesis, it is interesting to consider why. She believes the definition to be

[...] just middle class men acting like colonial explorers, showing us their discoveries and guarding their plot.<sup>17</sup>

This only serves to emphasise my point earlier that psychogeography has been a largely male dominion, and that the need for women to participate and occupy space in this sphere is inherent. I hope that this thesis shows not only how this can be done, but also, how the work has actually already begun through the medium of two working class women poets, and how I am striving towards a continuation of this ethos throughout my own praxis.

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<sup>15</sup> Laura Oldfield Ford, *Savage Messiah*, Issue 5. [London, Verso, 2011.]

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, Issue 6.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Fisher, Introduction. Laura Oldfield Ford, *Savage Messiah*. [London, Verso, 2011.]

## Monk

Regarding my own endeavours to write on psychogeography through the lens of a working class woman, the importance of Geraldine Monk's work cannot be underestimated. Through this chapter, I will be looking at how the poet applies language to demonstrate class and social status within a geographical framework.

The bulk of women's poetry concerning concepts of space and place throughout innovative poetry to date appears to be more in tune with the work featured in Harriet Tarlo's *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape*. Indeed, Tarlo herself has stated that Monk is not a landscape poet, as her work places nature within the cultural contexts of locality, culture and class.<sup>18</sup> I would place these concerns as the very foundations of what I am attempting to define as a working class psychogeography within experimental poetics. The "radical" in the aforementioned anthology refers to "poets whose formal techniques are exploratory and experimental enough to be called radical"<sup>19</sup> as opposed to any overtly socio-political content. Psychogeography covers a much wider field than the descriptive, and Monk's work extends much further out than the aesthetic in terms of the scope of its content.

The poet herself labels her work as her "emotional geography of place."<sup>20</sup> This definition is one that is of utmost relevance to my own work, not least when writing about Liverpool in a way that combines both the history behind a location and the present day appearance, which is more often than not a veneer in light of its former ambience. A collection which epitomises this approach is *Noctivagations*. The book contains numerous references that are consistent with the placing of a working class psychogeography within the genre of experimental poetry. For instance, the poem "Bluehound" begins:

But where  
are we going?  
And what is  
it all about?<sup>21</sup>

Here, Monk is asking questions, not making statements. The reader is encouraged to apply this to their own journeys and situations. Sticking to any concept of a straight and narrow path is gloriously irrelevant. In terms of class, Monk firstly employs dialect, which, whether we like it or not, is a social signifier. In this particular poem, she uses terms such as "Pet" which is classically Northern working class, and "pup-a-luv"<sup>22</sup> as "puppy love." However, the section of *Noctivagations* that really elucidates the concerns of a working class psychogeography is *Hidden Cities*, which describes various districts of Manchester, touching

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<sup>18</sup> Harriet Tarlo, "Home Hills." Taken from *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk*, edited by Scott Thurston. [Salt Publishing, Cambridge, 2007.] p.29.

<sup>19</sup> Harriet Tarlo, Introduction from *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*. [Bristol, Shearsman Books, 2011.] p.7.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.westhousebooks.co.uk/gmonk.asp> [First accessed 1 November 2016]

<sup>21</sup> Geraldine Monk, "Bluehound" taken from *Noctivagations*. [Sheffield, West House Press, 2001] .p.14.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

upon both history and perceptions that switch from the personal to the political. The work reflects the multicoloured prism that is that particular city and its various stories, from the Madchester<sup>23</sup> era, to the austere working conditions of child labourers in the Victorian mills of Ancoats, or as Monk rather beautifully puts it herself:

this place of critical hurt and psycho-catastrophe

this place where children roamed half giddy with the noise/<sup>24</sup>

Monk also acknowledges the imperialism, horror and the explicit class divide on which such cities were built. Manchester's cotton industry would not have been able to exist without the slave trade. The poem "Whitworth Street West", a site of many former warehouses and trade offices, contains the devastating truth of the palatial facades:

A magnificence built on the blood of slavery, Red raw cotton.

Strange hanging fruit.<sup>25</sup>

The history of the proletariat in Manchester acts as a palimpsest over the slave trade that provided the backdrop to it. Monk's project is therefore the ultimate example of working class psychogeography. It acknowledges the suffering and the strife of both the kidnapped slaves and the working poor twice over, with her own observations of the city as it stood at her time of writing (as Manchester, like several cities, is forever changing. But the history is entirely inescapable.) The slave trade is also inseparable from the creation of the city, not least as a port. To ignore this, and the other epochs of tension within its (continuous) evolution, would be revisionist as best, wilfully selective at worst. Indeed, the poet herself makes a pertinent reference to presenting such poetry as truth in her "Collaborations with the Dead" essay, stating "our minds are the embedded journalists of our bodies."<sup>26</sup> If we consider psychogeography as part documentation, then this perspective rings true. It also asks the readers to consider themselves as participants with the use of the word our. This chimes also with the work of both Tina Richardson, and Laura Oldfield Ford, who very much champion a psychogeography without exclusion, as referenced earlier. This particular article by Monk also invites the reader, albeit with humour, ("if there is an afterlife, my requisitioned collaborators will have all eternity to wreak their anger upon my celestial being"<sup>27</sup>) to ponder the spirit of collaboration with those who, by their deceased status, cannot either answer back or acquiesce to any adaptations the living poet is making.

Throughout *Interregnum*, Monk's book on the Pendle Witch Trials of 1612, the poet addresses the oppression of working class women, and the suppression of their stories. These

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<sup>23</sup> Cultural term for late 1980s – early 1990s Manchester music scene.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/apr/21/madchester-manchester-interviews-hook-ryder> accessed 22 November, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Geraldine Monk, "Ancoats." Taken from *Noctivagations* [Sheffield, West House Press, 2001]. p.65

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.64.

<sup>26</sup> Geraldine Monk "Collaborations with the Dead." Taken from *The Salt Companion To Geraldine Monk*, edited by Scott Thurston. [Cambridge, Salt Publishing, 2007.] p.178

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.181.

women were treated as subhuman, and Monk takes up their cause, and the language she has to describe it, with fervour:

They glamour. They bleed. Deceive. Imperfect animal.<sup>28</sup>

Placing glamour and bleed so close together asks the reader to consider the apparent opposites. In turn, this implies that to do both (in the eyes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century patriarchy) is simply impossible. It also suggests that to be simultaneously glamorous and bleeding must pertain to being a creature, an animal, as opposed to a woman without the scent of witchcraft hanging over her door. The next phrase in the above line, however, is imperative as a placing of women in any historical context and consideration:

Barely once removed from<sup>29</sup>

This can be interpreted as follows: we are only ever one lesion away from those who may have been denounced in their time. In the case of Monk's work, the women in question were executed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for being different and, most notably, being poor. They were unable to offer a decent defence in a justice system run by powerful, religious zealots who were obsequious towards a Protestant king, James I. Destitute women being sent to their deaths or being left to die in squalor within a system that favoured the rich continued well into the following centuries and, it could even be argued, up into the present day. This feature of history certainly creeps into the family trees of many working class women. So many ancestral searches result in stalemate simply because the women were not even deemed worthy of their births and deaths being recorded. When this is contemplated during a psychogeographical drift, suddenly the air seems so much heavier. What begins as a walk spirals into a time lapse.

At the start of Interregnum, Monk invites the reader to re-evaluate what might seem like a quaint Lancashire village scene. Scorn seems especially present in the opening lines of GOOD FRIDAY HIKERS:

We love to go a-wandering  
across this hillside track<sup>30</sup>

Psychogeographers of any city or town that serves as a tourist trap can surely relate to Monk's cynicism for tourists here. In her essay "Home Hills," Harriet Tarlo mentions that the Good Friday bikers who visit Pendle "seem blissfully oblivious to the darker connotations of that day in the Christian calendar."<sup>31</sup> It is also an absolute failure to acknowledge the gravitas of that date to those who were executed for witchcraft in 1612, as Good Friday was the supposed date for a Witches Sabbath held at Malkin Tower, the home of the Demdike family, most of whom stood accused and were sent to their deaths.<sup>32</sup> There are clear parallels for this

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<sup>28</sup> Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum*. [London, Creation Books, 1994.]

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Harriet Tarlo, "Home Hills." Taken from *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk*, edited by Scott Thurston. [Cambridge Salt Publishing, 2007.] p.41

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.pendlewitches.co.uk/> [first accessed 31/10/2016]

disdain of tourists, or occupiers of sites that were formerly sites of poverty and suffering. Victorian workhouse sites across the country have been demolished in favour of housing that local people cannot, in all reality, afford to occupy. Former social housing sites across cities have been taken over by private developers for either wealthy students or city workers. These are issues that can breed resentment, and Monk is fully aware of this kind of historical misalignment that takes place in cities like Liverpool and in districts like Pendle. These issues provide an infrastructure for a working class psychogeography. Whereas stately homes have been preserved, factories and housing schemes have been torn down. The maps change for the sites of our history on a constant basis. Sites of work and leisure of proletarian past continue to be decimated in the name of progress. The maps continue to shift, for some towards an ideal of progress, for others, complete erasure.

There are several points during Interregnum in which the poet outlines exactly what we must do at points in the map that have been eradicated, or at least hidden. For example in GAOL SONG – PART 2:

picking out what isn't said  
beneath the teething lines and  
blocked out crevices<sup>33</sup>

There is also the following line from STRIP SEARCH, which reads like it has come straight out of a poststructuralist manual in terms of how many different meanings can be applied by a reader to a certain text. It is, as Charles Bernstein puts it, Derrida's "getting rid of the idea that words refer to metaphysical absolutes, to universals."<sup>34</sup> While Monk's work tends to fluctuate between using the lyric "I" and the classic post-structuralist refutation of any of thing, it appears that in this instance, she is making reference to semiotic praxis:

Stripping off the signfields. Metaphors.<sup>35</sup>

It would certainly seem that Monk has established a blueprint in her work for how to proceed with work that is inherently psychogeographical and working class. To return to the point of using localised language, this is a powerful tool appropriated to emphasise the social class of those who were sentenced to death in the Witch Trials. The poems from the INTERREGNUM section, which consist of the replies of the accused, contain a deluge of local dialect. The Katherine Hewitt poem is especially laden with scorn and bitter reproach for her prosecutors, expressed as follows:

E lived down't lane in a big owse  
wi iz poriky fatted fingers drippin  
rings and blotted copy

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<sup>33</sup> Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum*, Creation Books, 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Bernstein: 'The Objects Of Meaning.' Taken From *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, Edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, p.61. [ Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.] p.61.

<sup>35</sup> Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum*, Creation Books, 1994.

after nervous copy – and for what?  
A right royal smile?<sup>36</sup>

This is, as voiced by Monk, the right to reply that Katherine Hewitt herself would not have possessed. King James I, and the ruling classes during 1612, staunchly believed in witchcraft. The slightest deviation from a woman who kept her head down, mouth shut would have been regarded with the highest suspicion. The real Katherine Hewitt would have no doubt been far too terrified by the threat of torture to vocalise any of this backstory that Monk highlights. The work serves as almost supernatural, a phantasmal call to arms for the dead who were never allowed to truly defend themselves. Christine and David Kennedy recall Monk's work as moving "between commentating and mediumistic voices and between simple, and almost naïve language and something akin to free improvisation which values words for the sounds that they contain and can be broken down into."<sup>37</sup> While I most definitely agree with both points of musicality and the poet as intermediary between the living reader and the dead subject, I feel that there is nothing elementary or innocent about the choices the poet makes when she breaks out of the normalised standard of written English into the realm of regional speech. I believe every single choice is meticulously made for maximum emotional effect. There is no naïveté about it.

In the final poem in the book, THE ETERNAL BEWILDERMENT OF JENNET DEVICE, Monk applies alliteration to the seemingly childlike lament of Jennet Device, whose own testimony during the 1612 Witch Trials effectively sentenced her own grandmother, mother, brother and sister to death. The following example accentuates this:

killything-a. Gran. Ali. J.  
killyall thing-a bright X X X X  
killyma  
killykin a killy killy kin<sup>38</sup>

Not only does Monk alliterate by stealth, reading X X X X as "kiss kiss kiss kiss" but also, through the intention of "killyall" and "Killykin" as words. The former being taken as a sinister compound of local speech (kill y'all) which is "kill you all" in turn. The latter serves as a reminder that Jennet sent her nearest and dearest to be executed via her performance at the trials.

The poet herself also sets aside her own definition of this particular poem. Before introducing an extract on the West House Books website, she states:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy&Kennedy, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum*. [London,Creation Books, 1994.]

My mother was fond of reciting Harold Munro's 'Overheard on a Saltmarsh' in the slower, more melodramatic variety of Lancastrian. My father talked faster, never recited but was never lost for words. I was in-between. As children are. Both forms creep into my writing.<sup>39</sup>

It is this medium quality that allows Monk to jump from the more poetic streams contained throughout the book, to the indigenous language of Lancashire in order to utilise the vernacular to heartbreaking effect. The same poem contains the following:

OH MA  
 mi maa mi mother  
 mUth er ing  
 muth rin  
 muR ther ing ringa<sup>40</sup>

The Device child is invoked and conjured, not through chance, but through careful choices of capital lettering, space and placement. Harriet Tarlo also refers to this poem in particular as containing both poignancy and pathos.<sup>41</sup> There is the centred U in the word mUthering, which asks the reader to insert themselves into this child's shoes and watch the full horror and consequence unfold. It is so much more effective than any long treatise on the relationship between mother and daughter. There is more. The word muR ther ing brings the word murder to mind, which is exactly what happened in reality. There is then "ringa," which evokes the child's song "ringa ringa roses." This works on two levels. Firstly, it is referenced earlier in the book via the HALLOWE'EN BIKERS poem:

studs  
 ring a  
 ring-a-rosey  
 clash a holy<sup>42</sup>

It seems the reader is being reminded that at the crux of this tragedy, certainly at the court case, are the words, and the whimsy, of a child. Not just literally, as in Jenet Device, but also in the sense of men behaving like children who want to please a schoolmaster, or in this case, a higher authority. Secondly, the recollection of a child's song rouses the thought that Jenet's performance in court was just that: as though the girl was given the audience and, as children are wont to do, acted accordingly, without realising the dire result her actions would have. All eyes were on her. It is certainly accurate to say, in light of the historical context provided earlier, that a young girl would not be accustomed to captivating an entire room, or

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.westhousebooks.co.uk/gmonk.asp> [First accessed 31 October 2016]

<sup>40</sup> Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum*. [London, Creation Books, 1994]

<sup>41</sup> Harriet Tarlo, "Home Hills." Taken from *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk*, edited by Scott Thurston. [Cambridge, Salt Publishing, 2007.] p.56.

<sup>42</sup> Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum*. [London, Creation Books, 1994]

indeed, be given the chance to. The opening lines of the poem correlate with this theory, as is it described by Monk's voicing of Jennet:

I weird sang. High trilled and skirled.  
I led a merry crab dance. Bright.<sup>43</sup>

This is the voice of a working class girl, on location, in her own movie set for a few precious minutes. Had she known it would lead to the obliteration of her entire family, one wonders whether she would have participated. Monk's choice of presentation highlights the full extent of misfortune that has occurred here, on both a gender level, and a class level. By highlighting Jennet's story, and that of the other women on trial at Pendle, the poet is not only recounting history, but also, putting her own impression and sense of place onto the map and rewriting the whole thing. *Interregnum*, in this sense, prefigures a working class woman's psychogeography, presented through innovative poetry. It would be wonderful to think that it is a prelude, rather than a work in isolation, in terms of working class female participation in this field.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



## Maggie O’Sullivan

In recent years, psychogeography has been largely concerned with the city. Tina Richardson conducted the Leeds Psychogeography Group until 2012, Morag Rose, an anarcha – flâneuse,<sup>44</sup> continues to organise the Loiterer’s Resistance Movement in Manchester city centre. Lauren Elkin’s book, *Flâneuse*, covers London, and on an international level, Paris, New York and Tokyo. But work that covers a potential psychogeography of rural areas remains few and far between. As discussed earlier, it is certainly true to say that the radical landscape poets turn their gaze extensively to more pastoral backdrops, but the issues that a working class psychogeography would be especially concerned with, such as disparity of presence, and how our history informs the here and now, are somewhat absent. However, Maggie O’Sullivan is one poet who has broached these themes consistently. It would be impossible to talk about experimental poetry within the framework of working class women’s psychogeography without referring to O’Sullivan’s work. She has written extensively about both the unseen and the Other as both female and working class throughout the past few decades, and in this chapter I aim to highlight how.

The poet has said of her own upbringing:

My background undoubtedly has shaped...my work. My father and mother had little schooling, and my father worked as a labourer in and out of work all his life. We were brought up on the edge, locked out, without any voice.  
(O’Sullivan 2004:159)<sup>45</sup>

There can be no doubt here that O’Sullivan is asserting herself as working class, and also the tremendous influence that this has had on her poetics. Furthermore, she is also attesting to the fact that the working class are, in terms of having their voices heard in a genuine and meaningful way, excluded.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, O’Sullivan’s views on her own praxis could well be used as a beginner’s guide to working class women’s psychogeography. In an interview with Redell Olsen, she determines that: “deconstructing/re-constituting-as-(being) heard is embodied in my poetics.”<sup>47</sup> The crucial point here is being heard, the notion that through the

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<sup>44</sup> Rose uses this phrase as opposed to flâneur because, in her own words: “a working class queer disabled woman does not have the affordances of (Walter) Benjamin’s privileged subject.” Morag Rose, “Confessions of an Anarcho-Flâneuse” taken from Tina Richardson: *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography* [London, Rowman&Littlefield, 2015.] p.149.

<sup>45</sup> Mandy Bloomfield, “Dragging at the haemorrhage of uns-”: Maggie O’Sullivan’s excavations of Irish History, pg 3. <http://plymouth.academia.edu/MandyBloomfield> 2009  
[http://www.academia.edu/1152598/\\_Dragging\\_at\\_the\\_haemorrhage\\_of\\_uns\\_Maggie\\_O\\_Sullivan\\_s\\_excavations\\_of\\_Irish\\_history](http://www.academia.edu/1152598/_Dragging_at_the_haemorrhage_of_uns_Maggie_O_Sullivan_s_excavations_of_Irish_history) [first accessed 22 November 2016.]

<sup>46</sup>Of course, there are certain media factions that claim to represent the working class, but only when it can be twisted into a right wing agenda. For example, *The Sun* newspaper employ these tactics on a regular basis to support the current Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May, and to attack the Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, as a “Leftie dinosaur appealing solely to (the) middle class.”  
<https://www.google.co.uk/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=The+Sun+newspaper+working+class> [first accessed 10 April 2017]  
excavations\_of\_Irish\_history [first accessed 22 November 2016.]

<sup>47</sup> Redell Olsen: “Writing/Conversation with Maggie O’Sullivan.” Taken from *The Salt Companion to Maggie O’Sullivan* ed. Lawrence Upton [Cambridge, Salt Publishing, 2011.] p.203

medium of walking and creating our own impressions, working class women poets can and will be able to articulate both their social concerns, interpretation on environment and the importance of history as a backdrop. All of these elements are captured perfectly in O’Sullivan’s choice of reconstitution as a fundamental “ingredient” of her poetics. I use the word ingredient consciously, as the idea of a cooking pot (or cauldron even, if we have Monk’s Pendle witches from Interregnum in mind) to form a recipe for working class women’s psychogeography is consistent. The items are various and multifarious: history, geography, sociology, and so much more, especially where O’Sullivan’s work is concerned.

Through the sequence, that bread should be, O’Sullivan introduces a musicality, and how song can serve as a medium for storytelling about the history of place, in this case, the story of the Great Famine in Ireland 1845-1852. It begins with a musical score, and then the Gaelic words: AN SCIOBAIRIN (Skibereen, where O’Sullivan’s ancestors were from) SCIOBADH (snatching) and UISCE BREAN<sup>48</sup> (dirty water.) This indicates that in spite of the adjacent melody, the story contained within the poem will be tragic. As Mandy Bloomfield rightly points out, for the illiterate poor, oral and folk forms such as song would be a way of transcribing history to the next generation.<sup>49</sup> Indeed this tradition continued to an extent as late as the 1980s. I attended a Catholic primary school in a predominantly working class area, with an Irish Catholic teacher and many pupils who were descendants of Irish Catholics who would have shared O’Sullivan’s history. The teacher would frequently sing songs such as Molly Malone, a fishmonger who died of a fever in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dublin. Or The Ballad of Seth Davy, a North Liverpool street performer at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>50</sup> This method of narrative is therefore highly resonant for myself and others of my generation in Liverpool. In this sequence, O’Sullivan also uses the line:

S  
 E  
 V  
 E  
 R  
 E  
 D  
 laid bare the narrative i SINGING<sup>51</sup>

Not only does O’Sullivan draw attention to the importance of song as chronicle, but also by placing the word “SEVERED” on a downward slant, invites the reader to see the word as a descending musical scale. Of course, it also serves as steps, or hills, or a downward compass point, all of which illustrate geography as a topic in a visual way. It could even be said that the language appears to dance on the page, as opposed to being presented statically throughout the poem. The repetition of words and letters would support this point, as though

<sup>48</sup> Maggie O’Sullivan: “that bread should be” taken from *WATERFALLS*, [ London, Reality Street, 2012.] p.21

<sup>49</sup> Bloomfield, p.7

<sup>50</sup> <http://aliverpoolfolksongaweek.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/21-seth-davy.html> [first accessed 31 March 2017.]

<sup>51</sup> Maggie O’Sullivan: “that bread should be” taken from *WATERFALLS*, [ London, Reality Street, 2012.] p.21

they had been choreographed as a pattern that is every bit as physical as it is literary. The following abstract is a fitting example of this:

IMPEARLS TO FEATHER  
feathering & stars

stagg –e-r-r-i-n-g  
at rest CONVULSE...  
the bloodless  
failing  
lit lit lit<sup>52</sup>

There is so much materiality to this work, staggering as not just a word but an action in its enunciation. There is also the image of convulsing, bloodless and failing contrasted sharply with the glamour of feathering & stars in the lines above. This idea of the poem as a functional being as opposed to simple, pretty words on a page is completely analogous to the idea of poet as worker, and poet as working class woman in return. It is a call to movement, and how to enact ideas as a rolling theme rather than reciting immovable facts.

O’Sullivan’s work as a poet is often that of an archaeologist, digging up the remnants of a past that is untold, yet to be told, discarded, and forgotten. The reader has to contemplate the sombre truth of a catastrophe that still holds back so many stories, as O’Sullivan demonstrates here:

whole families without a trace my \_\_\_\_\_

it occurs: \_\_\_\_\_

the unstory

- that bread should be -<sup>53</sup>

The lines not only point to an empty space, but a cavernous echo, and a blank topography. It is, as the poet phrases herself, the unstory. It forms the basis of a working class woman’s psychogeographical encounters with her own land. It is not her story that the history books have highlighted since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The extent to which Irish events have been covered with bias and subjectivity in the media has only been elucidated relatively recently. For example, between 1988 – 1994, the voices of Irish Republicans Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were banned from broadcast, with news programmes having to use voiceover

<sup>52</sup> Maggie O’Sullivan: *winter ceremony* taken from *WATERFALLS* [London, Reality Street, 2012.] p.50.

<sup>53</sup> Maggie O’Sullivan: “that bread should be” taken from *WATERFALLS* [ London, Reality Street, 2012.] p.21

actors in their place.<sup>54</sup> Another instance would be the news coverage of the Bloody Sunday massacre, in which 14 innocent civilians were murdered by the British Army at a civil rights march in Derry in 1972. The British media reported that the victims were armed, yet this was proved untrue by the Saville Inquiry in 2010.<sup>55</sup> Yet O'Sullivan has always been concerned with the violence of misrepresentation, as Peter Manson rightfully highlights through his essay "O'Sullivan's A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts." Manson introduces "the interruption of text by image and image" (in this case, the words *the Moon's /black BLACK Vanilla scent*) as being appropriate to the themes of invasion and violation.<sup>56</sup> Psychogeography often operates in the same way as a palimpsest, with motifs, signs and symbols being written over, out of sight and juxtaposed, with a whole new host of different indicators in terms of what the given area actually means. In the case of the Irish Republic, and the subsequent formation of Northern Ireland's six counties, we can witness how the creation of new geographies can actually bear testimony to acts of destruction and social cleansing.<sup>57</sup> O'Sullivan's experimental praxis of undercutting, overlapping and conscious erasure lends itself entirely to these matters throughout her various works.

Mandy Bloomfield states that the word excavation has special relevance when we consider how O'Sullivan's work investigates unofficial aspects of history and culture.<sup>58</sup> This word also has meaning in terms of bringing up the dead, either for forensic pathology or historical interest. This resonates deeply with my own work, as an ample amount of my creative writing involves bringing out the dead, and presenting their experiences as working class women within a local, psychogeographical framework. I believe it chimes also with Brian McHale's definition of postmodern archaeological poetry, that is, using its own status as an artefact as opposed to a representation of an artefact.<sup>59</sup> Poetry, and indeed psychogeography, are different from history in that they both contemplate and reflect the personal, the writer's own impression, rather than just eidetic facts. O'Sullivan excels at this subjective and yet evocative delivery of image, for example here in THE WALKS:

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<sup>54</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1988%E2%80%9389\\_British\\_broadcasting\\_voice\\_restrictions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1988%E2%80%9389_British_broadcasting_voice_restrictions) [First accessed 17 March 2017]

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2010/jun/15/bloodysunday-northernireland> [First accessed March 17 2017]

<sup>56</sup> Peter Manson: 'A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts'. Taken from *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*. [Cambridge, Salt Publishing, 2011.] p.76

<sup>57</sup> As late as 1993, the Northern Ireland Civil Service comprised of 63.2% Protestant employees, 36.8% Roman Catholic. In his book 'Ulster's White Negroes,' Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh provides a useful Appendix with quotes from Unionist leaders between 1922 – 1969 that demonstrate exactly how stacked the odds were against Roman Catholics searching for housing and employment. In terms of the book's title, Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey states in the introduction: "the reader might well conclude that asking nationalist working class people to recognise 'unionism' having tradition with equal validity with their own is like asking the Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Indian or Chinese population of the 'United Kingdom' to accord the same dignity to racism."

<sup>58</sup> Bloomfield, pg 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

To record surface, single grain towards

Blatt strips feuilles hojas

Sepulchral. Jaff, Jonquils  
Ledge. Bearing of head,  
head, cleavage/  
be  
reavement.<sup>60</sup>

Feuilles is a word that most readers would usually associate with cake, as in the French mille-feuille. The word hoja, Spanish for leaf, is also a word attached to patisserie, as in Latin America Milhojas is taken to refer to the same variety of puff pastry used for dessert. Yet O’Sullivan is talking about her surroundings, a walk. The word Blatt is old Germanic for leaf, and the use of Jonquils, a flowering plant, also indicates that she is outside. These types of leaves are also common in food crops, such as corn. This subject matter is clearly important to the poet in the historical context of the Irish famine, as discussed previously. But the depiction of these exquisite layers creates an altogether exceptional invocation of what would be an almost simplistic scene in less capable hands.

Returning to the presence of a working class aesthetic in O’Sullivan’s work, she has often described the process of creating publications as labour intensive. During an interview with Redell Olsen, she outlines the making of *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts* as such:

We constructed the entire book going from xeroxing my original pages, collating, binding, glueing, trimming the A5 pages etc. and it took us a 5-day working week, Monday – Friday – to do this – working intensively from 10 to 5 every day.<sup>61</sup>

O’Sullivan compares her artistic output to the value of a working week, and rightfully so. As a working class woman I understand exactly the justification required to convince family, friends and peers that creating poetry and the medium of distribution is very much “real” work. Implications about needing a proper job are both misguided and unfair. The only element sadly absent is any sort of salary. As a working class woman, O’Sullivan would know this aspect of our culture only too well. Not least in comparison to the definition of work that her parents would have known, as mentioned earlier. For her to highlight this point in an interview demonstrates the level at which this will have been part of her class consciousness.

The poet speaks about her work as though it were made of materials, which to an extent it really is, as O’Sullivan is very much an artist working with paints and other textures. However, she considers that which cannot be quantified by physical existence as an essential part of her creative output. She is interested in that which has not been uttered – voices that

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<sup>60</sup> Maggie O’Sullivan ‘THE WALKS’ taken from *DIVISIONS OF LABOUR* [Newcastle Upon Tyne, Galloping Dog Press, 1986.] p.11

<sup>61</sup> Olsen, p.211.

are, as she puts it herself, “other – than or invisible....or without privilege.”<sup>62</sup> Obviously, without privilege is of paramount concern to anyone considering class. But also, O’Sullivan’s ethic here extends to gender, as working class women will have been the unseen twice over on any mainstream map of history, and these concerns continue to the present day. Her praxis is not only inherently political, but personal. She defines her process to Redell Olsen as follows:

body intensive....bending, sticking, cutting, shaping marks, shaping sounds into the recorder, pain (t) ing and building – all inscriptions of my body’s breathing.<sup>63</sup>

Here O’Sullivan not only portrays herself a manual labourer, but also, a dancer, a decorator, and a musician even. It is heartening as a working class woman poet to read her twin writing poetry with all these elements of physical work so seamlessly. It is something we can relate both our lives and our passions to without the nagging voice of doubt, or the voice of class guilt that tells us we should be on a shop floor instead of trying to create art. This confirmation of being without apology, especially within the context of innovative poetry, is intrinsically important to O’Sullivan, as she states in an interview with Scott Thurston:

I think anybody who’s working in Britain who isn’t working within the referential, transparent language axis, is ostracised, invisible, shut out, unheard.<sup>64</sup>

This is a significant indictment of not just mainstream media, but also, the dominant poetry culture, the view that poetry should rhyme, be in couplets, verses or adhere to some other rigid formula. It not only functions on an intersectional level, but also, encompasses all those who seek to create experimental art of some variety. By using the word “axis,” O’Sullivan once more evokes the image of a map, as though there is a clear guide, a handbook to direct all budding writers that there is a certain way of doing poetry. And she is right, so many of these tomes exist, claiming to guide people on how to get published, what forms are deemed acceptable to use, and what direction in which to steer a poem, or not. For example, Happenstance Press feature a “do’s and don’ts” section for budding poets on their website, stating that budding poets should:

Avoid text language. Don’t use lower case i unless you can find a very good reason for doing so (except in the middle of words!)<sup>65</sup>

Of course, this would be acceptable if this piece was labelled as the personal preference of Happenstance Press, but it employs a tone of universality, using the “publisher/s” as the second person as opposed to first. This raises questions of accessibility for anyone who writes

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<sup>62</sup> Christine and David Kennedy: *women’s experimental poetry 1970 – 2010: body, time, locale*. [Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2013.] p.104

<sup>63</sup> Olsen, p.207.

<sup>64</sup> Maggie O’Sullivan and Scott Thurston: An Interview. Taken from *The Salt Companion to Maggie O’Sullivan*. [Cambridge, Salt Publishing, 2011.] p.245.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.happenstancepress.com/index.php/poetry-submission/dos-and-don-ts> [First accessed 22/11/2016]

in a non linear way. This could act to exclude any demographic, such as working class women, who may not have been party to traditional poetry as part of their education, and who seek to express themselves in an alternative fashion. Anyone who wishes to create genuinely innovative work can safely dismiss these instructions as restrictive nonsense. Clearly, conceptual poetry and the Flarf<sup>66</sup> phase passed Happenstance by.

To end on the influence on and shared value system between O'Sullivan's work and my own as working class women writing on psychogeography, I quote the following:

but am here  
 BLOOD LINES  
 on soil  
  
 the feet  
 hobbling  
 to the letter<sup>67</sup>

The poet is outside. She is contemplating not just her surroundings, but also the feeling of her feet on soil, not just an empty space, but one imbued with her ancestor's past and their untold stories. This is precisely one of the aims of the creative sequence that I have produced for this thesis. Not that I would ever lay claim to O'Sullivan's immense talent in this field. Her ability to combine ley lines, working class pictorial and gender issues through her innovative work is only, to my mind, matched by Monk. To emphasise this, I offer the following extract:

weeping is  
 woman as  
     haven  
 (all broken line)<sup>68</sup>

Three powerful points are made here. The first is the conjuration of the weeping woman. This works on two levels, not only as a flag to O'Sullivan's background as an artist (with *The Weeping Woman* being a Picasso painting) but also to Catholicism (as the predominant religion of O'Sullivan's Irish heritage) as the weeping women of Jerusalem is the Eighth Station of the Cross.<sup>69</sup> The second is woman as haven, the concept of woman as a safe place on a land delineation. If we consider society as patriarchy, then this is of clear relevance to women's psychogeography in its truly feminist approach. The last point is in the parenthesis, (all broken line) as this is exactly how women's history would appear if it was represented via mapping. It is disjointed, jumbled and discontinuous. Only certain aspects are available through photographs, census, and most prevalent of all, word of mouth. In this short sample, O'Sullivan has covered three vital points towards her own working class women's

<sup>66</sup> [http://artvoice.com/issues/v7n12/introducing\\_flarf.html](http://artvoice.com/issues/v7n12/introducing_flarf.html) [first accessed 1 March 2017]

<sup>67</sup> Maggie O'Sullivan: *In the House of the Shaman*, pg 21. [London, Reality Street, 1993.]

<sup>68</sup> Maggie O'Sullivan: THE DISPUTES taken from *DIVISIONS OF LABOUR* [ Newcastle Upon Tyne, Galloping Dog Press, 1986.] p.7

<sup>69</sup> <http://catholicism.org/ad-rem-no-266.html> [first accessed March 17 2017]

psychogeography, and it is exactly these sort of issues that I believe proponents of this field within innovative poetry should be aiming to debate further.

## Conclusion

The flag has been raised and the standard has been set. Through the work of O’Sullivan and Monk, there is a solid case for working class women’s psychogeography having a legitimate and tangible place in innovative poetry. But how can this work be continued? Working class women continue to face many obstacles in terms of representation in this particular creative orb. University fees are at an all time high. This restricts access to a potential flow of talent from this demographic. As mentioned in my introductory chapter, the reality of experimental poetry is that it is increasingly rooted in higher education. If poetry has enough of an image problem in terms of being difficult, then innovative work even more so.

From my own personal experience as a working class woman, the most common question from older generations is “do you get paid for that?” When the answer is no, confusion reigns as to why I would want to do something that does not provide money to pay the bills or put food on the table. Poetry is not what we are meant to do with our spare time. It is 2017, and half the time when asked where I am going by an inquisitive taxi driver, or what I am doing with the rest of my day by another mother on the school yard, I know better than to answer “to a poetry reading!” or “home, to write!” and expect them to respond favourably. The standard answers are “to meet friends” (which incidentally, is often true, I just decline to mention that my friends are other poets) or “just getting the house sorted.” In my culture, working class Liverpool, nobody wants to be perceived as weird, or identified as slightly odd. Especially among the other mothers on the school playground.

Psychogeography as a discipline has been entirely harmonious with my own class status. It is free to walk the streets of my own city. The most expensive it has proved so far is the cost of a bus fare. I can fit it seamlessly around school hours, and even cement it into the school run. However, as mentioned in my introduction, psychogeography’s public face is in danger of isolating any would be participants with its homogeneity. It often ignores any possibility that women are participating in urban walking, which is simply untrue. It cannot be denied that the male only display is offputting to anyone who is Other. There are different methods of counteracting this approach. In her book, *Flâneuse*, Lauren Elkin offers a definition of the flâneuse as follows:

not merely a male flâneur, but a figure to be reckoned with, and inspired by, all on her own.<sup>70</sup>

It is heartening to read psychogeography from a young woman’s perspective, and Elkin’s passion for the subject and praxis itself could offer much encouragement to female would-be urban walkers. Elkin also presents the fact that Will Self refers to psychogeographers as a

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<sup>70</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse* [London, Chatto&Windus, 2016] p.19



fraternity of middle aged men.<sup>71</sup> In the absence of any other gender in this definition, anyone who is not a middle age man is automatically excluded. Even if these men are working class, it still dismisses the participation of anyone who is non-male. If this is how psychogeography is characterised, then it is unsurprising that women may think twice before engaging with it.

However, Elkin's work is not without its own problems in terms of having a broader scope. The book covers Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London. To have lived in, and indeed travelled at leisure in, all of these cities, indicates a certain class status and disposable income. Elkin refers to her architect father at several intervals, and working class women are frankly unlikely to have shared this experience either, not to mention have been educated at the Sorbonne and Barnard College, a private and highly selective college in New York.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps Morag Rose, referenced earlier in the Maggie O'Sullivan chapter, has a more inclusive approach to offer nascent practitioners. Rose outlines the importance of heterogeneous participants as follows:

The potential for diverse groups of people to engage in experimental walking should be developed as it affords the opportunity to rupture the banal and disrupt the monotony of capitalism, (re) connecting with space, (re) mapping according to personal affect and (re)creating with multitudinous new stories.<sup>73</sup>

I would argue that these tenets could also be applied not just to experimental walking, but also to experimental poetry. If the entire genre is composed of people who walk, talk and look the same, then the amplitude and generative capacity for the work will be inevitably reduced. There is indeed, no worse criticism for a poet than "it all sounds the same." If psychogeography is to release its full potential as an active, flourishing discipline, then inclusion is vital. This is entirely relevant to all stretches of art, literature and creativity.

Social geographer Doreen Massey defined space as containing three elements: firstly, that it is the product of interrelations, secondly, as the sphere in which distinct trajectories co-exist, and thirdly, always under construction.<sup>74</sup> These points are a compelling guide to the conflicts and tensions that can arise in any writing that claims to be psychogeographical, poetry included. The first would suggest that for space truly to be described as such, then co-habitation must take place. Again, if we take this within the context of poetry, then it could be argued that for a true representation of a *dérive*, there must at be at least two visible narratives. This chimes well with Rose's praxis as outlined above. It is useless to provide an account of an environment that does not portray this element of difference. This also leads onto the second point, that not just the presence of separate stories, but also, their inclusion in any given account. The final point, that space is always being developed, points to the notion

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<sup>71</sup> Elkin, p.22

<sup>72</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnard\\_College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnard_College) [first accessed May 12,2017.]

<sup>73</sup> Morag Rose, "Confessions of an Anarcho-Flâneuse" taken from Tina Richardson: *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography* [London, Rowman&Littlefield, 2015.] p.161.

<sup>5</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* [London, SAGE, 2005] p.9.

of fluidity. This proposal is utterly congruent with innovative poetry and its penchant for that which is permanently in flux, as mentioned earlier via Charles Bernstein. Massey's rationale of what space is could be used as a blueprint for how psychogeography in poetry should be approached. Both Monk and O'Sullivan's work explore all three of these concepts to the full, and I feel that the work I have produced for the accompanying creative sequence strives to do this also.

A major influence on my approach is Audre Lorde. She was a pioneer on the subject of intersectionality, that is, the concept that women and different minorities have separate intersections in relation to power structures. For example, as the critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw outlines, a black woman is not only susceptible to sexism, but racism also.<sup>75</sup> To apply intersectionality to working class women, one could consider how we are vulnerable not only to sexism, but to class prejudice as well. I cannot count the amount of times I have felt like the only working class person in what has been deemed as a safe space for every other intersection. We face thoughtlessness and microaggressions too, from the fetishisation of our accents, to mockery of our dialect, to puritanical vetting of how much we swear, to the close and careful monitoring of exactly how much we drink at the poetry reading and remembering to tell us we were so drunk! the next day. Nobody told us that it was a game and there were certain social rules. Or that when people are laughing, it is not always with you, but rather at you and how loud or scary you are, just for articulating your passions without inserting conversational footnotes.

Writings such as Lorde's *Sister Outsider* appear to be more progressive than a large chunk of single issue feminists who believe themselves to be radical now. One of the major schisms in 21<sup>st</sup> century feminism is how to include the trans community within feminist dialogue. It is the view of some (who are labelled as "Rad-Fems") that they should not be included at all, with feminist journalists such as Julie Burchill and Julie Bindel all expressing vociferous opposition to their involvement. This has caused untold amounts of pain and fracture within the women's rights movement, on both sides. Yet Lorde was immensely critical of any such dismemberment, stating "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."<sup>76</sup> Indeed, this approach is entirely adopted by the New York based Audre Lorde Project, who define themselves as a community organising centre for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming (LGBTSTGNC) People of Colour Communities."<sup>77</sup> Like the organisation itself, I believe recognising how each intersection has a unique point of entry into a shared dialogue is entirely in keeping with the teachings of Lorde. To my own purpose, this is the position of the female working class, and how we can contribute our own understandings, theories and critique of society, the economy and politics. Indeed, one of the criticisms of the Women's Equality Party is that it has so far failed to reach out to both women of colour and the working class. Sandi Toksvig has even said of herself and other founding members that they

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<sup>75</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency\\_of\\_intersectionality](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality) [first accessed 24 April 2017]

<sup>76</sup> Audre Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us* [London, Sheba, 1987.]

<sup>77</sup> <http://alp.org/about-alp> [first accessed 16 January 2017]

are “probably the worst people to start a political party....we’re too white, too middle class. You could cut your tongue on my consonants.”<sup>78</sup> While Toksvig is clearly being humorous, there is an unfortunate resonance to her words. Whereas Lorde, on the other hand, as a writer and teacher, was able to address the various aspects of her multifaceted existence, not just being a woman, but also being black, being lesbian, and being working class. Her thoughts on the latter continue to prove revelatory to those who are trying to carve an existence for themselves within an artistic medium that appears to be dominated by the middle class. In her essay, *Age, Race, Class and Sex*, Lorde says of poetry that of all the art forms:

poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labour, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts in the hospital pantry, on the subway and on scraps on surplus paper.<sup>79</sup>

The implication here is that poetry can be done not only on scraps of extra paper, but also, scraps of extra time that can be snatched from a day of housework, paid labour, and childcare.

Through the medium of experimental poetry, the female writer can go beyond the rigidity of social and literary convention. We are able to produce, as Christine and David Kennedy put it, different or new types of bodies. We can utilise new voices, the heard, the unheard, the non-heard. The poet can distance themselves from “the roles of the anguished “I” and the victimised “we.”<sup>80</sup> This variety of poetry appears to have enjoyed a renaissance through the gurlisque<sup>81</sup> movement over the past decade. It sells. Readers are intrinsically curious about the intimate lives of others it seems. The bestsellers list of any major bookstore will contain at least one form of memoir or autobiography. People get kicks and thrills from the legitimised peering at another’s diary entry, and the more lascivious the better. Sex sells, there is nothing new in this. In her essay, *On Breaking Up With The Gurlisque* (not that we were ever going steady) the poet Elizabeth Treadwell talks of her displeasure about a flyer for a Gurlisque event, organised by Arielle Greenberg. The poster is described as showing a thin white woman ‘covered in whipped cream, eyes dull in commercialized seduction.’<sup>82</sup> Treadwell then goes further on to say:

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<sup>78</sup> Helen Raymond: *The challenges of non-partisan politics*. 09/01/2017.

<https://www.thefword.org.uk/2017/01/womens-equality-party-conference/> [first accessed 16 January 2017]

<sup>79</sup> Audre Lorde, ‘Age, Race, Class and Sex.’ Taken from *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. [New York, Crossing Press, 1984.] p.116.

<sup>80</sup> David&Christine Kennedy: *women’s experimental poetry in britain 1970-2010: body, time&locale*. [Liverpool University Press, 2013]. p.15.

<sup>81</sup> Defined by Lara Glenum, an American gurlisque poet, as female artists who “ taking a page from the burlesque, perform their femininity in a campy or overtly mocking way.” It includes poets such as Chelsey Minnis, Arielle Greenberg and Ariana Reines. <http://jacketmagazine.com/40/glenum-gurlisque.shtml> [first accessed 22 November, 2017]

<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth Treadwell: *On Breaking Up With The Gurlisque* (not that we were ever going steady.) <https://www.tumblr.com/search/gorgon%20poetics> [First accessed November 22, 2017]

we all must live every day in this world, survive and create anew. Let's not put this mind fuckery onto undergrads, male or female. I bet this flyer seems corny and mom-ish to them anyway; let them DIY.<sup>83</sup>

Treadwell is adamant that this genre of writing that places the burlesque, the camp and the idea of selling sex as somehow ironic has little in common with the values of a truly radical poetry. Therefore, in this same vein, to opt for the innovative, something that reaches out further, or to put it another way, goes off course, beyond the primal, yet simultaneously to the very root of something more, is to consciously reject any concept of capital behind writing. We are made of more than this. We live in politically precarious times. Women's lives, history and heritage are being destroyed by the continuous pursuit of aggressive capitalism, protectionism and Government policy that is anti-working class and anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, anti-disabled and implicitly anti-feminist. We need more than pussy poems that cater for the heterosexual male gaze to counteract this.

It is perhaps notable that Monk and O'Sullivan rarely touch upon sexuality in their work (with the exception of considering how it is used against the women in Monk's *Interregnum*.) Put simply, both poets have so much more to say than the sum of their parts, so to speak. They write as women, unapologetically, but also, as women who do not belong to the elite. Both poets draw upon the surroundings that they have grown up in, and also, grown into, wandered through, and imagined. While other female poets may choose to make sex and sexuality the very epicentre of their work, for Monk and O'Sullivan, it is clearly secondary to their socio political concerns as far as their poetry is concerned. It is with this kind of inspiration in mind that I pursue my own working class psychogeographical poetics.

The relation of stories, anecdotes, history and artefacts also invites me to question my own work, both ethically and in terms of its accuracy: how can I be sure that my ancestors are exactly as I am portraying them in my poems? My answer would be that people are (and indeed, language is) multi faceted and complex, and I have endeavoured to combine the stories of the dead with the impressions of the living in a fair and sensitive fashion, while simultaneously inviting various interpretations through the medium of what I hope is innovative and experimental writing praxis. A large figure in my sequence is my great grandmother Lilian. While accounts of her from primary sources are harsh, it is important to recognise her hardship, both socio economically and as a woman who lost a child to a disease in the wrong place, at the wrong time, in 1920s slum housing, in Liverpool. Tracing her steps through the city via several *dérives* and extensive research of the areas in question have provided both connection and empathy on a personal level. It has also provided pause for thought in light of how women are historically portrayed, often to the detriment of truth if they were anything other than subservient and compliant.

To return to psychogeography, my creative sequence for this study has included not so much old ground, but that which is barely recognisable as such. The former slum housing sites that my grandparents grew up in are now sites for private student apartments. I cannot

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

enter the land on which my ancestors played as children without a pass code. Other sites, such as Vauxhall, Old Ford Cemetery in Litherland and Yew Tree Cemetery in West Derby, are on sites that I have never visited before. These poems, and also those that are located outside Liverpool, in the interval section, followed the exact template of psychogeographical adventure that Tina Richardson helpfully outlines in *Walking Inside Out*:

Get off when you feel you are far enough away from home that the area is unfamiliar.  
Begin your walk here.<sup>84</sup>

Richardson also illustrates that psychogeography does not have to be clinical, as it is fundamentally based upon the subjectivity of the walker.<sup>85</sup> This chimes perfectly with poetry, which is nothing if not absolutely subjective. One person's shipwreck is another person's treasure chest. For some it is both. I have endeavoured to present the city of Liverpool as such.

I would like to end this thesis on Audre Lorde's iconic quote:

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.<sup>86</sup>

There is an implicit knowledge that once working class women have stepped into academia, they have effectively stepped into the master's house. Now more than ever, universities are not designed with the needs of those who are financially challenged as priority. While it is certainly true to say that more working class people are entering university than ever before, this does not account for the disproportionate levels of debt that render subsequent career and further study opportunities unavailable to several working class students. Leaving a Bachelor's degree in financial difficulty makes a Masters degree and/or PhD completion (essential for most academic careers such as being a creative writing lecturer) unrealistic at best, wreckless at worst. Indeed, this entire thesis would have been impossible without complete scholarship funding, which I was extremely lucky to receive. But how many more working class women are denied a voice in innovative poetry, not because of their lack of talent, but rather, their lack of money to integrate themselves fully within academia, which is where the bulk of experimental poetry resources and knowledge reside? Psychogeography can be seized by working class women as a template to tell our stories, and to share our deepest feelings about our surroundings. But to join a community that is sometimes literally behind brick walls and sequestered on campuses is far more difficult. The world of experimental poetry needs to look within itself to find a way to become more inclusive towards a group that, while entirely prominent in everyday life, is somewhat absent from its events and publications. If not, we may miss out on the next generation of Monks and O'Sullivans, which would without doubt be a sincere loss to us all. We are not just cleaners, cooks, dinner ladies, classroom assistants. We are poets too, with so much to bring and much more to say.

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<sup>84</sup> Richardson, p.1

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>86</sup> Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House.' Taken from *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. [New York, Crossing Press, 1984.] p.112.

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**floss**

**sarah crewe**

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**preface (portmanteau)**

idiomatic tongue twister: *ken dodd's dad's dog's dead*

knotty ash exists mythical

millennium roundabouts suede floorlength

to dry clean would be erasure&

contrary to purpose opposite to praxis rewind:

death is fresh but sites are dormant

covered concealed foundation brushed

ivory honey vanilla lily white

maps&faces blended contoured new shade

skintone /roads ricochet bounce back

psychogeographical shotput discus throw

hangman cover girl hospital mortuary

discuss artifice flick: a woman-thing

fling a dice microphone

*flick's dad's dad's dog's dead*

her name was floss

canine inspector

brother replacer: this is yr life

one whole page: numbered dog days

numb or non cognizant not once

did he call it squalor not once

slum living destitution cricket bones

adventure                      beloved sister

the model of veronica   size three

size six   shadow trace   job search

cotton candy   photo booths   yr best years

bus routes   signal commonality   visiting angels   how did we get here

we came through marriage   eviction   social cleansing

rent stamps   a flick book   in which

the stick man wears a skirt   is spherical

absorbs stories   horror   gender based

missing girls&broken fathers

distant mothers   gutted sons&

so on&   sewn on grief on sleeves on paper

*flick's dad's dad's dead*

manifest   wilderness   eyes closed

stinging   poetry   a ditch   a soapy bowl

hands rinsed   bleached   scoured

mouth abrasive   brass like   ship's bell

melancholy   call out   the scrabble

for remnants   miscellany   anything related

from the sea floor   trinkets   letters

rusticles   blue auburn spikes   composition

scratch   silver dust   scratch   skin

scratch   floss   both flick and loss in flight

in fight mode   barking   hear me at dawn

in birdsong   through river fog   traffic horns

suspect ice cream vans   localisms

megaphone dropkicks   footstamps   the word *shan't*

the word shall   shall we dance

shall we write   shall we flick out a pen

shall we talk about loss   the personal

the social   shall we

**lichen**

it begins here

gale force – if creeping ivy had hands

waves a river with an ankle fetish

walking mermaids

the shadow of belfast

stena line

white star line

inclement in shawls

swaddled by fate&

bad weather

birth line

heart line

marriage line

crossed wires rather

twisted gnarled

romanticised

how many babies can a river lose

how many times can slavery =

a wide eyed shiver

a grimace

how many hearses

overthrown urns

half flash fiction

half forgotten

growth symbiotic

poverty/tragedy

contamination from

outside disturbances

river births

second wives

the bitter cold

the tired trope

pathetic fallacy

foaming at the mouth

/grief

/seizure

/trauma

it is dark

deadly affirmative

a permanent wreath

a crown

call me queen

call me ms crewe

a multipurpose veil

a suffragette scarf

a headdress

a head chock full

chocker

#itsliverpool

bare trees and a brazen flag

arms folded

bottom lip

all bleeding

all bitten

if a river had hands

if a river could plead

remember me

appropriately

**valentine**

freshly dead &nearly  
 smokestack the site of jude  
 lost causes flat caps  
 the desecration of gregson's well  
 past the necropolis descend slowly  
 steeply flatfoot sharply horseshoe  
 a bridal gift smoking apparition  
 did you ever wear your hair up  
 release the clip shake the debris  
 the building as a wedding cake  
 poppies an annual bouquet  
 eleven eleven love leave  
 sugar spun trees six blue tits  
 six boys terence /lemuel/francis  
 billy/alec/bobby: dodge diphtheria epidemic  
 dead brothers not so lucky  
 must not trivialise sirens  
 neon reminders any blood clots in the family?  
 no clots just fleeting absence

**rat in the kitchen**

he wonders now  
rocking his chair  
should he have built  
a boat

Lorine Niedecker

what i am doing here is irrelevant. what they are doing here, when the ghosts of the ancestors are prowling/dancing/squeezing their laundry dry is really the question. hold a mirror up. spit clean. these prefab factories will dissolve. haircare is not eternal, ask norah. graffiti spells prophet, speaks mission. LC in yellow paint. the phantom S is deeply moved. the street has collapsed, vanished. dissolved, like sherbet in a copper urn. like the sand on the cast iron shore. he should have built a boat. mutiny on the Dominion Monarch. cannot steer through turnstiles, pass through barcodes. to the car park attendant: i have no car but this is my land. to the barmaid: *this used to be slum housing.....my grandfather....her eyes glaze*. to the gull at my feet: i see you.

always do



**emporium**

an explosion of colour chintz excess punctuation

old girls feign horror: the generosity of other

a centrepiece: blackpool

the café is a glasshouse stone resistant

millennium dissidents: it is 1989

all about textures girlhood

yr grandmother's habitual shoplifting pick n'mix ethics

dolls named joyce women called maisie

chequered saturday pink silver curls

diamond sofas london road: a scouse pastiche of capital

pretend play toy money plastic that sparkles

the ancestral hall of mirrors shorter: white rose march

material matriarchal under arches

arms linked the fragments of a social life

the remains of a fabric discontinued

the insistence: she looks like her father

*doesn't she*

**mülleimer**

go throw your plan in the purple bin – Jürgen Klopp, post match interview, April 14<sup>th</sup> 2016.

the politics of trash

the poetics of waste

how to identify social housing: the

doors

postbox red a safer shade of black

a temporary white bottle green

bottle soundscapes

not the sound of stars twinkling

the crash of last night's bettering plans

utilise the double t sound

far from mancurian

far from meadows

forests

the idyllic

jürgen: observe how the stadium

juts out from the landscape

look: victorian

terraces

defy the shape

how the new build

pierces the skyline

a dorsal fin collapsing

as it thrashes over parkland

over council prophecy: a better anfield is coming

did a thesis on walking

teach you how to wait?

how to interpret the scaffold as trees



**concentric**

the circular within the circular  
 spectacular a circus of tightrope living  
 of somersaults september rainbows  
 as though we deserved them pre storm  
 fluctuation pink violet believe this  
 number six breathes lizards sand dogs  
 the ghost of gentrified living edwardian  
 discontinued no bourgeois honeytrap  
 all spheres clammed shut jackknife  
 bouquet of broken razors  
 the ingenuity of magpies glittering  
 a flutter of brackets  
 a red gold rioja safehouse forcefield  
 contains felis rattus lepidoptera  
 taxonomy: watership down for ward  
 66  
 all creatures come out night  
 all white all unwashed all feral  
 neon blue dusk patrol  
 housing (dis) association  
 it all becomes relative normalised  
 inchoate flux falling

**middle fifth**

awake: industrial drill

over breakfast the cobbles appeared the cats are fixated on straitlaced ghosts  
four legged mediums crystal ball skulls in an 1890s parlour room

the spectre of football gentry a bearded dragon on a windowpane stationary  
the irony of a real life reptile is observed  
blame the americans joe anderson the 1980s

switch

soubriquet

switch

circumference

switch

riverside

matching the seaweed in the entry midnight mermaids with scales of shellac

unseen by daylight reflect on glass fortress such ugly self defence

we will not stoop to barbed wire

this is home not alcatraz

pitch imperfect

yet a wolf fifth

would be too dramatic

side streets

fissures that could still bloom

boats under construction

the right houses the wrong dolls

fluidity will save us

from cardboard box living

from peach and beige

from homogenous rot  
wrapped up as modernity

primary colours act as protest

jagged plum curtains sing no surrender

**gloria**

glorious. too good for tenement living. platinum, ash, streaked, memory slip. little yellow teapot, lift up the lid, multiple voices, hear them steep, whistling, the hard hum of of a class 'a' substance in festive voile form. gloria did not teach young children how to read newspapers. gloria did not say precocious. gloria's son said, that kid is a walking dictionary. gloria's daughter said her dad was a tramp, poor georgie. a brown leather jacket, a tonsure as a hairstyle. the first going cheap the second as contrition gloria had a kitchen radio. ah gloria, we all did. pop chart countdown tuppence jumper felt tip hair, undeterred voice, gloria listened. gloria marvelled at song on a stone cold landing. gloria's mum lived in a champagne pink flat. auburn hair, housecoat eternal. first name mrs. please tell gloria about the dislike of lemonade. please tell gloria, motorway access does not indicate social mobility. please tell gloria, the new town is not dynasty . please tell gloria, that the shoulder pads will not cushion against lack of cohesion please tell gloria no amount of nail polish will release the gate please tell gloria the block is locked indefinitely

**dark like grandma**

placing the lil into lilith the medea a rejection worse than death  
 the son who died and lived and died proper  
 the hearse is now a food bank adjoining streets titanic calamity  
 the air is pinched imagined yr features starched  
 head bowed thought train: arborescent resigned&vertical  
 these streets are lakes static foreboding without welcome  
 he said: she would see you were ours  
 he said: she would let you in ambivalence suspicion of scarlet lily beetles  
 toxic to cats cold shoulder shawls not corsets no belle epoch  
 the beautiful dresses excluded no gibson girl all mary ellen s shape in absentia  
 fury delayed by a century reverberation: home and bargain car park  
 silver hair odd stockings clasp handbag bird woman tactics for L6  
 easier than feeding kids cheaper than hair dye peroxide irrelevant  
 dark like grandma declared at family parties a passport in black ribbed concealed  
 invoke lilian woods pigmentation as a portal  
 lilian woods in defiance of age daylight deadlight eternal without flowers  
 there can be no grave without a grave there can be no death  
 white lilies as trinity lilian as memento plaster cast imprinted  
 in spite of being long gone forever dead imagined as apology  
 conjured as remorse dismissed as gratuitous it is unbecoming &farcical  
 to hold a grudge against the ancestors she who birthed nine  
 she who lost four she who rose from a sea of statistics she who disowned herself  
 found again the upper arms of a sailor read mam or mother  
 reluctance is futile lilian your descendants are persistent relentless

dark like grandma

**laurence**

1.

welcome      little uncle

li'ul

lil lil lil lilian      death flower      dog-violet

phantom dog barking      floss

shepherd's purse

mother's heart

1922      west derby western

subdistrict      standard

after the storm      soapsuds

l is for libra      october

la      la      *alright la'*      for lad      for little boy

u      specifically      u      u      r      so beautiful      to her

en      end      ended      on the poor law cusp      a dead end street

c-e      celandine      see he      see 'e 'ad no chance      bacterial

ragged      rag and bone man&amp;

man/men

is a killer

june      1929      six years      eight months

less than 48 hours      pear shaped      l shaped

jigsaw: school time      contagious      love in isolation

little lau: with a W      wrong spelling      *we don't care*

would not bring him back      gone      his father's red book

his mother's last

the space a boy fills \_\_\_\_\_



2.

choir of catalan angels aqui! aqui! aqui!

tangerine coated counting floral streets

crocus snowdrop pansy

off to see the uncley dead the road of the living

not even a wave a reminisce or invitation

drop gaze delinquents child murderer vibes

here a mental cortege tram route

litherland interminable steel sidetracked

our little l is out of sight out of mind

dare to admonish her:

too far lilian too far

growling a virtual séance

ford cemetery arcadian anonymous

*all li'ul fellas love cars*

she reasoned

pink frost the shadow of the cross

commemoration for the unmarked

requiesce in pace the big boy

in the shared grave [public/pauper/poor pop]

a dislocated breath in recording in progress crooked trees alveoli

wellington boots shared soil this is the closest we get

to each other

have ever been

to each other

welcome li'ul uncle into the blood

**reflection (berwick street)**

after Paula Gunn Allen's Grandmother

a gene pool is not the universe

it is: a split surface glass cobwebs a substructure

beating a path invisible

non tangible thread

stitched inside: a walking tapestry

a best sunday suit a crossbreed

stuck record

the year of sergeant pepper check out

sudden in spite of decline

someone tell the residents:

christmas is over

street sign of rust and rupture wire hexagons

concave mirrors intense focus

incoming traffic dental records

women who pray vs women who smoke

historical alignment meets baggage

a shopping route go local

a gateway gold pointed collapse

hybrid images weave in weave out

forget to breathe

forward backward embroidered

and braided continuous

perpetual great grandmother

neverending

**kensington fields - other**

(a short walk from lilian)

we find ourselves before the grace  
of a blind eye  
**reddened** street **light** the **dissonance**  
the **strictest** dictum of the faithful  
*me mum's no prozzy* truth: ask the seven demons  
ask jesus christ himself of  
the myriad of ways in which  
they scrub their hands of the north end &  
women who walk in zig-zags  
death by male entitlement  
death in turquoise baby pink tribute  
red umbrellas spiralling silence  
voiceless aphonic recalled  
recorded in press cutting frenzy  
in nineteenth all encompassing historical shorthand  
scoured steps police tape: crux decussata  
the slanted occult the desolate familiars  
mummy aunty sister  
maxine anne marie hanane

**hufeisensiedlung (hoof-eisen-seed-lung)****hoof**

on the hoof and off the cuff

livestock

gathered

the skirts of a stockyard

a scheme

shawls to the front

high heels to the front

top hats

posterior

a background humming sound

mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmunicipal

metropolitan

a modern perimeter

fringes

the advent of curls

thirties glamour

scouse italian

the darling buds of block 'D'

demand fresh air suntraps verandas and curvature

settlements assurances

to remain on the right side

of a dichotomy

the wage earners as opposed to

the destitute

the side of the horseshoe

closest to the horse

that is: the carthorse

champions irrelevant

the only medals of value: holy name for the jesuits

st.joseph for the immigrants

skillfully executed

congratulations

the masses

the mammas

are happy \_\_\_\_\_

**eisen**

a siren (i) past life regression the concept of recycled souls to say of a child: (i)  
 she's been here before survived the blitz (i) tunnel vision (i) remember the trees  
 as saplings the exhibition 1948 the consecration 1967 the papal visit:1982  
 pray for me norah the clasped hand of a polish pope pray for him for myrtle  
 gerard caryl gardens those who have no repose (i) evacuations wreckage  
 the mystery car on the coliseum floor the forbidden top landing giddy heights  
 the dare (i) the five tier sugar stack piped decorations the kid who refuses  
 to leave the deflated bouncy castle (i) the deleted walkway the depleted  
 community compliment: devotion to the past (i) a human spirograph party hat  
 a centrepiece decades cascade whirling the icing on the cake the eisen  
 in a horseshoe hufeisensiedlung so euro so retro so karl marx-hof  
  
 so pleased to meet (you/it) was a pleasure

**seed (flick-in-the-bullring)**

who's there?

eight steps

all giddy girlish flick/lift

the outstretched hands raised

mock/shock artificial elevation as if

as if any kid could forgo a helter skelter

a slope of moss algae a shipwreck the same pipes funnels

all first class passengers

none of you are stokers

all of you intruders

running on deck verboten but fun

imagining a skeleton crew a glut of irish surnames

not yr local legend this is the bullring

the last vestige of a pre war utopia

yr daddy could not buy this

sold out turfed

retired racehorses

yr private stables

cctv superfluous to citizens

flick/hiss modified replicate&multiply

firethorn cotoneaster hawberries it grows it grows on loop

punctured balloons inauspicious colour clash

red/green mistle thrush

train of thought echoed

locomotive

no departure

## lung

and so it was butchered – the bronchi torn apart  
like a fight. too young for bronte disco  
too old for false consciousness. barricaded -  
but still broken up. dispersed. a city council  
plays mary poppins. shelter for investors -  
breadcrumbs for birds. rats with wings.  
roman catholic breeding patterns. done  
because we are too menny. must not  
embellish. concave and depressed.  
so many boys. so many older boys.  
too many cigarettes. too much substance.  
the last coach out went pumpkin shaped -  
protest in glass slippers. inconsequential.  
blind to it. lamb busy bleating. peeling  
paint. merry skipping. to be small is  
to be oblivious. the space is a whirligig.  
cavernous – voice imitation. blackbirds  
on a ballroom floor. still dancing. still  
the point of contact. membrane attached.  
still a sneaky shortcut. happy childhood.  
still a beacon. still a bonfire. still standing.  
still the bully                                       still home.

74A

upper

how to revitalise: add measurements to street names

lower

court dwelling so cute

so rad so working class chic antediluvian alignment

delightful

caravans prayer vans

the ghosts of christian niche congregations

glassite christadelphians

lost boys stray dogs tin can kittens fireworks

today silence: the unthere the undone the under-done

the layer cake minus three tiers

imaginary friends imaginary wealth an actual sibling

a little princess black velvet pink sash

bears in turquoise a reading school

all such wonderful militants

prodigy living recite:

the herald of free enterprise capsized on the night of march 6<sup>th</sup> 1987

especially cold the flat flooded for a second time that same year

the child made a lego model of the big ship she named

TOWNSEND THORESEN

in red like all things of permanence

negligence

controlled atrophy

submersion



**25B**

the bear's leg scorched a bronze bolt on black fur  
 too close yr granddaughter's heart reduced to menthol  
 cinders scented jumpers chanel factoids &breathe

standing in the shadow of a yellow fiesta  
 for anti-climb read anti cry read girly anti social  
 the awkward silence in which psychogeography

exposed yr very own episode literary filler  
 who do you think you are? compressed living  
 private property succession of rat traps

live wires reported open electrics  
 mortality realised internally  
 meaning: you are old not seven

you are gone & permit holders only  
 occupy this space & mascara only  
 prevents a torrent & medication only

stems niagara falls bill murray style  
 now compose collect yrself the ghost  
 of under 12 pulls so heavy

**flick/trowbridge street**

for the Bronte community centre, L3 5NB

avoiding voxpop on honeybees      nursery for bluebirds

the site of a twice split eyebrow &

prevention of flick on fleek      on point

compass      maritime wheel      to steer a street through

contraction      dilation      mission house

music box      many paint/plant mishaps

watercolours      two girls in a kitchen: the north is the time

top of the dial      the south      to/past/to

past      to dredge through sediment      silt

a seabed community      abridged ecosystem      slashed coral

hacked but thriving      yellow typography

bronte      not yr literary sisters      a cover

a dustjacket      a cunning disguise      inner city safehouse

academy bail-out      & still      it glitters

if a building could give a nodding wink

unwritten history      emotional discord      empty dancefloor

taps shrouded/shut off      secluded

factory romance      secret handshakes

door codes      daydreams      collective aspiration

made in L3

**lime street (generic girl poet)**

chock full of humour and explicit sexuality  
 the descent is laden with innuendo and vice  
 it must mean something trains are deeply  
 unprovocative banal shall we try tunnels?  
 dear sirs i have read my lacan a little girl  
 dreams of big red engines swarms of bees  
 subterranean plague translate: the child  
 mourns lack of phallus steam locomotive  
 too young for confession on the cusp  
 of sainthood her grandfather said that  
 seven was the age and the violets meant  
 she had a kind heart may she always  
 and may she always be true to it this  
 interpretation: family social history sharks  
 urban walking socialism feminism gender  
 dear sirs i have read my judith butler  
 violence in yr restrictive poetic (bodily)  
 forms repeated stylization of all vagina  
 poets within a highly rigid regulatory  
 frame rail tracks ladders in tights  
 virgin franchise a scathing critique of  
 prostitution maggie may's concourse  
 exploitation ha ha ha please write  
 on legs not stations please admit  
 the accent cracks you up so kind of you  
 to register forgive me i have no matches

to sell     no shawl to wear lasciviously  
 but we can talk about   bessie braddock  
 and how she drowned that welsh village  
 or we could sigh with relief   about the  
 landslide not bursting   the railey walls  
 above     my nerdish heart would have  
 broken    is she talking about her Gwa  
 again?   yes   you will yawn as i recall  
 he had to tempt   my aunty down from  
 her death   with a charming voice and  
 sweets                     embankment signage  
 the dead streets             the live wires  
 the hen parties             the lucky visitors  
 the poem                    as a comedy sketch  
 what to say:     the station is a circus  
 tent   a kitchen sink   a bed a brothel  
 what not to say:            the station  
 is a microcosm              of a city  
                                   i'm in love with

**third exit (anfield cemetery)**

I've been learning to drive.

My whole life, I've been learning.

Oh, Norah!

Arcade Fire: In The Backseat.

dahlia

burst luminous colour balloons daydreams immortality  
 arm scratches signify terminus  
 vapour trails cut adrift from lancashire  
 hills that frame a high rise

daylily

the promise of minxx escorts

from a phonebox red menace women who wash

scrub

symptomatic of absorbing dirt inhale digest purge

scrub

patri/matrilineal funeral routes norah: the terror of horses

equivalent to death feather plumes snatched from the

burlesque patent leather harness no cheap show

no delusions of grandeur just death for death's sake

without psychotics without dual meaning

from courts to dirt and so on

shedding

measured in handspans

tremor

the height of a hearse the lost infants of mary jane&

the last of the proud macs enduring nasal shapes

secret pharmacy handshakes hardfaced

princess complex cherry blossom ashes

headless seraphim flower torsos

melodrama befitting chaos demon only child

in the red shoes cross legged another one

reflector

a cherubic boy in the light of the ancestors

reflector

	his mother	a mimeograph	of hers	of his/hers	
	the dark/the dyed/the deathly			the not dead	
	the no thanks	the waxwork		the parlour	
	the top lid			gilded crucifix	
	the former picture house		the big bad signpost		
	film star	static		porcelain	
her face	the faithless	the not please	the backseat		her face
	oh	[the endless pause]		norah	

**interlude (prole holiday doc)****a cautionary tale**

haven seaside squad the trajectory is set: polly doll oversized eyelashes

archetypal hair

swinging raspberry laces cheekbones exaggerated

a stepford puppet lady rictus meanwhile:

anxious the literal elephant in the room

fluffball pink pindown locks matron blue sister act

polly asks: does everyone have a best friend?

anxious waves a petrified trunk wishes herself invisible

we have all been there two left feet voice: perishable item

iceberg lettuce limp enter: barney

yr all girl band is co-opted by a boy/bear who wants to name you himself

found/discovered = owned&branded

ask farmers ask cattle herders ask daisy/babe the blue ox/lulubelle III

how to dodge steak house avoid meat content

anxious glances sideways clocks exit

will not end days as one-woman vaudeville

will not feature in diversity manual

or be grateful oh so grateful

for the exposure the portfolio shots or even the six pound cocktail

poking fun at her waistline jelly belly

anxious drops a bombshell:

this is not (a) fancy dress

**a dog named euro (seton sands)**

lilac pincer

a mutilation

**GATHERING**

shell cluster

silver whippet

canine glitterstick

skin&amp;bones&amp;

excess nuzzling

EURO dog-tag

east lothian

social fund beneficiary

snatch luminous sphere snatch global snatch

FETCH this stick with which beaten

beach head barren

booted without will

or resurgence foot slash absent pearl ridges

tethered fastened to a beach

copper=ersatz babbling brook [BOY] crackle algae

popping candy pied wagtail

swirly whirly

a portion of oystercatchers the correct use of supper

[RECLAMATION] the boats of leith

the crystal sea the three

the four shout EURO fido fidelis pebbledashed whitewashed

impossibly woodchipped

all our houses

all our poll slips

all our internal

class ID cards



## funstars

the poet has placed three hearts on a page. he has named them: immortality/subjugation/ambition. what this means: we lost at bingo. purple dabbers make for pretty faces. immortality looks tired&shocked. subjugation looks like a one eyed swine. ambition has false eyelashes. the room is a hotchpotch of death tattoos. dates in abundance. walking headstones. two swallows on each foot. she cuts me off at "my grandfather" and finishes "was a sailor." the girl sat in front lost her dad at 42. her family drink lager through a straw. a mhairi black doppelganger cases the joint. will she be our queen? funstar has the same name as my mother. the teeth tell a different story. addiction at the minimum. irn bru. dancing the skag fantastic. we shouldn't judge. distant cousins etc. a man with downs (19) gives approximately no shits for societal convention. he came to burn the house down. *do you know where you're from?* asks the failed drama student. kill him mouths the failed journalist. each news story 300 words. choose the angle: ban this sick prole filth from our kids. listen in horror. eyeless whites breeding scheme. deviant guinea pigs. patriotic lighters: a saltire. family values: caravan living. sharing chips. tales of the old house. the three hearts are people. the boy is an emoticon: SMILE. on camera. smile: documented working class. oh so lucky. the boy cries laughing. this is yr heritage. ticket value: priceless.

**seaside girls (dublin 12)**

blatant    *i'm not*    *i won't*    brickbat    out of order vs bang to rights  
 utterly affirmative    these acts of resistance    young woman    romanticised  
 the refusal to take instruction    *i'm not goin' anywhere*    in spite of history  
 goldenbridge    abandonment    multiple cruelty    girlhoods switched  
 our lady    queen of heaven    we offer you cheap jewellery    childhoods  
 the offshoots    bluebell    demand    occupation    free transport    equality  
*why don't you ask them*    interchange    power    in gender relations  
 banshee republic    objectification of paddy and seán    in body ink  
 in utero    our lady    of the wayside    travellers    familiar with  
 post war housing aesthetic    acquainted with    tell tale    track lines  
 certain flutters    agitation    pressed up against    quaysides    intentions  
 part time off licence shifts    ponytails    the bottle    the audacity  
 broad daylight    a compo claim    for the grandmothers  
 servility meaning:    you owe us a favour    a lifetime    a living

**west curvee (june 2017)**

curveball off in a motorcar double decker

the passengers create a newsreel lights: a summer sky camera: cross river closed circuit  
television action: dissection of tragedy via local means storey count 24 23 1980s  
everton brow tore them down tear them down city council police cuts static azure

the border

west kirby seaside town the gentrified dee the anarchist mersey best kept in sunlight  
cryptic ice cream flavours *elleanor's surprise* rathbone's ghost patron saint of family  
allowance catalogue payments women citizens supermarket role switch car park

liberals

matching magnums property swap pigeon chests: outwards gonna take the 137  
magnanimous so benevolent so fucking boring small world small world except  
if you live in it private beaches weekend offenders safety nets from a great height

marine lakes

sunday streaming favourite band t-shirts flotillas pear drop caudal fins baby yachts  
horizontal stripes: earn them flagrant disregard of no swimming signs feet in the water  
fresh resolve endgame we need an armada white working class diminishes all of us

all of them

**vauxhall and i**

the dérive constant interruption of cheap funerals

contradiction exchange hooves for motorcade

everton valley kerb crawling deterrent

minus graphics plus nordic model inclination

sharp left pirate approach to darkness

dank stairs elegaic bird songs black in top hats

devoid of direction intent stacked up

the river/the rail/the public housing refuge

canal corridor promises an obsolete sign

a spectacle rattan hearts speak memorial

padlocked another son lost mistaken i.d.

the barge cuts through flower relics photographs

always and forever/local communities

tired juxtaposition merseyside improved

corporation playground sign splintered faded

a dangling rope a snap election boundary murmur

dead bluebells limp at redbrick feet

the church is an island with borders

no gods no masters just pier head housing

cilla black celebrity openings bridges

fly posters invitations remember fenians

the anarchist bookfair sisters uncut

the ghost of county mayo catherine sam

paranormal quivering the shakes the claims

the mock tudor flats   the pioneers   deserted  
worker apparitions   untouchable   non contact

the wrong type of plenitude   skips overflow  
profound disappointment   not a single zombie  
or banshee   no washerwoman   no street clown  
singing whisky on a sunday at bevington bush

no song credits from the irish   bonfire remains  
the opening of cheshire   the kingsway tunnel  
deepest water   open space   big science  
vauxhall road   come day go day

wishing in my heart it was sunday

wishing puppets had statues

wishing homes   were not dispensable

**anfield fleet maintenance**

sunlight day of the lords three mayors treble masters forgotten voters

floss is a dog. imagined as rather like the black rabbit of inlé from watership down. another incarnation of my psychogeographical self is flick, a girl version of spring heeled jack. legendary menace. flick/slick, sleek and all aerial like. dogs in a maelstrom more visible than women. even dead dogs. both of these more palpable than dead women. most of all, dead poor women.

dead in my language as alternative to very. dead good. dead bad. dead old.

floss as flick/loss/fleeting. working class women: we learn early [dead right] that we come and go on pay rolls, registers, phone books, electoral rolls, archives. nobody is indispensable. music teacher, an all girls high school. dictionary: heads roll on a stove.

spike a male dog name colloquial: workhouse canine alternative: rover

belmont road: for vagrants. test house. safe house. and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, halfway house. none of this is fiction. victoriana. mirror billboards. reflective in the current state. if pavements could creak and tramps were poltergeists, this street would be teeming. ambulance. spooks. nurses on fag breaks. in food banks. many complex reasons.

walking wandering to romanticise: nomadic to trivialise: bag lady carriers

disease both intersects and divides. the site contained a tramp ward. the british medical association reported in 1895 that it also provided for the permanent able bodied of no fixed address. parallel buildings. children detained. clutch a baby. a synonym offered for homeless is rootless. grotesque. everyone came from somewhere. some of us came from here. some of us swerved it. my women were lucky. and this is all it was. ambulatory. mobile.

barking discarded carpets pathways horse kicks lethal you deserve a history

**lilian is not a bear (yew tree cemetery)***after Michael Rosen's "Going on a Bear Hunt"*

going on a grave hunt not scared

partial to white cats

painkillers

&amp;swearing

the chances of rejection

rocket

fifty years internment

seventeen bus stops hair all sticky

subdivision one over eight

blueberry park princess drive

dainty names

diurnal innocence

wet grass uh-oh

long wet grass

wading open toed toad

short&amp;stout

hooked nose

monuments

lily flood adjacent names

woods

mcdonald

mccabe

bullseye keystone a keynote: hello quiet

how to articulate:

you would not like me anyway

clattering of jackdaws

of restless

potentially unforgiving

iliac crests hip bones

shorter sacrum masquerade

dead as body forgets how to bleed

raiders: ants wasps hymenoptera

without waist symphyta

fitter& dark

cold impassable

cannot get over

cannot go under fingertip:

a ladybird a red/black ladybird

a greeting not scared

stealing roses

sitting on

buttercups

rearrange pronounced floor-al

or floral does not matter unimportant

the point is: i saw you

i see you &

see yiz in plural i am

laurence's daughter terry's granddaughter

an earwig on all these flowerpots

layers desquamated to begin again: open the door

back outside new islington

new jerusalem new liverpool

no bears

many girls



**Notes:**

The Hufeisensiedlung (horseshoe) estate is a housing estate in Berlin, built in 1925. Structurally it is very similar to St. Andrews Gardens, a housing estate made of five storey council flats, which opened in Liverpool, 1935. It is known colloquially as The Bullring. Designed by John Hughes on the former site of an abbatoir, originally the Bullring itself was referred to in the planning sketches as the D wing, with the A,B and C blocks surrounding being Gill Street, St. Andrews Street and Trowbridge Street respectively. These streets were demolished in 1994. Only the Bullring itself remains, having been purchased by the Liverpool John Moores University as student housing.

The interlude poems are set in the Haven holiday camp at Seton Sands, East Lothian, Scotland. The evening entertainment at these centres across the UK features children's characters including Anxious the Elephant, Bradley the Bear and Polly the Lifeguard.

In dublin 12 , the area of Goldenbridge was previously the location of St. Vincents Industrial School, in which it was later discovered that child labour, under rough conditions, was employed in the making of rosary beads

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\\_Vincent%27s\\_Industrial\\_School,\\_Goldenbridge#Rosary\\_Bead\\_making](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Vincent%27s_Industrial_School,_Goldenbridge#Rosary_Bead_making)

The news story referred to in west curvee is the burning of Grenfell Tower in June 2017, in which at least 80 social housing tenants are known to have lost their lives. The title itself was my son's way of pronouncing the seaside resort of West Kirby when he was a toddler.

mülleimer has appeared in para.text magazine, the hufeisensiedlung sequence in zarf magazine and the interlude sequence in Guttural magazine. My thanks to the editors.