

In Our Own Words: Exploring
Neurodivergent+ Culture, Creative
Expression and Aesthetics through the
Disciplines of Performance and Creative
Writing



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Abstract: Drawing on lived experience of creative Neurodivergent+ identity, this thesis employs, uncovers and performs a diverse range of autoethnographic modes of expression. Fundamental to this process has been the creation of a novel in experimental prose which presents a number of the author's own encounters, critiques, and developments within its writing and performance; many of these qualities can be conceptualised in terms of Neurodivergent+ experience and aesthetics. This investigation is comprised of critical commentary and creative practice but also features qualitative interviews with ND+ authors and performers. The research is informed by a range of diverse Neurodivergent+ Literary and Performative histories. The author examines these influences regarding how they have affected the processes behind her own creative practice, most notably an extract from her novel, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'. The approach to the main body of creative work adopts practices surrounding ethnofiction and autoethnography concerning genre and methodology, whereby lived experience, research and interviews are woven into multi-disciplinary narratives; not only does the practice, element of this research, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights', draw upon this, but elements of the accompanying thesis are also experimental. A large component of this research involves analysing the work of both neurotypical (NT) and Neurodivergent+ (ND+) authors who utilize a combination of what is theorised as 'authentic' and 'crafted' Neurodivergent+ aesthetics within their writing; ultimately this thesis advocates that 'form' (in terms of grammar, syntax, content and sentiment), both written and performative, can be reflective ND+ experiences, perception, process and fascination, as well as differing states of mental health presentation. This exploration discusses how ND+ creatives might uncover and utilize several more intrinsic, personalized, original and multi-modal methods towards creation. This research seeks to foster new appreciations surrounding how language and communication can be presented and formatted, particularly in creative settings. In doing this it hopes to challenge hierarchies surrounding 'standardized' registers, potentially paving the way for new writing and performance that will encompass fresh appreciations towards diversity. This research pursues and uncovers several innovative methodologies within Performance and Creative Practice by focusing upon ND+ first-person narration, both written and performative. It aims to continue developing the notion of Neurodivergent+ Culture within the Arts, while seeking to bridge gaps of understanding and empathy between ND+ and NT individuals/communities. What is discussed in this research is not in any way meant to limit ND+ individuals, rather, as 'In Our Own Words' suggests, it seeks to analyse and discuss several ND+ creative practices and practitioners regarding their ethos, intention, and philosophy. This research also raises questions surrounding Neurodivergence and cultural appropriations, alongside theories to why authentic Neurodivergent+ voices may have struggled to reach mainstream industry and publishing expectations, making suggestions as to how both could be addressed. The researcher hopes that this body of work will foster more multi-faceted conversations surrounding representation and authenticity, paving the way for ND+ creatives and academics to feel more confident not just in being 'out', but also in 'unmasking', and having the confidence to 'relearn' and experiment with perhaps more intrinsic ways to communicate and creatively express identity; thusly leading to increased occurrence and appreciation of Neurodivergent+ Culture and Aesthetics within the arts and creative practice.

PhD Overview:

Preface and Introduction: Contextualising the PhD

Chapter 1: Contextualisation Brief Overview of Influences/Categories

Chapter 2: Neurodivergent+ Contemporary Voice (Interview and Performance-focused) Examination/Investigation of ND+ Individuals and creative collectives upon ethos and performative practices. Ending with synopsis of my experimental Dylexie Performance

Chapter 3: Close Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics (Text and Author-focused) Examination of ND+ texts/textual aesthetics moving towards discussions of Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics within my own creative practice, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'.

Creative Practice: (86,000) **40,000-word** section of my ND+ Experimental Novel, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'.

Chapter 4: Overall Conclusions/round offs of PhD including identified influences, ethical considerations, potential research bias and personal reflections.

Total Word Count excluding footnotes, bibliographies and appendix:

101,837

Preface: Why this Research Matters

I will begin this exploration of Neurodivergent+¹ (ND+) culture and ingenuity by introducing myself as an autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, dyspraxic, OCD creative and hopefully, academic. That I am an ND+ creative means that components of my lived experience have guided elements of this exploration. This PhD is comprised of my own ND+ experimental creative applications, which is accompanied by an exploratory thesis, delving into the roots and ethos of ND+ creative practice within performance and literature.

Due to the cultural, anthropological, and personal nature of this PhD, this research utilises methods that are autoethnographic, that invoke elements of ethnofiction; autoethnographic research is a form of study which acknowledges the positionality of the researcher and subsequently treats their experiences and lived knowledge as vital in understanding or decoding what is being studied, this research adds to existing subjective knowledge². Ethnofiction is a relatively new genre that can support or work in parallel to ethnographic research; it supports interdisciplinary/cross-genre theory and practice-based research in facilitating the melding of fiction, research and/or documentary with participants' experiences³. It is a qualitative form of research that seeks to capture the perceptions of the researcher and/or people setting up the research. It believes this insight to be key in creating new 'hybrid' research and fiction, offering nuanced understandings into research relying upon human communication and awareness.

Presenting at UOK's '*Communicating the Value of Research Symposium*' (24/07/22) permitted me to further explore conversations surrounding ownership, authenticity, and community dynamics/relationships, in doing this I further came to recognise my insight as having comprehensive worth, not despite, but because of my own empathies and compassion. This was further solidified after attending fellow Neurodivergent+ academic Dr Kate Moorhead's lecture upon '*Positionality and Feminist Pedagogy*'. Her lecture encouraged me to further question my positionality as a Neurodivergent+ academic and creative, and helped me understand why it was important to explore Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics regarding my own background and pedagogy. While undergoing this research I have been fortunate enough to attend a number of Neurodivergent+ led workshops upon the topic of creativity including a solidarity workshop at the National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (NDACA) by Disability Arts Online (whom I work for as a freelance journalist for articles on ND+ artistic progression), a talk by Daniel Oliver (Dyspraxic Creative) on 'Awkward' as a ND+ creative aesthetic, a workshop for ND+ writers by Nicola Werenowska (ND+/Dyspraxic creative) upon writing about ND+ solidarity and truth, a number of workshops organised by Elinor Rowlands

¹ **Note:** The term, '**Neurodivergent+**' is used within this thesis; it understands neurodivergence as both ADHD/Dyslexia/Autism/Dyspraxia, and also something which interlinks and overlaps with mental health diagnosis such as: OCD/BPD/BP/Anxiety/Manic/Psychotic/Depressive conditions. It is not diagnostic-specific and is interested in lived experiences and identity.

² Sjoberg, J. (2009) Ethnofiction, 'Genre Hybridity in Theory and Practice-Based Research' School of Arts History and Cultures [PDF] www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/api/datastream?publicationPid=uk-ac-man-scw:ths0031&datastreamId=Fulltext.pdf [Accessed 23/02/23]

³ Sjoberg, J. (2009). Ethnofiction, 'Genre Hybridity in Theory and Practice-Based Research' School of Arts History and Cultures [PDF] www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/api/datastream?publicationPid=uk-ac-man-scw:ths0031&datastreamId=Fulltext.pdf [Accessed 23/02/23]

(ADHD/Autistic Creative) supporting Neurodivergent energy and stimming, as well as a ND+ creative 'workshop' organised by Hanna Randall (ND+ Creative) that endorsed location/movement as creative stimuli. I was also fortunate enough to attend writing events that were organised for ND+ creatives by ND+ creatives including: Neurodivergent Congress (2023), a talk entitled Neurodiversity within the University hosted by Hanna Randall and featuring four ND+ writers: Lizzie Huxley Jones, Nick Walker and Kate Moorhead⁴, and also benefited from research arising from Autscope (a yearly UK conference organised by autistic people for autistic people upon ND+ research and culture progressions). These experiences not only solidified my own sense of ND+ creative solidarity, but they also aided me in realising I was not alone in recognising that Neurodivergence/Neurodivergent creativity can be self-actualised as a worthy area of exploration. This exploration has ultimately led me to leading my own, Arts Council Funded, arts collective, MixMatched, which now hosts regular performance nights and creative workshops for ND+ participants.

In many ways this research can be seen as taking a stance against neuronormative practices and expectation,

'Neuronormative refers to the socially accepted and expected neurological and cognitive functioning patterns. It represents how individuals process information, communicate, and interact with the world. Neuronormativity often forms the basis for societal norms and expectations, influencing how people are perceived and valued in various contexts'.⁵

Neurodivergent+ individuals often either work outside of that parameter or are expected to change themselves to conform to it; all too often they find themselves stifled, judged, burnt out and excluded by neuronormative expectations, with many ND+ people's individuality and sense of self suffering as a result. This research focuses specifically upon neuronormative ideals that pervade within mediums of communication and self-expression that can impact creative practices. As ND+ movements progress many individuals wish to break down, remove and reject neuronormative expectation, and uncover more about themselves in the process. This thesis explores how a number of ND+ contemporary creatives are progressing this conversation.

This research includes interviews that I have personally conducted with several contemporary ND+ creatives, as well as the close analysis of selected ND+ texts and performances; I use elements of my lived experience to critique the research and creative practice of others. In order to appreciate some of this research's nuance, it would be beneficial for the reader to understand elements of my own neurodivergence/ND+ identification. Something which has influenced the tone of this research is that I was firmly 'in the closet' about my ND+ identities

⁴ Randall, H., Huxley-Jones, L., Walker N. and Moorhead, K. (2021) 'Neurodiversity and the University Symposium'. [ONLINE] www.chasevle.org.uk/programmes/teaching-creative-writing/tcw-session-11/ [Accessed 13/03/24]

⁵ Goally. (2024) What is Neuronormative? [ONLINE] www.getgoally.com/blog/neurodiversopedia/what-is-neuronormative/ [Accessed 24/10/24]

(extending past dyslexia⁶) until 2020. It has only been recently, since starting my PHD, that I have come to further accept and allow others to acknowledge ND+ attributes relating to autism, OCD, ADHD, and dyspraxia.

Many of my experiences existing as a ND+ neurogender⁷ woman have been relatively hidden/masked; even when undergoing my MA dissertation upon, 'The Misrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Autistic Women in Film', I was not 'out' about my own identity, and rather framed the topic as a point of interest, rather than personal. Within this research I did not connect to any other members of ND+ community, I was focused more solidly upon stigma/misrepresentation; in being able to identify more directly as ND+ this exploration has been able to be much more transformative; it does not focus inherently upon 'what's wrong with representation', rather it was more directly able to identify ND+ lived-experiences and how they may be able to transgress existing binaries. In short, instead of focusing just upon 'What is wrong' in terms of misrepresentation and stigma, I have been able to focus and gain insight upon 'What is new and developing', which, when treated as forefront, has the power to potentially re-write and reinvent elements of Neurodivergent+ identity.

One of the reasons I undertook this investigation; though I was not necessarily 'proud', or 'out' about diagnosis/identity, throughout my lifetime I have been drawn to individuals and groups that encourage 'outsider' narratives. I am grateful that pockets of disguised ND+ culture/s existed; it has meant that I found spaces to connect comfortably and creatively in. This phenomenon began my initial exploration into ND+ culture, identity, and expression; that ND+ individuals have blindly reached out and haphazardly stumbled upon one another. Many ND+ individuals have not been as fortunate; outside ND+ friendly 'pockets', wider society has often not been patient, accepting or accommodating to perceived difference. It is my intention for this research to build solidarity and bring attention to a range of creative ND+ individuals and our budding communities.

ND+ identity and politics have steadily been gaining more recognition with further publications and academia emerging each year; though Judy Singer⁸, autistic psychologist, has widely been credited for coining the term 'Neurodiversity' in 1997⁹, it has been more recently asserted that the term was actually developed collectively, and came about through a number of groups that championing the politics and inclusion of divergence. An open letter by several ND+ authors and scholars entitled,

⁶ **Note:** Differing diagnosis/Neurodivergent+ diagnosis and identification carry differing stigma; dyslexia was my first diagnosis, and the one I used to 'cover/mask' other ND+ qualities relating to different diagnosis. However, it is also true to say that I felt 'proud' of dyslexia, and one reason for this may have been because it had/has more direct general associations with creativity/innovation. With dyslexia in mind, I have been 'out' and 'proud' as a ND+ woman since my mid-teens but has taken me far longer (early 30s) to even be close to that regarding Autism and ADHD.

⁷ **Neurogender:** Believing that gender experience and Neurodivergence, regarding identity, can be inextricably interlinked, a concept coined by Lydia Brown Lydia X.Z Brown in her essay, '*Gendervague: At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences*'

⁸ Singer, J. (1997) *Odd People In: The Birth of Community amongst people on the Autistic Spectrum*, 'A personal exploration based on neurological diversity'. *University of Technology*.

⁹ Singer, J. (2017). *Why Can't You Be Normal for Once in Your Life*. Judy Singer.

‘The Neurodiversity Concept was Developed Collectively: An Overdue Correction on the Origins of Neurodiversity Theory’¹⁰,

Despite the widespread attribution to Singer, the terms ‘neurological diversity’ and ‘neurodiversity’ were first printed in 1997 and 1998, respectively, in the work of the journalist Harvey Blume, who himself attributed them not to Singer but rather to the online community of autistic people, such as the ‘Institute for the Study of the Neurologically Typical’. Recently, Martijn Dekker reported a 1996 discussion in which one InLv poster, Tony Langdon, writes of the ‘neurological diversity of people. i.e. the atypical among a society provide the different perspectives needed to generate new ideas and advances, whether they be technological, cultural, artistic or otherwise’. Going forward, we should recognise the multiple, collective origins of the neurodiversity concept rather than attributing it to any single author. ¹¹

The letter suggests that historically, ‘origin’ has been oversimplified, and accredited to singular individuals, rather than acknowledging convoluted, multi-faceted trajectories. In relation to this research, that the concept has arisen from a range of impetus, supports that a number of themes and ND+ communities are examined and explored to glean insights into today’s progressions which have now developed within a vast array of platforms and literatures. Some of the most prevalent in terms of Neurodivergent+ identity and progress have been: Thomas Armstrong’s published PhD, ‘*The Power of Neurodiversity*’ (2010)¹², exploring the term and its development into politics and identity, ‘*Authoring Autism, ‘On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness’*¹³ (2018) featuring a collection of essays upon autism and identity, ‘*We’re Not Broken*’ (2021)¹⁴ a breakdown of autism politics and history by autistic journalist and editor Eric Garcia, ‘*Letters to my Weird Sisters, On Autism and Feminism*’ (2021)¹⁵ by Joanne Limberg, an autistic writer seeking to connect and empower other ND+ women, and ‘*Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm: Autistic Empowerment and Post Normal Possibilities*’ (2022)¹⁶, composed by Neuroqueer identifying psychologist Nick Walker upon the topic of Neurodivergence and how it can intersect with identity and gender. The acknowledgment of Neurodivergent+ identities and solidarity is transferring more directly into everyday culture, not only with their being more groups that directly acknowledge Neurodivergent+ needs and access, but with more groups specifically led and comprised of Neurodivergent+ individuals; Kent alone has eight Neurodivergent+ art, support, and social groups. Developing from this, specific groups, that acknowledge Neurodivergent+ creative identity and expression, are also evolving, such as: LAVA Elastic¹⁷ (Neurodivergent+ comedy night, Brighton) DYSPLA¹⁸ (dyslexic/Neurodivergent+ creative arts organisation, London),

¹⁰ Botha, M. Chapman, R. Walker, N. Onaiwu, M. Kapp, S. Ashley, A. (2024) The neurodiversity concept was developed collectively: An overdue correction on the origins of neurodiversity theory. Sage Journals [ONLINE] <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613241237871> [Accessed 31/07/24]

¹¹ Botha, M. Chapman, R. Walker, N. Onaiwu, M. Kapp, S. Ashley, A. (2024) The neurodiversity concept was developed collectively: An overdue correction on the origins of neurodiversity theory. Sage Journals [ONLINE] <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613241237871> [Accessed 31/07/24]

¹² Armstrong, T. (2011) *The Power of Neurodiversity, ‘Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain’*. Da Capo Lifelong Books.

¹³ Yergeau, M. (2017). *Authoring Autism, ‘On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness’*. Duke University Press Books.

¹⁴ Garcia, E. (2021) *We’re Not Broken, Changing the Autism Conversation*. Harvest

¹⁵ Limburg, J. (2021). *Letters to my Weird Sisters*. Atlantic Books.

¹⁶ Walker, N. (2021) *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*. Autonomous Press.

¹⁷ Lava Elastic, an ND+ Comedy Collective run by Sarah Saeed in Brighton.

¹⁸ DYSPLA: a Dyslexic/ND+ Arts Collective run by Lennie Varvarides and Kaz Bielecki in London.

Magical Women¹⁹ (ADHD/autistic arts organisation, London) Invisible Women²⁰ (autistic artists group, Kent) Awkwoods²¹ (Dyspraxic Performance Practises, London) and, more recently, my own Neurodivergent+ Performance Night, MixMatched²², Canterbury; all these creative groups are led by ND+ artists who encourage other ND+ creatives to inventively ‘unmask’ to explore elements of their own voice, on their own terms.

Although there are more ‘out’ and positively identifying ND+ creatives seen in 2023, we are by no means a ‘new’ phenomenon; before the 21st century several ‘lone’ ND+ narratives reached mainstream success, such as Donna Williams’ *‘Somebody Somewhere’* (1994) and Temple Grandin’s *‘Emerging Autistic’* (1996); both authors directly identified as autistic within their writings. Something I have fostered, or rather uncovered through this research is a sense of joint historic solidarity; several ND+ individuals have, and still are, progressing within The Disability Movement narrative, and more recently, Disability Arts²³, however, alongside perhaps more generalised disability politics, The Psychiatric Survivor’s and Mad Pride movements have unfolded, two histories which explicitly concentrate their attentions upon ND+ needs and lived experiences.²⁴ ‘Survivors’ formed in the late 1970s/80s as groups of ND+ individuals, many of whom experienced ill-treatment or trauma within psychiatric institutions; Emboldened by the movement, they were to encouraged speak out directly about their experiences of mistreatment; Survivor’s poetry often expresses very raw feelings, sensations and awareness’s of pain and struggle. The later movement ‘Mad Pride’ can be viewed as a ‘break’ or ‘splinter’ movement, beginning in the 1990s. Founders of ‘Mad’ wanted to change, or rather update, sentiments surrounding ‘Survivor’ narratives which focused prominently, and often exclusively upon struggle and suffering. People who identified as ‘Mad’, sought to claim back words and identity by affirming their own individuality and communication through uncensored self-expression, unedited writings and literature, beginning by embracing and reclaiming the word ‘Mad’.

Both ‘Survivors’ and ‘Mad’ groups encouraged divergent creative practices and literature as mediums of expression and political manifestation, they also were not diagnostic specific, meaning that they comprised of ND+ individuals relating across a range of diagnostic criteria.

The influences, ‘Survivors’ and ‘Mad’ coincide and overlap with the term that I most commonly use within this research: **Neurodivergent+**. The word ‘neurodiversity’ (sometimes ‘Neurodiverse’²⁵), erupted from a range of ‘divergent’ communities within the 1990s, and can, and should be accredited to a network of developing communities striving for acknowledgement; however, the term first reached more mainstream publication in 1997

¹⁹ **Magical Women**: an Autistic/ADHD Arts Collective run by Elinor Rowlands in London.

²⁰ **Invisible Women**: an autistic Arts Gallery/Display run by Marion Armstrong in Kent.

²¹ **Awkwoods**: Dyspraxic/ND+ experimental performance practices run by Dr. Daniel Oliver in London.

²² **MixMatched**: a Neurodivergent+ arts/performance collective run by Emma Robdale, Holly Mcclough and Alice Riley in Canterbury.

²³ **Note**: I work as a freelance journalist for ‘Disability Arts Online’, the largest UK based magazine/collective publishing upon this topic.

²⁴ **Note**: This research supports that neurodivergence can be seen as part of the Disability Movement, dependent upon individual ND+ insight and identification. This research is concentrated, in part, upon differences in neurological perception/processing/communication, as well as lived experience. The researcher acknowledges, appreciates, and understands solidarity with Disability Movements/politics, but has chosen to predominantly focus and highlight groups and philosophies which specifically focus/relate directly to ND+ experience. With this in mind, Woman’s Rights/Feminism, LGBTQIA+ and Queer Studies are also discussed in direct relation to Neurodivergence, highlighting links and commonalities that have sometimes been overlooked.

²⁵ **Note**: This is contested; there is some disagreement to whether ‘neurodiverse/neurodiversity’ should now refer to ‘neurodivergence’ or rather an understanding of ‘everyone/all neurotypes’.

when Autistic Sociologist Judy Singer²⁶ explored it within her own auto-ethnographic research. She reflected upon this more recently within an interview with Psychology Today²⁷:

“For Singer, neurodiversity was another identity, like gender or race, with potentially enormous impact that could best be understood through an intersectionality framework.”

She commented in the interview that, since her initial coinage almost three decades ago it had changed, “I could put it [neurodiversity] out there, but I couldn’t control it”²⁸, referring to her now more controversial views surrounding gender, which are condemned by progressive Neurodivergent+ individuals and theorists, and will not be discussed within this thesis. Since her initial usage, the word has developed to: Neurodivergent/neurodivergence (Neurodivergent+), and more colloquially, ‘neurodissident’ and ‘Neurospicey’²⁹. Though it might be more commonly associated with identity/diagnosis such as: ADHD/Autism/Dyslexia/Dyspraxia/Tourette’s Syndrome, in more recent developments the term can be progressed to encapsulate a much wider range of neurological differences, including personality conditions and recurrent/pervasive MH diagnoses such as: BPD (EUPD), Bi-Polar Disorder, OCD, Eating Disorders, Schizophrenia, Depressive/Anxiety conditions. This is how the term Neurodivergent+ (ND+) will be used within this research.

These ND+ identities referred to in the above paragraph are the ones most prevalent to this research; it is in no way all-encompassing; some more modern appreciations of Neurodivergence also include brain differences/degenerations such as Alzheimer’s and Dementia, but these applications of ND+ are not explored within this research.

Neurodivergent+ (ND+): inclusive of all Neurodivergent+ diagnosis, identity and/or MH conditions. While the term recognises all given diagnoses, I also understand the term to be ‘post’ medical diagnosis/medical model in nature; it does not treat diagnosis as binary but displays an understanding and appreciation of the correlating/‘co-morbid’ nature of ND+ identity. For me, it is a term that acknowledges person-first experience and leaves room to expand knowledge around ND+ diagnosis that does not focus specifically on deficit. It is a term that is lead/defined by ND+ individuals and seeks to avoid/dispel stereotypes. It acknowledges similarities of neurotype and lived experience (such as medication, isolation, alienation, ill-health, burnout, masking, executive function difficulties), regardless of specific diagnosis. It is a term that I believe lends to a more rounded and ‘human’ appreciation to what are perceived as neurological differences and can hopefully unify people who can often become extremely isolated,

“In a way your dyslexia will have slight autism attached to it. It will have maybe attention deficit, it will have other things it will have maybe have a bit of icebergs opt in there. The idea of it as a pure piece of water is ridiculous. So the fact is, it’s all in one part of the brain

²⁶ Singer, J. (1997) *Odd People In: The Birth of Community amongst people on the Autistic Spectrum: A personal exploration based on neurological diversity*. Undergraduate Thesis, University of Technology, Sydney.

²⁷ Luz, A. (2023) ‘An Interview with Neurodiversity Originator Judy Singer’, Psychology Today [ONLINE] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/inspectrum/202306/an-interview-with-neurodiversity-originator-judy-singer> [Accessed 14/02/24]

²⁸ Luz, A. (2023) ‘An Interview with Neurodiversity Originator Judy Singer’, Psychology Today [ONLINE]

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/inspectrum/202306/an-interview-with-neurodiversity-originator-judy-singer> [Accessed 14/02/24]

²⁹ **Neurospicey:** Often used to express someone who is beginning to question their identity in terms of Neurodivergence.

and we all have them in different varying this mix. And if it was looked at in that way. As a really beautiful wine in a way and most fabulous wine. You know, this person has a dyslexic main tone, but there is autistic streaks and you can see in the unit if we just took it. What amazing gift this is. And the thing about being very dyslexic, I am able I'm incredibly flibbertigibbet when I have to sort of do this kind of thing but I can concentrate for hours absolutely locked down. I'm not I'm not available to anyone. So I think there is in me that you know an autistic quality as well as it's like that I suppose because I'm able to make up stories and be characters."³⁰

Quote from Sally Gardner, writer of *Maggot Moon*, one of the core texts explored and analysed in Chapter 4.

To be more conscious of what neurodivergence is and how it can be appreciated, it is helpful to comprehend its spirit and trajectory aligned with other activist groups and movements. Two movements that can be seen to have parallels with substantial overlap are Women's Rights and LGBTQIA+. These movements were foremostly recognised for their politics and activism before then progressing to become more widely recognised within academia and creative practice³¹, with fields/genres such as feminist literature and queer theory subsequently unfolding. Even more pertinently Women's Rights, LGBTQIA+, and ND+ individuals have all, at some point in history, been pathologised. Perhaps beginning with notions (and diagnosis) of 'hysteria' within 17th to 19th centuries³², whereby women were diagnosed mentally unfit with many ending up in asylums. Homosexuality was categorised as a diagnosable mental illness, which was only removed from the Diagnostic Status of Homosexuality (DSM) in 1973³³. Only very freshly contested, is 'gender dysmorphia', which used to be the MH diagnosis which trans men and women needed to obtain to access hormones or surgery, this has only just begun its journey of being 'depathologised'³⁴.

Definition of 'Depathologise': (*transitive*) To cease to treat as a medical disorder.³⁵

To pathologise is to take several traits and/or behaviours and categorise them under a medical label (such as Autism, OCD, ADHD). I am using the concept of depathologising in relation to characteristics being removed, and no longer seen in relation to being pathologised; Many LGBT+ identities have been 'depathologised', in that they are no longer viewed in terms of diagnostic criteria.

To bring this point to a head, attributes associated with being female and/or LGBTQIA+ have led to MH diagnoses; these diagnoses, targeted specific genders and sexualities, and were crafted from ingrained prejudices, impacting on how individuals were viewed and treated. The diagnosis that was given or associated to elements of female and LGBTQIA+ identity can now

³⁰ Taken from interview with Sally Gardner, conducted upon 26/11/20

³¹ **Note:** An objective for this research is to support a growing appreciation of ND+ identity, culture and creative practice, within academic studies.

³² Appignanesi, L. (2007) *Mad, Bad and Sad, 'A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from the 1800s to the Present*. Virago.

³³ Drescher, J. (2015) 'Out of the DSM: Depathologising Homosexuality', National Library of Medicine [ONLINE]

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4695779/> [Accessed 31/01/23]

³⁴ **'Depathology/Depathologising':** Terms that have been used (but not are not necessarily more officially recognised) by a number of researchers (including Jack Dreschen in the above citation), relating to removing or reducing the way in which an attribute which was/is considered pathological and/or diagnosable criterion for a listed and/or previously listed mental health condition. Regarding 'depathology', these conditions/identities are no longer viewed, or no longer purely/only viewed, as a symptom of mental 'unwell'. The concept of 'depathology' further highlights and solidifies that a number of 'pathologised' attributes and/or behaviours are/have been shaped by bigoted/stigmatised/prejudiced applications of the Social Model of Disability.

³⁵ Word Sense (2023) Depathologizes: meaning, definition [ONLINE] www.wordsense.depathologizes/ [Accessed 24/03/24]

be viewed as entirely constructed by a misguided and heavily stigmatised ‘Social Model of Disability’³⁶; In the cases of sex and gender diagnosis, an individual’s perceived mental ill health was entirely based on sociological ideals of ‘normal’ and ‘not normal’, meaning that how society viewed them was disabling, rather than any true attributes of hysterical or homosexual diagnosis.

This trajectory can be illustrated within the way society treats ND+ individuals; incorrect assumptions/theories, stigmas and stereotypes have (and do) affect the ways in which mainstream society perceives and treats a range of Neurodivergent+ diagnosed or presenting individuals. However, the main difference in the comparison of Neurodivergent+ diagnosis to the pathologising of female/LGBTQIA+ identity is that psychology/psychiatry/neurology began as a way to study, form, and categorise the diagnoses that comprise many ND+ identities. Though the term ‘Neurodivergent’ is not a diagnosis, and is more rooted to self-identity, it has inextricable overlays to pathology and what began as psychiatric diagnosis. This exploration into ND+ creative practices does not seek to medically identify or diagnose individuals through their art or writing, but rather to develop a sense of creative and communicational solidarity. Unakin to other civil rights groups which have sought to detach themselves from pathology, neurodivergence is much more inextricably linked; with this in mind, it is perhaps not ‘neurodivergence’ that should be ‘depathologised’, but the negative associations of pathology itself.

This is a predicament that surrounds ND+ individuals and creatives and their ability to be ‘out’ or ‘unmasked’; the want for our identities to be seen and respected, and our processing and/or MH difficulties to be understood, while also fearing that our inherent pathological status and/or presentation as ND+ will be socially damming. Building a root of understanding/empathy, while enabling wider society to move away from inflexibility/intolerance approaches to perceived weakness and struggle, will aid Neurodivergent+ individuals and creatives in being able to ‘unmask’, and feel safe discovering themselves. Ultimately, diagnosis, difference, and atypical psychology have been the most prominently known roots of ND+ identification; with this in mind, rather than simply ‘pathologising’ neurodivergence, a focus needs to be on depathologising ‘pathology’ itself; instead of removing identities from the category of ‘pathology’ (diagnosis), a focus needs to be upon about eliminating stigma and prejudice from pathologised identity. This is akin to philosophies surrounding a wider disability theory, with an onus being upon destigmatising disability, rather than individuals attempting to remove or hide their ND+/disability identity³⁷. A vital

36 **The Social Model of Disability:** is a model of disability that asserts that many difficulties/prejudices that exist for disabled and ND+ individuals are socially constructed. It adds to or can be seen to oppose the ‘Medical Model of Disability’, which assumes that individual struggles are caused solely by the disability and/or neurodivergence of an individual. The model of disability used for this research is the ‘Integrated Model of Disability’, which acknowledges that some elements of the medical model of disability can be painful/traumatic in and of themselves (such as psychosis, mania, executive function difficulties), but that these problems (and others) are worsened or made shameful by societal prejudice, shame, and unaccommodating practices. UPIAS (1976) *Fundamental Principles of Disability*, [ONLINE] <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/UPIAS-fundamental-principles.pdf> [Accessed 19/11/23]

37 **Note:** Discussions Surrounding Neurodivergent+ and Disability Politics are extensive but are not central to this thesis; it is worth acknowledging that many Neurodivergent+ Individuals understand neurodivergence to be synonymous with disability and legally elements of neurodivergence are protected under the 2010 disabilities act. However, several Neurodivergent+ individuals do not view themselves as disabled and believe that they are not fully understood or represented by disability politics. Some ND+ individuals view neurodivergence as a ‘subset’ of disability politics, whilst others see Neurodivergent+ identity as something separate.

foundation in this research is the assumption that, if ND+ individuals can positively and confidently utilise their own words and creative aesthetics when claiming their own narratives, this will naturally make space and build upon overall acceptance and understanding.

Pathological Diagnosis in relation to language and communication is a huge field in and of itself; I will briefly cover a few select terms that relate to diagnostic criteria and Neurodivergent+ presentation, but it is worth noting that this investigation does not champion the use of diagnostic criterion to be used as inspiration for writing Neurodivergent+ characters; without direct input/involvement from Neurodivergent+ individuals, it runs the risk of perpetuating stereotypes rather than incorporating a ND+ person's lived experience. Until areas surrounding psychology/pathology/psychiatry significantly evolve in terms of ND+ person centred appreciations and approaches, their direct use as research for literature/creativity is likely to hold significant stigma.

Word Salad and Schizophrenia:

'**Word salad** is a type of dysfunctional language, sometimes seen in those with schizophrenia, consisting of an odd mix of seemingly random words and phrases. Schizophrenia is a complex psychiatric disorder that affects how a person interprets reality. Though most schizophrenia symptoms involve some level of thought and communication dysfunction, these difficulties seem to manifest at their most extreme in formal thought disorder (or simply thought disorder), a state of highly disorganized thinking and speaking. In severe cases, thought disorder presents as "Word salad," in which the speaker's words have no discernible meaning to others and seem completely disconnected from reality.'³⁸

People with schizophrenia can experience episodes in which their thoughts are interrupted, causing them to utilise language differently; within this research I argue that this can be recognised within a creative/linguistic capacity; either authentically, when a person experiencing an episode communicates through writing and/or performance, as is seen chapters of David Burke's *'When The Music's Over'* or, that certain language trends can be more purposely utilised to embody/represent ND+ language.³⁹

Tourette's Syndrome

'Tourette syndrome (TS) is a neurological disorder that may cause sudden unwanted and uncontrolled rapid and repeated movements or vocal sounds called tics. TS is one of a group of disorders of the developing nervous system called tic disorders.'⁴⁰

Tourette's syndrome is a ND+ quality that quite directly effects language. But the definition above does not give indication to how it might positively shape identity, or

³⁸ Psych Central (2023) 'What is Word Salad Schizophrenia?' [ONLINE] <https://www.verywellmind.com/word-salad-what-it-is-and-why-it-happens-7369922#:~:text=Word%20salad%20is%20also%20a%20frequent%20symptom%20of,experience%20psychotic%20episodes%20from%20certain%20other%20psychiatric%20conditions.> [Accessed 20/11/23]

³⁹ **Note:** The act of creating fictitious ND+ characters, in an unrepresentative way, which does not incorporate ND+ communities, is discussed as problematic later in this thesis.

⁴⁰ National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [ONLINE] <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/tourette-syndrome#:~:text=Wh at%20is%20Tourett e%20syndrom e%3F,nervous%20system%20called%20tic%20disorders.> [Accessed 12/02/24]

be utilized creatively. Jess Thom, who has been interviewed for this research, has Tourette's Syndrome and is a ND+/Disabled artist and writer. She has a range of differing ways to incorporate and utilize her 'Tic Language' within both her writing and live performances. This is expanded upon in Chapter Two.

Autistic Language and Communication:

Autism, medically/pathologically, is often discussed in terms of language and communicational difference; below I have chosen select quotes to demonstrate this:

Idiosyncratic speech:

One of the core symptoms of autism are restricted/repetitive behaviours and interests can manifest in speech and language as a fixated focus on idiosyncratic topics. Idiosyncratic speech may include using stereotypical or inappropriate words. [..]⁴¹

Cluttering speech:

Speech patterns may also be unusual in a child with autism due to a fluency disorder referred to as cluttering speech. Cluttering makes speech sound fast and/or irregular, phrases are repeated, excessive filler words may be relied on, and pausing patterns may be different from the norm.⁴²

This is just one of resource that focuses upon language difference for autistic individuals; this topic is expansive in and of itself, with several physiologically based studies making claims upon autism speech, language, and communication. Other articles rooted in psychology and autistic communication are: 'Language and Communication in Autistic Disorders'(1994)⁴³, 'Language and Speech Characteristics in Autism (2022)⁴⁴, and a list of perceived adult differences can be found on Very Well Health Website,⁴⁵ and an article that goes more in-depth into this topic is, 'Autism Speech Patterns: Addressing Autism Communication'⁴⁶.

One interesting comment in relation to Autism and language was the concept/diagnosis of hyperlexia.

Hyperlexia is when a child starts reading early and surprisingly beyond their expected ability. It's often accompanied by an obsessive interest in letters and

⁴¹ Loftus, Y. (2024) Autism Speech Patterns: Understanding Communication Differences [ONLINE] Autism Parenting Magazine <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-speech-patterns/> [Accessed 14/02/24]

⁴² Loftus, Y. (2024) Autism Speech Patterns: Understanding Communication Differences [ONLINE] Autism Parenting Magazine <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-speech-patterns/> [Accessed 14/02/24]

⁴³ Frith, U and Happe, F. (1994) Language and Communication in Autistic Disorders, Research Gate [ONLINE] [PDF] www.researchgate.net/profile/Francesca-Happe/publication/15313388_Language_and_Communication_in_Autistic_Disorders/links/575e8c4508ae414b8e5422ed/Language-and-Communication-in-Autistic-Disorders.pdf [Accessed 21/11/23]

⁴⁴ Vogindroukas, I., Stankova, M., Chelas, E-N. and Proedrou, A. (2022) 'Language and Speech Characteristics in Autism' *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*. Vol. 18, pp.2367–2377

⁴⁵ Rudy, L. J. (2023) 'Communication Differences Among Autistic People' [ONLINE] <https://www.verywellhealth.com/why-is-conversation-so-hard-for-people-with-autism-259896> [Accessed 22/11/23]

⁴⁶ Autism Parenting Magazine (2023) 'Autism Speech and Patterns' [ONLINE] <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-speech-patterns> [Accessed 12/02/24]

numbers, which develops as an infant. Hyperlexia is often, but not always, part of the autism spectrum disorder (ASD).⁴⁷

Autistic women often seek socially acceptable intense fascinations, in combination to other more holistic reasons, and that writing could be a method in which a number of Autistic individuals process and decompress, hyperlexia could factor into why a number of autistic individuals are drawn to specific writing and literature studies.

ADHD Language:

‘ADHD can impact speech in a few different ways. It can spur:

- vocal stimming
- erratic speech due to disorganised thoughts
- grammatical errors
- topic changes
- frequent urges to interrupt others
- trouble taking turns’^{48 49}

This is the most condensed/concise explanation from PsychCentral, a number of other studies within this area including Clay Brites chapter in the volume ‘ADHD from Etiology to Comorbidity’ entitled, ‘ADHD and Impact on Language’ (2020)⁵⁰. This research doesn’t make links directly to how this can be harnessed creatively; David Pilkey, a children’s writer who has ADHD/is ND+, speaks about how the way he thinks and processes effects his content and writing style in, ‘David Pilkey sees ADHD and Dyslexia as his Superpowers’⁵¹.

OCD and Language:

‘Rumination within OCD can cause a variety of intrusive thoughts that are different for each person. A person may experience symptoms of OCD that involve multiple themes and subtypes of OCD, and it is not unusual for a person to suddenly experience obsessions about new OCD content areas.’⁵²

OCD, and other mental health differences, can cause invasive thoughts, ritualistic and/or black and white moralistic logic; in part this study is focused on whether creative, stream of consciousness writing could differ when utilised by Neurodivergent+ individuals. If ND+ individuals are experiencing differences in thought/thought interruptions, this can be reflected in writing, specifically when relating to stream-of-consciousness, perhaps with writing that includes specific interruptions or repetitions, and the impact they have emotionally upon individuals. More research specifically relating to language and

⁴⁷ WebMD (2023) ‘Hyperlexia: What It Means, What the Symptoms Are, and More’. [ONLINE] <https://www.webmd.com/child ren/what-is-hyperlexia> [Accessed 22/11/23]

⁴⁸ Loftus, Y. (2023) Autism Speech Patterns: Understanding Communication Differences [ONLINE] Autism Parenting Magazine <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/autism-speech-patterns/> [Accessed 14/02/24]

⁴⁹ Psych Central (2023) ‘Does ADHD Affect Speech in Adults?’ [ONLINE] <https://www.healthline.com/health/adhd/adhd-and-speech> [Accessed 21/11/23]

⁵⁰ Brites, C. (2023) ‘ADHD from Etiology to Comorbidity’, *ADHD and Its Impact on Language*. IntechOpen

⁵¹ Understood. (2023) ‘David Pilkey sees ADHD and Dyslexia as his Superpowers’ [ONLINE] <http://www.understood.org/en/articles/dav-pilkey-adhd-dyslexia-superpowers> [Accessed 12/02/24]

⁵² The Gateway Institute (2023) OCD Rumination, Symptoms and Treatment [ONLINE] <https://www.gatewayocd.com/rumination-ocd-symptoms-and-treatment> [Accessed 21/11/23]

psychological study can be found in 'The Linguistic Construction of Self in Narratives of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.'⁵³, which suggests that repeated unpleasant thoughts and compulsions alter a person's sense of self. In *'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'* I have drawn upon elements of my own OCD monologue to give some first-hand personal flavour to the narrative.

Bi-Polar Disorder:

'Bipolar disorder (BD) is characterised by speech abnormalities, reflected by symptoms such as pressure of speech in mania and poverty of speech in depression.' (2019)⁵⁴

With this in mind, when creatively replicating either writing or performance relating to a narrative characteristic of bi-polar disorder, tone, content, speed, emotive qualities and overall aesthetic could present differently. Many conditions within the umbrella of neurodivergency are characterised by differences in thought, speech, language, and communication; with this in mind it can be argued Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, in terms of Neurodivergent+ individuals relating or employing language in alternative fashions, are already recognised within the realms of psychological study and research; however, the majority of psychology-based research into ND+ language focuses on deficit 'grammatical errors', 'erratic speech due to disorganised thought', 'a type of dysfunctional language'. Much research focuses upon language difference as something inherently negative, and many are centred upon children, and are not concerned with ND+ adult communication and language. More pertinently to this research, these studies into the linguistics and pathology have not been widely used or thought relevant within creative practice; their purpose was to discover more about psychological/developmental conditions, not to claim or assert ND+ identity. This exploration does not discredit what has already been discovered within the realms of psychology, however, it does ascertain that ND+ individuals have the right to their own personal insights and human explorations of language and communication.

This exploration only lightly touches upon pathological studies surrounding neurological research relating to Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics and does not endorse using diagnostic criteria/s to produce ND+ presenting narratives. It acknowledges that the fields of psychology/psychiatry have uncovered differences in word usage, processing, and communication, but asserts that, especially when used within creative practices surrounding self and identity, we ND+ individuals need autonomy over lived experiences that influence our insight and language usage.

The most prominent focus within this research is creative practice and identity, with ND+ lived experience at the forefront. Bringing this discussion back to its initial comparisons between feminism and LGBTQIA+ movements, this research acknowledges intersectionality. A number of ND+ individuals view gender, sexuality, and their neurodivergence as interrelated. Over the

⁵³ Knapton, O. (2018) 'The linguistic construction of the self in narratives of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. [PDF] [www. doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.149983](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.149983) [Accessed 21/11/23]

⁵⁴ Weiner, L., Doignon-Camus, N., Bertschy, G. and Giersch, A. (2019) 'Thought and language disturbance in bipolar disorder quantified via process-oriented verbal fluency measures', *Scientific Reports*. Vol. 9. [ONLINE] <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-50818-5>. [Accessed 21/11/23]

last decade a greater appreciation of the overlaps between these identities has been explored, leading to new concepts and vocabularies evolving, some of these being:

Neurogender⁵⁵, Gendervague⁵⁶, Neuroqueer (Neuroqueering)⁵⁷ Autiegender⁵⁸, Borderfluid⁵⁹

This research is not specifically centred upon gender/sexuality, however, how a person communicates and sees themselves in relation to wider society will be a significant factor in shaping and influencing ND+ creativity especially when in relation to first person narration and performing identities. Before moving onto the next section, which focuses on literary and performative practice, I will briefly introduce the concept of **neurogender**:

‘When one’s gender is linked to someone’s neurodivergency. A person’s perception of their gender influenced by them being Neurodivergent+ . Both an identity and an umbrella term for genders that are limited to Neurodivergent+ individuals.’ (Taken from, ‘Let’s Talk About Neurogenders⁶⁰)

There are already hundreds of acknowledged neurogenders, whereby an element of a ND+ individual’s qualities/diagnosis impacts upon their gender and/or sexuality, such as ‘autiegender/autgender’ which is a gender that can only be identified with if autistic. Autistic blogger Ryon Boan discusses it as, ‘When a person is saying that they are autiegender, what they are saying is more or less that their understanding of gender is fundamentally altered by their autism.’⁶¹ As a ND+ individual, I would go a step further to say that my lived experiences in a gendered society have been distinct, and this has impacted my view of self/gender.

Two other similar perceptions of ‘neurogender’ exist including autistic psychologist Nick Walker’s development of **neuroqueer/neuroqueering**, in which she details her philosophies within ‘*Neuroqueer Heresies*’⁶² (2021) which surround the notion that the concept of ‘Neuroqueer’ can expand more directly upon how ND+ individuals can explore elements of our newly emerging identities; she sees ‘Neuroqueering’ as the act of challenging and diverting ‘Neurotypical’ expectations by radically accepting and expressing Neuroqueer identity and culture. Additionally, the concept of gendervague was made more widely recognised by autistic activist Lydia X.Z Brown in her essay, ‘*Gendervague: At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences*’⁶³ This explores how trans and non-binary autistic individuals can have new perspectives and relationships with gender. In her essay Lydia talks about how she relates to the emerging gender,

⁵⁵ Neurogender [ONLINE]

<https://lgbtqiia.fandom.com/wiki/Neurogender#:~:text=By%202016%2C%2022neurogender%22%20had,ment%20illness%2C%20or%20neurological%20conditions.> [Accessed 19/02/24]

⁵⁶ Brown, L. (2011) ‘GenderVague At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences’, AutisticChoya [ONLINE] www.autisticchoya.com/2020/05/gendervague-at-the-intersection-of-autistic.html [Accessed: 16/10/23]

⁵⁷ Walker, N. (2021) ‘Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities’, *Neuroqueer Heresies*. Autonomous Press.

⁵⁸ GenderWiki (2023) ‘Autiegender’. [ONLINE] <https://gender.fandom.com/wiki/Autiegender> [Accessed 19/02/23]

⁵⁹ Asexuality (2015) ‘Bordergender / Borderfluid’. [ONLINE] <https://www.asexuality.org/en/topic/119074-bordergenderborderfluid.> [Accessed 19/02/24]

⁶⁰ CARRD Neurogender (2023) Let’s Talk About Neurogenders [ONLINE] <http://neurogender.carrd.co> [Accessed 01/02/23]

⁶¹ Boan, R. (2022) ‘Autiegender and Neuroqueer, “Two Words on the Relationship Between Autism and Gender That Fit Me”, Stimpunks [ONLINE] stimpunks.org/2022/09/25/autiegender-and-neuroqueer-two-words-on-the-relationship-between-autism-and-gender-that-fit-me/#-autiegender [Accessed 24/03/24]

⁶² Walker, N. (2021) ‘Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities’, *Neuroqueer Heresies*. Autonomous Press.

⁶³ Brown, L. (2011) ‘GenderVague: At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences’, AutisticChoya [ONLINE] www.autisticchoya.com/2020/05/gendervague-at-the-intersection-of-autistic.html [Accessed 16/10/23]

'I've started referring to myself as gendervague, a term coined within the autistic community to refer to a specifically Neurodivergent+ experience of trans/gender identity. For many of us, gender mostly impacts our lives when projected onto us through other people's assumptions but holds little intrinsic meaning. Someone who is gendervague cannot separate their gender identity from their neurodivergence – being autistic doesn't *cause* my gender identity, but it is inextricably related to how I understand and experience gender.'⁶⁴

Other ND+ specific genders such as Autigender⁶⁵ and BorderGender⁶⁶ are also evolving under the more general term of Neurogender⁶⁷. By beginning to acknowledge and understand how ND+ identities will/should impact our approach towards studies surrounding gender, arts, and culture, our appreciation of how emerging identities challenge existing binaries can be expanded.

For the relevance of this research, I, the author, identify as a neurogender woman, and understand my atypical experiences of gender, femininity, and womanhood to be influenced and in many ways attributed to me possessing a Neurodivergent+ 'brain'; through my final interview with Joanne Limburg, who wrote, 'To My Weird Sisters, on Autism and Feminism'⁶⁸, I was able to understand more upon why I felt strange, and in many ways, alienated by gender in terms of it embodying, what I deemed, unfair/arbitrary, expectation, which my very existence (and, to an extent, joy and self-expression) seemed to flaunt⁶⁹. Within my own artistic practice, this influence can clearly be traced through my 'Wombinescent' gallery, where I explore notions surrounding ND+ gender, bodily anatomy, and societal disgust. [You can read my essay upon Wombinescent and Neuroqueer identity Appendix B] 'Wombinescent' was framed by my own lived experiences of feeling both 'defined' as female by my anatomy, but also 'shamed' by menstruation and genitalia. I worked alongside Chella Quint, a Neurodivergent+ woman undergoing her own PhD in Period Positive research, who aided me in utilising trans-inclusive anatomical language to ensure that Wombinescent expressed my own journey, while making room for nuanced applications of gender. As well as a gallery exhibit, 'Wombinescent'⁷⁰ featured a panel event where three other ND+ identifying women spoke upon their own research surrounding neurodivergence/neurogender/gender, art, and menstruation: Chella Quint, Shelly Sayer⁷¹ and Elinor Rowlands (founder of Magical Woman, autism and ADHD arts collective, interviewed for this research which is expanded upon in Chapter Two)⁷². Though my intentions can be witnessed within this work, I would also argue that there are subtler influences that stem from my gender/identity that transcends into other elements of my writing and performance. I permitted myself to present a more free-flowing ND+ narrative

⁶⁴ Brown, L. (2011) 'GenderVague: At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences', AutisticChoya [ONLINE] www.autisticchoya.com/2020/05/gendervague-at-intersection-of-autistic.html [Accessed 16/10/23]

⁶⁵ **AutiGender:** A gender that should only be identified with if Autistic.

⁶⁶ **Bordergender:** A gender that should only be identified with if you identify with Borderline Personality Disorder.

⁶⁷ **Neurogender:** Both a gender in and of itself, and also an umbrella term for other more specific gender identities connected to neurodivergence.

⁶⁸ Limberg, J. (2021). *Letters to my Weird Sisters*. Atlantic Books.

⁶⁹ **Note:** This is expanded upon within the conclusionary chapter within the section, "Fitting Out: Neurodivergence, Self-Expression, Feminism and Queer Theory", which discusses Joanne Limburg's, 'To my Weird Sisters, On Autism and Feminism'

⁷⁰ Robdale, E. (2021) 'Wombinescent', Word Press [ONLINE] emmarobdalestoriesandpoetry.wordpress.com/2021/07/11/wombinescent/ [01/02/23]

⁷¹ **Shelly Sayer:** a student at the University of Kent, spoke about blood/bleeding menstruation and medieval theories of womanhood.

⁷² **Elinor Rowlands:** Founder of 'Magical Woman' – an Autism and ADHD Collective based in London – who is doing her own PHD on autism, creativity, and stimming.

within my novel *'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'* which is written as a mixture of experimental, ethnofictional prose that explores Neurodivergent+ lexical difference.

In summary, this thesis wishes to progress understandings of ND+ identity and culture within the creative practices of writing and performance. It advocates that ND+ individuals and creatives should be at the heart of shaping their own narratives. This research also acknowledges some of the psychiatric/diagnostic roots in relation to language, communication, and processing differences, however, these principles will be discussed in terms of potential linguistic innovation and will avoid discussion of deficit. Most of this research will be used to support personal narratives that will be highlighted within interviews with ND+ creatives discussing their lived experiences.

On a more personal note, another reason that many ND+ individuals, especially Autistic and ADHD women, may feel so negatively towards Medical Models of disability/neurodivergence, is that 'it', or perhaps more aptly the people (Psychiatrists, Therapists, Social Workers) who 'gate-keep' it, have left us out. Upon recognising herself as Autistic, Fern Brady, an autistic comedian who wrote upon some of her experiences within, *'Strong Female Character'*⁷³⁷⁴, within an interview upon trying to be recognized autistic said her doctor commented, "You can't be Aspergers, It's mainly men, and you've got a boyfriend and you're making eye-contact with me."⁷⁵ These are almost identical comments to my own experiences; even after diagnosis I have been told repeatedly, by medical professionals that I'm, not autistic in relation to the fact that I am talking to them, trying to be seen/understood, or most infuriatingly, that I have friends/am likable has been used to attempt to diminish me/my autism experience. The medical modal is not only restrictive/stereotyped, but the individuals who are 'in charge' of it are painfully unaware/untrained towards ND+ nuance; somewhat ironically, its rigidity and lack of flexibility, have left individuals confused, lost, frustrated and without support. We, the ND+ community, have needed to create spaces of solidarity, away from the medical model, even just to assert, support and recognize ourselves as being ND+.

⁷³ Brady, F. (2023) Strong Female Character. Brazen.

⁷⁴ Brady, F. (2023) Strong Female Character. Brazen.

⁷⁵ Brady, F. (2023) Fern Brady On Being a Stripper, Autism Diagnosis, and School in a Men's Prison. *Unfiltered*. [ONLINE] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHLnaHJwATk> [Accessed 24/03/24]

Introduction

This research contains some juxtapositions, some of which are impacted by the complicated and multi-factional nature of the evolving ND+ Movement. These include divisions within the community and differing individual experiences and personal appreciations across diagnostic spectrums. ND+ refers to a number of identities, and it is therefore worth noting that several theories/appreciations surrounding mental health-based neurodivergence can differ from those focusing upon dyslexia/dyspraxia/ADHD/autism. Currently understandings surrounding how differing or co-morbid ND+ identities/diagnosis such as Autism, BPD, Dyslexia, OCD, Depressive/anxiety conditions, BPD, Dyspraxia, BP, ADHD, and how a number of ND+ individuals' lived experiences transgress boundaries distinguishing Neurodivergent categorisations and mental health conditions (ideas surrounding more fluid ND+ identifications are expanded upon within Chapter One). More pertinently, what should be kept in mind throughout this exploration, is that a ND+ individual's first-hand experiences, interests/observations/perspectives, family dynamics, philosophies, and sense of self and/or spirituality is intricate and multi-faceted; being wired 'neurodivergently' is something which can be seen to permeate into every element of lived experience.⁷⁶ With respect to this research, other factors comprising 'existence' should be understood as equally connected to creative process, narratives and linguistic and performative aesthetics. Some of the choices made in this research have been influenced by my own ND+ nature, identity, and positionality⁷⁷, one being that I exist as a Neurodivergent individual, who for a large proportion of my life, did not directly identify or acknowledge this; elements of this research reflect some of my own background, and developing stance upon ND+ identity.

One of the reasons that this research focuses specifically upon literature and performance is that they are fields in which I have connected to; throughout my academic study I've been intensely fascinated⁷⁸ by innovative linguistics⁷⁹ and experiention⁸⁰. This compulsion⁸¹ has powered me through a level six qualification in Creative Writing and Drama, BA honours in Creative Writing, Master of Arts in Creative Writing, and remained with me into this Drama by Practice PhD.

My interest in innovative writing and performance was what initially led my exploration/fascination with ND+ linguistics. I was beguiled by the possibilities of experimental ND+ language: could multiple first-person narrations be utilised to characterise schizophrenia? Could echolalia, repetition, and mental unwellness be captured or simulated

⁷⁶ **Example:** a dyslexic creative, who may have experienced poor mental health and perhaps been sectioned, might produce writing or performance reflective of their experiences within a mental health unit (rather than explicitly upon dyslexia, but this would still be connected to ND+ experience). With this in mind, a number of life events, such as, having a gap year abroad, having a passion for Japanese Folklore, may all be equally contributing factors to their sense of self/creativity. Eg., their work may have ND+ aesthetics, but other aesthetics within their work are equally prominent and important.

⁷⁷ **Positionality:** A term/concept that I learnt from Kate Morehead, an ADHD activist and academic, in her CHASE lecture upon the subject of Feminist Pedagogy, in which she promoted asking the question, 'Why are you from?', instead of 'where?'.

⁷⁸ **Intense Fascination:** my own term in place of 'special interest', which I find personally find condescending; 'special interest' can also be a term used in diagnostic language, which predominantly focuses on deficit, which is another reason why I prefer Intense Fascination.

⁷⁹ **Linguistics:** (new 'dylexie' word) roots: Language + Linguistics. Definition: a term used in conjunction with exploring language/linguistic rules and boundaries.

⁸⁰ **Experiention:** (new 'dylexie' word) Roots: Experiment + Invention. Definition: To both theorize a new concept and bring it into practice.

⁸¹ **Compulsion:** (Root words: Compulsion +Compelled) A ND+ emotive and all-consuming need/drive/calling to do or complete something.

within prose? Ultimately, I found the answer to be ‘yes’, but my focus has now shifted onto whether it can do so while also being authentic, ethical representation. Though elements of post-modern theory surrounding language/performance perhaps on a more superficial level seem to correlate to notions surrounding some ND+ aesthetics, post-modern theories are not rooted to the same ethos or ethical considerations as what I am proposing for ND+ aesthetics/linguistics. Post-modernist practitioners have been influenced by many stimuli, but there is no specific need or criterion for the person to either be ND+, or to be specifically influenced in any way by ND+ perception/history/culture.

After watching Victoria Melody’s performance of ‘Headset’⁸², in which she performs her own comedy-set while wired up to a headset machine which monitors electrical impulses throughout her performance, to generate research to support her hypothesis surrounding audience laughter, dopamine hits and ADHD regulation, I came to further realise that the true nuance of ND+ Aesthetics does not exist outside of lived experience. Victoria Melody has had many careers, one being an anthropologist; she was employed to merge herself into a range of communities and then create comedy centring around those observations; she believes that she is a ‘natural’ at this type of work due to the fact that, as a ND+ individual, she had to intrinsically ‘mask’. She sees this ‘hyper-masking’ now as a skill which helps her study and reflect upon social differences. Within Melody’s act she does ‘endorse’ tangents, but to say that ADHD is characterised by tangents would be incredibly reductive; the narrative I saw on stage was undoubtedly her personal story, but it was also undeniably influenced by ADHD in its narrative/presentation.

Concerning my literary interest in this area, rather than simply ‘finding’ ND Aesthetics, I am asking:

Why could/can ND+ authors utilise language differently?

What, in the content of their creative practice, denotes ND+ lived experience/identity?

I still find ND+ linguistic innovation an interesting new ‘realm’ within language, but I now have much more consideration of nuance and ethics. This was solidified further by my interview with Sally Gardner, dyslexic author and spokesperson for the BDA (British Dyslexia Association). In her award-winning novel, *‘Maggot Moon’* (2012), she characterised Standish, a dyslexic protagonist with her own insight and experiences, commenting,

“I wanted to do was just to get a truth about dyslexia, which is not ever spoken about. Everybody who does dyslexic character in my book does bad spelling. I am so sick to death of it. I’m not interested. It just doesn’t interest me. I just used everything I used to say and some of the crazy stuff I used to say and just bombed it into Standish.”⁸³

Gardner employs her knowledge and personal insight into dyslexic innovation, inquisitiveness, and ‘word play’, injecting Standish with elements of her own lived experience. Similarly, Sarah

⁸² Melody, V. (2022) Headset [ONLINE] <https://victoriamelody.com/projects/head-set> [Accessed 04/02/24]

⁸³ My interview with Sally Gardner, Author of *Maggot Moon*. Interview conducted 26/11/20

Saeed, ND+ performer and founder of *'Lava Elastic'* (ND+ comedy night based in Brighton) spoke about how her writing focuses on exploring her mask, investigating different masks, and changing and removing elements of them on stage to create her personas. Insights such as these have given more appreciation of the different representations from ND+ authors writing ND+ characters and NT authors writing ND+ characters. With better understanding of ND+ cultures, Neurotypical writers can produce interesting, innovative, and highly readable lexis, but regarding representation, it may sound two-dimensional and perhaps somewhat clumsy, characterised by 'extremes', 'super-powers', and diagnostic symptoms rather than individual ND+ experiences. ND+ creative practice and narrative can hopefully permeate into every element of the creative process, this sentiment is strongly advocated by DYSPLA, a dyslexic/ND+ experimental arts collective, interviewed for this research and expanded upon within the next chapter.

When I began this PhD my concern with authenticity was more passive, and my interests were primarily focused upon whether authors, Neurotypical and ND+ alike, are able to shape/create stylistically innovative lexis incorporative/reflective of ND+ lived experience/perception, and differing states of mind/mental wellbeing. What initially inspired my investigation was Mark Haddon's novel *'The Curious Case of The Dog in the Night-time'* (2003); I was captivated by the way he used lexical deviations in characterising his protagonist Christopher as an autistic teenage boy. However, it would also be true to say that as an autistic/ND+ woman, I did not personally engage with Christopher's narration on a personal level, and, as an autistic person felt that certain stereotypes had been injected into Christopher's narration. Another narrative I was captured by, and directly spurred this investigation, was Lily Bailey's *'Because We are Bad, OCD, a Girl Lost in Thought'* (2017). I recognised Bailey's autobiographical narrative as more than an autobiographical critique of her condition; linguistically the nature of her OCD 'voice' and processing transcended the narrative, capturing obsessive compulsive thinking and reasoning; in the spirit of Neurodivergent+ narratives being multifaceted, in relation to this research, Bailey now also identifies as Dyspraxic, which she explores in her latest publication, *When I Feel Red* (2024)⁸⁴. As an ND+ woman I felt attuned to her way of seeing and decoding her surroundings, so much so, that I felt my own illness creeping out from the shadows. But directly reading about other presentations of intrusive thought also enabled me to feel kinship and less disgusted at my own intrusive OCD thoughts and compulsions; I wasn't 'bad', I really did have a type of relatively unspoken about OCD ('Pure O').

Mark Haddon does not identify as Neurodivergent+ but used ND+ lexis in order to procure further narrational interest, whereas Lily Bailey infused her narrative with her own voice, capturing the condition of OCD within her pages. It is the distinctions between these two narratives which confirmed to me that ND+ writing can be more than a stylistic trend; it can be a force that promotes ND+ energy, power, and unity.

⁸⁴ Bailey, L. (2024) *When I Feel Red* 'A Powerful Story of Dyspraxia, Identity and Finding Your Place in the World'. Orion.

In our interview, Mark Haddon discussed how although he was not ND+, he did identify as having an ‘outsider’ narrative, which I found of interest, as several ND+ writers/creatives also identify strongly with the term ‘outsider’. Though *‘Curious Incident’* may raise issues regarding appropriation, it may have captured the minds/hearts of many readers due to the fact that Haddon has managed to tap into some of the ‘felt’ truths and realities of existing as an ‘outsider’. With that insight, though he can be criticised for his attempt at ‘crafting autism’, perhaps an affiliation with ‘outsider’ enabled him to push past Christopher being a purely superficial ND+ character. Does this give Mark Haddon permission to claim autism as his own outsider narrative? Regarding this PhD, I do not necessarily believe that NT authors should not write ND+ narratives; they can be done with insight, kindness, and collaboration, and should be subject to critiques by the ND+ community, and that this critique should be forefront.

Reflected within this thesis are lines of enquiry that suggest appropriation is only part of the problem; that a consistent lack of active engagement with Neurodivergent+ communities, paired with the perpetuation of inaccurate stereotyping may also be to blame for contributing to the erasure of authentic ND+ narratives. The existence of Neurotypical representations of neurodivergence may not be the problem, rather that they have sometimes been given more space/recognition than the narratives of actual ND+ writings/representation. An added consideration regarding the line of enquiry of ND+ and NT authors is that elements of being ND+ aligning with the social model of disability, may mean that it is more difficult for some ND+ individuals to write/edit, reach publication expectations, tour with performance groups, social network, and, with many individuals experiencing alienation/isolation and repetitive setbacks, may not have the confidence/assurance. This thesis also puts forwards some suggestions that if ND+ individuals utilise text differently, then this might not conform to standardised publisher formats. With this in mind, it might be easier and more prevalent to publish work by Neurotypical authors, rather than spend time/energy/money in addressing access issues and supporting marginalised ND+ writers, which is deeply problematic.

ND+ lexis was utilised in my novel, *‘The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights’*, which pays homage to Mark Haddon’s *‘Curious Incident’*, but has a female ND+ protagonist, (Tammy). This is influenced by my own female Neurodivergent+ identification, and that ND+ women, particularly those presenting with experiences surrounding autism and ADHD, are and have been diagnostically side-lined and chronically under-identified or misdiagnosed.⁸⁵ Sally Gardner expressed to me how, in identifying her character Standish as dyslexic, she felt she could inject him with more of her dyslexic insight and be more lexically experimental. Dyslexic academic Deborah Leveroy in her research also discussed her application of ‘meta’ in terms of consciously being able to claim Neurodivergent+ self⁸⁶. When attending a talk hosted by ‘Neurodivergent Congress’ in 2023 one of the speakers discussed how you had to give yourself

⁸⁵ University of Durham (2022) Why many women with autism and ADHD aren’t diagnosed until adulthood – and what to do if you think you’re one of them. [ONLINE] <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/current/through-t-leadership/women-with-autism-adhd-arent-diagnosed-until-adulthood/> [Accessed 14/02/24]

⁸⁶ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] [PDF] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23]

permission to write in your own style, and by doing that you could work on undoing an internalised 'NT gaze'. In characterising Tammy, I consciously gave myself permission to utilise several of my own Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics in flavouring Tammy's writing and made a number of stylistically reflective choices. Within interviews, both Sally Gardner, dyslexic writer of *'Maggot Moon'*, and Kate Fox, writer and performance poet, stressed the importance that their work was not 'sectioned off', or isolated from other genres, and equally that ND+ classification would not overshadow other appreciations.

To conclude: As a scholar of creative writing, I was excited by the new possibilities Neurodivergent+ 'appearing' lexis opened up. With parallels to linguistically innovative writing techniques, I thought it could be a new way for authors to explore, meld, and craft language. I wished to explore the differing ways that authors could alter their linguistic syntax, descriptions, flow, content and potentially chronology to portray ND+ characters and divergent ways of thinking/communicating within creative practices. However, the further I delve into the topic, the more I see this as a reductionist approach; the format, layout, syntax, and typographic play of writing can be seen as the tip of the iceberg; it is not only the 'what' someone has written that is interesting, but also the how, why, its impetus, and the questions it engenders.

In pursuing this research, I have developed a greater understanding not only of the potential of Neurodivergent+ aesthetics in terms of self-identity, but also why/how it might be damaging for Neurotypical individuals to treat it as a style that is created in separation from ND+ experience; treating ND+ aesthetics two-dimensionally has the potential to discredit a hugely intricate culture and community, and risks perpetuating prejudice/stigma. With this said, undergoing this research I have also developed a greater appreciation of some of the nuance and difficulty surrounding policing such an expansive and often relatively hidden identity/culture; it has caused me to reflect upon the intricacies of ethics surrounding the nature of narrative, ownership, and whether it is in the nature of all writers/artists (ND+ and Neurotypical alike) to transgress boundaries, experiment and attempt to capture the perceptions of others. Should art have boundaries? – If it does, can there be ways/rules to guide and improve individuals seeking to write about experiences outside their own? What would these be?

I will now briefly introduce the contents and structure of the upcoming chapters:

Chapter One, Contextualisation: This chapter discusses several significant themes (including The Autie-biography, The Survivor's Movement and Mad Pride) providing a background whereby Neurodivergent+ Culture and Literature can emerge; it details specific historic influences, groups and movements, and also covers how Neurodivergent+ linguistic traits and communicational differences have been somewhat recognised/documentated within the fields of psychology/psychiatry/pathology, but discusses how much of this research focuses on

deficit. Going one step further, this chapter suggests that, on the occasions where literature has utilised lexical difference to portray Neurodivergent+ first-person protagonists, it has not necessarily been done to empower/give voice to members of the emerging Neurodivergent+ community, and discusses this in terms of possible insensitivities, stigma, and cultural appropriation.

Chapter Two, Neurodivergent+ Contemporary Voice: This chapter moves on to discuss several contemporary Neurodivergent+ artists, detailing emerging assertions around Neurodivergent+ creative aesthetics, such as: How ND+ creatives channel elements of lived experiences, and why they might experiment and present ND+ communication and ND+ processing into creative practices. This is done through analysing several of the interviews I conducted with Neurodivergent+ creatives. Alongside are some of my own observations and assertions from attending ND+ workshops and symposiums. A number of contemporary ND+ texts, writings and performances are also discussed within this chapter.

Chapter Three, Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics through the Close Analysis of Text: This section begins by discussing terms and distinctions ascertained through this exploration and reflects upon how these terms have grown from a need for language and categorisation to adapt so we have the words/concepts to reflect and eloquent progressions in Neurodivergent+ Culture/Inclusion surrounding ND+ Aesthetics. After establishing terminology this chapter employs these newly coined terms within the close examination of selected novels and memoirs that have attempted to utilize ND+ voice.

Main Creative Practice Component, The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights: The novel, which is the main element of creative practice of this research, has a ND+ narrator (Tammy) and endorses experimental language influenced by ND+ perception/lived experience. The content and linguistic techniques employed stem from this research and elements of my own Neurodivergent+ creative practice. This writing has been put forwards as a personal demonstration of how neurodivergence/Neurodivergent+ perceptions and Neurodivergent+ lived experience can be creative and exploratory in terms of how they can be wielded to claim identity, champion diverse, idiocentric voices and transgress neuronormative boundaries surrounding communication and creative mediums.

Chapter Four, Conclusions: This last segment moves onto how Neurodivergent+ Creativity, as a concept, is only just beginning, and how acknowledging Neurodivergent+ creative practice is not only about looking for what is already in existence, but also about making room for Neurodivergent+ Individuals to expand and develop their own sense of identity/creative identity. A 'counterargument' is then explored that focuses upon the accessibility of creative writing in relation to Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, as well as several smaller discussions surrounding the ethics of concepts uncovered through this exploration. It acknowledges that Neurodivergent Literature/literary and performative aesthetics are developing fields and

discusses their potential in furthering rounded appreciations of Neurodivergence as a cultural identity that is as varied, intricate, and complicated as any other, ending upon some of my personal reflections on this research journey.

Chapter One: Contextualisation

This exploration into Neurodivergent+ creative expression, and how ND+ perception and lived experience might transcend into language/communication/narrative, seeks to focus upon ND+ writers'/performers' insight, deliberating that ND+ 'thinking'/presentation/identification does affect/transcend language, and can be seen as fundamental within social sciences, namely fields concerning pathology, psychology, and psychiatry. When focusing upon ND+ identity and mental health conditions in terms of diagnosis and diagnostic attributes, many perceived qualities are highlighted by perceived differences in thought, mood, and perception; these are often monitored in relation to how they transgress into/impact communication and language.

Details to how elements of diagnostic criteria are thought to relate with selected ND+ identity/diagnosis: Schizophrenia, Autism, ADHD, Autism, OCD, Bi-Polar Disorder and Tourette's Syndrome can be found, and are discussed within this research's Preface; but, even though differing presentations of ND+ thought/language/communicational fashions are central concerns relating to fields surrounding pathology/psychology/psychiatry, these disciplines have historically focused/treated ND+ 'difference' in terms of deficit. Often ND+ participants' views/perspectives have not been treated as forefront; ND+ participants have often been observed, rather than included in conducting the research.

Moving on from ND+ categorisation/diagnosis being constrained by social science fields surrounding pathology, psychology and psychiatry, this section explores some of the histories behind ND+ literature, including two of its shaping movements: Survivors and Mad Pride. This section also focuses upon acknowledging potential ND+ pioneers within Literature/Performance, including two of the founding voices associated with the 'autiebiography' (Temple Grandin and Donna Williams). More specific nuances surrounding Neurodivergent+ Literature/Performance and Literary and Performative aesthetics are discussed later within this chapter, however a key distinction of Neurodivergent+ Literature, as opposed to the autiebiography, is that it not only covers a spectrum of Neurodivergent+ Identities, but that it is more wide-reaching regarding genre, encompassing autobiography, memoir writing, as well as fiction, and poetry. With this in mind, both the genres can be discussed in terms of ND+ aesthetics.

This chapter includes a brief analysis of some of the models of disability leading up to and existing with today's 'contemporary' ND+ creative practice, regarding elements of its ethos and conviction; though these are not discussed directly within the thesis, a number of the philosophies detailed underpin arguments throughout.

Psychology and Diagnosis: A Matter of Syntax?

There is already a plethora of research surrounding both Neurodivergent+ diagnosis/identity and mental health conditions, concerning thought, perception, and communicational and linguistic difference⁸⁷ existing within the fields of pathology, psychology and psychiatry.

One of this thesis's main assertions is that the ways in which Neurodivergent+ identifying creatives⁸⁸ communicate, perceive, and experience the world around them can influence/impact their creative practice. Referring more specifically to a Neurodivergent+ person who experiences fluctuating mental health, a transcript taken in a state of mania or psychosis would likely differ and have significant variations from one taken when in a differing, potentially more reflective state of mind. An example of writing in times of fluctuation and reflection can be witnessed in the second part of David Burke's hybrid novel, *'When the Music's Over: My Journey into Schizophrenia'* (1996). Writing or performance that includes unusual tangents, internal interruptions, paranoia, losing a sense of 'appropriateness' or oversharing, could stem and be influenced by this. Even more pertinently to this research surrounding identity, a question it poses is: Does, or can having differing experiences/perceptions effect a person's sense of self more generally? Leading on from this: Can elements of these insights be captured within flexible, divergent models of creative writing and performance?

The main question this research poses is:

- 1) How can/are Neurodivergent+ differences in experience, perception and communication translated into creative practice (specifically Creative Writing and Performance), and who has the authority to do so?**

Secondary questions relating to this research are:

- 2) If Neurodivergent+ appearing aesthetics are/can be identified and utilized to create Neurodivergent+ characters/their narration, should this be employed more generally within linguistic innovation and creative writing, or is it medium that only Neurodivergent+ Creatives should endorse? (How might the purposeful employment of 'Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics' relate to discussions surrounding Cultural Appropriation?)**

And a line of inquiry which is interspersed throughout this research is:

- 3) Are there any specific barriers, relating to accessibility and/or publishing industry expectation, that might negatively impact Neurodivergent+ Creatives?**

⁸⁷ **Note:** Difference is only used in comparison to 'difference from perceived NT 'norms''. Neurodivergent+ individuals/communities may not identify themselves as inherently difference. This is part of the reason/need of individuals finding solidarity within ND+ spaces, so that they no longer need to see themselves as inherently 'different', rather appreciations towards ND+ self and existence will form/prevail regarding 'difference'.

⁸⁸ **Neurodivergent+ Identifying Creatives** in this research refers to writers and performers who are 'out' about having been Neurodivergent+ and/or experiencing mental health conditions in relation to either self-identity or diagnosis.

This deviation of language for ND+ individuals has typically been studied through predominantly medical and 'ableist'⁸⁹ gazes, with a focus mainly upon difference as deficit. Dr Damian Milton, an autistic researcher, wrote, '*A Mismatch of Saliency, Explorations of the Nature of Autism from Theory to Practice*'⁹⁰ in which, along with other assertions, he highlights, 'The Double Empathy Problem'; in short this relates to how autistic individuals, who have been shown limited compassion, empathy and understanding within Neurotypical society, have then been judged by Neurotypical assumptions, to not be empathetic. With this in mind, he understands a number of assumptions towards autistic empathetic capacity as ableist and hypercritical in nature; in relation to autism and perceived empathy deficit he asks, 'Deficient in comparison to what?'⁹¹

Regarding this research, in pertaining differing ways of understanding and embodying ND+ thought/language/communication/perception, I would answer that 'we' (ND+ individuals) are often seen as 'deficient' in comparison to what has been deemed as 'correct' Neurotypical thought, language, perception and communicational expectations, rather than these presentations being viewed in more pure terms of difference.

It is my hope that this research can more directly acknowledge/claim Neurodivergent+ language in terms of identity and creative aesthetic not only highlighting the importance and value of Neurodivergent+ communication to ourselves/within ND+ communities, but also in that enabling NT individuals to have more direct appreciation of ND+ writing/performance, demonstrating elements of 'differing' thought/perception/communication/lived experience, it might go some way to bridging gaps of empathy and understanding between ND+ and Neurotypical individuals and the wider community.

To conclude this section, this investigation develops upon research relating to Neurodivergent+ language and communication that exists within the fields of psychology and psychiatry, but extrapolates and applies it to ND+ creative practice within the subjects of Literature, Creative Writing and Performance; an important distinction setting this research apart from many psychological studies is that it does not focus upon perceived ND+ linguistic/communicational differences as 'deficit', rather upon identity and creative linguistic innovation. Going forward the researcher hopes that the direct acknowledgement of ND+ aesthetics in creative practices will promote diverse, innovate original lexical practices.

Note: Discouragingly, when first undergoing this research, I uncovered an amount of research more directly relating to Literature/creative practice centred upon ascertaining autistic deficits in imagination within speech and writing; this research was grounded upon outdated diagnostic criteria relating towards AS individuals being literal thinkers and lacking imaginative qualities. Some examples of this type of inquiry can be found within Mark Osteen's collection of papers surrounding Autism, language and Literature titled, '*Autism and Representation*' (2007)⁹² particularly within Chapter 6, Kristina Chew's, '*Fractured Idiom: Metonymy and the*

⁸⁹ **Ableist:** A term referring to an 'able-bodied', or in this assertion, 'neurotypical' perspectives/outlooks that negatively impacts upon a disabled, or in this usage, Neurodivergent+ individual's experiences.

⁹⁰ Milton, D. (2017) *A Mismatch of Saliency: Explorations of the Nature of Autism from Theory to Practice*. Pavilion Publishing.

⁹¹ Milton, D. (2017) *A Mismatch of Saliency: Explorations of the Nature of Autism from Theory to Practice*. Pavilion Publishing.

⁹² Osteen, M. (2007) *Autism and Representation*. Routledge.

Language of Autism' (pp. 133-145), and Chapter 7, Ilona Roth's, *'Imagination and the awareness of self in Autistic Spectrum Poets'* (pp.145-166). Chapter 7 sought to ascertain whether autistic poets endorsed less advanced abstract qualities in their writing; I was pleased that their findings, which involved analysing autistic participant's poetry to prove diminished creativity, actually did not demonstrate reduced imaginative qualities, however the line of inquiry led me to alter how I sourced and selected research.

Several studies centred particularly upon autistic creativity/imagination and artistic expression had not actively employed Neurodivergent+ agency and therefore rehashed existing ND+ stereotypes/stigma within fields relating to the arts. To avoid this happening within this thesis, where possible I have focused upon histories led and comprised by ND+ unions and firsthand accounts, where possible I have also sourced the majority of my research from ND+ identifying researchers and creatives.

Neurodivergent+ History: Survivor's and Mad Pride Movements

The Survivor's Movement took root in the 1970s, but only started to gain real momentum in the 1980s; in 1985 the first Mind World Federation Health Conference was held, 'Dutch and US patient groups met UK user/survivor groups for the first time.'⁹³ During this event, ND+ individuals who had experienced institutionalisation were encouraged to speak about their experiences not only to strengthen solidarity but so that their first-hand perspectives could be recognised and acknowledged by doctors and psychiatrists running the wards and initiate empathy/understanding and change. During this period, ND+ individuals produced writing and poetry which sought to release anguish and heighten awareness; this was dubbed 'Survivor Poetry'. Much of it detailed extremely raw, first-hand accounts of individuals experiencing trauma and ill-treatment. Although it is poetry that details a lack of control and agency, it is also poetry that managed to permeate through the padded cells, steady itself through compulsory electroconvulsive shocks, and collect itself into anthologies. It is arguably one of the first and quite painful chapters leading up to the Neurodivergent+ Movement today; many Survivor accounts existed only as spoken pieces or were published by small grass-roots organisations, and have sadly been lost, but a number of collections do still exist within Asylum Magazine⁹⁴ archives. Asylum Magazine was first published in 1886, it focuses upon publishing content that might not make it into the mainstream press⁹⁵, and is one of the longest running Survivor collections, with it still publishing today in 2023. Asylum Magazine also recognise the importance of viewing ND+/Mad issues as intricately joined with other intersectionalities,

"We always try to show solidarity with wider progressive social movements and make links with the struggle for Mad people's rights. Recently, that has included the struggle for environmental justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, especially Trans people's rights"⁹⁶

⁹³ Wallcraft, J. & Bryant, M. (2003) *The Mental Health Server User Guide in England by The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health*. Kings' college London. p.3 [ONLINE] http://studymore.org.uk/policy_2.pdf [Accessed 05/08/2020]

⁹⁴ Asylum Magazine (1999-2024) [ONLINE] <http://www.asylummagazine.org/about-the-magazine>. [Accessed 06/02/24]

⁹⁵ Parker, A. (2010) 'Democratic Psychiatry in 2010', *Asylum Magazine Online*. [ONLINE] <https://socialistresistance.org/asylum-democratic-psychiatry-in-2010/849> [Accessed 15/02/24]

⁹⁶Spandler, H. [Ed.] (2020) *Asylum Magazine*, Vol. 27 No. 3. [ONLINE] <https://asylummagazine.org/2020/09/asylum-27-3-autumn-2020> [Accessed 15/02/24]

Another representation of literature and writings from and around the time of the Survivors movement is *'Out of Her Mind'* (2000), which specifically focuses on women with firsthand experiences of 20th century asylums. The anthology is edited by Rebecca Shannonhouse, with her introduction ascertaining,

“It is clear that there is an important body of literature that can reveal to others the largely private world of emotional suffering. The writers whose works are collected in this anthology not only represent creative, romanticized women, like Zelda Fitzgerald and Sylvia Plath, and so many others, but also, in a sense, anonymous ones who, for generations, have existed behind harsh, impersonal statistics of mental illness.”⁹⁷

Stigma and depictions specifically surrounding 'Mad Women' is a topic in-and-of itself, but, as a ND+ woman, I felt a deep sense of emotive solidarity regarding some the expressions of trauma, pain, endurance and prejudice that *'Out of Her Mind'* captured. Shannonhouse determines that this type of literature, that values and supports find-hand accounts, personalises 'impersonal statistics', allowing for more direct understanding surrounding 'mental illness' and 'emotional suffering'. The Survivors Movement and its ethos supported many vulnerable individuals in voicing and asserting ownership of their narrative, for some it was a way of claiming agency while also reflecting and working through traumatic life experiences through the act of expressive⁹⁸ writing. *'When the Music's Over'* (1995)⁹⁹ a hybrid novel by Ross David Burke, is one of the few examples of Survivor Writing that found itself a publisher, one reason for this could be that the first half is written by Burke's Therapist, which framed *'When the Music's Over'* as more of a case study upon Schizophrenia. The second half of the novel is written by Burke, and, to read, it is clear that he has written chapters while experiencing differing mental health states; some chapters are autobiographical, others seem to stray into fiction, whereas other sections read as impassioned existentialist rants. As he becomes more ill, his writing becomes much 'looser' as it drifts into spiralling logics, occasionally drifting into the realms of 'word salad'.¹⁰⁰

“The spy. The fanatic dreamer who wishes to preserve the burial ground of earth crash-landed on the planet's natural truth. He was the dream-giver. He called forever. I am future. I am earth. He who had the vision to see a million years was called sanity, the same man. I am the same man. rit of the book spoke. I know, I love, I think, I feel.”

The book unfortunately ends with Burke's published suicide note. Though lexically 'The Music is Over' is a very interesting regarding mental health and how mentality effects language, the reason why I have categorised his novel as encapsulating 'Survivor's' ethos is that Burke wrote to communicate his lived reality of Schizophrenia and openly documents his experiences/mental health states to be accessible to others, its style and sentiment, being

⁹⁷ Shannonhouse, R. (2000) *Out of Her Mind*, 'Women Writing On Madness'. Random House.

⁹⁸ **Expressive Writing:** I am using this term to describe a type of creative writing that focuses prominently upon self-expression and can be used as a medium to work through specific emotions or trauma.

⁹⁹ Burke, D. (1995) *When The Music's Over: My Journey into Schizophrenia*. Penguin.

¹⁰⁰ **Word Salad:** a term used mainly around schizophrenic language when it becomes incomprehensible to a listener. It is spoken as if conversational, but with no way for a listener to comprehend unconnected thoughts, words and logic, definition extrapolated from the Psychology Dictionary [ONLINE]

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/word-salad#:~:text=Word%20salad%20is%20defined%20as,of%20dementia%2C%20such%20as%20Alzheimer's.>

[Accessed 24/03/24]

quite directly reflective of struggle and ill mental-health, characterise it as a Survivor's text. Many sources of Survivor writings have been lost as they were self-published within pamphlets by grass-roots organisations, however, one prevailing collection is Asylum¹⁰¹, first published in 1986, which still continues to collect and advocate for individuals who were held within mental health institutions.

Survivor's splinter group 'Mad Pride' preserves the 'Survivor' ethos of self-expression and non-censorship, however, it has a stronger focus on reclaiming words and identity, leaving more room for a different scope of writing that is more concerned with 'joy', self-expression, and individuality. 'Mad Pride' was more of an assertion of uniqueness, without specific emphasis on trauma/surviving, and with this came the notion of 'new', unedited/unproofed writing that endorsed tangents, 'oversharing' along with register and rapid topic change. 'Mad Pride' can be seen as a movement against masking¹⁰² and openly invites ND+ individuals to be accepted on their own terms; 'Mad' explores communicative/expressional freedom within unedited/uncensored ND+ linguistics¹⁰³.

Previous to this investigation into ND+ literary history, I had not been aware of either 'Mad' or 'Survivor' as influences or movements. It was only when I was invited to the National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (NDACA) at Buckinghamshire New University as a journalist for Disability Arts Online (DAO) that I was directed to these areas. Within the physical archive, not only did I find a box of 'Survivor' poetry, I was also made aware of activist Ted Curtis, who collated a collection of 'Mad' literature by diverse authors and activists in 2000: *'Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture'*¹⁰⁴.

Inquiring further, I discovered that the founder and editor of DAO, Colin Hambrook, identified both as 'Survivor' and 'Mad' and had been politically active within both movements. His initial ethos had in fact spurred him to co-found DAO; at a later date I interviewed Colin upon his trauma-laden political activism and poetry. It was a poignant conversation and one which enabled me to adopt a more intimate connection with DAO (of which I have written for as a freelance journalist for a number of years). As a researcher I also felt stronger and more connected to a sense of overall unity/solidarity. I understood that I was in no way the 'start' of a movement, rather, I was standing on the shoulders of decades of Neurodivergent+ people who had striven for inclusion and acknowledgement. Uncovering and identifying more upon Neurodivergent+ roots and histories has aided a sense of ND+ kinship and self-reflection.

A much more recent publication documenting and building upon 'Mad Pride' as a culture is by Mad identifying Creative, Dolly Sen, entitled, *Installing Normality, 'A Study Guide on*

¹⁰¹ Asylum Magazine (1999-2024) [ONLINE] <http://www.asylummagazine.org/about-the-magazine>. [Accessed 06/02/24]

¹⁰² **Masking:** A term that's used for a range of ND+ individuals who attempt to present less 'Neurodivergently', and/or cope with high stress situations, this can be through studying the perceived Neurotypical (NT) reactions/behaviours/communications of those around them, attempting to alter how they as ND+ individuals look/speak/behave/move/write, attempting not to publicly stim, and/or hiding their own feelings of panic/anxiety/discomfort.

¹⁰³ **Linguistic:** A dylexie* word combing 'Language' and 'Linguistic', I have coined it to mean: the innovative or new uses of language and/or linguistics.

***dylexie** – this is how I, as a dyslexic individual, term thoughts/behaviour and communication in relation to myself. It acknowledges the diagnostic term but also reclaims it to be more colloquial/less medical.

¹⁰⁴ Curtis, T. Leslie, E. and Dellar, R. (2000) *Mad Pride*. Chipmunkpublishing.

Madness, Mad Pride and Questioning Normality' (2024)¹⁰⁵. Her writing identifies mental illness, in part, as a construction of sociological ideals,

'Diagnosis comes from subjective judgements of 'professional' about what is acceptable behaviour. For me, madness or mental distress is not about the broken brain but broken hearts, caused by trauma, adversity, social issues like poverty and disconnection, and inequality and discrimination.'¹⁰⁶

She asserts that 'mad'/ND+ individuals identify under a cacophony of words and frameworks, but that self-determination is key, "The rule of thumb is to ask people how they would like to be termed"¹⁰⁷. Her study room guide upon madness includes a chapter on language, stating, "Madness and mental health are the perfect place to explore the power of language."¹⁰⁸ In characterising her own experience of psychosis/madness she stated,

"I had my first psychotic episode at 14, which was a terrifying experience. Psychosis is an altered state where you can experience voices, sounds, vision, smells and tastes other people can't experience."¹⁰⁹

A section within her study guide is upon her involvement with Mad Pride movement, and her friendship/solidarity with Ted Curtis, author/editor of 'Mad Pride' (2000). She initially joined the movement as she saw it to have a focus upon "taking away the feeling of shame" and upon "action and creativity". While facilitating as part of 'Mad Pride' Sen discussed how they offered creative workshops and performance opportunities including the festival BONKERSFEST, a free music and arts festival that celebrated "madness and creativity".¹¹⁰

'Mad Pride' as a movement emerged from the Survivors Movement; its first recorded rally was in Toronto Canada, 1993, where people living within sheltered psychiatric housing combatted negative attitudes existing within their area. A number of ND+ individuals believed The Survivor's Movement focused too strongly upon negativity, whereas Mad Pride sought to reclaim the word 'Mad' and celebrate its status of difference. Below is a quote from 'Toronto Mad Pride', which still exists as a celebration today,

'Similar to how LGBTQ communities are reclaiming the word "queer", Mad Pride activists seek to reclaim language that has been used against us such as "mad", "nutter", "crazy", "lunatic",

105 Sen, D. (2024) Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNjvwTY_aem_ArD2Xf_HPICKLRf_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG a 97u-1sUBTqbg-V0tVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnk87_ [Accessed 29/03/24]

106 Sen, D. (2024) Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNjvwTY_aem_ArD2Xf_HPICKLRf_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG a 97u-1sUBTqbg-V0tVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnk87_ [Accessed 29/03/24] Section Language. p.3.

107 Sen, D. (2024) Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNjvwTY_aem_ArD2Xf_HPICKLRf_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG a 97u-1sUBTqbg-V0tVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnk87_ [Accessed 29/03/24] Section Language. p.2.

108 Sen, D. (2024) Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNjvwTY_aem_ArD2Xf_HPICKLRf_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG a 97u-1sUBTqbg-V0tVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnk87_ [Accessed 29/03/24] Section: Language. p.5.

109 Sen, D. (2024) Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNjvwTY_aem_ArD2Xf_HPICKLRf_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG a 97u-1sUBTqbg-V0tVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnk87_ [Accessed 29/03/24] Section: I Am Mad. p.6.

110 Section: Mad Pride. P.8.

“maniac”, and “psycho”. Reclaiming language is political and challenges discrimination. Mad Pride participants use and refuse a variety of labels. We choose “mad” as an umbrella term.’¹¹¹

The Mad Pride movement produced a substantial amount of literature from a number of its contributors, endorsing styles more characterised by non-confirmative, sporadic, and perhaps ‘zany’ writing content and aesthetic. The term and concept of Neurodivergent developed within a number of communities, in 1997 Judy Singer’s writings helped popularize the term, and newly identifying Neurodivergent+ individuals began demanding recognition on their terms. All three of these movements, ‘Survivors’, ‘Mad’ and ‘ND+’, focus on Neurodivergent+ individuals unionising and taking charge of their narratives outside the confines of the medical model of disability¹¹².

These movements, though politically driven, started lending themselves towards literature, creative writing, speech, and performances as a means for Neurodivergent+ people to be heard and assert their identity. Several ND+ artists interviewed for this research echoed their sentiments, with many contemporary writing and performance inspirations still being rooted in expressing mistreatment and alienation. Going forward, a number of contemporary ND+ creatives acknowledge the need to artistically express pain/injustice but hope that the society/environment in which we exist and survive will aid us in fostering more progressive assertions surrounding ND+ identity, which will hopefully leave room for new types of ND+ creativities to develop.

The Autie-Biography:

‘Those individuals who speak, write or communicate in some other way make their presence felt through their entry into the domain of cultural representation [...] their individuality is a narrative of its own.’¹¹³

This quote from Murray’s *‘Representing Autism, Culture, Narrative, Fascination’* (2008) suggests that there is something about the Neurodivergent+ voice, and writing that inherently taps into ND+ perspective. The term ‘autie-biography’ was pioneered by some of the first autistic writers, two dominant founders being: Dr Temple Grandin, an American autistic academic, and Donna Williams an Australian autistic teacher and international speaker, both of whom began publishing works in the early to mid-1990s.

Temple Grandin began her career by specialising in animal rights work, involving her fashioning environments to improve cattle slaughterhouses¹¹⁴. After rising to fame, she was widely considered the ‘female face of autism’ and lectured in autism studies at Colorado State University. Grandin publicly expressed views that advocate the separation of ‘useful/high functioning’ autistic peoples from ‘less useful autism’, which she voiced should be cured or aborted¹¹⁵. Though controversial, Grandin remains respected in her field and has written widely about her life and experiences as an autistic woman. Her most famous writing being

¹¹¹ Mad Pride Toronto (2020) What is Mad Pride? WordPress [ONLINE] <http://www.torontomadpride.com/what-is-mp/> [Accessed 10/08/2020]

¹¹² Disability Wales (2023) Neurodiversity and the Social Model of Disability [ONLINE] <https://www.disabilitywales.org/neurodiversity-and-the-social-model-of-disability/> [Accessed 15/02/24]

¹¹³ Murray, S. (2008) *Representing Autism, Culture, Narrative, Fascination*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 16–17.

¹¹⁴ National Women’s Hall of Fame (2023) ‘Temple Grandin’ [ONLINE] <https://www.womenofthehall.org/inductee/temple-grandin> [Accessed 16/02/24]

¹¹⁵ Crossman, C. (2019) ‘Why Temple Grandin is Not My Hero’, *In the Loop About Neurodiversity* [ONLINE]

<https://intheaboutneurodiversity.wordpress.com/2019/07/21/why-temple-grandin-is-not-my-hero/#:~:text=As%20a%20believer%20in%20functioning,what%20free%20and%20dairy%20free.> [Accessed 24/03/24]

her autobiography *'Thinking in Pictures'* (1995) was produced as a film in 2010. Other renowned works are: *'Emergence'*, *'Labelled Autistic'* (1986), and *'The Autistic Brain, Thinking Across the Spectrum'* (2013).

Another prominent 'Autie-biographical' voice was Donna Williams; renowned for writings upon her autistic experience, has cultivated a less controversial reputation. Her writing, though highly creative, strongly advocates a narrative of 'overcoming' and self-improvement through learning how to appear less autistic. Though upsetting to many modern readers, this was her view and experience of autism in the 1990s, prior to more substantial recognition and support of the Neurodivergent+ movements. Her most notable works are: *'Nobody Nowhere'* (1992), *'Somebody Somewhere'* (1994), *'Like Colour to the Blind'* (1996) and *'Everyday Heaven'* (2004). Below Williams is quoted from *Nobody Nowhere* talking about how she began writing and expressing herself in ways which might be considered unconventional,

"In English [class], I would write, though never on the prescribed topic. I'd spend the time writing evasively about something which disturbed me. [...] I would always finish my work off with a lightly pencilled sketch drawn over the writing, covering the length of the page which, I felt, would more adequately capture what I was trying to express."¹¹⁶

Regardless of their views, these were the first women to reach international autism literacy fame. Their personal views and life experiences may not be shared by contemporary autistic women, but their voices were heard in an era that was not only more restrictive for women, but also those with differing neurologies. They had the courage to be 'out' as Autistic/ND+; undoubtedly making it easier for others, such as myself, to persevere in future years. Donna Williams, poetic by nature, comments on how she wrote her first 'autie-biography':

'Writing it had been like a fever before the waking. Words had attacked the pages, my fingers striking the keys of the plastic typewriter with such speed and ferocity that the manuscript felt like it was written in braille. There was little awareness of what was being written.'¹¹⁷

Since Grandin's and Williams' publications, the term 'autie-biography'¹¹⁸ emerged and several similar terms have joined: autistic autobiography¹¹⁹, autism narratives¹²⁰, AS (autistic spectrum) writings, autism testimonies. In a paper by Ian Hacking upon the pertinence of Autistic Autobiographies he states,

'Autism narratives are not just stories or histories, describing a given reality. They are creating the language in which to describe the experience of autism, and hence helping to forge the concepts in which to think autism.'¹²¹

In another paper, 'How We have been Learning to talk about Autism: A Role for Stories', he wrote,

¹¹⁶ Williams, D. (1992) *Nobody Nowhere*. Doubleday.

¹¹⁷ Van Goidsenhoven, L. (2017) 'Autie-Biographies': Life Writing Genres and Strategies from an Autistic Perspective', *Journal of Language Literature and Culture*. 64(2): 79-95. A traditional genre perspective and its textual assumptions p.5.

¹¹⁸ **Autie-Biography**: The writing and reflections of an autistic individual on the topic/reflection of their own autistic experiences.

¹¹⁹ Hacking, I. (2009a) 'Autistic Autobiography', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*. Vol. 364, Issue 1522.

¹²⁰ Neff, M. (2023) 'Autistic Narratives VS Autistic Stories', *Neurodivergent Insights*. [ONLINE] <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/blog/autism-narratives-vs-autistic-stories> [Accessed 16/02/24]

¹²¹ Hacking, I. (2009a) 'Autistic Autobiography', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*. Vol. 364, Issue 1522.

“One role for the wave of autism stories now being published, is to create such a language of autism. This in turn effects how autistic people think of themselves. It certainly affects how nonautistics, “Neurotypical Individuals” think about autism.”¹²²

Hacking asserts that making way for Autistic/Neurodivergent+ writings goes further than flat/superficial documentation of ‘stories or histories’, and relates to creating something new, through the developing assertions surrounding of autistic identity. Leni Van Goidsenhoven, an autistic academic, published, ‘*Autie-biographies: Life Writing Genres and Strategies from an Autistic Perspective*’¹²³ in 2017 on the topic of what the ‘autie-biography’ is and how it is progressing into more mainstream culture,

‘The proliferation of life writings written by people on the autism spectrum is a relatively recent phenomenon and has quickly become the touchstone for autism culture. Cultural and literary studies have gradually acknowledged these autism narratives. Is it possible to approach them as a new subgenre within life writing or disability narratives, and if so, what are its distinctive features and what could this labelling possibly imply?’¹²⁴

Leni Van Goidsenhoven’s paper upon ‘Autie-biography’ poses questions that this PHD has sought to address. The text discusses if autie-biographies could be innately different from the already existent genres of life writing and disability narrative. Van Goidsenhoven’s article discusses how autie-biographies were the beginning of literature on the topic of autism that were not medically driven. Though this narrative would have reflected the view of wider society, the article goes on to discuss the role of publishing houses in creating and perpetuating these views. With the development of a new genre also emerges ideas of what it should comprise of. This leads to this research’s second question: Are Neurodivergent+ voices being censored, edited, or tailored by editors and publicists?

‘Numerous constraints are formatting the genre [a-biography] and are manipulating it towards the demands of the market. Or, as Couser stated: ‘(...) cultural forces determine what sorts of stories get written and published, who gets a life.’¹²⁵ In order to examine the complexity of the disability memoir boom, we propose to look into the proliferation of autism narratives or what is called ‘autie-biographies’. More precisely, we investigate them as part of a production cycle that has to continually negotiate between the demands of the individual’s unique story, the expectations of a community and a commercial rationale. More precisely, we focus on Jessica Kingsley Publishers (JKP), a leading international niche publisher in the field of neurological and cognitive differences.’¹²⁶

On the one hand, Van Goidsenhoven is highlighting that the more publishers who are aware of the genre and value the autie-biography has, then the more autie-biographies will be published. However, publishers would then become gatekeepers for autistic voices/narrative; autistic voices being ‘policed’ to meet neurotypical commercial publishing standards and certain story-line expectations. The article concludes that the first autie-biographies written

¹²² Hacking, M. HACKING, I. (2009). How We Have Been Learning To Talk About Autism: A Role For Stories. *Metaphilosophy*, 40(3/4), 499–516. [ONLINE] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24439798> [Accessed 19/03/24]

¹²³ Van Goidsenhoven, L. (2017) ‘Autie-Biographies’: Life Writing Genres and Strategies from an Autistic Perspective’, *Journal of Language Literature and Culture*. 64(2): 79-95.

¹²⁴ Van Goidsenhoven, L. (2017) ‘Autie-Biographies’: Life Writing Genres and Strategies from an Autistic Perspective’, *Journal of Language Literature and Culture*. 64(2): 79-95.

¹²⁵ Courser, T. (1997) *Recovering bodies, ‘Illness Disability and Life Writing*. University Wisconsin Press.

¹²⁶ Van Goidsenhoven, L. (2017) ‘Autie-Biographies’: Life Writing Genres and Strategies from an Autistic Perspective’, *Journal of Language Literature and Culture*. 64(2): 79-95.

by Temple Grandin and Donna Williams were not written to start a genre, rather, for self-expression. The article suggests that contemporary novels published on the topic of autism now need to meet cultural sensitivities or political expectations (even if they are policed by the autism community itself), which could lead them to be less in tune with true/individual self-expression.

On the topic of autism and the 'autie-biography' and how it has developed currently into the 21st century, Sara Gibbs, autistic author of 'Drama Queen' (2021)¹²⁷, chaired her own limited series Podcast 'Aut Hour'¹²⁸ which exclusively interviews present-day autistic authors such as Erin Ekins, Abigail Balfe, Lizzie Huxley-Jones, Morenike Giwa Onaiwu and Nicole Burstein. Regarding ethos and 'Autie-Biography' Gibbs is taking conversations a step further in not only giving autistic authors a place to talk upon their writings, but also creating safe ND+ spaces where autistic authors can speak freely/without prejudice with other autistic authors upon writing and process. Similarly to this research upon ND+ aesthetics, and my own interviews with ND+ creatives, Gibbs, within Aut Hour, has facilitated conversations that empathetically continue conversations surrounding writing/autism and autie-biography in the 21st century; what is striking about her lines of enquiry, is that she is able to pursue authentic, non-threatening lines of enquiry, using her own experiences to examine other autistic author's lived experiences, such as when they first recognising themselves as autistic, and how this transcends into their writings. Regarding Neurodivergence and solidarity, a reason why her podcast seems authentic/relaxed is that, with Gibbs, as well as the interviewee being autistic, there is a natural breakdown of hierarchy¹²⁹ whereby Gibbs is able to question her interviewees from a place of understanding. Within her 4th podcast episode, with Lizzie Huxley Jones autistic author of 'Stim' a collection of short stories by different autistic authors, Gibbs commented,

"The Eclectic mix of styles and subject matter is such a great showcase of what our brilliant branes can don when we're allowed the space to do it"¹³⁰

Within Courser's collection 'Recovering Bodies, 'Illness Disability and Life Writing'' (1997)¹³¹, many of the essays suggest that Life Writing, in relation to disability, which I am extrapolating to Neurodivergence, can capture/contain perspectives, and empathy towards experiences of disability and pain/mental illness (and I argue Neurodivergence) that are able to obtain and give others, such as medical professionals, more in-depth understandings that would not be able to be found/understood/captured within diagnostic speech or manuals; art/poetry/Life Writing can capture perspectives that permeate beyond medical definitions, thereby humanising these experiences. Within the introduction, 'Human Conditions – Illness, Disability and Life Writing', it also stipulates that sometimes illness/disability (and I argue Neurodivergence/Mental health conditions) are seen as an 'interruption' to life, rather than experiences that are lived through, can be constant, and ultimately inform an individual's

¹²⁷ Gibbs, S. (2021) Drama Queen, 'One Autistic Woman and a Life of Unhelpful Labels'. Headline

¹²⁸ Gibbs, S. (2021-2023) Aut Hour. Spotify [ONLINE] <https://open.spotify.com/show/613Ai66JCoNNnVWrE8x8YD> [Accessed 26/03/24]

¹²⁹ **Note:** In instances with autistic interviewees and Neurotypical interviewers, there runs a risk of the Neurotypical interviewer setting certain precedence of 'normality' vs 'abnormality', and following lines of questioning that can be from places of curiosity/fascination, rather than empathy and understanding.

¹³⁰ Gibbs, S. (2023) Aut Hour Lizzie Huxley-Jones. AutHour on Spotify [ONLINE] <https://open.spotify.com/show/613Ai66JCoNNnVWrE8x8YD> [Accessed 26/03/24]

¹³¹ Courser, T. (1997) Recovering bodies, 'Illness Disability and Life Writing. University Wisconsin Press. Introduction: Human Conditions- Illness, Disability and Life Writing. p.5.

perspectives and life views. Regarding OCD, and my own experiences of having intense episodes, I relate strongly to this sentiment, that the continuous ‘episodes’ do not exist in complete isolation/separation; when within them I still need to work/interact and communicate, and when they have passed, I remember them, experiencing them, for better or for worse, changes me and my outlooks.

One of the developing ideologies around Neurodivergence highlighted within this research, relating directly to elements of my trajectory, is to challenge assertions relating to binary diagnosis. The notion of distinct diagnostic categorisation in relation to ND+ identity has been framed by ideas surrounding The Medical Models of Disability/Neurodivergence. Strict diagnostic segregation risks creating barriers of understanding and collaboration between Neurodivergent+ individuals with similar lived experiences. Many ND+ individuals will never formally get a specific ND+ diagnosis, perhaps due to lack of opportunity, sometimes choice, but will have narratives that inherently resonate/are akin with ND+ experience/narrative. Research conducted by Durham University suggested that 80% of autistic are women misdiagnosed,

‘...Autism and ADHD are both often missed or even misdiagnosed in women. Nearly 80% of women with autism are misdiagnosed – often with conditions such as borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, bipolar disorder and anxiety. It’s currently unknown how often women with ADHD are misdiagnosed.’¹³²

Even within medical fields it is becoming increasingly clear that individuals have/are being misdiagnosed, with women being much more likely to receive mental health diagnoses. Many women live only with mental health diagnosis and will never be recognised/recognise themselves as Autistic/ADHD; in recognising the many ways in which neurodivergence intersects, we can connect to a number of otherwise ‘lost’/isolated ND+ voices. Extrapolating further, diagnosis can perhaps be viewed more in terms of ‘best fit’ for a range of individual Neurodivergent+ presentations and experiences, already terms such as AuDHD¹³³ (both autistic and ADHD) are emerging more colloquially for ND+ individuals.

A number of ND+ individuals may relate to more mental health-centred identity/diagnosis such as repetitive/enduring OCD, bi-bolar disorder, mania/psychotic/depressive/anxiety condition/identity differently to how they appreciate more neurocognitive/neurodevelopmental identity/diagnosis such as ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia. In terms of my relationship to being ND+, I feel quite negatively impacted by OCD, obsessions/compulsions, but have a much more ‘positive’/encompassing appreciation towards Autistic/Dyslexic/Dyspraxic identity. I spoke with Angella Barnes, ADHD performer and comedian, who similarly voiced how she views her ADHD differently/as more identity encompassing than her mental health diagnosis¹³⁴. With this in mind, though I have a splattering of medical labels I generally view myself as having one, non-diagnosis specific,

¹³²Durham University. (2022) ‘Why Women with Autism and ADHD aren’t diagnosed until Adulthood’ [ONLINE] <http://www.durham.ac.uk/research/current/thought-leadership/women-with-autism--adhd-arent-diagnosed-until-adulthood> [Accessed 17/12/23]

¹³³Neurodiverse Counselling Centre (2023) ‘Support for Dual Diagnosis’ [ONLINE] <http://www.neurodiverseouplescounseling.com/audhd> [Accessed 19/12/23]

¹³⁴Robdale, E. (2023) ‘Angella Barnes, ‘Comedy, ADHD, Dopamine and Depression’’, *Disability Arts Online* [ONLINE] < <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/angela-barnes-comedy-adhd-dopamine-and-depression/> [Accessed 16/02/24]

Neurodivergent+ identity; I consider my position, in relation to Neurodivergence and Identity, inherently post-diagnostic¹³⁵ in nature.

Relating specifically to what is now termed Neurodivergent+ identity, long-lasting/enduring mental health diagnosis/experience/identity as well as neurodevelopmental/neurocognitive diagnosis/experience/identity are both covered by many definitions of the widening criteria of Neurodivergent+ below I have included a quote from Very Well Minds from their article, 'What Does it Mean to be Neurodivergent+ ';

'While originally used to refer specifically to people who are autistic, usage of the term has broadened significantly in years since. Neurodivergence now refers to any structured, consistent way that brains work differently for a group of people than they do for the majority of others.'¹³⁶

I have also included a list of some of the categorisation of Neurodivergent+ from The University of Glasgow's Post-Graduate-Research Blog,

Types of Neurodivergence

Examples of conditions/labels that come under Neurodivergent are:

- Autism, Asperger's, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Pathological Demand Avoidance or Sensory Processing Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Tourette's Syndrome
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Meares-Irlen Syndrome
- Hyperlexia
- Synaesthesia

Some other conditions such as schizophrenia, OCD, anti-social personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, dissociative disorder, and bipolar disorder can be classed as a form of neurodivergence too.¹³⁷

As explained, I have diagnoses relating to both mental health and neurocognitive identifications, (ND+), both of which influence how/why I identify as ND+. It is partly due to this that I believe the term autie-biography is too diagnostically exclusive. It is my belief that, as a community, bringing ND+ individuals together will strengthen authentic representation by propagating the reality of ND+ duality. The second reason why this research does not fit the criteria for autie-biographies is that, though each autie-biography is different, they are all based upon the premise of autobiographical life-writing, meaning that the genre does not include fictional portrayals of autism; even if the author is an autistic person who has written about an autistic character, this would not fulfil the requirement of an autie-biography.

¹³⁵ **Post-Diagnostic:** I am using this term to refer to an understanding of Neurodivergence, in relation to culture/identity, that extends past diagnostic terms and may develop further going forwards.

¹³⁶ Resnick, A. (2023) What is Neurodivergence? [ONLINE] www.verywellmind.com/what-is-neurodivergence-and-what-does-it-mean-to-be-Neurodivergent+-5196627 [Accessed 16/12/23]

¹³⁷ University of Glasgow (2021) Neurodiversity & Neurodivergent: What do they mean and how do they impact me as a PGR?

[ONLINE] uofgprblog.com/pgrblog/2021/3/24/neurodiversity#:~:text=Types%20of%20Neurodivergence&text=Some%20other%20conditions%20such%20as,a%20form%20of%20neurodivergence%20too [Accessed 16/12/23]

Fictional writing is my strength. It allows for far more flexibility and deviation not only of the plot, but also the way the plot is displayed. Other ND+ individuals play with form to break away from grammar standardisation rules and regulations which may inhibit creative writing as an expressive art form. Additionally, as has been endorsed within Sylvia Plath's *'A Bell Jar'* (1963), where Plath intermingles elements of her own experiences of mental unwell and psychiatric units into the narrator Esther¹³⁸, this is also done within McBride's *'A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing'* (2012) and Sarah Kane's *'4.48 Psychosis'* (1999). Fiction also allows a ND+ writer to protect their own sense of self in terms of anonymity and privacy; in writing *'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'*, it has enabled me to talk/express elements of lived experience surrounding OCD/thought intrusion that I would not have written or published in my own voice.

McBride commented within an interview to *London Magazine* in October of 2021 entitled, *'Women are Expected to Tell Their Personal Stories All the Time'*¹³⁹. She voiced that women feel as if they must reveal their sexual experiences publicly to be taken seriously as a writer, to be sexist as a standard. In *'A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing'* she leaves it ambiguous whether, or to what degree, the narrative is fictitious or based upon autobiographical experiences.

Within this thesis I attempt to create and define new terminology surrounding Neurodivergent+ as a genre within the arts; reflecting upon discussions so far, I suggest these distinctions:

Neurodivergent+ Literature: this encompasses a variety of ND+ authorship and literary genres, not just autobiography, but also fiction, short stories, poetry, and playwriting. The autie-biography would sit within Neurodivergent+ literature alongside Sarah Kane's *'4.48 Psychosis'*, and Sally Gardner's *'Maggot Moon'*.

This research is not just interested in intrinsic ways that ND+ people can deviate language, but also how, and if it is ethical, to use language to creatively signify ND+ characterisation.

Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics: A sub-category of Neurodivergent+ literature that encourages ND+ writers to express their own neurotypes, thoughts, and processing style within their writing, and encourages innovative form and lexis.

Note: regarding this second category, this thesis discusses how NT authors already have (and will likely continue) to contribute to ND+ presenting aesthetics, and potential ethics/discussions this raises.

Creative Writing as a Malleable Art vs Stringent Academic Writing

Creative writing does not need to follow agreed standardised grammar, spelling, or syntax. It lies somewhere between word play, train of thought, and 'art' as a more general genre. Creative writing can be used as a way to express yourself; it is not necessarily written with an audience in mind. Daniel Oliver, within our interview and also his Dyspraxic Performance text *'Awkwoods'*¹⁴⁰, explains how within his performance he does not mind if people enjoy it

¹³⁸ Jordison, S. (2012) 'Art and Autobiography in *'The Bell Jar'*'. *The Guardian* [ONLINE] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jan/09/reading-group-autobiography-bell-jar> [Accessed 16/02/24]

¹³⁹ McBride, E. (2021) 'Women are Expected to Tell Their Personal Stories All the Time'. *The London Magazine* [ONLINE] <https://www.thelondonmagazine.org/interview-women-are-expected-to-tell-their-personal-story-all-the-time-in-conversation-with-eimear-mcbride/> [Accessed 06/09/2022]

¹⁴⁰ Oliver, D. (2014) *Awkwoods*, Daniel Oliver's Dyspraxic Adventures into Participatory Performance. Live Art Development Agency.

or not; he makes it for himself first, and if they enjoy it, that is a bonus; he believes that this is what gives a unique aesthetic. Something that this thesis touches upon, relating to ND+ aesthetics and expression, is whether it is ethical to edit/amend elements of performance and/or writing in light of improving more mainstream understanding/accessibility; this is discussed more thoroughly in the conclusion, but, in short, it is discussed how all work can benefit from editing, but editors working with ND+ authors/their work might need to take different approaches and be aware of ND+ aesthetics, so not to intrinsically edit them out.

Formal and academic language could have developed with structures and formats that could now be viewed ableist/less accessible for a number of ND+ individuals. ND+ students who are able to access higher education may remain at a disadvantage because they have difficulty with specific standardisations. Their papers may be more likely to get lower marks, be refused or not accepted, and they may not be chosen to speak at events and conferences. Lennie and Kaz, founders of DYSPLA, within their interview, spoke about feeling unwelcome at many events because people did not always respect the way they communicated or presented ideas. If the quite ridged standardisation of language is considered appropriate for academia, can the un-standardisation of language be considered more valuable regarding the arts, creativity, and creative writing?

The ideas and questions explored/posed within this thesis are:

Could certain forms of communication/self-expression be caricaturised by Neurotypical standardisations making them less accessible to Neurodivergent+ creatives? Can Neurodivergent+ creative expression, through the mediums of written word and/or performance, develop to encompass aesthetics that are better representative of ND+ perception, communication, language process, and lived experience? Can the varied thinking patterns of ND+ individuals be captured in creative writing and performance? And, could there be a more intrinsic/natural modes of expression/communication that could be utilised as mediums for claiming/developing ND+ identity and narrative?

Neurodivergent+ and Illness Narratives: Illness narrative/s have been growing in popularity and given attention in this year's Neurodivergent+ Congress's Symposium; discussions circulated upon how these genres have a number of overlapping of sentiment and ethos, such as foregrounding specific feelings/experiences as not only important, but inherently connected to the self. Ann Jurecic's 'Illness as Narrative'¹⁴¹ extrapolates upon Illness as Narrative as a genre,

'There are many explanations for why and how illness memoirs evolved into a thriving genre in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. When science developed better explanations for disease and more effective treatments, personal stories of illness were displaced from clinical settings in the United States and surfaced elsewhere. With the growth of the publishing industry, changed attitudes toward personal disclosure, patient activism about women's health and AIDS, and the rise of the Internet, more people turned to the *written* word to give illness meaning.'¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Jurecic, A. (2012) *Illness as Narrative*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

¹⁴² Jurecic, A. (2012) *Illness as Narrative*. University of Pittsburgh Press. Chapter Two: Life narratives in the risk society. pp. 18-42.

But with this in mind, there are also several contrasts, one being that Illness Narratives are a much larger discipline than the ND+ narrative. Several ND+ narratives, especially with the inclusion of mental health experience/conditions, may also fit into Illness Narratives, but this is not representative of all ND+ identifying individuals/their experiences; a number of ND+ identifications such as Dyslexia, ADHD, Autism, dyspraxia, Tourette's Syndrome, view themselves as 'wired differently' but do not perceive this in terms of illness. In relation to Neurodivergence for many it is synonymous with/to existing, therefore the creativities powering these narratives stem from a range of sources, interests, joys, and fascinations, which are not at all related with illness. With respect to this research, I would also argue that when/if ND+ narratives and Illness narratives 'co-exist', it is important for both genres to be equally recognised within the narrative, not only so that other ND+ individuals are able to find them (as they might not be aware of them if only under Illness Narratives) but that so differing elements of identity and their overlap can be distinguished.

Neurodivergent+ Writing is not intrinsically Writing as Therapy

This genre/source of writing encapsulates many of the arguments expressed above in the discussion of Illness Narratives; a number of Neurodivergent+ individuals may/will write as a form of therapy. It may be true that currently several ND+ individuals have been further at risk of events such as sexual assaults and episodes of mental health unwell, but not only can some of this be viewed in terms of the social model of disability (rather than an innate truth of being ND+), but this is by no means the one and only root/reason/inspiration behind ND+ writings. Additionally, therapy and experiencing trauma are not synonymous to being ND+, many NT individuals write as a form of therapy. An element of writing as therapy is viewed in terms of having space to reflect. Moving away from trauma narratives, though many ND+ writers may write to process their life, I would argue that this can be a more innate day-to-day need/drive, rather than something specifically therapeutic.

Why ND+ Aesthetics are not Intrinsically Post-Modern:

Though some ND+ Aesthetics may hold similarities to the styles endorsed within post-modernism, this section expands upon how the motivations and reasons behind ND+ 'deviation' are not the same.

Post-modernism as a literary genre/style emerged in the second half of the 20th century¹⁴³, and is generally defined as¹⁴⁴:

'[Post-modern] literature takes on new qualities and characteristics that it did not have in earlier decades. Post-modernist writers sought to undermine established literary conventions as a way to explore their own intense feelings surrounding the major events that had occurred in the world during their lifetimes.

Post-modernism in literature indicates a departure from earlier genres. Post-modernists attempted to express the deep paranoia and sense of meaninglessness that they felt as a result of the Second World War and other major historical events.

¹⁴³ Butler, C. Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction (2002) Oxford.

¹⁴⁴ Blakeley, S. (2023) 'Post Modernism Literature Characteristics' [ONLINE] <https://study.com/learn/lesson/postmodernism-literature-characteristics-examples.html> [Accessed 07/09/22]

Post-modernism is credited with breaking apart many literary standards and paving the way for new genres that have emerged in recent decades. Post-modern literature is also considered an important exploration of the human psyche and a creative and unusual form of artistic expression.

A rejection of the distinctions between high and low culture

An exploration of meaninglessness and absurdity

An interest in mixing genres in a single work

An obsession with challenging philosophical and psychological questions'¹⁴⁵

Post-modernism is more of a purposeful creation and deviation of genre from previous genre expectations. However, what I am proposing as possible ND+ Aesthetics is not necessarily driven by a purposeful wish to challenge existing norms, but rather to create a more authentic reflection of how ND+ authors process language and communicate. Additionally, though post-modern, multi-modal language purposely defies form to create new genres, it does not claim to represent, be attached to, or encompass ND+ narration/identity/culture/self-expression.

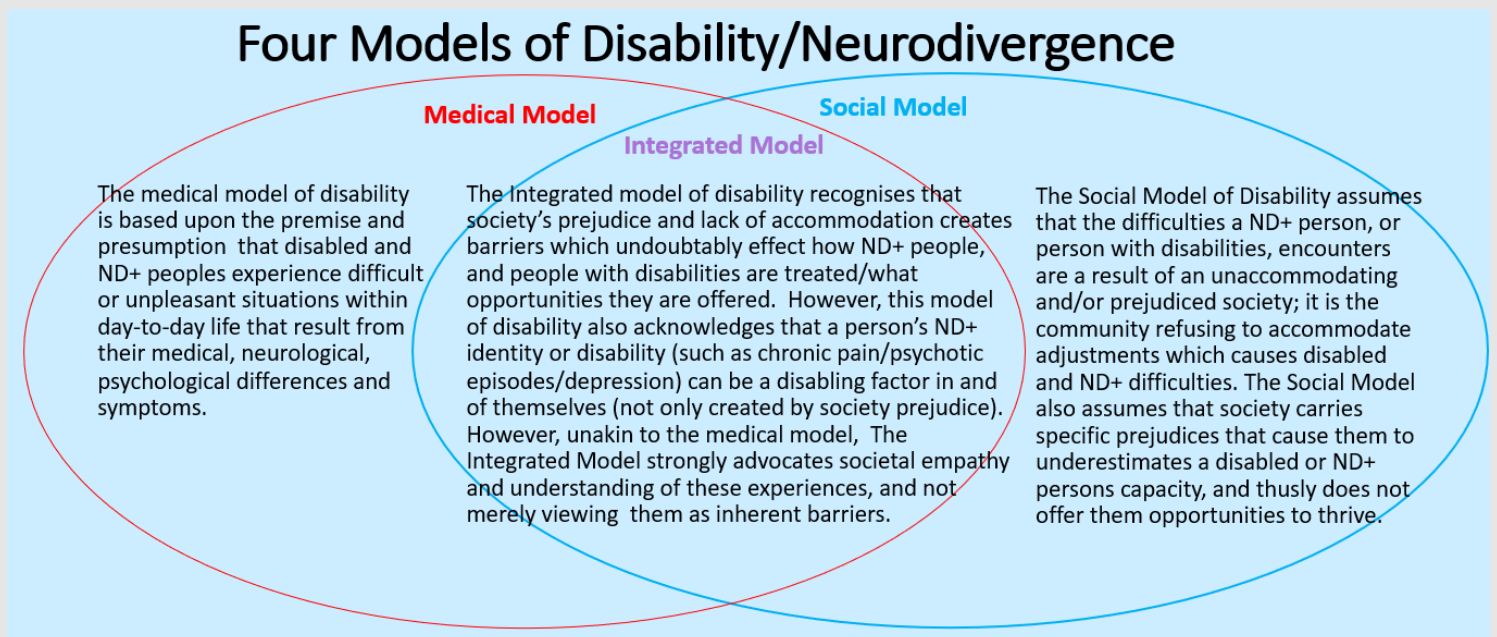
Some ND+ and post-modernist aesthetics have similarities, but their roots come from a differing ethos and source. While post-modern language is focused upon comprehending and breaking down emotions around 'major events', ND+ Aesthetics is far more centred on personal perceptions; there is focus on individuals being able to express their lived experiences, rather than theories surrounding post-modernism, which concentrate more prominently upon revealing more about the human condition in general. ND+ Aesthetics may be better positioned to capture/express the complexity of ND+ thought and demonstrate ND+ sensitivities and perspective.

Note: Though Neurodivergence is not intrinsically post-modern, a number of ND+ authors may purposely utilize post-modern aesthetics; meaning that their writing/performance may denote post-modernism and ND+ aesthetics.

¹⁴⁵Blakeley, S. 'Post Modernism Literature Characteristics' (2021) Study.com <https://study.com/learn/lesson/postmodernism-literature-characteristics-examples.html> [Accessed 07/09/22]

Brief Overview of Disability/ND+ Models:

To be able to understand the ethos behind this research it is also helpful to be briefly acquainted with these models of disability/ND+. Figure 1:



Model 4: Neurodivergent+ Model of Disability (sometimes in separation from disability):

This is a developing model. Though many ND+ individuals' views align with the sentiments of both the Integrated Model and Social Model of disability, several ND+ individuals do not view differing neurotypes in terms of inherent disability (rather they see being 'wired differently' more in terms of perceptive/communicational difference), and therefore do not necessarily identify as disabled/with disability.

Many ND+ individuals do firmly identify as disabled/stand with the disability movement; one prominent ND+/Disability voice being Jess Thom, who is directly discussed and interviewed in Chapter Two, she is a ND+ woman who uses a wheelchair and strongly advocates the solidarity/unionship of Disabled and ND+ peoples. Many ND+ individuals wish to develop the general understanding of disability to be more inclusive of ND+ needs; a number of ND+ individuals also have physical disabilities.

This thesis is an exploration of ND+ creative practice within literature and performance, but what makes it complicated and ultimately human is that ND+ identity and ideology has come from a range of sources and philosophies. Concerning the philosophy and sentiment of this research and its ethos, The Integrated Model of Disability¹⁴⁶ has been chosen to underpin its essence:

¹⁴⁶ Seelman, K. (2003) Trends in rehabilitation and disability: transition from a medical model to an integrative model. National Rehabilitation Conference Keynote. Tokorozawa, Japan: National Centre for Persons with Disabilities.

‘The Integrated Model of Disability is an attempt to merge, or at least bring together, the medical and social perspectives’ (Seelman, 2003).¹⁴⁷ (See figure one Page 24)

This model acknowledges that many depictions of ND+ have been shaped by societal attitudes, but also that psychological and cognitive differences can impact ND+ communities. Within my exploration of ND+ creative writing and performance, I occasionally touch upon psychological/neurological difference. I see taking elements of our heavily pathologised history and re-using it to be relevant within the fields of literature, linguistics, and performance to be a way of reclaiming narrative and voice¹⁴⁸. However, I recognise this is a delicate area of expansion due to the potential that stigmas have in rehashing stereotypes that prevail within the areas of psychology/psychiatry/pathology, and simply transferring them to fields of literature/performance/the arts.

Contemporary Neurodivergence: The general acknowledgment of neurodivergence has grown since this research began in 2019. The number of publications on Amazon by ‘out’ ND+ author grows larger by the month. New terms stemming from ND+ communities are beginning to be coined that help build upon appreciations of ND+ experiences, including recognitions towards spirituality, gender, and sexuality; As detailed in Preface, terms such as neuroqueer¹⁴⁹, neurogender¹⁵⁰, autie-gender¹⁵¹, and gendervague¹⁵² have arisen that detail ND+ individuals who believe that their sense of self, gender, and sexuality are inextricably linked.

Furthermore, in 2019 this research began arguing that neurodivergence should become its own genre, and in the current year (2024), neurodivergence can now be searched for as a performance genre at the Edinburgh Fringe, enabling people interested in ND+ performance to seek it out more easily. Moreover, the movement is being acknowledged by more mainstream parties; The Labour party now has a ND+ manifesto thanks to ND+ political poet Janine Booth¹⁵³, and, regarding personal progression I have recently formed my own Arts Council Funded ND+ arts collective ‘MixMatched’, supporting ND+ writers, poets, and performers in having a sense of solidarity and developing/sharing ND+ voice.

ND+ communities are beginning to grow and nurture themselves, this sense of internal solidarity is slowly changing the world around us and spreading into wider spaces; now is an exciting and explorative time for ND+ narratives.

¹⁴⁷ Seelman, K. D. (2003). Trends in rehabilitation and disability: transition from a medical model to an integrative model. National Rehabilitation Conference Keynote. Tokorozawa, Japan: National Center for Persons with Disabilities.

¹⁴⁸ **Note:** The section ‘Psychology and Diagnosis: A Matter of Syntax?’, briefly discusses how/why ‘pathological’ cognitive differences are thought to factor into differences within linguistic processes, but attempts to shift these conversations, that initially developed to highlight ‘deficit’, to now be thought as relevant to ND+ creativity and innovation.

¹⁴⁹ Walker, N. (2021) *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*. Autonomous Press.

¹⁵⁰ LGBTQIA+ Wiki (2024) ‘Neurogender’ [ONLINE] <https://lgbtqia.fandom.com/wiki/Neurogender> [Accessed 19/02/24]

¹⁵¹ Autigender [ONLINE]

<https://gender.fandom.com/wiki/Autigender#:~:text=Autigender%2C%20or%20autisgender%2C%20is%20a,making%20it%20difficult%20to%20describe> [Accessed 19/02/23]

¹⁵² Brown, L. (2011) ‘GenderVague At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences’, AutisticChoya [ONLINE]

<http://www.autisticchoya.com/2020/05/gendervague-at-the-intersection-of-autistic.html> [Accessed 16/10/23]

¹⁵³ Robdale, E. (2020) ‘The Autistic Marxist Motor Mouth’. *Disability Arts Online* [ONLINE] <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/the-autistic-marxist-motormouth-janine-booth-and-the-poetry-of-politics/> [Accessed 20/02/24]

Chapter Two: ND+ Contemporary Voice

This thesis has two main strands: interviews with current ND+ arts collectives to ascertain ND+ contemporary voice and creative practice, and the identification of ND+ language/aesthetics within selected works. This chapter mainly focuses upon UK based ND+ arts collectives and interviews I have conducted with their founders, alongside several other ND+ creatives who have spoken upon their drive and craft.

Regarding autoethnographic research, it has been the investigation into ‘contemporary voices’ that has been, for me, the most prolific and insightful element of this thesis; as a ND+ researcher/creative, connecting to other ND+ creatives who are adding to existing situated knowledge is what has fuelled my research, and ultimately proved its relevance. Since beginning this exploration (2019) I have attended several talks and workshops, some of which have been led by ND+ creatives for ND+ creatives, for the purpose of being able to connect/build a sense of creative solidarity (For full list of interviews see Appendix A). I have also interviewed over 20 artists and various ND+ playwrights, performers, authors, and editors in order to gather information upon the roots and inspiration fuelling ND+ narratives. I believe they can be the bedrock for building a shared sense of creative ND+ commonality and progression. Towards the end of this section, I elaborate on how their voices have influenced my own creative output.

For me, the most insightful and engaging part of my research methodology has been conducting these interviews, enabling me to directly connect to present day ND+ writers /artists. These bonds have been the lifeblood of this research; not only helping me find a greater sense of solidarity, but also confirming that I am not alone in the recognition of ND+ Aesthetics. Many of the conversations I had within these interviews have informed my writing and perspective throughout this PhD, however, this section is more specifically focused on unearthing discussions from interviewees.

In discussing the upcoming interviews, I will introduce each interviewee before continuing the discussion by stressing points of similarity and contrast, comparing viewpoints, perspectives, and drive. Through talking to other ND+ creatives about their creative ‘drive’, and ‘need’ I have discovered more about ND+ method.

Magical Women (Persecution, and Solidarity)

Elinor Rowlands is the founder of Magical Women, a London-based collective for autistic and ADHD creatives. Elinor is currently (2024) undergoing her own PhD upon autism creativity and stimming, part of her research concentrates upon why/how ND+ artists stim, and how stimming can be integral to an autistic/ADHD artistic method/output. She endorses ideas surrounding ‘group stim’, in which ND+ creatives are encouraged to stim together in a supportive, non-judgemental environment. Rowlands desires to uncover and develop ideas surrounding how endorsing group creative stim/stimming practice might transgress into art/writing within her ND+ workshops.

One of the reasons Elinor chose the word 'magical' (Magical Women) is influenced by the notion of 'the witch' and 16th/17th century trials whereby, 'women vastly outnumbered men in the ranks of the accused and executed'¹⁵⁴. Alongside other reasons, neurodivergence and/or presentations of mental illness would have likely made ND+ woman vulnerable/easy targets.

Elinor understands the persecution of difference as something which has permeated into the 21st century in more insidious means, not just with ND+ individuals facing increased instances of isolation and alienation, but also more directly related to bullying and violence, with an increased likelihood of sexual assault against autistic women¹⁵⁵.

Rowland's sees Magical Women as a place to claim back 'lost' magic; believing that if ND+ women have places where they can be their true, creative, unabashed self without the need to mask or fear persecution, they will not only be able to reach their full potential, but, if they feel safe/heard they will have the opportunity to create something new.

"Artists don't want to be an inspiration, a hero or champion. They want to have access to the arts without "their access" being a major part of this journey, instead, at Magical Women our focus is on curating art and words so they might be shared with wider and more diverse audiences. Magical Women has been based on a model developed by Elinor which is a process that she describes as removing the risk found in neurotypical situations."¹⁵⁶

She discussed how many social conventions and societal expectations of female surrounding 'dainty', 'quiet', or 'appropriate' unfairly affect a number of ND+ women who are branded 'difficult', 'loud', 'blunt', 'abrupt' and 'anti-social'. It is due to this that Magical Women directed their attention into their project, 'Rage Writing as Curated Words'¹⁵⁷ that encourages 'voices of rage'; the unedited written words of ADHD and autistic women, who are encouraged to speak and express themselves without masking in an attempt to claim back their 'magic'/sense of self, 'Rage is a collection of art and words made during times of overwhelm, sensory overload, rage or stress.'¹⁵⁸ An autistic comedian Fern Brady, who spoke openly upon discovering herself as autistic in an interview with Unfiltered, commented on the topic of meltdown and its expression, 'I was only reading about quiet, self-contained autistic woman'¹⁵⁹; It would seem that even the representation of ND+ woman being published were not demonstrated, this was one of the impetuses leading Brady to unveil her own explorations of performance and autism within her publication of, 'Strong Female Character'¹⁶⁰

Another autistic women's art and creative writing collective, Invisible Women, champions similar methodology. This is headed by painter Marion Armstrong, a very late-diagnosed autistic woman (68), who, since her diagnosis, has sought to collect the art and writings of other invisible women. She views autism in terms of feminism and underrepresented female

¹⁵⁴ The Conversation. (2019) "Most Witches are Women, 'Because Witch Hunts were all about Persecuting the Powerless" [ONLINE]

<https://theconversation.com/most-witches-are-women-because-witch-hunts-were-all-about-persecuting-the-powerless-125427#:~:text=In%20Salem%2C%2014%20of%20the,According%20to%20author%20Carol%20F> [Accessed 19/02/24]

¹⁵⁵ Cazalis, F., Reyes, E., Leduc, S. and Gourion, D. (2022) 'Evidence that nine out of 10 autistic women have been victims of sexual violence', *Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience*, Vol. 16

¹⁵⁶ Rowlands, E. 'Rage Writing as Curated Words', *Magical Women*. [ONLINE] <http://www.magicalwomen.co.uk/rage/rage> [Accessed 09/10/23]

¹⁵⁷ Rowlands, E. 'Rage Writing as Curated Words', *Magical Women*. [ONLINE] <http://www.magicalwomen.co.uk/rage/rage> [Accessed 09/10/23]

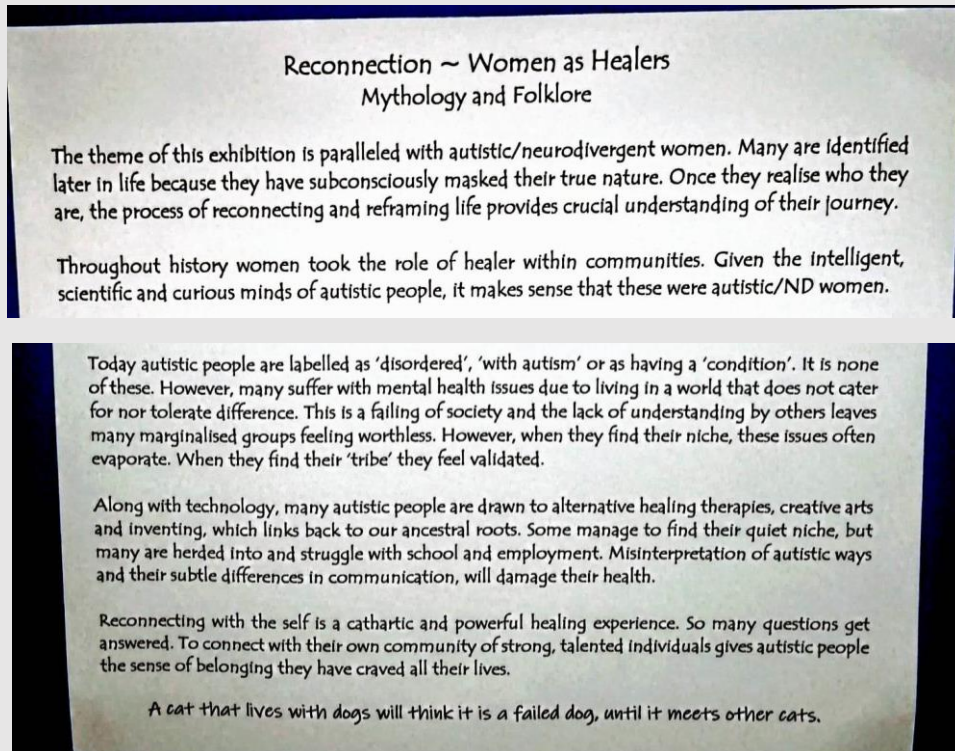
¹⁵⁸ Magical Women (2023) 'Rage', *Magical Women*. [ONLINE] <http://www.magicalwomen.co.uk/rage> [Accessed 09/10/23]

¹⁵⁹ Brady, F. (2023) Fern Brady On Been a Stripper, Autism Diagnosis and School in 'A Men's Prison'. Unfiltered. [ONLINE]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHLnaHJwATk> [Accessed 24/03/24]

¹⁶⁰ Brady, F. (2023) Strong Female Character. Brazen.

voices, believing that we have not been included within the mainstream feminist narrative; her bi-yearly gallery events seek to remedy this. Her last one opened as part of the Power of Women Festival, Margate. I have taken two extracts of writing from the Invisible Women gallery which discuss ND+ women in relation to witchcraft,

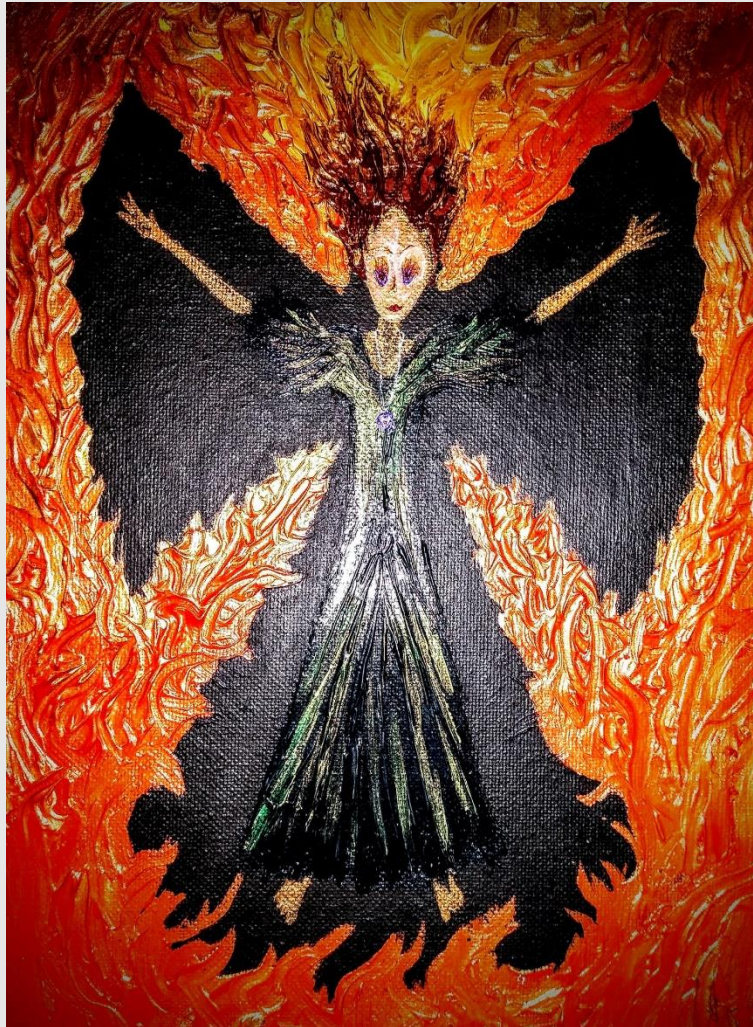


Akin to Magical Women, the Invisible Women collective discusses how female artists may feel connected to the idea of healers persecuted as witches. They may feel that ND+ women have been 'cut off' from something innately spiritual and that now they are trying to reclaim this sense of identity. Katherine May, renowned autistic author of *'The Electricity of Every Living Thing'*, discusses her own inherent connection to nature and her drive to be united with it to self-reflect and heal,

"All this wonderful diversity is invisible in the winter, but in a couple of months, it will begin again: buds, blossom, and then apples which will fall to reveal naked branches."¹⁶¹

Poetic and intensely evocative. I read this as a metaphor that May feels elements of her personality retract into hibernation, but then unveil in times of safe. Within this research I have included the notion of witches and healers as both a history and an influence due to a 'felt' appreciation of female Neurodivergent+ persecution; it has been a historical symbol and inspiration for creativity for a number of today's ND+ female creatives. In response to viewing both Invisible Women galleries and speaking to Elinor Rowlands on the essence of Magical Women, I produced this image (see below), and a number of writings regarding the notion of space, magic, and nature. [A larger sample of my writing inspired by Magical Women and Witches can be found within Appendix C]

¹⁶¹ May, K. (2018) *The Electricity of Every Living Thing*. Orion Publishing Group Limited.



Born of Fire/Fallen Angel: ‘Witch’ resisting persecution/burning by creating a sacred space for herself within the flame/s.

Creative Description: I lay upon a field of flame, each blade of grass flickering, my body cool against their surface. Fanning arms across the flat of ground, I flap, exposing the char of earth beneath, revealing angel wings of black, my legs, alive with spark, spread like scissors, forming dark-tent shrouds of dusky dress.

Colin Hambrook: Connecting Disability Arts Online (DAO) to Survivor’s and Mad Pride.

A particularly influential interview for me was with Colin Hambrook, editor of DAO; it was through DAO that I discovered more about ‘Survivor’ and ‘Mad’ collectives, which gave me a greater appreciation of shared ND+ history. Our interview was focused upon his experiences collecting literature and the launching and running of DAO.

“I founded Disability Arts Online to create a platform where those conversations about the complexities of the brain could evolve. [...] We understood the labelling of individuals with pseudo-scientific medical diagnoses as an invention of the capitalist system to scapegoat individuals who failed to conform to societal norms and to intrinsically control through fear. In many ways the spirit of the Survivor Movement was linked with the alternative scene and the punk rock movement with dreams of rebellion. [...] We ran twice monthly gigs and

writing workshops in central London. It was very much about honing creative expression, developing new skills and trying out new forms. In some respects there was a confessional aspect to the creativity and much of the writing was autobiographical. 'We're not mad, we're angry' was a key slogan that was a rallying cry to challenge the exigence' [...] The creative writing/literature that came out of firstly Survivors Poetry and then Mad Pride was powerful, idiosyncratic, personal and wildly creative."¹⁶²

Colin was most active as a poet and writer during the Survivor Movement (mid 1980s), the name for the movement in which a number of Psychiatric Survivors channelled their first-hand experience of pain and/or mistreatment into writings that were typically quite raw/uncensored, while also being politically driven. The Survivors' formed as a medium for ND+ individuals, who had been victims of inadequacies in mental healthcare, to be heard and find a sense of community. Colin has experienced a number of psychiatric difficulties and channelled elements of pain, strife, and psychiatric mistreatment into his writings. Speaking to Colin helped me understand the pain, isolation, trauma, and heartache that flavours a large chunk of ND+ history and permeates into creatives writings.

Reflecting on his trajectory, 30 years before my own, made me feel less positive/hopeful; realising that I, and my own ND+ family/friends, have faced, and are still facing many of the issues he had lived through. Although the Survivor's Movement may have been most active in the 1980s, its philosophy and sentiment is very much reflected within the work of a number of current and upcoming ND+ writers/performers today.

The writer Ross Burke experienced schizophrenia/auditory and visual psychosis. He co-wrote *'When The Music's Over: My Journey into Schizophrenia'* (1996), a text which is very much reflective of the Survivor's Movement. Half of *'When The Music's Over'* is written by his psychiatrist, the other by himself as an attempt to explain what he experienced. The part he writes presents itself as a 'true' or 'authentic' insight into schizophrenia regarding its language/thought disturbance, paranoia, and spiralling logic; a review published within the Canadian Medical Association Journal commented,

'The patient's own story is so difficult to understand that it fails to keep the reader's attention. It is full of rich language but the style – a genuine rendering of the distorted cognitive process of a person in the grips of schizophrenia – is indecipherable [...] its best quality is its authenticity.'¹⁶³

The text changes from sections of more comprehensible writing to sections that detail repetitive anxieties, paranoia, compulsion, and intrusive thought, much of the writing is preoccupied with abstract, existential philosophy, detailed in metaphorical language that is not fully coherent in context. Burke's final suicide note is published at the end; despite obvious struggles with mental health, I recognised this text as embodying the some of the ethos of the Survivor Movement; Burke was attempting to have his personal experiences and voice heard and recognised.

¹⁶² Taken from my interview with Colin Hambrook, conducted 01/09/21

¹⁶³ Seeman, M. (1995) 'Review of *'When the Music's Over'*, *Canadian Medical Journal Association*. 153:431-432.

Although Colin Hambrook's experiences were more directly related to The Survivors' Movement, he also discussed his encounters with Mad Pride, a movement which sought to focus upon Neurodivergent+ nature more in terms of difference (rather than strife/pain). In order to further my investigation Hambrook directed me to the collection '*Mad Pride: A celebration of Mad Culture*'; published in 2003 by writers who identify as 'mad', but do not necessarily reveal/identify with any specific diagnosis.

I have included a section of Mad Prides in order to illuminate more about the ethos of 'Mad' as a cultural movement and creative aesthetic:

Over the last century, giant strides forward were made by those asserting their rights and self-determination in the fields of race, gender and equality, but 'mental health' issues failed to keep pace. This is set to change. [...] The writings which follow are written from perspectives surrounding concerns with reclaiming the experience of madness and the language surrounding it [...] It asserts that language can be subverted and that words derive their meanings from the contexts in which they are used. [...] Neither Mad Pride nor this book claim to reflect a fully developed political philosophy, but each address some of the issues that will arise as we sharpen our visions. [...] Much of the literature around mental health has focused on the 'victim' status of mad people. This book, on the other hand, celebrates madness largely from the perspectives of users who refuse to be ground down. It asserts the rights of 'mad' people without pleading for them, in the belief that we should not make for minor concessions, but instead change the world into a fit place for us to live. [...] What follows, therefore, is the writing boasting about the wild things the authors have done when they've been losing it; accounts of personal empowerment and liberation through madness; a few pertinent 'political' pieces: and a great number of gratuitous gestures of defiance. It suggests that 'madness' is as much to do with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll than with the "Long echoing, echoing corridors" described repeatedly by Survivor poets. And, while of course, this is far from being the whole truth, it is mindful of the tactics necessary to implant Mad Pride into Public consciousness as a liberation struggle in its own right.¹⁶⁴

This collection contains twenty-five essays by authors who identify as 'mad'; each entry is entirely unique in its understanding of madness, however, many breach what would be considered socially acceptable parameters of conversation. I have taken an excerpt from one by Nick Blinko in his contribution of '*Cuckoos Don't Make Nests*', for the reason that he has purposely used a non-standard grammatical structure,

'Curious? I'm furious!/Fly Pie/The Bladder ladder/ Crazy baby/ Dr. Fay Talatie /flying with Pyre/ Sphere Shaped room/ A stipulative character/ Dolls of IDOLS/ 1000000%/ Threaded Headed thread headed/ Dr. Tiny brain/ passionate assassins/associates.'¹⁶⁵

It continues in a similar vein, forcing the reader to piece together similarities of context to understand what he is communicating, possibly reminiscent of 'word salad'; a term that relates to, 'a mixture of words or phrases that is confused and difficult to understand'¹⁶⁶ and is often used in association to language some ND+ individuals with schizophrenia may use in an episode of ill/disorganized mental health. He has used a forward slash as one of the only

¹⁶⁴ Curtis, T. Dellar, R. Leslie, E. and Watson, B. (2000) *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture*. Chipmunka Publishing. introduction pp.7-9.

¹⁶⁵ Curtis, T. Dellar, R. Leslie, E. and Watson, B. (2000) *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture*. Chipmunka Publishing. Section: Cuckoos Don't Make Nests pp.205-206.

¹⁶⁶ Cambridge Dictionary. (2023) 'Word Salad'. [ONLINE] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/word-salad> [Accessed 16/12/23]

forms of grammar to section the sentences. Other contributors have a change of tone and register; mostly, it is not the 'grammar/lexis' that is alternative, but the conscious state of the author that is 'unstandardised'. The collection is clearly a stand against conformity.

Another more contemporary artist who boldly reflects and builds upon the ethos of Mad Pride, is Daniel Oliver, a Dyspraxic/ND performance artist who promotes communicational differences on the stage.

Daniel Oliver and the theory of 'Awkwood'

"My research, which is both practice-led and theoretical, focuses on the roles and experiences of neurodiversity in contemporary, experimental performance. I work to develop appropriately diverse ways of writing on and disseminating this research, interweaving creative, performative, personal, and theoretical writing practices. This is currently building towards the development of a theory and practice that I call 'neurotransgressive' and 'accidental avant gardism'."¹⁶⁷

Daniel Oliver, a dyspraxic performance artist and lecturer of English and Drama at Queen Mary University, London, authored '*Awkwoods: Daniel Oliver's Dyspraxic Adventures in Participatory Performance*'¹⁶⁸. His assertions that neurodivergent+ creatives/performers can utilize elements of their first-hand experiences to create 'diverse ways of writing on and disseminating research', and his coinage of the word 'neurotransgressive' to refer to this practice very much aligned to my own investigations. He has also connected to other ND+ creatives and had 1:1 conversations to discover more upon his theories around 'neurotransgressing', which he has compiled into his study guide, entitled 'On Neurodiversity' (2019)¹⁶⁹, two of which, Jess Thom (founder of Tourette's Hero) and Jon Adams (Founder of Flow Observatorium), are also interviewed for this research. One distinction between Oliver's work and my own, is that his is very much rooted to performance, whereas my research also strays more prominently into creative writing.

As well as attending one of his talks upon Awkward and ND+ practice, we spoke 1:1 upon his compilation of 'Awkwoods', a collection of ND+ essays upon the topic of performance. Daniel Oliver believes awkward humour to be profound in that it reveals and illuminates truths and barriers which have been created by societal expectations, and that, through awkward interactions, these barriers can and should be questioned by asking, how and why was that awkward?

Daniel Oliver goes a step further with his theory; claiming 'Awkward' to be a distinctively Dyspraxic and ADHD fuelled trait; he reasons that, due to struggles with adhering to NT communicational standards, ND+/Dyspraxic individuals more commonly find themselves in 'Awkward' situations. He views Awkward as a word that has been used to describe and shame ND+ conduct but argues that it can now be re-claimed as an asset,¹⁷⁰ believing that 'Awkward' is central to the creation of performance, especially when in its practice and

¹⁶⁷ Oliver, D. Dr Daniel Oliver. Royal School of Speech and Drama. [ONLINE] <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/staff-profiles/dr-daniel-oliver> [Accessed 24/03/24]

¹⁶⁸ Oliver, D. (2019a) *Awkwoods: Daniel Oliver's Dyspraxic Adventures in Participatory Performance*. Live Art Development Agency.

¹⁶⁹ Oliver, D. (2019b) *On Neurodiversity: A Study Room Guide*. Live Art Development Agency [ONLINE] [PDF] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Daniel_Oliver_Guide-2.pdf [Accessed 09/10/23]

¹⁷⁰ **Note:** This shares a similar philosophy to the 1993 movement, 'Mad Pride' whereby users of mental health united and claimed the word 'Mad' to be a more empowering description, in many ways Daniel Oliver's assertions seem to derive and progress upon ideas that initially developed within Mad Pride.

experimental stages. He expands on this theory within a chapter entitled, '*Seven Reason's Awkwardness is Great*',

'Our wants are rarely really our own wants, but are always entangled with other people's, as well as the wants/demands of the systems and structures which we participate.'¹⁷¹

He discusses how awkwardness exposes something about our own desires in relation to the desire of others. Furthermore, he believes that it shows more about what our own anxieties are towards other people's wants and desires. Upon stage, or when improvising with other people, Daniel suggests that these aspirations are role-played, confronted, challenged, and intermingled by other participants/actors, and sometimes audience expectation.

Below is an abridged summary of 6 of Oliver's principles of Awkward:

- 1- Awkwardness can signal a glitch or a cap in the boundaries that we presume are framing and limiting our experiences. Awkwardness emerges as a call for us to test these boundaries and confront our own role in sustaining them. (Oliver also expands that Awkwardness can act as a prompt for others to become awkward or continue being awkward.)
- 2- Awkwardness momentarily examines our role in a system or structure.
- 3- Awkwardness helps individuals affirm causes for awkward, for example: Motivation, intention, meanings, and messages that are not fully rounded, full of contraction, unclear, and unfixed.
- 4- Awkwardness is great when it's a contingent outcome of a spontaneously awkward situation involving awkward people that embrace rather than overcome.
- 5- It celebrates ambiguities, flux, multiplicities of styles, atmospheres, and tones.
- 6- Awkwardness can relate to questioning the capability and authority of a facilitator.¹⁷²

Daniel believes that these seven qualities are intrinsic to Dyspraxic (and other ND+) individuals due to the ways in which they can make different connections, miss intended subtleties, and, from his perspective, interact in ways which can be characterised by 'Awkward'; he argues that these qualities lead to what can be deemed inappropriate, distracted, irrelevant, tangented, or 'off the wall' interaction/conversation/aesthetics.

With the view that 'Awkward' is socially constructed, Oliver forwards drama practices whereby awkward situations are both challenged and embraced. He discusses whether 'awkward' emerges through intentionality or incapability; he questions whether someone can choose to be awkward, and choose to create 'Awkward' humour, or if the act of 'trying' to be awkward makes it unauthentic? His practice examines whether 'awkward' (as a 'true'/authentic form) could spur from natural and accidental occurrences of the ND+ brain/ND+ interactions, which can then be more purposely capitalised upon.

I am still unsure of where I personally sit upon the ethics of purposeful Neurodivergent+ writing/purposeful ND+ writing by NT individuals, such as '*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*', or '*Flower's For Algernon*'. After speaking to several ND+ individuals, a number forwarded the belief that, without authenticity, ND+ aesthetics often rang 'hollow' or

¹⁷¹ Oliver, D. Awkwoods. p.20-24.

¹⁷² Oliver, D. Awkwoods. p.20-24.

as a 'cheap imitation', while others thought that with compassionate/true effort and connection to ND+ individuals, that this type of writing could be acceptable.

Throughout my research I have had mixed feelings to this question: **if there is such a thing as ND+ Aesthetics, who has the right to endorse them?**

This research also touches upon whether Neurodivergent+ style or characteristics may be edited out to reach NT publishing standards. Part of Daniel Oliver's book is dedicated to a section entitled, '*Dyspraxic Writing*':

'This book has been copy-edited for typos and other minor issues, but not so much for style or clarity. It is important that parts of the writing maintain a stylistic and performative fidelity to the clumsiness and awkwardness of my performance [...] Awkwardness and the writing that accompany them is rarely neatly framed and signposted.'¹⁷³

Oliver specifically did not edit the book to meet NT standards or neuronormative¹⁷⁴ expectation; sections go off into tangents and sometimes do not round back to their original point. The introduction explores how this is 'encouraged' with some points where meaning is dissolved, perhaps championing elements of authenticity over accessibility.

Jon Adams is an autistic individual who ran 'Flow Observatorium'¹⁷⁵ (Flow). His work was published within the autistic collection '*In Our Own Words*'¹⁷⁶ and handled by an editor. I asked him whether he believed that his Neurodivergent+ voice had been lessened by this editing. He responded that "all writing benefits from editing"¹⁷⁷. I asked the same question to Sally Gardner, dyslexic writer of '*Maggot Moon*'¹⁷⁸; she described the NT characterisation/any characterisation of dyslexia through misspellings as boring, as it only focused on what she felt was a flimsy 2-dimensional appreciation of an intuitive, creative, and multi-faceted neurodivergence.

I spoke to Miranda Prag, editor of the '*In Other Words*' collection of shorts by autistic authors, and she discussed how it was important that the editors worked with their autistic writers to improve clarity, rather than simply standardise the text. She also discussed how open questions need to be asked to correctly gauge an author's intent and wishes. She understood the importance of this consideration due to some ND+ individuals' damaged confidence and that they may be led by who they presume to be an authority.

There is a chance that unedited writing/unedited Neurodivergent+ writing could impact accessibility for other readers (including ND+ readers). With Oliver's text in mind, as a dyslexic and dyspraxic reader, I found parts of it difficult to comprehend. Despite this, I understood Oliver's '*Awkwoods: Adventures in Participatory Performance*' to be more of an experimental call for change and acceptance, rather than a serious book on style and tone. With these discussions in mind, I would argue that it is not that ND+ work is edited that is most

¹⁷³ Oliver, D. *Awkwoods*. p.15

¹⁷⁴ **Definition of Neuronormative:** 'Neuronormative means the usual or typical way that brains and minds work. It's like a map of how most people think and behave.' (<https://getgoally.com/blog/neurodiversopedia/what-is-neuronormative/>)

¹⁷⁵ Flow Observatorium was a ND+ Arts Collective founded by ND+ artist Jon Adams.

¹⁷⁶ Mitchell, D. and Limburg, J. (2021) *In Other Words*. Unbound.

¹⁷⁷ Taken from my interview Jon Adams conducted upon 21/01/21

¹⁷⁸ Gardner, S. (2011) *Maggot Moon*. Hot Key Books.

problematic, but rather how it is edited when editors are not aware or do not value ND+ Aesthetics. Below is an extract from a chapter called 'Chiperlaterartparty', where he uses a sex dungeon as a simile to describe the feeling of 'getting something wrong',

"They say just go fucking wild!... but then I actually do, and I'm asked to leave. It's like you're in a free space, a sex dungeon for example (and that's just an example). They're like, "Welcome! Do what you want," ... and then you do something, and it feels lovely BUT, everyone suddenly stops. They're looking at you, like, 'What are you doing?!'"¹⁷⁹

As a lecturer at Queen Mary University, he could arguably be making a stand for Neurodivergent+ presenting language and its appropriateness within class-based or academic settings. Similarly, within this thesis, it is argued that speech, writing, and in-particular academic writing, has so many social and grammatical constraints that it can be difficult for ND+ voices to be heard without significant masking. Within creative practices such as performance and stream-of-consciousness writing, not only could rigid binaries be ableist, but they could also suppress creative freedoms. Within Oliver's introduction, a section is entitled '*Brief notes on Design Style and Structure*', clarifying that,

'This book keeps its toes hesitantly dipped in clumsiness, irrelevance, mess, abruptness, clunkiness, participation and frivolousness.'¹⁸⁰

Oliver highlights how he has not edited the authors' contributions; some phonetic spellings have been left intact, tangents have not been 'tidied', and writers have been permitted to work in whichever tone and referencing style they are comfortable with. As a dyslexic reader, while I found some parts difficult, some were fun; it could be stimulating or refreshing to read what might be considered 'dry' subject matter written in 'voices' that allowed humour-based anecdotes. To improve accessibility for Neurodivergent+ readers, the pages of '*Awkwoods*' were printed on light green paper, a dimmer alternative to the white that many ND individuals struggle with due to the comorbidity of Irlen Syndrome¹⁸¹, a sensitivity to light that causes visual stress when reading. This was the first book I read that had utilised this, and it was because a ND+ person oversaw the editorial process that this was considered.

I feel that '*Awkwoods*' (2019) reflects much of the ethos of Ted Curtis's '*Mad Pride*' (2000), who began to shun 'proper' or more 'socially acceptable' writing and communicative trends. Many of the essays collated within '*Awkwoods*' are similar, not necessarily in their content, but by their nonconformity of style and direction. It is my understanding that '*Awkwoods*' brought something new to this narrative with its central notion of 'Awkward' rather than 'Mad'. I felt that 'Mad' was more about claiming identity, but the philosophy of 'Awkward' takes this notion further in that it encourages ND+ people to question NT societal structures, and more specifically sees performance as experiment, posing the questions:

¹⁷⁹ Oliver, D. *Awkwoods*. p.76

¹⁸⁰ Oliver, D. *Awkwoods*. p.8.

¹⁸¹ **Irlen Syndrome:** involves visual perception or eye problems, caused by the way in which the brain interprets the visual information that is being sent through the eyes. University of Oxford (2014) Neurodivergent Conditions. University of Oxford, *Equality and Diversity Unit* [ONLINE] <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/neurodivergent-conditions#:~:text=Irlen%20Syndrome%20involves%20visual%20perception,being%20sent%20through%20the%20eyes.> [Accessed 24/03/24]

“Why was that weird? Do I agree with why that was weird? What does that say about the values of the people around me?”¹⁸²

Oliver believes that embracing ‘Awkward’ allows people to explore elements of themselves that have been socially shunned. Humour, especially humour with language and communication, is incredibly nuanced, subjective, situationally dependant, and easy to misunderstand. Many ND+ people can feel like they ‘get it wrong’ within certain social dynamics. Oliver’s work questions, does this matter? And could it even add depth, level, and variety to humour? Perhaps the most poignant and ironic part of our conversation was when he discussed how when talking to neurotypicals, they sometimes thought his ‘true’ Neurodivergent+ presentation was an eccentric mask or act, and that they had ‘had enough’ and wanted him to ‘knock it off’. He discussed, regarding neurodivergence and appropriation, how, for him, he cannot be ‘normal’; neurodivergence is not a style, but his intrinsic way of existing.

Reflecting upon my own life as a ND+ individual, I can see that I have used humour as a mask to shield or deflect from awkwardness. Regarding neurodivergence and rejection sensitivity, the act of making people laugh has been a way to boost my self-esteem. Within my research I have spoken to two neurodivergent+ comedians who have felt similarly: Victoria Melody and Amanda Barnes. They both discussed ‘laughs’ in terms of dopamine hits and described how this aided them in mood and energy regulation. From this I understand humour, or masking through humour, as a form of placation, which a number of ND+ individuals, and perhaps most prominently comedy performers, have unconsciously adopted and injected into their work.

With the rising number of comedians who are now openly discussing autism and ADHD diagnosis, it would seem that stand-up comedy is indeed something we are drawn to. Edinburgh Fringe has seen an increase in ADHD and comedy as more comedians are speaking directly upon their experiences and a handful of the headlines being: Undivided Attention: Comedians on ADHD¹⁸³, The Fringe Show that will Transform Perceptions of ADHD¹⁸⁴, Ten Neurodiverse Comedians at the Edinburgh Fringe¹⁸⁵, Interviews: Comedy and ADHD¹⁸⁶. Angela Barnes, a comedian recently diagnosed with ADHD, commented that for her, the ND+ performative drive is unique of coupling “crippling low self-esteem with a burning desire to show off”.¹⁸⁷ For Neurodivergent+ individuals, the act of performing comedy can be seen as a way of finding, asserting, and advocating ‘self’ and claiming identity. However, when paired with low self-esteem, there is a danger that this humour can be restrictive, in that it exists to justify or validate the person using it. Hannah Gadsby, a renowned autistic ADHD comedian came out in her show ‘*Nannette*’ upon how, for many years she had felt she was using her

¹⁸²Taken from my interview with Daniel Oliver, conducted on 06/12/2020

¹⁸³ Venables, B (2018) Undivided Attention: Comedians on ADHD [ONLINE] www.theskinny.co.uk/festivals/edinburgh-fringe/comedy/undivided-in-attention-comedians-on-adhd [Accessed 13/03/24]

¹⁸⁴ Given, K. (2023) The Fringe Show that Will Transform Perceptions of ADHD. *National Theatre* [ONLINE] www.thenational.scot/comment/23728256.fringe-show-will-transform-perceptions-adhd/ [Accessed 13/03/24]

¹⁸⁵ Chortle (2022) ‘Ten Neurodiverse Comedians at the Edinburgh Fringe: Stand-Ups with their brain Wired differently’ [ONLINE] https://www.chortle.co.uk/features/2022/07/27/51254/ten_neurodiverse_comedians_at_the_edinburgh_fringe [Accessed 13/03/24]

¹⁸⁶ Richardson, J (2022) Interviews Comedy and ADHD [ONLINE] www.festmag.com/edinburgh/comedy/interviews-comedy-and-adhd [Accessed 13/03/24]

¹⁸⁷ Robdale, E. (2023) ‘Angella Barnes: Comedy, ADHD, Dopamine and Depression’ [ONLINE] www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/angella-barnes-comedy-adhd-dopamine-and-depression/ [Accessed 13/03/24]

voice to help people laugh ‘at her’, rather than gain true understandings¹⁸⁸. She would tweak traumatic situations to make them into hilarious stage anecdotes. In *Nannette* she spoke about how, if she were going to continue with comedy, she would be changing the locus of the comedy; she was no longer going to make herself the butt of the joke, and she was no longer going to ‘hide’ or make her trauma palatable onstage. In her show, *‘Body of Work’* some years later, you can see a shift in her humour. She still discusses situations she finds uncomfortable or awkward, but there is more focus on why they exist; why has neurotypical society created these situations which she now finds herself in? Debatably, Oliver’s theory that ND+ individuals not only experience more awkward situations, but are more likely to question them, is what produces the material for many ND+ comedians who detail, decompress, and process them on stage.

Both Angela Barnes and Hannah Gadsby discussed that the stage could be a space where they felt comfortable; it was quiet and away from ‘turn-taking’ social conventions. Gadsby spoke about how if anyone met her away from the stage, they would find her reclusive and quiet. Daniel Oliver, in his own stage practice, discussed how for him it is not a place to mask. Rather, he believes that some of the joy in his performance is that it is not governed by social conventions; he feels it is ND+ people’s authentic nature that leads to new and insightful performance art. The act of whether or not to mask, or to ‘people please’ on stage can be viewed as two equal and opposite components of neurodivergent+ performance.

To conclude, ‘Awkwood’ can be viewed as a universally understood ND+ experience or trait that has featured in several ND+ creative practitioners’ works and lived experience. With this said, it would not be fair to claim ‘awkward’ solely as a ND+ experience. Neurodivergent+ individuals/community do not live in a vacuum; there are many intersections, nuances and overlaps within human experiences, but it is about recognising the prevalence, increased impact upon lived experiences, and treating these nuances as significant and understanding their ability to impact/inform/flavour identity. I would argue that through its prevalence, specifically relating to social communication, anxiety, and misunderstanding, I have come to recognise ‘Awkwood’ as a central component of Neurodivergent+ communication; we have felt awkward. We want to know why, and, ultimately, discover that it really was not ‘us’ that were wrong after all.

Sarah Saeed, ‘Lava Elastic’ Comedy Collective: Masking and Unmasking

Sarah Saeed runs ‘Lava Elastic’ Neurodivergent comedy collective in Brighton; it is called ‘Lava Elastic’ after her own special interest/sensory appreciation of light/lava lamps. The stage is always illuminated by a number of lamps. I spoke to her about ND+ aesthetics and masking, she confirmed that, for her, though masking initially begins as a coping mechanism, it is inherently personal and related to how a ND+ person perceives the world around them. Among my interviewees Saeed was not alone in her appreciation of masking becoming inadvertently melded to her sense of self.

¹⁸⁸ Gadsby, H. (2018) *Nannette*, *Netflix*. [ONLINE] <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80233611?trackId=255824129&tctx=0%2C1%2C338abe6a-431d-41cb-91cc-c1262c43f626-132080568%2C338abe6a-431d-41cb-91cc-c1262c43f626-132080568%7C2%2Cunknown%2C%2CtitlesResults%2C80233611%2CVideo%3A80233611%2CminiDpPlayButton> [Accessed 23/03/24]

Although Saeed still finds the practice exhausting, she also viewed masking as something she can now more self-reflectively take ownership of. She endorsed performance as a way to explore and embrace elements of masking prowess, using it to flavour her creative and performative aesthetics. We discussed how the art of Neurodivergent+ masking, when encouraged playfully, might encourage ND+ individuals to experiment and explore elements of self on stage.

The range of creative practices, disciplines, methodologies, and style amongst all of the ND+ interviewees was vast. But, with this in mind, something many of them did have in common was lived experience of masking, and I was particularly interested in how this related to their creative drive and output. I relate to the definition of masking by autistic advocate Kieran Rose in *'Masking, Camouflaging, Mimicking'*,

“(Masking is) Ultimately the act of making yourself appear as non-autistic as possible in order to protect yourself and fit in, without ever really understanding what’s going on”¹⁸⁹

This relates to ND+ individuals feeling the need to suppress stims, keep up differing public personas, plan conversational ‘scripts’, dress and present in an ‘acceptable’ way, and cope in uncomfortable environments. Ultimately, masking is an activity that a number of ND+ individuals engage in to seem more ‘socially acceptable’; however, the art of masking in ND+ community is generally viewed as anxiety provoking, a mentally exhausting and damaging practice; within my own MixMatched performance night ‘Masking and Masquerades’¹⁹⁰, I spoke upon how I felt very protective of my mask, as it is ultimately a part of me, developing alongside my own perceptions/creativities, that has been with me through some of my darkest and most trying times.



Picture Left: Victoria Melody. ADHD/Autistic Performer. Photo from her performance ‘Headset’, wearing a headset to monitor electric pulses.

The most direct performative depiction of masking I saw was in Victoria Melody’s show *‘Headset’*¹⁹¹. Victoria Melody is an ADHD autistic performer who, in *‘Headset’*, explores her own ADHD; not only does she wear a headset which was designed to monitor electrical pulses and uncover more about laughs and dopamine release, but she also utilizes a ‘masking wheel’, with different faces/‘masks’ attached to its circumference. Her show detailed an eclectic life story and career progression, perhaps leading to more authentic/intrinsic presentations of her ADHD communication and storytelling upon stage.

¹⁸⁹ Rose, K (2019) ‘Masking, Camouflaging, Mimicking’. *So, You Think You’re Autistic* [ONLINE] <https://soyoureautistic.com/masking-camouflaging-mimicking-2/#:~:text=putting%20on%20a%20public%20face,Kieran%20Rose%2C%20Autistic%20Self%20Advocate> (Accessed 25/08/22)

¹⁹⁰ Robdale, E (2023) ‘Masks and Masquerading MixMatched Performance Night’. *MixMatched* [ONLINE] <https://mixmatched.co.uk/masks-and-masquerading-mixmatched-performance-night/> [Accessed 13/03/24]

¹⁹¹ Robdale, E. (2022) ‘Headset: Victoria Melody ‘comes out’ as ADHD at Edinburgh Fringe at one-woman show’. *Disability Arts Online* (2022) <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/head-set-victoria-melody-comes-out-as-adhd-at-edinburgh-fringe-in-one-woman-show/> [Accessed 13/03/24]

She discussed how, due to her need to move, explore, and meet new people, she became bored even if she was doing well at a job. Due to this, she had kept changing jobs, eventually landing upon anthropologist; a job which enabled her to step into other people's culture, learn everything about them. She feels as if this lifestyle is aiding her to endorse or potentially capitalise upon masking, which she felt had been instilled from an early age. She had now paired her fascination of other people's cultures with her lived experiences of masking, which she then discusses, explores, and unpacks on stage. As performers, both Saeed and Melody discussed how being proficient innovative maskers actually fed into their performative practice.

I attended a symposium upon Neurodiversity and the University in December 2021¹⁹². Three ND+ authors were present: Nick Walker (autistic psychologist and author of 'Neuroqueer Heresies', who is spoken upon within this thesis's introduction regarding ND+ genders/sexualities), Lizzie Huxley-Jones (Autistic writer who edited the 'Stim'¹⁹³ Autistic anthology), and Dr Kate Moorhead (ND+/ADHD writer and lecturer, also mentioned within the introduction in relation to feminist pedagogy/positionality and Neurodivergence). The symposium was chaired by Hanna Randall, also a Neurodivergent+ creative and academic. My question to the panel was whether they believed that masking and/or being aware of their diagnosis factored into their writing, and whether their writing had changed before or after diagnosis?

Kate Moorhead spoke about how their ADHD diagnosis had given them a differing sense of self and the knowledge/acceptance needed to realise they were masking. This led into a discussion on how diagnosis could make ND+ creatives more self-aware, and how this could in turn affect how they present narrative.

Moorhead had written their first novel, '*The First Law of Motion*'¹⁹⁴, before gaining a diagnosis. Upon reflection, they could see how the novel inadvertently outlines the life of an ADHD individual in times of struggle and procrastination. In not recognising themselves as ADHD, it afforded them a type of unintentional nuance and reflection upon the subject without any direct knowledge of it. If they were to write the novel again, after recognising themselves directly as an ADHD individual, they believed this insight might afford them a differing perspective. Regarding my research and practice, this line of enquiry unearthed a number of questions directly relating to ND+ writing and performance:

- Do ND+ creatives keep up their masks while performing and writing?
- Could writing and performance be a way for ND+ creatives to explore, question, and evaluate the art of masking?
- Ultimately, could the act of writing or performance be an opportunity to unmask?
- Do these unmasked narratives expose differing writerly or performative aesthetics?

¹⁹² Randall, H., Huxley-Jones, L., Walker, N. and Moorhead, K. (2021) 'Neurodiversity and the University Symposium'. [ONLINE] www.chasevle.org.uk/programmes/teaching-creative-writing/tcw-session-11/ [Accessed 13/03/24]

¹⁹³ Huxley-Jones, L. (2020) [Ed.] *Stim: An Autistic Anthology*. Unbound.

¹⁹⁴ Moorhead, K. (2009) *The First Law of Motion*. Griffin.

Authenticity and Process

After conducting and collating my interviews with Neurodivergent+ writers and performers, an emerging theme was that the method of creation and the reasons behind this process were, to many ND+ creatives, as fundamental as the final output. With this in mind, because reason/intent and process are often considered crucial, the final result of many Neurodivergent+ artist's work were often quite multi-modal/cross-genre/interdisciplinary. As a Neurodivergent+ creative I saw this as a way of naturally challenging existing criteria/genre, and through our work/writing/performance, not just 'fitting' existing classifications/binaries, expanding and merging their criterion to fit us. Many of the galleries led by ND+ individuals (such as Magical Woman and Invisible Woman) seek to adapt their exhibits to be able to develop, capture and present artwork that bridges mediums and genres; it is one of the reasons why the MixMatched Neurodivergent night that I run in Canterbury encourages performance on any topic/genre/style.

Four of the ND+ writers/artists I interviewed discussed how being Neurodivergent+, in more specific relation to autism, ADHD and synaesthesia, informed their perception and practice as artists, these being: Elinor Rowlands (founder of Magical Women and pursuing her own PHD research on stimming and creativity) Hanna Randall (Runs ND+ activities in Brighton, while pursuing her own research being Neurodivergent/having synaesthesia and being a writer/artist), Jon Adams (Director of Flow Observatorium, a ND+ arts collective), and Elena Re (Neurodivergent+ Brighton based creative, worked with Carousel, a charity that supports ND+ adult creativity, and BBC to explore her love/synesthetic relationship to orange in 'What is Normal, Who Decides?'¹⁹⁵).

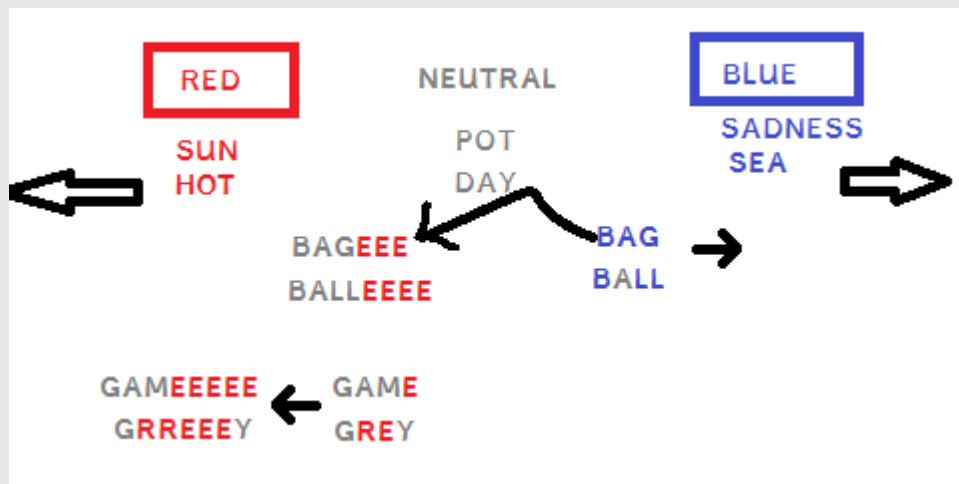
Their experiences of synaesthesia could directly transcend into their writing/how/what they wrote. When discussing neurodivergence and synaesthesia, it is important to note that only a small number of ND+ creatives experience this, and because of this it can be the cause of NT 'fascination' with perceived Neurodivergent+ 'super-powers'; with this in mind, within this thesis, I try to focus and centre the discussion upon the ND+ authors' method/what makes them feel comfortable, rather than explicitly focusing on synaesthesia.

Elena Re is a Brighton based Neurodivergent+ creative. When struggling with a sense of identity in her teenage years she developed an intense love for the colour orange and an aversion to blue. Several autistic Neurodivergent+ individuals have been known to associate colour with ideas of safety and security, but in Elena's case, this feeling, at a point of incredible unwellness, became crystallised. Elena began to develop an understanding, or perhaps obsession, with language and letterings associated blue or orange. She detailed how some letters, such as 'R' and 'E' were explicitly associated with red/orange, and other letters such as 'B', and 'L' associated with blue. Other letters/words were more neutral but could gain colour if next to Red or Blue letters, whereas other words/letters/themes gained colour if they had connotations with the colour red or blue (though this was quite personal). But an example would be that the words/letters 'hot' or 'sun' would gain red connotations, and ones that had connotations with 'Navy' or 'sadness' would be blue.

¹⁹⁵ Re, E. (2019) What is Normal, Who Decides? *BBC* [ONLINE] www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/what-is-normal-who-decides/p07194s4 [Accessed 13/03/24]

“So that letter has a colour, and it has associations, like the sun is, you know, a warm colour.”¹⁹⁶

Some letters were neutral and would gain colour by other letters within the word. In this way she came to develop what she termed ‘red language’. She found that she could phonetically spell words with ‘orange’ letters or double up the orange letters (often vowels) within ‘blue’ words to make them orange words. After speaking to Elena Re I developed this diagram to aid understanding; it has two distinct colour categories: RED and BLUE and shows how neutral words (or words with just one/two red letters) can be made ‘more red’.



When Elena experienced intense mental health difficulties, she found that she struggled to speak as she would attempt to build sentences in phonetically ‘red language’ which became debilitating and akin to a compulsion.

She received Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to encourage her to use more ‘normal’ speech, and after seeking help with her mental health, her speech eventually returned to ‘normal’; however, she still wrote using ‘red language’. Now she has the choice to use differing modes of writing. When texting with close friends she describes feeling the want to use ‘red language’, as it feels as if it contains more of her spirit. Now, reflecting upon sense of self, she regularly endorses orange within her artwork as a way of exploring herself. She spoke about feeling saddened or upset that in regard to creative writing, that she feels there is not a place for ‘red language’ and that it has never been appreciated as interesting or personal writing usage; rather it is seen as ‘incorrect’. She commented on formal spelling and grammar,

“It’s been set in stone for ages, since forever! And it’s still set in stone. It feels like, if people mind would open up to that (utilising differing letters/sounds/presentation) a bit, then it could also (be) creative. - Not just (understood) for the fact that it (the writing) has broken a rule, but also that it’s you (who) can create, like (when writing about) auras and vibes and fields of atmospheres, the writing, (the way you create it) could be a bit more atmospheric.”¹⁹⁷

Another interviewee, Jon Adams, founder of Neurodivergent+ arts collective Flow Observatorium, discussed experiencing a differing relationship to letters, in that he associated

¹⁹⁶Taken from my interview with Elena Re, conducted 30/11/2020

¹⁹⁷ Taken from my interview with Elena Re, conducted 30/11/20

them with having differing personalities. More specifically, he felt that capital letters felt 'grown up' as if they had evolved from lower case letters; dependent on the subject matter he was writing about, its seriousness or joviality, he would swap from lower case to capital; as a dyslexic individual, he felt this synthetic use of CAPITAL and lower-case letters was often viewed as accident rather than intentional. His individualised usage of letters would also be a trait that would likely be standardised 'out' for mainstream publications.

Another Neurodivergent+ artist I spoke to who also experiences synaesthesia was Hanna Randall. She is pursuing an interdisciplinary PhD in Japanese, Creative Writing, and Synaesthesia. Her intense relationship with colour is interrelated to place and character. Due to the multitude of senses, characters, and colours that locations can trigger, she often finds herself easily overwhelmed. For her, location, place, colour, and character do not exist in isolation, and so the space she writes in does not just inspire her but fuels her stories. She described how, when writing, she starts with a location and how this space then corresponds to certain colours. She detailed how she experiences different shades of colour as emotion or character. This is a subtle and free-flowing experience of creation; for her, simply 'being' in certain spaces would allow her characters, in a way, to form and create themselves.

Randall understands the art of 'creative walking' as being an inherent method for her creative practice; without the walk, the writing does not exist. In August 2022 Randall held what she termed a ND+ 'walkshop' in Brighton; she was curious as to how other ND+ individuals would respond to 'walking' as a creative method, and what emotions, feelings, and artistic methods walking in Brighton could inspire amongst other ND+ creatives. Both Elena Re and I supported and took part in this walk, opening ourselves up to Randall's creative methods.



Influenced by Randall's understanding of colour and space, I tried to visually express a combination of my own experiences of feeling connected and alive when swimming at Brighton seaside, where I had lived for two years previously, and this culminated in the shark which opens into a large human eye. Drawing this with Elena Re, I was inspired and limited by her art collection which did not include the colour blue. I engaged with pinks, oranges, and reds. I felt very connected to this piece of art as a symbol for Neurodivergent+ energy.

My first interview for this research was with Jen Malia, an 'out' autistic writer, professor, and academic. She had been a part of '*Autism Through a Literary Lens*' symposium and conducted a lecture on writing '*Authentic Autistic Characters*.' When I asked her if she had any advice for NT people writing ND+ characters she responded that they should think about why they are choosing to include a ND+ character, what their relationship is to the community, and what research they will be conducting. If they were going to include a Neurodivergent+/autistic character on a whim character to make their narrative more interesting (but with no specific engagement with ND+ culture/community), then they should consider not doing it. However, with this in mind, another ND+ collective, DYSPLA, voiced concerns that putting restrictions upon who owns writing reduces experimentation and creative potential; sometimes there is joy to writing about experiences which are not your own. They believed that art does not have inherent morals, only experimentation, and that 'bad'/insensitive representations sometimes have the potential to spark conversations and activate change. Though I understood this angle, I feel that there can be ways to progress that do not inherently involve needing to defend/fight against misrepresentation; as, for a community/ND+, this can be quite exhausting. It is sometimes not insensitive depictions that are most damaging, but rather that they are printed/published/recognised in place of Neurodivergent+ voice, as NT creatives may be seen as 'easier' to work with/have less access adjustments. Jess Thom, a very prominent ND+ activist, also interviewed for this research, has strong opinions on ownership and believes that representations of neurodivergence and disability that are not authentic are flat and insulting.

It is the juxtaposition of these ideas voiced by Jess and DYSPLA which create friction when discussing ND+ Aesthetics. Perhaps even more controversial is the question of who owns ND+ narration? Arguably, specific characteristics under the umbrella of neurodivergence should be owned by those who are ND+ (dyslexic/dyspraxic/ADHD/autistic/OCD/BP/Other), with an appreciation of how they can interlink and overlap. A text which seeks to directly illuminate how fictional stereotypes have impacted upon more general cultural understanding is '*Imagining Autism, Fiction and stereotypes on the Spectrum*'¹⁹⁸ authored by Sonya Freeman Loftis, who identifies as autistic, a review upon her work by Disability Studies Quarterly speaks upon how it,

"Examines the interrelationship of literary representations of autism, cultural stereotypes, autistic culture, and disability identity politics"¹⁹⁹. Arguing that literary depictions of life on the spectrum remain unexamined from the standpoints of both Disability Studies and autistic

198 Ajitpaul, A. (2015) 'Loftis, Sonya Freeman *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*'. Disability Studies Quarterly. 36(4). [ONLINE] <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/5399/4486> [Accessed 31/03/24]

¹⁹⁹ Freeman Loftis, S. (2015) *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. Indiana University Press.

culture²⁰⁰, Loftis seeks to "examine the assumptions that underpin common literary stereotypes of people on the spectrum"²⁰¹ as well as "explore the implications that these fictional depictions have on public perceptions of the condition"²⁰².

Keeping in mind how ND+ fictional portrayals can effect wider society views/stigma, Chapter Three of *'Imagining Autism'* which is entitled, 'The Autistic Victim: of Mice and Men and Flowers for Algernon', discusses how the depiction of Lennie as learning disabled in Steinbeck's *'Of Mice and Men'*, was the main factor used to decide whether a person who is learning disabled should face the death penalty in Texas; if they are considered more capable than Lennie, they can be given the death penalty. Steinbeck loosely created the fictional Lennie from someone he used to work with and claims no in-depth knowledge of learning disabilities. This is a strong example of the extreme power fictional ND+ narratives can have had upon mainstream understandings of neurodivergence. However, with this said, drawing upon arguments throughout this thesis, it may be unfair to suggest that blame regarding stereotypes lays solely upon fictional portrayals of Neurodivergence; it was not Steinbeck's intention for his fictional works to be utilized as a measure for the death penalty, and, that it was/is used, donates far wider educational and sociological gaps in understanding surrounding learning disabilities, and Neurodivergence and spikey peripherals (whereby a person may have strengths in one area, but struggle deeply in others). With this in mind, if *'Of Mice and Men'* had been published in a different sociological context, though the novel might have still contained stereotypical/oversimplified portrayals, these stereotypes could have been challenged, and likely would have not had so much effect upon public perceptions, nor law making policy; it might simply have been appreciated as a work of fiction.

Another strong example of a ND+ character that had a noticeable effect upon public perceptions is Mark Haddon's *'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time'*, whereby even though the author purposely did not conduct research into autism or connect with autistic communities, the book still paved the way for understanding and autism inclusion. A more mainstream reference would be the combining of violence and schizophrenia in popular horror films, which has made it harder for people living with schizophrenia to be open about diagnosis. Mainstream society seems to enjoy fiction over reality, which brings up even more subjective debates surrounding the artist or creator versus the audience and consumer:

- Should artists be held responsible for the creative content of novels/films they create?
- Does the industry/editors have a responsibility to produce authentic and ethical fictional creations of neurodivergence?
- Should the audience refuse to read/watch unrealistic Neurodivergent+ portrayal?
- Should an audience, after viewing unrealistic portrayal, know better than to endorse/believe fictional stigmas?

It can be argued that the artist, industry, and consumer could become far more conscious about the distinctions they are making about ND+ representation. If individuals throughout

200 Ajitpaul, A. (2015) 'Loftis, Sonya Freeman *'Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum'*'. Disability Studies Quarterly. 36(4). [ONLINE] <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/5399/4486> [Accessed 31/03/24] Note: Ajitpaul quotes from Loftis' original work *'Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum'* within his review for Disability Studies Quarterly.

201 Freeman Loftis, S. (2015) *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. Indiana University Press.

202 Freeman Loftis, S. (2015) *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. Indiana University Press.

all levels of the process had a better or more informed base appreciation of neurodivergence, then ethical issues surrounding appropriation would undoubtedly lessen.

Away from 'bigger picture' ethics, and larger questions surrounding neurodivergence and the creative industry, what many present-day ND+ individuals struggle with is the reading of narratives written by NT authors that they do not relate to nor identify with. Speaking to Dr Jen Malia about autistic representation, she believed that she could tell if the author was ND+, or if they truly understood neurodivergence. Malia is an autistic lecturer of literature at Virginia University and author of *'Too Sticky'*²⁰³. She discussed how it was the subtle ways that ND+ writers framed themselves and infused writing that made it come alive, I understood this in terms of 'autistic fingerprint' being left upon writing. She discussed how these were details that you only understood through the 'lived' ND+ experience, and how often, when NT writers undergo 'research' to write ND+ characters, they often use diagnostic material which are outdated and describe symptoms rather than innate qualities. I enquired whether she believed that a NT person could write rounded Neurodivergent+ characters. She had read many that had not but agreed that a handful of them had. Could this be because the authors were secretly autistic? Or perhaps some authors just have a more refined creative lens and are able to view characters more as a whole?

Note: This next section was originally in the conclusion, but I have deemed it appropriate to move 'up', so that the ideas can be understood/kept in mind in relation to this chapter and the next.

As the researcher, I am unsure how heavily I come down on 'restricting' NT writers from portraying ND+ characters, but I unequivocally support that scrutiny/critiques by ND+ communities upon ND+ portrayals created by Neurotypical authors need to be forefront and respected; and, that further support needs to be recognised and given to ND+ creatives so that they have equal footing in creating and producing narratives and writing concerning ND+ portrayals.

Going forward from this, it is my hope that more Neurodivergent+ individuals will be able to be involved in the construction of ND+ characters/their narratives. A number of barriers (such as confidence, writing ability, differences in communication/networking, having sensory difficulties, overwhelm/burnout) will often be present for Neurodivergent+ creatives/writers/drama practitioners, due to this less Neurodivergent+ individuals may be in positions to apply, and the ones that do may be seen as less favourable by production companies. Neurodivergent+ access is an expansive topic, which is not fully expanded upon within this thesis; however, with direct respect to this research, I am putting forward two specific reasons that Neurodivergent+ writing/performance might find it difficult to get past publication gatekeepers:

1. **Neurodivergent+ Presenting Language:** That Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics and Neurodivergent+ presenting language/communication, may not always conform to publisher expectations, and might not be understood or appreciated; this could lead publishers to reject/overlook a number of Neurodivergent+ writers and performers,

²⁰³ Malia, J. (2020) *Too Sticky, Sensory Issues with Autism* (2020) Albert Whitman & Company.

especially those who self-assuredly claim/utilise elements of Neurodivergent+ aesthetics. It may mean that to reach publishing/industry expectations ND+ creatives need to 'mask'/edit out ND+ traits, or that these traits are masked/edited out for them if they do go on to be published.

Stereotypical Genre Expectations for Neurodivergence: That the gatekeeper's publishing/performance industries may have certain genre expectations to what a Neurodivergent+ narrative consists of, and these representations may be wrapped up with more ridged appreciations of Neurodivergence taken from the Medical Modal of Disability, which have then transgressed into several stereotypes and troupes in popular culture. With this in mind, a number of ND+ authors may also feel a need to stereotype/pigeonhole themselves/their own narratives in order to be seen/recognised/published.

Sally Gardner, who wrote the award-winning *'Maggot Moon'* is another dyslexic/ND+ writer who spoke about authenticity. On the topic of neurodivergence and stereotyping, something she found exasperating was the overuse of characterising dyslexics simply by not being good at spelling; she felt it was reductionist and boring. Regarding spelling and editorship, she ensures that all her published writing is grammatically formatted; similar to Jon Adams, she believes that this type of editorship is useful to all voices, Neurodivergent+ and neurotypical. In our interview she described how in *'Maggot Moon'*, due to the main character being dyslexic, she felt she was able to 'unmask' and insert more of her own lived experiences and appreciations into the narrative than she had with other works. This assertion suggests that in other works she felt pressure not to be herself and perhaps to write in a way that presented more standard lexis. When asked, she commented that she was not necessarily masking, more that she had not given herself the permission of free reign.

Three of my interviews were with people involved in the *'In Other Words'*²⁰⁴ anthology, a collection of shorts by autistic writers. Esther Lowery was one contributor to the collection. On the topic of authenticity and emotion, she discussed how she writes to deal with panic or overwhelm, and how, when doing this, her form is incredibly 'broken'. In order to express herself fully her structure is haphazard and breaks away from what may be viewed as conventional form. Esther Lowery shed light on how, for her, sometimes she found that writing was a safe way to explore new scenarios; she could role play characters in different situations, and sometimes used a feelings encyclopaedia to help her imagine ways people might present in times of stress or anxiety.

Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams is the author of *'The Duck'*²⁰⁵, a play that combines poetry, prose, and scriptwriting. She is autistic and spoke about enjoying exploring ideas within differing creative mediums, first writing poetry about experiencing life as an autistic woman. She then wanted to explore this within the form of playwriting. Regarding process, she is a perfectionistic writer. She articulated how due to her extensive editing, the end writing is very precise; she 'mows' through writings until the sentences feel right. I felt this precise editing was perhaps a type of 'stim' or way to sort and order discombobulation. She commented that

²⁰⁴ Mitchell, D. and Limburg, J. (2021) [Ed.] *In Other Words*. Unbound.

²⁰⁵ Lloyd-Williams, R. (2019b) *The Duck: Playtext*. Aut Act.

if she were to write in more of a true train of thought narrative, this type of writing would have a different aesthetic as her thoughts do not arrive as neat or formulated. This brought up the question of whether writing in an extremely controlled manner could be a type of masking or whether it was more telling of intention, style, and preference; I recognise my own writing as flavoured by perfectionism, and I wonder if this is both a form of masking, in trying to 'undo' ND+ writing aesthetics that I've been shamed for in the past, and a channel for ND+/OCD perfectionism.

Each ND+ interviewee, having drastically different life experiences, interests, and creative mediums, had differing appreciations of process. That artists are inherently connected to their work and methods is not necessarily a distinctive factor of neurodivergence, however, when investigated closely, there are elements of process can be seen as interconnected to neurodivergence.

Jess Thom, founder of 'Touretteshero'

Jess Thom is another ND+ performance artist who uses their neurodivergence to 'deviate' from standardised appreciations of language and communication. She is the founder of 'Touretteshero' a collective that supports people with Tourette's Syndrome. After her international tour with Beckett's *'Not I'*, which was followed by a BBC 2 documentary about its making, Jess Thom rose to become one of the most prominent voices advocating for disability and Neurodivergent+ inclusion; over the lockdown she created 'Burnt Out in Biscuitland'²⁰⁶ with two other ND+ woman to build on applications of ND+ experience over lockdown. Two of her most prominent publications, whereby she utilised elements of subconscious Tourette's/Tic Language are 'Welcome to Biscuit land, 'A Year in the Life of Touretteshero'²⁰⁷ (The word Biscuits is one of her most 'everyday'/prominent Tics), and 'Lights of My Life'. Some of the ways in which Thom's utilises 'Tic Language' within her works are expanded upon within this section.

Tourette's Syndrome is a Neurodivergence that can cause individuals to experience verbal and physical tics. Each person's specific experiences of Tourette's are personal, and many will subconsciously or unintentionally include 'accidental' words or sounds within intentional speech. Jess Thom is a leading speaker not only in the Neurodivergent+ community, but also in the wider disability community, she spoke to me upon how her tics naturally infuse her style as a performer and how she incorporates what she referred to as 'Tic Language' within her writing/Playwriting, "Whenever we're collaborating, we're also collaborating with my tics."²⁰⁸

Thom expanded upon not only how she uses her tics, but how she wishes them to be utilised and transcribed by others; she spoke upon how it is important to work with people she trusts, so she can ensure she is being appropriately transcribed,

²⁰⁶ Thom, J. (2018b) 'Lampost: Light of my Life' [ONLINE] <https://www.touretteshero.com/2013/10/18/still-on-speaking-terms/> [Accessed 12/10/23]

²⁰⁷ Thom, J. (2012) *Welcome to Biscuit Land: A Year in the Life of Touretteshero*. Souvenir Press.

²⁰⁸ Taken from my interview with Jess Thom, conducted upon 20/01/12

“If I’m performing and stuff is being interpreted into sign language, or is captioned, I’ll always ask that ticks are included, because obviously, they’re relevant content, and it will be missing a layer to not include them.”²⁰⁹

Within audio or transcript Thom suggests her tics are italicised or in a different colour. It is extremely important to Thom that they are correctly transcribed. She commented, “Personally I feel a bit weird if people get tics wrong”²¹⁰, explaining how her tic language is inherently personal, and that misquoting it demonstrated that people didn’t value them. She also stressed the importance of people being able to focus on what she is intentionally saying, especially in interviews where she is “wary of tics being used as gimmicks.”²¹¹

Within our interview Thom spoke extensively upon how she personally uses her tic language within her work, “I incorporate it in my writing all the time”²¹². She commented upon how, when she is writing, this is the only time she is in complete control of how/when she incorporates tics/ideas that are infused by tics. Regarding many of her productions, such as ‘*Backstage in Biscuit Land*’²¹³ she spoke upon how she re-drafts each time they are spoken/rehearsed by her, as she would incorporate new tics, “If I ticked a funny line, then it would be added, that will become part of the scripted writing.”²¹⁴

Jess Thom spoke about how she sometimes ‘charges’ her Tourette’s by watching films or documentaries on a certain topic she is writing about. She then purposely evokes certain situations or sounds which ‘spur’ her Tourette’s language. She sometimes views her Tourette’s verbal tics as more creative than herself and sometimes wonders if she can take full credit for it, but ultimately realises that the Tic Language does come from a part of her own subconscious,

“There are certain things that are that I find really overstimulating, so certain sounds, people rolling their eyes, and they’re all really random [...] I suppose there’s part of my brain that’s quite good at absorbing cultural content and then spitting it back out in a sort of mashed up way; I listened to Obama’s inauguration speech once and then we recorded my response, which was essentially like a simultaneous tic inauguration speech, which we then transcribed [...] we use tics sometimes, like a machine, to generate a load of text [...] we record a load of stuff, transcribe it, and then then be able to play with it in a piece of writing.”²¹⁵

Regarding the ways she ‘charged’ her Tourette’s, I could see a synergy regarding how I created ‘verbal smergage’; an experimental linguistic performance representing some of the traits and strengths of verbal dyslexia and dyspraxia within language. I would re-read a script at points where my processing strained or I was tired so that I would make more ‘dylexie’ spoonerisms²¹⁶, and then further incorporate them into the text. A play which Jess

²⁰⁹ Taken from my interview with Jess Thom, conducted upon 20/01/12

²¹⁰ Taken from my interview with Jess Thom, conducted upon 20/01/12

²¹¹ Taken from my interview with Jess Thom, conducted upon 20/01/12

²¹² Taken from my interview with Jess Thom, conducted upon 20/01/12

²¹³ Thom, J (2016) *Backstage in Biscuit Land*. Touretteshero.

²¹⁴ Taken from my interview with Jess Thom, conducted upon 20/01/12

²¹⁵ Taken from my interview with Jess Thom, conducted upon 20/01/12

²¹⁶ **Spoonerism Definition:** ‘a mistake in which you change around the first sounds of two words by mistake when saying them, often with a humorous result’ Oxford (2024) Spoonerism [ONLINE] <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/spoonerism#:~:text=spoonerism-,noun,oiled%20bicycleTopics%20Languagec2> [Accessed 24/03/24]

incorporated her Tourette's into was '*Lamppost, Light of my Life*' (2018)²¹⁷. She articulated how she had transcribed a number of vocal tics which she then continuously incorporated into the narrative.

Despite encountering prejudice and hostility stemming from being unable to control Tourette's utterances, she values the spontaneity and humour Tourette's can spark; she publishes what she terms a 'Daily Outburst' on her Facebook page; her most 'random' or profound utterance of that day:

"Good morning, your Care Bears are showing."

"I'm parking some ideas in your space, Sky."

"Too many broken biscuits in the world."

"Trees or optical illusions? Choose."²¹⁸

She spoke about the ethics of transcribing and editing her Tourette's; she felt as if many people do not understand or value her Tourette's language; for this reason, she sometimes prefers it to be completely removed from transcripts and interviews, and described how many people who had included it in the past had not respected its nuance; they would quote her intentional language correctly, but then misquote her Tourette's. She described this as unsettling, as exactly what and how an 'outburst' presents are unique to her; if tic language is misinterpreted, she feels unrepresented.

As an actor Thom describes herself as naturally inclined to improvisation, and this is in-part related to her Tourette's and continual script additions in performances. She often finds her best work to be with people she trusts and are also comfortable with improvising themselves. In 2017 Thom toured Europe with her one-woman production of Samuel Beckett's '*Not I*', depicting a woman of unknown origin, who has experienced a range of ambiguous hardships; it's one character, 'Mouth', spouts lines in emotive and sometimes confusing rapid-fire monologues. Due to the ambiguity of Mouth's status, class, and background, something that arises from '*Not I*' is a timelessness and anonymity that allows actors from different backgrounds to tap into a shared understanding of hardship and claim the role of 'Mouth' as their own.

Thom's performance of '*Not I*' is a recent example of how the culture and language of theatre can be utilised and adapted to better represent ND+ presentation and lexis. In 2018, BBC 2 made a documentary about Thom's production, which in part gave insight into how Thom's tics were changed and charged by the stress, excitement, and concentration of the performance; directly after the performance the stage goes dark and she can be heard 'decompressing'; "Beckett, Beckett, Beckett. Biscuits. Fuck. Fuck. Buffering."²¹⁹ She is then unstrapped from her position where she proceeds to run a questions and answer session with the audience. I have transcribed a section of her speech from this below.

"This is your chance to splurge. To join Mouth and to make as much noise as you can in the theatre [biscuits]. Mouth is only as isolated as her community makes her [biscuits] so if we don't want to be a bunch of [FLACCID HORSE TITS] (laughs and looks to the BSL interpreter to see how

²¹⁷ Thom, J. (2018b) '*Lamppost: Light of my Life*' [ONLINE] <https://www.touretteshero.com/2013/10/18/still-on-speaking-terms/> [Accessed 12/10/23]

²¹⁸ Jess Thom posts humorous Tourette's inspired 'Daily Outbursts' upon her Facebook; here a four have been included.

²¹⁹ Thom, J. (2018a) '*Touretteshero: Me, Myself and I*', BBC Two, 7th August 2018.

this will be translated). Flaccid horse tits. (she and the audience laugh more) So, if we don't want to be a bunch of flaccid horse tits. It is our shared responsibility to use our words and actions to demonstrate this, and I'd like is to do that right now [biscuits]."²²⁰

In the section of speech above you can see Thom's recurrent tic of the word 'biscuits'. There are a number of other spontaneous vocal tics, some of which appear more random, and others are more specifically related to the content/emotion of what she is saying. In the transcription above you can see how she claims 'flaccid horse tits' within her conscious language; recognising its humour, she embraces it in her purposeful language going forward. She is not separating, ignoring, nor embarrassed by her additions; in this community, she has learnt to embrace them.

Another practitioner utilising tic-like language, in both his writing and performance is Neil Hilborn, whose work can be seen as an interesting contrast to Jess Thom's. Hilborn is famous for his poem '*OCD*'²²¹ which endorses obsessive compulsive disorder, intrusive thought language, and repetitions. He writes/crafts his intrusive thoughts akin to tic language highlighting how his struggle with intrusive thoughts feels internally/within thought. Suffering from OCD myself, it was through watching his performance that I came to have an appreciation of OCD thought looping in relation to involuntary tics. To read Hilborn's poem the tics may be mistaken as more 'flat' repetition, which can be/is a more mainstream poetic technique, that is not necessarily unique to neurodivergence; it is his performance of his poem '*OCD*' that characterises the repetition as more of an involuntary and traumatic linguistic manifestation relating to OCD. Hilborn reads the poem in two voices, a conscious voice, and an unconscious voice, which is his OCD compulsion/thought intrusions. I have included extracts of his poem below.

You can listen to Hilborn perform this poem via this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnKZ4pdSU-s&feature=emb_logo

Extract 1:

The first time I saw her...
Everything in my head went quiet.
All the tics, all the constantly refreshing images just disappeared.
When you have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, you don't really get quiet moments.
Even in bed, I'm thinking:
Did I lock the doors? Yes.
Did I wash my hands? Yes.
Did I lock the doors? Yes.
Did I wash my hands? Yes.
But when I saw her, the only thing I could think about was the hairpin curve of her lips..
Or the eyelash on her cheek—
the eyelash on her cheek—
the eyelash on her cheek.

²²⁰ Thom, J. (2018a) 'Touretteshero: Me, Myself and I', BBC Two, 7th August 2018.

²²¹ Hilborn, N. (2013) 'OCD poem' [ONLINE] www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnKZ4pdSU-s&feature=emb_logo [Accessed 09/10/23]

“Being Neurodivergent+ has physiological effects that shape how dyslexic individuals grow and how identities are formed [...] Dyslexics are very intuitive. We know how to read people, we know how to read situations, and that probably comes from not being able to read that well in school. [...] They’ve learned a shorthand with situations, characters, danger and excitement. Everything becomes a shorthand to emotion so young Dyslexics can understand the world.”²²⁴

Part of the nature of dyslexic neurology is that individuals process and relate to language Neurodivergently. Deborah Leveroy, dyslexic academic and author of *‘Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting Practice’*²²⁵, discusses how historically dyslexia has been viewed regarding deficit and difficulty. She identifies how historic understandings of dyslexia have often surrounded reading, spelling, and writing, but that more recent definitions include the cognitive processing aspects of verbal language; memory and organisation²²⁶. What both Leveroy and DYSPLA explore are other ways to acknowledge neurodivergent ‘wiring’ that can apply to creative difference and potentially strength,

“Their (dyslexics’) subsequent lack of special attention to singular details or linearity can help to create a freer process of working, and one which includes a much broader spectrum of influences, methods and ideas.” (DYSPLA)²²⁷

Deborah Leveroy conducted research on several dyslexic performers²²⁸ advocating that dyslexic performance artists thrive in environments that allow for different approaches to performance and inclusion. Upon the subject of dyslexic language and processing she asserts that ‘the research participants (dyslexic performers) have a different intentional relationship to language and linear sequencing.’²²⁹

Her research asserts dyslexia as a Neurodivergence/identity as both comprised of perceptive/neurological difference as well as being shaped by specific dyslexic lived experiences; Leveroy discusses the work of Macdonald, Professor of Social Work at the Department of Sociology at Durham University, and his understandings of ‘distributed cognition’²³⁰. He describes this as relevant to dyslexia as it is ‘constructed from both a neurological basis and in interaction with the social environment’²³¹. Although lived experience is unique, many dyslexics and ND+ individuals, in part due to sociological barriers, can share some similar quite inherently ND+ experiences.

²²⁴ Robdale, E. (2018) ‘Eclectic Dyslexics: Could Neurodiversity be Key to Artistic Success’ *Disability Arts Online* [ONLINE] disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/eclectic-dyslexics-neurodiversity-key-artistic-success/ [Accessed 24/03/24]

²²⁵ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting Practice*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23]

²²⁶ Leveroy, D. *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting Practice*. Chapter Two. p.76.

²²⁷ Robdale, E. (2018) ‘Eclectic Dyslexics: Could Neurodiversity be Key to Artistic Success’ *Disability Arts Online* [ONLINE] disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/eclectic-dyslexics-neurodiversity-key-artistic-success/ [Accessed 24/03/24]

²²⁸ Robdale, E. (2018) ‘Eclectic Dyslexics: Could Neurodiversity be Key to Artistic Success’ *Disability Arts Online* [ONLINE] disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/eclectic-dyslexics-neurodiversity-key-artistic-success/ [Accessed 24/03/24]

²²⁹ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting Practice*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23]

²³⁰ **Distributed Cognition:** A theory suggesting that a number of different sources and influences impact upon how identity is formed. Definition taken from The Decision Lab. (2024) ‘Distributed Cognition’ *The Decision Lab* [ONLINE] <https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/neuroscience/distributed-cognition> [Accessed 24/03/24]

²³¹ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting Practice*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23]

Macdonald's assertion that ND+ or dyslexic diagnosis and the subsequent expectations and experience is similar to Hacking's Theory of Classification²³² and Looping. Hacking is a leading scholar in the fields of philosophy and history of science, who is interested in the,

'Classifications of people, in how they affect the people classified, and how the effects on the people in turn change these classifications.'²³³

He describes classification as a phenomenon which happens when you give a person or group of people a label; the label at first is supposedly made to fit the person, but as that label progresses, the labelled person can view themselves differently dependent on how that label develops within social understanding. Hacking describes this effect as 'looping',

"They (labelled/classified people) are moving targets because our investigations interact with them and change them. And since they are changed, they are not quite the same kind of people as before. [...] I call this the 'looping effect'.'²³⁴

This is intriguing as it suggests that 'classification', or rather diagnosis and/or self-identification in relation to ND+, has the power to affect a person's sense of identity. Regarding my own labels and diagnoses, I saw this trajectory of looping and categorisation within my own sense of self; I was in some ways proud of my dyslexic diagnosis due to a more positive perception towards creativity, but ashamed of autism due to stigmatisations of social ineptitude. Regarding ND+ identity, DYSPLA and Leveroy's investigation further highlight ideas surrounding 'Distributed Cognition'; that ND+ identities are a combination of both neurological processing differences and joint social, communication experiences and expectations. Leveroy discussed the term meta-cognition, which is a,

'Process of consciously knowing about the ways in which we think and learn and taking control of these cognitive processes'²³⁵ and how it is currently, 'thought to be a key factor in understanding the learning development of students with learning disabilities.'²³⁶

Something else that I found really interesting about Leveroy's research is that it discussed ideas surrounding the 'dyslexic body' and how it is usually perceived as 'misperforming'²³⁷. Leveroy's work outlined this as ableist, championing that a 'dyslexic body' should be seen and understood as a 'lived body' with an intentional relationship to its surroundings. A number of her dyslexic participants understand their dyslexia in terms of sensory experience; in my interviews with both Lennie Varvarides and Sam Rapp, they believed that being ND+ gave them an inherently sensory heavy appreciation of their surroundings which then translated into their creative practices. Some of the reasons behind this may be that a number of ND+

²³²Hacking, I. (2006) 'Making Up People'. London Review. [ONLINE] <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n16/ian-hacking/making-up-people> [Accessed 23/03/24]

²³³ Hacking, I. (2006) 'Making Up People'. London Review. [ONLINE] <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n16/ian-hacking/making-up-people> [Accessed 23/03/24]

²³⁴Hacking, I. (2006) 'Making Up People'. London Review [ONLINE] <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n16/ian-hacking/making-up-people> [Accessed 23/03/24]

²³⁵ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23]

Meta-cognition and distributed cognition. P.104.

²³⁶ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23]

Meta-cognition and distributed cognition. P.104.

²³⁷Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23]

. The social aspects of adult dyslexia P.70.

individuals experience a variety of heightened sensory experiences and have strengths in illustrative innovations; this is not a prominent focus of this thesis, but a list of current studies in and around this area have been collected by a group entitled The Dyslexics Advantage, in an article entitled, 'Dyslexia and Creativity'²³⁸.

Both DYSPLA and Leveroy discuss how dyslexic individuals have found alternative strategies to complete tasks, strengthening different processing skills. Leveroy discusses how dyslexic individuals may struggle to decipher meaning and be more inclined to see information as a whole. She describes this in terms of 'dys-location'. In discussing 'dys-location' she draws upon the work of Philpott, author of '*A Phenomenology of Dyslexia: The Lived-Body, Ambiguity, and the Breakdown of Expression*'²³⁹. He suggests that dyslexic learners can be susceptible to an insufficiency of involvement with the text which results in a diminishing of meaning (dys-location). The objects of the text (letters, words, and syntax) may become undifferentiated. Regarding one of her own dyslexic participants, Leveroy discussed how,

'Rosa experiences verbal and written words as vague, unfixed meanings rather than specific significances. [...] The learner has overpowering freedom over the objects in the text, and fails to recognise or settle on the fixed meaning of a word.'²⁴⁰

This supports DYSPLA's belief that,

"Their (dyslexics') subsequent lack of special attention to singular details or linearity can help to create a freer process of working, and one which includes a much broader spectrum of influences, methods and ideas."

Another participant in Leveroy's study, Morris, commented that a dyslexic person who struggled with reading may enjoy acting due to it being a more accessible three-dimensional approach;

"Acting would be the best place to go. It's because it's a three-dimensional version of reading."²⁴¹

Due to having differing lived experiences and having dyslexic neurological memory processes, Leveroy notes that information or time might be described less chronologically; one of her interviewees spoke about talking to a dyslexic actor,

"This actor felt that he had never fixed in his mind a linear progression [of the play]... What he wanted to talk about was individual moments, and it was much more scattered."²⁴²

Leveroy goes on to discuss the ways in which dyslexic individuals sort and arrive at information, and how this creates different relationships to it. Regarding dyslexic forms of communication and creativity she discussed a theory of 'schema', where, due to differences

²³⁸ Dyslexia Advantage Team. Dyslexia and Creativity (2022) Dyslexia Advantage [ONLINE] <https://www.dyslexicadvantage.org/creativity-and-dyslexia/> [Accessed 17/03/24]

²³⁹Philpott, M. J (1998) *A Phenomenology of Dyslexia: The Lived-body, Ambiguity, and the Breakdown of Expression*. Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology. 5 (1)

²⁴⁰ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23] The social aspects of adult dyslexia. The social aspects of adult dyslexia p.74.

²⁴¹ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23] The social aspects of adult dyslexia. Chapter Four: Dyslexia, cognitive style and meaning-making. p.132

²⁴² Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23] The social aspects of adult dyslexia. p. 114.

in dyslexic processing such as having to skim and scan through several other similar sounding words to arrive at the one they want, dyslexics have a differing relationship or appreciation to language and information. She discussed this in terms of 'deep language processing'; I have included this section of her research directly due to its relevance to my creative practice with my performance of 'Wordal Smergage', whereby I draw upon my own awareness of processing language 'dylexicly' whereby word sound, form and context 'slurge' to form what I have suggested as a hypothetical new language, 'Dylexie'. Drawing upon the research of other scholars focused upon dylexic language and processing, Leveroy more fully explains some dyslexic linguistic processes,

'Eide and Eide suggest that misreading is symptomatic of a dyslexic processing strength in perceiving relationships between words, ideas and concepts, which are connected either through similarity, association or cause and effect (2011: 83). This ability could be one mode of experience which enables the dyslexic learner to relocate meaning in an otherwise 'dys-located' linguistic environment (Philpott 2000). Eide and Eide suggest that words or concepts are surrounded by 'a rich network of association and that these associations can become overwhelming and give rise to unintended substitutions' (2011: 95)²⁴³

Taking notions of dyslexia, malapropism, and conceptual substitution regarding dyslexic/ND+ individuals, and claiming creative identity is something which both Sally Gardner and Benedict Phillips, dyslexic author of '*A Benedictionary*' (2011)²⁴⁴ (discussed in next section), directly utilise within their practices. Sally Gardner, dyslexic author of '*Maggot Moon*', created Standish, a dyslexic protagonist, and within his narrative includes conceptual substitutions in text such as the term 'double-gangster' to describe a vindictive person who looks like someone else Standish knew (instead of doppelganger). More of these substitutions are detailed in a later section. Benedict Phillips, a dyslexic artist, produced his own phonetic dictionary that treats dyslexia as a different dialect of English. Here he mixes correct spellings of words with several differing phonetic spellings. He describes his work as,

"A list of the shifting langwidge of werdz wich fined it hard to be nayelled down. A word list, of the sculpited voyuss of instickt."²⁴⁵

This continual and purposeful use of differing phonetic spellings makes Phillips' writing appear in some ways avant-garde in its playfulness and experimentation; however, the intention was not to create difference for the sake of difference, but rather to denote something about the dyslexic process. The A-Z trajectory is aimed at teaching 'non-dyslexics' to afford themselves a less constrained relationship with language. There is a tongue-in-cheek introduction discussing Restrictive Creativity Spelling Disorder Sufferers,

"For many years the vast majority of Lexis, or Restrictive Creativity Spelling Disorder Sufferers, have struggled to free themselves from the arduous constraints of Dictionary Defined Spellings ... The Benedictionary allows lexis an opportunity to free themselves at last from the constraints of their condition and to taste a little of what it is like to be dyslexic."²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23] The social aspects of adult dyslexia. Chapter Four: Dyslexia, cognitive style and meaning-making. p.132p.89.

²⁴⁴ Phillips, B. (2011) *The Benedictionary* (2019) DIV Books

²⁴⁵ Phillips, B. (2011) *The Benedictionary* (2019) DIV Books. Forward. pp 13-15.

²⁴⁶ Phillips, B. (2011) *The Benedictionary* (2019) DIV Books. Forward. pp.13-15.

Two pages from the 'Benedictionary': On the left is the 'dislecsick' spelling, on the right is the translation to 'Lecksick', and in the first half of the Benedictionary the words are shown the other way around ('Lecksick to Dislecsic'.) 'Lecksick' is the word Benedict Phillips is using for 'normal' or 'Neurotypical' in relation to spelling.

The purpose was, and continues to be to open up the multi dimensional Dyslexic world to those excluded from it. This is done in the hope that Lecksicks can free their minds from the tyranny of Dictionary Defined Spelling and that through the enlightened vision of Benedictionary Defined Spelling, will break their bonds and unleash there inner DIV.

Why lern to do a thing that is not your destiny? You can rite and the shock in thowz hoo will reed is not in that thay canot understand. But that yours is a more lojcull way.

– *The Agender Of The Agressive Dislecksick*
B. L. Hislam, 1995

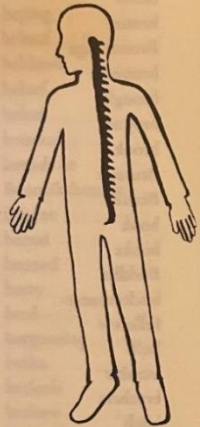
Some useful terms used in the Benedictionary

TAOTAD	The Agenda of the Aggressive Dyslexic
BDS	Benedictionary defined spelling
DDS	Dictionary defined spelling
RCH	Random Collision Head – A state of Intelligent Disorientation
RCSD	Restrictive creative spelling disorder
DIV	Dislecksick Intelligent Visjon – a space time understanding of sound and word, manifest as dyslexia.

SEE—C

BENEDICTIONARY

cabernet cabinet



The *Cabinet* had an approach to foreign policy that was spineless.

cabunet	cabernet	canoow	canoe
cafay	café	canot	cannot
cair	care	canvass	canvas
calidz	collides	canyon	canyon
camaswell	camisole	canz	cans
cambridg	Cambridge	canzz	canes
cammarfardg	camouflage	capacheno	cappucino
camra	camera	capasteey	capacity
camunaty	communities	capitol	capital cities
canbara	Canberra	captin	captain
candellz	candles	car	Caribbean
cannon	canon	carabeon	Caribbean
canon	canon	carakatuwer	caricature
		carapays	carapace
		carascuro	chiaroscuro
		carbaniffaruss	carboniferous
		carbodayting	carbon dating
		carbodioxside	carbon dioxide
		carbonfootprint	carbon footprint
		cariatrid	characterised
		caricktaz	characters
		carreying	carrying
		carsell	castle
		carskit	casket
		cartoggrafeey	cartography
		cartoon	cartoon
		carving	calving
		carving	carving
		cash	cash
		casting	casting
		casullz	castles
		catalever	cantilever
		cathlike	catholic
		cathowraytyoob	cathode ray tub
		caverty's	cavities
		cayoss	chaos
		ceda	cedar
		cellyalowss	cellulose

SEE—C

In regard to the Benidictionary, its ethos and its effect, Colin Hambrook, editor of Disability Arts Online, within his interview commented,

“Benedict’s manifesto 'the agender of the agresiv dislecksick' had a profound effect on my understanding of the narrowness of the constraint’s society places on individuals’ expression and shackles it places on the imagination.”²⁴⁹

The introduction quotes R.W. Burchfield, a lexicographer, scholar, and writer, who edited the Oxford English Dictionary,

“The early plays of Shakespeare were written before the first English dictionary was published. It is self-evident therefore that English Literature can proceed at the highest level of performance

²⁴⁷Phillips, B. (2019) The Benedictionary (2019) DIV Books. Introduction, p.15.

²⁴⁸Phillips, B. (2019) The Benedictionary (2019) DIV Books p.78.

²⁴⁹ Taken from my interview with Colin Hambrook, Editor of Disability Arts Online, conducted 01/09/21

without the existence of elaborate lexicons and grammars. The spoken language has always proceeded without recourse to dictionaries.”²⁵⁰

The Benidictionary in many ways embodies the focus within this thesis on Neurodivergent language in regard to breaking ‘conventional form’; its lexical innovations support elements of my creative practice, especially in regard to ‘Wordal Smergage’, which is detailed within the next section.

This section drew together the work of researchers on the topic of dyslexia/ND+ process, with dyslexic/ND+ performers and creatives and dyslexic ND+ arts organisations. It sought to connect and demonstrate research developing upon ND+ strength, to some of the creative practices of ND+ writers and performers; who, through their work, seem to be asserting/confirming and building upon research surrounding ND+ innovation through creative-expression.

Autoethnographic Influences on Creative Writing

Many of the influences included within this chapter aided me in moulding my own creative inclinations; with DYSPLA and Leveroy’s research in mind and Benedict Phillip’s understanding of dyslexia as a creative dialect of English, while being a student at the University of Kent University I have been collecting my own ‘dylexie’ word ‘amalgamations’.

A small sample of my dylexisms:

Remover = To remove by hoovering. Example: Could you remoover all the dust from the house?

Interversed = Integrated + Versed. Example. Dylexie is becoming interversed into everyday language and speech.

Culturvated = Culture + Cultivated. Example: Individuals are gradually becoming culturvated in DYLEXIE... a new, innovative, and imaginative linguistic.

Stample= Staple + Trample + Stomp+ Stamp. Meaning: The act of trying to put something in a specific place put failing. I just can’t stample down the right words!

Similar to Leveroy’s suggestion, as a dyslexic person, I often either misread or misspeak words, and, when I struggle to find a word, I scan through a vast word schema of similar sounding and meaning words until I eventually either arrive upon the word I want or create a new spoonerism. I find that this ability serves in creative methods that utilise freer word associations. Utilising Benedict Phillips’ understanding of dyslexia as a new, freer dialect of English, I performed my own creative essay in the character of a dyslexic professor who specialised in Linguistics at Lava Elastic Neurodivergent+ Comedy Night²⁵¹ ran by Sarah Saeed (discussed in previous section on ‘masking’). I have included extracts from my performance text below:

²⁵⁰ Phillips, B. (2019) The Benidictionary. DIV Books. Introduction. p.13.

[Full Dyslexie poem and performance text can be found in Appendix D]

Extract One:

Wordal Smergage: A lesson upon Dyslexie Syntax

Dylexie is not dia-lect-ly a competently different direct, but drop-ples of it do smerge and slodge intooneanother, giving it distant-tive timber; but it has not yet splintered or different-ed too far from the Eng-lash that your ordinary tongue strikes. We're tired of been the eloquents in the room, and so were are packing our trunks to sneeze out grammarphones and teaching the world to be less homo-
phonic.

Extract Two:

1. Can you help me fix my broken electrical defiance's? This question may not be correct, but it is very apt... isn't it?
2. Have you ever read Mary Shelly's Shankenstien?... far more gruesome!
3. Can you put the fridge in the milk? Go on.... Have a 'Honey, I shrunk the Fridge moment' and achieve the physically impossible!

Extract Three:

It's time for us to start raining on some parachutes! We've started getting others to cross over, instead of letting ourselves be crossed out, because we are no longer scarred of leaving scares on paiges and no longer abodeing to written rulers. We're saying **KNOW MORE** to extorsive **Sin-Taxes!**

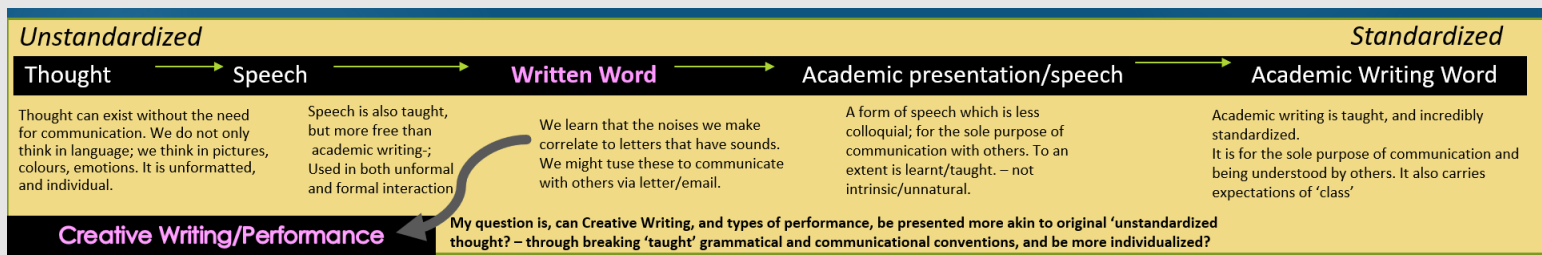
While the pen is hotter than the sawed it is chime for us to strike. We must collect all our smitherments and fragmareens; press against the grain and allow hour firs to spread. I am exper-inventing with something that is already in existence... but it's been sub-pressed. I want to set my words free in fluddles, so that they're unstrained to meirl and swirge. Together we will become distinct-u-ished! Let's do everything within our power to in-stiv-i-gate improved pudding! I am daring to be con-frog-a-tious! We must allow all fizcades to frazzle! Let us refuse to be reductionated. Refuse to translit! Clamp all the neigh-sayers with our native tongs! Through away thick dick-tongue-scaries and pretend Theo never saw us!

Add your words to the Dylexie Linstatistics! Reminber. There's no such thing as outvocalizing! We are talentable, option-ated peoples.... so let's knock away old-school zimmer-canes and show dopple-gramster's that change is a foot! If you agree, please offer my swatches, clobbles, smerges and amalgaimaginations, a haughty clappause.

Within this performance I wanted there to be a shift of authority; it was no longer 'I' as the dyslexic that needed teaching but rather the audience was learning from me, about my

dyslexic, Neurodivergent+ culture. Although this is a comedy piece, what I did want to promote was that rigid formulations of words constrain not just creativity but the ability to wield language. This piece for me was a push against some of the shame that dyslexic individuals meet when they do ‘misspeak’, highlighting this quality as dyslexic and creatively utilising it.

To reflect my own appreciation of how I see elements of expression, communication, and language, I constructed this diagram, Figure 2:



At one side is the more ‘natural’/intrinsic language. On the other side more formulated language. Arguably the more formulated language becomes, the more social and grammatical expectations and constraints are put upon it, which can make it less accessible to a range of people, especially a number of ND+ individuals who many struggle with specific conventions such as specific structures and registers.

Over the span of my interviews, I have found a number of situations in which ND+ narratives shape ND+ aesthetics. But, perhaps far more nuanced is that ND+ literature is key to an overall sense of insight and solidarity. For example, autobiographies and memoirs, written in more standard prose, have still given me insight into ND+ sentiment. Katherine May, in her novel *‘The Electricity of Every Living Thing’*, aptly describes an experience of autistic meltdown in a way that I do not believe could be captured by someone who had not lived through that experience,

“This is me right now, crumpled, incoherent, gasping for breath. Flapping my forearms at the elbows like a hyperactive windscreen wiper.”²⁵²

Arguably elements of writing/performance that hold/denote much more subtle ND+ characterisation and/or aesthetics could be at play, such as: imagery with vivid sensory descriptions, writings that centre/focus/passion upon intense fascinations. These writings may not seem to differ aesthetically to more NT novelists and performers, but, akin to Dr Jen Malia, autistic researcher and writer’s comments, it is more that they reveal ND+ creativity and authorship through very nuanced senses of ND+ perception/lived experience.

My Creative Practice ‘The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights’ (Casual Case) in relation to the Interviews:

Regarding my own creative practice ascribed to this thesis (a section of my novel *‘Casual Case’*, characterising Tammy, a ND+ narrator, whose narrative endorses what I determine as ND+

²⁵² May, K. (2018) *The Electricity of Every Living Thing*. Orion Publishing Group Limited.

Aesthetics), I took a number of stimuli and influences from my interviews, some of which I will expand upon here:

Lending from the ideas of Elena Re, I have written about Tammy having a synesthetic relationship to the colour purple, with it being related through memory and association to her friend's death. When re-editing, I thought about how my own understanding of synaesthesia was limited, and how it could be seen more to denote spectatorial interest. However, I chose to keep this element of Tammy, that regarding my own experiences, is an imagined element of Tammy's neurodivergence. In regard to this, that I am Neurodivergent does not necessarily mean I have authority over ND+ experiences outside my own, so this could be criticised regarding authenticity. In choosing to keep it in I considered discussions I'd had with DYSPLA, whereby they discussed how, as writers, part of the joy is writing about experiences outside our own. Within this research, this is recognised as a tricky and easily appropriated balance; an article which quite eloquently outlines some of the ethos defending creativity with regard to appropriation was published in the New York Review of Books entitled, *Fascinated to Presume: in Defence of Fiction*²⁵³, which talks about how, to an extent, the art of 'fiction' writing has often been centred upon elaboration upon experiences outside one's own, "All storytelling is the invitation to enter a parallel space, a hypothetical area in which you have imagined access to whatever it is not you", and how, if this is done with empathy and research, as well as fascination, it can not only lead to wondrously imaginative works of fiction, but can also be part of the joy/spirit of writing.²⁵⁴

Talking to a number of ND+ individuals upon the topic of masking made me consider it more in relevance to my own life experiences; do I mask? – If I do, how? Similar to some of the interviewees, I think it will take me an amount of time to reflect and unpick; after masking for so long, elements of the mask are perhaps soldered with my personality; I often do not even recognise when I am uncomfortable/what I do. I don't necessarily know how to unmask, or how this might transcend to my writing and or performance. I believe that elements of my writing reflects the type of social awareness and anxiety necessary to build and maintain a mask; often it leads to an incredibly self-critical, self-effacing train of thought which, within re-reading, I became aware had transcended to Tammy's narrative.

Sally Gardner, dyslexic writer of *Maggot Moon*, spoke upon how being able to directly identify her protagonist character Standish as dyslexic enabled her a more inherent connection and she felt more free in being experimental; similarly, identifying Tammy as Neurodivergent+ from the beginning gave me more 'permission' to self-realise her and write in 'non-standard' lexis that reflects elements of my own neurodivergences. The writing doesn't break off/disintegrate/change purely to interest a reader, neither does it do so 'randomly'. Importantly, it isn't the writing techniques themselves that, to me, makes them Neurodivergent+ but rather the 'why', and what feeling/effect it characterises in the writing and for the protagonist that denotes it as ND+ in its aesthetic.

²⁵³ Smith, Z. (2019) *Fascinated to Presume: in Defence of Fiction* The New York Review of Books [ONLINE] <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/> [Accessed 29/03/24]

²⁵⁴ **Note:** A more in-depth discussion in relation to Smith's article can be found within Chapter 3, pp.97-98)

When I spoke to Elinor Rowlands, founder of 'Magical Women', within our interview she expanded upon a concept surrounding 'words of rage', and how, often, autistic women are told they are: 'too much', 'too loud', 'too emotional', 'too outspoken'; which is definitely true within my own lifespan. Within submissions to Magical Women contributors are encouraged, if they wish, to utilise the full span of their wrath within creative writing, and this is not edited out of contributions. Anger is a problem that I have a lot of difficulty in expressing but I feel that in characterising Tammy, I was able to use elements of her subconscious to 'vent'/express anger and bottled-up emotion; this writing was often quite explicit, but I also used her anger/emotion to change the writing regarding form. When characterising her as angry, and when she was experiencing episodes of 'bad' mental health, I often altered the form using the style, size, intensity, and repetition of language, allowing my own emotion to guide me; this is similar to how Esther Lowry, autistic contributor to *'In Other Words'*, described her own writing in times of intense anger/overwhelm. I wrote many of the sections denoting Tammy as mentally unwell within spells of my own worsening mental health. I wrote most of the novel within a week, channelling hyper-fixation and obsession into the writing. In times of 'wellness'/calm I was able to go back and refine parts of the writing to more 'symbolically' or even pictorially represent unwellness.

Chapter Three: Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics

Through the Close Analysis of Text

The case studies I have looked at are mainly ND+ individuals who have consciously/confidently utilised certain writing trends to develop ND+ narratives, or NT writers who have purposely, and at points I argue clumsily, altered narratives to purposely assume Neurodivergent+ 'presenting' language.

As a student of creative writing I became fascinated with the possibility of ND+ aesthetics, but as a ND+ creative and researcher I also became much more invested upon criterion surrounding 'authentic' representations; as such, before I begin upon this chapter, I would like to make a distinction between **Neurodivergent+ Literature**, which I am classifying as work/writing by ND+ creatives, as opposed to **Literature on Neurodivergence** which includes the writing of NT authors. This distinction allows for both ND+ and NT authors, academics, and creatives to confidently expand upon these areas, but asserts that ND+ individuals are at the forefront of how the conversation is shaped.

However, these distinctions, 'Neurodivergent+ Literature' and 'Literature upon Neurodivergence', can be open to interpretation due to the complexity and multi-faceted nature of this topic. With this in mind, I would suggest Neurodivergent+ Literature is a category that exists as an 'opt in', with individual authors deciding if it is something they wish to be associated with their work. Another consideration around this topic is that, going forwards, as well as supporting ND+ solidarity/self-actualisation, there needs to be considerations surrounding supporting and advocating for NT and ND+ closeness and collaboration; additionally, if a number of influences have gone into 'joint' fictional or autobiographical writings, by a combination of ND+ and NT creative practitioners, then that might also be considered Neurodivergent+ Literature (possibly dependent upon how ethically they insured inclusion of ND+ insight). Some examples of these types of collaborative writing might include Limpfield Grange's school's creation of '*M is for Autism, The Students of Limpfield Grange School*' (2015)²⁵⁵ and their later publication, '*M in the Middle, Secret crushes, mega-colossal anxiety and the people's republic of autism*' (2017)²⁵⁶ whereby a central autistic character (M) was formed from a number of Limpfield Grange School's autistic student's insight and perspective, but then drawn together by NT identifying author/editor Vicky Martin. This type of collaboration can also be seen within '*Diary of a Dyslexic School Kid*' (2019)²⁵⁷ whereby NT identifying author Alais Winton, worked with Zac Millard (a dyslexic school kid). However, when collaborative practices are endorsed, it is extremely important that NT authors do not include ND+ participation only to push/display their own perspective upon Neurodivergence, or remove/distort ND+ insight; rather that they work equally with ND+ co-participants, not only in respect to the creative output, but within their mediums of communication²⁵⁸. When I interviewed Miranda Prag,

²⁵⁵ Martin, V. (2015). *M is for Autism, The Students of Limpfield Grange School*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

²⁵⁶ Martin, V., & Limpfield Grange Students. (2017). *M in the Middle, Secret crushes, mega-colossal anxiety and the people's republic of autism*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

²⁵⁷ Millard, Z., and Winton, A. (2019). *Diary of a Dyslexic School Kid*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

²⁵⁸ **Neurodivergent+ and Neurotypical Collaborative Practices:** This topic, in and of itself, is expansive, and is only touched upon within this research. More expansive models ethics and considerations surrounding ND+ collaborative practice are being developed within the arts by ND+ creatives, one being Sonia Boué, within her project and gallery display featuring NT and ND+ artists; you can read more upon her discovery and practice within: 'Neither Use Nor Ornament': Could Autism-led arts projects pioneer more inclusive and comprehensive perspectives (2020) [ONLINE]

editor of 'In Other Words' (2021), a collection of shorts by autistic authors, we discussed how, when working with ND+ individuals and their writings, it is important to address and attempt to remove NT hierarchy, while also being aware that lived experiences of Neurodivergence, regarding rejection and isolation, may have impacted ND+ participants confidence/willingness to directly contradict NT assumptions/norms. In short, regarding collaborative practice and Neurodivergence, it is vital that ND+ co-participants feel comfortable voicing their opinions/perspectives, so that their voice and lived experiences are respected, worked with, and seen as forefront to the creative output.

Moving on from these distinctions, in this chapter I will be focusing on a 'sub-category' of the above categories; I'm focusing upon **ND+ Aesthetics**. It is important to distinguish this as a subcategory for several reasons, one being that Neurodivergent+ literature focuses more upon individual experiences, and that ND+ authors (akin to NT) can/do create in any/all genres.

What is being discussed within this chapter touches on several distinctions, some of which I will list/highlight before delving into the close analysis of texts:

- 1) Not every Neurodivergent+ author will write with Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics.
- 2) It is very possible that there are several much subtler Neurodivergent+ 'fingerprints', but this chapter is focused upon far more 'obvious'/self-apparent Neurodivergent+ presenting lexis.
- 3) From my interviews I ascertained that several Neurodivergent+ practitioners do wish to 'unmask'; this is extremely personal regarding what it entails/how it presents; for some practitioners this would result in them feeling confident in utilising differing personal Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics.
- 4) Many of the ND+ Aesthetics I have analysed have been either done 'confidently' and/or with self-reflection; thinking back to Deborah Leveroy's explanation of meta-cognition, diagnosis and asserting ND+ identity might give some ND+ creatives both more insight and more confidence to write in ways which cultivate ND+ aesthetics; but, with this in mind, the text/performance created with 'self-actualisation' have often been more 'purposeful' or perhaps 'sculpted' appreciations of ND+ aesthetics. In comparison, some of the Survivor's and Mad texts could perhaps be seen as directly more 'intrinsic'/less sculpted examples of ND+ aesthetics, but you could also argue that a number of these were less tangible, and less potentially accessible due to some of their more idiocentric communication/presentations.

What I was interested in ascertaining within this chapter was that ND+ Aesthetics, regardless of their authenticity and intention, do exist, and have been utilised within a number of texts. I have split what I consider to be different genres/considerations of ND+ writing and/or its aesthetics into these categories:

- **Neurodivergent+ Writing/Literature:** Writing by a Neurodivergent+ person on any topic/genre. It may utilise ND+ aesthetics or be characterised by Neurodivergent+ 'fingerprints'²⁵⁹ but does not necessarily denote any specific ND+ aesthetics. It may be driven by intense fascinations/hyper fixations but could equally not be specifically

<https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/neither-use-nor-ornament-could-autism-led-arts-projects-pioneer-more-inclusive-and-comprehensive-perspectives/> [Accessed 29/03/24]

²⁵⁹ **ND+ Fingerprint:** A term I coined after speaking with Jen Malia, that refers to the indirect presence of ND+ authorship and/or creative practice that a ND+ may instil within upon work.

reflective of neurodivergence (such as a cookbook). This type of writing is not covered by this thesis; it is important to note this creates a type of bias, in that I am identifying ND+ literature and/or aesthetics in the work of authors who are either 'out' by identification or can be more directly identified by lived experience.

Texts Identified: I will not identify any texts directly, as they are not discussed within this thesis. Upon the subject of Neurodivergent+ Literature, appreciations of neurodivergence/genre and what 'flavours' it is growing; but, with this in mind, their also needs to be an appreciation of more 'neutral' ND+ creative writing/writers so that the creation/theorising of these genre's do not pigeonhole ND+ writers. Kate Fox, a ND+ Poet, within her interview also discussed how she felt confident categorising some of her work within the genre of 'Neurodivergent+' but perhaps felt less assuredly framing some of her other work, less connected to Neurodivergence, within the genre. Jess Thom, in her interview, discussed that though neurodivergence as a genre was important for recognition and solidarity, it is equally important for the works of ND+ individuals to be identified within all other relevant genres.

Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics/Neurodivergent+ Presenting Aesthetics: These can be seen as a 'subset' of Neurodivergent Literature and is what this thesis is most concentrated upon. Due to this, I have further developed my findings to distinctions within 'Neurodivergent+' aesthetics.

1) Authentic Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics (with an appreciation of audience): I've used this to refer to ND+ writers who either discuss their own life-story in autobiographical or memoir writing, or perhaps flavour a fictional character with insights of their own Neurodivergent+ lived experience. Along with the first category 'Neurodivergent+ Writing', these texts are not greatly present within this thesis; I have only included writing that has utilised more specific/purposeful or obvious ND+ presenting aesthetics.

Texts/Genre's Identified: Many books within the genre 'autie-biography' such as Temple Grandin's *Thinking in Pictures* and Donna Williams' *Somebody Somewhere*. Also, perhaps fictional works such as Sylvia Plath's, *The Bell Jar*, where ND+ writers inject Neurodivergent+ lived experiences and/or Psychiatric Survivor's lived experiences more directly into text.

2) Authentic Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics (without audience awareness): These types of writing can be evidenced in many of the 'Survivor's' and/or 'Mad' narratives. Often endorsing quite 'raw', train-of-thought style writing with less of an appreciation of communication/audience; not usually interested in 'correctness', 'politeness', and may tangent and/or detail heightened emotion. I would identify these texts in the genre of 'Neurodivergent+ Literature' and, in terms of my own research, in the sub-category of 'Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics'. However, I would note that their aesthetics, due to having less of a consideration of audience/communication, present very differently to 'Reflective

Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics', which are much more self-conscious, and stylised in their presentations.

Texts Identified: Several of the essays in the *'Mad Pride'* collection, Ross Burke's *'When the Music's Over: My Journey into Schizophrenia'*, Ester Lowrey's *'Overwhelm'* writing, Daniel Oliver's theory of *'Awkward'*, and elements of how Jess Thom's Tourette's alter stage texts.

Reflective Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics: This is when a Neurodivergent+ creative more consciously asserts elements of ND+ identity through altering form either to express something about themselves or attempting to give a differing creative perspective towards their neurodivergence. I would also place this category within the wider genre of Neurodivergent+ Literature, and within the sub-category of 'Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics' that this research is invested in. This category (Reflective Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics) is the 'phenomenon' that is discussed most widely within this thesis; how Neurodivergent+ writers, actors and performers have adapted with intention/self-actualisation and often more purposely interacted with their awareness of audience is what I have been most invested with.

Texts Identified: Sarah Kane's *'4.48 Psychosis'*, Neil Hilborn's performance of his poem *'OCD'*, Jess Thom's use of her Tourette's to inspire lines for, *'Lights of my Life'*, Sally Gardner's characterisation of Standish as dyslexic, and Benedict Phillips' *'Benedictionary'*.

'Crafted' Neurodivergent+ Presenting Aesthetics/Representations of ND+ Aesthetics: The changing of lexis or content to 'sound' or identify a character or narrator as ND+ by a NT author. I would identify this type of writing more purely as a creative/imagined aesthetic; its form can be seen to be more interested in the 'pure' realm of creativity/exploration and can be problematic/controversial when discussing Neurodivergent authenticity and raises questions surrounding 'appropriation' and 'ownership'. I would either place this aesthetic within the wider genre of 'Literature upon Neurodivergence', or discuss writings/performances in separation from neurodivergence, understanding their appreciation of innovation as a 'pure' notion of fiction, and not connected to ND+ identity.

Texts Identified: Mark Haddon's, 'The curious incident of the Dog in the Night-time' written in prose which shapes/identifies the protagonist, Christopher, as an 'aspie teenager' and Daniel Keyes', 'Flowers for Algernon', written in prose that identifies a man with learning difficulties.

As a drama, literature, and creative writing student, I enjoy language deviations from both 'Crafted Neurodivergent+ Presenting Aesthetics/Representations' alongside both 'Authentic' and 'Reflective Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics'. This is due to me being interested/fascinated in utilising language as a more intrinsic, creative, and variable medium of expression. In relation to the creative use of language to identify ND+ sounding characters, I would argue that many representations have been problematic and presented certain stereotypes, however it could also be debated that, rather than it been the 'fault' of individual authors and their works, it is also the context in which they are received and published which is further damaging. A difficulty has perhaps been that the wider population have historically been more

interested/pre-occupied with exaggerated, stigmatised ND+ representations than they have been with ones that denote ND+ authenticity.

With this in mind, the following close analysis of ND+ text, which discusses the representations of Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics by NT authors, notes that it isn't necessarily only the 'author' who is at fault, but also the climate the work was published and received within.

Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics

Trigger Warning: Suicide

To begin I will briefly discuss Sarah Kane's '*4.48 Psychosis*' (2000) as a direct influence of several themes and considerations within this thesis so far. It is worth noting that Kane died in 1999; though the term 'Neurodivergent+' existed, it was not well-known/widely used.

This research suggests that differing perceptions, states of mind, and ND+ lived experiences effects how and why ND+ creatives express themselves within the mediums of creative writing and performance, which '*4.48 Psychosis*' embodies. Kane herself commented,

"4.48 Psychosis is about a psychotic breakdown and what happens to a person's mind when the barriers which distinguish between reality and different forms of imagination completely disappear, so that you no longer know the difference between your waking life and your dream life. And also you no longer know where you stop, and the world starts [...] I'm trying to find a collapse between boundaries." – Sarah Kane²⁶⁰

Kane's lived experience reflects much of the sentiment of the Survivor's Movement; her experiences of mental health institutions, fluctuating states of mental unwell, isolation and medication undoubtedly influenced and transcended into '*4:48 Psychosis*'. A direct reason that I identified this text as relevant is due to the content covering suicide; it was published post-humorously after Kanes own suicide. Suicide and suicidal ideation can unfortunately have an increased prevalence within several Neurodivergent communities, spanning a range of ND+ identity/diagnosis; the creative practice for this PhD, '*The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights*', begins with the main character's closest friend 'Cat' having died through suicide, and the narrative then unfolds to demonstrate personal experiences of grief, loss, and suicidal ideation. In respect to Neurodivergence, what is interesting is that Sarah Kane does not identify or ever publicly discuss being psychotic, with this in mind, elements of the play-text can be seen, in-part, as 'imagined' neurodivergent-style narrative, which have been combined with elements of lived experience and self-expression.

Regarding style and multi-modal practice, '*4.48 Psychosis*' is an experimental play that also presents itself akin to a free verse poem or stream of consciousness narration; it has no specific characters, rather it follows a number of disembodied voices:

"Have you made any plans?
Take an overdose, slash my wrists then hang myself.

²⁶⁰ Rebellato, D. (1998) Sarah Kane Interview. [ONLINE] <https://www.danrebellato.co.uk/sarah-kane-interview> [Accessed 23/03/34]

All those things together?

It couldn't possibly be misconstrued as a cry for help."²⁶¹

You presume she's in a hospital setting, but equally, it could be a conversation that she's having with herself; she refers to another person or entity as 'you', but you are never made aware of who they are.

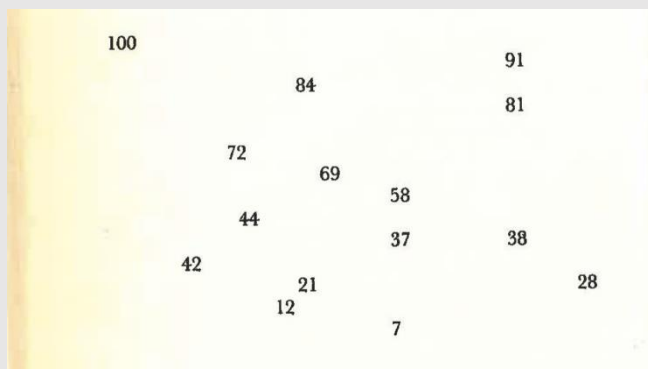
I like you
I like you

still black water
as deep as forever
as cold as the sky
as still as my heart when your voice is gone
I shall freeze in hell
of course I love you
you saved my life

I wish you hadn't
I wish you hadn't
I wish you'd left me alone ²⁶²

Regarding changing style, syntax, and presentation, many sections follow strong feelings of confusion and despair in stream-of-consciousness sounding narration, the above section is formatted more akin to a poem, but the below section is in more 'ordinary' paragraph writing:

"Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you for rejecting me by never being there, fuck you for making me feel like shit about myself, fuck you for bleeding the fucking love and life out of me, fuck my father for fucking up my life for good and fuck my mother for not leaving him, but most of all, fuck you God for making me love a person who does not exist.
FUCK YOU FUCK YOU FUCK YOU."²⁶³



The entire play has no stage directions; it is completely dependent upon how a director interprets the flow of her writing, fragmentation of numbers, and indirect/unspecified characters (see left).

'4.48 Psychosis' premiered in 2000, which was the same year Mad Pride, 'A Celebration of Mad Culture' was also

published. Mad Pride, as detailed in the previous chapter, was a movement in politics and literature that involved 'claiming identity' through allowing ND+ creatives to exist and express themselves in their own terms. Sarah Kane struggled immensely with her mental health and can be identified as a writer with parallels to the Psychiatric Survivor's Movement.

²⁶¹ Kane, S. 4.48 Psychosis. (2001) Bloomsbury [PDF] <https://rimalvin.angelfire.com/KaneSarah448Psychosis.pdf>. p.7.

²⁶² Kane, S. 4.48 Psychosis. (2001) Bloomsbury. p.28.

²⁶³ Kane, S. 4.48 Psychosis. (2001) Bloomsbury. p.10.

Kane's play is of further relevance in that, though it would seem her first-hand experiences of institutionalisation and mental unwellness 'flavour' her writings, she was also a scholar graduating in Drama from Bristol University; she would have been aware of Avant Garde, Post-Modern, and DaDa movements, and also taken a conscious decision to present her play '*4.48 Psychosis*' in an experimental form which was also demonstrative of poor mental health. Previous plays such as '*Blasted*' also demonstrate a desire to experiment and push boundaries; Kane is considered one of the 'founding' authors of 'In-Yer-Face' theatre.

As Kane's '*4.48 Psychosis*' so intimately connects to poor mental health and was published post-humorously (after her suicide), her writing has sometimes been considered a 'product' of mental illness. However, this robs Kane of her prowess and autonomy as a playwright. An article published by the Guardian on Kane in 2005 was entitled, 'Suicide Art? She's Better than That'²⁶⁴ by playwright Mark Ravenhill, who had known Kane. In it, Ravenhill expanded upon Kane's passions for writing, and how she keenly and often 'obsessively' re-drafted/refined her pieces. On the topic of how Kane is seen/viewed retrospectively he stated,

'We are still drawn to the idea that the artist is suddenly struck by the muse, that at a painfully young age they are compelled to write. No learning a craft, no honing a work: just a straight explosion from the Self on to the page. Sarah Kane slips easily into the mythic mould. [...]

There's a danger that we see all of Kane's work as one long preparation for suicide. We shouldn't. Only the last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, is a play written during her periods of depression and hospitalisation - and even there, the ending is ambiguous. There's a glimmer of light - but in life or in death? Rather, I think we should look at the plays as the work of a writer of great anger, of sardonic humour, who saw the cruelties of the world but also the human capacity for love. When a friend commits suicide, you're always going to feel angry with them. Any personal anger that I felt towards Sarah has long since gone, but I still feel a flash of anger that she could leave a fine body of work that can be appropriated as suicide art. Her work is far better than that.'²⁶⁵

He attempts to 'rehumanise', meaning that he attempts to present his experiences and memories of her to contrast the 'mythic mould' that her writing seems to have post-humorously gained. This is something I also determine as relevant surrounding notions of Neurodivergence/Neurodivergent+ writing as a whole; it is vitally important that ND+ writing is 'humanised', so that the genre/aesthetic itself doesn't become shrouded in 'myth', romanticism, and neurotypical fascination. Another source which sought to bring more nuance to appreciating Kane was Saunders's, '*Love Me or Kill Me, Sarah Kane and the theatre of extremes*',

"One of the most crucial things that must be stressed about Sarah Kane's last play is that it was not hastily written like a suicide note. In-fact there is evidence to suggest that she had begun preliminary work on it from January 1998 onwards, and it is as carefully crafted as anything Kane had worked on before."²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴Ravenhill, M. (2005) Suicide Art? She's Better than that. *The Guardian*. [ONLINE] www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/oct/12/theatre [Accessed 19/03/24]

²⁶⁵Ravenhill, M. (2005) Suicide Art? She's Better than that. *The Guardian*. [ONLINE] www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/oct/12/theatre [Accessed 19/03/24]

²⁶⁶Saunders, G. (2002) *Love Me or Kill Me*. Manchester University Press. p.111.

On the topic of '4.48 Psychosis' and the many influences/sources and creative methods Kane drew and endorsed from Saunder's commented,

"In 4.48 Psychosis these discourses are used as a way of making language attempt to express the boundaries between reality, fantasy and different mental states – the forms used range from monologues; doctor – patient conversations; the language of medical questions are clinical case histories; material taken from popular 'self-help' psychology books; apocalyptic visions derived and inspired by the book of revelations, as well as disembodied text and numbers that the characters do not speak."²⁶⁷

There are a number of contemporary Neurodivergent+ philosophies that identify recurrent/lifelong mental health conditions/identity as Neurodivergence; both I and Kane experience/suffer from recurrent life-long mental health conditions. Regarding 'placement' of '4.48 Psychosis' within the terminology on Neurodivergence and Aesthetics developed alongside this research I see the play text as both an example of 'Authentic' (writing at times of unwell), Reflective Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics (in that she has more purposely/intentionally shaped the texts within re-drafts), and also 'Imagined/Crafted/ND+ representation' in that it details elements of psychosis, which there is no direct evidence of Kane personally experiencing.²⁶⁸

I think this is an important distinction to make when concentrating on the originality of ND+ authors' texts; that the texts are a product of authors being brave enough to claim and exercise ND+ aesthetics alongside their specific interest, talent, and innovation in writing, literature and performance. As part of my teaching experience at Kent I presented a seminar within the module 'Disability in Theatre' on Sarah Kane in relation to Neurodivergence and writing; enabling a number of students be able to see and connect to her in this light was one of the highlights of my study.

Identifying ND+ Lexis: An Analysis of Selected Novels Indicative of ND+ Narrative

Four fictional and one autobiographical novel have been identified as being either directly demonstrative of Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics (ND+ authors) or Neurodivergent+ Presenting Aesthetics (NT authors).

The selected texts are: *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes, 1959 (author does not identify as ND+) *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon, 2003 (author does not identify as ND+), *Maggot Moon* by Sally Gardner, 2012 (author identifies as dyslexic), *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride, 2013 (Written in a lexis inspired by PTSD, which effects the narrative in terms of perception and structure – it is unknown whether this is completely fictional or based upon elements of author experience) *Because We Are Bad:*

²⁶⁷ Saunders, G. (2002) *Love Me or Kill Me*. Manchester University Press. p.112.

²⁶⁸ **Reflective Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics:** Within this research this is defined as when a Neurodivergent+ creative consciously asserts an element of ND+ identity through altering form to express something about themselves or attempt to give a differing creative perspective towards their neurodivergence. This category is also placed within the wider genre of Neurodivergent+ Literature. This category/term 'Reflective Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics' is the principle that is discussed most widely within this thesis; it is concerned with why/how Neurodivergent+ writers, actors and performers more intentionally/self-reflectively implement elements of being Neurodivergent into their writing and/or adapted writing/performance with an awareness of audience.

OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought by Lily Bailey, 2017 (Author identifies as having OCD)

All five novels, through their use of spelling, grammar, syntax, and content deviation, linguistically shape Neurodivergent+ sounding lexis. A prominent focus of this analysis will be to discuss whether the author's own life experiences or research has impacted upon their portrayal of their ND+ character, and how and why it has been intertwined into the narrative.

Flowers for Algernon, by Daniel Keyes: 1959

"Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* is another iconic classroom text that treats cognitive disability and engages with various autistic fictions."²⁶⁹

Daniel Keyes' novel is based upon the premise that an experimental 'treatment' can enhance Charlie, an intellectually disabled adult's IQ. Though this element of the novel is fictional as there is no such 'treatment', the rest of the narrative is rooted in realism. Within the novel Keyes experiments with how perceptions might change if they were to become 'more intelligent'. *'Imagining Autism, Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum'*, within section *'Up and Down the Spectrum: Autistic Fictions in Flowers for Algernon'*, outlines this discussion,

"Charlie's IQ moves him from one set of autism stereotypes to another, merely shifting his place on the larger spectrum of neurodiversity rather than rendering him neurotypical. In other words, Charlie moves from representing stereotypes commonly associated with intellectual disability to embodying stereotypes associated with the genius autistic savant. Keyes' novel devalues both ends of the "spectrum," presenting the intellectually disabled Charlie as a child worth of pity and the savant Charlie as egocentric, didactic, and unempathetic."²⁷⁰

'Flowers for Algernon' also portrays how Charlie's perception of self and self-worth is altered by his IQ level and the people who surround him. The novel is written in first-person pronouns and in the style of diary writing.

'Mr. Strauss says I shud rite down what I think and evrey thing that happins to me from now on. I dont know why but he says its importint so they will see if they will use me. I hope they use me. Miss Kinnian says maybe they can make me smart. I want to be smart. My name is Charlie Gordon. I am 37 years old and 2 weeks ago was my brithday. I have nuthing more to rite now so I will close for today.'²⁷¹

Within his stream-of-consciousness narrative many of the words are written phonetically: 'nuthing', 'shud', 'importint', 'happins'. Letters have also been switched around or omitted: 'evrey', 'brithday'. Another noteworthy purposeful un-grammaticalisation²⁷² of Keyes is Charlie's use of alternative homophones such as: 'rite' instead of 'write'. Charlie details his

²⁶⁹ Freeman Loftis, S. (2015). *Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. Indiana University Press. Chapter: Metaphor Stole My Autism. pp. 179-182

²⁷⁰ Freeman Loftis, S. (2015). *Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. Indiana University Press. Chapter: "Up and Down" the Spectrum: Autistic Fictions in *Flowers for Algernon*. (2015) Indiana University Press. p.71.

²⁷¹ Keyes, D. (1959) *Flowers for Algernon*. Harcourt. p.1

²⁷² **Un-grammaticalization:** This is a term that I have 'coined' which refers to the purposeful usage of incorrect/improper language to shape ND+ aesthetics and/or characters.

initial experiences of being questioned within the experiment, 'I get headaches from trying to think and remember so much'.

Keyes' suggestion is that poor writing and grammatical skills equate to low intellect and intelligence. The first third of the novel is written using these linguistic techniques of grammatical incorrectness to build Charlie's character. Regarding the content, Charlie's perception of events and descriptions of people surrounding him are simplistic and quite childlike; early in the novel he tells the reader why his teacher is fond of him,

'She likes me a lot because I try very hard to learn everything not like some of the people at the adult centre who don't really care.'²⁷³ .

Regarding Charlie's consciousness and awareness in the narrative, he begins as incredibly literal; he is given the Rorschach inkblot test, involving showing a participant a number of inkblots and asking them to state what 'abstract' shapes they look like. When Charlie is asked to give shape or meaning to each inkblot, he can only see a differently shaped inkblot. Further to Charlie's inability to see or interpret images, he is also unable to use or understand symbolic or metaphorical speech. As the experimental procedure works, his early lack of imagination within speech, symbolism, and metaphor serves as a stark contrast to how the lexis changes as he gradually becomes more poetic; he begins to be able to use analogy and describe elements of metaphysical existence,

'The worlds around me and my past seem far away, distorted, as if time and space were taffy being stretched, looped and twisted out of shape.'²⁷⁴

At first Charlie's rising IQ is demonstrated linguistically by less grammatical 'mistakes', inferring that incorrect spelling is related to his low IQ. As his intelligence progresses his language and descriptions become far more nuanced and poetic. His interests also become more 'adult',

*'Why haven't I ever noticed how beautiful Alice Kinnaird is? She has pigeon-soft brown eyes and feathery brown hair down to the hollow of her neck.'*²⁷⁵

He becomes romantically attracted to his teacher, Alice. Opposed to the start of the novel where he always presumed others were right and was compliant, he grows to become confident of his own perceptions, and able to counter other people's views, beliefs, and opinions. He grows to realise that the people he had viewed as friends had only been mocking and humiliating him. As Charlie's IQ increases not only does he become more intellectual, but also more successful, and they resent him for this.

'It had been all right as long as they could laugh at me and appear clever at my expense, but now they were feeling inferior to the moron. I began to see that by my astonishing growth I had made them shrink and emphasised their inadequacies.'²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Keyes, D. (1959) *Flowers for Algernon*. Harcourt. p.9.

²⁷⁴ Keyes, D. (1959) *Flowers for Algernon*. Harcourt. p.166.

²⁷⁵ Keyes, D. (1959) *Flowers for Algernon*. Harcourt. p.54.

²⁷⁶ Keyes, D. (1959) *Flowers for Algernon*. Harcourt. p.75.

At this point in the novel there are no longer any spelling or grammatical inaccuracies. The lexis clearly demonstrates how Charlie's perception of himself in relation to his surroundings has changed. Though Charlie is described as a genius by his love interest, Alice, his new level of intelligence has not made him happier, and he reflects upon this existentially. Along with his intelligence his newfound confidence also dissolves as his status within society dissipates. By the end of the novel Charlie writes using identical incorrect grammar and spelling as he did in the beginning; he regresses to the same simple understandings of people and events that he had at the start of the novel.

Another text that presents a ND+ protagonist who wields/utilises lexis that is less 'standardised' with elements of it less grammatical is Sally Gardner's 2012 *'Maggot Moon'*. Gardner is dyslexic, and her novel depicts a highly innovative and creative character, Standish Treadwell. He mixes homophones, spells incorrectly, at times has 'poor' grammar. Gardner, unlike Keyes, used this to present nuanced imaginative/inquisitive, dyslexic narrative, rather than determine low intelligence. The novel characterises Standish's language to depict a highly intuitive, creative, witty, and empathetic character who, at the same time, is dyslexic.

'Flowers for Algernon' sets up a view of humanity where intelligence equates to civilisation; Charlie's lack of intelligence demonstrates a lack of personality, humanity, and thereby worth. When Charlie is 'unintelligent' he is extremely aware that he is intellectually lacking; his confidence suffers due to this. Though this is not a particularly enlightening depiction of an ND+ narrative, bearing in mind the decade it was written (1959), it might arguably equate to an accurate representation; being ND+ would have been far more stigmatised with institutionalisation being an accepted 'norm' for people like Charlie. It has only been in the last two decades that the UK has developed a unified Disabilities Act²⁷⁷ protecting the rights of disabled people within workplaces and institutions. Authentic ND+ representation within this research will not always equate to the positive portrayal of ND+ characters, as this thesis does not strive to swap stigmatised 'negative' ND+ narratives with forced/stigmatised 'positive' ones.

Crucially, there is a huge emphasis on 'curing' Charlie of his 'affliction' (low IQ), and thereby making him 'better', even though the treatment risks his life. This association falls into the 'Kill or Cure' trope which suggests that ND+, and perhaps more specifically learning-disabled individuals, do not have inherent worth. Promoting an appreciation that Charlie would be 'better' and more valuable if he were more intelligent subscribes to the contested perspective that ND+ individuals should work towards 'overcoming' or curing their ND+ natures. Within its section on Keyes' novel, *'Imagining Autism'* states,

"Charlie's movement from "High Functioning" to "Low Functioning" stereotypes is culturally interpreted as tragedy, even though he actually returns to his original disabled identity."²⁷⁸

Taking all the above points into consideration, it may still be questionable whether *'Flowers for Algernon'* had any political influence upon ND+ movements when it was written in 1959. This is primarily because ND+ did not exist as a movement, but also due to the fact that Keyes'

²⁷⁷ GOV.UK (2010) 'Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010'. GOV.UK [ONLINE] www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010#:~:text=You're%20disabled%20under%20the,to%20do%20normal%20daily%20activities [Accessed 16/09/20]

²⁷⁸ Freeman Loftis, S. (2015) *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. Indiana University Press. Chapter: "Up and Down" the Spectrum: Autistic Fictions in *Flowers for Algernon*. pp.77.

lexis and narration was not associated with any specific ND+ labels²⁷⁹. It might be justifiable to claim that there is less harm done to the representation of ND+ individuals from NT narratives which are entirely fictional; it is possible that, if fully appreciated as a work of fiction, it may have less potential to be confused or associated with actual ND+ individuals/communities. It may be that NT authors, who base their narrative upon stereotypes and misrepresentations and/or then go on to use a specific ND+ label/diagnosis/identification, without having substantial links to ND+ communities, who cause the most damage to overall representation:

“Myths can be every bit as damaging as the sickness itself.”²⁸⁰

Quoted from: *‘Recovering Bodies, Illness, Disability and Life Writing’s’* epilogue *‘The Value of Body Stories’*. Although this research does not endorse using the word ‘sickness’ as a synonym for ND+, the sentiment is still relevant; unhealthy representations can lead to the propagation of ignorance and a lack of understanding to real ND+ lived experience, needs and desires.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, by Mark Haddon: 2003

Mark Haddon created a ND+ character who is far more directed and specific regarding ND+ diagnosis than Keyes’ Charlie. *‘Curious Incident’* was written 45 years after *‘Flowers for Algernon’* and well after the incarnation of the Survivor (1980s)²⁸¹ and Mad Pride Movements (1900s-onwards)²⁸². When *‘Curious Incident’* was written there was a brimming awareness and drive for ND+ pride and politics, though it was not nearly as self-actualised/recognised as the movement has become/is becoming today. *‘Curious Incident’*, was one of the first, and arguably still is of the most well-recognised fictional depictions of autism. But, *‘Curious Incident’* has been flagged as problematic by many ND+ individuals and communities; it has been accused of portraying stereotypes and depicting an unauthentic narrative and of ableist ‘othering’²⁸³.

Within Mark Haddon’s depiction he uses short paragraphs, pictures, tangents, and diagrams to demonstrate Christopher’s thought patterns, as well as the ‘squashing’ together of words at times of panic and overwhelm,

‘My name is Christopher John Francis Boone. I know all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,057.

Eight years ago, when I first met Siobhan, she showed me this picture

279 **Note:** This can be seen as unlike/apposing Mark Haddon’s novel *‘Curious Incident’* which attaches itself directly to autism in relation to the protagonist Christopher.

280 Couser, T. (2006) Nancy Mairs. *Recovering Bodies, Illness, Disability and Life Writing*. University of Wisconsin. Chapter 7: The Value of Body Stories. p.289.

281 **Survivor’s and Mad pride:** The Survivor’s movement began to root in the 1970s, however, only started to gain real momentum in the 1980s; in 1985 the first Mind World Federation Health Conference was held, ‘Dutch and US patient groups met UK user/survivor groups for the first time.’ (Wallcraft, J. Bryant, M. (2003, *The Mental Health Service User Movement in England*. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health. [PDF] http://studymore.org.uk/policy_2.pdf [Accessed 25/03/24] Introduction p.3.) During this event, Neurodivergent+ individuals with mental health conditions, who had experienced institutionalization, were encouraged to speak about their experiences; and they were listened to by the doctors and psychiatrists running the wards. During this period, ND+ individuals produced writing and poetry which sought to release anguish and heighten awareness; this was dubbed ‘Survivor Poetry’.

282 **Mad Pride** as a movement emerged from of the Survivors Movement; activists sought to reclaim language that has been used against them, and create new paradigms surrounding ND+ expression/identity.

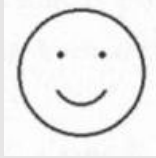
283 **Ableism in terms of ‘othering’:** Term highlights the creation of dynamics/principles which create ‘Neurotypical norms’ which are alienating to disabled and ND+ individuals and communities. The term ‘ableism’ can be seen as akin/parallel to sexism/racism/homophobia. Regarding ‘institutionalized ableism’, this relates to the not necessarily purposeful, but nevertheless ingrained attitudes/stigmas and overall set up of a society (often in terms of education/the workplace) that has not considered/adapted to include disabled and ND+ individuals. (for example, not having ramps for wheelchair access, having bright fluorescent lighting in an office space, having a ‘no note-taking policy’ in a workplace. Conklin, A (2014) *Definitions of Ableism*. Study.com [ONLINE]

[https://study.com/learn/lesson/wh-at-is-](https://study.com/learn/lesson/wh-at-is-ableism.html#:~:text=Ableism%20can%20take%20the%20form,mobility%20problems%20represent%20institutionalized%20ableism)

<ableism.html#:~:text=Ableism%20can%20take%20the%20form,mobility%20problems%20represent%20institutionalized%20ableism> [Accessed 25/03/24]

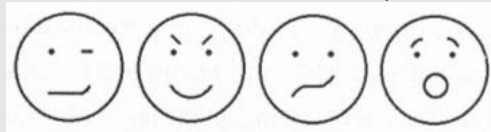


and I knew that it meant 'sad,' which is what I felt when I found the dead dog.



And I knew that it meant 'happy', like when I'm reading about the Apollo space missions, or when I am still awake at 3 am or 4 am in the morning and I can walk up and down the street and pretend that I am the only person in the whole world.

Then she drew some other pictures



284

Similar to *'Flowers for Algernon'*, *'Curious Incident'* has adapted and moulded its lexis and structure to linguistically portray a ND+ narrative; specifically, an 'aspie' teenager. The style is written in the form of a diary or journal, detailing stream-of-consciousness style narration as Christopher reports on how far he is to solve the mystery of the dead dog. Already in this very first paragraph he is engaging with some quite obvious autism stereotypes: 'Christopher knows all the 'capital cities', and every 'prime number up to 7,057'. Haddon also utilises language pictorially to show how Christopher perceives information around him, and how this information becomes overwhelming to process when he becomes anxious (see below)

284 Haddon, M. (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Jonathan Cape. p.2.

be Mother and the policeman in Swindon had phoned her up with the phone number I told him.
But he said, 'A policeman.'

And I said, 'I know.'

And he said, 'Oh. Right.' And then he said, 'You wait here, then, and I'll go and tell them,' and he walked back down the side of the train.

So I carried on walking. And I could still feel the feeling like a balloon inside my chest and it hurt and I covered my ears with my hands and I went and stood against the wall of a little shop which said **Hotel and Theatre Reservations Tel: 0207 402 5164** in the middle of the big room and then I took my hands away from my ears and I groaned to block out the noise and I looked round the big room at all the signs to see if this was London. And the signs said

Sweet Pastries **Heathrow Airport Check-In Here Bagel Factory EAT excellence and taste YDI** sushi **Stationlink**
Buses **W H Smith MEZZANINE Heathrow Express**
Clinique First Class Lounge **FULLERS easyCar.com The Mad**
Bishop and Bear Public House Fuller's London Pride Dixons
Our Price Paddington Bear at Paddington Station **Tickets**
Taxis **↑↑ Toilets** First Aid **Eastbourne Terrace** **ing-**
ton Way Out Praed Street The Lawn Q Here Please
Upper Crust Sainsbury's **Local i Information GREAT**
WESTERN FIRST **Ⓟ Position Closed Closed Position**
Closed Sock Shop **Fast Ticket Point ☹ Millie's Cookies**

Coffee **FERGIE TO STAY AT MANCHESTER UNITED Freshly Baked Cookies and Muffins Cold Drinks Penalty Fares**
Warning **Savoury Pastries Platforms 9-14 Burger King Fresh Filled!** the reef[®] café bar **business travel special edition TOP 75 ALBUMS Evening Standard**

But after a few seconds they looked like this

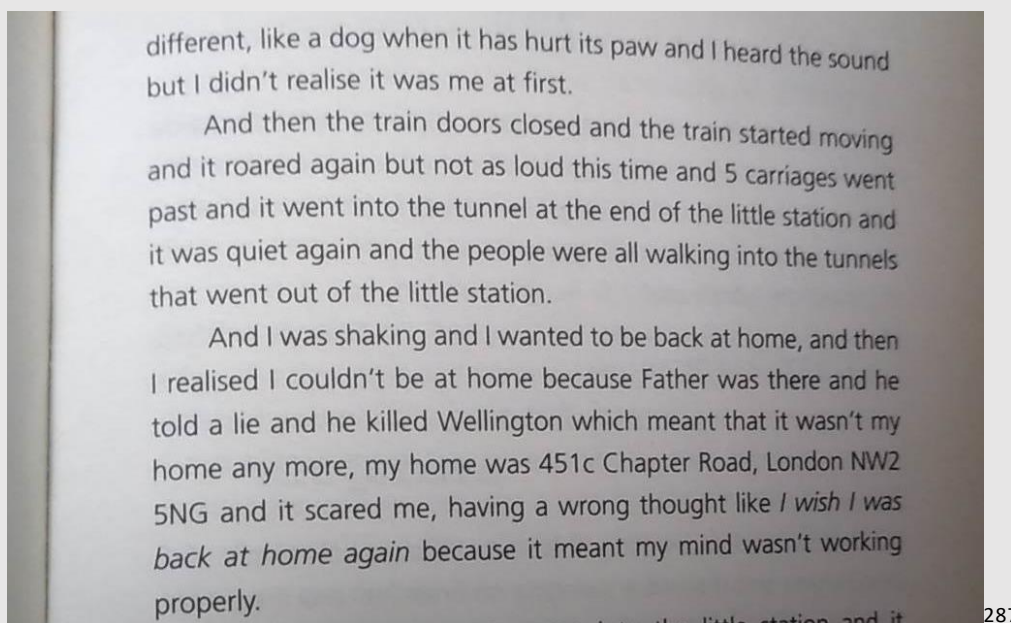
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because there were too many and my brain wasn't working

On the left you can see Christopher begin to read things around him in an attempt to locate his surroundings, on the right it shows how they 'smerge' together to become incomprehensible. 'There were too many and my brain wasn't working'²⁸⁶. The creation of lists/categorising events or emotions quite meticulously is something Christopher endorses throughout to iron out his thoughts or distract himself from discombobulating situations.

²⁸⁵ Haddon, M. (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Jonathan Cape. pp. 208-209.

²⁸⁶ Haddon, M. (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Jonathan Cape. p. 209.



Along with syntax, quite a lot of the actual descriptions of Christopher are what characterise him as autistic. Eric Chen, an autistic critique, commented that Christopher's 'focus' is more upon analysing himself from a NT standpoint, rather than intrinsically existing as autistic. A section of the writing I believe demonstrative of Christopher perhaps 'analysing' himself as autistic rather than simply being/existing I have included below,

"The next day I saw 4 yellow cars in a row on the way to school which made it a **Black Day** so I didn't eat anything at lunch and I sat in the corner of the room all day and read my A level Maths course book. And the next day, too, I saw 4 yellow cars in a row on the way to school which made it another **Black Day** too, so I didn't speak to anyone and for the whole afternoon I sat in the corner of the library groaning with my head pressed into the join between the two walls and this made me feel calm and safe."²⁸⁸

Regarding creating Christopher's narrative, Haddon commented,

I just think he has a really interesting outsider's perspective on what many people smugly think of as normality, and his language is a part of that.²⁸⁹

Though Haddon places his narrative within 'outsider', some of the ways in which he characterises Christopher do seem to more directly denote autism/autistic stereotypes; part of the narrative details his support worker Siobhan, drawing him pictures to be able to recognise different facial expressions. This first page shoehorns in three quite prominent and 'classic' autism traits quite stereotypically (mathematic ability, inability to recognise facial expressions, very specific interests/fascinations.) In '*Performing Psychologies*', Chapter 9: 'Autism and its Effect on Post-Realist Theatre' expands upon representation within '*Curious Incident*',

²⁸⁷ Haddon, M. (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Jonathan Cape. p.217.

²⁸⁸ Haddon, M. (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Jonathan Cape. p.68.

²⁸⁹ Taken from interview with Mark Haddon, conducted 25/11/20

“It creatively and convincingly presents a version of Aspie experience that conforms to certain popular paradigms of autism, in particular the stereotypical association between AS, enhanced mathematical abilities and impaired empathy.”²⁹⁰

When writing *‘Curious Incident’*, Haddon purposely did not undergo in-depth research on the topic of Autism as he believed that this insight would stifle his creativity. With this in consideration, it is safe to assume that Haddon’s mentality was a large factor to the novel being criticised by autistic people and communities for perpetuating stereotypes. However, it also received praise and support, Haddon commented,

‘In short, the novel has angered some people, but it has also profoundly changed some lives for the better.’²⁹¹

Jon Adams, ND+ creative and founder of ND+ collective ‘Flow Observatorium’, commented that *‘Curious Case’* was one of the first text where he felt ‘seen’, and it helped him develop upon his understanding of self; though a number of other interviewees, myself included, did not feel we were reflected in the narrative.

Below reads an excerpt from Haddon’s personal blog, posted on the 16th of July 2009, where he discusses his lack of awareness upon the subject, and justifies his choices within the novel:

asperger's & autism 16-07-2009

Unsurprisingly, I’m often asked to talk about Asperger’s and autism or to become involved with organisations who work on behalf of people with Asperger’s and autism, many of whom do wonderful work. but I always decline, for two reasons:

1) I know very little about the subject. I did no research for Curious Incident (other than photographing the interiors of Swindon and Paddington stations). I’d read Oliver Sacks’s essay about Temple Grandin and a handful of newspaper and magazine articles about, or by, people with Asperger’s and autism. I deliberately didn’t add to this list. Imagination always trumps research. I thought that if I could make Christopher real to me then he’d be real to readers. I gave him some rules to live by and some character traits and opinions, all of which I borrowed from people I know, none of whom would be labelled as having a disability. Judging by the reaction, it seems to have worked.

2) Curious Incident is not a book about Asperger’s. it’s a novel whose central character describes himself as ‘a mathematician with some behavioural difficulties’. Indeed, he never uses the words ‘Asperger’s’ or ‘autism’ (I slightly regret that fact that the word ‘Asperger’s’ was used on the cover). If anything, it’s a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way. It is as much a novel about us as it is about Christopher.

Labels say nothing about a person. They say only how the rest of us categorise that person. Good literature is always about peeling labels off. And treating real people with dignity is always about peeling the labels off. A diagnosis may lead to practical help. But genuinely

²⁹⁰ Carlson, M. (2019) ‘Autism and Affect in Post-Realist Theatre’, in Shaughnessy, N. & Barnard, P. (eds.) *Performing Psychologies*. Methuen Drama. p.154.

²⁹¹ Taken from interview with Mark Haddon, conducted 25/11/20

understanding another human being involves talking and listening to them and finding out what makes them an individual, not what makes them part of a group.

*I passionately believe this, and I've said it repeatedly in many different forms. To become a spokesperson for those with Asperger's or autism, or to present myself as some kind of expert in the field, would completely undermine this.*²⁹²

Within his blog explanation Haddon raises points about his choices of representation, but some of his points can be seen as contradictory. One example is when he states, 'A diagnosis may lead to practical help. But genuinely understanding another human being involves talking and listening to them and finding out what makes them an individual, not what makes them part of a group.' His emphasis upon 'finding out what makes people individual' would suggest that he values authenticity. He also states that he is striving to learn more about 'outsiders', but he also writes that 'imagination always trumps research.'

Haddon has accepted that he does not deserve a position whereby he has a say on autism rights, experience, or representation; he 'always declines invitations' to events which advocate autism because he,

*'Knows very little about the subject. I did no research for Curious Incident (other than photographing the interiors of Swindon and Paddington stations).'*²⁹³

It would seem that he is advocating for people who have more of an understanding and appreciation of Autism to be participating within these events; an extrapolation of this would be that novels and narratives which represent Autism should also follow this sentiment. His unwillingness to speak at events upon Autistic representation also brings into question why Haddon decided to write and publish a novel depicting a ND+ character if he is uninterested in representing the community authentically. For Haddon, it seems creating ND+ lexis was simply a way for him to create a new and 'odd' sounding narrative. This draws another correlation to '*Flowers for Algernon*' whereby the ND+ lexis is utilised as narrative convention; they are enjoying creativity for spectatorial interest, without necessarily considering or caring about issues surrounding ND+ authenticity.

Within his narrative Haddon can also be seen as 'othering' Christopher, in that, though it is written in first-person narration, Christopher's perspective often gives quite clear and fully-fledged viewpoints towards the characters surrounding him, such as his mum, dad, neighbour and school teacher; though many ND+ individuals, through masking, do develop extremely sensitive and self-conscious perspectives, Christopher, within Haddon's narrative, is characterized as having a number of higher learner needs surrounding communication, which suggest that he would be less aware, and not have this type of astute insight that comes from a pre-occupation with predicting the needs/wants/thoughts of those surrounding you. As a literary technique, it breaks up narrative and conveys a medley of differing perspectives, and other character motivations; however, regarding authenticity and ethics, it can be argued that Haddon at points uses Christopher to highlight the perspectives others, normalizing or reflective of the views of a Neurotypical reader, rather than more directly prioritising

²⁹² Haddon, M. Asperger's-Autism. *Mark Haddon Press*. (2009) <http://www.markhaddon.com/blog/aspergers-autism> [Accessed 16/09/20]

²⁹³ Haddon, M. Asperger's-Autism. *Mark Haddon Press*. (2009) <http://www.markhaddon.com/blog/aspergers-autism> [Accessed 16/09/20]

Christopher's viewpoint. This again perhaps brings up discussions around authenticity and literary technique; in this case, what might be more appealing to readers could be less genuine to Christopher. This is something that I also touch upon when discussing my creative choices for 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights', and my choice to have it to be quite introspective with most chapters stemming quite exclusively from Tammy's perspectives/insights, especially when she is experiencing heightened episodes of OCD. But this is a very nuanced discussion, as not only is there such a range of ND+ perspective, but also several autistic individuals enjoy and praise Haddon's novel; though there may be trends, we are a wide and varied community, so, in many ways, though we can develop the conversation, there may not be fixed 'right/wrong' assertions around many issues, including representation.

One thing that is noteworthy about *Curious Incident's* plot is that, despite the narrative pulling heavily upon the protagonist's Neurodivergent+ nature, it is also a mystery novel; Christopher's disability narrative is not the sole focus. Christopher is trying to work out who murdered his next-door neighbour's dog, and what really happened to his mother? Due to these elements the novel is essentially a 'Who Done It?'; much of the reader's attention is invested in unravelling the mystery alongside Christopher. Additionally, this mystery and detective genre can be seen to aid '*Curious Incident*' bridge into mainstream literature; ultimately meaning that a range of people, who may not have been interested in the topic of autism, picked up and read the novel.

It could be argued that despite problematic portrayal, '*Curious Incident*' brought autism to the public's attention and could be viewed as the beginning of a more nuanced conversation. In a written interview conducted with Haddon on cultural appropriation, he commented,

'There is a spectrum. At one end I would never write a first-person narrative from the point of view of someone of colour or someone who was trans (though repeatedly excluding them as characters would be equally wrong). At the other end I regularly write from the perspective of women. Indeed I think it's imperative that male authors write from the point of view of female characters and make it convincing. I guess neurodiversity sits somewhere in the middle of that spectrum. As do many forms of mental illness. And indeed physical disability.

Short answer: I'm not Lionel Shriver. I'm very conscious of the potential for cultural appropriation. But being conscious of the questions doesn't automatically provide easy answers.'²⁹⁴

Haddon discussed how he took characteristics from a number of people he was close to, and that, in parts, the text draws upon autobiographic moments from his own life; in a way this ethos questions the extent to which Neurodivergent+ narratives belong to specific people? As noted earlier by DYSPLA, while they promote Neurodivergent+ aesthetics, they do not believe in creative restriction; they champion full/free artistic expression and creativity and believe that it is the conversations that follow which are valuable. I'd also argue that the facilitation of conversations allows us to update our understandings of inclusion and appropriation. An article by Zadie Smith, published by The New York Review of books entitled, 'Fascinated to

²⁹⁴ Taken from my interview with Mark Haddon, conducted 25/11/20

Presume, in *Defence of Fiction*' (2019), delves further into arguments in defence of fiction/the art of fiction writing, highlighting that historically, fiction writing has often involved writing about 'other' experiences, and that fiction itself isn't necessarily constrained by ethics; she suggests that, autobiographical infused fiction writing may, in some ways, be 'safer', but not necessarily better, in terms of story and enjoyability, "Many have moved swiftly on to what they perceive to be safer grounds, namely the supposedly unquestionable authenticity of personal experience"²⁹⁵, Smith goes on to suggest that what was once a 'suggestion', has now become more concrete,

"Write about what you know' has morphed into something more of a threat: 'stay in your lane'.²⁹⁶

Her article suggests that lived authenticity, in relation to writing, can be viewed in terms of a modern 'trend', whereby we, as a society, recognise lived experience and authenticity to be synonymous to good/ethical fiction. She discussed how, though ideas of appropriation and ownership could strengthen the voice of particular communities/support their writings, arguably, these concepts can also be seen to limit/reduce overall creative possibilities. She envisioned how Charles Dickens might today feel in respect to his own writings,

"Dickens didn't look worried or ashamed. Didn't appear to suspect he might be schizophrenic or in some other way pathological. He had a name for his condition: novelist. Early in my life this became my cover story too, and for years "I" have been both adult and child, male and female, black, brown, and white, straight, funny, tragic, liberal, and conservative, religious, and godless, not to mention alive and dead."²⁹⁷

She dissects the term 'cultural appropriation', suggesting that the concept, in and of itself, can be highly subjective, and laden with its own stigma and sociological constraints; she suggests other ways in which the term could be conceptualized,

"What would our debates about fiction look like, I sometimes wonder, if our preferred verbal container for the phenomenon of writing about others was not "cultural appropriation" but rather "interpersonal voyeurism' or 'profound-other fascination" or even "cross-epidermal reanimation"²⁹⁸.

Her article suggested that, though historically several fictional portrayals weren't entirely accurate, or 'authentic', that they do not necessarily need to be to capture reader imaginations, and that writing can be seen more purely as a work of fiction and a product of imagination. Going forwards, to lessen purely voyeuristic portrayals, she put forth that the test of a good author could be the ability to temper more voyeuristic fascinations and interest with compassion and empathy for the community and/or experiences being depicted. But, with this in mind, upon representation and fiction she commented,

²⁹⁵ Smith, Z. (2019) Fascinated to Presume: in *Defence of Fiction*' The New York Review of Books [ONLINE] <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/> [Accessed 29/03/24]

²⁹⁶ Smith, Z. (2019) Fascinated to Presume: in *Defence of Fiction*' The New York Review of Books [ONLINE] <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/> [Accessed 29/03/24]

²⁹⁷ Smith, Z. (2019) Fascinated to Presume: in *Defence of Fiction*' The New York Review of Books [ONLINE] <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/> [Accessed 29/03/24]

²⁹⁸ Smith, Z. (2019) Fascinated to Presume: in *Defence of Fiction*' The New York Review of Books [ONLINE] <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/> [Accessed 29/03/24]

“Given the history, it’s natural that we should fear and be suspicious of representation of us by those who are not like us. Equally rational is the assumption that those who are like us will at least take care with their depictions and will be motivated by love and intimate knowledge instead of prejudice and phobia.”²⁹⁹

As a writer who enjoys experimentation, in many ways I relate to much of the sentiment within Smith’s article; however, much of its ethos can be seen to oppose many of the outlooks within this research. The balance between authorly imagination and authenticity underpins many of the discussions surrounding Neurodivergent+ aesthetics. A point that is stressed throughout this research is that it is not necessarily the creative pursuits of NT authors that should be ‘capped’, but rather, that there are substantial barriers surrounding the voices of Neurodivergent+ creatives being heard and recognised, and that these should be removed.

The article emphasised the want/needs of creative freedom, regarding individual authors and their intentions, but did not necessarily fully address wider cultural implications of hierarchy, and why authentic voice/s, historically, may have been ignored; in relation to this research, neurotypical hierarchies, a lack of awareness around ND+ access, and a devaluation of Neurodivergent+ insight, could have led to the erasure of Neurodivergent+ authorship. It is not necessarily the singular creation and publication of fiction portraying ND+ narration by Neurotypical authors that is most damaging, but rather the ongoing publication and mass accreditation of NT author’s portrayals of Neurodivergence above and instead of Neurodivergent+ writings; this, in and of itself, is denotive of wider institutional ableism. Feasibly, sometimes, ‘fiction’ should perhaps be seen as reflective of imagination (not inherently indicative of truth/reality), but this should not be used as a guise or excuse to continually propel damaging stigmas/prejudices within fiction and override the voice, insight and criticisms of minority groups. In relation to neurodivergence/ND+ creatives, with there being a number of barriers to ND+ access, and existing prejudice surrounding the valuing and recognition of ND+ individuals, the ‘over-publication’ of Neurotypical author’s writings on the topic of Neurodivergence, in place of directly supporting and publishing neurodivergent+ authors, risks further feeding stereotypes and upholding an absence of authentic insight. Furthermore, if two well-versed writers approach a topic, but one has substantial connection and lived experience of that area, it can be seen as somewhat conceited to believe that they will not bring with them a nuance of insight and perspective; and, this thesis argues, in reference to neurodivergent experience, this has too often been sidelined.

In relation to Smith’s, ‘In Defence of Fiction’ essay, which defends the validity and merit of authors in creating narratives that encompass cultures that they do not necessarily have first-hand experience of, it could be debated that it is more pertinent to inquire: ‘Who has not been listened to, and why? - Who may have been prevented from, or, had obstacles in writing their story and having it heard? – and, how this can be combatted?’ rather than one’s

²⁹⁹ Smith, Z. (2019) Fascinated to Presume: in Defence of Fiction’ *The New York Review of Books* [ONLINE] www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/ [Accessed 29/03/24]

own individual 'right' or 'lack of right' to detail/represent a specific narrative. But many individual writers/creatives are and will be captivated and interested in narratives outside their own, and the personal freedom and initiative to use, explore and connect to a range of perspectives/experiences outside of their own is a drive for many writers and creatives; with that in mind, it could be that the more sensitive ethical considerations regarding production and distribution lie more within wider publisher/creative industry standards and expectations, and perhaps less with individual creatives. It can also be true that a compelling, or 'best-selling' story may well be written by an author who does not have lived experience; whether art/writing/performance carries or should be constrained by ethical consideration/constraint is a question and stance in and of itself; as 'In Défense of Fiction' articulates, it is only more recently that an author's intention/background has been understood as much more relevant to creation; this position in many ways opposes concepts surrounding 'Death of the Author', whereby a creative piece and its value is treated in isolation from the creator; should we now be more directly/intentionally and openly placing value in the connection between the individual creative and their work? – Or, can these two seemingly opposing philosophies be equal considerations?

Regarding the ethos of this thesis, much of its impetus and promise is centred around breaking down hierarchy/neuro-normative practices by being more aware and in touch with author/performer background and/or motivation and/or ND+ creatives feeling more aware and in touch with their own voice. With this in mind, its focus is less on 'censoring' Neurotypical authors, and more centred on empowering ND+ creatives and ensuring institutional prejudice and ableism are not preventing/stifling ND+ progressions.

When/if there is a more level playing field within creative industries, taking into consideration factors such as access barriers, and communication differences, then, arguably, it could be more ethical/appropriate for writers/authors, whose experience is not situated within specific cultures (and regarding this research ND+ culture) to experiment with narratives they do not have personal experience with, as there would potentially be less controversy surrounding whose voice was not able to be heard and who did not have the resources to articulate their own story.

Arguably, many of these issues and concerns extend far further than discussions around creative practice/s and fictional ND+ portrayal; they are denotive of much larger societal stigma and ableism. If ND+ voices were to be fully recognised/appreciated within an array of disciplines, then unrealistic and potentially stigmatized fictional portrayals of neurodivergence might be less influential and damaging. The impetus within these discussions is returned to throughout this research. As the thesis unfurls, elements of it call for further recognition of something new regarding the development of ND+ aesthetics and growing senses of ND+ self-actualisation alongside and as well as focusing upon critique/dismantlement of literary stereotypes.

MAGGOT MOON, by Sally Gardner: 2012

The protagonist in '*Maggot Moon*', Standish Treadwell, is a dyslexic eleven-year-old boy. Gardner has not only written from the perspective of a dyslexic character, she has also

characterised Standish by attempting to display the dyslexic thought process through her use of lexis. Her chapters are extremely short, some only being a paragraph long, within interview she spoke upon this perhaps being reflective of 'ADHD'/ADHD friendly, in that it enables a fast/quite immediate pacing.³⁰⁰ Gardner's lexis deploys numerous 'dyslexicisms' such as: Freudian slips, syntax errors, wrong/new words, neologisms, executive function difficulties³⁰¹, and grammar that reads phonetically. While standing outside his house, Standish describes the wall at the bottom of his garden:

'A word to describe the wall would be impenetrable. See. I might not be able to spell but I have a huge vocabulary. I collect words – they are sweets in the mouth of sound'³⁰²

Throughout the novel sentences are written more akin to free-flowing speech than more strictly formatted written language. The novel often does not use full/grammatically correct clauses and syntax, but despite this, the content of Standish's writings is always clear.

Dyslexic mentality can transcend grammar; many dyslexic individuals put meaning, content, and sentiment before the composition of structure/grammar. Gardner displays this element of Standish's processing within '*Maggot Moon*' by giving words slippery edges such as being misspelt, or having words and meanings slip into one another. At one point Standish describes hiding below ground and then appearing to find a person who looks like his schoolteacher: 'I emerge from the trench to find Mr Gunnel's double-gangster waiting.' Standish means to say doppelgänger. But this dyslexic slip does not simply display a 'mistake'; it also gives the reader insight into how he views his teacher, who is a character who physically punishes a student to the point of death.

Standish lives with his grandad in a sectioned-off district of the city. At one point he asks his next-door neighbour how far away the moon is from the earth, and his neighbour replies that it is 221,463 miles away. Commenting upon his neighbour's astounding ability to remember precise facts and figures Standish comments, 'A bloody walking cyclops, was Mr Lush.' What Standish would have meant to say is 'A bloody walking encyclopaedia'. This can be viewed as verbal dyslexia, which in this case has led to a humorous lexical miscalculation. In '*Maggot Moon*' compound words and word slips often add more intuitive and introspective understanding than the 'correct' words would have done.

Although grammar in '*Maggot Moon*' is not always utilised 'correctly', Standish's English is striking and elegant with its fullness of analogy, metaphor, and detailed descriptions. By evoking rich and expressive prose Gardner has characterised Standish to be both attentive and curious,

'That huge ugly building was lit up. It shone brighter than the stars, even in the daytime. That was something. People in Zone Seven dared not ask why. We just wondered what was going on inside. Why did it need so much electricity when we were lucky to get an hour or two a day. You

³⁰⁰ **Note:** Sally Gardner does not directly identify as ADHD but does champion views and perspectives towards overlapping ND+ experiences.

³⁰¹ **Executive Function Condition/Disorder** is when a ND+ person has difficulty with getting things in the right order/place and can present itself within organisation, speech and writing. Goodman, B (2024) *Executive Function Disorder*. WebMD [ONLINE] www.webmd.com/add-adhd/executive-function [Accessed 25/03/24]

³⁰² Gardner, S. (2012) *Maggot Moon*. Hot Key Books p.23.

could hear the citizens of Zone Seven silently ask that Question. It crept along the streets, oozed out of everyone you met.³⁰³

Applying ungrammatical and non-standardised narrative that also demonstrates imagination and creativity is in tension with the lexis employed within *Flowers for Algernon*. Although both novels are characterised by using non-standard grammar, the sole intention for it within Daniel Keyes' novel was to demonstrate Charlie's intellectual inadequacy. In *Maggot Moon*, the lexis demonstrates a dyslexic way of thinking, writing, and communicating. By doing this, Gardner has eloquently demonstrated that a 'lack' of skills in literacy, does not equate to low intelligence or intuition, rather that the correctness of grammar and spelling does not need to be an obstacle within exciting and intellectually challenging writing.

Relating to 'positive representation' it could be said that *Maggot Moon's* sentiments are relatively bleak; the starting chapter begins, 'Can't read, can't write, Standish Treadwell isn't bright'. He is persecuted at his school because of his learning difference and differing eye colours, leading him to being labelled 'undesirable'. Although this could be viewed as quite a damning depiction of dyslexia, it is tempered by it coming from a place of truth and authenticity. Gardner is dyslexic; within interviews she divulges that she was branded as 'unteachable'³⁰⁴ at a very young age. Within this research it is important to state that it encourages authentic ND+ narratives which may be bleak, depict isolation, bullying, and depression. This research does not strive to replace inaccurate negative or harmful narratives with unauthentic or forced positive portrayals, rather it aims to report and 'capture' the first-hand sentiment/lived experience of a number ND+ creatives.

A strength of *Maggot Moon* is that Standish's dyslexia is both central to the plot while also being completely irrelevant; Standish's character is fully rounded (not comprised simply of dyslexic characteristics) and the plot is highly inventive, regardless to whether the protagonist, Standish, is or is not dyslexic. Standish's dyslexic experience permeates into the details he picks up on such as his inquisitiveness, the way he imagines, small things which slow or hinder him, as well as the pacing and syntax. To remove dyslexia from Standish, *Maggot Moon*, in terms of its linguistics, would need to be entirely re-written. In her interview Gardner commented, 'Maggot Moon isn't about dyslexia, but equally it wouldn't exist without it.'³⁰⁵ Upon inquisition and dyslexia she commented,

"I am prepared to turn the whole thing on its head to look at it backwards, turn it round and move it to whisk it to try again in a different way. Move the character up, move a character down, and never give up. And in a way, that is what's so amazing about dyslexic people you could ask them so what do we do with this room and you could have about 500,000 different ideas. Now, that isn't a problem. That should not be a problem a child with a chest full of questions should be something every school should be dying for."³⁰⁶

Additional to the printed copy of *Maggot Moon*, Gardner designed a version that can be read as an interactive iBook³⁰⁷, which gives the reader a more three-dimensional experience not

³⁰³ Gardner, S. (2012) *Maggot Moon*. Hot Key Books. p.115.

³⁰⁴ Gardner, S. (2012) 'About Sally Gardner'. Hot Key Books [ONLINE] www.maggotmoon.com/sally.php> [Accessed 16/09/20]

³⁰⁵ Taken from my interview with Sally Gardner, 26/11/20

³⁰⁶ Taken from my interview with Sally Gardner, 26/11/20

³⁰⁷ Gardner, S. (2012) 'About Sally Gardner'. Hot Key Books [ONLINE] www.maggotmoon.com/sally.php> [Accessed 16/09/20]

only of the dystopian reality, but of the dyslexic experience. She has designed a video in which the writing within ‘*Maggot Moon*’ morphs into different shapes, sizes, and fonts; this is so that NT readers can gain a greater understanding of what it is like to read as a dyslexic: (Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1O7pJaWrphM>)

A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing, by Eimear McBride: 2013

TW: details of rape/sexual assault

Similar to Keyes, Haddon, and Gardner, Eimear McBride manipulates language within ‘*A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*’. She punctuates in ways which are more akin to speech than written language, employing half clauses and disjointed syntax to characterise an unnamed ‘girl’ with traits which suggest difficulties with mental health, trauma, and PTSD. Within ‘*Half-Formed Thing*’, prose is not designed to be easy to read; narration is non-linear, moving between what is happening in past and present events. The narrator flows from one to the other, thereby transcending in and out of traumatic memories within day-to-day experiences. Within one traumatic situation, when she is being raped, it also triggers an unpleasant sexual experience she had with her uncle earlier, and she talks about both experiences as one; this not only forces the reader to pay attention, but also coerces them into comprehending the narrative emotionally, within glimpses and half-snapshots along with the Girl.

“For you. You’ll soon. You’ll give her name. In the stitches of her skin she’ll wear your say. Mammy me? Yes you. Bounce the bed, I’d say. I’d say that’s what you did. Then lay down. They cut you round. Wait an hour and a day.”³⁰⁸

McBride’s style of writing presents the Girl’s thoughts as fragmented and sometimes confused. ‘True’ stream-of-consciousness has permitted McBride’s lexis further scope for deviation, and her writings within ‘*Half-Formed Thing*’ demonstrate a more elusive, sporadic narrative than the other ND+ narratives depicted in this analysis. ‘*Half-Formed Thing*’ reveals ways in which both NT and ND+ people do not think or conceive in full sentences but conceive meanings within half-clauses and scatterings of ideas, which are then interspaced with emotion and repetitive thought. Elements of my research suggest that Neurodivergent+ writers, experiencing ill-mental health episodes, could write in ways which are either differently or further, pronounced.

Although the Girl’s language is fragmented throughout, narration becomes more or less fragmented dependent upon her disposition and whether she is in immediate danger. It depicts her entering several unpleasant and inappropriate sexual situations, and one instance of rape. When these depictions are happening, the Girl’s language scatters and dissipates further; at points it is simply letters. Below reads a section of the novel detailing the rape. Within it parts have been underlined where language has become particularly unformatted. This can be scanned if, as a reader, you would rather avoid the paragraph, which could be triggering:

‘Crushing I hear Boines ondone he up me fuck me. Smeeling he I don’t not do this I a don’t know he’s fuck me. Stucks the fck the thing in. Me. In. Jesus. I nme. Go. Away. Breeting. Skitch. Hear the way he. Slows. Hurts m. Jesus skreamthewayhe. Doos the fuck the fuckink

³⁰⁸ McBride, E. (2015) *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. Faber and Faber. p.1.

slatch in me. Scream. Kracks. Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy fucky shoves upo comes ui. Kom shitting ut H mitth fking kmg I'm fking cmin up you. Retch I. Rech I. Dinneradtea I choke mny. Up my. Thrtoat I. He come hecomehe. More. Slash the fuck the rank the sick up me sick up he and sticks his fingers in my mouth. Piull my mth he pull m mouth with him fingers pull the side of my mouth till I no. Stop that fuck and rip. Sckin. Stop heel. Tear my mouth. Garble lotof. Don't I come all mouth of blood of choking of he there bitch there bithc there there stranlge me strangle how you like it how you think it fun grouged breth scald my lungs til I. Puk blodd over me frum. In the next but. Let me air. Soon I'n dead I'm sre. Loose. Ver the always. Here. mY mose my Mouth I. VOMit. Clear. CleaR. He stopS up gETs. Stands uP. Look. And I breathe. And I breathe my. I make. You like those feelings do you now. Thanks to your uncle for like that the best fuck I ever had. HoCk SPIT me. Kicks. uPshes me over. With his brown boot foot.³⁰⁹

As the man touches the Girl her language becomes concrete and direct; she is only able to detail what is happening to her sporadically. Within parts that cause her most pain and distress the actual typeface dissipates and tangles; words are 'squashed' with no spaces, letters can become incomprehensible and jumbled, and at other points they capitalise, mixing between upper and lower case. This use of lexis gives the impression that she is overwhelmed and in such distress that she is unable to compute what is happening linguistically. After the rape, as the Girl recovers, her language gradually returns and becomes more standardised and comprehensible.

Throughout the novel, when facing anxiety provoking or traumatic situations, the language fluctuates to display her state of mind. However, although her lexis is broken, slipped together, and phonetically spelt with more 'spoken' grammar, the 'typography' is not utilised to suggest dyslexic or learning difficulties as it has been within *'Maggot Moon'* and *'Flowers for Algernon'*. Within *'A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing'*, although words are spelt phonetically, they are not spelt denoting more 'dyslexic traits'. The ungrammatical language denotes mental health difficulty and distress, portraying a woman struggling as she pieces together meaning within a confusing and harsh society, rather than dyslexic narration. Though, on a personal note surrounding my own dyslexia, at points of overwhelm/stress/trauma/fatigue, my dyslexic qualities/tendencies do become more pronounced both in writing and speech.

Another literary decision made by McBride is that she does not 'quote' or punctuate speech. It is instead internalised within her own narrative alongside her thoughts, 'They're off fuck knickers off. Fuck. Whore. You. He pulls like Mad I'.³¹⁰ In doing this, McBride has created narrative where a reader needs to ascertain whether words are coming from the Girl herself, or if they are external; in many sections it is ambiguous. This is also more akin to actual thought, where a person may not clearly distinguish between what they are hearing and what they are thinking.

During McBride's interview, she articulated that she has drawn upon her Northern Irish heritage. Eimear McBride's desire to infuse *'Half-Formed Thing'* with Irish heritage is one of her reasons behind the choice of lexis to capture accent within lexical flow. McBride has also attempted to write in a way that reflects how the Girl attempts to process and continue after

³⁰⁹ McBride, E. (2015) *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. Faber and Faber. p.214.

³¹⁰ McBride, E. (2015) *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. Faber and Faber. p.193.

experiencing trauma, making linkage to the language of pain. Graham Borland, a student from the National University of Ireland published a paper entitled, 'My name is gone: trauma, language and the death drive' in McBride's *'A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing'*. His research addresses reasons behind McBride's narrative fluctuation,

"In the process, the first-person narration of the novel registers this trauma through a shattered, stuttering, truncated prose of broken sentences and garbled syntax which only grows more strained as the novel progresses."³¹¹

Graham Borland coined the term 'death drive', which refers to how intense, anxiety provoking, and dangerous situations can 'kill' language function. Instead, a person relies on pictures, sounds, and emotions to comprehend the world around them. Only after the dangerous or anxiety provoking situation has passed can the conscious brain attempt to comprehend the event with language. In *'A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing'*, Borland specifically comments that,

"The representation of a (The Girl's) psyche is subjected to deep/prolonged trauma. It foregrounds language in such a way as to demonstrate the effect which trauma has on the structure of its protagonist's inner life. It is a relationship which becomes particularly pertinent when we understand language itself to be in a certain sense constitutive of one's subjectivity."³¹²

He goes on to comment that McBride concentrates on 'why' and 'how' a person is thinking as opposed to 'what' they are detailing. Borland highlighted that what could be described as 'chaotic' language choices within the novel are reflective of and mimicking Freudian-Lacan language theory surrounding mental health and trauma. In an interview with the Guardian, McBride comments upon her writing and the ways in which she wanted to attempt a lexis that mimicked being 'halfway' between experiencing an event and processing it consciously, 'I wanted to give the reader a very different experience.'³¹³

McBride has attempted to capture the internal monologue of a woman experiencing repeated traumas impacting upon her mental health and state of mind, which is why her writing style has been seen as relevant for this research. McBride's writing most prominently focuses upon trauma, rather than a specific ND+ narrative³¹⁴; however, due to a prevalence of discombobulating/unpleasant ordeals that many ND+ individuals face/have faced, I see that this type of fractured/broken thought can be more directly applicable. In a 2018 study published in Spectrum News, it was found that girls scoring high on autism tests were three times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse.³¹⁵ Regarding more direct relevance to my novel *'Curious Case'*, the narrative details a young woman struggling to come to terms with her friend's suicide, while experiencing episodes of extreme mental unwell. In regard to this I have taken some influence from McBride.

The heart of this PhD wishes to encourage individuals to utilise and harness their own creativities, voice and perception, in order to both performatively and linguistically assert

³¹¹ Silva, A. (2015) "My Name is Gone": Trauma, Sexuality and Language in Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*" TEXTUS, Vol.28:143-167

³¹² Silva, A. (2015) "My Name is Gone": Trauma, Sexuality and Language in Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*" TEXTUS, Vol.28:143-167

³¹³ McBride, E (2014) 'A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing Interview'. *The Guardian*. [ONLINE] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/16/eimear-mcbride-girl-is-a-half-formed-thing-interview> [Accessed 16/09/20]

³¹⁴ Note: Several developing Neurodivergent+ identifications do more directly include trauma and PTSD, however there are divided schools of thought on this.

³¹⁵ Zeliadt, N. (2018) Girls with autism at high risk of sexual abuse, large study says. Spectrum News. [ONLINE] <https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/girls-autism-high-risk-sexual-abuse-large-study-says/> [Accessed 16/09/20]

'self', and be able to deviate away from 'set', and potentially ableist forms of writing/language/self-expression. It is my assertion that this will not only lead to more innovative writing/performative practices, but it will also allow individuals/ND+ individuals to self-actualise, harness and confidently discover/develop new appreciations of self.

'Because We Are Bad: OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought', by Lily Bailey: 2016 ³¹⁶

Note: This year Lily Bailey also published and 'came out' as dyspraxic, *'When I feel Red: A Powerful story of dyspraxia, identity and finding your place in the world'* (2014), characterising her/her writing as multiply ND/ND+

This final text is autobiographical. Bailey's authenticity and literary innovation propelled my investigation into the subject of the power of Neurodivergent+ aesthetics. Bailey is a London based writer and model who suffers extensively from OCD. She details her struggles, obsessions, paranoia, and some quite absurd recollections of living with OCD from her childhood to present day; "I have existed for 21 years. I didn't live them all, but from now on I am hoping to."³¹⁷ Sadly, this is a sentiment that many people with consuming mental health difficulties will be able to relate to; feeling so overtaken by 'illness' that they no longer recognise themselves partaking within day-to-day life.

This section will begin by discussing five long excerpts from *'Because We Are Bad'* (2016). Bailey's OCD 'mental marathons' are convoluted and impossible to summarise without reducing what the true nature of her OCD is. The process is appreciated by more fully elaborating on sections that talk a reader through thought triggers, repetition, rumination, and reflection. These excerpts will be discussed in terms of sentiment and style. Passages have been chosen to demonstrate how the narrator mentally builds upon her ongoing thought processes.

Bailey not only writes out her obsessions and thought fixations, but she also expands on why she feels the need to repeat, and how this type of thinking affects her. Akin to 'real' overthinking, when an event 'triggers' her OCD, she will spend the next couple of pages reflecting and decoding it. People with OCD are often undiagnosed, and this is in part because an element of the condition insists that they cover their thought processes. However, Bailey does not brush her repetitive thinking under the carpet; she does not 'edit out' repetitive, or long-winded explanations. Part of me was relieved after reading her book, because it was something 'real' that demonstrated how exhaustive and meticulous OCD processing can be; perhaps something I could share with someone else so that they could understand me more without me having to talk about my own very personal experiences.

Excerpt one: Bailey elaborates upon the nature of her internal obsessions after waking up from a sleepover with her classmates (pp.51-54).

Actions start to be recorded:

³¹⁶ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'*. Canterbury Press.

³¹⁷ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'*. Canterbury Press. Chapter 29 *The Truth* p. 254.

STARE: As we got up to sit on the side of the bed, our eyes made contact with Soo-jin. She was sitting on the end of her bed in a bra. Will she be disgusted and tell everyone Lily is a pervert?

UNDER THE DUVET: The others get ready quite openly, but we prefer to take our pyjamas off and dress under the duvet so no one sees our body. As we pulled our pants up, we made a funny grabbing motion with our hands by accident. What if someone thinks we were masturbating?

REACH UP TO GET BOOK: We got off the bed and reached up to get our maths textbook from the top shelf. It felt like our skirt might have lifted up a bit at the back. What if everyone thought we were flashing them because we derive pleasure from exposing ourselves?

[...]

The others can be summarised as follows:

WHISPER

MUDDY

ELBOW

SMILE

[...]

Once we're in assembly, it takes about 10 minutes for the hall to be full. The chaplain marches onto stage to tell us that Jesus has come to save us, generating the first Pause of the day. It's time to address the list so far.

We go through it three times:

SURMBDMSEWMESJCATTBS.

SURMBDMSEWMESJCATTBS.

SURMBDMSEWMESJCATTBS.

A few more letters pop up while the chaplain talks, and we slot them in at the end.³¹⁸

This above section denotes how Bailey uses the pronouns 'We' to refer to herself and her OCD, it also expands in detail about a form of OCD colloquially known as 'Pure O'³¹⁹, whereby both the obsessions and compulsions are internal/thought based. She details the events that 'trigger' OCD, then shows us how she turns them into acronyms, and how she then categorises her internal thoughts and triggers. They are similar to some of my own childhood experiences of OCD.

Excerpt Two: From chapter '*Most Apologetic Girl!*' Which gives more detailed consideration to how Bailey sorts, processes and hoards compulsive thoughts (pp. 42-48.)

Our justification system – our way of saying sorry all the time – starts to get out of control. Initially, the idea was to justify things we would normally apologise for, to make them go

³¹⁸ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'*. Canterbury Press. 51-45.

³¹⁹ Mind. (unknown) 'What Is Pure O?' *Mind* [ONLINE] www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/symptoms-of-ocd/#:~:text=Pure%20O%20stands%20for%20'purely,checking%20or%20washing%20physical%20things. [Accessed 05/02/24]

away without having to say sorry. But as we got better at it, we realized we could use the system to deal with pretty much anything.

Unless you can remember what went wrong, though, you cannot put it right. So we take the first letter of each worry and put it in a list. We continuously repeat the list in our head until we have a quiet moment to go through the mall.

If we find a way of justifying the action, it becomes a green word. When we can't justify it, it is marked as a red word. We must remember and learn from it so we don't do it again.

Green words stick around for a day being reevaluated to check that they definitely weren't that bad, and then get left behind at some point between when we fall asleep and when we wake up the next morning.

Red ones can continue to be carried forward for several days until we find a way to excuse them.

If we've done something really bad, we have to accept that there is no way of excusing it. Then it becomes a very red word, and we see its letters spelled out bolder in our head, flashing an angrier crimson colour. It then goes into the Master Archive, which is the area in our head where we store all the really bad things we've done.³²⁰

The length and detail Bailey puts into defining what could have been envisaged as 'bad' and then attempting to clean/rid herself of them repetitively demonstrates how her obsessions take up much of her day, to the extent that they block out/distract, and to some extent dictate the reality in which she exists.

Excerpt Three: From chapter '*Doctor, Doctor*'. After being assessed by a psychiatrist for the first time, Bailey details her experience and diagnosis to her mother (pp. 86-87).

She squeezes my hand and bites her lip, 'I feel so terrible.'

'Why?'

'For not noticing.'

'You couldn't have. I live my life trying to come across as normal. All my energy seems to go into making sure no one does notice anything at all. If you knew, that would have meant I'd failed.'

'I don't get it, though. How is that OCD? I'm not saying I don't believe you fully—I do. But why don't I see you doing things over and over?'

'I do it all in my head'³²¹

In this section, for the first time, Bailey tells someone else, besides her psychologist, about her OCD intrusions. Though she has lived with them all her life, she has covered them from her mother. I have included this section as, for me, it was one of the most relatable; it demonstrates how, when individuals are suffering from OCD that is characteristic of 'Pure O' (mostly thought based compulsions), they are unlikely to be recognised, even by close friends and family. It is also demonstrative of how people with this type of very severe and insidious OCD often aren't immediately believed, due to a number of assumptions/stigmas/stereotypes surrounding the

³²⁰ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'*. Canterbury Press. pp. 42-48.

³²¹ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'*. Canterbury Press. pp. 86-87.

disorder. Reading this book was one of the first times I truly understood that other people, with OCD, experienced it akin to myself.

Excerpt four: Bailey is referred to a number of psychiatric care units, and a doctor inquires to whether she is psychotic (pp. 197-198).

It's YOUR fault!' I howl. 'YOUR fault I can't stop thinking about ice skates, because this treatment is WRONG. I wouldn't be thinking about ice skates if it weren't for YOU changing my medication and making me sit in huge groups of people and I FEEL ALL WRONG IN MY HEAD AND IT'S WORSE THAN BEFORE. And now you're sitting here making me feel angry, and all I can think about is ICE SKATES HITTING MY HEAD—'

I picture another white boot taking aim. I wince. The thought becomes so vivid, I hear my skull crack.

'Lily,' Dr Dax says slowly, 'have you ever considered the fact that you might be psychotic?'

'I'm not! Dr Finch said another doctor would say that! It's an intrusive thought, which of course you don't know anything about, because I'm not sure you even know what OCD is. GO AWAY!³²²

When something is captured within an OCD 'episode', the strength and tenacity of a 'belief' can cause individuals to seem psychotic when it is more akin to an intense personification of repetitive thinking and heightened anxiety whereby it becomes lodged/rooted as specific entities or beliefs. In my own experience, these 'strange thoughts' have at times confused friends, family, and practitioners who are not versed with the intricacies of OCD.

Excerpt Five/Six: From chapters, 'Nursery' and 'Journalism'. Both excerpts highlight the nature of 'intrusive thoughts', and how OCD sufferers often convince themselves they've committed heinous crimes. In this extract Bailey has started a job at a nursery and one of the children, out of the blue, gets an erection (pp. 222- 223).

What if he learned this behaviour from me? Maybe I've been abusing Matteo, and I don't even remember it?

It happens several times more, and each time Miss Rebecca and I report back to Miss Louise.

This section shows how intrusive thoughts, experienced over a number of days/weeks/months, can eventually make someone with OCD feel certain they have committed a crime, and how these crimes circulate around societies most ingrained 'taboos'/sin.

In the second extract Bailey has started a job as a journalist (pp. 246-247).

I am inputting local news stories into our online publishing software. A missing boy aged 14; a new celebrity moving to the area; the verdict of a trial of a local sex offender.

At this point, I'd normally spend a couple of hours thoroughly checking through the articles to see that I haven't chucked in some rogue concluding line like 'thanks for reading folks. FYI, I'm also a sex offender,' or 'Just so you know, the missing child is actually in my cellar.'

³²² Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'*. Canterbury Press. p.198.

Today, I only check through for standard spelling and grammar, and then hit the Publish button. I tell myself it's okay, because I can check through them later.

OCD is intrinsically individual and will morph itself to the sufferer/suffers fears, but the notion/awareness of 'unknown terror', 'The forbidden' and 'The unthinkable' are what encompasses a range of OCD and 'Pure O' avoidance, distress, and paranoia. People with OCD may not trust themselves, and so they may check and 're-check' their actions to prevent against wrongdoings or 'evil'.

Excerpt Seven: Towards the end of the novel Bailey chooses to disclose her OCD to Bill, a potential employer.

I prepare for Bill to give one of three standard responses:

"Oh, I'm also OCD!"

"Aren't we all a bit OCD?"

"You can come and clean my house."

What he says next takes me by surprise.

"What's OCD?" He looks a little embarrassed. "I mean, sorry, I know I should know, but I don't."

"No, don't worry at all. Well, it stands for obsessive-compulsive disorder. So, people who have it obsess over something, like a thought, or a worry, and then they do a compulsion to make that thing go away. And they get into a cycle where they can't stop doing those compulsions. So, I.... I worry a lot about all the actions I do, like how I say stuff, and whether it looked funny when I did something, or whether something about me appeared disgusting, and then I have to write it down and think about it a lot to make it go away. I fill up endless notebooks making lists of everyday stuff that other people don't think about. It takes up hours of every day. I'm also quite scared of dirt, so I wash my hands a lot. That's probably more what OCD is known for."

The only person I tell this to is Dr Finch. I suddenly feel vulnerable and idiotic. Why am I telling a future boss about it.

'I know it sounds silly' I add hastily.

'It doesn't sound silly, it sounds hellish!'

Oh. Sympathy. That's Nice. I feel a little bolder.

For a person with OCD to tell another person seems unnatural and counterintuitive; it is all about 'The forbidden'. Whether and how to inform friends, employers, and partners, is one of the biggest challenges for many ND+ people. For me, this extract is particularly interesting, as it highlights how telling someone you have 'OCD' is not necessarily insightful, unless they know more about the condition. Bailey's writing style is incredibly self-reflective and self-critical, which can be seen to relate to her OCD.

Bailey's Writing Style:

Although grammatically sentences are written out in full, often her speech and thought are indistinguishable. Additionally, when speaking, she punctuates fairly fluently; she might pause in speech, then start speaking again in a new paragraph. Through the content of what is being said, the reader can work out whether it is her speaking, or whether it is a secondary person, such as her mum or a psychiatrist.

Throughout the novel Bailey uses short one-line paragraphs that represent her building upon or changing direction in thought. Not only does this represent her internal thought process of making a statement and then answering it herself, but it also changes the pace of the novel. In the following quotation, a classmate questions why she is awarded extra time in examinations,

“Why do you even get extra time anyway? It’s so unfair, because you’re really clever.’

‘I’m a slow processor.’

What does that even mean? It sounds totally made up.

This is hard to dispute.

Lying scummy cheat.

Lying scummy cheat.

*Lying scummy cheat.*³²³

People living with OCD often take criticism to heart and see it as a strong manifestation of ‘evil’ within their personality; this connects to other notions around rejection sensitivity³²⁴ and neurodivergence. Additionally, similarly to dyslexia and autism, people with OCD, due to the way they ‘overthink’ or perfectionise, can find processing written and spoken information challenging, and this is why they may be awarded extra time at school. One of the most noticeable, and for me significant MH lexical stylistics within the novel is Bailey’s use of pronoun. She refers to her own OCD as: ‘we’, ‘us’, or ‘my friend and I’. OCD can manifest itself in a number of ways, but it is often referred to as ‘The Bully’. It can be experienced as a distinct, constant, interwoven voice; individuals can experience OCD as a ‘separate consciousness’ which is something that Bailey has demonstrated linguistically. She discusses how she relates to her internal OCD with Dr Finch in chapter, ‘Pills, Pills, Pills’,

Dr Finch says, ‘Some people do say they hear their OCD as a voice.... It’s difficult to know exactly how someone’s OCD feels unless you’re actually in their head. It could be because you had OCD from when you were so young that it was just easier for you to see it that way.

She wants to discuss the obsession about being a bad person.³²⁵

³²³ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, ‘OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought’*. Canterbury Press. p.72.

³²⁴ **Rejection Sensitivity:** ‘Rejection sensitivity is a trait that makes a person expect, perceive, and react intensely to rejection, real or perceived.1 If you have rejection sensitivity, not getting a response to a text message might convince you that you are no longer liked.’ Herndon, J. (2024) ‘What is Rejection Sensitivity’, very well health [ONLINE] <https://www.verywellhealth.com/rejection-sensitivity-vs-rsd-5271409#:~:text=Rejection%20sensitivity%20is%20a%20trait,you%20are%20no%20longer%20liked>. [Accessed 25/03/24]

³²⁵ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad, ‘OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought’*. Canterbury Press. Chapter 14: Pills, Pills, Pills p.93.

'Because We are Bad' was loaned to me by a friend who also experienced OCD and Pure O. I found the novel immersive; so much so that halfway through my own condition began to worsen; symptoms jangled against thinly meshed cages, and I phoned the friend who had loaned me the book. She confessed that she had wanted to get rid of the book and had not finished reading it. Reading the obsessive-compulsive narrative had begun to affect her own mental health, with her own OCD resurfacing. A quote from the book that both me and my friend relate to is,

"I'd love to learn everything all over again but learn it right this time. I'd love to return my brain to factory settings."³²⁶

Bailey's novel captured and encased our shared OCD infliction. While reading, fears and dilutions floated up, off pages, clinging to us. I concluded that *'Because We are Bad'* could only have been written and brought to life by a person who had actually lived and experienced OCD. The very last line of her story is optimistic:

"I am better. I don't know whether it's for good, or if one day something might make me abnormal again. But that's the funny think about living. If you do it properly, you don't know how the next sentence will begin."³²⁷

Though all five of the texts discussed within this chapter differ quite substantially regarding their content, what they have all done is experiment with language/break down 'set'/'correct' linguistic form in order to characterise ND+ narration. Something which I initially set out to show in my research was 'Can Neurodivergent+ aesthetics/style aesthetics transcend/be captured within creative writing?' Something that has become quite evident within this chapter and the previous, is that they can, have, and are continuing to do so. However, what has also been forefront, is how and the responsibilities/ethics that are captured within this type of experimentation and ideas of possible ownership/appropriation. Mark Haddon and Daniel Keyes, NT presenting authors, in their forming of ND+ narrations, were not as concerned with authentic ND+ portrayal, or being heard/related to/read/respected within wider ND+ communities, with Haddon actively avoiding them. Whereas Sally Gardner and Lily Bailey, who both do identify as ND+, as well as enjoying the act of writing/experimentation, have actively connected to and engaged with respective ND+ communities, and prominently wanted their works to be read and engaged by ND+ population. For Bailey and Gardner their work and writing upon the topic of ND+ representation didn't stop at a good/successful book, their novels have sprung from their own lived experiences, and their writings have been a step in them further recognising and solidifying ND+ identity, which they have then continued to champion after writing, both on their own platforms, and also within larger organisations that support ND+ individuals. This sentiment does not carry the same for a number of NT authors upon ND+ representation/inclusion, with Haddon and Keyes included.

³²⁶ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad*, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'. Canterbury Press. Chapter 27: Journalism. p.263.

³²⁷ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad*, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'. Canterbury Press. p.225.

Lily Bailey, Mark Haddon: OCD and Autism in relation to my writings and inspiration of, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'

I formulated the concept of 'ND+' writing through reading '*Because We are Bad*'³²⁸ and Mark Haddon's '*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*'³²⁹. As a creative writing student, I admired Haddon's innovative use of grammar, lexis, syntax, and typography to capture his 'Aspie' protagonist's first-hand experiences. Although I enjoyed elements of the novel, I was not personally affected or moved by Christopher's narration in the same way I had been with '*Because We are Bad*'. This could be due to me being female (whereas Christopher and Haddon are male), but I attributed it to the fact that Lily Bailey's was autobiographical; full of nuance and sentiment that, I champion, can only be gleaned through lived experience.

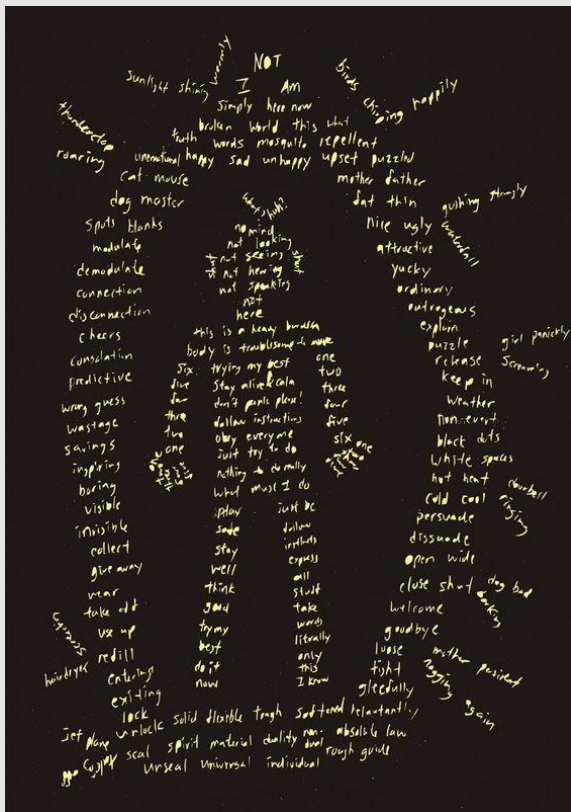
Based upon reviews left by the #ActuallyAutistic community responding to Haddon's novel, it seemed a number of ND+ individuals felt similarly. Eric Chen, a prominent #ActuallyAutistic activist starts his write up of '*Curious Incident*' with: 'Warning: This book will not help you understand real autistics'³³⁰. He proceeds to re-pen specific excerpts of the novel in ways which he feels are more representative of authentic autistic narration. I have taken inspiration from Chen to develop an entirely new novel, drawing attention to ND+ narrative, with specific awareness of Neurodivergent+ femininity. Below left is a mind-map (lists of words in pictorial form) that was created by Chen. At one point in my novel, I have used a similar stylistic technique to demonstrate the protagonist, Tammy, processing and reflecting upon sexually abusive experiences (below right)³³¹.

³²⁸ Bailey, L. (2016) *Because We are Bad*, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought'. Canterbury Press.

³²⁹ Haddon, M. (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Jonathan Cape.

³³⁰ Chen, E. (2016) 'Review of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon' [ONLINE] <http://iautistic.com/autism-myths-the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time.php> [Accessed 09/10/23]

³³¹ **Note:** The idea that, not only the words, but that layout/structure/format could relate to ND+ aesthetics is a notion discussed throughout this thesis.



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My novel *'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'* depicts fictitious narration. This meant I could concentrate on form, stylistics, and syntax rather than become 'enwebbed' within the specifics and 'truth' of my own lived experience. An additional layer of 'hiding' is also incorporated; Tammy often expands on her emotions in ways which are abstract, absurd, and drenched in fairy-tale. She is speaking, thinking, and communicating using these tools as 'guises'; distancing herself from her own narrative. However, this style somewhat opposes/contrasts Bailey's, and other first-person ND+ narrations.

Akin to Bailey, something that I wanted to really highlight within my own writing is that OCD is a complex, multifaceted condition that can exist almost in complete separation to stereotypes surrounding cleaning and order; it is something internal, ingrained, and inherently secret.

Tammy's thoughts can be quite sudden, strange, and violent, showing the nature of intrusive thoughts and intrusive thought rumination. People who have 'Pure O' don't continuously 'do' things, they continuously think things instead, and, when combined with anxiety/insomnia these thoughts will get stronger, quicker, and more consuming. I have used a number of linguistic techniques to try and demonstrate this, such as certain paragraphs being retyped and texts being re-written. I have also enlarged certain sentences visually, then shrunk nearby 'thoughts' to demonstrate how several views are occurring to Tammy at same time; they slide next to or in-between; literally stacking on top of one another.

³³² Chen, E. (2005) *Mirror Mind 'Penetrating Autism's Enigma'*. Self-Published.

³³³ This is the 'Mind Map Monster Poem' from my own creative practice, *'Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'*

The inspiration for Claw-dia, Tammy's personified OCD Monster, was taken from a BBC article by Lucy Wallis entitled, 'I call my OCD, Olivia', and was about the work of OCD sufferer, Catherine Benfield. A woman who was not diagnosed until she was thirty-one. She had been distressed by unpleasant, intrusive thoughts surrounding how she might treat her own children, and had no insight to why these thoughts were appearing,

"I didn't know it was OCD," she says. "I thought I wanted to do it. I thought, 'What kind of mother has thoughts like that about their child?'"³³⁴

She draws her OCD as a rabbit which changes dependant on what she's feeling. If she has thoughts about hurting someone, she pretends it is the rabbit which is thinking them, not her. She has personified certain traits, Catherine Benfield elaborates,

"Oliva's got the big ears, because she's like a startled hare, she's listening out, she's bedraggled, because she's been through a lot and she's normally having some kind of panic, The big eyes are about making sure she's keeping an eye out for danger, The big legs - for running, "like a frightened hare."³³⁵



³³⁴ Wallis, L. (2018) 'I Call my OCD Olivia', *BBC Stories*. [ONLINE] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-45879034> [Accessed 09/10/23]

³³⁵ Wallis, L. (2018) 'I Call my OCD Olivia', *BBC Stories*. [ONLINE] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-45879034> [Accessed 09/10/23]

Benfield is not the only person to personify the OCD Bully, as it is often called. A human size OCD Bully statue created by David Veale³³⁶ had been erected outside the Anxiety Disorders Residential Unit at Bethlem Royal Hospital. The reasons behind its construction were included within the 'British Medical Journal' (BMJ 2010;341:c2596), a section of which is below,



'People with OCD often consider their OCD to be like a bully or a demon that has to be obeyed. During the process of cognitive behaviour therapy, they may be encouraged to "externalise" their bully and to act against it by doing the opposite to what the bully demands. We therefore decided to enhance the environment at The Anxiety Disorders Residential Unit at the Bethlem by making a humanoid version of an OCD bully or monster.

On the outside of the bully are various manifestations of OCD, for example a clock that represents the wasted time of compulsions; a toilet seat that is full of germs; knives for fears of being violent; words such as Paedophile and numbers such as 666. The bully has several eyes to depict the vigilance for threat. A door in its chest opens to reveal a heart of stone. At the base is a broken mirror.'³³⁷

This personification includes more depth to the notion of OCD which is popularly believed, having 'paedophile' written on it, one of the most common intrusive thoughts. Subconsciously a belief exists that if they do not 'check' or undergo a certain routine, something bad might happen. Within the narrative Tammy feels compelled to re-check doors to ensure they are locked and stroke dogs exactly thirty times before they leave. But more prominent to 'outward' compulsions are her 'Pure O' compulsions, which

involve compulsive thoughts and narratives, and this is a type of internal behaviour which is very difficult to shed.

Curious Case, OCD, Writing Practice

Regarding OCD and writing, because of the nature of the illness, it leaves a person with a level of unwanted 'imagination' with scenarios such as intrusive thoughts. Additionally, a symptom of OCD can be 'feeling as if you can harm inanimate objects'; the personification of inanimate objects has also been discussed as relevant to autistic individuals in 'Object Personification in Autism, This Paper will be very said fi you don't read it',

'In online forums, autistic individuals describe a special relationship with objects. They report, for example, that papers in a filing cabinet feel unloved or that the last crisp in a packet is lonely. Savarese (2014) identified an 'object-centred empathy' in the literary contributions (e.g. novels, essays) of autistic writers and proposed that autistic individuals act like personifying poets.'³³⁸ [Note: the authors of this study on 'Object Personification and Autism' extrapolated from the research of an article entitled, 'Autism: Feeling Sympathy for

³³⁶ Veale, D. (2020) The OCD Bully. David Veale [ONLINE] <https://veale.co.uk/feature/the-ocd-bully/> [Accessed 25/03/24]

³³⁷ Veale, D. (2020) The OCD Bully. David Veale [ONLINE] <https://veale.co.uk/feature/the-ocd-bully/> [Accessed 25/03/24] and BMJ 2010;341:c2596 p.779.

³³⁸ White, R. and Remington, A. (2022) Object Personification in Autism, 'This Paper Will Be Very Sad If You Don't Read It'. Sage Journals. 23 (4) [ONLINE] <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1362361318793408> [Accessed 23/03/24]

Objects'³³⁹ and the paper, 'I Object: Autism Empathy, and the Troupe of personification'³⁴⁰ within this quoted section.]

In its conclusion it gave possible reasons for this 'personifying', one being that it may aid individuals who are feeling excessively lonely or isolated or could be linked with understandings surrounding Synaesthesia. I believe that with my OCD/autism this has aided elements of my writing. When I was younger, I used to become extremely upset if objects were broken in any way. One reason for this was a desire for perfection, but another was because I believed I could 'empathise' with its pain. To empathise with an object, you have to have in some way personified it; I believe that having OCD means that I intrinsically personify many items.

Regarding Tangent/creative tangents, something that I am guilty of, and is likely interconnected to Neurodivergence is wanting to 'add' and explain 'further'. Within Haddon's depiction of Christopher, he utilises footnotes creatively to 'add' things that expand more factually upon Christopher's thoughts; within my narration I have 'taken' this idea and utilised it in order to permit Tammy to 'tangent' more fully, but not directly distract from the main text. With Haddon's novel being one of the most prominent fictitious representations of autism, I wanted to allude to it/give an alternative autistic/ND+ narration that focused on a female autistic protagonist, and one which hopefully provided more authenticity. Alongside tangents are also a number of interruptions, and changes of topic and/or pace. I think that this can be seen as more reflective of thought in general, but this might be in some ways be different or heightened for ND+ individuals; the way I speak, and the way I write can be particularly scattered, and this intensifies when I'm excited, inspired, tired, anxious and overwhelmed. I've injected elements of this into Tammy's narration; when her emotion/state of mind changes, so does the writing style.

The ND+ novel I wrote is quite extensive, and my writing has been pulled/inspired/influenced from a cacophony of ND+ sources, included both within and externally from this research. But something that I would like to stress is that this was not done expressly to characterise Tammy as ND+, but rather in wanting to write a ND+ narrative, it opened me up to utilising and potentially monopolising on injecting elements of my own perspective/processing and ND+ understandings within Tammy. One book which helped me recognise and reflect upon how OCD can alter narrative, especially in terms of affecting your own sense of time, self, and how you interact with the world was, Mariane Eloise's 'Obsessive Intrusive Magical Thinking'³⁴¹ which is a collection of personal essays exploring and breaking down elements of neurodivergence, fixation and disorder. She describes her obsession as her 'natural state'³⁴², which changes dependent upon what her brain holds onto: fixations on very specific subjects, violent intrusive thoughts/images, and phrases that just keep repeating. She writes about time, how she sought to control it through obsessive writing and journaling, and how she experiences it in her first Section titled 'Obsessive':

"Time is relative to everyone, but more so when you're neurodiverse, when your two states are chronic distraction or hyper-fixation. If I'm down a rabbit hole, reading about earthquakes or looking at photos of celebrities wearing sneakers, time melts, 3am

³³⁹ Slavin, S. (2015) A Voice for the Autism Community 'I have felt sympathy for objects since I was a very young child'. *Adults With Autism* [ONLINE] <https://adultswithautism.org.uk/autism-feeling-sympathy-for-inanimate-objects/> [Accessed 19/03/24]

³⁴⁰ Savarese, R. (2014) *I object: autism, empathy, and the trope of personification*. [ONLINE] https://www.academia.edu/6428705/I_Object_Autism_Empathy_and_the_Trope_of_Personification [Accessed 13/12/24]

³⁴¹ Eloise, M. (2023) *Obsessive Intrusive Magical Thinking*. Icon Books.

³⁴² Eloise, M. (2023) *Obsessive Intrusive Magical Thinking*. Icon Books. Introduction. p.7.

turning to 5am in the time it takes to click on a link. If I have to focus, listen to someone speak, stay still, even a minute is a lifetime.”³⁴³

The next two sections are titled ‘Intrusive’ and ‘Magical’, after some of the differing types of thinking categorized as reflective of OCD. Similar to my own writing, what her experimental essays really highlight is how deeply personal OCD is and how OCD thought process can shape many elements of existence. Reflecting on my own writing, after reading her work, I realize how, though our voices are very different, that the writing content, regarding fixation and looping, was very much reflected within my writing, attempting to capture elements of my own thought processes in fluctuating states of health. It demonstrated how, day-to-day, somethings stick (for days, months years) while other things do not, and how this is both very individual, but also indiscernibly linked to OCD wiring. I feel as if my own concept of time has sometimes been warped (or wasted) by OCD rumination, and similarity, this loss/different comprehension of time being lost, or rather bombarded in thought I sought to inject into Tammy. At points she becomes less concerned with the outside world and gets captured within the narrative; a narrative that I often did not write chronologically, but rather sewed together more of a patchwork of chapters capturing her within differing states.

Something that was very important to bring out in my writing was that, though Tammy is ND+, her narrative is shaped by many interlacing and overlapping experiences, one being grief. Being Neurodivergent+ is both relevant to day-to-day life, but also isn’t, in that it is just you. But, with this in mind, being a ND+ individual, who may be in contact with other ND+ individuals, you may be more likely to either experience suicidal thoughts yourself, or know others who are either suicidal, or have committed suicide. I hope that this is something that becomes less true going forwards, but currently Neurodivergent+ individuals are at a high likelihood of suicide and mental health difficulties. With this in mind, and drawing on some of my own experiences, I wanted to put forward one Neurodivergent+ narrative of grief³⁴⁴; I am not claiming that grief is inherent to ND+ individuals, but, how a person responds to tragedy is connected to how they see/process the world, and in this way Tammy’s experience of grief does overlap/intersect with her ND experience. Elements of her OCD, dissociation, emotional triggers, forever trying to work things out and make sense of the world around her and what happens, are impacted; Tammy’s narrative of grief and neurodivergence within ‘The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights’ are inseparable; there is no right/wrong way to experience loss or to grieve, but I wanted to put forward how Tammy, as a ND+ individual, might process grief, which is at times scattered, metaphorical, existential as well as creative and poetic. Unfortunately, grief and isolation are experiences that many ND+ individuals often face more prevalently with ND+ individuals currently being more at risk; with Neurodivergence, mental health and suicide all being somewhat taboo subjects, I wanted to tackle them frankly and head on. In a way, many of the parts of the Narrative are Tammy trying to cope and make sense of the situation she finds herself. I was writing the novel at a time where I had also started taking anti-depressives for the first time, and so, I wrote and included elements of this towards the centre of the novel, to give more of a first-hand impression of

³⁴³ Eloise, M. (2023) *Obsessive Intrusive Magical Thinking*. Icon Books. Chapter 1. Obsessive. Section 1. I am Old Now, but I Wasn’t Then. p.18

³⁴⁴ **Note:** ‘Sad’ a Neurodivergent+ Performance exploring grief autobiographically, toured Marlow Theatre on Wednesday the 3rd of April. I (Emma Robdale) conducted a question and answers session with the two ND+ actors who asserted that their own personal ND+ natures permeated their performance, and expanded upon how they somewhat accidentally transcended theatrical conventions around rules/boundaries/communication and were quite naturally improvisational. They also discussed how experiencing grief, as ND+ individuals, is what drove them to create ‘SAD’; its form, which adopted a variety of disjointed mediums, fluctuating in light/pitch/style was led/influenced by attempts to express their own ND+ grieving process. This conversation aided in me being able to see, connect and understand grief/the grieving process, and my own grieving process as something that can also have ND+ nuance, shapes a number of narratives. If you would like to read more upon the questions and answers session held with ‘Sad’ you can on MixMatched Blog: <https://mixmatched.co.uk/sad-mixmatch-ed-theatre-trip-review/>

how it feels; how medication can slow down breakneck thoughts, but also make you feel forgetful and lose drive; people often focus on the physical effects of medication, but I wanted to demonstrate how they affected my train of thought.

At points in the narrative, I preferred to let 'emotion' lead the direction of the writing; when Tammy is either experiencing bouts of strong emotion or intense 'OCD episodes' the writing favours emotion over clarity and coherence. Regarding Tammy's experience of OCD, at points it is all-consuming; affecting the way she sees, hears and communicates with the world around her. In this draft, I have chosen, when quoting other characters and using 'reported speech', to report the speech akin to how Tammy might process or remember it. In this way, Tammy, as the narrator, is slightly unreliable; at points her intense anxiety and also experiences of grief colour her perception, subtly changing the way she records the world around her; the speech of other characters often has the same style/repetitive nature as Tammy's own voice.

One reason for this decision was so that the Narrative 'came' from Tammy. Though OCD is an incredibly introspective condition, it is incredibly critical and often documents surrounding 'information' with negative bias; it effects/skews the person's ability to 'mentalize' which is,

'The capacity to "read," access, and reflect on mental states (e.g., thoughts, emotions, desires, attitudes) in ourselves as well as other people.'³⁴⁵

At many points Tammy is trying to work out so many dynamics, but her OCD often creates a distorted bias; due to this, within sections of the text, you are not able to truly apprehend other character's views/reactions to her. Other than following the nature of OCD, one reason I have invoked this within my writing is to avoid 'othering'. 'Othering' is when a character/character's narration is in some way alienated; instead of viewing a narrative from the protagonist's vantage, a perspective is given as if watching/analysing them from 'outside'. Though, at points, this can be done intentionally, to include other character's perspectives/insight, if it is done continuously, it can take away from the authenticity of the narrator. Mark Haddon was accused of 'othering' by several autistic individuals, including Eric Chen, an autistic activist/writer, who re-wrote part of the novel himself, in his creation of Christopher. This was commented upon within Grand Valley State's University Blog 'Autism Neurodiversity and Fiction,

'Chen stressed that Christopher showed a level of self-consciousness that wasn't realistic for a character who is supposed to be representing ASD or Asperger's.'³⁴⁶

Haddon's perception/description of Christopher tends to be pre-occupied upon accurately envisaging how other people view him, despite him also being characterized as having difficulty with reading facial expressions and social cues from those surrounding him. In this way the locus of the story, to an extent, is concerned with 'watching' Christopher, rather than following him/his sense of self through the story. Tammy, within 'Casual Case', is perhaps overly pre-occupied with working out a 'sense of self' and can be so wrapped up in her thoughts that it can leave little room for true external perception or insight. One of the difficulties with mental illness is that it can increase someone's want/need to mentalize (the

³⁴⁵ Science Direct (2024) Mentalization. [ONLINE] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/mentalization#:~:text=%E2%80%9CMentalization%E2%80%9D%20is%20defined%20as%20the,as%20well%20as%20other%20people.> [01/08/24]

³⁴⁶ Grand Valley State University (2016) Autism, Neurodiversity and Fiction, 'Fricke, Analysis 5'. [ONLINE]: www.eng330f16.wordpress.com/tag/aspengers/ [Accessed 25/10/24]

ability to know/reflect upon your own mental state and guess/predict that of others³⁴⁷), but reduce their ability to do it accurately, e.g., someone may believe they are being very astute, but elements of their negative/fast/disproportional beliefs towards themselves can twist reality, rather than it being a true insight; in some ways, this makes Tammy an incredibly introspective, but potentially unreliable narrator; she is likely to be more reliable when less anxious, and less when her OCD is heightened. In some ways similar to Lily Bailey's, 'OCD and a Girl Lost in Thought', whereby some parts of the narrative are narrated more by her OCD, Tammy's narration can also be seen to 'change'; but this narrative is still seen as coming from her/her having just one voice (rather than the OCD having a completely split identity), but at differing points her 'well self' and her 'OCD narrative' intermingle, with them both fighting and working in collaboration for agency/control/clarity; such is the confusing nature of mental illness.

Regarding how wrapped up, or perhaps 'lost' Tammy is within her own thought/narration, it also in many ways 'warps' her sense of time. OCD generally is quite a dissociative disorder. Tammy tries to find herself in a range of fictional and fairy-tale like narratives that merge and intersect with how she's processing, hiding and storing emotion. In many ways she can become 'lost' within her own narrative, which, though in chapters, are not necessarily chronological, and could be read in differing orders. In my method of writing/creation, I wrote many chapters 'separately' in Tammy's voice, channelling elements of my own OCD in times of stress and anxiety; these then latched onto and into Tammy's life/memory and became merged in a kind of patchwork quilt of quite emotive and figurative chapters. I feel like this way of 'merging' elements of my own sentiment with Tammy's means her narration, though not my own story, feels inherently personal and somewhat confessional in nature. In some ways Tammy herself can be seen as a creative dissociation and personification of elements of my own spirit, with a number of her poems and dreams spanning first from my own diary before being injected within her. With this in mind, writing has helped me process some of my own OCD/trauma experiences, in both being able to write them more 'immediately', but also in re-drafting where I have been able to process/refine some of my own thoughts/feelings. Similarly to how Elinor Rowlands spoke about stimming as ND+ creative practice, I think there is something about creative word, and, for me, especially in re-drafting, that is cathartic; trying to get the sentences 'just right' I view as both interrelated to elements of OCD illness/perfectionism, and an expression of ND+ joy/process and decompression. Throughout my life and my writing, this has been a constant struggle. Similarly to how Sally Gardner, author of *Maggot Moon*, commented that she didn't especially try to characterize her main protagonist as dyslexic, more in recognising him as such she permitted herself to 'let go' and tap into that part of herself, I also feel as if I didn't have to try too hard to 'create' a voice for Tammy as an effect, allowing elements of myself to guide and inform both the writing and its structure.

On a final note, ND+ lived experiences are as expansive as any other, however, though this research does not focus predominately upon deficit and does seek to highlight ND+ experiences surrounding joy/fascination/inquisition, it also does not shy away from reflecting some of the true/painful lived experiences ND+ individuals have found themselves in; one being that suicide is encountered at an increased prevalence within our communities. '*Curious Case*' is about a lot of things, but suicide/how Cat perceives/processes and ultimately moves

³⁴⁷ Williams, L. and Muir, O. (2020) Adolescent Suicide and Self injury, 'Mentalizing Theory and Treatment'. Chapter 1: What is Mentalizing? 'Mentalizing Theory and Treatment'. Springer. pp.1-15.

forward from her best friend's death is at its heart. I've tried not to include any specific 'message'/meaning within this, rather just a truer appreciation of individual experience of loss. I hope you find it an interesting read.

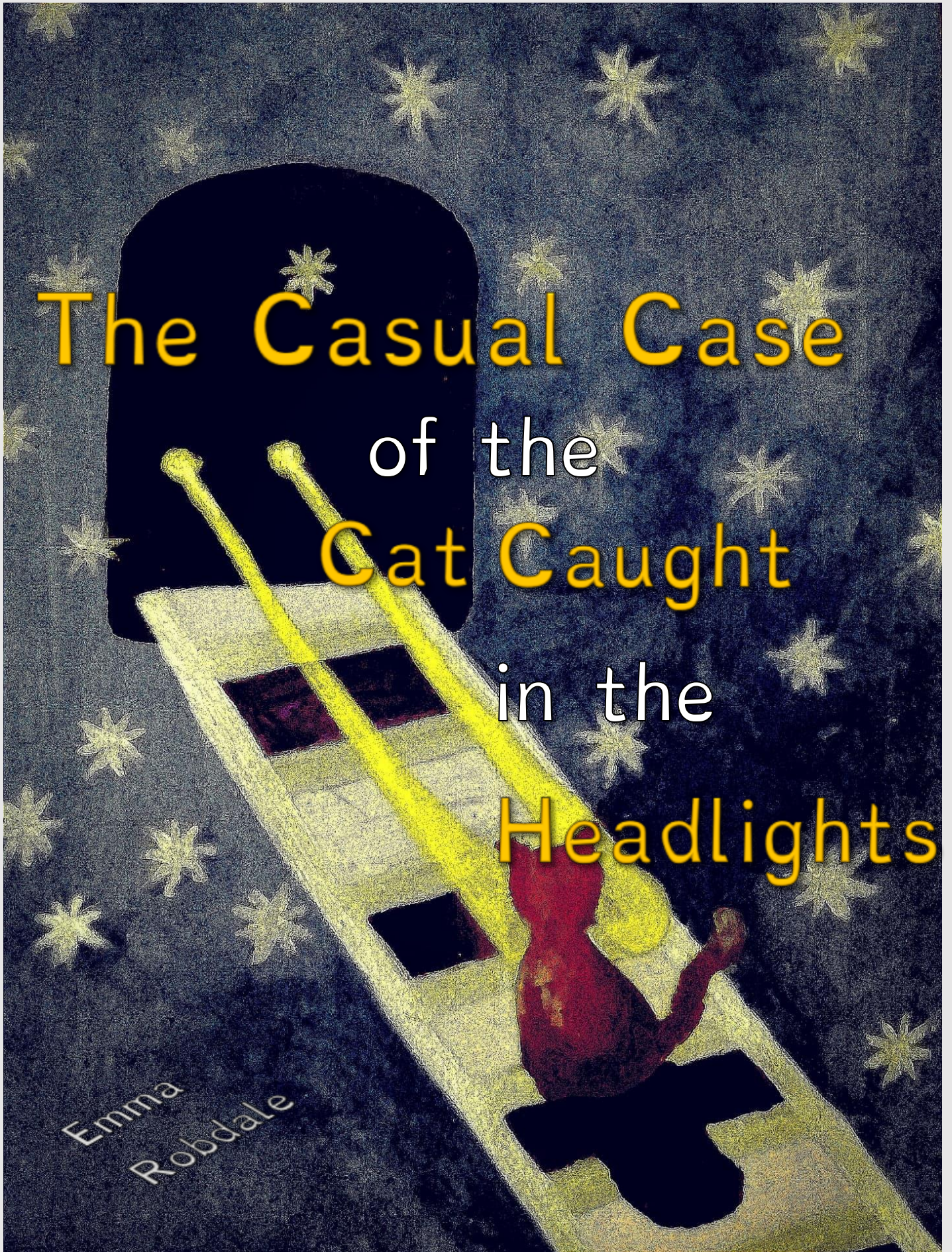
Start of ‘The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights’

[Selected Chapters from the rest of the novel can be found in Appendix E]

[The entire rest of the text/novel can be found in Appendix G]

In 2021, as part of ‘Playing Apart Project’ and Beyond Stereotypes, a symposium which facilitated discussions surrounding more inclusive autism representation, I presented a summary of my research which ended in a dramatic reading of ‘Book-Shelves’ the last chapter of ‘Casual Case’; If you would like to listen to the chapter being read aloud you can follow this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIFDgZEZ2tw> and the chapter reading will be between 14.45-18.29 of the video.

Note: The novel ‘Casual Case’ (and all creative work within this thesis) uses Dyslexie Font. This is a font that is weighted and spaced to make it easier for dyslexics to read. The ‘paper’ throughout is also ‘off-white’, alleviating visual stress for ND+ individuals who experience Irlen Syndrome.



The Casual Case
of the
Cat Caught
in the
Headlights

Emma
Robdale

Dedicated to my one and only mum

Evergreen Hearts

Some of us fall at the right time; brown, speckled, crisping at the edges, quivering in the wind, we have to let go... but there are many who fall too soon; too fresh, still curled... deprived of a chance to fully unfurl and denied the privilege to wilt upon branches; knocked by thoughtless elbows, edges blown too roughly. There are those of us who stuck out, then found the chill too strong.

Soft-spined, warm-veined, we all begin as hair-thin stems. Reaching towards the sun, we billow into multitudes of green-shaded sails. Our forming takes seasons, but our falling?

... a heartbeat in the breeze.



BLURB... YES. I wrote my own blurb

AND...

I'M STARTING WITH IT!

The Curious Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights

Haddon's 'Curious Incident' sneezes into Plath's 'Bell Jar'... An exciting 'outsider' narrative.

Tammy works at 'Barking Mad Snippets'. Her Aunt's dog groomers. After training as a microbiologist, the closest Tammy's come is uncovering tics beneath hair clods. At least. At least she loves dogs because. Because...

"Dogs don't care if you're mad, sad or bad. Dogs don't lie. Cry. And they
NEVER try to die."

PEOPLE. People on the other hand. They do. **TRY TO DIE**. And. And sometimes. **SOMETIMES** they succeed. Tammy's struggling to come to terms with a not so unexpected death. She finds herself spiralling. Trapped and **FIXATED** within her own **REPULSIVE** imagination. And

She **BATTLES** to
see **PAST** bars.
Is **IT** possible.

Possible for life not to go to plan. If. If you accept. Accept that it never actually had one?

Can't Gold-Coat a Snowflake



Everyone knows that each snowflake is different. A frozen fingerprint that doesn't leave a

mark

You can not

catch

one

on the way

down.

It would

m

e

l

t

upon your fingertip.

If you love it,
you just need to find
the strength to
keep it
company

as it's
falling,

and hope.

CHAPTER, ONE

I CAN'T. I. I. Can't. Can't face today. I just want to sleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.
The door's only for steps away from my cocoon (bed).

One.

To.

Three.

For.

No... I didn't walk it while counting. I just said the numbers in my head. I was just 'prepping' for getting up. I turned my alarm off three hours ago. Didn't go back to sleep though. Or maybe I did. For a bit. Because I reminder having a strange dream about using my badminton racket as a toilet brush... then playing badminton. Flecks of poo flew everywhere. I lost all the new friends I'd made.

Anyway.

I'm still in bed.

CHAPTER, TWO

There once was a girl who nailed herself to the bed. She had travelled out specially to buy a hammer and some nails. Then, she lay back, placed one above her big toe, closed her eyes... and tapped it right throw to the wooden board. After she'd done both feat, at the top of the bed, she did the same to her hands...

How she got the last one in?

Nobody knows.

CHAPTER, THREE

I'm on this list you see. 'They', whomever 'they' are.... 'they' know I need help. **BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER.** Because. Because there are just too many people who need it. **HELP.** And. Unless I **JUMP** off a building, then fail to die. I won't get it. The help is souly for people. People who fail to die. **But. But I JUST.** bounce. **Bounce,** bounce around telling people I need help. **NO NET.** I've not found a net.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Another initial assessment...

am I worth longer investment?

Too sick for counselling,

to well for a crisis-team,

can I at least have a drink on the Sertraline?

Time to cook using a Diaza-pan,
though the doctor says 'addicted',
I'm just its biggest fan!
Dish it up,
let it stew the marrow of my bones,
PLEASE turn me into another doped-up Zop-i-clone!!!
Its better, it's better,
its better than over-contemplation,
Dr!!! It's worth it. To let go of delusion and frustration,
strip me of all concentration....

I'll sever all ambition for a moment of clear cognition,
give up fixation, without hesitation,
JUST GIVE ME. One moment. Of pure mental liberation.
Instead. Instead of being. Stuck in never-ending guilt-rotation.

Can my current state be altered?
Or, am I stuck with a mind,
that undoubtedly has faltered.
Tomorrow comes another initial assessment,
wasn't worth the last's long-term investment.

Tick, Tick, Tick,
Adding scores of latest depression test.
Averaging the math of misery,
every service's main quest!
Click, Click, Click,
my data's stored electronically,
"File the new report and CBT referral under (jam-packed) folder 'D'
'Discharged', into the care,
of another (fucked and) underfunded facility."

"They'll give you an initial assessment... but there's a nine-month waiting list,
so take these magic numbers. Call. If you feel you're at risk!"

But there's nothing new to say,
this story's 'saved' on an ever-spinning disk...

Yet,
I'll say it all again...
I'll say it all again...

"You can leave the clipboard at reception" ...

But the outcome's all the same.

CHAPTER, FOUR

Why did she nail herself to the bed? I hear you ask. **WHY DID SHE NAIL HERSELF TO THE BED?** I hear you shout.

... she was not quite sure. **No.** She wasn't quite sure.

But she knew it had something to do with monsters lurking just around the door.

CHAPTER, THE PSYCHIATRIST SAID.

We. We sit and wait. In a dingy, cracked room. We do. Terrified. Excited. That we've finally got here. **THAT SOMEONE IS GOING TO LISTEN.** We look around. We look around and see a man rocking. Rocking and mumbling. We. We listen to the water machine bzzzzzzzzzz. We know. We believe we know. That. That however bad it is. That. That we've got this far. And. And now it'll get better?

The psychiatrist said, "You're not trans your autistic."

The psychiatrist said, "You're not autistic, because you're looking at me."

The psychiatrist said, "If you have friends, you're not autistic."

The psychiatrist said, "What a strong imagination you have! **Why.** Why instead of imagining these horrid things. **WHY.** Why don't you just replace the thoughts with good ones?"

The psychiatrist said, "Don't use the term. **PTSD.** For sexual assault. Do you even have **PTSD?**"

The psychiatrist said, "Don't say delusions. **No.** Please use the terminology 'weird thoughts.'"

The psychiatrist said, "You'll need medication. At least to tide you over the 9 month waiting list."

The psychiatrists said, "I told you! They are doctors in training! They need to be hear. **NOW.** Now tell us your innermost thoughts my dear!!!!"

The psychiatrist said, "Why would you be a paedophile. That's obviously not true."

The psychiatrist said, "You're very **OCD.**"

The psychiatrist said, "insomnia isn't real! You'll just get really tired and fall asleep!"

The psychiatrist said, "Les try new medication."

The psychiatrist said, "It's all just imagination."

... and. And if the psychiatrist. If the psychiatrist **DOESN'T.** Doesn't understand. **THEN.** Then what's the point in telling anyone? **I'VE. WE'VE.** We've got no hope that you'll

understand. Do we? Know. No we don't. If with all of their knowledge. With all of their training. WE. We are left. MISUNDERSTOOD. If not. If not by you. Certainly. Certainly, by ourselves.

CHAPTER, 5

My friend didn't fail to die. She didn't ring a magic number. She didn't get help. Or, didn't get enough help. Or maybe no help could have helped.³⁴⁸ Anyway. I wrote her an omnibus. I thought it should be me who writes the omnibus. I mean u-la-gy! Omnibus sounds like a bus meant for just one person, which would defeat the object. I didn't want her to die. But I knew that one day she would. I was pritty sure it would be like this too because. Because she'd failed to die a few times before. I'm upset. But not surprised.

CHAPTER, U-LA-GY

Cold Side of the Moon

The sun's vast thick wick
was extinguished one day,
by an etheric gust.

Shocked,
nearby stars spun in their sockets,
and fled,
afraid that the gale might ripple out,
and flood their star-beds.
Entire constellations regathered and grouped,
scattering their rays across the cosmos. (in troupes!)

Not one spotlight remained,
in the galaxy left behind.
In the breeze and the chill,
only the moon stood deserted, and still.
Crust clenched tight,
preserving its warmth,
and the last of its light.

It waited,
as shadows crept along its silver-dusted surface,
and sun-kissed craters cooled,
leaving a canopy of darkening soot to pool.

The moon,



³⁴⁸ There wasn't. Isn't. Any help. But. But I think. I think if there was. She. Cat would have avoided 'the help' like a plague. She'd have locked the doors. Hidden away. Until. Until no one came anymore. Because. Because she could have asked for help... right up to the end. But help. The help would have had to be forced. Involuntarily. And. And that's even rarer. It doesn't exist. I wish it did. Even if she would have hated it.

alone,
made no mark in the sky...
stopped waiting for comets,
or sparks, to pass by.
Learned to relax
into dark,
accepting its rust,
knowing all must crumble,
to etheric dust.

... I did a painting too. Scanned it into the computer, sent it to the funeral director. He. He says he can blow it up upon a screen behind me as I read. My friend. She's the moon. Or maybe. Maybe I'm the moon. And she's the sun? Or. Or maybe it's just a poem. Anyway, a lot of people flea when you're miserable. So normally. Normally it's best to keep miserable on the inside.³⁴⁹

CHAPTER, CHINESE FOLKLORE

They have a moon festival. In China. Once a year. They leave these thick lardy cakes outside, upon their doorstep. Like how we leave carrots for Rudolf. Each cake has a sweetened whole hard boiled-egg inside, to represent the moon.³⁵⁰



Anyway. There's a story behind it. Albeit an odd one...

There was once two people who knew. Knew that they would never bore or tire of one-another's company. They felt it. As certain as gravity bound them to earth. They felt it.

And so. And so they decided. Decided to spend eternity in one-another's company. Not a mortal eternity. No. A real eternity. To signify this decision the man. HE. Gave the WOMAN A CIRCULAR purple scarf. IT. It had. NO END. And no BEGINNING. It COULD NOT BE TIED. And so she looped it. LOOPED IT over her head.

³⁴⁹ They. My friend's Parents. Didn't. Didn't let me read it in the end. No. Because. Because it didn't focus. Didn't celebrate her life enough. But. But Death was a part of it. SUICIDE. Is a forbidden word in life. And. And It would seem. A forbidden 'post-death.' too. There's no place for SUICIDE. Not even in heaven... if your Catholic.

³⁵⁰ Don't be fooled by the ornate pastry... it tastes like a sugary fart!

As everyone knows, the only way to become immortal. Is through the eating of magic seeds. Seeds which only unfurl within two hearts that beat to the echo of one another. Seeds that feed upon reminiscences rich in compassion, drenched with devotion.

There were only two of these seeds in existence.

It just so happened that they grew. The seeds. They grew in the couple's garden. A little, unkept plot. Hid amongst thick-leaved thorn bushes and grass that sprouted. Sprouted right up to your elbows.³⁵¹ Within this dense foliage stood two rare and beautiful poppies. And. And held within their drying acorn heads lay the sacred seeds.

Fingers interlaced. The couple chatted excitedly about their plans. As they waited. Waited for the last petals to fall. For the seed cases to ripen. Crisp. And dry.

But before. Before becoming immortal. **THE MAN**. He wanted. Wanted to visit his family. One last time. Because. He was not sure. **HE WASN'T SURE** if he'd be able to afterwards. Because. Because no one had ever done it before.

Become immortal.

...And so. And so he. He just wanted to. Pop back. Tell them. Tell his family that. **THAT HE** was full of love and light. And. And tell them. **TELL THEM**. Goodbye. Because. Because it's very important to tell people goodbye. Yes. I think so.

AND SO. He set off. He did. And. **THE WOMAN**. The woman **TUCKED**. Tucked. Her purple scarf around her neck. And **VOWED**. Vowed to not take it off. Until. Until he returned. **NOT**. Not until. Until they were eternal.

The walls. The walls to the couple's little house were thin. Exceptionally thin. Rice paper thin. And. And so the knowledge of the seed's location. The knowledge of their **ETERNAL** properties. Had been eaten up. Gobbled up by their large-eared neighbour.

He. Their neighbour. He did not have anyone to spend eternity with. And. And given that his heart was hollow. The seeds. If he were to eat them. They could never have grown very **WELL**. But alas. He was **SO** afraid of death. Very afraid. That he. **LONGED** To live. **LIVE** forever. Even. **EVEN** if it would be alone.

He. Their neighbour. He'd been waiting. Waiting for the man to leave. For the couple to detach... He creaked open the fence at the bottom of their garden and crept in like a fox. The woman. She saw. Because she'd. She'd been watching. **SHE'D**. **SHE'D BEEN** worried. Worried something might happen. **WORRIED** that **SOMETHING** bad would happen before. **BEFORE** they became eternal.

³⁵¹ They were far too in love to do mundane things like gardening!

She. The woman. She saw. **SAW** their neighbour rummaging. Rummaging in the direction of the two regal poppies. **Scraping. Scraping** himself **FAST. VERY FAST FOR HIS AGE.** through a thorny bush.

QUICK. Quicker than a kingfisher dives she. **SHE** through open the door and flew. **FLEW** out to the garden. Thorns ripping her ankles, she fled forward. Tore forward. While her neighbour. He. **HE.** scuttled. **SCUTTLED** out. Hand outstretched. Ready. Ready to snatch. **READY TO STEAL.**

AND SO. And so she reached. **REACHED** faster. **FASTER** than **LIGHT.** She reached for the poppy seeds. A second before. He. **BUT** she.

She didn't know what to do! **WHEN SHE HAD THEM. SHE DIDN'T. SHE DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE.** panicked. Panicked. As her neighbour drew himself **UP.** Up out of the bush. **HANDS OUTSTRETCHED. OUTSTRETCHED TOWARDS HER NECK.**

In the confusion. In the terror. In that moment. **SHE.** She swept **THE SEEDS.** Seeds which lay in the palms of her hands. **SWEPT THEM.** up **TOWARDS** her mouth. **PLANTING.** Planting them within it.

SHE swallowed. **GLUMP**³⁵². Gone. The **TWO** Poppy cases. **GONE. BUT.**

Too poppy cases **ARE** two strong. **TOO** many. **TOO** potent.

Her cells. They morphed. Morphed with her. Moulded and beamed into spheres and crescents. In moments they. They cast out rays of light. Erupting beneath her nails. From the thinned skin of wrinkles, beaming out from bones, gleaming out of veins. Her neighbour. He. He was **F L U N G** right back to the garden fence. And her. The woman. Her purple scarf **S P RANG.** Sprang off. **OFF HER HEAD. A HALLO.** It fell to the ground.

She rose. **UP.** up. **UP.** Above the **EARTH.** And. And as she rose. She **GLOWED.**

GLOWED white.

GLOWED bright.

UNTIL. UNTIL. She was. She was immortalized. As the moon. Yes.

When her partner returned. Returned from visiting his family. **HE SAW.** He saw their neighbour. Knocked unconscious. Unconscious at their gate. He knew. **IN THAT INSTANT.** He knew. Something awful must have happened.

He ran.

³⁵² Glump: Glue and lump.

Ran forward. **BUT**. But before he saw. He **KNEW**. Knew in his heart. **THAT THE** poppy seeds would be gone. On the ground. **HE SAW**. **SAW HER PURPLE** scarf. The one. The one he had given her. He looked up. He looked up and saw **HER**. Bright and white³⁵³. And **HE** wept. **WEPT INTO** purple stitches. **HE** wept because he knew. **KNEW** that she was. **THAT SHE WOULD BE**. **FOR E V E R**. Eternally.

Eternally **O U T** o f **R E A C H**.

I was told this story. Told it at school. On ‘Culture Day’. I thought it was odd. **STRANGE**. **IT DIDN’T REALLY**. Have a comprehensible plot. **NOT REALLY**. But now. Now I think I feel it. I feel it **INSTEAD** of comprehending³⁵⁴. You don’t need to understand to feel. **THE MAN**. The man left behind. He. **HE** felt robbed. Like. Like his future had been stolen. Like you. Like she. Hadn’t waited. He’d come home. But you. But she. She’d gone without him. Even. Even if he knew it wasn’t her fault. He. He still felt bitter. Something had come. Something had come and scared you. **DIDN’T IT?** And so. You. In that moment. In that instant. **IN A MOMENT OF CONFUSION**. You decided. To **JUMP**.

BUT. **IT**. It didn’t happen like that. Not with you. Because. Because if I thought that. If I thought that it had happened like that. Then **MAYBE**. Perhaps. It would be forgivable. But. You. **YOU**. Weren’t going anywhere. **YOU HADN’T**. Intended. **HADN’T** planned for tomorrow. You hadn’t even bought a ticket. **PREMEDITATED**.

Pre-meditated suicide carries twice the sentence.

Anyway. That’s why. That’s. Why. Why you. You had to be the moon. In the **U-lar-gy**. Not me. **BECAUSE**. You chose to go. **NOT ME**. I didn’t leave you. You ate the seeds. Ate them **ON PURPOSE**.

CHAPTER, GONE AND DEAD

I hadn’t realized. Realized these were actually two different things. **BECAUSE**. Because I knew that **Cat** was **DEAD**. **YES**. I Knew that immediately. When I was told. **BUT**. But it didn’t occur to me that she was gone. No. Not for a very long time afterwards did I realize that. That dead = gone.

CHAPTER, PICTURE BOOK MEMORIES

When. When I was really young. Strange things started happening. I remember. Remember not being able to touch things with my right hand. Yes. Because. Because I thought it could infect them. Even though I was right-handed. I tried to do everything with my left. I

³⁵³ Presumably beforehand there were only stars! – and our oceans were flat and tideless. No moon.

³⁵⁴ Compretend: To pretend to comprehend something.... When you have know idea!

did. At first I was really slow. But. But gradually I became ambidextrous³⁵⁵. But. But if I forgot. I forgot and did something with my right hand. I'd. I'd have to STOP. Start again. I remember feeling. A feeling emerged inside me. Like. Like someone was out to get me. I didn't know who. No. But someone was.

And. Then I saw them. They. They were in my reflection. Yes. It had been tampered with. My reflection. Altered it so it wouldn't. couldn't smile. It hated me. My reflection. And. And. AND I HATED IT. I avoided windows. Shop windows. Phone screens. But. But Mirrors. Mirrors. They were out to get me.

I. I remember beating on my chest. Beating on my head. Beating on my vagina. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap Tap. I did it. Did it when I was outside. Did it when I was nervous. When things were too much. But. But they. My parents. YES. My teachers. YES. They. They told me to stop. Because. BECAUSE. It looked weird. SO. So I did. I stopped. Now. Now I look more well. Yes. I. I just tap. Tap internally. INSTEAD. Internal tapping drives you mad. Yes. Like Chinese water torture.³⁵⁶

I. I WAS BULLIED. Bullied anyway. Even without the tapping. Even. Even though I'd stopped. I never knew why I was bullied. AT SCHOOL. I never worked it out. The teachers. The teachers said it was because. Because. I was STUBBORN. Unwilling. UNWILLING to fit in. BUT. But that wasn't true. NO. I wasn't unwilling. BECAUSE. THAT. That means on purpose. Doesn't it? And I. I didn't do it on purpose. I JUST. Wasn't very interested. Or. Or good at skipping. AND. And I really liked worms³⁵⁷. IT'S TRUE. I did. But. But the thing is. The thing is. I didn't want to give them the satisfaction of my reaction. No. No. I wouldn't give them that. That's what 'they'. The Bullies. wanted. Me to feel. So. THEY COULD SEE. yes. They wanted to see me feel. SEE ME FEEL Bad. SEE MY CRY. See me crumple. So. So I had to stop. Feeling that is. I stopped feeling things at the same time that they happened. YES. I learned to feel on a different timescale. Cry in a different zone. Learned to take feelings home. WEIGHT. Wait. Wait to be alone.

I. I learnt to be neutral. Robotic. Then. Then learnt to make robotic look natural. YES. Because. Because crying is idiotic. And. It's what they wanted. I. I did it so well. Became so good. Good. At. Separating. That. That. It. disappeared. When I got home. It. It was gone. The feeling didn't wait for me. No. It evaporated.

³⁵⁵ Which for me meant 'equally bad/clumsy' with both hands!

³⁵⁶ ... trapped in a dark room, with a singular drop of water drooping upon the top of your head. Over. And over.

³⁵⁷ I was once invited to a girls house (my mum arranged it!) and took all her dolls out of their 'house' and replaced them with differing sized worms. Not. Not to be mean. NO. But. Because worms are real. ALIVE. You could play with them. But. But dolls. They. They were just plastic.

Often. I have no idea how. How or why I feel. No. Or What makes me feel SAD. Mad. Or BAD. Because. Because it just crops up. The feeling. RANDOMLY. It. It'll just crop up when. When I'm anxious. When. When I'm in a job interview. When I'm dancing. But. But I don't know what it relates to. Or. Or if. If in-fact if it relates to EVERYTHING. At the same time. It's too much. I shut down. Back to neutral. I just choose one thing and FOCUS on it. FOCUS REALLY STRONGLY. REALLY LONGLY. REALLY LOGICALLY. It could be an argument from five years previous. It. It could be a snide comment a colleague made yesterday. But. But I'll become convinced. I'll convince myself that. That if I can just fix. Just think myself out of that one thing. That. That. It'll go away. IT'LL ALL go away. Pain. Confusion. Borderline Delusion.

But it never does. No. They. They never do. My 'superpower' is? Is that. That you can't shock me. NO. Or. Or if you do. I wouldn't know. No. You. You could say anything to me now. Yes. HORRID. Scarring. VULGAR. You. You could tell me there's an earthquake. Yes. But. But I wouldn't feel frightened. No. Not yet. Not now.

I don't. CAN'T. Go further back. TO school. School memories. THEY. The memories. Have a block. Like. It's like I know WHAT HAPPENED. I KNOW. I used to be. To be an untouchable. I KNOW. I know. THAT PEOPLE. Children. USED. Used their WORDS to mock. I THINK. I think I know that. But I'M. It's like I'm. I'm reading about it instead. Reading about me. Like you are. Instead. Instead of it being me. They. The memories. They are part of someone else's story that I. I just happen to be able to ACCESS. Does that make sense?

ANYWAY. I hope. WHAT I MEAN TO SAY IS. That I hope. That in a few years. SOON. That this. This will be the same. That this will float off. DIS-connect. It won't be me. It won't be me whose LOST someone. IT. It will. Will be someone else's memory. That I. THAT I just happen. Happen to have ACCESS to. I THINK. Think I'd prefer that. It. It might have already happened. BECAUSE. I'm upset. Upset at many things. But. But I think I'm neutral. Neutral to her death.

Chapter, Imprint.

I keep. I keep one of her buttons. In a little box by my bed. The box has a beetle sticker on it. She. Cat that is. Gave it to me. Yes. She did. A year after I'd met her. For my 13th birthday. She. She had stuck the sticker upon it herself, inside. Inside there was another one of a beetle grub... as if it had dug itself out of the ground and metamorphosised. Some nights. Some nights I open the box, take out the button, and press it into my finger. HARD. As hard as I can. Until. Until it leaves an imprint. The four holes, my finger is left with the four holes... and. And I wait. Waiting for my thumb to forget. Waiting for the marks to fade. I will always be waiting. Pain isn't a rod. No. For me it's a ripple. If I threw the button into a pond. It would splash. At first. Yes. But. But then It'd expend. Ripple out right to the edges. Everything. Everything touched. Inescapably changed.

You. You can't take it back. And. And what happened ripples through me. Even when I'm not aware. I'm sure it does. And. And it's why I'm too tired. Too tired to read a text. Why I'm often glacial. Why I melt into mornings, dripping only a foot out of bed. Why my body often refuses to touch the day. Because. Because it doesn't want to start a new ripple. For everything to be ruined anew. It would rather recoil back. Back beneath a snow think duvet. Snakelike, coiling. I find myself unable to produce warmth.

CHAPTER, IT WAS A PURPLE DAY

I HAVE this thing. I don't actually know when it started. So don't ask. I just know I have it. NOW. I see. DAYS. I see. DAYS as colours. I don't mean. I DON'T MEAN. I DON'T mean that I SEE Colours. In days. NO. Everyone does that. I MEAN. Mean that each day. IS. A colour.

Monday = Red (scarlet).

Tuesday = Blue (midnight).

Wednesday = Yellow (mustard)

Thursday = Blue again (Probably because I often mixmatch 'T'-days!)

Friday = Purple (Violet)

Saturday = green (pea)

Sunday = orange (SUNNY-day)

I see. WHEN I REMEMBER. I see memories in certain colours CORRESPONDING. Corresponding to the days. Days of the week. So. So if. If I went to the shops on a Tuesday. The. That memory. THE memory of me getting the milk. IT. IT would. IT WILL be kind of a BLUE. As if. As IF THE memory has colour filter. And that's. THAT'S WHY. Why. I HATE PURPLE. Because. She. CAT. Got hit on a Friday.³⁵⁸ I. I wasn't there. But. But the memory is PURPLE all the same.



And now. Now I don't like to have. Have things of that colour. NO. I have a box under my bed. FULL. Full of all the purple: pencils, cushions, a lizard ornament, two eyeliners...

³⁵⁸ This is also why the big floating u-lar-gy wind lips are purple! If you noticed. The ones blowing out the sun candle.

THE PURPLE PUPILED PRINCESS (its actually her cornea that's purple, but that isn't alliterative)

The queen of the land. Which land, you will never know. She. She despised purple. Yes. YES she did. Even. EVEN THE thought of the colour was banished. BANISHED. From her kingdom. ON PENALTY OF DEATH. Any purple flowers DARING to push their heads UP were plucked and burned. Red cloths were forbidden to be washed with blue. JUST IN CASE. The dyes were to mix.

SO. And so. When she. THE QUEEN. had a daughter. Well. She. SHE WAS DISTRAUGHT. Mortified. Besides herself. WHEN. Her daughter. Her first born. Opened up her eyes. BECAUSE. Because. They. They were purple. Not bluey purple. Brownie purple. Or greeny purple NO. Pure Violet PURPLE.

SHE. The queen. She wanted. Wanted to sentence her daughter. VIOLET. To death. AT BIRTH. She did. To those. TO THOSE WHO CALLED HER UNMOTHERLY. She. The queen. SHE SAID IT WASN'T. BECAUSE. Because she was a mother. So. SO BY THE VERY NATURE OF HER DOING IT. Slaughtering her daughter. It. It was OF COURSE motherly.

THE KING. Yes. The king. He. He wasn't very bothered. No. BECAUSE. Because Violet was just a daughter. BUT. But He. He did suggest. SUGGEST A COMPROMISE. Because. Because he thought it was a bit of a waste of his wife's energy. To grow VIOLET for nine months. Only to behead her the next day. He was a practical man.

SO. HE. The KING. Suggested. That instead. Instead of executing the baby. They. That they simply get their physician to remove her eyes. YES. That sorted the problem. Didn't it?

“DON'T THROUGH THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATHWATER.” Just gouge out its eyes so it cannot cry. Then the bath will forever be dry.

As the now un-purpled princess grew. THE QUEEN. Yes. The queen also grew. Grew fond of her. Princess VIOLET that is. She gargled. The princess. Her first word was, 'Queen'. She said it. Said it while crawling round the palace gardens, gently tracing a snail shell with her fingertips.

The queen. THOUGH. Though she thought her measures reasonable. VERY REASONABLE INFACT. Realized. Realized that her daughter. VIOLET. That. That if she ever found out what she. The Queen. Had ordered. Her daughter. Might resent her... AND. And so. ON PENALTY OF DEATH. The Queen. FORBADE. Forbade anyone to talk about seeing. About eyes. Sight. BLINKING. In Violet's presence.

Princess Violet. She would never know. Never know that she couldn't see. **OR.** Or that she didn't have eyes. **Because. BECAUSE** It's not. Not the lie that's damaging. **IS IT? NO.** It's the realization. **THE** knowing. Comprehending. That's when the damage sets in. **ISN'T IT?**

VIOLET. Violet grew. Yes. She didn't shrink. **No.** She grew to sixteen. A happy, loving. Creative young woman. **Who. Who** loved to sing. Her voice. It was heard. Heard by all. The big the small. The ugly and the tall. As it poured out of her bedroom Tourette.

AND. And it was. It was heard by a spotty. **BIG NOSED.** Servant. **He. He** was very nice. **YES.** Just quite ugly. **HE'D.** He'd stand outside the door. **EVERY** morning. When she sung. She knew. Knew he was there. **Because. BECAUSE** he tapped his foot. She had exceptional hearing.

One day. **HE.** He was leaning against her door. **And. And** she opened it... **HE TUMBLED** into her room. She giggled. **Yes. And. And** she couldn't see. **But** he blushed. Hormones flushed. He reached forward. **REACHED** forward and touched her hand with his fingertips. **And. And** she traced it. His hand. Traced it up. **UP.** Up until she was upon his shoulder. She'd stepped close. Instinctively. Instinctively he traced her spine. From the bottom up. **UP** to her neck. **He. He** wasn't used to attention. **NO.** What with being ugly.

SOON. All too soon. **THEY BEDDED.** Meaning. Meaning they had sex. Fingers. Toes. Arms. Legs. Interlaced. Her hand swept. Caressed. down. **DOWN.** Down his face. **AND.** And too late. Too late did **HE.** The servant. **Grab** it. Her hand that is.

"**WHAT.** What are these. What are these moist balls? **WHAT.** What have you put upon your face?" The princess lightly prodded his eyes with her thumb and forefinger.

He blinked. Instinctively. He blinked. Then he. The servant. **PANICKED.** **Because. Because** he did not want to hurt the princess. **And If. If** the queen. If she found out. That he'd told her. **TOLD VIOLET.** About her eyes. About her lack of eyes. **HE'D.** He'd be a dead man walking.

"They are grapes. I balanced two grapes upon my face." His breathe quickened.

Violet stopped. Stopped touching him. And sat up, "No. No you haven't. **Because. Because** they're embedded. Embedded and twitching."

"I have. They're just very loose." He covered. Covered his face with his hands.

"Take them out then."

"What?"

"Take them out!" She. The princess demanded.

And. And of course he couldn't. No. For they were embedded. Yes. Part of him. So. And So he told her. The princess. **HE TOLD HER EVERYTHING.** About purple. About her eyes. About how. How they. Her eyes. They had not been wrong. But. But they had not. Had not fitted with the kingdom's colour scheme.

Princess Violet. She. In that instant. **REALIZED.** She knew. That. That she'd never trust. Or love. **NO.** She wouldn't be able to do either of those things. He. **THE SERVANT.** He. He kissed her on the head. Tucked her up tight. He. He tried to make sure she was alright. Asked. Asked her if she wanted him to stay the night?

SHE DIDN'T. no. She just. Just wanted him to comb her hair. **GENTLY.** Gently from the top. Yes. So. So it had no knots. And so. So he did. Then he left. After. After he left. We. We used to comb each other's hair. If one of us was sad. Yes. Because. Because it felt nice. Like. Like by untangling knots so close to the brain. That. That somehow it helped. Internally. I always felt warm. Like I could go to sleep. Like. Like I never wanted it to stop. But. But if we did it too long our scalps hurt the next day.

She. Princess Violet. She didn't fall asleep. No. Instead. **INSTEAD.** She fell. Fell. Out of a window. Yes. Yes she did.

The queen. She wept. Wept into a red handkerchief. For it was a Monday. And. And the King. He was saddened. Yes. Even though she. Violet. Was only a daughter. He was still saddened. **EVERYONE.** Yes everyone. They believed it was a tragic accident. She'd. Princess Violet. She'd not realized the window was open. **AND.** And leant. And leaned against it. Trusting it to be there. Closed and secure.

EVERYONE EXCEPT THE SERVANT. Yes. He. He strongly suspected. That. That it wasn't an accident. That it was him. Him who'd pushed her out the window. Figuratively. And he. He had to live with that.. Maybe it would be easier. Easier for him to live with himself. If. If people knew. Knew what he had said. **WHAT HE HAD UNVEILED.** To Princess Violet. Even though. Even though he would be promptly executed. But. But it wasn't really the servant, was it? Because. **BECAUSE.** One word. One action. Can't. Can't change a lifetime. **NO.** She. The Princess. was already primed.

Or. Or at least that's what I tell myself. Yes. I have to. Yes. It wasn't my words. It wasn't my actions. Even. Even if they may have been a catalyst.

CHAPTER, STRANGE

I watched six films. Until 5.37am: 'Girl Interrupted', 'The Dead Poet Society', 'Man on a Ledge.'... **BUT I.** But I didn't cry. **NOT EVEN A DAMP EYE CORNER.** I'd hoped I would. Cry. **BECAUSE.** These films. **THESE FILMS.** All made me cry. When I **WATCHED THEM.** Watched them the first time. **ALONE.** I only cry at films if I **WATCH THEM** alone. I. I didn't cry at the funeral. It's been six months. And I just feel... **FINE. FUCKING FINE.**

She's. CAT'S dead. And. And I feel? I FEEL FUCKING GUILTY. Guilty because. Because I don't. I DON'T feel sad. How ironic is that?

It's very ironic. That's how much.

I THINK. I THINK I know. I suspect why. WHY. I don't feel sad. It's because. BECAUSE. I knew. The first time was six years ago. THE FIRST TIME SHE TRIED TO DIE. And. I think. KNOWING. Knowing. It would happen. HAPPEN again. EVEN. EVEN KNOWING IT WAS POSSIBLE. A possibility. That I. That I started grieving then. WHILE. While she was alive. I DIDN'T'. Didn't go into denial. INSTEAD. Instead I STARTED grieving. So that. When she died. FOR REAL. I didn't. Didn't have to grieve. Because. Because I've already done it. SMART. So really. I think. I THINK. I'VE BEEN GRIEVING. Grieving for a really long time. MAYBE. Or maybe. I decided. I DECIDED. I'D stop. STOP. loving her. JUST A LITTLE BIT. The first time she tried to die. So. So that it'd be easier.

PEOPLE sometimes. SOMETIMES stop visiting RELATIVES. Especially old relatives. When they get sick. WHEN. When they get cancer. If you. IF THEY. stop. Stop caring. GRADUALLY. Then. Then WHEN THE AWFUL THING happens. IT'LL be ok. WON'T IT? Because. BECAUSE you've PREPARED. Prepared NOT TO CARE. You. I cared too much to care. Does that make sense?

No. I'm not sure it does.

CHAPTER, FLUTTERBYE

The two-legged half-winged butterfly stumbled,
staggering off the leaf,
And landed. She landed upside-down. In a puddle. Her legs flailing.
Nearby butterflies. They saw. THEY SAW AND. And fluttered up.

UP

and away.
Which made her die,
long before she was dead.

CHAPTER, SIX

I read a BBC article, 'I call my OCD Olivia'. Apparently, if you personify OCD, it's supposed to make it less TERRIFYING. The lady in the article. Her. Her creature IT. IT was a cute bunny. It. IT had big ears because it was sensitive to nose. Large eyes, so. SO it could see everything. Strong legs to run away. And it. it was easily startled. Easily overwhelmed.

I thought. I THOUGHT. I'd try ...

‘I CALL MY OCD CLAW-DIA.’



Clawdia's got huge claw-like hands for pincering onto worry and not letting go. She lures happy thoughts into her clutches with her headlight. She will then STAB these thoughts with her penis stinger. Impregnating them with pane and guilt.³⁵⁹ Clawdia's also got virus bodies for feet. And she tramples disease and infection wherever she scurries. She can usually be found tramping over old memories; changing, altering, exacerbating, reliving. Contaminating. And tweaking at them with her long fingernails.

She's basically a giant scorpion. And. And that's probably her only redeemable feature... I like bugs. A scorpion is an arachnoid. It looks quite a bit like a crab, doesn't it? But that's. A crab. That's actually a crustacean.

Anyway. Personification hasn't helped... The picture I drew is far worse than it not having an image. OCD never had a penis before. A penis makes everything worse.

Semen

It's evil. Product of sex. Swims up the cunt.

³⁵⁹ I used to have bad anxiety about getting pregnant and catching an incurable STD (at the same time!) An I'd go to the clinic around three. Three/Four times a year. To. To check a shaving rash bump. Just. Just after I'd shaved.

The six-headed hydra sperm,
obnoxiously heads to the ovaries.

CHAPTER, SEVEN

So, what happened to the girl nailed to the bed? Did she fall into an enchanted sleep? Slowly bleed to death from wounds? Did Prince Charming come to her rescue.... but upon discovering that no monster or which kept her there, jump straight back out the widow from witch he came³⁶⁰?

OR. Or did she rip the nails out one by one, wait for tissue to grow. Tendons and sin-yous to mend. Roll herself off that god-dam bed, to face. Face the next day?

I don't know. I DON'T KNOW. What she did.

CHAPTER, BLIZZARD

There was once a very tiny fairy. And though. Though the fairy had known sparkles and light, she was so small. So small that she could only fit one feeling, or one memory, inside at a time.

And

She awoke one day to find that all her sparkles were out of reach

She felt very, very cold

The feeling got stuck

Not just for an hour or a day

It followed her around like a shadow

Until. Until she couldn't remember. Remember the warm glow at all

So

She flew out,

Into a blizzard.

And her light

Her light went out for good.

³⁶⁰ Screaming "Dat Princess be a whole new level of CRAY CRAY."



CHAPTER, C

Catherine. If you want to know her name. 'Cat' or 'Catty' for short. She hated it when people spelt it with a K. A Kicking K. She wasn't one of those, she was a gentle curly C.

C for Cave.

Cat was Polish. Or her parents were. She'd inherited their directness. Her eyes. Burned intensely. And. And when she told you something. You never doubted. Doubted for one second that it wasn't true.

I liked that.

She told me. Told me that she loved me. We. We were playing in the roots of a tree. An old Oak. I loved her too. But not in the way. Not in the way she wanted me to. Not. Not in the way she loved me. If I had. Maybe. Maybe she'd. She'd still be here. But. But you can't fake love. Can you?

And. And no matter how much I loved her, it'd just slop off. She could never keep it. It'd burn in her hand. INTENSELY. For only a second. Like a sparkler. Before being forgotten. And. And the warmth would escape the cave. It was always too cold.

Caves. Are wombs,
as well. As tombs.

Caging. bats by day,
Birds. by night.
Creatures known best. for flight.

A baby Star

 ling falls from roof,
 If by ground
 it has not flapped,
 wings will break,
 will crack.
 ribs will crack.

CHAPTER, PHONE CALL

When. When He told me. Cat's Dad. Because. Because it was him. Him who told me. When. He told me. Told me. That she was dead. It didn't feel. Like she was dead. It felt like someone had. Had just told me. Told me that she was dead.

I wanted to ring her. Cat. To tell. Tell her the news. That was my first thought. That I. I wanted to ring her. And. And tell her. Tell her that her dad had rung me. To tell me. Tell me that she was dead. Strange. How strange is that?

And. And then. And then I realized that Cat wouldn't be going to the movies with me. Saturday. She'd. She'd stood me up.

CHAPTER, I'M NOT UPSET SHE'S DEAD.

It's. It's not her dyeing that upsets me. Well. at first it did. But. That wore off. Quickly. It didn't upset me that she was dead. No. It upset me that she was gone. It upset me that she didn't answer the phone... no matter how many voicemails I let. It upset me that I had bought her a birthday present. No. Not before she was dead. I bought it afterwards. Because. Because I saw it in the shop and knew she would like it. I wasted my money, didn't I? It. It was a book. A book on typography. She. She was obsessed with handwriting. Psychoanalysing. Through handwriting. I'm not. I'll never read it.

The Butterfly Box (Lepidopterology)

Alive. We Flitted. Flapped. Floated.
Flowers of the sky.
We were vibrant.
Young.
Bold.
Fearless.
Dancing circles in the wind.
Tumbling. Tailing. Tackling one another.
We surged. Soared. Sailed through highs.
Never to be speared.

Too fast to photograph.
We hadn't forecast how we'd be hunted.
Hounded.
Harpooned by tiny pins.
We fell as rainbow thuds.
Too beautiful to discard.

Our sky still dizzy. Darting.
Daggered with wings.
I noticed not until the air was barren,
and no new butterflies arose. Derelict.
Dormant.
Dead.
And boxed.

Each one pressed.
Preserved. Protected.
Still extravagant.
Painted.
Patterned.



Paralyzed by pins.
Dots. Stripes.
The iridescent of flapless wings
captures and captivates,
all who stagnate.

Reality tears. Ensnares. Wounds.
Try not to get tied. Tricked.
Trapped amongst limp airbrushed wings.
Vacant memories,
their ghosts spiral white against the breeze.
But.
Fresh heartbeats can't save them.

CHAPTER, SPIDER

If you give spider's caffeine, they spin perfectly symmetrical webs. Never missing a strand. Not a strand. But if you give them weed, they spew out lassos. Which hang flatly. Without pattern. And. And the spider then slinks to the bottom of the container.

At uni I definitely should have drunk more coffee and done less slunking. Then maybe I would have lasted longer than a year.

But here is the question. How. How pray may I ask... how do you give a spider caffeine? The study never explained that. And so, I can only imagine a spider with four miniature dolls house cups of tea (or espresso shots) steadying itself with its four other feet.

I guess. I guess it could hold two cups of tea, and two spliffs at once? Then maybe both extremes would be cancelled out, and. And it'd just do an alright job. I think that's. That's most of us. Isn't it?

(Note: Getting a spider stoned, I think, would be easy, just hot-box a jam-jar)

Me and Cat stood on a bridge. We called it spider bridge. It was latticed with metal, making up the structure. And these. These fat-bottomed Spider's webs joined beams to each other. Crafted like lace. The shear magnitude astounding... many spanned. Spanned five to six meters. ³⁶¹How did they loom so far? Me and Cat. We theorized.

Did they shoot the web out six meters at once (like spider man)?

Cat studied the triangular cuts of the design. She absolutely loved architecture. Whenever we went someplace new she'd. She'd find a structure she liked and sketch it. Cat deduced. Deduced that the spider had done it in sections. Starting from the centre, then spanning outwards. Round and round and round, spiralling the circumference.

³⁶¹ It would be as if I. ALONE. Completely by myself. Managed to plan. Plan and then build the Targe Mahal! Without thousands of slaves!

But I. I imagined. Imagined that the spiders absailed between the metal rods. Using their bodies as anchors. And then the wind. The wind would reel them out to another beam. Then. From that that initial chord. They could bulk the rest. The rest of the web.

It probably depends on the spider. Doesn't it? Maybe there isn't any one way. Any set rules. It depends.

Whether it's a thrill-seeking flyer, or a studious, meticulous planner. If I studied their designs closely..., maybe. Maybe I could deduce. Deduce their 'spider-nality'. Just above my head, a spider had built three webs. Like a Venn-diagram. The middle one slightly forward. If a fly. If a fly were to try zigzagging around it. It'd succumb to one of the others. Cat admired a three-dimensional web. Instead of spreading out thin. Thin and wide like a dreamcatcher. The spider had layered it. Bits went in and out. Like an egg-box. Each. Cup. An. Inescapable. Coffin.

CHAPTER, COFFIN

I looked at it. Plane except for a rectangular plaque, **FOUR NAILS HOLDING IT DOWN**. Catherine Hearts. Reductionated³⁶² to her name. Year of birth. Year of death. I looked at it and thought. How can her whole life fit into that coffin? It's so small. And the answer is. It doesn't. No. Life exists outside the coffin. Yes. You take nothing with you except the skin and bones you came with. Her life? I keep that. Little bits of it. And. And when I die. They'll be gone too. And. It all won't of mattered to begin with. Or. Maybe it did. Because. Because at the time it seemed too.

CHAPTER, DRENCHED

We. **WE WERE TOGETHER**. Next to the river. **AND. WE WANTED TO SWIM**. So we stripped. **STRIPPED** down to our underwear. **I WAS FATTER**. Fatter than **CAT**. And this meant. **MEANT THAT**. I. **THAT** I forced myself to jump in. **FIRST**. Jump in **FAST**. **THE COLD**. It. It knocked. **KNOCKED THE** breath out of me. **AND I SWAM**. Swam fast to stay alive.

"**I'VE DONE IT! DONE IT NOW... SO YOU. YOU HAVE TO TOO!**" I gasped. Gasped from the riverbed.

And. **AND**. She did. Backwards. She flipped. **I NEVER KNEW**. I never knew she could **FLIP**. Cat. Even though. Even though I'd known her a lifetime. **SHE ALWAYS**. Always surprised me. **WE DIDN'T DROWN**. No. We didn't drown because. Because we weren't in a stupid American high school drama. Where they break into a swimming pool... and someone slips. Cracks their head. How often does that actually **HAPPEN?**

We were outside. **OUTSIDE NAKED**. Vulnerable to the elements. **BUT Strong**. Stronger than the current. That is. That is until we saw. Saw group of school children

³⁶² Reductionated (pronounced: re-duc-tion-ated.)

APPROACHING. IN A SECOND. Bravery fled. WE DASHED OUT. GRABBED our cloths.
And hid. Hid behind bushes. GIGGLING. Like two forest nymphs.

CHAPTER, ATE

She was beautiful. But. But Cat never knew. Never knew. She never knew she was
beautiful. I wrote her this. But I. But I never gave it to her. Now. Now I never will. But I
never. But I never would have. I NEVER would have anyway.

A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing

Save your lies. I know it to be fact.

If I were pretty, I'd be happy. Wouldn't I?

WOULDN'T !!!!

My one chance comes at a price.

I'll borrow. LOAN. Make payment plans.

It's worth every penny. Every grand.

JUST CHANGE ME

Change me, so that I don't hate me

re-a-ran-ge me, so.

SO that I can face my face

remove the parts starvation does not reach.

Mould

me

TO...

TO

a

shape

that

doesn't

want

to

die.

I know

I know. that the world.

IT would be more beautiful

if I were not upon it. AND. That's why.

That's why. It tortures me. With hunger.

single swallows live inside me.

Fluttering in my belly. I feel them.

Itching across my thighs, hips, cheeks...

SPLIT ME OPEN

SPLIT ME OPEN

Drain

the

fat

like

oil

S t r e t c h my l e g s with pins

So that I can stand up,

Stand up. To the world.

KILL ME.

KILL ME OR CURE ME.

But please, PLEASE

Don't

leave me

CHAPTER, INSTITUTION

I visited you. I visited you every weak. They'd let me through the buzzer doors. Then the second buzzer doors. I'D walk down the corridor. The grey. And always well heated corridor.

To your cell. You hadn't done anything wrong. **No. But. But** you needed to be there. **Yes. AND.** And I'd tell you. Tell you what I'd done in my week. **NEVER. NEVER.** Had you been so interested. **SO DEVOTED. TO** every morsel of my life. Each home-made meal. Every stranger I waved to. **Because. Because.** I was a window. A real window. To life.

I'd plan ways. In my head. Ways that we could escape. I'd. I'd say I needed to talk. To the nurse. And **YOU'D.** You'd run. **RUN.** I'd tell you, tell you were the secret buzzers were. **AND YOU'D RUN.** But. **But** you didn't seem to be getting better. **No. Not** at all. Not for a long time. You seemed to be getting weaker. **GETTING** less. Rotting. Wilting. To a core. I didn't want them to force feed. **But. But.** I thought. I thought you'd fade away to nothing. To a shadow. I thought you just might.

You didn't. Not then. You didn't. You came back. Became an apple. Stayed. You stayed a while longer. And that's. That's all any of us can do.

Celtic Knot

Every weave a memory,
Intermingled, entwined. I thought.

Inseparable.

Robust, strong, beautiful,
where you ended. I began.

Where you began I ended.

Where I began. You ended.

Where I ended. You began.

Now a frayed and feeble string,

kinked where my body

refuses to forget.

Before
have
again when we began.

I know that I am not her. I know that I am not her. I'm not her. I know. I do know that. **But. But** I can't remember before. **No. Truly.** I can't. **BEFORE HER.** her. Are someone else's memories. That I just happen to access to. I think. I think I started again. I started



CHAPTER, PHOTOGRAPH

I didn't. I realized after. After the dying. That. THAT. I didn't have any pictures of us. NO. She. CAT. She hadn't let me. The thing about someone. Someone that doesn't like themselves very much... is that. Is that THEY. They. They don't want themselves to be captured. CAPTURED. UGLY. Do they? I understand. I THINK I DO. SHE'D. She'd ensure. She'd ask around to make sure. MAKE sure that no one had caught her on a camera phone. HELL would pay. Yes. HELL would pay if you had. ANYWAY. I DREW THIS. It's not much. NO. And she'd be angry. Definitely. BUT. But I wanted something. Something I could put in a frame. Even. Even if. Even if it's not very good. ITS NOT US. NOW. NO. it's us before. Before

we left the cave WHEN. When we were inseparable.³⁶³

CHAPTER, BED

Today. TODAY. I thought about getting out of bed for a really. REALLY. long time. Then. Then. I ENVISAGED breakfast. Really. Hard. I THOUGHT. I THOUGHT about calling a friend. And I IMAGINED. What they'd say. I DIDN'T. Eat breakfast. It was dinnertime when I got out of bed. And then. I was tired again.

THE PODLESS PEA

MUM. My mum.

SHE USED TO tuck us into a layer of velvet green.

SATURDAY. Saturday is a green day. And Saturday was the day.

The day you always came to stay. To sleep at mine.

But. But one day. You rolled out. Out and away. And. And I don't think. I don't think I was ready for that.

³⁶³ After. After this picture you had betrayed me. Betrayed me by growing taller. It doesn't seem like such a betrayal now. But. But when you did it. It was a heinous crime.

Before. Before bed. I. I. I had a list of all of the evil things I'd done in the day. Yes. Yes I did. So. So. I could tell mum³⁶⁴. Confess to mum before I slept. So. So they'd all be gone for the next day. So. So I wouldn't need to keep on adding. But. But now. Now I'm grown. I know. I know she can't take away sin. No one can. It. It sticks to you like grease.

CHAPTER, BEGINNINGS

Two pees in a pod. Two pees in a pod standing amongst tough beanstalks. Like the ones my grandad used to grow. Used to grow them. He did. We drew stuff. At college. I found it hard. College. I'd always found it hard... **SCHOOL. STAYING** still. Learning. **LISTENING. EDUCATION.**³⁶⁵....



Dirty words. Disgusting. **ASH IN MOUTH.** Words. Putrid. **YUCK.**

I'VE FOUND IT HARD. Ever since. Ever since I was made to go. I didn't. I **WASN'T** paired to **Clawd-ia** before. Before **School.** I didn't. I didn't know she existed. Because no one told me. No one told me it would happen. No one told me it could happen. **THAT CLAWD-IA WAS A SYMPTOM OF SCHOOL.** And now? **NOW.** I can't forget.

It. **CLAWDIA.** She won't let me. Forget. I don't think I ever will. She's weevilled into my neurons. **Claw-dia.**

Might as well call it. **OCD.** Call it **CLAWDIA** now. When **Clawd-ia** got lodged. Lodged in my head. Concreted to my body. I was alone with her. I'd never. I'd not found someone else. Someone who found it hard. Someone else who hid a monster. Until **Cat. SHE DIDN'T NAME IT.** Her monster. No. **WE NEVER TALKED ABOUT THEM.** Not directly. But I could see it. The outline. Its outline sometimes drifted into her shadow. But. But. I don't think **Cat** ever saw it. Her monster. It snuck. **SNUCK** up on her.

CHAPTER, HOSPITAL

Its hard. Visiting someone after a suicide attempt. Yes. Because. Because there isn't a code of conduct. A code of good practice on what to say. There is. There is for funerals. But not. Not attempted suicides. That's new **UNSPOKEN** territory. You. You have to go. But. But the closer you get to them. The heavier you feel. It's not like you can bring a

³⁶⁴ She. My mum bought me worry dolls once. Tiny people who lived in a box. But. But there were only five of them. I asked if she would buy me more. But. But she said no.

³⁶⁵ **HOW.** How can everyone read so fast! Why. Why am I on the first page while they're on the last! Head-aches. Mind Breaks. It's all I can do to stay awake!

‘Get Well Soon’ card.... Unless you added on the inside ‘And don’t do it again!’ You’re happy their alive... but their probably not. You just have to keep moving your feet. Keep putting one in front of the other. Until. Until you’re by their bedside. Then. Then just see what happens. Hope. Hope you get it ‘right’.

She. She asked me if I could take her key and feed her bunny. Lady Grey. A large, heavy and incredibly soft house rabbit. It had floppy ears which trailed along the ground when it walked. Cat always washed and dried them. The ears before she put it to bed each night. I brought her some books. Cat. Not the rabbit. We chatted about other stuff. As if. As if she hadn’t just tried to die. Then. Then I went and fed her bunny. It was then that I found it. A NOTE. A note upon the kitchen countertop. It was short. It asked whoever found it if they could give Lady Grey to her cousin, Peter. And. And then it gave detailed instructions to what Lady Grey liked, and how she should be looked after. It ended with ‘Thanks’... AND THAT WAS IT.

Pathetic. Pathetic that I was jealous of the bloody Rabbit. It had big, scared eyes beneath its stupid floppy ears. Cat. Cat used to dress it up on special occasions. Lady Grey. Had an Instagram account. And an array of hats (scarves, and other novelty items) Santa Clause. Pointed birthday hat. Flat Cap. Beer festival hat... Lady Grey never looked happy in the photos. NO. But. But maybe that was just her face. When I don’t purposely smile. Sometimes. Sometimes people say that I look unhappy. Yes. It was actually the reason I got sacked. Sacked from retail jobs, “You do great work! But we keep telling you to smile for the customers. And you just won’t!”

Anyway. Anyway CAT. She. She needed to be discharged into somebody’s care. Yes. The day afterwards. And. And since I was at the hospital. Since I knew her best. It was mine. It was my responsibility to keep her alive. ALIVE for three weeks. I temporarily succeeded. We. We ate nice things and watched Disney. I. I chomped down upon my nails every time she went out and didn’t text. Yes. But. But this still feels like a failure in the long run.

CHAPTER, BRANDED

You don’t know. If you’ve got. Got a **DIAGNOSIS**. If. You’ve been given. A **DIAGNOSIS**. **OF MAD BAD SAD**. **YOU’VE BEEN** branded. But. You can’t see. No. You can’t see where. **WHERE IT IS**. Where is it?

Is it on your face? Your arms? Legs. It’s invisible?! **NO**. No it isn’t. **THEY**. The doctors. The psychiatrists. The teachers. School kids. **THEY**. Can see it. They saw it! **YOU**. You can read their report. Their report of you. **YES**. You can. **THAT**. That can help you know. Know what you need to **CHANGE**. Exchange and **REARRANGE**. It’ll. It’ll use words like:

PROBLEMS. **DIFFICULTIES.** **COMMUNICATION.** Concentration

SOCIAL SKILLS. **LACKS AWARENESS.**

TOO LITERAL.

TROUBLES FITTING IN.

inappropriate.

TROUBLES PRIORITIZING.

ORGANISING.

LISTENING.

RESPONDING.

AVOIDING.

LACKS A

FILTER.

LACKS. LACKS. LACKS.

BUT. But. You're not quite sure. NOT QUITE SURE. What you're allowed to keep. CHOP. CHOP. CHOP. It. Your personality up. Like a butcher. HIDE. SWIP³⁶⁶. Mop. Mop up what you can. WHAT DID THEY SEE? WHERE IS IT!? ³⁶⁷ GET RID OF IT. I've got spinach in my personality! Chocolate. Chocolate on my temperament. It's easier. Far easier. To hide than mask. Less tiring. It's also less tiring to bulldoze than mask. YES. YOU'VE. You've just got to have the confidence. THE TENACITY. Not to stop. Not to stop when people scream.

"I think we'll stop you there."

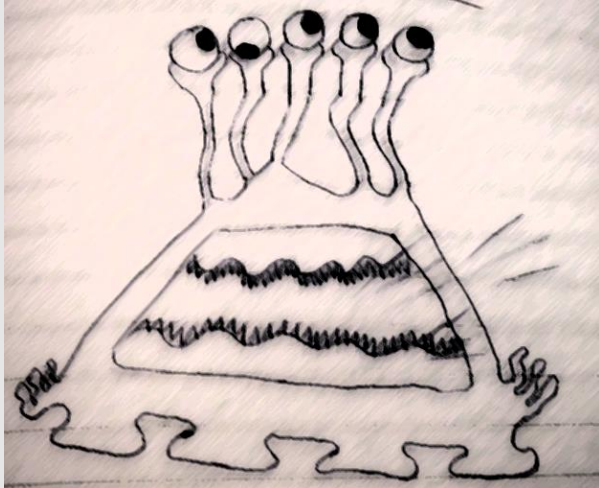
No. I'm going to continue. And you're. You're going to listen.

CHAPTER, COLLEGE

I drew the first one. The Pentapus (five eyes). Sketched it in Biology. I've always been fascinated with the body. How it works. Why it stops working. (such as getting hit by a train! YOU don't need to be a microbiologist to work that one out! FUCK. That' wasn't funny.) Mrs Horrobin, a teacher with an unfortunate at name, expanded upon how many mitochondria live in different parts of the cell... and I. And I took notes. Well. I sort of took notes... I doodled... then wrote notes upon my doodle.

³⁶⁶ Swipped/swatched = switched/swapped.

³⁶⁷ There were definitely kids. Children at school who hid theirs worse than me and Cat. Who. Who showed their brands. We didn't mock them. No. We. We got along with them. In private. Yes. We saw ourselves in them and. And hated it. WE STUDIED THEM. The way they rambled. Overexplained. Laughed too loud. Their unpoised bodes. Studied them so we could learn to hide better. They. They couldn't be our friends. No. Not publicly. Because. Because we were barely hiding retarded. Yes. Just! And they. They were flaunting it. Bethany. Bethany was nice. Yes. But if someone threw something at her head. It. It took her a minute to respond. It did. We. We wouldn't let them. Let her. Blow our disguise. Our covers were stitched with blood, sweat and tears. We wouldn't let them DRAG. Drag us down with them. I went to her house once. Bethany's. But I didn't want her to tell anyone. NO. And I think. I think that's why. That's why some people didn't like us. Because. BECAUSE They were worried. Worried that WE. Me and Cat. The elitist retards. WE. We would. Would blow their slightly better. Slightly more sophisticated cover. In private. Privately WE made them feel less broken. But. But publicly WE. WE EMBARRASSED THEM. No one. No one wants to catch retard. Cover your faces if one sneezes! We all want our covers on. Don't we? The world is cold. Cold and cruel. I was worried Cat would ditch me. Yes. Because she was better. SHE WOULDN'T. No. She didn't care. But I was worried. So. So I tried extra hard to hold my covers. TIGHT. Because. Because it's a dog eat dog. Retard eat retard world. Speaking out. When you think something isn't right? That's wrong. Very wrong. I discovered that the hard way. The everyone stops and stares way. So. So I learned to stop and stare. Yes. And I. I hated. I hate myself for it. Because. Because if I reject difference. I reject myself. Yes. I MUST. But. But WE need. Needed to survive. We didn't make the rules. But. But we did need to learn them.



Pentapus

Profile: Uses suckers to cling onto windows of dull lectures. Feeds on existing human boredom (without lessening the boredom being felt). Uses its five eyes to seek out the most agitated students. Filters out spontaneousness with its fine teeth as it finds it difficult to digest.

That's how. How it started. With a single. A single five eyed Pentapus. We didn't take the same classes. Me and Cat. At break-time we'd catch up.

"What the hell is that!!!" she choked a little on dry biscuit, I remember. She did.

".... Oh. It's just a little creature I discovered in Biology. I Observed it. Then Sketched it. For science."

"IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE", she slapped the table. "I want a specimen bought back immediately for examination. Mind blowing. Mind boggling!"

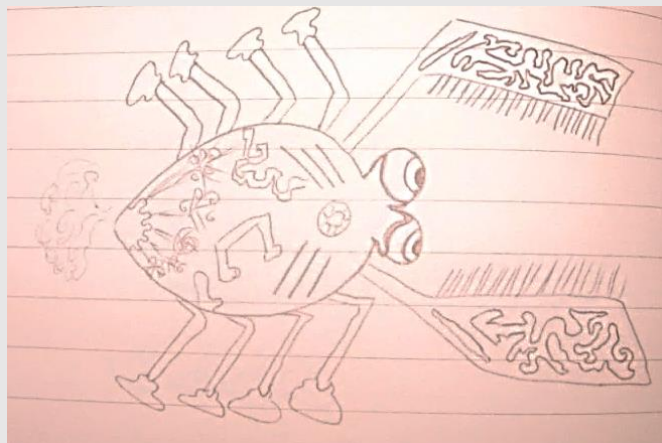
"I'll try my very best. Very best. But I fear it was a rare sighting, a very rare sighting!".

"Well, I'll be sure. Sure to keep my eyes peeled too!" Her eyes widened. For dramatic effect.

At the end of the day, when we were walking home, she opened her Geometry book, revealing,

Distractabot

Profile: Roughly the size of a large spider. Crawls into student's ears during classes. Feeds off concentration. Uses its eight legs to block thought pours, then gently combs thought waves with its two front claws, stimulating imagination atoms. Lastly it secretes a hormone, via its butt, causing thoughts to wonder.



“By golly there’s more!” I liked how she’d drawn it little cup wellies. They looked like toilet plungers.

“An infestation. An infestation!” I declared with as much gusto as I could muster for the end of the day.

Soon. Soon we became heavily infested. Infested and infected. Because. Well. Because we were never there. I mean, we were in body. **IN CLASS.** But we weren’t there. **IN MIND.** I took some of it in. I **DID!**... but I’D. It’d pop out. Where? I don’t actually know. I could never remember. But, after a moment of staring at the board, I’d always return. To wherever it was. So I presumed. I presumed it must be somewhere nice. But. But when the lecturer said, ‘And now begin the task’... I couldn’t. No. I never knew what it was.



Murmster

Profile: The Murmster is completely translucent, almost invisible. Springs into the mouths of students and uses its hundreds of outer hairs to latch on. Using its web-like mouth it filters out good points. Making students sound

bumblely. And, in severe cases, incomprehensible. Feeds on potential eloquence.

I wish. I’ve always wished. Wished I could write down everything first. Then say it. Even though. Even though that would be absolutely exhausting. It’s just. With the pressure of everyone watching. I just. I just keep. Keep interrupting myself. With a new and better. because it’s like. I’m redrafting, even before gotten to the. It’s because. Because there is just always something more to say. To add. And. And before long you get lost. Lost because you never quite said what. Because you only just remembered that. And something else turned out to be true. That you should have really introduced at the start. However, you’ve got to remember this contrasting perspective. If that indeed it is true.

Perhaps.

Perhaps I should start again?

A lot of conversation for me is fingerpainting. Prodding a glump of words into a shape. A pattern. An argument. At times. **SPECIALLY** at ‘that time of the month’, ‘When the painters are in’, (**THE BLOODY** stringy, drippy scarlet time) just a sentence. **JUST** a sentence would do! And I would. I’m sure I would. If I were. Were given an infinite amount of time. Which. Of course. You’re not. I never was. **BUT I’M SURE.** If I was just given. Enough time. I’D. I’d say something utterly profound.

Mono-ster

Profile: Is a close relation to the Murmster; Lodges itself behind lecturer's lips making it hard for them to form shapes with their mouth. It causes an afflicted lecturer to speak in monotone. Feeds on potential pitch. Once it finds a host it is unlikely ever to detach. Note: The



Pentapus follows lecturers afflicted with by the Mono-Ster

Mr Harding was one of Cat's lecturers. He taught Higher Maths. She needed that. Apparently. Apparently it was useful for architecture. Anyway. Anyway he was the only teacher who insisted. **INSISTED.** students use his last name. Cat had a real problem with him. Not because he was arrogant. She didn't care about that. And not because he was pompous... Her problem? Her problem with him was that his voice didn't change. **FLucTUate** or **quiVER.** Ever. Every word, syllable, **EVEN** the end of questions. **FLAT.** Even if he was telling a joke!

I didn't believe Cat when she told me. But then. we bumped into him. **TALL. ROUND. Bauld.** Wore a tie. even though he didn't have to....

"Murberdy merberdy murb murb muuuurrrrrrrrrrb." He stroked the whiskers on his chin. keeping us both slightly beneath his eyeline.

I knew. I **KNEW.** he was being condescending. **BUT,** I had no idea. **HOW. OR WHAT.** What he was saying to Cat. I just couldn't distinguish one word from the other!



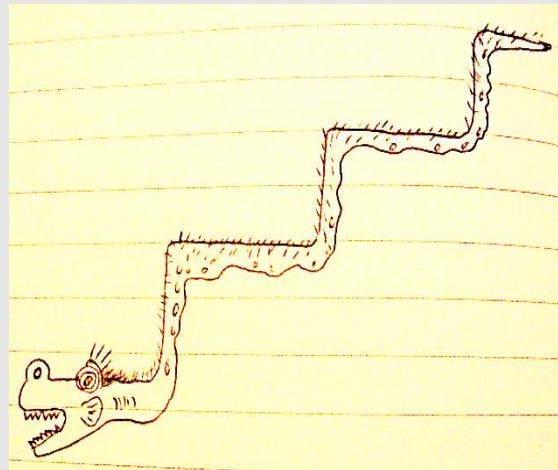
Monstara

Profile: Vicious and merciless. Lives in the tear ducts of people wearing non-waterproof mascara. With its pointed body it rolls around irritating sensitive parts of the eye. Feeds on freckles. Causes tears for fun.

I wore mascara would be understatement. I bathed in mascara...well, that would be an over-statement wouldn't it? But I used to re-apply it **EVERY** break. Even in five-minute lesson changes. As if. As if regularly coating eyelashes meant I was protected. Protected from being ugly. But. **BUT** by the end of the day they were so coated with mascara, that they couldn't bend! Not at all. Stiff as **BRISTLES.** When. When I used to take it off at the end of the day. They used to rip out. **RIP OUT** in clumps.

One-upster

Profile: Lies on college stairs, has excellent camouflage reflexes and very fine dust-like hairs that are removed when impacted by a shoe. Hairs are highly toxic; they melt into the shoe, through the sock, into the foot's hardened skin, into the blood stream, until they arrive at the brain. When lodged they cause insecurity. They cause afflicted students to be unable to make conversation that isn't boastful, condescending, pompous or conceited. Feeds on shoe-rubber particles.



The phenomenon its hair causes to unfortunate treaders is purely accidental.

This slinky eely snake thing is Cat's. Inspired by the dragon from *The Never-Ending Story* (if it were hit by a plane). Anyway. I had this friend. Grace.

“My mum said that. At three. Even at three. I was able to play ‘Hot Crossed Buns’. While all the other children just banged away on drums.”

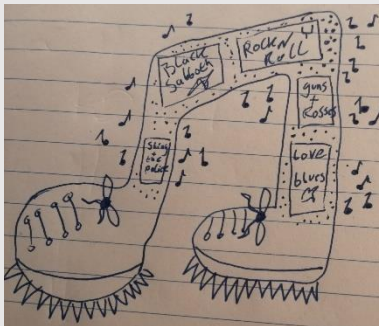
... I mentioned (In passing) that my dad had given me his old guitar. I was learning to play. She. Grace. She went on. Went on to tell me how she came second for ‘classical play’ in young pianists last year. How she'd only missed out on first because she'd burnt her finger on the toaster that morning. And how. How now. She does it. ‘Toast’ in the oven instead.

I was annoyed. Annoyed at Cat. NOT GRACE. (well, a little bit Grace for BEING annoying) Because. Because we'd only been making them about people we didn't know. And teachers. They're fair game. But. But this felt. PERSONAL. And it wasn't just Grace. No.

Whenever I made a new friend. Cat doodled them. Something related to them. THEY WERE FUNNY. I laughed. Laughed through my nose. BUT. Then, when I saw them (The person not the doodlebug). And. When I SAW them, I felt. FELT guilty BECAUSE. Because. If they knew. They'd hate. HATE ME, wouldn't they? The worst bit. The worst bit was. They. The personified flaw. It was always correct. Once seen it. COULDN'T be unknown. It was stuck. Rooted. Rooting people to their spots.

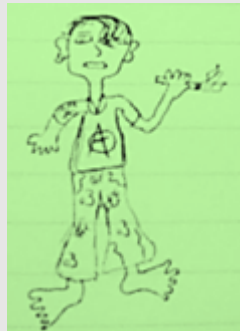
Selected Drawings of My Friend's Personified Flaws

Quav-ster



Profile: The Quav-ster is permeable. It filters through the air until it gets into a student's head. When they are talking, if they have a Quav-ster, they will be unable to think of anything but, music, bands, bands they like, bands they've gone to see, band posters, band memorabilia. Uses its studded music shoes to cling to the brain's soft tissue. Has been witnessed tap dancing. Feeds on other people's exasperation, and potential topic changes.

Hip-Ster



Profile: Has two eyes but you can normally only see one. May also have extra Indian style eyes on any item of clothing (or jewellery). Has only ever been witnessed holding an expression of angst and a cigarette. It has not been ascertained if can use both legs. It has only been spotted leaning. Usually bare foot. Feeds on irony and the sound of its own voice. Avoided by all people and other doodlebugs.

Heinous-Stink-Trap



Profile: Travels in the air as a small spore until it finds a dark moist place to sprout. Usually finds itself upon student tongues (or, other parts of the inner mouth.) Can occasionally be transmitted to genitals. Its toothed leaves absorb existing smells. They travel down to its large tongue-like stamen where the smells are strengthened. When the stamen is at maximum capacity, it bursts, causing thousands of malodourous spores to be freed. Some sprout in the same host's mouth, but, others become airborne. Feeds on avoidance and upturned noses. Note: Relatively easy to remove with an ordinary toothbrush if applied to the tongue, as it has very shallow roots.

Left: Clive. Middle: Clive (again!) Right: Fergal.

Clive was posh. Well, compared to us. he was posh... He'd buy parsnip and beetroot crisps. he could have bought two packets of salt and vinegar instead. He knew he was posh. aware. Yes. Which is why. Which is maybe why he'd talk about music. Not posh classical music like Grace. Like grace and her classical piano. He'd. He'd monologue about Indie, Punk, Reggae. And. lots I hadn't heard of: Cyber-punk, Techno Steal, Blue Velvet Hydro-Metal... It distracted. Or. it was meant to distract. Distract us from the fact he had a car (Mercedes) and went skiing with his uncle twice a year.

I THINK. I personally think he should have owned it. I would have. Yes.

The middle picture. HIP-STER. That's him. Him too. But it isn't really very creative. IS IT? Because. WELL. because a hipster (without the hyphen) that's already a thing. Clive. He. He used to make fashion holes in his designer cloths. He did. Very carefully. Using plyers, fabric scissors, and a flat-head screwdriver. I didn't see him. NO. His sister told me. SHE. She thought it was funny. I DID. I did too.

Pot. He smoked a lot of that. NEVER shared. NEVER turned up to class. AND. HE. he. Made fun of the people who did, 'SQUARES'... 'YOU. You don't need mainstream education. To learn. Just to open your mind. Open it to the elements.' But, he. CLIVE. wasn't. WASN'T a true rebel. Because.

Because. When your uncle owns 40% shares of Percy Throwers... then you've got a substantial net. Haven't you?

Fergal. (left) Fergal wasn't like Clive. Not at all. He took philosophy. I didn't meet him there. NO. I did too much thinking. Without. WITH out studying. Concepts that drove. That drive. Great men. MAD. And women too. I'm sure. EVEN. Even if you don't learn about them.

I'D MET. I'd met FERGAL. While I was walking. Walking to college. HE'D. PAUSED. Staring. STARING. He was staring at a snail. HE'D. he'd crushed it. And. HE. he. was about to cry. I STOPPED HIM.

And we walked. WE walked together. The rest of the way. Friends are easy to make when you're young. Aren't they?

Fergal. Fergal. Was upset by choice. (anything more than two!). And. He. He always looked to his feet. Because he didn't want to crush an ant. APPARENTLY. But. But. I wasn't so sure. BECAUSE. He was. VERY. shy. AND. Even when we were sitting. EVEN. When we were inside. He always looked to his feet. Quiet. Reservoired³⁶⁸ Very sparing with his words. But. When he. when he did. SPEAK. His breath. It. it ALWAYS. Always. Always was fragranted with egg, ham and iron? It. it wasn't' just a WHIFF. IT was. A FULL ON SMACK. Smack in your face. BUT. But. This. This doodle-monster. The Heinous-Stench-Trap. IT. it wasn't really this wasn't really a personified flaw... it was. It was just mean. Just a way. Just a way for Cat to. REINFORCE. THAT. That he smelt. But IF. IF YOU. If you were. Were ever to bring it up. WITH HIM. His breath. You knew. I knew. He'd never. NEVER speak never speak to you. To you. Me. OR ANYONE. Again.

I sat opposite him. At lunchtime. Never next. They. FERGAL and CLIVE. Joined us. JOINED us to chat. At lunchtime.

³⁶⁸ Reservoired= Definition: Originating from the words Reservoir + Reserved, it is the act of keeping all of your energy/opinions locked away underground. Example: He may seem shy, but you need to tap in, and you'll find he's just resevoired.

Cat. But **BUT CAT** ate in silence when they did.

AND that. **SOMETIMES**. That got to me.

Because. Because I find that hard.

SILENCE.

In silence I. In the silence I sometimes imagined. **IMAGINED** getting the book. **THE DOODLE MONSTER BOOK** out... showing them. Showing them their personalized 'doodle-monsters'.

SILENCE makes me want to confess.

CONFESS. That I'm bad.

The college. The college asked. **ASKED ME**. Asked me to show new students. **THE NEW STUDENTS** from China around. I didn't. **DIDN'T** volunteer. The teacher knew. Knew that if she asked me. I wouldn't say no. I **JUST**. Just wouldn't be able too.

Not on the spot.

They were crying. - **CRYING!** No - Not the teacher who'd asked me. **WHO'D** asked me to do it. She wasn't that manipulative! - The **CHINESE** students.

AND. And. They had only just got off the bus. They hadn't. **THEY HADN'T** learnt. That. **THAT**. **IT** isn't appropriate. isn't acceptable. In the **UK**. **CRYING**. To cry.

'WE' DON'T CRY'

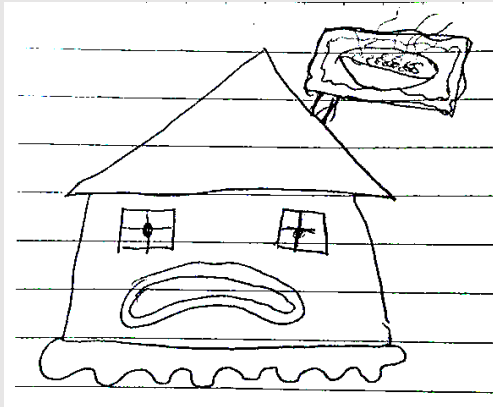
. ('they' **WHOEVER** 'they' are. should put that on the Brexit Poster's. shouldn't they?)

NO. 'WE'. 'We' seal. 'We' use our stiff upper lip to prod anyone. **ANYONE** who looks. **WHO** looks fragile. Who looks. Like they're brimming. **WHO**. **WHO** we may fear. **FEAR** will become emotional. **WE**. We prod them. To. To do the same. **DON'T WE?**

Five. **FIVE**. Five more started crying. I **JUST TOOK THEM** for **LUNCH**.

Is the food really that bad here?

Dome-EAT-Home



Profile: Dome-Eat-Dome is named such because of its pointed or roof-like head. Much like a snail it has one slimed foot, which it moves with.

It likes to stick to student faces. It's particularly prevalent in the first few months of college. It can morph to look like all kinds of homes... bungalows, apartments, even campervans.

Its one chimney-like antenna can also project scented images of their favourite parents (or grandparents) home-made food at mealtimes. Feeds on homesickness, takeaways, and expensive weekend train (and/or aeroplane) fares.

In the second year of college. LOTS. Lots. LOT of People got PREGNANT. (All Woman) AND. And Grace (the one-upster). SHE.

SHE was one. SECRETLY (very secretly) I. I WAS. I was. PLEASSED (yes) BECAUSE she. Because she HAD FAILED. Failed at life. HADN'T SHE?

AND I. I WHO COULD NEVER SIT ON THE SAME STAIR as she. I. HAD NOT?

– of course. I wasn't. wasn't. COMPLETELY pleased. BECAUSE. That would be anti-feminist wouldn't it? probably. AND. And. And. After listening. Listening to. TO. How. How. She'd got onto the CLASSICAL. Classical arts and music course. AT CAMBRIDGE. Well. well. I also felt a bit sad. SAD. For her. That she couldn't go. THAT'S. that's. that's how I should of felt anyway. BECAUSE. Friends. They should. THEY SHOULD. Wish. Want. The best. For each other. BECAUSE. Because. Because. Them doing. BADLY. Them doing badly. WILL JUST MAKE THEM depressed. IT WON'T? If. If. She. If your friend doesn't SUCCEED. It doesn't actually help you. Does it? You don't do better. FOR THEM. Not succeeding? SHIT. Then. Why. WHY DO I STILL FEEL. HAPPY.

HAPPY. That the condom broke?

She said. SAID. That the condom. IT. broke...

BUT.

Did it? I mean, do condoms break?

I mean. OBVIOUSLY. OBVIOUSLY. THEY DO. It is within the realms of possibility. BUT. But how often. How often. DOES. It actually happen? AND. How often. How often. DOES that. ONE SINGULAR. That one SINGULAR. Time. You did it. AND. And the condom broke. HOW OFTEN. Does that actually lead to pregnancy?

EVERY TIME. It would seem. At my college.

AND. And this was the time. The time of THE NATURAL CYCLE FAD. YES. Yes. That hippy dippy, **SOMEHOW GOT MAINSTREAM. Pseudo-FEMINIST. FAD.**

Celebrities, health 'experts', **YOU TUBE PROMOTERS. 'They',** and you know who you are! 'They' pumped 'Natural Cycles' **CIRCULATED** natural cycles,

More effective **HEALTHIER. NATURAL. COMFORTABLE. EFFECTIVE** (don't forget effective) **FEMALE. Natural** (don't **FORGET NATURAL**). **THAN** Condoms. **LESS** less **TOXIC.** Yes! less **TOXIC THAN THE PILL. EXPERTS. REAL EXPERTS.** They lied. **THEY'VE BEEN LYING. About THE PILL. IT'S BAD. BAD. BAD. BAD. BAD. BAD. BAD. BAD. BAD.** For your body. **BUT.** We. We know the solution. **WE'LL** give you the solution. **TRY NATURAL CYCLES.** Just try it. **WHAT.** What could go wrong? -

DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW [CLICK HEAR!]

VERY natural. **CHILDBIRTH.** That's natural too? **I'M SURE.** Sure my great, great Irish Catholic grandmother (on my dad's side) checked her. **CHECKED HER** apps daily too!

WAIT.

OH WAIT.

She didn't have time. **NO.**

And **WHY? WHY DIDN'T** she have time.

BECAUSE.

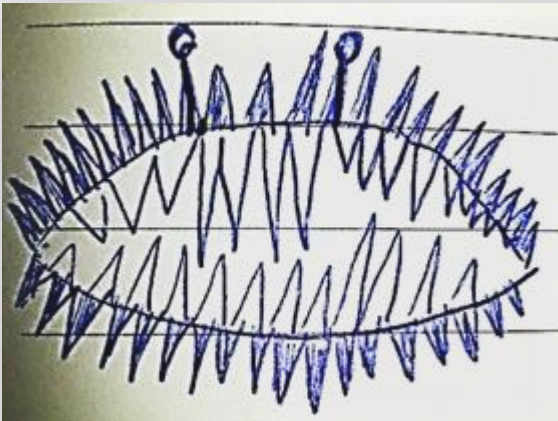
Because she was feeding her dozens of children! **THAT'S WHY**

Natural cycles? **NATURAL CYCLES MY ARSE.** (which btw, is a far better. **FULLY TESTED.** And pregnancy-proof system³⁶⁹.)

Anyway, Cat. **YES CAT. SHE.** She gave. **Gave Grace.** The benefit of the doubt. She did. **BECAUSE.** Because Cat discovered. Cat uncovered. She uncovered this little mite...

³⁶⁹ Guys. Guys sometimes say. If you love me... You'll let me put it in. In your arse, "you'll enjoy it. I promise". Even though. Even though they. Men have a prostate **G-spot...** but women. Women don't! Anyway. Anyway a friend of mine. She. She said that if she hears that. She produces a dildo. From her top draw. And says, "If. If you let me put this up your arse first. Then. Then I'll consider." **THEY.** They never bring up the subject again. **SHE SAYS.**

stab stab



Profile: Stab Stabs live in clusters on male and female student genitals. They only make themselves prevalent during sexual intercourse with a condom. With razor-sharp teeth they chomp on condoms (and the lesser used femidom).

Feeds on latex, causing condoms to split is an unfortunate side-effect.

Note: Sadly Doodle-Bug Zoologist's believe Stabs to be dying out. Starving to death as more and more students

opting to use modern contraceptives, alongside prehistoric Natural Cycles, neither of which utilize latex.

JUG Jug



Profile: The Jug Jug is permeable, and it can pass as a large water molecule through the skin, and place itself in the human bladder, where it can add quarter pints instantly. Water in the jug jug doubles in volume. When in the bladder it simply fills and empties itself with surrounding water. Increasing the volume each time. It causes an unwitting host to immediately need the loo, and for this feeling to escalate very suddenly. Usually the Jug Jug likes to strike at the very beginning of a lecture or speech, or, towards the end of long ques. Feeds off uncomfortableness, and the colour yellow.

I drew Jug Jug for Cat. We shared one lesson together. (ICT – a compulsory subject, to EVERYONE'S dismay)

She couldn't. COULDN'T hold it. Every lesson she'd ask. HAVE TO ASK. I. I on the other hand. HARDLY. Hardly drunk. When. When I'm concentrating. OR. Or if I'm stressed. I

OFTEN. Often forget. BUT cat. She went all the time. later. ONLY MUCH LATER. I found out. That. She. CAT had become. She was. She was bulimic. ICT. ICT was just after lunch.

STUPID. I was so stupid. STUPID. To draw that stupid picture. I WONDERED. I wondered why she didn't laugh. LAUGH. WHEN. She saw it. I KNOW NOW. BUT I. but I did not. I didn't know then.

ANYWAY. Soon. Soon we had a lot of them. Doodle-Monsters that is. I thought. And I thought we should collect them. SO WE DON'T FORGET. In the name of science. there was. There was no point in our discoveries being scattered and forgotten, was there?

No. There wasn't.

And so. I. I got all of Cats Books (Higher Maths, Landscape Planning, and Law) And I. I got all my books (Biology, Sociology, and Media Studies) and I. I scanned them all. All the Doodlebugs. Into my laptop. THE ONE. the one my parents had bought me.

I'd seen. Seen wild-life books. My sister had a collection, 'British Wildlife', 'Attracting Wildlife to your Garden', 'The Wildlife Pond Book'. I used to. Used to like the pages on bugs. Because I. Because like them. I like how small they are. Their bodies. with extra bits, strange bits. Frightening bits. Still living. Breathing... like us. I like their colours, bright, striped, and iridescent. Bu most of all. most of all I like the way they move, the way they scuttle, weave and ripple.

ME. ME and my sister. We used to. We used to put tired bumble bees in matchboxes. We. We did. When we lived together. If we found them. Then. Then we'd put the match box on our windowsill, above a radiator. AND. And. NORMALLY.

Normally. They'd gather their strength. And buzz off the next day. TAP. TAP. TAP. Frantic against the glass. And before. BEFORE. I'd let it go. I'D show my sister.

But. BUT sometimes.

Sometimes. It wasn't enough. Or we were too late. AND. They'd just curl up and die. AND THEN. And then I'd burry it in the garden under a leaf. And. AND. I'D TELL. I'd tell my sister. THAT. That it had flown away.

I THOUGHT. it was a white lie. BUT NOW. Now I THINK. I shouldn't. I SHOULDN'T. have shielded her from the sting. BECAUSE. Life shouldn't be about avoiding the sting. It should be about. ABOUT. Learning how to pull it out. Leaning how to heal.

I THINK. It must be hard. Flapping tiny wings fast. FAST ENOUGH to defy physics. So they can fly. NO wonder. NO WONDER. They burn out. SOMETimes. When my thoughts.

When my thoughts are very. **VERY**. fast. I think. I Think. Think. think. Think. It's the same. **THAT. THAT. I MUST.** I must be breaking the thought barrier.

And so. **So. So** it's no wonder. **THAT SOMETIMES.** Sometimes I **GET.** So tired. So tired that I can't get home. **SO. So** tired. That I have to hug my bag close to me and lie besides a tree, curl up in the corner of a library, and hope. Hope the security guy leaves me be. **WE. I. I.** I and the bee. **We. Need** to recharge. **Sometimes. Before** taking off again.

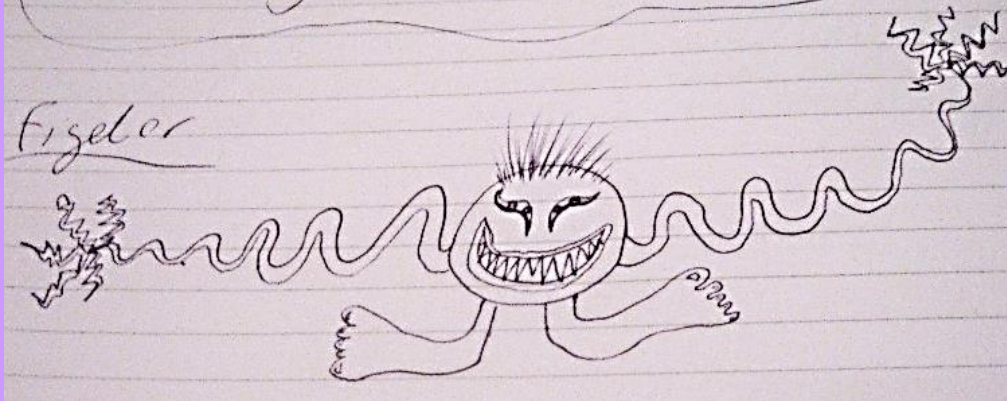
ANYWAY. I. I tried. I tried to set them out. The **DOODLE.** The doodle-monsters. **Set** them out. Like. Like. how I saw them. in my sister's wildlife books.

And then. **I. When** I was done. **I. I.** printed two copies....

College Critters and Creepy Crawlers!

Discoveries by Tammy Gardner and Cat Hearts

Fidge-Eater



Profile: Has two pupils in each of its eyes, and due to this it sees everything twice as quickly. It has no bones in its arms or fingers, and squiggles them constantly to create a force known as 'static fidge-it-es-ty'. This force travels into the air and grounds itself into the stillest students. It can affect up to three students at once. Static fidge-it-e-sty causes students feel as if sitting still could be fatal. Feeds on kinaesthetic energy.
Note: Its hair is naturally floppy, but static-fidge-it-e-sty causes it to stand on end.

Ink-Spotted Dipper



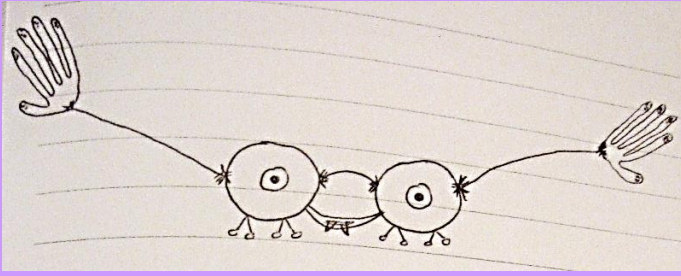
Profile: The Ink Spotted Dipper Is half the size of an average human thumb. Has proportionally small wings for its body. It flies by flapping extremely fast, which means it is constantly dehydrated. It lands upon the tops of student's pens. When they are intently listening, or reading, it latches on to pens with its long fingers (all types including, but not exclusive to; fountain, ballpoint, and biro). It uses its long curly tongue to dips into pens and drains them of ink. Feeds off black and blue ink, lost thoughts, and incorrectly cited references.

Giggle Louse



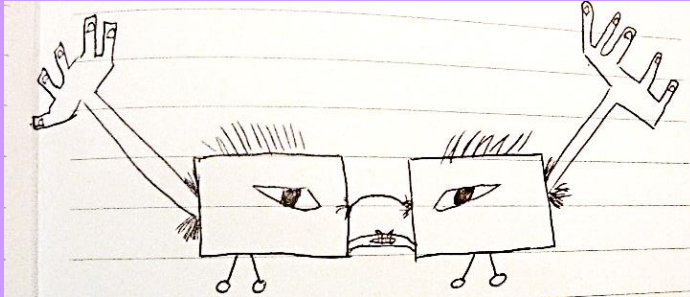
Profile: When students' mouths are agape the Giggle Louse leaps in, making itself at home in the throat. Once lodged it uses its fluffy bum and fluffy feet to tickle causing its host to laugh, uncontrollably, at everything for elongated periods of time, even if they don't understand the joke. Even if it is not appropriate. The Giggle Louse is extremely infectious, it breeds like crazy in new situations. Feeds off host insecurity, and surrounding other people's contempt.

Slam Slam



Profile: Especially prevalent in summer. The Slam Slam Lives in window frames. It sneaks out on hot days when windows are ajar. Its fingers are sticky and attach to open windows. It then quickly pulls them closed with its elasticated arms. Feeds on perspiration and sudden jumps.

Ajar



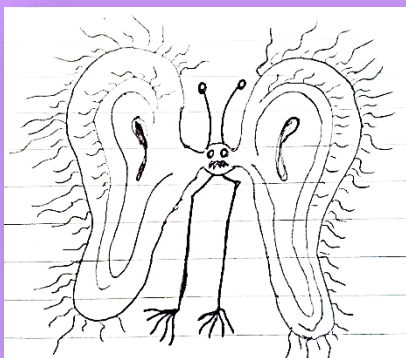
Profile: Most prevalent in winter. Closely related to the Slam Slam, however, if they ever meet on the same window-ledge it leads to a fight to the death; causing the very sudden and sharp opening and closing of a window. It is much sturdier than the Slam Slam. It uses its firm fingers to push closed windows open. Feeds on shivers and snot from drippy noses.

Accelerate-deor



Profile: Around the size of a Christmas sugar mouse. Lives in the silent sections of libraries. The Accelerate-deor's antlers work like TV antenna, they pick up very quiet vibrations. Then, using its megaphone like snout, it amplifies them up to fifty times. Feeds off 'Shushes' and Irritation.

Sound Pounder



Profile: Is able to fly as well as walk. The Sound Pounder creeps into the outer region of the ear where it amplifies sound using its two hairy wing ears. Students often feel overwhelmed by anything that makes noise. Feeds on vibrations, headaches and skipped activities.
Note: is able to live-in students with high wax levels due to its stalk-like wading legs.

These were all mine. (above) I mean. I MEAN. I get distracted easy. I do. That's true. BUT. But NOISE. I. I really struggle with. Clicking. Tripping. Clacking, Turning of Pages, passionate typing, lousy whispering. They all swim. Swim right into my brain as spikes and play trampoline on my spongy grey matter.

Tic-Tock



Profile: The tic-tock is small slender, has a rounded bottom and pointed head. It attaches itself to analogue clock minute hands using two of its six grabby curved legs. The other four drag underneath, slowing the clock hand. Makes each hour longer by 5 to 45 minutes dependant on its strength and stamina. Make lectures much longer.
Note: Baby TockTicks get into watches, where they have the opposite effect, as they pull the second had around quicker. This causes students, through no fault of their own, to 'loose' track of time, and be unwittingly be late, to everything.

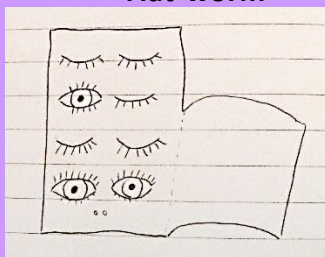
Zapster



Profile: Can lives in absolutely everything electrical, and also anything that that works in conjunction with electrical things. Senses importance. It only emits electrical malfunction volts when an audience is present. It causes memory sticks, projectors, saved files, and printers, amongst other tings, to misbehave. Frightened of electricians and technicians, it will always disappear if it senses them approach. Feeds on perceived incompetence, and sometimes pairs up with the adult Tic-tock to make the time before a technician arrives much longer.

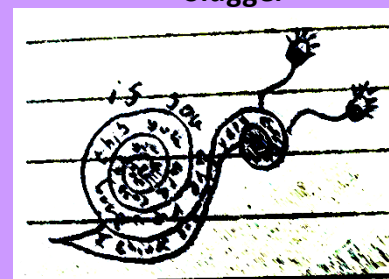
Both these little twerp [top LEFT, TOP RIGHT] were plentiful in ICT. Even with Cat in ICT with me. IT. The class still just felt like an era. IT JUST KEPT GOING. At one point, the teacher. THIN. Tall. Blondey-grey. She. She asked me. Asked me if English was my second language. She did. FUCKING PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE MIDDLECLASS... CONDESCENDING... SHRILL DEODORANT WEARING³⁷⁰ CUNT. YES. I like cunt. Much better than SLUT or SLAG. They are. They are damaging to all women. CUNT. Cunt is much more precise.

Flat-worm



Profile: The Flat-worm has bright red eyes. But, when they're closed, it is completely white. Far thinner than paper, it has been theorized if it is actually two-dimensional. Moves by scrunching itself up then unscrunching itself. Lives on room booking timetables. It moulds itself to cover existing bookings, which causes students and lecturers to double book spaces. Feeds on kaffuffle and aggression as people bicker over who booked the room first.

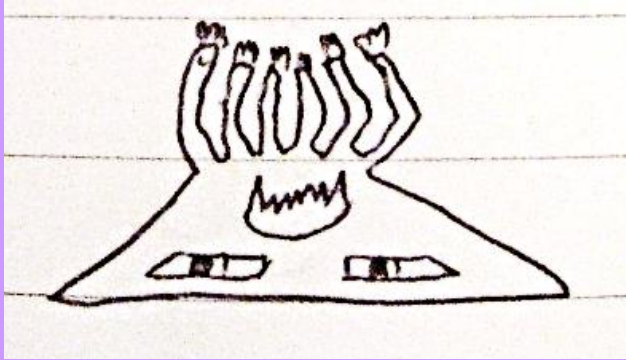
Slugger



Profile: Along with the Flat-worm, the Slugger is the only other Doodlebug that's completely 2D. It crawls along pages a student is currently reading. Can also transplant itself into computerized screens (and Kindles!). Its spiralling shape causes singular words, and occasionally whole sentences to blur and distort. Feeds off re-read paragraphs, exasperation, and potential comprehension.

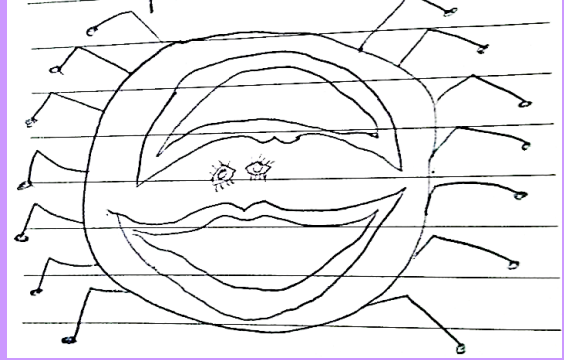
³⁷⁰ – I should explain the penultimate 'inslut', she war deodorant. Too much. Lavender. I hated it. Made me feel sick. Used to hold my breath when she came to see how I was doing. But, she always asked me questions, so I had to breathe.

Bed Thug



Profile: The Bed Thug is highly transmittable and breeds extremely fast. Each Bed Thug can lay up to 1000 eggs. They are hermaphrodites. And, after mating, both parties become pregnant. Bed Thugs lodge upside-down in student's skin (and clothes) with their hard, sucker-like head. They then grip onto anything they touch with their multitude of incredibly strong legs. A surface has yet been found which they cannot grip onto. Students will feel heavy when they have an infestation; they will have problems getting up once sat down, and, in the lying position, the Bed Thug has more surface area, it is almost impossible for students to rise. Feeds on missed events and Netflix accounts.

Blabster



Profile: The Blabster crawls into student mouths. It latches on to taste buds with its fourteen spindly legs. It got very small eyes and two extremely large mouths. Using the 'size contrast effect', this means that their host will not have any insight to what they are saying, however, despite this, they will be unable to stop speaking, no matter the topic, appropriateness, or significance of the conversation. Feeds off parties the host isn't invited to, and heightening nervous host energy as they realize they are speaking, but, are unable to stop.

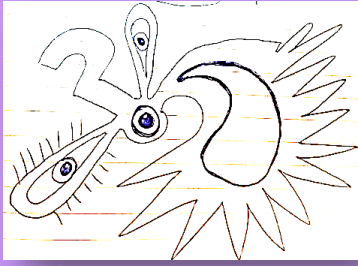
Love Bug



Profile: With its two bumped antenna it senses attraction. However, it does not distinguish between mutual attraction and one-sided attraction. It creeps up the backs of students, to their necks, where it releases a toxin, which causes initial buds of attraction to be doubled. It then drops off. The effect usually lasts a fortnight. The Love Bug remembers past hosts and often targets them again. Causing a host to have repeated feelings of love instead of mild attraction. The Love Bug is especially potent if it strikes again before the first doubled reaction has worn off, as this will cause the initial doubled reaction, to be doubled again, and for twice the timeframe. Feeds off obsession and potential healthy relationships with other people.

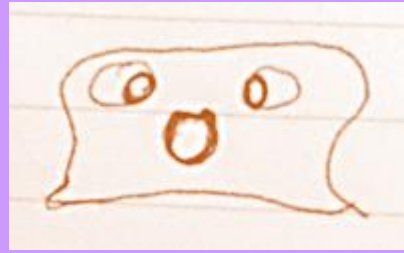
Assessment-Situated Doodlebugs....

Mentalizer



Profile: The Mentalizer breeds around exam deadlines. It multiplies by breaking off one of its eyed limbs, much like succulent cacti; this will form into new Mentalizer. Akin to other Doodlebugs, it enters the student body by rolling through the ear canal, this can cause a tickling sensation in. Once inside a student's head it rolls upon all small problems, clumping them together and making them appear as one huge uncontrollable mass. Feeds on panic and despair.

Worry Wart



Profile: Gathers upon college ceilings. Senses imminent examinations. It will drop off, then flip around in the air, so it is eye side up. Upon landing, it immediately uses its singular sucker to latch to a host. (It also has a cousin strain, Worry Ache, which is visible to the naked eye.) The worry wart only drops off hosts after examinations. Feeds on pacing and positive thoughts which it reduces to puss, and eventually pops that out; causing t positivity to completely separate from the host. Note: The worry Wart does not actually cause negative thoughts; the side effect of having positive ones reduced simply leaves more space for anxious ones to grow. In many cases the worry wart also exacerbates host hunger.

Hallo Hallo!



PROFILE: The Halo Halo hovers. It still has tiny residual legs, but after it discovered hovering it stopped using them altogether and they shrunk away. It still uses its singular wobbleing tail, which it utilizes much like a rudder. It can only go around in circles. It spins over all 'university' centred thoughts, halo-ing them. The affected student won't be able to comprehend failing getting into their first choice of University. They will not consider life worth living if they do not get in. The Halo Halo's teeth work much like a tin opener. They latch onto the top of a student's cranium enabling thoughts of panic to split straight through to the student's crown and circulate.

Feeds on: 'Make or break' mentalities, nervous ticks, sleepless nights, and potential jobs in unrelated study fields.

I felt it. I felt it for the first time. **GUILT**. True guilt. Unadulterated guilt. **IT LATCHED**. It was better. **LESS** than now. **But**. I felt it. **PANGING**. It panged. Radioactive. Pulsating. You. **YOU**. were cut up. **Not** figuratively. **YOU**. you were cut up. Cut from your wrist to your elbow.

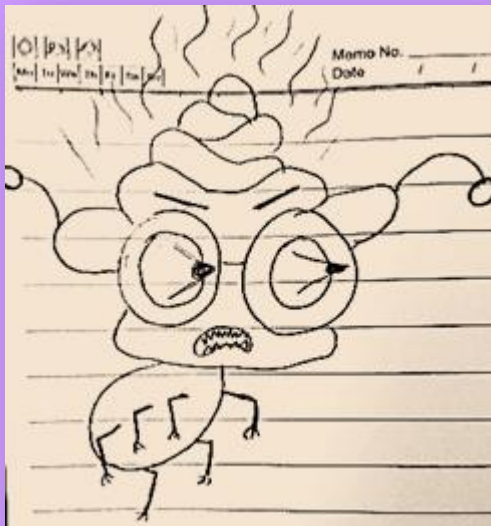
Thick tallies that exceeded five.

I'd laughed. Laughed at you. Laughed at you for. For crying. **PRODDED** you with my stiff upper lip for crying over a low grade. **CALLED YOU SILLY**. I had. **But**. **But**. I hadn't realized. **No**. I hadn't. **HADN'T** realized. The teacher. The teacher **HADN'T**. hadn't graded your work. **No**. They'd graded your soul. Graded it. **GRADED IT** below average. I hadn't realized. Hadn't realized. That's what. That's what had happened. I wasn't laughing. **No**. **Not** anymore.

We kept Doodlebugging. **YES**. **But**. **But**. **Before**. The first batch. The first batch... the first batch were. **Cute**. Weren't they? They were. **THEY WERE** a bit noisy. A bit irritating. A bit unfortunate. **Unwanted**. **But**. tolerable. **We**. me and cat. **We'd**. **WE'D** been immune. Immune to many of them. Files. **FLIES** on the wall. **We'd** watched. Watched other's strange Doodlemonstered behaviour.

But now. These. The new ones. To find them. To find these ones. **We**. **We** scraped into our own skin. **BECAUSE**. Because they were embedded. **We**. **We** made up slides and put them under a microscope them. **TO SEE**. Too see what was within us.

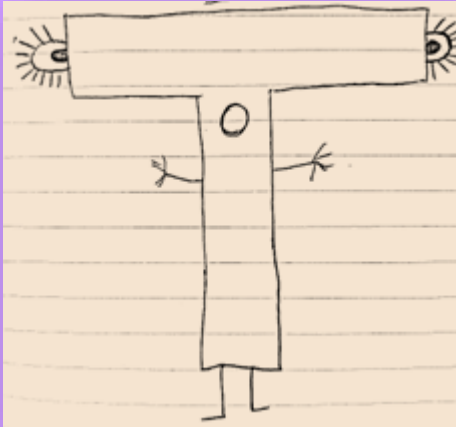
Fea-See



Profile: The Flea-see carries a soft smelly substance on the top of its head. It crawls across student assignments, both hand-written and upon laptops. It then smears its invisible head substance upon them this work. If a student views work after it has been affected by the Flea Sees, regardless of the actual quality of the piece, the student will be unable to see its merit. It will, metaphorically, stink. The longer a student works upon the assignment, the longer they are exposed to the unpleasant substance, and, the worse they'll believe the assignment is. Feeds on despair which it senses using its two peripheral antenna.

Note: The substance takes three days to a week to lose potency. Any work contaminated by a Flea-sea should be left and viewed after a period of time.

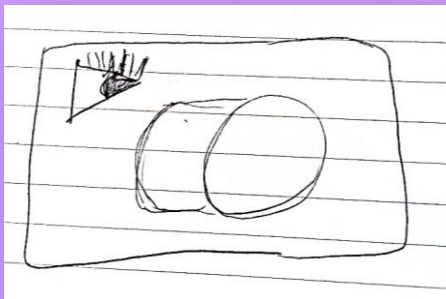
Stupit-ID-T



Profile: The Stupit-ID-T uses its unique shape to push a host's comprehension cells apart, wedging itself in between them. Inflicted Students will believe that, due to their own lack of intellect, they are missing something which is apparent to everyone else. Often influenced students cease thinking on hard topics altogether, as they feel they will never be able to grasp them. Feeds off potential PHD's.

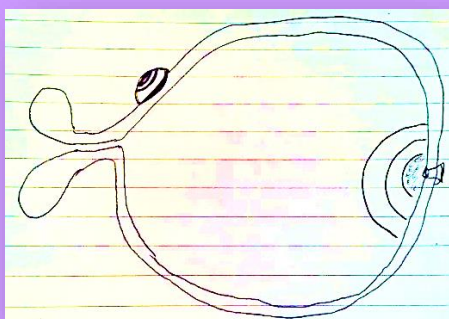
Note: Often an entire class will be infected. Which means that, though they are all in the same boat, they will never realize; and will never feel relief from a sense of incomprehension solidarity.

Snap-Shooter



Profile: Except for its one eyebrow, The Snap-Shooter is invisible. It clings, much like a starfish, to a student's faces. Its circular funnel manoeuvres itself so that it covers student eye's. It always travels in twos, and mates for life. The Snap-shooter has the ability to photograph all words a student says, mumbles or shouts. It then holds them in its gallery for hours, days, and sometimes weeks afterwards for a student to view. It has interchangeable, and also congruent filters, the: stupidity filter, embarrassment filter, and ineloquence filter (which is slightly blurry.) A student will zoom in and out of memories of themselves, seeing more and more social flaws each time. Student's usually try and reduce the number of pictures the Snap-Shooter will take by reducing social interaction and conversations. Feeds on potential conversations that the student never had, and also any potential positive repercussions of said conversations, and blinks.

Balloon Baboon



Profile: The Balloon Baboon is airborne. It starts as a miniscule beaked spore, then floats to the back of a student throats during social interactions. Just when they are about to swallow, it expands, causing students to feel as if their breath is being restricted. The more a student tries to breathe the more stressed air the Balloon Baboon has to expand with. It can slowly be given flatulence to deflate by gentle paced even breaths. Feeds on unattended social events, and tiny weeny air born krill. **Note:** It is often thought to be named Balloon 'Baboon' because of the rings on its posterior; however, it was named after Dr Baboon who first witnessed one in one of his own students. Believing them to be choking, he smacked them so hard on the back that it flew straight out of the student's mouth, splatting onto the desk.

Chapter Slides.

At uni. University. I made up slides. So. So I could see the little monsters with all of their details. I could see things that others couldn't. I could stick the monsters down, nail them to a slide (metaphorically... obviously they are too small for nails!). And watch them. I could watch their nucleus blob. I could see their (word) quiver. But. But I wish I could have done this to my own doodle-monsters. Controlled them, taken a sample, learned what caused them, how to treat them, how to kill them. But. Mine wouldn't stay on a slide. And. And I'm not sure if I'd really want to see them close up.

CHAPTER, CARING

Mum. MY MUM CARED. BUT. BUT. She was also CRITICAL. I think she thought of them as one of the same. To care you had to be critical. BEING CRITICAL. Meant she was caring... but. BUT IT. It DIDN'T. IT DIDN'T feel that way.

WHICH is. Which why. I THINK. WHICH IS WHY I think I SPENT SO MUCH time with my aunt. Dad's Sister. My dad. If he. If he broke something. HE'D. he'd hide it from my mum. AND IN turn. IN TURN. He'd do the same for me.

Because. BECAUSE. SHE. Mum. COULDN'T. she could not take it when something broke. IT WAS LIKE. Like the thing that was broken nested in her head. THAT. That shards from it were stabbing her.

Anyway. If I broke something at AUNT Tina's house. She'd say.

"NEVER MIND!" and give me a dustpan and brush. SHE WOULD. She'd give me that. And her dog. BILLY. A Golden Lab. He'd run over. You'd have to. You'd have to try and hold him. Hold him out the way so he didn't. DIDN'T cut his feat while you were trying to sweep. AND. SOMEHOW. Somehow he always managed to lick your FACE. WITH HIS BIG hammy tongue.

CHAPTER, I KNEW BEFORE I KNEW.

If. If you've ever been told news. News that isn't 'bad news'. It's. It's devastating news. Then. Then you'll know. Yes. That it creates what's called a 'flashbulb' memory. A. A really strong memory that seems to light up the time and room around you. Unless. Unless you're so traumatized that you just block it out. I. I wasn't. I've got a flashbulb. I wasn't at home. No. I wasn't somewhere I could hibernate. I. I was at a friend's house. Grace. We. We were just catching up. And. And we were going to watch a film. One with Ben Stiller. It would have been an awful film. She. Grace. Had chosen it. Yes. But. But then she got a blast of my trauma as it rippled out. I was told on the phone. Yes. Because.

Because my aunt worried that I'd see. See or hear. From the 'papers'³⁷¹ if. If she didn't get to me quick. Now. Now I fear all phonecalls. Yes. often I leave them. Because. Because don't want to loose someone else.

"....." Hello Tammy.

(I I thought she was firing me. Yes. Because. Because she sounded so serious. But. But she'd do that in person... yes.)

"Is something Wrong?" (That's me. But. But I knew it was. Before. Before she said anything.

"It's Cat. Tammy... they've found a body."

But. But if I'm being honest. I. I knew they'd found a body before. Before I was told. Yes. I. I think I did. I think I felt it. Inside me. Schrodinger's Cat died. Yes. Before I was told it was dead. And. And I was devastated. Yes. for once. Maybe just for once. Immediately. I. I had the 'right' reaction. I. I cried. Yes. I did. Properly. And. And Grace came over. And rubbed my back. And. And though I didn't like it. I didn't care that I didn't like it. Pink. Her pink walls very bright. And. And I sat on the floor in the doorway. And. And curled into a ball.

So. So I did. I do care. I must. Because. Because I didn't fake that. No. It happened. And. And it wouldn't of if I didn't care. And. And I didn't care so much. That. That I must have been a bad guest for Grace. Yes. that day she probably didn't enjoy my company. BUT. But it didn't matter. At least for a few minutes.

Sometime later. Yes. I couldn't tell you if it was one hour or many. My aunt. Tiny. She. She came in her car. Her car that's always slightly sticky, and has a lot of pamphlets wedged in its side pockets. She came and picked me up. And. And I stopped being devastated. I picked out a pamphlet on, "Community action. And 'Green thinking' And. And I read the whole thing.

CHAPTER, APPROPRIATELY DRESSED

"You look like a whore! GOING OUT LIKE THAT. AND. AND. And ALL your friend's mums THINK SO TOO!"

Mum. My mum shouted that out the door. Down the street. As I walked. WALKED. AWAY. That. That she'd asked around. all my friend's mums. She probably made that up. IT'S UNLIKELY. Unlikely she took her out a clipboard to get UNREFUSABLE... I mean IRREFUTABLE results...

³⁷¹ ... Not literal paper's no. I'm using paper's broadly to refer to: radio, TV, word of mouth, Web-news....

Stylish and acceptable	Slightly Risky	Whore
		

Besides. IT ONLY made me. MADE ME happier. HAPPIER TO KNOW. to know that she didn't like it. SOMETIMES. Sometimes I took cigarettes home. hid them BADLY. By the side of my bed. I DIDN'T SMOKE. No. I JUST WANTED. JUST WANTED. her to find them.

ANYWAY. Anyway. I didn't care what she thought of me. I was a gothic sheik vintage LIBERATED woman.... And. And feeling mighty FINE. THAT WAS. That was until. UNTIL.



HELLO EVERYONE.
I'm Tammy. I flap my hands around when I speak and I lost two hair brushes IN MY HAIRY BUSH, Can you help me find them?

Someone. Someone did this. THIS sketch.

It. IT was posted. Posted around. BECAUSE. Because. Apparently. I GOT IT WRONG. Again.

FASHION. That is.

COLLEGE was all about 'being an individual'. But. But within certain parameters. AND. I OFTEN. I often got these parameters. The parameters of individuality wrong. Note: The image depicts me with a bracelet I do not wear bracelets. Because. BECAUSE they are too TIGHT. TIGHT around the wrist. I can't forget I'm wearing them.

And. And as for the 'flapping'. FUCK. Well. It's hard enough to work out what to say. How to say it. If it's appropriate. What accent I'm saying it in... AND THEN. Then I've got my stupid flappy hands. Like verbal string puppets.

FUCK. People notice! But. BUT It's a shit picture. It. IT SAYS more. More about the 'artist' than me. Doesn't it?

BUT. But It opened something. WHEN I SAW IT. IT OPENED. It opened. IT MADE ME REMEMBER. Remember that I was the girl. The girl in memory book. That. That I'D. I'd gone to college. But. But NOTHING had changed.

CHAPTER, PARTY LIKE THERE'S NO TOMORROW

There was a party. We went to parties. ME and CAT. I love parties. Well. I LOVE BITS OF PARTIES. I used to like. I USED TO LIKE. Dressing up. I THINK. I used to like. DRESSING UP. More than going OUT. ME AND CAT. We'd. We'd dress up together. WE'D. DRESS UP perfectly before going. HAIR, FACE, DRESS, SHOES. All expertly chosen from our collections. SOMETIMES. SOMETIMES. We'd even go out in the day to buy accessories.

WE'D TURN UP. Spot on. LATE. BUT SPOT ON.

DANCING. I loved dancing. BECAUSE. You. I. was free. Didn't need to make conversation. You. I. just need to. CLOSE YOUR EYES. Move. Be in tune. Be aware of nothing else but how the beat. Affects your feat. How the beat feels. Felt. Felt as it pulsed through you, moving you, moving you like its puppet. You. I. BELONGED. I COULD belong. To the beat.

Sometimes. SOMETIMES I accidentally WHACKED people. YES. BECAUSE. I was. CONSUMED. Utterly. IT WAS. Glorious.³⁷² BUT. PARTIES. At parties there's always ALLOT of people NATTERING. Chattering at once. THAT. I found hard. so I always DRUNK. Yes. THEN. It dimmed. Then I FOUND IT EASY.

EASY-PEASY.

Tick Tock on the clock,
Take it out the room,
The party must stop.
My mind fumbles in the mumble of this social jungle,
Each tip and trip makes a rumble
My mind is shooting, re-booting,
Trying to comprehend,
Trying to pretend.
"Ha Ha HA!"
Chatter splatters all around.
Bring the drink to my lip,
Take a sip.
RELAX A BIT!
Thoughts were growing,
Now they're slowing.
time to work out where I'm going!

SOMETHING. Something. WHITE. And fast. A FEELING. A white fast feeling. I was spinning. someone had put me in one of those Beyblade contraptions and shot me out. I

³⁷² I was enjoying the dancing... not the whacking!

was. I WAS industrial spinning. COUNTING DOWN FROM TEN. Spinning. I'D. I'd sat. I'D BEEN SITTING. in the toilet for 40 minutes. PEOPLE KEPT BANGING. Banging on the door.

I NEEDED PEACE. Proper peace.

OUTSIDE. I went outside. And. AND I. I put my face against the cold metal of a car. It felt good. I felt awake. I slid down, slid down to the ground. AND GRABBED IT. grabbed it with both hands. FLAT. Fingers stretched out.

And he.

He slid down next to me.

I HADN'T. realized. Hadn't realized HE'D COME OUT.

We'd been talking. YES? TALKING EARLIER. I DON'T know about what. I THINK ABOUT. Neo-liberalism. HE'D BE FLEXING. A BIT. yes, he had. AND I'D. I'D gone back to dancing.

He said. He said. What did he say? He said,

“Are you cold?”

I SHOOK MY HEAD.

THEN. He. he. Then he said. “CAN I. can I show you something?”

I was giggling. Giggling and counting back from ten to stop myself hurling. I was doing both.

HE STOOD. UNZIPPED. Unzipped his pink FLESHY COCK.

STUNNED. I was stunned. STUNNED INTO SILENCE. Maybe I KEPT giggling. I DON'T KNOW.

“Would you like to suck it?” He was stroking it. I REMEMBER THAT.

I didn't know.

No one had asked me before. I was pretty sure I didn't. BUT. BUT. Would it be awkward.

WOULD it be RUDE to say. no?

ANYWAY. I don't think. I DON'T THINK I WAS THINKING. I just thought. JUST THOUGHT. It was what he wanted. And. And. I THINK. I think I WANTED. him to like me. AND SO.

SO.

I SUCKING FUCKED IT. I MEAN. I fucking SUCKED IT. HIS COCK. That is. I sucked it because. BECAUSE. I didn't want to be rude. I SUCKED IT. because. Because. I COULDN'T work out how to say no.

I THREW UP ON HIS COCK. I did. It didn't take long. I THINK. I think I'd needed to. I'D NEEDED TO throw up for a while.

PIECES. PIECES OF wet sausage roll. Disseminated into his pubic hair.

And I felt much better. YES. I did.

He went back inside. SO. so did I. I. I WENT BACK. Back to dancing.

CHAPTER, POST-BJ

HE TOLD. everyone.

I thought. I THOUGHT THAT'S ALL THERE WAS TOO IT. It would evaporate. Like a bad dream. IT WAS. Was already blurry.

He told. EVERYONE. I'D thrown up. I'D THROWN UP. On his cock. CALLED ME. THEY. His friends. Called me Hurly Whirly. His FRIENDS SHOUTED.

“Hurley WHIRLY!!!”

Down. Down the corridor. I HID. HID AS THEY PASSED. LATE. I WAS. I was late. Late to lessons because. BECAUSE I'D wait. WAIT until it was quite. Wait. Until it was safe.

Embarrassed. I. I. FELT. felt disgusting. I. I FELT. Felt. changed. I FELT. Felt ruined.

I should have been glad I through up on his cock. I should have. Should have clipped the end with my teeth Taken a bit out. Like a hole-puncher. SO. So he'd. He'd remember. remember. NOT. Not. To shove HIS COCK. Down. Down a drunk girl's throat. BUT. I DIDN'T. I IDOLIZED. Him. Yes. He. this. This was my first. MY FIRST sex. Yes. My first encounter. I. I hoped. HOPED. Hoped he'd notice me. Notice me at another party. YES. And. And. And I could do better. YES. I. I could choose. And do better. Yes. I could.

EVEN NOW. After Emma Watson. I STILL. I STILL think. Mum. She. She was right. I SHOULDN'T. shouldn't have dressed like that. A WHORE. And. And I shouldn't. shouldn't

have drunk. Shouldn't have PUT MYSELF IN. in a bad position. BECAUSE. GUYS. Guys will always PUSH THEIR COCKS. Into your mouths. Won't they? SO. you. YOU JUST NEED TO MAKE SURE YOUR MOUTHS AREN'T THERE. DON'T YOU? Yes.

CAT. I never told. TOLD Cat. NEVER. SHE ASKED. Why. WHY they. BOYS. Shouted. HURLEY WHIRLY. I said. Said I DIDN'T KNOW. this was. THIS WAS. My first secret. First lie. FROM YOU. CAT. Because. BECAUSE. I DIDN'T want you to think. To KNOW I was a SLUT. A disgusting SLUT.

Anyway. I made this. This MONSTER. After. I DID. But NOT for the book. NO.

Just for me. This one. I didn't want anyone to see. Anyone to ask. To know. BECAUSE. It wasn't rape. Was it? NO. not at all. it was. My fault. And the next one. And they next one. They weren't rape either. NO. They. They were also my fault. MY FAULT.

A GEEZ-STER

He. he doesn't have
He doesn't have a.
set shape. No. He.
he can be.
can be your
friend's older brother. He.
He could. He could be. Could be your
friend's dad. He could He. he
could be some guy. Some guy.
Some guy you met at a club
He could be. He.
He. He could be
A close friend
who's drunk. Or
or a close friend and
you're drunk. But
But a GEEZ STER
He. a. A GEEZ TER will.
ALWAYS HE³⁷³ will. He
ALWAYS has a
Penis. ALWAYS.
Because. BECAUSE.
When. When men
say guys. say, "guys get
raped TOO." they
do. ITS TRUE.
But. BUT it DOESN'T
DOESN'T NORMALLY.
MEAN THAT women RAPE. It means that.
It means that men RAPE men too. Doesn't
It? YES. Normally. NORMALLY it does.

GEEZ-STER

A Geezter preys on young stray men and women, on average 3+ years younger than itself. It becomes irrationally horny after sensing inebriation, tears, or actual sick. Unwanted BJs and unwelcome fondles are its typical exercises. It is confident in the knowledge that most rapes aren't reported. And, that when they are, only one in four leads to prosecution. Rarely spotted in courtrooms. Feeds on power, shame, HUMILIATION and, evaded legal ramifications.

³⁷³ Dust mites have spikey maces for dicks. They swing them around trying to hit females. If a female gets hit in the head. Shoulder. Leg. If the spiked penis penetrates her skin at all... Then she'll get pregnant. They can only have sex once. Female dust mites. Because if they got hit by the spikey mace dick a second time... They'll die. So. So what I'm getting at is. It could be worse. Ladies. At least we're not dust mites. When. When women are really evil. I curse them to be reincarnated as dust mites. And men as Seahorses... so they'll have to give birth. (though, in practice, it is actually very easy for the male seahorse... like a kangaroo pouch)

ANYWAY. Lets just cut this one out. It was a great party. I liked dancing. I LIKED been invited to a party. ENJOYED dressing up. So. Lets. Lets. just write this one out. Can we? Can we print it in a book and say it happened to someone else?

YES.

Let's move on.... to the rest. The bits I allowed Cat to see. I DID GO. I WENT. Went to. OTHER. better parties. ONE. one. one where we all got stoned. STONED. CLOTHED. Clothed and stoned in a BATHTUB.

Just girls. ONE DUDE. One dude came in. came in to take a piss. We giggled. Not BECAUSE WE WERE NERVOUS. No.

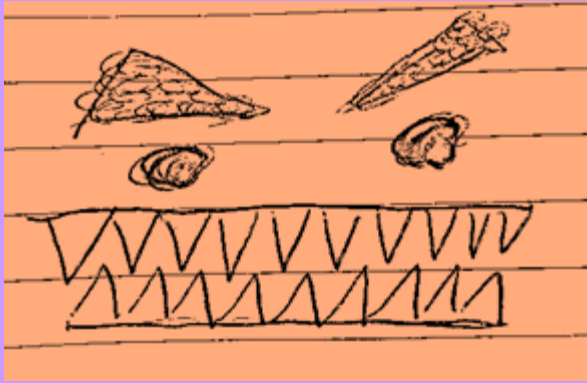
NOT. Not because we were scared.

No.

BECAUSE IT WAS FUNNY. Him hiding. Hiding to piss while. While we were in the bathtub.

Can you. CAN I. write over one memory with another. A. A better one? I. I HOPE SO. I'd like to.

Gnash Gnash



Profile: The Gnash Gnash does not have a physical body. It is comprised of two pairs of disembodied eyes, above them sits two 'angry eyebrows', and below one set of very strong teeth.

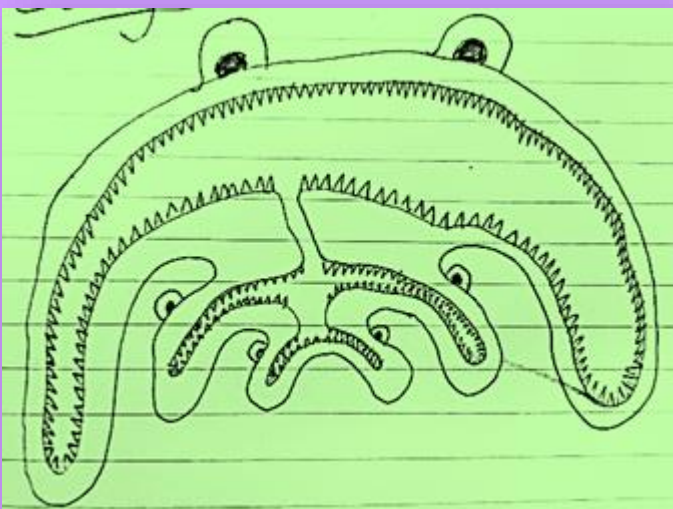
The Gnash Gnash does not make itself immediately apparent to hosts. When something that has been said that a student initially finds mildly irritating/insensitive, the Gnash Gnash seeks out that memory and viciously chews on it. It can continue chewing as a host sleeps. The following day the student will feel disproportionately angry at a tutor for constructive criticism. Feeds on hate, passive aggressive emails, and smashed plates.

Splash Splash



Profile: Closely related to the Gnash Gnash. The Splash Splash does not have a set form. It finds a memory which is mildly upsetting, and then relentlessly soaks it in within its saltwater body. This causes students to feel sadder and sadder about the memory. A large Splash Splash can act instantly, causing it's host to burst into tears about something that might have only mildly peeved them. When co-inhibiting a memory with the Gnash Gnash they fight over it. Causing students to feel irrationally sad, then irrationally angry. Feeds on latent confusion as students ask themselves: Why? Why am I so upset?

Glum Glum



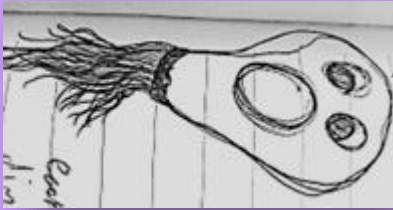
Profile: The Glum Glum buries itself into a student's skin leaving only its outer eyes poking out, which are almost undetectable. It then magnifies all upset that a host feels on a superficial level. It filters this superficial upset deep inside via its central throat, into it's small lower and further embedded mouths. As the 'upset' needs to fit into a smaller space, the Glum Glum, removes the memory of the event, but keeps the emotion. This has the unfortunate effect of a host feeling sad (or glum) but not knowing the reason. Feeds on woe and smashed plates.

Unwholesome Ovum



Profile: The Unwholesome Ovum has never been witnessed awake. This microscopic egg floats in the air of classroom environments like a spore. It is then inadvertently inhaled or swept into an ear. If inhaled the Unwholesome Ovum causes no effect to a host, however, if it is swept into an ear it then lodges in the brain. As it sleeps the unwholesome Ovum emits strong slumber rays which will be absorbed by nearby neurons. This will cause a student to feel excessively tired, no matter how much they've slept. It is believed that the Unwholesome Ovum is in a kind of meditational or perhaps hibernational trance, and does not feed on anything.

Bad-Pole



Profile: The Bad-pole exists along with ordinary dust particles in the air. It is not very strong, but, if it finds itself next to the ear canal, it will swim into the brain. Once inside it begins wailing, using it as one discontented mouth. Even if a host is naturally interested in a topic, the wailing emitted by the Bad-pole creates a feeling of boredom, or discontentment. Often students afflicted will choose to skip lectures to lounge in their own company. Unfortunately, this behaviour excites the Badpole further, and it will become louder. Though it has eyes it is blind, it mindlessly bumps into neurons without direction or determination.

Feeds on boredom, low buzzing noises, and decreasing IQs.

Last, but not at all least. ³⁷⁴Don't be fooled by its Hawaiian grass skirt. It's the worst one by far...

The Abominable Blight Blub



The product of an Unwholesome Ovum that has been fertilized by a Bad-pole

³⁷⁴ This is actually a lie.... There are more doodle-bugs and monsters at the **VERY VERY END...** you don't **NEED** to read them. **BUT.** But me and Cat created them. **So. SO.** if you don't like them. Then. **TOO BAD.** Because. Because this book isn't for you.

Profile: Fortunately, due to the Badpole being blind, and the Unwholesome Ovum always been asleep, it is not too common an occurrence. However, if these two doodle-monsters do manage to bump into each other, the Bad-pole will fertilise the Unwholesome Ovum; this leads to an Abominable Blight Bulb forming. It is a vindictive and violent doodle-monster that attacks in two stages:

- 1) The Blight Bulb still causes students to want to sleep, however does not permit them to do so. While emitting 'slumber rays' it also hovers over the neurons and tickles them with its arm and leg tentacles. The immense tiredness that it inspires in a host, amongst other problems, it dims creativity.
- 2) The Blight Bulb's second stage of attack starts after a student has almost completely stopped sleeping. It emits a ray that all other doodlebugs enjoy feeding on. It is the equivalent of salt or cocaine to them. When the other doodle bugs flood over a host will be filled with a variety of combine symptoms such as: lack of concentration, anxiety, low-self-confidence, ineloquence, etc.

The Blight-Bulb feeds off balance (both literal and metaphorical) and will eat all positive emotions, sentiments, and reactions. It views existential crisis like you or I might view a prom; A big finally, where it can invite ALL other doodle-monsters for a 'catch up'.

Note: The Blight Bulb is extremely hard to get rid of. Unlike other doodlebug/monster effects which often linger for hours, days and weeks Blight Bulbs, once switched on, are very resilient. They have been witnessed to be harmed (but never completely killed) by an assortment of therapies, such as: counselling, CBT and REM. Prozac, Sertraline and Diazepam have also been witnessed to be somewhat effective against the rays. ³⁷⁵

CHAPTER, CHAPTER RESULTS

YOU. You weren't happy. (would be an understatement) You. You had been unwell. You had been doing well. But then you had been unwell. UNWELL. Just before the EXAMS. YES. AND. You. YOU hadn't seen a doctor NO. You were afraid of DOCTORS. Afraid they might. THEY MIGHT LOCK YOU AWAY. Again. YES. So. SO you hadn't seen one. WHICH MEANT. You didn't have a note. A NOTE. To protect you.

IT doesn't matter. NO. It doesn't matter. how clever you are. not at all. IF YOU DON'T. Don't have a note.

³⁷⁵ **Note:** Doodle-monsters, much like Sharks and Komodo Dragons they. They sense BLOOD. In-particular menstrual blood. (which is why woman aren't allowed to work on Komodo island) And. And have you ever seen a frog mating ball? When one female frog is swamped with 20-60 male frogs. Sometimes. Sometimes she suffocates. Brutal. Well. well. That's what it's like. Two to three days before your period. They (the male frogs/doodle-monsters). THEY CAN SENSE IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN. And. And the doodle-monsters all swarm towards you. Like vampires. Vampires that gain strength with each globby blob that drains out the cunt. Cunt. CUNT. LITTLE cunts. All of them. The doodle-monsters.

AND. And If you don't get **BRANDED**:

AAA

AAB

ABB

BBB

BBC?

(it's not going well)

BCC

CCC

CCD

CDD!

It doesn't matter. Does it? If you could do it. Which I knew she could. She would have been. She would have trained to be **AN AMAZING**. Amazing architect. I know that. **BUT**. If you've not been **BRANDED**. Branded with the password. Then. Then you'll never get through the door. Then. Then you'll never find out. **CAT**.

Cat didn't get through the door.

I DID.

BBB

My parents had given. Had paid. For extra tuition. They'd. **THEY'D**. bought me a laptop, so that the code could channel itself to me better.

CAT. Said. She **SAID** she was pleased. Pleased for me. But then she didn't say much more.

It must have hurt. **TO BE BRANDED**. **BRANDED** unacademic. Branded stupid.

Branded useless.

CHAPTER, THE DIVIDE

We'd. **ME AND CAT**. We'd never been apart for long. **BECAUSE**. We saw each other every day. Every morning. Every lunch. We'd walk home. And. **THEN**. On weekends. She'd. sleep. Sleep over. sometimes.

I RANG HER. Every day. At first. BUT. I FELT BAD. Because. BECAUSE I didn't know what to say. I TALKED ABOUT UNI. Then hated myself... for talking about uni. Because it was SELFISH. INSENSITIVE. FUCKING CRUEL.

When we'd first met each other. IT. It had felt like personality SNAP. LIKE. Like whatever card she put down. I KNEW. Knew I'd have it too. She wanted to travel. SNAP. Our parents were both divorced. SNAP. We LOVED dogs. SNAP. We LOVED. Cheesecake. SNAP. SNAP. SNAFFLE IT ALL UP.

But now. Now I was hunting for crumbs. It was like that annoying Christmas game where two or three people know the rules, then everyone else is supposed to work out the game out while playing. BUT YOU CAN'T. But we couldn't. We didn't have a clue. I KNEW. That she was far away. SHE KNEW. That she wasn't part of what I was doing. I knew. I KNEW SHE hadn't done much since I'd left. She knew. SHE KNEW I was doing allot.

I stopped calling. GRADUALLY. I stopped. Stopped because. BECAUSE IT WAS HARD. Building a new life. BUILDING A NEW LIFE, while maintaining the one before. I needed. NEEDED to meet deadlines. NEEDED. I needed to be SOCIAL. NEEDED. I needed TO WASH MY CLOTHS SO MY FLOOR DIDN'T BECOME LEVEL WITH MY BED. Needed to cook. I NEEDED TO CLEAN. NEEDED friends. Needed people. People to like me.

WHATEVER. Whatever I NEEDED. I didn't QUITE GET. No. BECAUSE. Because I was back home at the end of the year. NOT FOR SUMMER. NO. Forever.

I'd thought that. That when I. When I left college. The monsters. They'd unlatch. Detach. disappear. Suddenly. SUDDENLY. I'D KNOW. I'd know... how to. LISTEN. Concentrate. DELIBERATE. without zoning out. Take pills. SIT STILL. Without it feeling like death. Public SPEAKING. Without smerging words! Use Excel. Have the energy to wash dishes. Take out the garbage. HOOVER. But. BUT They're everywhere. Mourning meetings. Toasters, the office sofa. Waiting. WAITING to leap out of pent-up emails.

It hasn't. It didn't. Get easier. They didn't. Didn't go. Just. They just became more mundane. More. More insidious.

CHAPTER, HYPERFOCUS

You don't need to look afar to find something alien. Swap the telescope for a microscope... Discover entire canopies, ecosystems, remarkable brainless, legless creatures, with cell walls and mitochondria, that though seemingly estranged, though invisible to the naked eye, are interact with us PERMANENTLY. Above. Bellow. On our skin, in our body... regulating our guts, clinging to our eyelashes... look under (and inside) your own noise. Its astonishing.

I hyper-focus. quite literally. Yes. It's where my love of microbiology sprouts. Taking something. Something tiny. Something miniscule. Something that no one else can even see. And making it important. Making it central. Literally sticking it on a slide. Translucent.

The colours and shapes. Unlike the block colours of the larger world. I'm understanding the world from the tiniest micro-organism first. Because. Because their powerful. A virus can take over the world, just like a thought can consume a brain. It's living. It's not shrivelled up (when you first make up the slides anyway) it's fresh. It's moving. Its life. It's a cognitively uncomplicated life, but non the less fascinating. Its separate. Yes. Separate from people. Separate from talking. Separate from concepts. Separate from philosophy, sociology and psychology. I can detach. Detach living atoms and feel nothing. I can just watch. I can watch a world that is small. Contained. And. And maybe I can even solve it. That's our problem. We. We have far too much on our slides. In life. We're looking at a heap. A conjoined mess. I. As a microbiologist. Would never put more than three cross-sections on one slide.

CHAPTER, POST COLLEGE AND PREMATURELY POST-UNI

UNI didn't work. I wanted it to work. But I wasn't tough enough. I wasn't tough enough to get out of bed. Microbiology. That's what I took. The study of tiny monsters that can't be seen by the naked eye. But. BUT.

I ended up back home after the first year. I FINISHED IT. The year. So it could be saved. IN CASE. In case I EVER WANTED. I ever could. GO BACK. It. It's good. Good to have options. Unless they drive you crazy. Isn't it? I. I'd thought a degree. I thought a degree would have. Would have been my ultimate 'gold star'. That. That I could show it to people. And. And prove I wasn't lacking. LACKING SOMETHING. It. It would be official. I WOULD BE OFFICIALLY ACCEPTABLE. Officially not retarded. But. But I dropped the ball. Yes. Yes I did.

DAD. His sister Tina. SHE looks a bit like dad. Got his nose. Unfortunately. FUCK. Why did I say that? BECAUSE. Because Women WHO DON'T HAVE NICE FACES AREN'T VERY UNFORTUNATE. Tammy, you HURLEY WHIRLY hypocrite SLUT.

What was I saying? Tina. Tina was my dad's sister and. And a dog groomer. She had her own shop.

Her top dogger. Meaning. Her top CUTTER. Was off PREGGERS. And SHE. Tina. She needed help. AND I. I NEEDED. nEeeded an excuse to get out of bed. I'D ALWAYS WANTED ONE. A dog.³⁷⁶ but my little sister. SNOTTY BITCH. Was. Is. allergic. YES. POOR SNOTTY BITCH. (and my flatmate is too! Snotty Bastard!)

ANYWAY. I don't trust people. People who don't like dogs. Unless they're allergic to them. Or Muslim. Some Muslims won't touch dogs. Because of their saliva. I don't like it when they lick me in the face. DOGS. Not Muslims. But. But otherwise. Otherwise I can

³⁷⁶ I wouldn't eat dog. No. I know they do in some countries. I was offered dog burger in China. When I went with my family. horrified. I was. But then I thought. I thought that Pigs are just as intelligent. And. And I love sausage and bacon. So. So I guess it's cultural. What we love and eat.

take it. The licking. Cos. Cos. Dogs. Dogs don't care if you're mad, sad or bad... Dogs don't lie. Cry. And they NEVER try to die.

CAT. Cat hadn't gone very far. She. She took a bus to the next town. EVERY DAY. EARLY. Very early. Because she. She was a baker. A baker of bread. Man can live on bread. But women can't.

ANYWAY. Anyway. IT WAS GOOD. It was good. Because. BECAUSE. I could see you AGAIN. Couldn't I? YES. but. Something. Something wasn't quite GELLING. I'd. I'd left you. And I don't think you'd forgiven me. We were now. BOTH. Both out of the CAVE now. But. I. I had. I HAD left first. I don't think you knew. I DON'T THINK YOU realized. That you hadn't forgiven me. But I knew.

CHAPTER, FORGIVE

You. Actually. I. Maybe you can. But I. I can't forgive someone who's dead. Because they've have gone. Disappeared from continuity. They cease to exist. And so. So There's no point doing anything for them... unless it helps you. Because. Because they don't care. But. So. So do it for yourself. Forgive yourself. Or. Or forgive them... but only if it helps you. Otherwise. Otherwise there is no point. Life's for the living, and you'll forget that when you're dead.

CHAPTER, CHANGE

I changed. CAT. when we met. I did. A decade. A DECADE OF YOU. changed me. And so. SO. I have no choice. No. choice. But. But to change again. Now you're. You're not here.

Each disk-like blood cell morphed,
morphed to a rose petal
fingertips,
nose,



hips,
fluid fluttered,
your words bloomed and
Scattered, flurrying
through arteries,
into veins,



but
pollen pollutes,
perfuming haemoglobin,
charging each synapse, ensuring
that every nerve is
devoted

but I.
I never knew.
I never knew that blood could wilt.
Each petal carried a hidden thorn to rip.
Tear. and
slash.

Poisoning
lungs,
fingertips,
gut,
the whites of my eyes
scarleted

skin
sickens as
capillaries were
cut

My
legs,
arms,
toes,
fingers,
head,

grew heavy,
as rounded petals thickened
crimsoning to sludge

alone,
I withdraw each thorn from every cell

and when I am done,
a red river will flow again,
to wash away
the debris.

We all learn. Learn to live with scars beneath our skin. YES. We do. For me. The world. It may still be spinning. But its. Its lost its scent. She. Cat. Stored memories. And If there was one that I couldn't. I couldn't quite reach she'd get it down.

She would. She did. She'd open it. Read It aloud. But now. the. dried. Pe.ta.ls w.e sli.de be.twix.t th.e pa.ge.s h.ave .fallen out.

Lost.

Entire shelves.

lost.

CHAPTER, CUT

I'D SEE THEM. Even if she wore bangles. Even if she wore baggy hoodies. They weren't a secret. But. But unless she brought them up. I. I didn't. Because. Because sometimes you. You don't need to talk about the terrible times. Because. Because then you're just left with terrible times... and reflections upon terrible times. You. You need to have some better. times. In-between. In-between terrible times. And. And I think we did. We had lots. I'm. I'm not. Not a therapist. NO. I tried. I tried sometimes. Because. Because often friends are all someone's got. But. But I could. I wanted. We wanted to have fun. Not just for her. No. For me too. She gave me that. Slices. Slices of fun.

In a certain tribes. I'm not sure which. The women. The women chop off a finger. ³⁷⁷Every. Every time a son dies. And. And this is so that things don't go back to normal NO. Because. Because after death. After death. Everything keeps going. As if they were never there. Like. Like dropping a stone into water... once the ripples disappear. You. You wouldn't know.

But. But by chopping a finger off. They. They have changed. People know. Know just by looking at them. They don't need to be told.

³⁷⁷ The only. The only problem with the tradition is that it's sexist. Because. BECAUSE. Daughters. Daughters are vital too. AND. AND. And why isn't the father changed? – can't they take turns? TAKE TURNS ON WHOSE HAND. Whose hand take the chop. Maybe fathers could take the daughters? BECAUSE. Because. We exist.

I thought it was stupid before. But. But now I think I understand. **HOW.** How I want people to know. **KNOW THAT.** Know that I've been marked. Irreparably. I piggy-back her ghost. Only I can feel her weight.

CHAPTER, NINE

The day was cold. The day was bright. The day was too bright. She was wearing sunglasses. They were smashed onto the track. It was all caught on **CCTV.** No one pushed her. No one pushed her. I wish someone had pushed her. If someone had pushed her... I could be angry. Angry at them. Not at her. I will never forget her. I will never forgive her.

CHAPTER, I DIDN'T STOP WORK

I didn't stop. **NO.** I didn't. I thought. That if. If I stopped. I'd never **START AGAIN.** Tina understood. **SHE DIDN'T WANT ME TO STOP EITHER.** Not because she was mean. she understood. Her husband had died three years ago. cancer. **Cancer of the prostate** She said. She said it was the shop that kept her sane.

I thought that maybe. Maybe it could do the same for me.

Anyway. **TODAY.** Today. **I'M TRIMMING.** Trimming Cuddles. Cuddles is an old black terrier cross. A bit stiff, but always happy to see me. **HIS OWNER.** Margery. She comes. Comes every two weeks. **EVEN THOUGH.** Even though there's nothing to cut.

I **THINK.** I think she just likes to chat. I'd made. Made Cuddles a scarf. Last **Christmas.** Yes. In rib stitch. Blue and yellow. Because she always. **ALWAYS.** Comes on either a Tuesday or a Wednesday with Cuddles. I dropped. Dropped a stitch. One. So. So it wasn't perfect. I'd. I'd wanted to knit scarfs for all my family members. **But. But. But** after I'd finished **CUDDLES.** I didn't want to do another. They got chocolates instead. I'd wanted. wanted to through it out and start again. **BECAUSE.** Because it was wrong. **But.** Dad said. Dad said. **CUDDLES** wouldn't notice. And he was probably right.

"It's nice to see you Tammy. **ESPECIALLY.** Especially. After what happened with your friend. Don't want you going that way, do we?"

Margery didn't. didn't beat around the bush. **NO. BUT.** But. It was nice. **BECAUSE. SO MANY.** So. Many people avoided the subject. **PRESUMED.** Presumed I **DIDN'T** want to talk about it. **BECAUSE. THEY.** They didn't want to talk about it. **THAT.** This. This was kind of nice. It broke. **BROKE.** The unspoken **CAT FLAP.**

Anyway. I. I **POLISHED.** Cuddle's teeth. **BRIGHT WHITE.** Well. actually, kind of yellowy, like ivory. Like ivory that smells like tuna. **ANIMAL ACTIVISTS. THEY.** They sometimes dye living elephant's tusks **RED.** To deter poaches. I **THINK.** I think they should scent it of tuna too. **JUST.** Just to make sure.

I DON'T LIKE ELEPHANTS. TOO BIG. Too snotty.

DOGS. Dogs are a good safe size to love. I stroke them. I try and stroke them. 40 times. Yes. Each one. **Before.** Before It goes back to its owner. Ten on the head. Ten on the left side. Ten on the right side. And 10 on the head. I try and do it before the owner comes back because when they're back the dog starts pulling to get to them. And I have to hold onto its collar and try and do the last ones really quickly. And sometimes I can't. Then. Then I worry something bad might happen to the dog. **Or. Or** to the owner. I don't know what. And I don't know why. I just know how I feel. **No one. No one** else knows I do that. They just think I like petting. Which I do too. **Of course.**

Chapter, the 'tooth' dream.

TEETH. We've all had the tooth dream. Haven't we? The bank managers, scoober drivers and uber divers... you, and me. **So. So** there's no point in me telling you about it really. **But. But** I will anyway...

I pulled one. Tooth that is. It came out, but. **But** like a string of pearls the ones on eather side came too! then. Then whentey had all come loose they went soft. Like a mini-mix sweets, and crumbled. I choacked. Choacked as their powder solidified in my throat.

CHAPTER, STAIRCASE

I get trapped, sometimes. In a spiral staircase. It has no floors upwards. And no floors downwards. You can just go round and around and around. I just go.... around. Trying to grab hold of something. And when you. When I can't grab hold of something. When I can't grab hold of something. You. I just keep on going. Indefinitely.

I try. To grab hold. **Of something. Anything. So** I can catch a breath. **But. but** when I cling. Whatever I'm holding crumbles. It breaks off.

So... What's the best I can do???

The best I can do is take it with me. **PICK IT UP.** And take it with me.

Until. I'm running up. and down. this staircase, with an armful of objects. Objects

I can't drop. **MUSTN'T** drop. Mustn't forget.

To make sure I'm holding them...I say their names. over and. over...

"First I grabbed the hook, but the hook said I was needy, the hook said I was intense. Screw the hook!!!...."

"I grabbed hook, but **IT DIDN'T HELP.** So. So. I'll try the lamp. the lamp. The Lamp."

"But the hook said I was needy, the hook said I was intense. Screw the hook. I grabbed the lamp. The lamp. But the lamp didn't hold the answers, it just said, it just said, 'Ok then, if that's how you feel'. But what does that mean? But what does that mean?"

"First I grabbed the hook but the hook said I was needy, the hook said I was intense. Screw the hook. Then I grabbed the lamp. The Lamp. But the lamp didn't hold the answers,

it just said, it just said, 'Ok then, if that's how you feel'. But what does that mean? But what does that mean? I WANT TO TELL THE LAMP. The lamp should know that. that. it's up its own arse. I think. I'm sorry. Am I sorry? The lamp said. The lamp said. The lamp said it couldn't be friends. Then it turned off. It TURNED Off!!!"

First I grabbed the hook. Said I was needy. Intense. FUCK THE HOOK, but the hook should understand that. The hook should understand that it shouldn't have said that at her 61st birthday. No. it shouldn't have said that. Then I grabbed the lamp. LAMP. No answers, no answers. It said. SAID. 'OK if that's how you feel.' BUT WHAT DID IT MEAN? OFF. TURNED OFF. So I GRABBED AT A WALKING STICK. GRABBED A WALKING STICK. BUT IT DIDN'T RESPOND.

NO IT DIDN'T RESPOND...

FASTER. FASTER. UNTIL I HAVE MANTRA.

FASTER. Faster. UNTIL I HAVE A MANTRA!!!

What's today's mantra?

OH YES. Oh yes. It's pretty much like yesterdays! But a little bit longer. Yes, it's a little bit longer.

HOOK NEEDY. FUCK INTENSE. GRABBED LAMP. NO ANSWER. 'If that's how you feel.' BUT WHAT DID IT MEAN? TURNED OFF. Walking stick. I grabbed. IT DIDN'T. RESPOND...

It's a bit like last month's MANTRA but MUCH much longer.

LONGER and stronger.

I tripped.

Tripped on the stick. The walking stick tripped me. Foot over heal. HEAD over foot.

Step SMASHes KNEE.

Everything is falling. CLATTERING

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN,

WITH a BANG BANG BANG,

and a SMASH from the bulb of the lamp.

TUMBLING,

TUMBLING AWAY.

AWAY. FROM ME.

You. I let everything fall. You're. I'M an idiot. You're. I'M a fat stupid idiot.

Pick it up.

Don't stop.

PICK IT UP.

KEEP GOING!!! You HAVE TO KEEP GOING.

Remember the story about the dancing girl? You shouldn't have put the shoes on! Should you? WHEN YOU WERE EIGHT, YOU PUT THE SHOES ON. You shouldn't have. YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE.

Now you can't stop dancing. Dancing AROUND AND

AROUND

AND AROUND.

AND AROUND.

AND....

PICK IT UP, Start with the hook. Pick the hook up first. WHY CAN'T I TAKE THESE FUCKING CUNT SHOES OFF?

THEN THE LAMP. And try to. Try to remember what it said....

What did it say?

Oh yes. It said. 'if That's how you feel?' Did it say anything else? Yes. I remember it did. IT DID SAY SOMETHING ELSE! – then what did you say? – what did you say?

Write it all down TAMMY. So you don't need to carry it. Write it all down. It's too heavy to carry. Write it all down. leave the objects. Carry a little note instead...

Write it all again

because you didn't capture it all the first time.

I think you need to write it all down again.

Because you didn't capture it the second time...

Ever played. Have you ever played 'My grandma went to the shops and bought a.....' and you just keep adding an ingredient until someone can't fit all the items in their head??....

Have you ever played that?

OCD. Clawdia. She. She plays games with you. But she's always smarter. You'll. I'll never figure out how to win. You're lucky if you glean a rule, or two. But there's really no

point... NO. because. Because as soon as it knows. AS SOON AS IT KNOWS you know (and it always knows you know), it changes. CHANGES the game.

ALTERS THE RULES. And as. As you try. Try desperately to work it out. TRY DESPERATELY to repent. Try desperately to work out your own faults and FIX FIX FIX THEM.

Life outside. OUTSIDE the game. outside the rail of the staircase, fades. Slowly, but once the sun sets it'll never come back up again. Or you don't think it will. You reach the parts of the staircase with no windows. But you keep on going. Even if you can't see.

Why?

Why do you keep on going?

Because. WELL. it's because. I don't know? I guess it's because you haven't quite figured out how to stop... you just. Just keep finding different ways to catch breath. Maybe

Maybe it's best

to

just

jump

off the staircase?

AND hope that somewhere

is a net

down there,

Cat leaped off hers.

Being ignored is the worst thing. Claudia thrives. THE THOUGHTS. The THOUGHTS. Don't catch. Don't catch. On anything. So THEY JUST spiral. SPIRAL faster TO fill in THE faster and faster

Trying to locate an answer. TRYING TO LOCATE THE PERFECT QUESTION.

Find the answer. FIND the answer. Make an answer, break off an answer, remodel it.

Say it. Replay it. WRITE IT DOWN. READ it. READ IT AGAIN. NO.

RE-WRITE IT. and read it again. Yes? NO.

That's why. Sometimes, I give myself floor. Temporary. Flimsy. But sometimes I can nail up one myself. It'll hold me. Just. Just for a few seconds.

Don't wait. You. I. can't wait for an answer. Decide.

But how do you know it's true? Your floor?

You can't, and so. And so. When you try and walk.

Walk again. You'll likely tread on a nail.

and you'll take that with you. When the floor falls through.

It always does.

Pure O. Pure O. Pure O. OH NO. nooooo. No NO NO.

Noise drowns me. I. I try to funnel it. But. But there's too much. I can't breathe.

CHAPTER, MONSTERS

Its under your bed hiding. Yes. Yes you know. or at least you think. It's there. So you look. Yes. You look. You look and see. See that it's not.

But. But then what about the vampire bats raging at the widow? – you heard them yes. sometimes you see their eyes.

So. So. So you bolt the window shut yes. you bolt it.

Then. Then you hear scratching. Scratching in the wall. Then. Then you itch. Because. Because the dirt. The evil. It's. It's not external no. Scarabs. You have scarabs. You can feel their little legs hook and creep, crawling through capillaries.

YOU. Before long. You wish. You LONG. For the monster under your bed.

Because. Because each distraction. EACH. EACH STEP. Each step away from the monster. Without. Without finding the root. The real root. Whether it be a co-worker that snubs you, a boss who gaslights, a partner who sulks. If. If you don't address the root, then each step MUST be worse. Yes. To distract. To distract from the last. BECAUSE. Because you don't care that you might have forgotten to buy your eyeliner.... That maybe, in distraction, you just walked out of the shop. YOU DON'T CARE. You don't care about the indescresion of shoplifting. Because. Because deep down. Very deep down. YOU'RE A PAEDOPHILE....

STEPS TO HELL

FUCK. I'M A PAEDOPHILE AREN'T I? MUST PROTECT EVERYONE. FROM. ME.

Did I turn to purposely see my niece undress? I thought about her when at home!

I. I probably slid my toe up that dogs Bum hole. Yes. When it sat on my foot.

I think. I think I hit someone. In my car. Yes. And I then drove off. I swear I heard a bump.

I once made a pass at a guy at a bar. I was drunk. He wasn't into me. Did I sexually harass him?

I made a joke that was insensitive. – am I abusive?

I think. I think I left the stove on. It's burning down my house.

Maybe I left the door open?

I'M. I'm not sure if you understand. But. But to go up. UP. UP. Those steps is so easy. Because. Because each step cures. Wipes. Deletes the one bellow. Because.... Because. Because. If you are scared about being a paedophile. YOU. You don't care. Don't care that you left the door open. Do you? You. You don't care about the presentation you need to make Infront of your class. NO. You. You just have one simple. ALL CONSUMING. Worry.

But. But. Only recently have I learnt. Learnt that the bottom step. The bottom step should be the top. Yes. And. And that there is a way down. Down. Down. Into the cool. Into the calm. You. You have to talk yourself down from a ledge. Not. NOT DISTRACT YOURSELF BY CLIMBING TO A HIGHER ONE.

You have to stop the mantras. Before they loop.

Catch them and dismiss. CATCH THEM. Dismiss.

You. You might reason with them.

I checked the door. It was locked.

Paedophile is the most common OCD

anxiety

So common that there is

even a type called POCD

I have OCD.

I know OCD. Isn't it likely? Isn't it likely

That this is a manifestation of that?

Must create doubt. Reasonable doubt. But still. If I'm being honest. I've. I've persuaded myself that I haven't got OCD. I've manipulated everyone into thinking I have OCD. Yes. I have. So. So that they don't see me for what I really am. An abuser. A sexual abuser. An animal abuser. A PAEDOPHILE.

SERTRALINE. SERTRALINE. SERTRA-SCREAM!

CLIMBING AGAIN.

I'm climbing.

FUCK

EACH TIME. Each time I think a thought. Each time I roooooominate. It. It becomes harder to unthink. Cotton wound round and round and round, cutting off my sense. Sense of reason. Sense of proportion. Until. Until I'm just left with panic. Blind panic.

You. You have to stop plugging. STOP DIGGING. But. But its automatic.

I DON'T KNOW HOW.

Honest.

I'm not doing it on purpose.

I just don't know how to stop.

CHAPTER, PROGRAMMING

Sometimes. Sometimes it's like seeing all the raw data. ON a screen. You don't speak that language. Or at least I don't. Just squiggles and numbers and symbols. Pages and Pages of it refreshing in front of you.

You. You don't know quite what you're looking at. But. But you know it's important. Fundamental. You know that without it you'd break. You know. You know your computer is trying to fix itself. And. And you hope it knows how. But. But sometimes. Sometimes you're sure it's just looping. Generating letters numbers symbols for the sake of it. It's stuck. STUCK IN A LOOP.



CHAPTER, SHOPPING

The light. The long thin lights that go down the centre. Firstly, they hum. Not loud. Not as loudly as my sister used to hum in the mornings. But they do. And secondly.

SECONDLY. Their light is toxic. **IT** beams straight to you and captures your head. Holding it. Holding it in a state of confusion. **I FEEL.** Feel like a cat. A cat caught in headlights.

A picture. I have a picture. In my head. **Of. Of** two grapes, one old and withered, one plump and round getting married with a ring and. And they are on a biscuit boat, on an orange lake. I need(/Want): Grapes, raisins, ring doughnuts, bagels and biscuits. I couldn't find a pen or paper when I rushed out. **So. So** I mental imaged it.

I PERUSE. Peruse aisles. It's like a library. **I. I.** I go through all sixteen of the isles to find **RAISINS.** And then. And then I need to do that again for the second item on my list. **BREAD.** Bagels. The bagels look like those hoops that you use at Water World. **ME AND CAT.** Me and cat went there for my 14th birthday. We walked. **WALKED** across the Lilly pad steppingstones. **FUCK.** I'm thinking of her. **THIS WAS THE BAKERY ILE. THAT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN.**

... hungry and sleepy is the same emotion **NOW.**

BISCUITS. Time. Time to find biscuits. Party rings. Jammy Dodgers. Shortbread. They'll make you fat. **TAMMY** Fig. **FIG ROLES.** Roles of fat. Fig roles were **Cats** favourite. We ate them when she slept over. **MUM.** Mum would be cross. She'd be cross because we'd get crumbs in the sheets. **FUCK.** Fuck **IT.** **FUCK OFF CAT.**

I'M LEAVING. I walk. **I WALK.** I walk to the door. It slides. I've only got half my shopping it slides. **WHO.** who do I bump into. **SODS LAW. YES.**

CAT'S dad. **Pietr** (or Peter) He's. His lost soul has wondered into the supermarket. He's seen me. **HE'S** coming over. Staggering slightly. I smell him before he speaks. **I KNOW.** know which aisle he'll be headed to.

CHAPTER, CAT AND HER MULTI-BUTTONED DREAM COAT

Her Dad. **Cat's.** He. He worked at a button factory. Yes. All types of buttons. Stripped and Spotted. Leather and suede, round, square and star.

If. If there was a particularly nice one. **A.** A particularly special one. He'd. He'd bring it home. And give it. Give it to cat. Yes. He would. He'd slip it into his pocket and take it home.

She'd. She'd sow them. Sow them onto an old coat. Not just the ones her dad gave her. No. Any buttons. If she found them. Lying around. She said. She said she'd wanted to give them a home. She said. Said each button was a memory. A stich in time.

Anyway. Anyway every year I'd give her a birthday button. I'd. I'd cut it off one of my own clothes. The nicest. The brightest. The most interesting. And. And I'd put it in a little padded box. Like a necklace. And. And I'd wrap it up for her. I'd give her something else too! **But. But** she always got a birthday button.

Steampunk. The coat looked steam punk. But that was just a coincidence. Anyway. The day. The day she died. She was wearing. She wore that coat. AND. And. And my. My PURPLE scarf. I'd made it. She was born. BORN on a Friday. So. so. I'd knitted it purple. I WONDER. Did. She. Did she. Do it. DIE. ON a Friday. ON A PURPLE FRIDAY. THE SAME. The same day she was born. DID she do it purposely. Did she do it. DO it for me? OR. Or. Or was it just a purple. PURPLE coincidence?

CHAPTER, TRAIN

CHEW. CHHHHHHHHEEEEW. I'd like. I WANT. I need something to stop it. to break it. THE TRAIN. train of thought. I'D LIKE. I'd like it to break. To slow. BUT. More than that. I'D LIKE. I'd like some of the carriages to drop off. BECAUSE. IT'S GOT. It's got MILES AND MILES of carriages. The engine. BUT THE engine hasn't got BIGGER. It never gets re-installed. NO. So. SO. It. So I. just have to work harder.

I WISH. I wish something would JUMP. Jump out. INFRONT of my thought train. TO. To give it a reason to stop. To break. HARD. Screech to a still.

THE train. The train of thought. THE train of thought didn't miss. Didn't bypass you Cat. You. You just wanted it to stop too. I bet. I bet you had even more carriages than me.

Just KNOW. JUST know I'm still waving. CAT. Waving at the end of the platform.

CHAPTER, FLAT

It's not like in cartoons. No. It's not like in cartoons where when they get run over their body is just a 2D version of their 3D body. No. Cat went splat.

I think. I think. To put her in the coffin would have been a jigsaw. Someone would have had snap her arms and legs back into place. I'm glad she was dead for that bit at least.

Apparently. Apparently they did a good job. Of stitching her. Into shape. Her dad said she'd, 'looked peaceful'... so they, the Mortician, must have done a good job then... mustn't they! Must have been a mother fucking artist.

CHAPTER, RELIEF.

Strange. Do you know what is really strange. After. After the shock. THE HORROR. Of what happened. I felt relief. Because. Because when someone's missing. Any news. Any news is. Good. No. any news. Any news is. Welcomed. Because knowing. Even if you know the worst. Is. Is much better than not knowing. Yes. Infinitely. After. After she. Cat. Cat went missing. It. It was better to know. Know she was hit. Yes. It was. Even. Even though before. I. I could pretend she wasn't.

At the time I thought, 'Oh Shit' Cat's dead.... It was only later. Only much MUCH later. Did I realize that this fact was devastating. Because. Because. Gone is gone. They don't come back for a 'special' or a guest appearance. GONE IS GONE. You don't see them at the back of a concert hall, or at a mutual friend's wedding. GONE IS GONE. You can't.

You can't look them up on Facebook to see how they're doing. **BECAUSE.** Because. **GONE MEANS GONE.**

Now. Now time takes on a new meaning. A new distinction.

BC – Before Christ.

AC – After Christ. (thought it doesn't actually stand for that... but everyone remembers it this way!)

.....

But for me. For me.

WC – this is With Cat.

PC – and this stands for Post-Cat.

I know. I know instantly. And I think I always will. Even if she's not there. Not in that specific memory. I recognize³⁷⁸ memories where I'm whole.

And. And I feel the gap in the memories where I am not. Whatever they are. They will always be Post-Cat. And. And I'm not sure if I have any control over that.

Comet Catherine

Cat's comet landed amongst pointed mountains.

Her fire dimmed.

Leaving a round and barren rock.

Stuck within its crater.

Too weak to boulder on.

Wind chiselled.

Moss crept.

She forgot.

Forgot. She used to fly.

CHAPTER, SECOND THOUGHTS.

I thought I'd made it up. For attention. Yes. For a week. I just didn't talk to anyone else. Then. Then I rang my aunt. And said.

"I'm still upset about cat."

And. And she didn't correct me. So. So I knew it must be true.

CHAPTER, CAMPING

³⁷⁸ **Recognated** = Recognized + Appreciated. Meaning: The act of seeing something and realizing it has worth. Example: Dylexie will soon be recongated as a language in it's own right.

We. We tried to go camping once. At College. It was Me. Cat. And. And Fergus. Clive loves home comforts too much. Even when he was younger.

We. We went out into the middle of a wood. I'd. I'd. Got a huge rucksack. Considering we were only there one night. Marshmallows. Four books (more than I read in a year!). She-wee. Small ukulele. Bongo drum. Yes. I'd brought the works.

But. But what. I. What we hadn't brought was. Was poles. No. We. We had the tent. We. We. Had the pegs. And we had the strings. But not the poles. We. We thought about all laying in the tent. And using it sort of like a waterproof blanket. But. But then it started raining. And we realized it would not work. Because. Because when flat it wasn't waterproof. Cat. Cat was dancing in the puddles. I'd been dancing with her. But. But my feet had got wet and cold. Now I was curled up under the dampening tent. Fergus called his dad. And. And we all stayed at his house instead. It. It was nice. Fergus in a tent with us. Breathing. With his breath. Would. Would have been challenging. His dad was an AMAZING cook. Much better than the baked-beans and cereal we'd had planned.

Fergus had decorated his room with glow-in-dark dark posters of planets. And. And had a Telescope. A big metal one. We spent the night trying to find constellations. The Armadillo. Pelican. A half dog half fish mermaid. And. We made them into stories. Ridiculous stories. Ate my marshmallows. Before. Before falling asleep under luminous planets. Snug. Warm. And. And slightly sticky.

Anyway. Anyway. I had fun. I did. But. But It makes me think. Made me think. Yes. Yes. That. That that was our problem. Me and Cats. That. That we didn't have a structure. In life. No. That we seemed to have everything. Everything around us that we should need. Education. Books. Pens. Paper. Career Websites. Uni prospectus. But. But we couldn't frame it. Couldn't hold it up. FOR LONG. We. We were always trying to camp with no poles. At school. At work. Even. Even at home. And. And sometimes when we got close to close to the elements. We felt it. The damp. And. And the cold.

CHAPTER, HAIRY-CUTS

No one treasures. No one treasures half measures. OR AT LEAST. At least I DON'T. no. NEVER. I don't treasure half measures.

I didn't want to do an OK job. I MIGHT NOT BE A MICROBIOLOGIST.

NO. But. BUT I was going to be the best fucking dog clipper, cutter, buffer, scrubber and styler this town had ever seen. EVER KNOWN.

Why? Because I have nothing else to do... and, because I'm inherently perfectionistic. It's lucky that I don't have hair all over. LIKE A DOG. Because. BECAUSE. I'd never get out the house.

I watched my aunt. **AT FIRST.** At first I **WATCHED.** Whenever I **WASN'T.** clipping. I watched how she separated the hair. How she brushed it. **Shaped it.** What products she used. How much.

But. **BUT.** I wanted to be better. **THE BEST.** I started to research. **STARTED TO READ.** **READ** about cuts. Went on you-tube. I **WATCHED.** watched. What they did. **WATCHED.** **HOW TO STYLE.** How to execute complex cuts.

THESE. These are the most common:

Neaten: This is the most requested style. You trim the feet, sanitary areas, and feather the back of the legs, belly lines, neck and chest. This is most common for double-coated breeds like golden retrievers, Australian Shepherds, and Great Pyrenees.

Lamb Cut: To achieve this style, the hair on the body and neck is clipped short, this leaves the hair longer on the head and legs. This is not a breed-specific haircut, but it is often seen on poodles.

Lion Cut: (roar!) Just like it sounds, this is when the cut resembles a lion's mane. Body hair cut short, while the hair on the neck and head is left much longer.

Puppy Cut: The hair is cut to a uniform length all over the body. Usually, 1-2 inches of fur is left behind. It is short all over.

Schnauzer Cut. Contrary to its name, this cut isn't just for Schnauzers. Appropriate for large and small dogs alike. It leaves longer hair on the dog's legs while trimming the back and sides very short. Its distinguishing characteristic is the light fringe of hair left on the lower side of the dog's body, and a little 'mustache' cut around the dog's face.

Teddy Bear Cut. The opposite of the Lion Cut. You trim the hair on the head shorter but leave the rest of the body hair longer. It can be clipped to any length, dependant on owner's preference. The end-result resembles a Teddy Bear.

Practical Topknot. This style is usually seen in long-haired dogs such as Lhasa Apso, Maltese or Shih Tzu. In the Topknot, some of the hair on the head is gathered and secured with a band (or clip) making a sort of a ponytail. Hair on the rest of the body is then clipped to the desired length.

I **BOUGHT.** I bought these fluffy unicorn toys. **THEY WERE** long-haired unicorns. And they. They obviously didn't sell. **BECAUSE.** Because. They'd ended up in pound world. Probably because they looked more like one horned yacks. Anyway. I bought **LOADS** of them. **AND.** Some pink and black Halloween wings. I stuck them onto the yack unicorns... so I could have another go.

I had a pile. A pile of balded unicorns at the end. I felt sorry for them³⁷⁹. Donated them. In **SHOE BOXES.** To. **TO AFRICAN** children. I felt a bit bad. For cutting all their fur off. To practice cuts. **BECAUSE.** Because. I **WAS** depriving the Africans of fluffy toys. **BUT.** I guess. A hairless unicorn is better than nothing?

³⁷⁹ They weren't the only victim. **MY FLATMATE.** MY flatmate. **HATED** the hair. Hated that little bits of it made their way down the stairs. Onto his coat. **INTO HIS SOUP.**

I like. I LIKE learning things. Consuming them. I don't like. I don't like being a 'bit' good, I like being the best. I want to hold something's history, while shaking hands with its future. I CAN knit. I KNOW that knitting first started in the sixteenth century, in the Middle East. Then travelled to Europe. I can pearl. Cross stich. Stockinette. Rib. Andalusian, and Chevron. I know. I KNOW THAT. Hip hop. Hip hop started in the Bronx, New York BY AFRO, CARIBBEAN AND LATINO American's. I CAN. SMURF. PREP. Steve Martin. Cabbage Patch and Rambo.

Once I've learnt something. WELL. I move on. On to something else. I SPORADICALLY. Hyper-focus. Like a. like a binocular-kilido-microscope. I can't read one book. NO. I HAVE TO. Have to read THREE at once. So. When. When I GET BORED I can Swap. change.

But. If. BUT WHEN I'm Invested.
FULLY.

When I decide.

decide a that.

Something Has bonded TO ME. To my DNA

THEN.

THEN.

I NEVER do IT half measures.

WHICH IS why SOMETIMES. Why sometimes. Why I find it very hard to start. BECAUSE I know. I KNOW. I won't be able to finish. Finish until it's perfect.

SNIP SNIP SNIP. SNIPPING THROUGH THE DAY.

SNIPPING THROUGH THE NIGHT

Snipping through

SNIPPING THROUGH the THOUGHTS.

Thoughts that plague and PLAY.

CHAPTER, FIRE ANT VAGINA

I had a dream. I had a dream that I'd left my dildo. My dildos. All around Barking Mad Snips. Customers. Mrs Harvey. Margery. Aunty Tina. They. They kept finding them. And telling me.

I GOT SENT HOME. Yes. I did. I was mortified.

AT HOME. At my house I sat down. And. And there were ants on the arm chair. Beneath me. So. And so I moved. But the ants. They. They were still there. RED ants. I took my trousers off. But I realized. realized they were coming from under my knickerline. So. And so I took them off. I saw. And I SAW. That the red ants. THEY'D THEY'D nested. Nested inside me. Funnelling in and out through my vagina.

FUCK. It was my period again. When I woke my crotch was wet and sticky. But. But that dream. So leggy.

I think. I think it was because I had seen a friend. An Indian friend the day before. She's a psychiatrist. She'd. She'd been telling me about 'cultural' mental health problems. YES. Diagnosis which only exist within certain cultures. In Africa there's Koro, which is. Is the irrational fear that your genitals will disappear inside of you. And. And in India. Before arranged marriages. Women. Some women. They get the sensation of ants. BITING. Their feet. FIRE ANTS. Searing so badly that they can hardly walk. It drives them. Drives them insane. instead of getting 'cold feet' they have pathological BURNING feet. And I think. I think it's because she told me about this. That I had that vagina aunt dream.

Periods are fucking AWFUL times. Even without FIRE ants. DEPRESSION. Shots. A five day shot of instant depression. My favourite underwear too. Blue silk with a hot air balloons design. Now irreparably STAINED.

Fucking irregular. Flows. CAN'T EVEN PLAN MY PERIOD. NO wonder everything else is SHIT.

CHAPTER, EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY

RING ring. RING ring. RING rin....

"HELLO, Barking Mad Snippets, how can I help?" That's. This is. me. My phone voice. I tried. I try to Monroe it. A little bit. make it breathy.

Sex sells.

"Madam Jasmine. Madame Jasmine Darling..."

She. The woman. Sounded like she was talking through a small sourer apple. She held a pause after the she said her name.

I WAITED.

"Prince needs an appointment. He'll be entering Crufts this year. His first year. And. And He needs to be styled. Professionally styled."

"Yes. Well we can arrange that. I can book you in [...]"

"I'd like it to be done by Tammy. She works here, doesn't she?"

I DO! But. But...

"Our most experienced groomer is Tina, I think I should book you in with her."

“That simply won’t do! Is Tammy available?” Her voice is sharp.

I am Tammy. Should I tell her? Has it gone on too long? I think it’s gone on too long.

I SAY...

“Yes”. I SAY, “Tammy can be available. How’s 2.30 next TUESDAY?”

“GOOD.”

WITH THAT. And with that she. MADAM DARLING. Put the phone down.

TURNS OUT. Turns out. TURNS OUT I’d been recommended. By Suzie. SALTY SUZIE. Ant Tina calls her that. Cos. Cos she never runs out of stories about her ex-husband. LAST TIME. Last time HE. he. he had too much nose fluff. So much that it tickled. Tickled to kiss him.

Suzie has a Shih tzu. Lulu. And. And Tina always MADE ME. MADE ME do Lulu. Because. BECAUSE she. Lulu. Was complicated. SUZIE wanted her cut. Cut like a show dog. Not simply trimmed, clipped and polished. She wanted her styled.

“There you go Tams! Something to keep you busy. Make use of all those fancy clipping skills!”



And I did. I’D PUT MY SOUL. And Heart into Lulu’s cut.

What I found hard. Not just on LuLu. But. But all the dogs. I found it hard. I hated cutting the hair around a dog's anus.

Not because it smelt. OR. Or because it had bits of poo stuck in it (it sometimes did.). But. But BECAUSE. I worried. I ALWAYS worried that. That I might slip with the scissors. AND. accidentally rape the dog. OR. Even worse. Do it on purpose. I was terrified that I might SUDDENLY do it on purpose. It has never happened. But. But it ever so easily could. Couldn't it?

Anyway. MADAM. MADAM DARLING. The woman on the phone. She. LUNCHEd. Lunched with Suzie. And. And she'd. She'd. SHE'D asked. ASKED SUZIE. Where LULU HAD BEEN CUT. And that's. That's how I'd been recommended. This. This was so important. That. That I made a mental memory. Yes. I did. It was a crown. A crown being cut by a giant pair of scissors. CUT PRINCE. When. When I have to remember something. I. I make a mental image. Especially if I have a lot of things to remember. I call it 'picture clumping'. Because. Because instead of remembering lots of little things. You. You imagine a picture that has lots of little clues in it. Then. Then all you need to do is remember that picture. And. And why you've put all the bits in it.

CHAPTER, SCALES

I DON'T WANT TO STEP. Step upon it. BECAUSE. Because I know. I KNOW. it's been a while and I KNOW. I'VE

SNACKED, SNACKED, SNACKED. Greed and Gluttony are deadly sins.

THREE POUND. Three pound heavier.

The fucking little quivery arrow has spoken.

TODAY IS A SHIT DAY. UNTIL. Until I can loose the weight. Until I can become myself again. UNTIL I'M lighter. Then EVERY DAY. Every day will be a shit day.

Guess I'd better get to the gym, HADN'T I?

So. So I don't get fat. GET FATTER No. do you know why? Because. Because if I reach the next STONE. If that happens. I'll just do what CAT DID. Because. BECAUSE. I don't think I could live with MYSELF. If. If I put that much PRESSURE ON the GROUND. On the earth I. I simply COULDN'T live with myself. If. If. Someone. Someone comments on my weight. GOOD. OR BAD. Then. Then that week. That week I loose a pound.

CHAPTER, SACKED

Not from my Aunts No. before. The first job I had. When I got back. From university. Was a waitress at. At the Silver Teaspoon. HIGH CLASS. Good tips. But not for me. I. I kept dropping dishes. with. and without food. Knives leaped off a plates. Made their way down customer backs. They did.

I mixed up orders. They. The management. Wouldn't let me write them down. Told me. Said. Said I had to remember. But. But I. I couldn't. or rather. I could. But not like a photograph. I'd get close. But not. Not exact. People. People like their food exact.

Signing on. Signing on is hard. Yes. Hard when you're young. **BECAUSE. YOU CAN'T.** you can't be young. And depressed. **NO.** And you definitely can't be young. Young and **UNFORTUNATE.**

NO.

When. When **YOU'RE YOUNG.** You're lazy. **YES. ALWAYS.** Young people don't have difficulty. **YOUNG** people don't. don't have strife. Don't have reasons. Proper reasons to die. Do they? No. Young people **HAVEN'T** lived enough to deserve to die. "I **DIDN'T COMMIT SUICIDE WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, DID I?**" no. **YOU DIDN'T.** And. Maybe. Maybe that's the problem.³⁸⁰

That. That all the people who've died. They're not. They're. Not here to help anymore. They. They've been. Been erased.

This woman. Short. Plump. Pink rounded glasses. She. The woman at the centre. The centre for **LAZY INCOMPETENT,** government **SCROUNGING** bums. Said. I was almost in tears. And. And she said,

"I think. Think your applying for jobs you're under-qualified for. Try something more. More realistic next time." She pushed her glasses up her nose so she could hold me. Hold me in their frames.

More realistic? More realistic than a waitress???

Fortunately. Yes. **VERY FORTUNATELY.** Tina. Aunty Tina. She. She **SAVED ME.** Yes. But. But. But I know. that. That not everyone has somebody to. Or. Somebody who can. Who is able. Able to save them.

CHAPTER, PRINCE

PRINCE. Prince was. Prince **IS** Poodle. A posh pampered pedigree poodle³⁸¹.

WHO. Who was entering. Entering his first **CRUFTS.** He'd. **THEY'D.** Him and Madam Darling. They'd worked themselves up at other shows. **BUT THIS.** This would be **HIS FIRST BIG ONE.**

³⁸⁰ **SORRY.** Sorry that you're still alive... **PRICK!**

³⁸¹ Dogs are a perfect example of humans perverting nature aren't they. Because a poode, especially when it is cut. Doesn't look like a wolf. A snoozer. With it's silly little eyebrows. Not a wolf. And a Pug. That's more like a caterpillar with legs. Not a wolf. No wonder we're so hard on 'our' own image... if. If we take dogs image so seriously. It's no wonder we all want plastic surgery.

Aunty Tina. SHE ran. RAN a clean shop. But it was mainly for mums. MUMS with a bit of extra cash. And. old ladies who weren't bendy enough to clip and sheer themselves, and wanted a natter.

THIS WAS. Well. THIS WAS. Our. OUR FIRST CELEBRITY!

CHAPTER, 12.

I'm going to push her. PUSH PUSH PUSH HER! NOW! LEAN. Just a little bit. LEEN. Fuck. FUC. FUK. I'M GOING TO KILL HER. She's my sister. Little siter. And. AND I'm going to kill her.

"Tammy! TAMMY. Are you listening? I was telling you that I'd completed my...."

I LEANED. I FELT. Felt myself. MYSELF LEAN

I FELT MYSELF LEAN TOWARDS HeR. I know I did. I felt it.

... I DID IT AGAIN. I'm practising. Practising for the real thing.

AGAIN. I leaned ...LURCHED EVEN!

I wlsH She was staNDing on the paveMENT side. And I. I was on the CUrb side. WHY DOES SHE ALWAYS STAND ON THE PAVEMENT SIDE? sHe'D never LOVE me if she knEw. Never loVE me if she knEW. HE couldN'T. He wouldn't be able too. MUM would hATE me. sHe's the favourite.

When I was seven, I had this solid metal golden plant pot. It was in my bedroom, on the top shelf of my dresser. I LOVED IT. But I knew. I knew. That if I didn't get my mum to put it away somewhere SECRET, where I couldn't find it.... I'd WHACK my sister over the head with it. I'd do it. until. Until she was dead.

I knew that. I knew that for certain. Well, I was pretty sure I did. Now that.

...We're home. Home now.

She. My sister. She LIVES. another day.

CHAPTER, BARKING MAD SNIPPETS

"It's a dog Tammy! Not a Vogue model."

Tina said. Said if I went faster. If I went faster. She could make twice the cash. But. But I DON'T want to make dogs look stupid. NO. A good haircut can change someone's day. EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY. And Mr Spot's day was today. Today was HIS day. TODAY. IT. He WOULD LOOK. Today he would feel better than he's felt all day.

WAG. WAG. Pout. Pout.

Claws polished. Each ear primed and propped. EVERY hair. CUT. Cut the same length as the rest. Not a milometer off.

“YOU KNOW. You know it’ll just grow back, right? AND. THE DOG. THE Dog. DOESN’T care! Just the owner. And they can’t really tell!”

Tina. Tina didn’t understand. Understand that. Understand that once I’d started. I couldn’t stop. That if I stopped. I wished I hadn’t started. That if. That if it. The dog. If the dog walked out the door looking SHAGGY. Then. Then that. That dog would be in my dreams. Pining. Pawing at my leg. Asking, “Why? Why Tammy? Why couldn’t you make me look beautiful?”

ANYWAY. Anyway I love dogs. And. And I love bugs. But. But I hate finding bugs on dogs. Yes. That’s the worst bit about the job. Tics and Fleas. Fleas I can deal with. Just chemical shampoo them. But. But tics you need to pull out. PULL OUT WITH TWEEZERS. Their little crabby legs wave at you while you do it. But I still feel guilty killing them. I get Auntie Tina. Auntie Tina to tell the owner. Because. Because they get very upset. Or. Or VERY OFFENDED. And. And If I tell them. I. I feel like it’s my fault. My fault their dogs infested. It’s. It’s confrontation. AND I HATE IT.

CHAPTER, ORIGAMI CRANE

It hit me. It hit me in the head as I passed through the park. I don’t know who sent it. The small lilac origami crane.

And so. And so. I picked it up.

I bent down and picked it up.
I scooped down and picked it up.
Because I wanted to know,
I wanted to know.

What’d hit me.

But I should have. I should have thrown it into the pond. Let it sink.

Can cranes swim? They can. They’re a wading bird. But paper cranes can’t. Paper cranes dissolve. Dissolve to nothing.

Fleeting thoughts dissolve

But I wanted to know BUT I NEEDED TO KNOW
so I pulled at its wings and they came out
all the way out

then I pulled at its tale
and then I pulled at its beak I wanted to know what it had to say
so I pulled at its beak

and I kept unfolding and unfolding I sat down upon the paper to stop it from blowing away
and started unfolding it around me

catacombs catacombs of paper unfolded still

until until I could no longer see the park not the ducks the pond the firs or oaks

it folded out further further out across fields towns mountains I lay

lay on-top of it

using my whole body to iron a crease

when when when it was fully out I thought I thought I'd understand

but but but It caught fire the whole thing the whole thing caught fire

while I was in the middle

this was not a fleeting thought.

CHAPTER, LITTLE PAPER LEMON

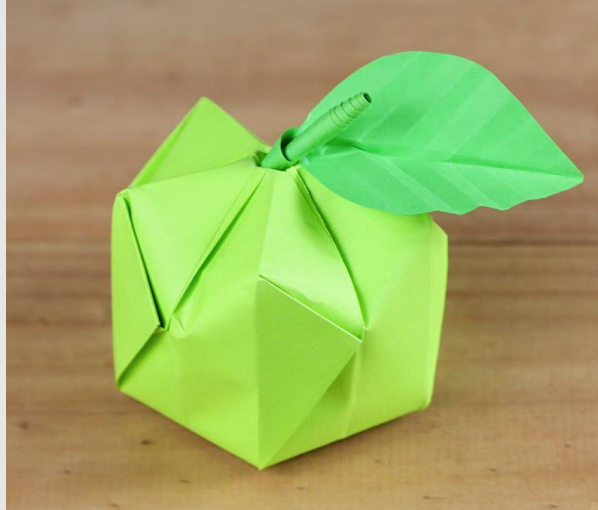
I remember. I remember trying to make a new creature. Out of paper. Each week with you. Cat. Yes. We had a little book. And special square paper with patterns of trees with golden leaves, coi-carp in a pond, pink cherry blossom... One week. One week we made a lemon. Yes. Because. Because when life gives you little yellow squares of paper... Make lemons.

It was flat. After we folded it. Over and over and over. Our globulation³⁸² was flat. But with all the detail. All it's potential. Lay in wait.

Then.

³⁸²Globulation: Any Round shaped creation.

We blew. Blew through a little head hole. It popped up. Yours stayed flat. You stick a pencil in it to try and pop it out. But. But I'd folded mine very neatly. It kept the air in. PUFF. There it was. You. You hit it with your fist, so it was flat like yours. I ripped yours in half. We laughed. If the paper hadn't been yellow neither would have looked like a lemon anyway.



CHAPTER, FINAL THOUGHTS

I keep wondering. trying to remember. Even though I wasn't there. I can imagine it. Her standing. Standing on platform 7B. And. And I keep wondering. What. what was she thinking? I've been with her a lifetime. A LIFETIME. But. But. But now. All my other 'real' memories flea. Leaving me wondering.... WHAT.

What were her last thoughts?

I bet. I bet they weren't comprehensible. I bet. I bet they weren't neat. I bet they slogged in and out. I bet. BET. I bet they GLUMPED together. bet. I BET you couldn't type them. I couldn't. Emotions. They. They don't look like letters. They imitate. But the words PANIC. Confusion. Sadness? Anger? Just words, Aren't they? AREN'T THEY? Just words. You don't feel anything if you read them.

Empty. JUST empty shells.

...each time she'd been hurt, each time she felt ugly, another jab, another stab. Another red-hot poker edging her forward. Every year. Every day. Every hour EVERY FUCKING MINUTE. Until. Until the platform was gone. MAYBE. Yes. No. That isn't how. You know them. You don't think them. That's why. That's why I can't really know. EVER KNOW. What she was feeling. Because it wasn't me. ITS NOT ME. Not me on the platform.

I asked for my copy of 'College Critters and Creepy Crawley' to be incinerated. With Cat. STUPID. Stupid really. But. But I wanted. I wanted her to take it with her. I wanted. I wanted. goodbye. I wanted her. her last memory to be. To be fun? It wasn't. Fun. DEFINITELY. It WASN'T.

But I. I. wanted it to be.

CHAPTER, BOYFRIEND

She started. **STARTED** seeing boys again. Before the end. She'd started seeing boys again. **GOODNESS KNOWS WHY?** Why the fuck would she do that? I hadn't met him. I hadn't. I hadn't. But I knew. **DIRTY MOTHER FUCKER. I KNEW IT WAS HIM. HE. DID. someTHING.** I felt it. I feel it.

CHAPTER, CLUTTS

I'M. I'm never thought of as elegant. It upsets me. **ARE.** People in wheelchairs. Are they clumsy? **SOMETIMES.** Sometimes they bump into stuff. **Because. IT CAN.** It can be difficult. And. I think **NORMALLY.** Unless you're watching at a distance. And. And. The wheelchair user. can't see you. **Can't see you CHUCKLE.** You don't. Do you? **CHUCKLE.** Because it wouldn't. **Wouldn't be acceptable.**

When I eat. I eat backwards. I don't know how. How I do. I've just been told. That. That I do. **AND.** And. It often. **IT OFTEN ENDS UP** funnelling. **Crumbs. DOWN MY SHIRT** Between my breasts. **YES.** I find it them at the end of the day. People. They joke. That. That I need a bib. **IT'S FUNNY?** Isn't it. I **GUESS IT IS.** I'd probably laugh at myself. If I wasn't trapped in myself.

BUT. But I. I'd quite like to be elegant. Stylish. Sophisticated. **BUT.** people. **PEOPLE** presume that if. **THAT** If. If you can't eat without getting it down your top. Without making a puddle of crumbs. **IF YOU.** If you can't own a phone without cracking the screen. **THEN.** Then. You're not. Not. Sophisticated. At all. in any way. **AND.** I. I. have to live with that. **BECAUSE.** Because. You can't have a clumsy Catwalk Model. **OR. OR. OR. A.** A tightrope-walking ballerina. Who can't. **CAN'T** tie their own laces.

Can you?

CHAPTER, WALK LIKE A LADY

I don't. **DON'T** Walk like a lady. No. **NOT** when I'm not concentrating. I can. Walk like a lady. If I think about it. wiggle my hips. Push out my bosom.... If that's. That's walking like a lady?

If. If I walk naturally. It's very practical. Clunky. **BALANCED.** Maybe heavy? I. I wasn't. Wasn't aware of this. **UNTIL SOMEONE.** A friend. Grace. **GRACE FORM SCHOOL.** She. **SHE. TOLD ME.**

SHE INSTRUCTED. Me. To. To walk differently. **EFFEMINATELY.** And I tried. Tried for a bit. **BECAUSE. I FELT SELF-CONSCIOUS.** It's bad. Bad enough to feel conscious when speaking. But now. Even when walking. Walking away. I'm conscious.

But. But because. Because I'm female. THEN. I must. MUST walk like a lady. Mustn't I? Because. Because WE DON'T. We should not. Have just one type of walk. I MISS CAT. She didn't. She didn't mind how I walked.

CHAPTER, TALK LIKE A LADY

My laugh's too. TOO LOUD. AND. And my voice has an AMERICAN-south-African-NEW-ZEALAND-Australian-CANADIAN. Twang to it.

SO I'M TOLD.

I have to have. I normally have to have. The same. SAME. Conversation. With everyone. Everyone I meet. THEY. They say. They ask, "WHERE ARE YOU FROM?". I SAY. I say. That. when I was younger. I HAD AN AMERICAN TEACHER. But. But I didn't.

NO. I just say that. I SAY IT. Just. Just to satisfy them. SO. So. We can talk about something else. OTHER. Other than. How. HOW. Odd. How unusual. I SOUND.

IT'S. It's hard. HARD ENOUGH. Concentrating. On what I'm going to say. Ironing it out so. So it flows. Flows in a straight line. Instead of being a 'conduction'.³⁸³ TO pronounce. PRONounce each liT-T-EL individual word. SYL-a- ble. L-e-t-t-er. SOMETIMES. Sometimes it comes easy. TO ME. It. It floats off my tongue. BUT. BUT. NOT ALWAYS. No. Sometimes. Sometimes. It's just hard. IT takes unadulterated concentration. Just. Just to respond. Respond to,

"How are you?"

I hate it. THAT QUESTION.

Because the people that ask. THEY. They don't want to know. do they? No. SO. So not only. Not only do you have to work out HOW TO SPEAK. (how you sound!) Yes. But. But also. WHAT TO SAY. Weather to lie. Because.

"I feel sad because my friend's dead."

THAT'S INAPPROPRIATE. Isn't it? Misery isn't appropriate. Isn't polite. People don't ask, 'How are you?' to know. To know how you are. They ask. They ask to check. To check that you're still able to speak. My feelings. Explaining my feelings. IS TOO MUCH. Too much.

EVERYDAY. Everyday feelings have to be beige. Wrapped. You need to wrap them in a long beige scarf.

I think. That. If. If people weren't forced to be beige. Then. Then their other colours. Wouldn't. They wouldn't leak out. Leak out in the wash.

The Rainbow Fish

³⁸³Conduction: Conclusion that gets mixed in with an introduction (I'm redefining! Bite me!)

Rainbow Fish had bright. Beautiful scales. They shone. Glittered with every twitch of a fin. Every tremor.

Other fish were jealous. Jealous that she was unabashed. Flamboyant.

They said it looked ridiculous,

“She’s ridiculous!”

“Look at her... all dressed up like that! Over the top, it is!”

“She’s just attention-seeking, that’s all. All it is.”

The lowly bottom feeders sucked and blended while Rainbow Fish fluttered, casting brilliant dazzling-coloured beams upon them.

But the other fish. What did they do? The other fish jetted away beneath rocks. The beams were too bright. Too loud. They. The other fish. Said. Said the beams were disruptive,

“Those beams are disruptive!”

“Who does she think she is? Who?”

They turned their backs upon Rainbow Fish. They did. Yes. They did.

Rainbow Fish should have indulged. Bathed. Gorged and gloried in magnificence. Instead. But instead she. She stopped recognizing her own splendour.

She did. Yes. Yes she did. And slowly. Slowly. She began slinking to the bottom. Yes she slowly slunk.

And, as she slunk, the other fish. They noticed. Noticed her dropping. They saw her drop. Drip. drop. Drip. And. What. What did they do? They swam up to Rainbow Fish. To tell her. To tell her how wonderfully she was sinking,

“You’re sinking wonderfully!”

“You’ve really come down such a long way!”

“So much progress! Keep it up! Keep it up!”

Then. Then what did they do? They’d take a scale. Rip a scale. From Rainbow Fish’s back. Rip it right off. Replace it. And Replace it with bottle caps they’d found when feeding on the bottom... Coke, Sprite, Pepsi, Fanta.

It hurt, at first. It did. It hurt. But. One by one. The fish. They visited. Visited Rainbow Fish. She felt special. Yes. She did.

So. She just kept giving.

She just kept giving.

Giving and giving and giving.

And they just kept taking.

Taking and taking and taking.

And she. She just kept sinking and sinking

and sinking,

Until, at last, she only had one. She was at the bottom with. Just one. scale. she only had one scale left.

At the bottom. Once she was at the bottom. Rainbow Fish. realized. She realized that she couldn't really see the singular sparkly scales upon the other fish. The ones she'd given away. They'd grubbed up. Grimed up. Very few had scrubbed up.

She. Rainbow Fish. Didn't like how dark it was. At the bottom. The fish. The fish. They always complained about how dark it was. That's all they talked about. How dark it was. At the bottom. She didn't like it. No. She didn't. Why had they wanted her to come to the bottom?

It was only then. And only then. That she realized. That she remembered. She remembered that she loved her shimmering, glimmering, radiant scales. she'd given too many. Too much away. Grime coated her. And she was heavy. The bottle caps were heavy. The dark was heavy. She wanted to float back up. She did. But she was heavy. She wanted her light bright scales back. Yes. Just a few. They suited her. Yes. They'd suited her. So. she asked. She asked if she could have them back. She asked. But would they give them? The other fish. Would they? Would they give her back her scales?

Of course not!

NO. Of course not. No one gives brilliance back... even if they don't wear it well. Never. They won't.

She looked up. Rainbow Fish. Up. Up. Up. Following a shimmering bubble. Bright like light. Bright like light. It pulsed. And she saw. Rainbow Fish saw. The most beautiful. She saw the most beautiful. Beautiful fish. It shone gold and silver. Gold and silver. Coins. It was as if each scale was a polished coin. A fierce suit of armour.

Rainbow Fish clumsily clinked and clanked. For she was coated in bottle caps. Encrusted in the rusting caps. Jealously panged. Yes. Yes. It did. Jealousy panged. Within Rainbow Fish panged jealousy. And she swam away. She swam. Swam away. Into a cave. Ashamed. She. She was rubbish. She. She was rubbish now. She swam away. Ashamed. She'd. She'd throne herself away. She had.

She really had.

They don't tell you that at school. Do they? Do they. No. They don't. I know they don't. Because they didn't tell me. They didn't warn me. And they didn't warn. And. They. And they didn't warn. They didn't warn Cat either. No. They didn't.

No one warned her.

CHAPTER, QUESTION

What did he do. WHAT did he do?? WHAT THE FUCK Did he. CAT'S BOYFRIEND. Do? The question was eternal. The question would live within me. The question was fire.

CHAPTER, MIND MESSAGE

Did you know the brain is a muscle? If you think too hard it gets all bunched. Sprained. CLUSTERED. It's bunched UP now. I want a hairdresser to run their fingers through it. With warm soapy water. Loosen it. Take out the knots.

CHAPTER, PAPER WEIGHTS

TOO MANY NOTES. I'm writing one when. I'm JUST SO PISSING ANGRY. FUCKING ANGRY. AT MY SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER. Fuck. SHE WAS A cunt BECAUSE SHE BURT me WHEN I WAS TRYING TO TAKE FLAPJACKS OUT THE OVEN. THAT'S WHY I'VE GOT THIS MARK BECAUSE I WAS APPLYING for a scholarship BUT I don't know where I've saved the sodden form. TOO FAT. THE FORMS too fat. JOG. TOO FAT JOG. JOG. NO ONE WILL WANT TO GIVE MONEY TO A FAT LAZY BITCH. You know that. You know that. Don't you?

PAPER WEIGHT.

I PUT. I PUT. A paper weight on that one. I did. I PUT A PAPER weight on it. TODAY IS A NEW DAY. Because yesterday. Yesterday is trapped under A PAPER WEIGHT. JUST HAVE BREAKFAST. Don't FUCKING put honey on your CEREAL. It's LIQUID SUGAR. Butterflies drink sugar out of plants with their tongues. Their proboscis laps Nectar. STUPID SPOON. STUPID meeting. THEY INTERRUPTED YOU IN THE MEETING. YOU WERE TELLING THEM. You were TELLING them that their policy DIDN'T WORK. You didn't even get to the END OF YOUR SENTENCE. She just. SHE JUST CUT IN. SHE DID. DID. DO THAT. I did. NOTHING. BUT. But WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE. I SHOULD HAVE....

PAPER WAIT.

BUT the paper weight doesn't sit flat. No. Because of all the above thoughts. THE ABOVE THOUGHTS. AND THE OTHER PAPERWEIGHTS. SO. so THIS PAPERWEIGHT. SITS. Is sitting ON TOP OF THE OTHER ONE. WHICH SITS ON TOP OF THE OTHER one. THOUGHTS. Fuck. IF I FILED. IF I FILED THEM. THESE THOUGHTS. TODAY'S THOUGHTS. IF I FILED THEM. THEN. THEN. THERE'D STILL BE ONES UNDERNEATH.

Fuckidy. Fuckidy. Fuck. **FUCK A DUCK.** Did I? Would I fuck a **DUCK.** Disgusting? **WHY WOULD YOU THINK THAT. PERVENT.** Avoid the park. **NEVER FUCKING GO** to the park. **PROTECT THE DUCKS.**

PAPER WEIGHT.

I wonder how many. **HOW MANY THOUGHT'S I HAVEN'T. FILED.** How **MANY. HOW MANY CLOUDS OF NOTES** I'm sitting on?

I'M AFRAID.

AFRAID TO LOOK UNDER THE ROCK. The weight. Afraid to go near the weight. **AFRAID TO GO NEAR ANY OF THE FUCKING weights.**

COS IF I KNOCK ONE. Knock them. **THEY'LL COME OUT. THEY'LL COME FOR ME. A THOUSAND CUTS. A THOUSAND CUTS. A THOUSAND TINY PAPER CUTS. I'D BLEAD OUT. BLEAD OUT THROUGH THE brain.**

PAPER WEIGHT.

I WOUNDER WHAT HE SAID. HE TALKED TO HER LAST. HE DID. SOMEONE said he did. **SOMEONE SAID.** Someone said. **SOMEONE SAID.** That He talked to her last. Her boyfriend. **THEY SAID he HAD. THEY SAID he DID. BUT** they didn't say what he said. **I BET HE TOLD HER SHE WAS AN. UGLY WHOLE.** I bet he told her **SHE WAS FAT. I bet. I BET. I bet HE RAPED HER.**

I bet. I bet he did. **HE DID.** I bet.

CHAPTER, 14

We were all happy when Cat came out. She'd never liked men. But they were attracted to her all the same. Her tiny stick-insect frame. Her naturally jet-black hair. Her ability to absorb others pain and store it with her own. They thought that they could keep her. She'd get stuck with an ogre. For a while. Just to pass the time.

"What you fuckin' playin' at mate?"

"You. You ordered two coffees?"

"Hers has a heart!" He nods to Cat's cup.

"When we've got time, we put shapes in the Coffee."

"I saw you glancing at him over your lashes. You're a slut Cat."

Cat picks up her spoon. Swills the heart away, "Mike. It's gone. It's gone Mike."

"You better get out of my sight."

The waiter hurries back to the till.

“We’re not coming back ‘ere again.”

“We can go to Nero next time.” Cat places a hand on his knee.

“Shagging’ someone their too?”

She. Cat sips her coffee. Eyes down at the table.

“Hurry up. Sooner you’re finished sooner we can leave.”

“I’m done.” She puts the cup down.

“Fuckin half left. Spent three pound fifty I did! Finish it.”

Cat drinks from the cup again. Draining it. Draining it dry.

... Cat. She. She was soon to discover that women, even within sleek and slender bodies, could be just as hideous.

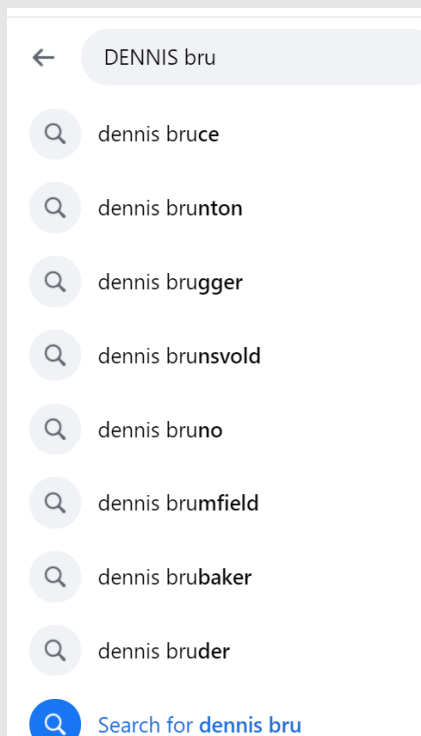
CHAPTER, 14

Black eye want to cry.

BLACK EYE WANT TO DIE.

It was never just a BLACK EYE.

CHAPTER, I HADN’T MET HIM



I HADN’T MET HIM. THIS ONE. I HADN’T MET HIM. But I’d met the others. She had a type. AWFUL. Awful was her type. So. SO. I didn’t need to meet him to know. TO KNOW.

She’d TALKED. Said. SAID THIS ONE WAS DIFFERENT. She did. BUT HE WASN’T WAS HE? BECAUSE. He did. HE DID SOMETHING. AND. And I had to know what. The computer is a wonderful thing. I THINK. You can find ALMOST anything. So long as it’s NOT TOO FAR BACK. I tried researching a GREAT aunt once. ONLY found her DEATH RECORD. But NOW. Now. EVERYONE LIVING. Is Trace able.

I KNEW his name. He lived in my AREA. I knew. I KNEW we’d have her. CAT. As mutual.

IT TOOK SECONDS. Seconds to find him.

Answer It!

I answer the phone,
the chain pulls tighter.
My tongue severed from my mind,
your breath, a pillow over my face,
your touch a cast over my skin,
keeping my shivering body still.

Your gargoyle embrace sets.
choking me AS
thistles tumble down my throat,
you
stamp kisses upon my neck.

A pile
of old
washing,
I lie
draped upon the bed.
You
can't read my expression,
you
wouldn't want to.

CHAPTER, WHAT TO DO?

I'D FOUND HIM. Dennis. But. NOW. What. What SHOULD. How should. Should I MESSAGE? Should I? Send HIM. a message?

HEY, DENNIS

It's TAMMY. (I WAS AT THE FUNERAL, SECOND row from the front. YOU WERE. You were SOMEWHERE. I don't fucking know where you were!) I wanted to. I just wanted to ask. WHAT WERE YOU'RE LAST WORDS?

Too. IT'S TOO. it's too. IT'S TOO. TOO SCATTERED. I'LL WRITE IT AGAIN. Again in the morning.

HELLO, DENNIS

I'M Tammy. We haven't met but we were both at Cat's funeral. I know that you were close to cat. DID YOU FUCKING RAPE HER?....

NO- OF course I CAN'T. can't say that can I. Can I?

HI, DENNIS

I'M Tammy. AND, ISn't IT. strange. STRANGE. that we haven't met? Cat must have told you about me. I know that you like FALL OUT BOY, and that you tried to play the tin

whistle. But. **BUT** you aren't very good. And that you wanted to be a computer programmer, **YOU'RE** applying to go to college.

WHERE AM I GOING WITH THIS?

HELLO DENNIS.

I'm struggling quite a bit at the moment. **So. So** I was hoping. Would you be able to clear some things up for me? **PLEASE.** Because. Because. I just. I'm so. I **JUST** need some closure after Tammy. And. And I know that you were. That you were. That you were. That you were. **THAT YOU WERE.** That you were. The last person to talk to her. And. **AND AND I JUST WONDERED.** Wondered if we. If we could. If we could meet up and have a chat. Could we. Could we please speak?

That's four. Four of 1000s. **Of 1000s** I wrote in my head. **AS SOON** as I **STOP.** Writing it. I'll write it again. **AND THEN.** And then. Then. If there's something new. Something different. I'll write that too. **WRITE IT DOWN.**

The above letter. It's the best from around 50 I wrote. I. I've **COMBINED THEM TO** make one super letter. **PERFECT.**

Yes. It's the most perfect one.

SEND

Last Time

You'd said no

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No

No.

No.

too many times,
You wore out,
gave in,
gave up.

If he wanted it,
maybe you could.

Did you enjoy her logflume body?

It went through the motions,
Now. It wants to get off the track.

What was done
was done
out of want for you
but it was not her that you wanted.

King Midas turned his wife to gold,
And, with a touch,
you,
turned her to dirt.

I should have killed him.
I SHOULD HAVE KILLED THEM.

But Cat was too gentle. She didn't want me to. She didn't want me to kill him. To kill them.

If it had been me. She would have killed them. I know she would have. Whether. Whether I'd wanted her to or not. She'd kill them. She'd have killed him. Which is why I never told her.

CHAPTER, THE ADVENTURES OF SHITTY CLITTY AND MOUSE PUBES

Now. I know what you're thinking. Actually. Scrap that. I have no idea. I find it hard enough to keep track of what I'm thinking.

Boys. **SOME BOYS. THEY.** They hadn't grown up. **WHIRLY WHIRLY.** Wasn't my only nickname. No. I learnt myself Mouse Pubes. too. because. **ONCE.** At secondary school. I was changing. And. And I didn't shave. No. I didn't shave and someone. **SOME PERVE. A FEMALE** perve too! She. She spied some stray hair coming out of my knicker lining.

YES.

AND SO. So. Mouse Pubes³⁸⁴ It was. It stuck.³⁸⁵

That's all very well and fine. But. But what about Shitty Clitty?

Well. Cat. Cat was Shitty Clitty.

It all started with a UTI. WE ALL GET THEM. Cat. Cat was taking anti-biotics for one. And told her friend. JANE. PLAIN JANE.

PLAIN JANE LIKED CALLUM. An awful boy. An awful boy who'd feel up the leg of any girl within his arm-span. AN AWFUL GUY WHO FANCIED CAT JANE. So Jane. So plain JANE. PLAIN JANE. She. She SAW. SAW THE WAY Callum. LEERED. Leered at CAT.

So. So. She made up. MADE UP. That. That Cat. Th at Cat had a Shitty clit. YES. And. That. That's. That's why.

Why she developed a UTI.

PLAIN JANE GOT chlamydia off Callum anyway. Actually. I've got no idea if that's true.

STUPID? Yes. Stupid. So. So what can you do if someone gives you a stupid hurtful nickname? WELL. we. Me and Cat. We made them into SUPERHEROES. Or, more accurately, feminist vigilantes.

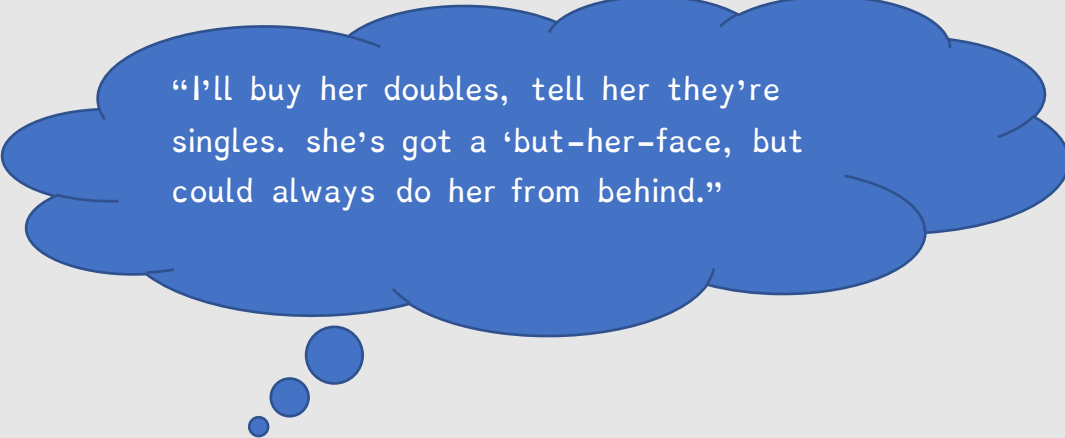
Me and Cat. We sketched them. Shitty Clitty adorned crotchless underwear, and Mouse Pubes pulled off a lovely bush. Yes. She DID. She wore it well. They were long. Her pubes. Long. Strong and majestic. A low medusaian mane. The source of her power. If. If just one stray pube touched a man. Then she. Mouse Pubes. Could read their mind.

SHITTY CLITY. Her power was far more literal. If she touched a man. Touched a man with her clit. He'd turn to shit. Literally. He'd morph into a big heap of faecal matter. Hold a 'man' shape for a few seconds, then collapse.

IF. If a dude did SOMETHING. Something crap. We'd sketch a little comic. If. If they'd say something shit... or, were suspected of thinking something shit. Because MOUSE PUBES. She could ascertain that... she'd stretch out a singular long hair, it'd make it's way along the ground, and slide up a trouser leg.

³⁸⁴ In old English Folklore, apparently the devil can be cast away by one stray curly pube, left beneath a pillow. At least I know he'll leave me alone!!!

³⁸⁵ Woman who can afford Labiaplasty. I think. I think must always have pretty faces. Because if you had the money to change yourself. You'd start with your face. Wouldn't you? Because more people see that day to day than you're vagina. My. My Labia is too long on the left. And. And it's an 'outie'. Everyone knows what you want is a nice tidy 'inny'. But. But if I had the money. I'd go for liposuction and a nose job. Because. Because people would notice that. Day to day.



“I’ll buy her doubles, tell her they’re singles. she’s got a ‘but-her-face, but could always do her from behind.”

If. If he was thinking something like this. Then. Then **SHITTY CLITTY** would swoop in, and handle the situation with her crotchless panties. (by literally turning him into the turd he really is!)

They. Shitty Clitty and Mouse Pubes. Like all superheroes/villains. They had arch nemeses, The Chauvin-fists³⁸⁶. Dr Wang. And. Professor Ballsack.

Professor Ballsack spent all his time creating a super razor. It would be the only item sharp enough to cut through Mouse Pubes Pubes. He wanted. to capture her, and shave her. Because. If her hair was cut. Then. Then she’d. She’d lose her power.

Dr Wang. He. He was a surgeon. A surgeon who specialized in Female Genital Mutilation (FGM!!!) And he. He was coming for Shitty Clitty! **TO REMOVE HER CLIT.**

BUT. So far. **SO FAR.** They’d had been unsuccessful. There had been close scrapes. **But.** Shitty Clitty and Mouse Pubes³⁸⁷ remain undefeated.....

IN THE NAME. The name **OF PUBIC INDECENCY!** ...

³⁸⁶ Though in truth. Yes. In truth. It had been. **BITCHES.** Yes. It had been **BITCHES.** At school who gave us the ‘nickname’. **MEN** can be shit. **BUT WOMAN.** But Woman **FUCK.** they’re evil. **AM I EVEN A FEMINIST?**

³⁸⁷ Shitty Clitty and Pusey Pubes were also ‘Free the Nipple’ advocates.



The Adventures of Shitty City and Mouse Pubes

NO ONE messes with these Carpet CRUNCHERS!



SKUNK!

Chapter, Hair.

Hair. Like Samson. I know it holds strength. Yes. hair does. My hair. Her hair. Your. Whoever you are. Your hair. Which. Which is why I kept a lock... I couldn't see her body. Know. it was splattered. But. But I could have this. even. Even though h it was less than one piece of the jigsaw. ... I know. Knew it was hers. And. And I think that helped me know she ws there. In the box. Not. Not somewhere. In hiding. Ready go jump into life again.

But. But she does jump out. Sometimes. Yes. in. in my slumber. When. When I sleep. I see you. Cat. I see you as strong as real as a memory. I touche you and you shrink, and as you shrink I try to say everything. Everything left unsead. But. But you disappeared to fast. I awake dry crying. Now. Now that's a new experience.

Rise of the She-Wolf (Shaving)

Strands of thread stand in thousands,
and glimmer in the sun.
Come winter they are soldiers,
loyal, they jump to attention at every breeze,
I am a living tapestry.

But you have me take a blade,
and cut off each tassel until I am bear.
Pink as a baby mouse,
my smooth legs reflect the white moonlight.
As I shiver, you stroke my back
whispering that I'm beautiful.

To the naked eye I'm plain,
but weeds writhe beneath the surface.
A needle plucks
and silver thread looms out.
Like a hydra where one was cut five more
have sprung.
Soon I'll have a home-grown coat,
silver, dense,
and able to withstand far more than cold.

In slumber your hand will brush against my fur,
you'll wake to a pair of lunar eclipses,
the thin orange rim surrounding the black of my eyes.
Disgust will dim to fear,
maybe you'll see that beauty need not be weak.

I will leap from the bed into the night,
howling at injustice until morn.
And no matter how you plead
come day,
I will not change my form.

CHAPTER, GOD

TINA. DAD'S SISTER. She'd take me to Mass with her. When I was little.
I didn't like God. I didn't like God. Because I could never find the right page. Or the right
chapter. So. So when they asked me to read. At church school.

I couldn't find him (or her).

Not BECAUSE I couldn't read. NO. It was because. Because I was on the wrong page.

BUT. I ALSO. I'd also mixed up God. With Clawdia. I KEPT thinking I could hear him.
THAT. That HE WAS JUDGING ME. I kept apologising. IN MY HEAD. For all my bad
thoughts.

BECAUSE. because I'D BEEN TOLD. That thinking something evil. WAS AS GOOD. As
doing something evil.

GOD. He knew. HE KNEW WHAT YOU. What I. was THINKING. More fucked up than
Santa Clause.

ANYWAY. I kept seeing him seeing my thoughts. AND. TRYING NOT TO THINK BAD
THOUGHTS. SO THAT. So that he couldn't see them.

BUT. But this had a 'Hydra' effect. Each thought split off into another.

MORE.

MORE MORE.

MORE MORE. MORE MORE.

MORE MORE. MORE MORE. MORE MORE. MORE MORE.

Anyway. I knew. From a very young age. That I would be going to hell. Because. It didn't
matter what I did. It mattered what I thought about doing. And. And I could. And I can.
Think. Think about doing more evil things that most people ever actually do.

I'm sure of that.

ONE DAY. One day I thought. THOUGHT FUCK THAT. Shit. Fuck the MOTHER-
FUCKERS: God, Jesus, and his WHORE MOTHER. Mary.

I thought. I THOUGHT I'd be free. But now I think. Now I realize. That Clawdia is FAR. SHE'S far stronger than god.

AND. And I don't get to choose whether to believe in her.

CHAPTER, FLATMATE

"Could you put the fridge in the milk." I'm tired. This happens when I'm tired. He. Clive. He looks at me. He doesn't know what I meant. He. He can't just flip it around. He never can. Its frustrating. He. He always hears what I say. Not what I mean to say. I miss Cat. She focused on what I meant to say. Not what I said. But Clive. Clive can't help it Clive just likes everything in the right place. In the place it came from.

He knew her too. CAT. He. CLIVE. Didn't know her like I knew her. No one did. MY flatmate. CLIVE. CLIVE from college. HE. He. took it better than me. Death. The death. He really didn't seem any different. IT WAS LIKE NO ONE HAD DIED. But. But. He did now make me a hot chocolate every night. He didn't do that before.

BUT he

Still. He still moans at me for the washing up.
STILL. Still moans at me for the hoovering. That.

That. That didn't wane. Not for a day. He. He likes everything to be in a certain place. Yes. And. And he doesn't feel safe. Safe to come downstairs. If. If he thinks. If he believes them to be disrupted.

"I'm not your butler!... I'M YOUR FLATMATE!"

He. He was really quite particular. Yes. He. Clive. He. He knows every capital city of every country. ONE DAY. ONE DAY. He just decided to sit down and learn them all. he did. I used to test him. But got bored. Cos he knows them. He. HE. likes the number five. Yes. ALLOT. BECAUSE. I asked him. AND HE SAID IT WAS BECAUSE, 'because I have five toes and fingers on each hand. Stars have five points, pentagons are the most worshiped symbol, my name (his name) has five letters, and. And it rhymes with the word ALIVE.' Yes. Yes it does. He didn't go out of the way to make things happen in fives. NO. but he is naturally happy if they do. If there's five plates drying, if questions have five words in them, every '5th' of the months he sings. Yes. He does. He also doodles stars when bored. Yes. Clive does. Because he's really QUITE particular. Anyway. He Clive. had a problem with teacups left in the living room.... and mould growing on stacks of dishes... that exceed five.

YES.

He did.

But
upstairs.
IN BED.
I didn't.
I didn't really notice.
Until he'd shout.
Below.
Bellow through my door.

CHAPTER, CHORES

People. People don't understand. I don't think. That. They do. That. That for me. One. One task. Is. Is actually many mini ones. I. I feel them. Feel them tugging at me. Like I'm a string puppet. A string puppet that doesn't quite collate to the strings being tugged. "I left my handbag at Barking Mad Tam Tams. Could you pop back and get it. As you're near."

I need to. Need to work out how to leave the house. **FIND.** Find. **FIND.** **KEYS.** AM I. Am I wearing the right clothing?

Who. Who has the shop key. A spare. A spare's in the shop next door. **CHAT.** Talk. **TALK TO THE STANGER AT THAT SHOP.** How. How do you work a fucking key. How. How do you work a fucking key? **NOW.** **WHAT.** What was even in the shop? **HANDBAG.** By the door. **WHICH DOOR!**

EVEN. Even going to the loo. **GOING TO THE LOO.** When. When I'm stressed. Where. **WHERE IS THE NEAREST LOO?** Is. Is it open? How. How do I pull my pants down? **FUCK.** **BELT ON.** I'VE GOT A BELT ON. **YES** (I never wear jump-suits... just asking for a melt down!) **THE BELT.** It. It needs to come off. **SHIT.** I'VE DONE A SHIT. And. And I should have checked for toilet paper first. **NOW WHAT?**

NOW WHAT!!!

It's like. Like saying, 'We're going on holiday.' No. **NO YOU'RE NOT.** You're going to pack. Going. Going to have to get your transport documents ready. Going to have to find transport. Or parking. **PARKING AT THE AIRPORT.** Going. **GOING** to go through security. **DON'T.** **DON'T PUT YOUR PASSPORT DOWN WHILE GRABBING A COFFEE.** Going. Going to get on a plane...

AND. **AND THAT'S JUST THE START.** You're. you're not even at your destination. I. I love adventures. **BUT.** But. I hate getting to them.

But. But that's how I feel about most. Most day-to-day tasks. I find things so hard. **SO VERY. HARD.** That. When I'm working. **THAT'S ALL I CAN DO.** And then. When I have a day off. A day off. I do the chores. **BECAUSE.** Because doing them at the same time. At

the same time as working. That. THAT EXPLODES ME. Finishes me. BUT. But. If I'm working on the working days. AND. AND CHORING ON. ON MY DAYS OFF. Then. Then When do I do something fun? FUN. Fun is a commodity I rarely have energy for. BUT. Much to Clive's distress. I. I often swap. Swap the chores for fun.

CHAPTER, IGNORED

HE'S HE'S HE'S. NoT SEEn it. YET. I check. I CHECK. CHECK. CHECK. CHECK.

NOT YET.

NOT now.

I eat lunch. BUT HE'S. DENNIS. HE'S still NOT SEEN IT.

THE TEXT. The text asking about TAMMY.

I archive the message. So. So. So it's harder to see. HARDER TO

CHECK. CHECK. CHECK. CHECK CHECK CHECK CHECK.

CHAPTER, AGAIN

When I SENT HIM. Just after I sent him. The message. MY BRAIN. It went quiet. TOOK a breath.

BUT NOW. Now it's writing again. WRITING. HIM. ANOTHER. Another.

HI!

Doesn't look as if you saw my last message?? So. I'm just sending this. Sending this to Check. To see. CAN. Can you get back to me if you see this?

Hi!

It's Tammy. AGAIN.

Did you get my last message? Because. BECAUSE. I was just wondering. Just deliberating.....

Redraft. Retype. Re-write.

Re-draft. Retype Re-write.

AND AFTER A WEEK.

AFTER A WEEK I have another. ANOTHER PERFECT TEXT.

Hi!

BTW. I've got a Hoodie of yours at mine. And a game. FALL OUT BOY. I think. THINK it's yours. When. WHEN I. WHEN I went through Cat's stuff. I found it. So. Could I. It would be good if. If I could drop them around. And maybe. Maybe we could have a chat?

CHAPTER, IGNORED

Nothing. STILL NOTHING.

FUCK. I need. I need food.

NO MORE. No more Crisps and melted cheese. No more. No more. LETTICE LEAVES AND CHIPS.

I. I JUST. JUST CAN'T STAND. Can't Take. THOSE STUPID. stupid. SELF-SERVICE CHECKOUTS.

BEEEP. BEEEEP. BEEEP.

I stand and brace myself. BRACE MYSELF. Before each item.

I feel the noise. FEEL IT IN MY TEETH. JABBBING ME. Like a sting ray. Like the sting ran that killed Steve Erwin. Like a scorpion, like a scorpion jamming its tail into a cricket. Not once.

BUT OVER AND OVER AND OVER.

Paralyzing it.

I CHECK AGAIN.

He's. DENNIS. HE'S still not seen it. NO. Not yet.

CHAPTER, SEA MONSTER

They put their arms around you. Cradling. Cradling you. Wrapping huge soft. Huge safe tentacles around your bow. Each circular sucker biting in.

You call this devotion. And relax further into tightening grips.

Tightening looping legs. Looping arms. Stiffening. Stiffening around your masts.

THEN. Then. In one quick motion. It'd. They'll. He'll. He'd rip away your sails. Take them deep down. DOWN to the seabed. YOU'LL. you'll never. Never find them. You could never hold your breath long enough to look.

In another. In another quick motion. He. HE. He took your masts SNAP. Snaped them as low as it dared. As low as HE dared without sinking you.

It. He told you. HE. HE told you.

You didn't deserve them. Your masts. **NO.** And then. And then it. Then. Then **HE** told you.

TOLD YOU.

MADE YOU BELIEVE. THAT. That they were never there. Never **EXISTED.** Even though. Even though. You had the stumps. **Stumps** that never grow.

You. **Cat.** You always told me this was better. **Better** than being alone. **BUT.** But I. I wasn't so sure. **AND THEN.** Then. I stopped listening. **BECAUSE.** Because. It never **CHANGED.** **AND.** And. My words. They drowned into the ocean.

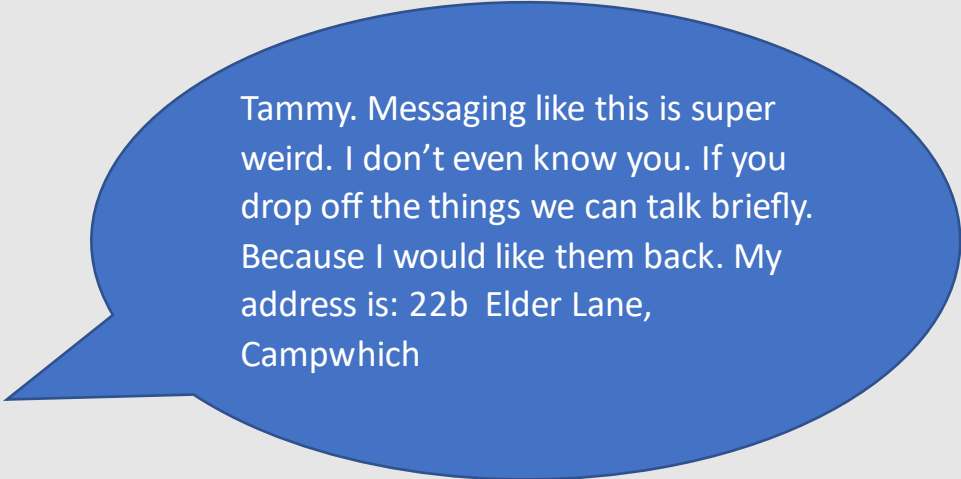
Sap

Branches bend to and fro,
as wind strokes,
you're dancing.

You're body bows,
they've made you an arch,
you look pretty that way.

You snap.
You shouldn't have strained yourself.
You never grew like that.

CHAPTER, RESPONSE



Tammy. Messaging like this is super weird. I don't even know you. If you drop off the things we can talk briefly. Because I would like them back. My address is: 22b Elder Lane, Campwhich

I. I didn't need to write it down. **Because.** **Because** I saw twenty-two witches, with size **B** breasts camping. Camping in the middle of a lane. Yes. Yes I'd captured it.

CHAPTER, POLICE STATION

I went with you. CAT. The day after it happened. You told me. And I went with you. I TOLD YOU GO. They asked. They asked if you were going out. If you. If you were dating.

They asked that.

They did.

You were. You were going out with him. Not DENNIS. NO. A different him. You were. You were dating. You DON'T. You didn't. look 'knocked around' they said. They said that.

But you hadn't wanted to. NO. You hadn't wanted him to. You hadn't. You'd said no.

I wish. I wish I.

Wish I hadn't told you. To go.

It didn't help at all.

No. Because. BECAUSE

IT WASN'T COOKIE CUT RAPE. It wasn't IT WASN'T. STRANGER broke into your house BEAT YOUR FACE IN RAPE. But. But let's be fair. BE FAIR.

IT HARDLY EVER IS.

COOKIE CUT rape.

Is it? BUT. But. DOES THAT MEAN. If It's not COOKIE CUT. THAT. That you. YOU just have to trust. TRUST. Someone won't. WON'T RAPE you??? Does it?

BECAUSE. BECAUSE. If. If they do. THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT.

Just. JUST. Close your eyes and hope. Hope THEY'RE NICE. HOPE they are NOT.

A RAPIST. CAPABLE OF BEING. A RAPIST.

Because. Because. BECAUSE IF THEY DO. Then. Then you shouldn't have PUT YOURSELF IN that POSITION. Should you? WITH SOMEONE. Someone YOU DIDN'T completely KNOW. someone you. You DIDN'T COMPLETELY TRUST.

Can you. You COMPLETELY TRUST ANYONE?

WELL, YOU'LL. You'll know for next time. WON'T YOU? Know for next time not to GET RAPED.

NO ONE WANTS TO BE COOKIE CUT RAPED. Because that's the bad kind of rape.

EVERYONE wants to be cookie cut RAPED. BECAUSE then. BECAUSE. Then. You can tell people you were RAPED.

EVERYONE wants to be COOKIE cut RAPED. Because. Because then YOU'RE allowed TO BE SAD.

IF IT'S NOT COOKIE CUT RAPE... it wasn't that bad.

IF IT'S NOT COOKIE CUT RAPE... IT'S JUST AS BAD.

But there's nothing you can do.

STICK THAT IN YOUR FEMINIST PIPES.

SMOKE IT.

At least. At least before. Before it was yours. All yours. It was. awful. But it was. yours. And you. could imagine. You. could imagine. That if. If you. ever wanted help it would be there. Holding its arms out. Holding its arms out to catch you.

First You. were pushed. He pushed you. He pushed into you.

Then. And then you. tried. You. tried. You. closed your eyes. Asked the police to catch you.

They stood aside.
They. Stood. aside.

And you.
YOU knew.
There wasn't a net.

CHAPTER, KNOCK KNOCK

KNOCK KNOCK. Yes. I was outside his door. I'd been thinking about **NOTHING ELSE. NOTHING. ELSE.** And I mean that. I do. I'd written him several more letters. **DIDN'T SEND THEM. No. THEY WERE JUST.** Just So, so I could plan out what to say. What he might say in response. I'd written them. I'd also told myself it didn't matter. **But it did. IT DID.** It did matter.

He opened it. The door that is. It was him. Big noise. Small chin. **TALL.** Relaxed pants. Fishbone **NECKLACE.** Blue **CRYSTAL** eyes. **BUT. red. DEAD RED.** The whites of them.

"... Tammy? Are you Tammy?"

Ddddddddddddddoooooooooooooonfclop. **CLOP. Clop.**

"Are **YOU TAMMY?**"

FuKc

"You are Tammy."

Yes. I know that.

"... would you like to come in?"

I walked past him, into his lounge.

Thumpidy**POUND**Pound**POUND**Pound**POUND**Pound**POUND**.

Sopha. Two-seater. Floor coated in take-away. Chinese. KFC. **SMELT** of **BO** and desperation.

I sat. He didn't ask. But I sat.

"It's a bit cluttered." **HE SAID THAT. NOT ME.** I didn't care.

Books. He's got books. stacked. Open washing basket. Overflowing. **WHY AM I HEAR WHY AM I HEAR WHY. WHY. WHY. WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU DO TO HER. ASK HIM ASK HIM!** See him. See his face. Spotty. Unshaven.

The air. The air humms. Buzzes. Why is the air buzzing?

IT STOPS. the buzzing. **SUDDENLY.** I'M I'M an interviewer. **FOR THE BBC.** This is exclusive. I'm live. **CAN'T** fuck **THIS** up. **DON'T** **FUCK** this up.

I'm watching myself from above. I'm not there anymore. My body. My mind. They're on reflex mode. **REFLEX.** Mode. **DON'T HAVE GLITCHES.** Ask the right questions.

"Do. You know. Why? Did you talk to her? When was. When was the last. Last time. **WHAT** did you say?"

He's quiet. very quiet. **CONFESSINGLY QUIET.** Still. So **STILL.** **STAB HIM IN THE THROAT** still. **FINGER YOURSELF IN PUBLIC** still. **STILL** as a **CRUSHED SNAIL** still. **GLOBBY** cold custard still. Still as a **FUCKING** rock. **SKULL SMASHING ROCK** still.

"Did you. Did you. Did. Did you argue?"

He moves. **SUDDENLY.** Pacing.

"**FUCK YOU TAMMY. YOU.** You can't. Can't **JUST BARGE.** Barge in here!"

I **DIDN'T.** No. He invited me.

THE GIRL WHO KNEW. KNEW TOO MUCH

The girl who knew too much. The girl who knew too much. Didn't know that she knew too much. Until. Until. She swallowed just. Just **ONE MORE FACT.** It was just one. **SHE.** Sipped at a lemonade. And **SWALLOWED.** She gulped it. Gulped it down with the rest.

And then. Then. The girl who knew too much. She exploded. **BANG. BUT. But.** The **GIRL.** The girl who knew too little. The girl who knew too little. She didn't. **EXPLODE.** no. sHe didn't. sHe died of hunger. Yes. **YES.** sHe did. **THE HUNGER KILLED HER.**

What does that tell you? Not very much.

Not very much at all.

CHAPTER, CONTINUED...

“You did? DIDN’T YOU.” Probing. I’m probing further.

TURNED AROUND. THE TURD TURNED. He did.

“You want to know what happened Tammy? You want TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED?”

He’s Breaking, breaking like a giraffe’s neck. Like a stem. Like a glass bottle on a drunken night. Like a virgin’s hymen. Like a like a tooth. Like a tooth biting down hard on a rock.

“Yes Tammy. Yes Tammy. WE spoke. I was the last one. THE LAST ONE. TO speak. I WAS.”

He stops. STOPS. HE’S TAPPING. Tapping his keys AGAINST. Against a wall.

RAT-A-TAT-TAT.

RAT-A-TAT-TAT.

DO. Do I speak NOW? SHOULD I? OR. Or do I wait for him. For him to speak. I wait. I will wait. Wait like a spoon. HUNGRY FOR MORE. Wait. Wait. like a war widow. SOON TO BE VEILED. Wait. It was weight that broke the SCALES.

“THE TEXTS. Tammy. She was upset. Upset about the texts.”

He’s. He’s trying to look at me. His. His voice. He’s breathing through it. to try. Try to make it stable. Trying. Trying to iron his sentences. His pitch flat.

“She. She showed me THEM. Hysterical. She was. She was shaking. SHE WAS. SHE WAS INCOMPREHENSIBLE. SHE. She was raving...”

He stops tapping his keys. I’m relieved. I am.

“I SAID. I SAID. Sleep on it...I SAID. DON’T WORRY. I said. It’d be fine in the moring.”

I COULD FUCKING.

FUCKING

Fucking sit on his face right now. His big nose. I THINK HIS BIG nose would get my clit.

YES.

HEAVEN IN A GRAVY BOAT. What? WHY. cat’s boyfriend. DENNIS? WHY. Why RIDE HIM. RIDE HIM. RIDE HIM. Ride him. RIDE HIM LIKE a DONKEY. Why would you ride a donkey? SORRY. I’m sorry cat. SO SORRY. But he’s KNEE DEEP IN MY PUSSY and I’m LOVING IN.

NO.

“I’m going to leave now.” I leave his stuff on the sofa. Scan it. SCAN IT. Before I go. To make sure. I don’t leave anything. SO. I DON’T need. Need to come back.

His EYES. They're RED. DEAD RED. And. He. And he walks. WALKS behind me. I can feel him. Yes. He walks me to his door. Opens it. And I walk out.

Across his front lawn. I didn't. I don't use the path. I just walk across it.

"Tammy... She was ill."

I TURN AROUND.

But he's. He's shut the door. He said that. Then he shut it.

BANG. Shut forever.

AWAY. I walk. Away

He stays.

The truth follows.

CHAPTER, THE TRUTH

SO. So you want the truth? DO YOU. WANT THE TRUTH? I can give it to you. But I won't like it.

I PUSHED HER. I. I PUSHED her. I pushed her.

I as good as pushed her.

I stole her last scale. Her last shimmering scale. RIPPED IT OFF. It was me.

And. And I'D FORGOTTEN. HOW DID I FORGET? FORGET THAT

We. We'd argued. The night before. The night before she stepped. WE ARGUED THE NIGHT BEFORE SHE STEPPED WE. We argued the night before THE NIGHT BEFORE she stepped.

About what, I hear you ask? ABOUT WHAT? I hear you scream.

Well. Well that's between me, her and the angels now.

CHAPTER 'POST-CAT'

I'd. I'd never really worried about time. Other than from a philosophical sense. I think everyone dreams about time-travel. Where we have far more glamorous lives, in big Elizabethans houses (when really most of us would just be scullery maids polishing bogs!) or meeting Cleopatra, bathing in milk and sharing make-up tips (though again, I'd be more likely to be a slave building a pyramid!) But. BUT NOW. Day to day. There was always

just a me. A constant. A me that had been in different places. Or a me that had been in the same places, but a bit before. **BUT**. But they were more the less the same. They kinda ran into eachother. **BUT**. But now. Now they don't. The cake has been sliced. There is a time with **Cat**, and a time without **Cat**. **BC** and **AC**. And **BC** (before **Cat**) is all chopped up. I remember us playing at home, but also in a forest, and I can't remember if they were the same day, or month, or year... or decade. The memories are squodged together. I'm pretty sure some have evaporated. I can't remember. I can't remember half her birthdays. I try, but they're not in order. Maybe they were always lost and jumbled. I'd just never checked the file? But. But here's the thing. I'm pretty sure **Cat** took a bit of me with her. Yes. I didn't realize it at the time. But. But when she went. When she went she forced me to change. And. **AND**. I can except that she died. But. But I'm not sure if I can forgive her for killing a bit of me too.

Relating both to this PhD and to my writing of ‘Casual Case’, upon Neurodivergence writing and overload, within our interview Sally Gardner, dyslexic writer of *Maggot Moon*, said something that rang very true,

“When books get big, I find them very frightening. Yeah, then they get really big, they get really, scary. You've got to hold it all together. And then you've got to see it as a whole and see if you've got what you want.”³⁸⁸

Chapter Four: Conclusions

Today’s ND+ identity has had a complicated and somewhat convoluted path arising from a range of influences and trajectories; I will begin this conclusion by briefly summarising what I have identified as Neurodivergent+ historical influences through engaging with this research; these assertions stem from perspectives held by ND+ interviewees and organisations alongside extrapolations from research detailed in chapter one. These are listed chronologically (beginning with the furthest back potential ND+ influences/recognitions, to ones that have been recognised in present-day) below:

Witch Persecution: It was theorised by Elinor Rowlands and members of the Invisible Woman ND+ Collective that Neurodivergent+ women who presented or communicated differently would likely have been vulnerable to persecution for witchcraft within time periods where this was considered a real and legitimate crime. In a more figurative sense, the notion of ‘witch’, with connotations of ‘female’ and ‘oddness’, has been seen and claimed by at least two contemporary female-led ND+ arts collectives. Actively and self-assuredly expressing self and producing ND+ art today, with less fear of persecution, can be seen as a contemporary way of reclaiming ‘magic’ (self).

Individual Neurodivergent+ Creatives: The creative practice and narratives of ‘lone’ ND+ individuals whose background/lifestyle/experiences may be identified in terms of neurodivergence/mental health difficulty/Survivor experiences. Some such narratives being Sarah Kane, and potentially author’s such as Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath; however, historic recognition/ND+ diagnosis can be a controversial topic in and of itself. Joanne Limburg, author of ‘Letters to my Weird Sisters, On Autism and Feminism’³⁸⁹, in her interview discussed this in relation to her identification of ‘Uncanny’, and being able to recognise this trait within herself and other potentially ND+ individuals; asserting that she might not necessarily be able to retrospectively ‘diagnose’ a number of historic individuals directly as autistic, but she could find and claim a more personal sense of solidarity through recognising the ‘Uncanny’ in them and then understanding this in relation to her ‘Uncanny’ experiences and autistic identity.

³⁸⁸ Taken from interview with Sally Gardner, conducted 26/11/20

³⁸⁹ Limburg, J. (2021) *Letters to my Weird Sisters*. Atlantic Books.

Psychiatry/Psychiatric diagnosis': The medical classification of diagnoses within neurodivergence began in psychological fields. For many Neurodivergent+ individuals, diagnosis has also impacted upon how they view themselves. The psychiatric status of Neurodivergence is something which many ND+ individuals seek, while several ND+ communities also move away from solely being identified pathologically.

Autie-biography: 'Out' autistic authors writing upon their own experiences autobiographically.

Survivors Movement: Literature spanning from this movement largely began as a way of emotively processing, documenting, and vocalising mistreatment within psychiatric institutions. Focusing upon ND+ narratives, it was the beginning of care/treatments becoming patient centric, as medical providers were encouraged to listen and take direction from patient experiences. This movement/unionising led to Survivor writings and poetry.

Mad Pride: 'Mad Pride' moved away from some of the 'trauma' of Survivors. Several ND+ individuals wished to claim back 'Mad'; writing/performance/art endorsed lexical configurations of non-conformity in context and grammar, communication, and social expectation.

'Neurodivergent' emerged as a term/Subsequent Extrapolations (ND+): The term Neurodivergent developed out of a number of communities and groups in the 1990s³⁹⁰, amidst movements such as 'Survivor's' and 'Mad'.

Contemporary ND+ Identifying Writers and Performers: ND+ individuals and arts collectives have and are gaining more recognition. This thesis has predominantly focused upon current ND+ artists who are finding new frameworks for neurodivergence to be understood and recognised within their creative practices: examples include Daniel Oliver's theory of 'Awkwood', Deborah Leveroy's discussions around the dyslexic body, DYSPLA's investigations into Dyslexic Aesthetics, Jess Thom's assertions surrounding 'Tic Language', Eleanor Rowlands explorations around stimming and ND+ creative practice, and Sarah Saeed's discussions around creatively exploring masks.

Focusing on this last influence, in creating *'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'*, I have been developing frameworks to assert elements of my own appreciation of Neurodivergent+ identity. I attended a symposium run by the Neurodivergent+ Humanities Network and Mentoring Program on the topic of creativity and new research practices:

'The research paths we are co-developing reject the prevailing deficit model in neurodivergence discourse; instead, we seek to reframe best practices as teaching, learning, and research methods that can best support the diverse needs and skills within our community in an academic environment.'³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ Botha, M. Chapman, R. Walker, N. Onaiwu, M. Kapp, S. and Ashley, A. (2024) The neurodiversity concept was developed collectively: An overdue correction on the origins of neurodiversity theory. Sage Journals. [ONLINE] <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613241237871> [Accessed 31/07/24]

³⁹¹ Neurodivergent+ Humanities Network and Mentorship Programme Launch (2023) 'New ways of thinking, being and doing research': the founders explain the ethos of the Neurodivergent Humanities Network and introduce their anti-hierarchical mentorship scheme. The Polyphony. [ONLINE]

It was discussed that ND+ individuals, potentially through masking, have internalised several NT norms, and that many of these have arisen from neuronormative societal expectations, whereby value/correctness is judged upon unwritten ‘rules’ that prevail within many settings; similar to beliefs surrounding patriarchal expectations on women and gender roles, these can be viewed as internalized social constructs that negatively paint and effect a number of groups; in the case of neuronormative, individuals who fit ‘outside the norm’, such as Neurodivergent+ peoples, are likely to be effected by either naturally or more intentionally ‘not fitting’. To find and uncover more Neurodivergent+ modes of expression, the conference discussed how a number of ‘us’ (ND+ individuals) can experiment and question an internalised ‘NT gaze’, and what challenging/uninstalling/‘undoing’ this entails, and how this can aid us on our journey to self-discovery and claiming what it is we want for ourselves.

In my own research, by conducting interviews with other ND+ creatives and attending several creative workshops run for and by ND+ creatives and academics, I have learnt more about other ND+ individuals’ processes and become more confident in my own. Within my novel *‘The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights’*, I utilised several writing techniques reflective of elements of my own neurodivergence:

Repetition and Stimming—Throughout I utilise ‘imperfect’ grammar that I found more intrinsic to the way I speak; instead of lines being ‘clear cut’, parts of sentences are rephrased or rebegun; this reflects elements of Tammy’s uncertainty. When redrafting I read it back through verbally, editing parts that felt ‘natural’ to repeat. To me, ‘redrafting’ can feed into ‘stimming’; both myself and the narrator, Tammy, portray elements of stimming through language.

ADHD DoodleBugs— Throughout the novel I have included small pictures of ‘literal’ anthropomorphisms of ADHD/ND+ distraction, depression, and overwhelm, whereby a ‘feeling’ has taken on a shape and character that has physical attributes or powers. I created most of these when attending lectures; they aided me to concentrate and reflect upon difficulties I was having. They are a creative way for me to identify and discuss some of my own ND+ struggle away from diagnostic analysis.

Fragmented Lexis —Sections of the novel break ‘visually’ into repetitive or cycling sections or ‘chunks’; this is done to demonstrate how repetitions of OCD thoughts can feel as if they are ‘cramming’ themselves into smaller and small places, while also escalating in speed. This technique I crafted to attempt to convey what it feels like in periods of OCD illness. Later, when Tammy tries medication to assuage her symptoms, narration becomes ‘looser’ and more ‘separated’, with words or sentences drifting away from each other, or even stopping or disappearing.

Multi-Modal Lexis/Creative Practice: Tammy’s story was extracted from a range of my own creative practices: train of thought narration, poetry, image, and research; this was not done ‘purposely’, but rather felt a natural medium to combine elements of Tammy’s narrative. Rhi Lloyd Williams, writer of *‘The Duck’*, a screenplay blending

research, fiction, and her autobiographical experience of being an autistic woman, discussed the possibility that ND+ creatives might enjoy 'rediscovering' a special interest or intense fascination through a myriad of mediums. In other interviews it was also discussed that ND+ individuals might be more likely to 'flaunt' set genre expectation and be more naturally/intrinsically drawn to mixed mediums to attempt to convey or express themselves artistically; this could be for several reasons, such as differences in processing and connecting information, potentially relating to differing logics, speed, tangents, but could also relate to many ND+ individuals having confusing, scattered, and often traumatic learning experiences, meaning that they have been forced to find new ways for neuronormative structures to make sense, can be processing elements of trauma and/or PTSD/Complex PTSD into elements of creation, which, this exploration asserts, can also inform style/syntax/communication within creative mediums.

Non-Linear Structure: Many parts of the narrative are short stories which feed into the main story. Within '*Casual Case*' the priority is not solely upon furthering the plot, rather, it explores Tammy's state of mind and her self-discovery. Some chapters reflect how Tammy 'dissociates' from the story itself; at points she doesn't tell you how she's feeling as she is still processing emotions herself, but through her exploration of other stories you can uncover more.

Obsession/Intense Fascinations: Within Tammy's narration some of her interests are explored, denoting how much certain colours (purple), or topics mean to her. They also reflect mental health fixations such as 'why her friend killed herself?', 'Has she committed a crime?', 'Is she a bad person?'. The way in which I wrote it was also obsessional: the first draft both started and finished within three weeks; I first became 'consumed' by the narrative, and afterwards began adding further splitting/ruminating chapters; the narrative became attached to my own 'hyper-fixation'.

Differing/ 'inappropriate' register: The stream-of-consciousness like register captures elements of both Tammy's OCD 'intrusive thoughts', and also somewhat unformatted feelings of rage/anger. Akin to conversations around with Elinor Rowlands (founder of Magical Woman) upon ND+ woman not necessarily fitting 'polite' boxes (or sometimes feeling backed into them), Tammy, within her prose, quite openly goes between more poetic language into content that might be considered more 'vulgar'/inappropriate.

Specific Insight into ND+ Experiences: I was incredibly self-conscious in the writing of this novel; I not only blended elements of my own insight into it, but also hid some of my lived experiences within Tammy's narration. In the re-writing, anecdotes gleaned from interviews became injected within the plot as well as my own self-reflections upon elements of ND+. Several poems and allegories I wrote in my own 'voice', in separation from Tammy's. Elements of my experiences are interconnected with Tammy's; akin to Tammy, I have also found expressing elements of self within fiction to be cathartic.

The crux of many ND+ aesthetics lies in ND+ individuals, such as myself, being able to more self-assuredly/confidently utilise and incorporate elements of our own insight, memory, lived experience, masking, sense of self, communication, train of thought, sensory processing/overwhelm, emotion, executive function/dysfunction and processing styles, not only within the content of our creative practices and narrative, but also in exploring and challenging form and structure, breaking down a number of neuronormative conventions and expectations in order to more fully explore elements of our own voice and identity.

Focusing upon the distinctions surrounding neurodivergence, Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, and my own identification as ND+, '*Casual Case*' would be included within the wider genre of Neurodivergent+ Literature, and also within the subgenres of, 'Neurodivergent+ Reflective Aesthetics'. However, as discussed with Jess Thom and Kate Fox within their interviews, it is equally important that the work of ND+ artists are also present among other categories to avoid ND+ being viewed as a niche genre and strengthening any stigmatisation.

Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics is Not Synonymous with Neurodivergence in Literature:

This research has put forth substantial evidence to say that ND+ Aesthetics exist; 'standard' English can, either intrinsically or purposely, be altered to better reflect how ND+ individuals think, relate, and use language. However, this does not equate to Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics being synonymous to Neurodivergent+ Literature. Even though there could be problems with representation, NT authors are able to use Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, but, reflecting similar sentiments to DYSPLA within our interview, I would not see this as categorised as ND+ Literature; in this regard the more finite definition/appreciation of ND+ literature is not easily appropriated.

'*Casual Case*' utilises Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, which I identified as both 'authentic' and 'crafted'; theorising both ND+ and NT authors had the ability to 'craft'³⁹² language regarding style and content. Though I still view this as true, after discovering Leveroy's theory of 'meta-cognition', discussing internalised NT gazes, and 'neuroqueering', I have a different appreciation of why ND+ authors may purposely 'craft' in how they explore elements of themselves and their perceptions.

Narratives exploring ND+ Innovation through the Deviation/Breakdown of Form:

In relation to ND+ narrative and expression of creative identity through the deviation of form, during this PhD I have read an extensive amount of literature by ND+ writers, but only found a handful which specifically endorse the cultivation of narration that breaks down 'traditional'/potentially Neurotypical linguistic forms of language, to explicitly demonstrate ND+ Aesthetics.

In order to show the prevalence and timescale of these works I have briefly detailed them below:

1985 - Ross David Burke, '*When the Music's Over: My Journey into Schizophrenia*'³⁹³: Burke is a writer who struggled with episodes of unwell associated

³⁹² Here I am using 'Craft' to refer to more purposeful/intentional wielding or sculpting of writing and performance to denote ND+ aesthetics.

³⁹³ Burke, R. (1995) *When the Music is Over: My Journey into Schizophrenia*. Collins.

with Schizophrenia; akin to 'true' stream-of-consciousness his autobiographical writings endorse pages of tangented, spiralling logics, repetitive ideas and intrusive thoughts. At points he attempts to gain a better insight/reflection into himself, he shares some of his poetry alongside narration.

1999 - Sarah Kane, '4.48 Psychosis'³⁹⁴: With the view that Sarah Kane had a long history of depressive illness³⁹⁵, and that, particularly within '4.48 Psychosis', elements of her experiences/state of mind have influenced/been injected into the writing. Kane's play '4.48 Psychosis' is experimental in style and covers topics of recurrent debilitating, ever-present depression and suicidal ideation. There are no set characters, rather disembodied voices within a largely stream-of-consciousness narration.

2000 - Ted Curtis, 'Mad Pride'³⁹⁶: Ted Curtis identified as part of the Mad Pride movement. He collected essays by ND+ individuals of no specific diagnosis; the writings within this volume are largely unedited/uncensored, ranging from being incredibly vulgar (such as describing masturbation), to sounding more essay like in tone.

2003 - Sally Gardner, 'Maggot Moon'³⁹⁷: Sally Gardner is a dyslexic writer, interviewed for this research. She spoke about 'unmasking' and writing more intrinsically within her novel. Her writing invokes wordplay, inquisition, vivid visual imagery, and inventive solutions to adversity. She employs extremely short chapters, denoting Standish's voice/attention, and making it a dyslexic friendly read.

2005 - Eric Chen, 'Mirror Mind'³⁹⁸: Eric Chen was one of the first 'out' autistic advocates in Singapore; he collects some of his experiences within poetry in *Mirror Mind*. To demonstrate authentic Autistic portrayals Chen rewrote sections of Mark Haddon's, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time' in ways he believed would authentically characterise his own autism within the book's scenarios.

2011 - Benedict Phillips, 'The Benedictionary': A dyslexic ND+ creative who claimed his 'difficulties' in spelling as difference in writing the 'The Benedictionary' the 'world's only 'lexis' to dyslexic translation dictionary,'³⁹⁹ containing alternative spellings of 2544 words. The idea of claiming and creating new language was something that I took inspiration from when creating my own 'new' amalgamated words creating my performance of 'Wordal Smergage', which then transcended into my novel, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights'.

2013 - Eimear McBride, 'A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing': Written in a register that aims to be before thought formation described in an essay published by the University Oviedo as, 'fictionalising the protagonist's unending thought-formation and

³⁹⁴ Kane, S. (2001) 4.48 Psychosis. Bloomsbury.

³⁹⁵ Quinn, S. (1999) 'Suicidal Writer was Free to Kill Herself'. The Guardian. [ONLINE] www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/sep/23/2 [Accessed 17/10/23]

³⁹⁶ Curtis, T. Dellar, R. Leslie, E. & Watson, B. (2000) Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture. Chipmunka Publishing.

³⁹⁷ Gardner, S. (2011) Maggot Moon. Hot Key Books.

³⁹⁸ Chen, E. Y. (2005) Mirror Mind 'Penetrating Autism's Enigma'. Self-Published.

³⁹⁹ Phillips, B. (2019) The Benedictionary. DIV Books.

representing this process by manipulating language.”⁴⁰⁰. The narration captures authentic Irish dialect alongside a stream-of-thought narrative effected by trauma/PTSD.

2013 - Neil Hilborn, ‘OCD’: Neil Hilborn became an internet sensation after sharing his poem about living with OCD/intrusive thoughts which he interjects as verbal and physical tics.

2017- Lily Bailey, ‘Because We Are Bad’: Lily Bailey, ND+/Dyspraxic model with OCD, published an innovate styled autobiography upon her experiences with OCD; detailing the intrusive thoughts/ruminations that lead her to incorrectly conclude she was a paedophile, the narrative is characterised by stream-of-consciousness narration which reflects her everchanging relationship to her OCD.

2017- Jess Thom, ‘Not I’: Jess Thom is a disabled/ND+ woman. She utilises elements of her Tourette’s ‘tic language’ within her own writings; she sees/values the creativity of her subconscious ‘Tourette’ language. She describes Tourette’s as inherently ‘improvisational’ as a performance style; Her touring performance of ‘Mouth’ in ‘Not I’ was made into a documentary by the BBC.

2018 - Rhiannon Lloyd Williams, ‘The Duck’: Rhiannon is an Autistic Woman, who developed ‘The Duck’ from a poetry collection upon her autistic experiences. Rhiannon combines several theatrical/performative measures to be reflective and demonstrative of autistic experience.

2019 - Daniel Oliver, ‘Awkwoods’: This collection is of largely unedited/ uncensored regarding content. Upon the topic of alternative performance theory endorses/unique registers. Daniel Oliver is ND+/Dyspraxic performer and lecturer, and his performances are largely informed by his theories upon awkward interaction, proposing that ND+ people, due to their perception, communication and inherent ‘clumsiness’, intrinsically find themselves in a high number of differing ‘awkward’ scenarios.

2020 - Elena Re, ‘Red Language’: Elena Re is a ND+ creative with a special interest formulated around the colour orange; She developed a synthetic relationship to the colour which informs her use of language; she sees some letters as orange (which she deems as positive) and others as blue (negative associations), whereas other letters are neutral and will change depending upon nearby coloured letters. Elena has formulated ‘Red Language’, she sometimes speaks/writes using increased phonics of red/orange letters.

2021 - Victoria Melody, ‘Headset’: Victoria Melody is a ND+, AutHD performer. She came out as ND+ in her one woman show ‘Headset’ which employs a wide range of ‘mini’ performances, tangents, eclectic props, video recordings, scientific data, visual prompts, and acting out other characters. Not only does she detail her lived

⁴⁰⁰ Tellez, S. (2018) ‘The Embodied Subjectivity of a Half-Formed Narrator: sexual abuse, language (un)formation and melancholic girlhood in Eimear McBride’s, ‘A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing’’. *University of Oviedo*. [ONLINE] <https://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/2018/03/the-embodied-subjectivity-of-a-half-formed-narrator-sexual-abuse-language-unformation-and-melancholic-girlhood-in-eimear-mcbrides-a-girl-is-a-half-formed-thing/> [Accessed 21/02/23]

experiences as a person with ADHD, but her style and choice of creative communication seem inherent/reflective of ADHD influenced narration.

These more apparent ND+ narrative styles were perhaps what I was initially searching for, however after reading further ND+ literature, attending a number of ND+ performances/speaking with ND+ novelists/actors/performers/playwrights, I came to recognise a range of more intrinsic/subtle indications of ND+ creative nuance.

Within this study, I explore whether having differing appreciations of self could transcend into creative practices, specifically when first-person narration is endorsed. Elements of my own hyper-fixations/intense fascinations channel both into what I create and how. Much of my poetry and writing centres around my love of insects; I collected a selection of these writings for my performance at Neuroelastic Neurodivergent+ comedy night⁴⁰¹. At a point where my OCD was more prolific, I visited the Vagina Museum in London and became obsessed with the shape of the reproductive system for a month afterwards, leading to me creating 43 vaginal paintings in three weeks, with little sleep, ending in an impromptu gallery event and accompanying essay upon Neuroqueer identity. In understanding more about ND+ Creativity, I have also been able to recognise that elements of my repetition, both written and through meticulous proof-reading, relates to me creatively stimulating through both writing and re-reading, which also related to some of my love of rhyme, rhythm and alliteration in my poetry and writing.

It is my hope that the development and acknowledgement of Neurodivergent+ Creative Practices through Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics will not only challenge and broaden Creative possibilities, but also aid ND+ individuals and community in being able to more directly, and perhaps self-assuredly recognise and claim, ND+ nuance. Potentially, understanding more upon Neurodivergent+ experience and perception will aid the ways in which people, (both Neurodivergent+ and Neurotypical) appreciate ND+ identity and expression.

Ethical Considerations:

Many of the examples of ND+ Aesthetics I have examined within this thesis are 'direct' applications of Neurodivergent+ Aesthetic. This exploration combined two main interests:

- 1) An interest in innovative language use.
- 2) An interest in authentic ND+ representation.

Additionally, the uncovering and categorisation of Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics has two main outputs:

- 1) To further identify innovative ND+ language and expression within creative practices.
- 2) To further ND+ individuals in being able to feel confident in 'neuroqueering' language within creative practice.

⁴⁰¹ I performed Wordal Smergage at Lava Elastic's and Fem Fest's ND+ comedy night upon 10th of March 2021.

The overlap between these distinctions can highlight ethical challenges, as seen in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*; his presentation of neurodivergence not only perpetuates stigmas, but also doesn't seek to capture authentic Neurodivergent+ expression.

Regarding appropriation, DYSPLA, a dyslexic arts collective based in London, was worried about the possibility of creatives finding themselves within situations where imagination is capped. DYSPLA shunned ideas of censorship, believing progress to be propelled from conversations sprouting from 'misrepresentation'; they believed that art, as a medium, does not necessarily have ethics. They were not concerned by NT representations of Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, stating they cannot truly be appropriated, maintaining if someone wasn't ND+, it simply wouldn't be a Neurodivergent+ Aesthetic (rather it would be a representation).

With this said, it has been identified that a number of inaccurate Neurodivergent+ portrayals have perpetuated harmful stereotypes. Though there may not be a sense of exactly who is permitted to utilise Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, there can be conversations expanding upon when it has been damaging, how it can be more inclusive, and why and how ND+ narratives are being used. Jess Thom, founder of Tourette's Hero, had strong views that representation that isn't authentic shouldn't be considered representation. Similarly, Dr Jen Malia, an autistic author and academic, commented that when she ran a workshop creating autistic characters, she encouraged NT authors to check their reasons, intention, and connection to the community before crafting Neurodivergent+ protagonists. As the author of *The Casual Case*, I do not believe the issue solely surrounds dictating who can utilise Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, but rather upon further sensitivities being established.

The literacy techniques including less formatted language, repetitions, and multi-modal lexis do not exclusively belong to ND+ people, however, when used explicitly to frame Neurodivergent+ thought and experience by Neurotypical authors/creatives, this has the potential to be problematic. Rather than individual NT authors bearing sole responsibility for issues around ND+ stereotyping, I would argue that much wider industry expectations come into practice. At a launch of *In Other Words*, it was discussed that one autistic man's autobiographical screenplay was rejected with the feedback that the character wasn't 'autistic enough', in this case the industry rejected a 'true' ND+ experience in favour for one that was in more line with their preconceptions. Exaggerated stereotypes of neurodivergence have historically been encouraged by performance, film, and publishing industries; this, combined with a lack of empathetic, rounded, well-informed representative depictions, ultimately exacerbates the power of fictional Neurodivergent+ stereotyping. Having a deficit of directly acknowledged ND+ writers and creatives also means that there are less ND+ examples and 'role models' in which others can see and connect with.

Establishing Neurodivergent+/Neuroqueer Literacy Criticism:

This research advocates that there is room for the 'Neurodivergent+ Lens' to widen so that stronger theory and criticism/literary criticism can form as a tool to critique and analyse performance/literature that surround presentations of ND+ narratives. Alongside the lens widening, it also highlights that neuronormative expectations exist and prevail within a

number of disciplines, including creative mediums surrounding communications, and that these need to be scrutinized and challenged.

Neurodivergent+ Censorship and Diminished Support/Access:

A number of barriers may be present for ND+ authors; the diminishment of 'out' authentic Neurodivergent+ voice could reflect a barrier. When conducting my interviews, two prominent reasons that ND+ creatives may not have the chance to break into the industry arose:

- 1) Accessibility challenges existing in relation to Neurodivergent+ creatives (connecting ND+/Disability narratives)
- 2) That authentic Neurodivergent+ voice/communication, due to potential differences, may be seen as more difficult/messy to capture, and therefore undervalued.

Many of the ND+ artists I interviewed had obtained a high level of support for their creative practice to gain recognition, which reduced burnout, meltdown, and fatigue. Jess Thom believes that companies should allow ND+ and disabled individuals to represent themselves and remove the notion that hiring a NT/nondisabled person is 'easier'. She propagated that the best way to fight this type of ableism is to demonstrate that this is not the case, and put pressure on companies to fund any adjustments needed to employ the people they claim to be representing. The stage production of Mark Haddon's novel 'Curious Incident'⁴⁰² which was adapted to theatre and premiered in 2012, took until 2017 for an autistic actor to be cast as the lead, Christopher; Mickey Rowe comments on his experience of playing Christopher,

'I am so looking forward to getting the chance to show young disabled people that they can represent themselves honestly onstage and tell their own stories.'⁴⁰³

Though a step in the right direction, it would seem that Rowe was not given much creative agency to adapt Christopher's character or his lines. And, as discussed previously, Haddon's characterisation of Christopher as autistic has received criticism and may be seen as somewhat dated. If disabled/ND+ individuals are not afforded voice and agency across all levels of the creative processes, their inclusion could be viewed as somewhat superficial or tokenistic. Forwards from this, having more ND+ scriptwriters and/or allowing ND+ actors to change/adapt parts of their script to more reflective of their experiences, could greatly further narratives in terms of ethos and authenticity; this has been done in the creation/adaption of the script, '*The Darkest Part of the Night*', depicting the experience of a black autistic man (Dwight) in 1980s Leeds. In choosing autistic actor, Lee Phillips, to play the lead, the playwright and the company adapted the script/playtext and production to incorporate and reflect Lee Phillips own autistic insight, experiences, stims and acting style.⁴⁰⁴ This ethos can be seen in some ways similarly to Jess Thom's assertions upon being 'naturally improvisational' upon stage and how this is influenced by elements of her 'Tic Language'; meaning she needs and feels most comfortable working alongside actors who accept and embrace this about her and

⁴⁰² Rowe, M (2017) 'Finally, An Actor with Autism Is Starring In 'Curious Incident''. The Huffington Post [ONLINE] www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/mickey-rowe-autism_n_59130afde4b050bdca6112d7 [Accessed 19/03/24]

⁴⁰³ Rowe, M. (2017) The First Actor with Autism to Play Curious Incident's Autistic Lead Speaks Out. *Playbill* [ONLINE] <https://playbill.com/article/the-first-actor-with-autism-to-play-curious-incidents-autistic-lead-speaks-out> [Accessed 22/11/24]

⁴⁰⁴ Robdale, E. (2022) 'The Darkest Part of the Night, 'A Play Depicting a black, undiagnosed autistic man', *Disability Arts Online* [ONLINE] www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/the-darkest-part-of-the-night-a-play-depicting-a-black-undiagnosed-autistic-man/ [Accessed 19/03/24]

her creative practice. Drawing upon Deborah Leveroy's research on acting and the dyslexic body⁴⁰⁵ (chapter two), which discussed how the dyslexic body has often been seen/viewed in terms of 'misperforming' (instead of being seen/understood as not only a natural sense of being, but also something that can be intentional) and extrapolating this to other neurodivergences, such as autism and Tourette's Syndrome, whereby individuals can stim, as well as having 'divergent' speech and communication styles, it is feasible that a number of autistic actors will have been discriminated against and not chosen for specific roles due to elements of ND+ presentation. Going forwards, there needs to be room made/adapted for ND+ individuals to present a range of differing communicational and presentational qualities within a multitude of roles across all genres of theatre; furthermore, as demonstrated within 'The Darkest Part of the Night' (and Jess Thom's performance of 'Mouth', discussed in Chapter 2), Neurodivergence can be written in and incorporated into the core ethos of production, with the autistic/ND+ body not only being understood as a natural entity, but also something which brings new light and understanding into a performance. Lee Phillips, who is a black autistic actor, was not only able to feel comfortable in his own body upon stage, but he was also able to inject his own understandings and interpretation of how the fictional autistic character (Dwight) he was playing would communicate and physically respond to events in the play such as family arguments, police interactions and institutionalisation. Somewhat ironically, though the play endorsed accessible access practice, its content depicted some of the struggles of being both black and autistic in 1980s Leeds, and showed how autistic presentation, especially when united with cultural differences and racial prejudice, can be highly stigmatized and pathologized leading to heightened societal discrimination. 'The Darkest Part of the Night', which was produced by Access All Areas, not only championed accessible performance practice, but also enabled the audience to understand more upon neurodivergence in terms of intersectionality.

When teaching my own drama students as an Associate Lecturer at University of Kent, I encouraged Neurodivergent+ practice within my workshops; several ND+ students grouped together and drew upon their experiences to inform their drama pieces. This didn't just comprise of them drawing on their lived experiences, but it also meant that they acted/presented on stage in ways that felt more comfortable and intrinsic to them; they stimmed, sometimes avoided looking directly at the audience, and spoke/communicated in ways that they felt comfortable when expressing elements of their own voice and character.

ND+ presentation and practice has the potential to go far beyond simply the plot or stimuli; it can be about accepting 'divergent' ways of creating, acting, presenting and communicating not just on stage, but throughout all elements of creative processes. Jess Thom, founder of Tourette's hero, in her interview, spoke upon how she verbally and physically stims on stage and incorporates verbal tics /'tic language' into the actual writing of her scripts. Dyspraxic identifying practitioner, Daniel Oliver, asserts that 'Awkward' can be viewed in light of Neurodivergence, with it not only uncovering new perspectives, but its acceptance also allowing for further 'unmasked' ND+ presentation within performance.

⁴⁰⁵ Leveroy, D. (2013b) *Enabling Performance: Dyslexia and Acting*. Unpublished PhD thesis University of Kent. [ONLINE] <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/75621/1/PhD%20final%20Deborah%20Leveroy.pdf> [Accessed 09/10/23] Meta-cognition and distributed cognition. P.104.

Going forwards, the judge of 'good performance' needs to move away from assessing or measuring whether Neurodivergent+ performers can imitate/adapt to more neurotypical or neuronormative presentational standards; for the arts to be more inclusive of a range of ND+ voices, not only does appreciation of Neurodivergent+ presence/inclusion need to increase, but ND+ creatives also need to be given the space to self-actualize so they can radically challenge neuronormative conventions within creative disciplines and assert new ND+ Led, developed and informed performance practices.

On the topic of authenticity and adapting narrative, several ND+ interviewees believed that their relationship to creative practice regarding deviations from standardised form meant their voices weren't valued or seen as publishable. Elinor Rowlands, founder of Magical Women, commented that NT representation of ND+ is more likely to be 'acceptable' and fit the demands and expectation of NT publisher and audience expectations, and that authentic representation could be more complicated, and perhaps confusing to NT society. Two ND+ interviewees who directly felt as if they had to conform to NT publishing standards were Elena Re and Hanna Randall, whose writing both endorsed elements of their synaesthesia; Elena believed that her 'orange' language was not taken seriously/considered appropriate, and Hanna Randall was asked to re-write/edit out direct experiences of synaesthesia from her novels, with editors believing that these perceptions made her writing less relatable.

On a personal note relating to access and societal prejudice, due to my Autism diagnosis, I was told directly, in a meeting with a careers officer at my school that I should not take Performance Studies at college, due to its social implications. I also had to struggle through being told that being dyslexic and studying language/literature was counter intuitive. As a child, I fortunately had the agency to know that this was wrong, but I wonder how many other ND+ kin never recognised or pursued their own passions due to other people's prejudices surrounding Neurodivergence.

Authenticity Versus Accessibility:

Neurodivergent+ authenticity within creative practice relating to language and communication can affect the accessibility of the work for its audience. Not all ND+ creators utilise unstandardised form, but if they do, to what extent can they be accessed by others? If it is inconsistent, non-chronological, and fragmented, it can be difficult to understand or comprehend.

Intent is important to identify, and in terms of expression, smooth readability does not need to be the ultimate objective; arguably the same can be said with performance; that something new and innovative can be created that is 'beyond' existing binaries, and that, as a writing or performative piece, discombobulation can be an aesthetic in and of itself. A less accessible text which I read was '*When the Music's is Over*', but perhaps this denotes some of the true difficulties with experiencing paranoid schizophrenia. Similarly, many of Daniel Oliver's collected essays on dyspraxic performance also endorse tangents/inconsistencies that make them difficult to follow. Arguably, part of the point of these writings was to make a stand and exist without the direct/explicit presence of NT writing expectations. In her interview, Kate

Fox commented upon an essay she published, 'Doctor Who, autism neurodiversity, the TARDIS',

"It was an essay that was very complicated, and involved, my thought processing just spiralling off in all sorts of directions, and being absolutely cut to ribbons by the producer, because she needed to prioritise accessibility."⁴⁰⁶

With this in mind, something that should be taken into consideration for proofreading is: When a ND+ text is sent for publication, to what degree should ND+ aesthetics be kept for authenticity? – and to what extent should they be standardised for accessibility?

Ultimately, there is room for several philosophies and intents surrounding Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics. Regarding my own appreciations, I have experienced several performances that have foregrounded some individual appreciations towards authentic ND+ expression and lived experience. One such example is Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams' one-woman play '*The Duck*', about her own experiences living as an autistic woman, which was performed at Theatre Delicatessen, Sheffield. Rhiannon injected it with a number of her lived experiences, but also wrote it with an audience in mind. It was supported by Autact Theatre, an autistic-led theatre company who helped ensure the text transitioned to stage to be accessible, as well as authentic and entertaining.

This research touches upon ethics surrounding editing in terms of ND+ authenticity. This follows on from my discussions with ND+ artists and editors, whether to edit or not, and how much, is sometimes dependent upon the style and wishes of the author; for example, a number of performances more directly endorse and wish to portray immediate first-hand voice/expression, and, regarding experimentation, it can be the rawness of a text that evokes its flavour. However, this is extremely dependent upon the artist, their intention style, and their preferences. In reference to this, many types of both ND and NT work/writing/performance benefits from editing; the heart of many ND+ writers work is not that it is unedited, but ND+ agency should be seen as a key component of the process. Going forwards, it would be beneficial for editors working with ND+ individuals to be open to learning more about divergent writing styles, so they can consider how these writing styles can be harnessed and brought out through the editing processes, and ensure that what they are removing/'correcting' isn't a characteristic that's important or inherent to the artist's voice. Regarding confidence, it is also fundamental that editors are aware they are working with individuals who have often been chronically undervalued and can experience high rejection sensitivity, not only is it important that their voices are not overpowered by editors, but the way the editors give and construct feedback can also be vital; for some ND+ individuals open ended questions might be appropriate to really tease out what their wants/intentions are, as they may feel intimidated, or a need to agree with feedback, potentially neglecting their own ideas. As a dyslexic ND+ individual, I have often felt disheartened by pieces I submit being littered by red pen with comments only referring to spelling/grammar. I have often felt undervalued and unheard, as the content or 'soul' of my writing is neglected; I prefer to work with a proof-reader to 'correct' these inconsistencies but wish editors to focus on the content

⁴⁰⁶ Fox, K. (2022) 'Ways of Being Kate Fox on Doctor Who'. BBC [ONLINE] www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0015m5t [Accessed 25/10/23]

of what I send them. Much of what I have suggested above might be a lengthier process, that is a more convoluted for editors, and though this is always a balance, I believe that these conversations need to happen for ND+ voice and agency to be more fully seen and valued. Something that this investigation does wish to bring attention to, is neuronormative practices/hierarchies that are baked into everyday disciplines that might be taken for granted, such as artistic genre, writing and communication expectations; not only may ND+ individuals need more understanding and access support, but the actual conventions themselves can be adapted, challenged and broken down.

Relating to creative practice, writing and performance, this can also mean that performance can be a more accessible, and potentially natural feeling discipline for a number of Neurodivergent+ individuals who struggle with the formation and elements of neuronormative standardizations of written word; there is much more awareness of the number of autistic, ADHD and Dyslexic performers, in particular comedians. This medium, evoking direct communication within spoken word, often concerns itself and thrives upon elements of immediacy and improvisation. In turn, a number of ND+ individuals and their voice have been recognised and celebrated in this discipline, enabling them to be approached and taken seriously by editors and stories who then become interested in their stories and autobiographies, two of which being comedian Hannah Gadsby's 'Ten Steps to Nannette'⁴⁰⁷ (her public comedy performance where she came out as a survivor of sexual assault) and Fern Brady's 'Strong Female Character'⁴⁰⁸, where she discusses addiction, sex work, abusive relationships and mental health. Performance provides different avenues to help widen the types of ND+ voice and story that get published and ultimately heard.

On a final note, this research mainly investigates Performance and Creative writing, understanding them as different models of creative expression and communication. Though there are a number of cross-overs and interdisciplinary mediums; many ND+ artists saw the blurring of disciplines and multi-modal practice as being inherent to a large amount of ND+ creative practice in terms of it not quite 'fitting' and it feeling natural to pull from a range of stimuli to more fully communicate and convey their stories, I have also observed, that the two disciplines can lend themselves to different applications of sentiment. Performance, as touched on above, can have the ability to be more directly communitive, and potentially emotive as the audience and the performer can connect and observe one-another within that space; it can sometimes hold and showcase potentially more chaotic communicational styles and artistic expressions, with its impact on the audience being one of the key focuses. However, Creative Writing can provide the space for ND+ individuals to reflect, compose and expand upon incredibly personal reflections, and have the time to decide and plan exactly how they would like their narrative to appear. In this way offer ND+ individuals a place where they can control the narrative; similarly, a number of ND+ individuals, especially those with speech processing difficulties, or who feel unable to speak in public, may be more likely to seek out this medium. In my study I have found that a number of ND+ stories can have confessional elements to them, in that they may be able to first write down, then explore

⁴⁰⁷ Gadsby, H (2022) *10 Steps to Nannette, 'A Memoir Situation'*. Allen & Unwin.

⁴⁰⁸ Brady, F. (2023) *Strong Female Character*. Brazen.

elements of self in private, before then choosing to publish, and potentially if they would like to use an alias. In my exploration I've found that a number of ND+ individuals are able to write about experiences that they probably would otherwise have not spoken upon. Regarding neuronormative conventions and taboos of what is 'allowed' in terms of oversharing and appropriateness, it may be easier for some ND+ individuals to experiment with removing shackles and unmasking in a discipline that can first take place in private before it is released. However, ND+ creativity also champions the legitimacy of divergent communication; in terms of voice, movement, and facial expression, performance is a discipline that can lend performers more agency upon exactly how they want their words/sentiment to be received and heard in relation to emotion and impact; it is only when Neil Hilborn's poem 'OCD' is performed that you understand repetition as an exploration and representation of painful/intrusive thought interruptions, and not simply a more commonplace poetic device. Similarly, I have performed segments of my own experimental novel, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights' as spoken word pieces, and feel that elements of my voice/passion, in terms of pace, panic and emotion deeply drive its performance. Other parts of the novel I believe are more impactful when read and reflected upon. If I were to approach publishers, I would consider how it could be produced as multi-modal, with the possibility of QR codes to direct readers to sections that are spoken aloud.

Research Bias:

All of the ND+ performers were 'out' and identify as Neurodivergent+, and most of the interviewees were diagnosed and 'out' as ND+. This could create bias as this research may not adequately represent those who are ND+ but undiagnosed or those who are not 'out'. It is possible that undiagnosed and non-identifying ND+ creatives may have a different viewpoint on this subject. I have attempted to question a range of ND+ creatives from differing backgrounds, locations, writing genres/discipline, and diagnosis/identity. However, gaining perspective and input from non-identifying or non-diagnosed ND+ would have been a much more difficult project; both ethically, due to not being able to name interviewees in my research, and practically, as they would have been almost impossible to 'find'.

Within this research I have attempted to capture a number of ND+ insights, but I understand that this research is in no way definitive. Due to the nature of the anonymity behind this the first bias, it is difficult to address. Instead, I have tried to ensure that this research and its findings are flexible and open to interpretation. Going forward, through this being the start of a conversation, it is my hope that more ND+ individuals will feel comfortable contributing to this area of study and take it down new avenues. With this in mind, an interesting assertion that was discussed within two interviews was that it might only be ethical for ND+ Literature/Aesthetics, to be first identified/agreed by the author/creator themselves; a ND+ author might not want/wish their work to be framed in this light, they could be happy for some work to be highlighted as ND+, but they may want other interests or genres to be treated in separation. With this in mind, it is agency and the ability to self-determine, not only 'yourself', but also that which you produce and create, that can also be seen as a paramount consideration. ND+ individuals hold a range of views, and not all ND+ creatives will see being

ND+ as identity encompassing, positive, or relevant to their writings, and that must also be respected.

Neurodivergent+ Joy and Fascination

Within her interview Jen Malia commented on how the terminology of autism can feel overintellectualized and tied to the medical model of disability; historically, if you were not a mental health professional, then it was felt by society that, as an ND+ individual, you could not have the proper insight or authority to convey autistic/ND+ experiences, not even your own. This false premise lies at the heart of this PhD; I am not a psychologist or therapist. The people interviewed were not psychiatrists or therapists. This PhD is not rooted in psychology or social science; it is an art/humanities PhD. We, as Neurodivergent+ creatives, need to feel comfortable talking about our own lived experiences, recognising and challenging the neuronormative expectations put on us and being able to assert how ND+ creativity permeates into our art, writing and performance. Theories such as ‘neuroqueering’ by Dr Nick Walker are becoming more widely known, explored, and expressed. Walker, in his/her book ‘Neuroqueer Heresies’ includes a chapter on ‘Guiding Principles for a Course on Autism’⁴⁰⁹, which argues that due to the fact that mainstream academic scholarship tends to be embedded within pathology paradigms. If one wants to champion the neurodiversity paradigm then one needs to draw on sources by neurodivergent self-advocates, and many of these tend to be online rather than traditional academic books and articles. These resources allow ND+ individuals to directly have a voice, without the need for it to adhere to any specific NT research models or guidelines.

Within our interview Kate Fox spoke about how many attitudes towards ND+ happiness exist regarding the internalization of conveying NT norms; we now need to find room to discover who we want to be and ultimately, what makes us happy. I have come to realize that it is not always ‘the result’ that holds this element, it is very firmly attached to process. The important element is lived experience, flavoured by ND+ existence, which fuels and drips into the creative pursuits of ND+ artists. Through this research I have come to recognise Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics to be extremely personal, often hidden, deep-rooted and nuanced.

This PhD does not attempt to force a view that Neurodivergent+ experience is inherently related to pride; for many individuals the ND+ journey has been peppered with very deep-rooted feelings of shame/isolation/alienation and burnout. But Kate Fox, autistic/ND+ writer and spoken word poet, and Nicola Werenowska, dyspraxic/ND+ scriptwriter stressed in their interviews that there has been too much focus on deficit and hardship. There is much more room for focusing upon ND+ joy and fascination within discussions surrounding Neurodivergent creativity; within my own creativity I take great joy in exploring my love of insects, vaginas and deep-sea creatures. I know countless other ND+ creatives who have channelled intense fascinations and obsessions into their art practices. I attended a workshop by Nicola Werenowska which had a focus on writing about what made us feel energized or joyful. For a number of ND+ individuals, it could be that part of the joy of

⁴⁰⁹ Walker, N. (2021) *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*. Autonomous Press. Chapter ‘Guiding Principles for a Course on Autism’ pp.102-110.

creating can be the exploration and channelling intense fascinations within different creative disciplines. Elinor Rowlands, founder of Magical Women, is dedicated to discovering more about how and why ND+ creatives may have a deep-seated need to creatively stim utilising words, pictures, movements and sounds. Artists Eleana Re and Hanna Randall relax into their writing and artwork, allowing them to connect with their sense of synaesthesia to promote their world view. Daniel Oliver, Dyspraxic performance artist, looks like he is having the time of his life within his ND+ chipolata parties, where he 'awkwoody' and self-assuredly claims a stage place to act/do/be exactly what pleases him. Within my interviews ND+ comedians Angela Barnes and Victoria Melody discussed their understanding of Neurodivergence as related and connected to information 'other wisely', and how, when they were given a platform to share this on stage, they felt energized. A number of ND+ creatives seem to be drawn to creative disciplines, writing and performance as ways to explore, communicate, self-regulate, process and ultimately enjoy themselves while sharing their outlooks and perspectives. The encouragement of other ND+ creatives in developing their sense of self, self-regulation, sense of body and having an intentional/self-actualised relationship to ND+ existence is paramount to the future of ND+ creativity, literature and performance aesthetics. The personal history of Neurodivergent+ individuals has for many, myself included, been incredibly difficult and quite traumatic. Despite this there have been spaces to take a breath and take pleasure in the incredible, convoluted, fascinating world in which we all live; there is room in our future for further progression, room to expand on Neurodivergent creativity in relation to joy. Akin to ND+ congress, Deborah Leveroy and Daniel Oliver's assertions that intentional, self-actualized creative practice will not only change the face of Neurodivergence, but also the climate and spaces in which we exist. Within his own research surrounding notions of 'neurotransgression', Daniel Oliver wrote that, though he practiced 'Embracing Neurodiversity', upon reflection, he didn't fully know what that meant, and this is why he interviewed 13 other ND+ performance artists, so he could connect to others/other ND+ experiences and modes of creativity in learning and exploring his own practices. In many ways I feel similarly to this research; it has only been through having more direct conversations with ND+ creatives that I've been able to more widely/fully conceptualize elements of my own ND+ aesthetics and see myself as linked to much wider more expansive conversations. We may not yet know what Neurodivergent+ Creativity could be. We haven't always believed that we have permission to be ourselves. We are only just discovering this. Sally Gardner, author of Maggot Moon commented within her interview,

"I just feel like a lot of dyslexic children, or adults, would easily succeed and do well if they hadn't had their confidence from trampled."⁴¹⁰

The current climate is not perfect, or even adequate, regarding ND+ inclusion and positive self-development. Many of us have had to mask up to our eyeballs, exist in a state of fight and flight, experienced rejection, and ridicule for daring to be ourselves. If we weren't so traumatized, what great works could be written? Fern Brady, a prominent autistic stand-up comedian and author of 'Strong Female Character' commented within an interview with Oli

⁴¹⁰ Taken from interview with Sally Gardner, conducted upon 26/11/20

Dugmore, “I always think if you are creative in any way, you should make the thing that you wished existed when you were younger”⁴¹¹. Going forwards we can develop safe pockets for ourselves, to develop a sense of solidarity and creative self; we can gain the self-assurance to assert our right to exist, just as we are. To know that in just existing we have inherent value, we can reach out, discover what makes us tick, laugh, relax, love and feel at peace. What great works of creativity might this lead to? This is already something that many of the interviewees within this research have been exploring: DYSPLA within their ND+ arts collective, Jess Thom within her collective Tourette’s Hero, Daniel Oliver within his Chipolata Parties, Hanna Randall by hosting a ND+ ‘Walkshop’, Sam Rapp within her creative organisations for ND+ children, Elinor Rowlands in facilitating Magical Women and her own PhD focusing upon ND+ stimming in creative practice, and Nicola Werenowska in facilitating ND+ creative workshops focusing on joy. Daniel Oliver worked with Jess Thom, and Jon Adams to co-produce ‘Neurodiversity, A study room guide’⁴¹², collecting the experiences of ND+ artists exploring the fields of Live Art and Performance; upon this he commented in his introduction,

‘I decided to talk to neurodivergent artists about neurodiversity and the ways in which they feel their own practices embrace their neurodivergencies’⁴¹³

Already there are talks and symposiums such as Neurodivergent Congress and Autscope in existence; these understandings are something I could never have envisaged when I was growing up; they simply didn’t exist... but, for ND+ individuals NOW, they do! I believe that our sense of creativity and self could spread to places that were previously blocked off. We may not currently know where these places are, or exactly what they will look or feel like, but it is my firm belief that the field of Neurodivergent+ creativity, in relation to joy and self-discovery, has only just begun. I hope that my own ND+ arts collective, Mixmatched, which has been providing performance spaces and workshops for ND+ culture, creativity and community in Kent for the last three years, encouraging ND+ performers to create work around their own intense fascinations, can be a start in the facilitation of this.

Note: While attending Werenowska’s writing workshop for ND+ creatives, I partook in a selection of activities that focused on ND+ participants understanding more about themselves/solidifying a more positive sense of identity. One of the activities related to how participants, who were mostly late diagnosed/identified Neurodivergent+, felt in relation to initially/first understanding themselves as Neurodivergent+. Unlike many of the other participants, who had come to understand themselves as ND+ later in life, I had been ‘given’ my ND+ diagnosis/identity when I was eight; as a child, under CAMHS (Child and Mental Health Services) you are only really ‘diagnosed’ as ND+ if you are ‘missperforming’/ failing within educational settings. Regarding this initial diagnosis, I produced this within Wernowska’s workshop:

⁴¹¹ Brady, F. (2023) On Being a Stripper, Autism Diagnosis, and School in ‘A Men’s Prison. [ONLINE] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHLnaHJwATk> [Accessed 24/03/24]

⁴¹² Oliver, D. (2019b) *On Neurodiversity: A Study Room Guide*. Live Art Development Agency. [ONLINE] [PDF] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Daniel_Oliver_Guide-2.pdf [Accessed 09/10/23]

⁴¹³ Oliver, D. (2019a) *Awkwoods: Daniel Oliver’s Dyspraxic Adventures in Participatory Performance*. Live Art Development Agency. Introduction p.3.

I did not identify as autistic... It was given to me. Pumped into me, like cold concrete. Stamped upon my skin [DEFECTIVE]. It was decided. I'd been cast and couldn't 'escape'. I wanted to peel myself. Peel myself out of 'special ed'. Peel myself into a shape that wasn't broken. Mould myself likeable, beautiful, intelligent... I didn't know. I didn't know then. That I. As I was. Might be enough.

I sincerely hope that the climate for childhood diagnosis has/is changing. I later reflected upon my initial feelings towards my autism diagnosis and compared it some of my more recently developed understanding/appreciations of Neurodivergence/ND+ identification (rather than specific diagnosis) in relation to myself, and repeated the creative exercise:

Neurodivergence bleeds into synapses, lying between the interconnectivity of things, flavouring the marrow of bone. I watch its spores explore, reflect and redirect light, touch sound. I watch them absorb you before inhaling them back. Dewy with newfound knowledge, they take root, thriving in the cool recess of shade, deep within the hypodermis.

Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics Nuance and Process

I have come to realize through this research that ND+ aesthetics, when utilized by ND+ individuals, are not something superficial; they are as much about process and lived experiences as they are about any specific look or style. They may not be directly evident within end creations. Jess Thom in 'Lights of my Life' recorded her Tourette's, and then worked it consciously into the play text; to read the text by itself the reader may not understand it to 'look' or 'sound' like an ND+ aesthetic. For this to be ascertained you would need to talk to the author and learn about her process.

Similarly, regarding characterisations such as repetition and multi-modal practice, they are not in themselves Neurodivergent+. It is more of a shared understanding, prevalence or specific reason for use that characterises it as ND+; in the case of David Burke, a writer with Schizophrenia who wrote 'When the Music's Over', his repetitive aesthetics characterized recurrent impulsive thoughts. Neil Hilborn, a poet with OCD, also did this to denote thought intrusion/compulsion. What I see as characterizing an ND+ aesthetic is the reasons/intent/experience/intense fascination/drive/methods that a ND+ creative is inspired/driven by leading up to final creation. I now understand Neurodivergent+ aesthetics as being interconnected to ideas such as Daniel Oliver's notion of Neurotransgressing or Nick Walker's concept of Neuroqueering, which are incredibly personal and interconnected to lived experiences, self-expression and identity. With this consideration, I agree with some of DYSPLA's views that, in many ways, it may be impossible for Neurotypical creatives to replicate ND+ aesthetics in terms of drive and insight; even if a piece of work endorsed aesthetics that seek to characterize Neurodivergence, such as Mark Haddon's 'Curious Incident' or Daniel Keyes' 'Flowers For Algernon', the authors were not directly drawing upon Neurodivergent+ ideas of self or self-expression; neurotypical writers would not be writing to find or discover more about their own ND+ identity.

I see the nuance of individual ND+ aesthetics as interconnected with ND+ perspective and ingenuity. While undergoing this research I have interviewed many ND+ creatives and analysed texts by ND+ authors. When I began this research there were only a handful of individuals and creative organisations that directly identified themselves as ND+. Over the last five years I am pleased to say that many more have emerged. If I were to have held interviews and studied the texts of different ND+ authors and performance artists, they may have forwarded a number of different outlooks towards ND+ aesthetics. It may be that a number of Neurodivergent+ aesthetics will not necessarily be something that can be 'picked out' by observers, rather that they may be hidden elements of creative practice that can first be explored by individual ND+ creatives, before they are revealed.

As with Kate Fox and Jess Thom, who both asserted that it was important for the genre Neurodivergent+ literature not to overshadow other elements of their writing, I would champion similar reasoning regarding the specifics of Neurodivergent+ aesthetics in my own practice. In dissecting my own creative piece, 'Casual Case', for this research I have focused upon its ND+ aesthetics. However, my writing has many other influences and drives; in relation to 'Casual Case' I have heavily drawn upon elements of Magical Realism⁴¹⁴ and a general love of fairytale. Similarly to Sarah Kane, I have directly studied both creative writing and drama; in doing this I have developed understandings surrounding experimental and post-modernist writing. Lastly, though I am always ND+, I do not always want my lived experiences to be viewed as 'ND+ aesthetics'; Neurodivergent+ peoples are a complex mixture; if 'Casual Case' ever were to be published, I would want to be free to be able to discuss and reflect upon its other influences and drives.

A final note on Neurodivergent+ aesthetics would be that I would not want 'neurodivergence' to absorb credit for my writing and style. In the analysis surrounding Sarah Kane and '4.48 Psychosis', it was discussed how some reviews have credited her writing style as symptomatic of worsening mental health, rather than seeing it as a piece of art that Kane had expertly crafted alongside ND+ aesthetics/ND+ experience. Similarly, I would want it to be fully acknowledged and appreciated that innovation, skill, practice and research shape my creative work. This should be kept in mind when examining the work of all ND+ artists within this investigation. For example, being an ND+ autistic/ADHD creative may mean that you develop intense fascinations, but how they manifest themselves will be inherently personal. It is not autism/ADHD which makes someone knowledgeable and talented within an area; it is formed by research, exploration and practice.

It may be that several ND+ aesthetics may present more naturally or authentically, but, as a writer/artist/performer, to have the confidence, skill and originality to produce a piece of creative writing/literature/play text/performance, that is nuanced, innovative, able to instil meaning and evoke emotion, even when trying something completely different, means that you, as an artist, have to be proficient in your craft. To conclude, being Neurodivergent+ is not what makes me a good/innovative writer or researcher; everything I write and research, is manifested through an ND+ lens which draws together a number of my perceptions and lived

⁴¹⁴ **Magical Realism:** 'a literary genre or style associated especially with Latin America that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction' Merriam-Webster (2024) Magical Realism. [ONLINE] <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/magic%20realism> [Accessed 26/03/24]

experiences. But, similarly to artists and writers from other minority groups, it is not being a member of a group that makes someone inherently a writer or artist but, as a creative, I intrinsically bring elements of my experiences and perceptions of being ND+ into my work.

To round off this discussion on some of the nuance of identifying ND+ writing, within my investigation I have ascertained that it is not just the writing/how it looks or presents that characterises or identifies ND+ Aesthetics. To me, it is largely concerned with intention; why an ND+ author has chosen to write this narrative, what is its impetus, what are they pulling from. The 'Why' is dependent on each individual; in many ways I see ND+ aesthetics to be in contrast to notions around 'death of the author'⁴¹⁵, whereby artwork is seen/understood in separation. To understand the ND+ 'lens' it was written or created in, you may need to know more about the author (or the author may be trying to find out more about themselves), or the author may not be able/willing to reveal this to anyone. In this way it may be much easier for other ND+ individuals to glimpse kinship that others miss, because, at the heart of authentic ND+ Aesthetics, I believe is self-expression and discovery. They are deeply personal and synonymous with personal experiences, emotions, communication, perception and processing. Although elements of ND+ aesthetic nuance can be used to challenge neuronormative practices and may produce innovative genre-defying writings, it can also be an unseen phenomenon; something that each ND+ individual is exploring and cultivating within themselves, part of their journey, subtle, and not necessarily created to be viewed or understood by others.

Regarding its progression, ND+ individuals are becoming more aware of their own voice, that they are allowed to have a voice, and that their voice is valuable; we are beginning to have more of an awareness of ourselves, and an awareness of ND+ community/artistic creative communities, and how we can build and collaborate with each other. As for many ND+ individuals, who have been chronically undervalued, it is not just about being given a space, it is about knowing we can adapt it and having the confidence to do so; knowing we have the right to represent ourselves. Keeping the Medical Model of Disability in mind, and its previous gatekeepers more solely being NT identifying Doctors, Psychiatrists and researchers, this self-representation has not always been something afforded to ND+ individuals.

What this research touches on is the notion that hierarchies and neuronormative practices are baked into a range of everyday disciplines, including those within language/linguistics and communication, and that ND+ authorship and creative practices is one way of exploring and challenging these; a number of Neurodivergent+ individuals/creatives may intrinsically 'flaunt' a number of seemingly 'set' conventions. However, using self/self-expression to explore boundaries does not fit traditional standardized form/cultural expectation. It is my view that language can be challenged in a number of ways, by a number of individuals from diverse backgrounds, but, that it would only be considered ND+ aesthetics/ND+ Literature/Creative Practice, if one if one or more of the lead practitioners are ND+.

⁴¹⁵ Oxford Home Schooling (2024) *Death of the Author*. [ONLINE]: www.oxfordhomeschooling.co.uk/blog/the-death-of-the-author/#:~:text=The%20Death%20of%20the%20Author%20is%20a%20literary%20theory%20that,of%20the%20Author%E2%80%9D%20in%201967. [Accessed 31/10/24]

Going further regarding the 'un'-standardization of language in terms of being more representative of thought/thought process, I believe that everyone, from every background is able to challenge set/traditional forms to capture elements of memory, image, music, feeling, through multi-disciplinary practices that seek to creatively capture and draw together often quite fractured emotional recollection. The breaking down of set form/neuronormative practice and hierarchy, I would argue, benefits many people and widens creative exploration and expansion. It is the reason/why/how that is important in relation to claiming Neurodivergent+ aesthetics, e.g., anyone can play and breakdown neuronormative expectation through experimentation, but, it is only denotive of first-hand ND+ creative practice/innovation/ND+ Aesthetics if an ND+ individual is using their life, experiences, and thought process to explore voice. A number of ND+ individuals mask, and this can 'remove' elements of ND+ voice/presentation; however, what this research stresses is that masking is exhaustive and shouldn't be an expectation. Furthermore, a number of ND+ individuals are unable to mask, and this can be exacerbated within differing disciplines, including creative writing and performance; the expectation to utilise, communicate, and ultimately play using 'correct syntax/proper English', not only stifles creativity, but can also foster shame and embarrassment around expressing self. This research acknowledges that there are access divisions for ND+ creatives regarding expression and communication, and that these can be challenged and broken down in ways that support and encourage ND+ creative enrichment.

Whether ND+ aesthetics can be purposely experimented with by NT creatives is something that has also been explored throughout this investigation. I align with DYSPLA's assertion that ND+ aesthetics come from ND+ experience and processing and reflection, and in this way a NT creative, by their very nature, cannot possess a ND+ narrative. They are only able to take inspiration, research, and creatively portray ND+ characters/narration. The question is, is this ethical?

In terms of my own personal opinion, I do believe that some of the joy of creation can be in exploring thoughts/perspectives and narratives other than your own. I do not advocate 'banning'/reducing creative exploration; however, I do advocate viewing imagined narratives more akin to true works of fiction, and that writing by people with lived experience to be viewed more in light of having more insight.

When the ND+ community has more agency, there will be more voices to critique and judge narratives claiming their experience. What has been problematic is that NT authors' voices on ND subjects have historically taken precedence, and that stereotyped portrayals of ND+ lives may have been preferred by publishers. They have taken priority over ND+ voices, which have not been supported, or sometimes treated as important. What can be stressed here is hierarchy, and as this is broken down, more first-hand ND+ are published/produced and understood, a heightened appreciation of ND+ creativity and culture will aid in dispelling unauthentic ND+ narrative; valuing the feedback, opinions and direct of the ND+ community will not only change the landscape, but also help build a framework for neurodivergent+ literary theory and models of good practice. Individual authors are also more likely to think question and research why they are including a ND+ voice, and potentially seek out ND+ peer review to improve their depictions. What could be one of the most fundamental shifts in the

industry is that ND+ individuals will be able to directly see and recognise themselves within literature, performance and creative disciplines, creating solidarity, 'role models' and being able to adapt the fields ourselves to create the future. Already there are ND+ run groups, publishers and performance collectives, who are developing their own standards and groundwork to support and champion other ND+ creatives. 'Neither Art Nor Ornament' is a creative project that sought to create a model for autistic leadership and best practice, led by autistic artist Sonia Boué; she led and organized a project of 14 artists, and voiced what she needed to be able to feel supported leading the project, she then wrote up her findings so that other organisations could directly learn from her experiences and research⁴¹⁶. When I was growing up, I didn't know of any ND+/Autistic/ADHD celebrities, comedians, political leaders. I felt like a recognition/diagnosis forbade me from these fields; it wasn't something to be proud of; now, things are developing, not in all fields, not in all spaces, but a wider sense of ND+ solidarity, and ND+ creative leadership is now in existence, even if only in pockets.

What I found really exciting over the 5 years I have been researching is seeing ND+ culture and creativity become something more self-aware, reflective and confident in claiming and asserting its own agency. Trajectories within this exploration have taken the conversation much further than I had originally foreseen, and that has emboldened me, as an ND+ creative and researcher, to adapt my initial investigation, and also to develop more faith in my own ability to convey this research and accept elements of my own voice.

'Fitting Out': Neurodivergence, Self-Expression, Feminism and Queer Theory

The majority of authors and creatives interviewed within my investigation were women or neurogender/Neuroqueer identifying individuals. As detailed within the preface, I identify as a neurogender woman; several ND+ interviewees have aided me in not only being more open/'out', but also in developing my understandings of neurodivergent+ womanhood and femininity, and, further from this, how this might be expressed within creative mediums and practices. The last interview that I conducted for this investigation was with Joanne Limburg, author of 'To My Weird Sisters, on autism and feminism', a collection of explorative essays in the form of letters. These letters creatively investigate historic female 'Uncanny' voices as relevant to autism; she understood that a certain individuals stood out as 'Uncanny', and recognised this, in herself, to elements of autistic identity, in this light she found solidarity with other 'Uncanny' individuals, without directly diagnosing them as Autistic/Neurodivergent.

This really supported some of my own understandings around ND+ empathy and solidarity. This type of understanding allows for further ND+ solidarity and recognition away from diagnostic terms not only in terms of history (as Joanne Limburg wrote most of her letters to historic 'Uncanny' women), but also in terms of present-day connection ... many of 'us' (Uncanny peoples) may not ever recognize ourselves as Neurodivergent+ or be able to obtain diagnosis, and this can often be connected to economic and sociological factors. I especially admired within Limburg's work that, through the assertion of 'Uncanny', she had

⁴¹⁶ Robdale, E. (2020) Neither Art Nor Ornament, 'Could Autism-led arts projects pioneer more inclusive and comprehensive perspectives?'. *Disability Arts Online*. [ONLINE] www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/neither-use-nor-ornament-could-autism-led-arts-projects-pioneer-more-inclusive-and-comprehensive-perspectives/ [Accessed 13/04/23]

found a way to confidently claim her experience and see it in relation to others. Her first letter, addressed to the reader, really resonated with me,

“There was a whole world out there for me to observe and explore and think about, and I had no interest in interpreting my activities so that the world could look at me and judge whether I was pretty or nice or good – whether, in other words, I was becoming a girl.”⁴¹⁷

It solidified and supported many of my own thoughts around being a Neurodivergent+ woman, in terms of high sociological pressures to conform, be polite, be dainty/poised, and feeling ‘ajar’ when following my own insight and explorations which often seemed unaligned. Joanne Limburg also authored, ‘The Woman Who Thought Too Much’⁴¹⁸ in 2010, reflecting upon her own lived experiences of OCD; alongside myself, and many of the ND+ individuals interviewed, her experiences/thought processes are not tethered to a solitary term of diagnosis. This is one reason why I felt this research needed to be expansive regarding ND+ narratives. I identify as an ND+ individual, as I do not think it is possible, or identity-encompassing, for me to break myself down rigidly into specific labels/diagnostic terms to reflect on elements of my own lived experience/thought processes, especially in relation to creative practices. It is simply not how I exist. Regarding my own ND+ framework, in terms of fostering more of a social and identity-encompassing understanding of Neurodivergence as a movement, I support expanding/loosening parameters surrounding stringent categorisations and endorsing understandings surrounding more multi-faceted ND+ perspectives. It would be my hope that, in doing this ‘We’ (ND+ individuals) can recognise ourselves more as wholes, alongside finding and connecting with others on our own terms⁴¹⁹.

However, in relation both to combined ND+ identity and concepts around diagnostic separation, adding another level of intricacy, how I feel about my OCD, in terms of illness and mental health, is quite different to how I view being ADHD/Autistic/Dyslexic/Dyspraxic. I see several experiences/qualities relating to the latter ND+ identities as more identity-encompassing. Though I understand my OCD as deeply personal, and inextricably linked to other elements of my ND+ nature, experience and processing, I would also, theoretically, like not to have/be OCD. Several other ND+ individuals interviewed within this study also felt as if they related differently towards Neurodivergence relating more directly to mental health, than they did to elements of ND+ identity/processing that were less directly associated/characterized/diagnostically associated with experiences more exclusively situated around experiences of anxiety, depression, delusion, mania, paranoia, psychosis, and experiences of feeling less stable. One interviewee who discussed elements of her depression was comedian and performer Angella Barnes, this is explored within our

⁴¹⁷ Limburg, J. (2021). *Letters to my Weird Sisters*. Atlantic Books. p.59.

⁴¹⁸ Limburg, J. (2010) *The Woman Who Thought Too Much*. Atlantic Books.

⁴¹⁹ **Note:** This is quite a nuanced view/perspective. I understand that some ND+ individuals take do take pride in specific terms and are able to find more catered kinship/help/support within groups tailored to particular diagnostic terms/identity. Diagnostic terms can also be useful in aiding individuals to understand/discover and find more upon specific ND+ experiences, especially in terms of those relating to mental health difficulties that can require tailored therapies and medications. And, regarding how help and support is currently viewed and given, specific diagnosis is often essential to gaining support. I am drawing upon elements of my experiences and ND+ frameworks to advocate for less stringent categorisation surrounding unity in relation to ND+ social progressions relating to arts and identity. I do not wish to negate or speculate upon the usage of diagnostic terms as a whole/within other settings, neither do I wish to diminish their value to ND+ individuals who do view specific terms as more identity encompassing.

interview, which was published by Disability Arts Online, 'Angella Barnes: Comedy, ADHD, Dopamine and Depression'.⁴²⁰

How someone sees and relates to being Neurodivergent+ is inherently personal; going forward, within the community, I hope more space/understanding develops not just surrounding ND+ individuals who find similar experiences/synergies, but also between those who have differing experiences, viewpoints, and ND+ processes. A plethora of people can be encompassed and welcomed beneath our Neurodivergent+ umbrella. I would like this research to aid in making room for further discussions, narratives and solidarities to form that can incorporate a wider scope for multi-faceted ND+ identities.

With my own identity in mind, I was not able to identify my narrative specifically as a ADHD, or Autism, or Dyslexic, or OCD Narrative; my own interpretation of having multiple diagnoses/ND+ identity is that my narrative encompasses and expands upon elements of all those labels (and potentially more). ND+ narratives of course exist alongside all other intersecting overlaying, interlacing, identity-informing factors attached to the condition of being human. It is for this reason that, regarding this research, I attempted to steer clear from treating diagnostic/singular ND+ identity terms (such as ADHD, or, Autism, or OCD) in strict separation; rather, I have attempted to use them to aid in explaining how some ND+ creatives relate to elements of their identity. This approach has aided me in being able to recognise and discuss synergies/trends surrounding ethos and ND+ experience across a wide range of ND+ ideologies, enabling connections and discussion that supersedes singular, potentially more narrow-sited terminology; for example, Daniel Oliver is not only discussed in relation to other Dyspraxic Practitioners, Jess Thom's is not discussed only in relation to other practitioners with Tourette's Syndrome, they are positioned and contrasted alongside a number of ND+ individuals/groups with comparable practise/philosophy. This research focuses on finding and connecting a range of ideas and thinking surrounding ND+ creativity, but its focus is not on situating, or segregating, these concepts along strict diagnostic groups/singular ND identity terminology. I am not at all alone in this disposition, not only do the two initiating movements identified within this research, Survivors (1980s+) and Mad Pride (1990s+), promote ND+ identity/unity that is not centred upon any specific diagnosis and/or terminology, but a number of more current ND+ organisations continue this; the arts collective DYSPLA originally championed dyslexic creatives, but now also understands Neurodivergence/ND+ creativity as multi-faceted and is open to all ND+ identifying artists, Sarah Saeed's ND+ comedy collective 'Lava Elastic' is also open to all Neurodivergences, as is MixMatched collective, Daniel Oliver's 'Awkwoods: Dyspraxic Adventures in Participatory Performance' (2014) includes essays by several differently divergent authors, as does the more recent publication, 'Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality'(2024), which again includes interviews with an assortment of ND+ creatives (Daniel Oliver and Jess Thom included). These are just a handful of the many ND+ individuals and organisations that have been/are connecting and collaborating and are drawn to one another due to similarities of practice, thought and ethos surrounding far-reaching ND+ coverage (which is not based exclusively on specific singular, potentially more diagnostic terminology)⁴²¹.

⁴²⁰ Robdale, E. (2023) Angela Barnes: Comedy, ADHD, Dopamine and Depression. Disability Arts Online. [ONLINE] www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/interviews/angela-barnes-comedy-adhd-dopamine-and-depression/ [Accessed 14/11/04]

⁴²¹ **Note:** Many Neurodivergent+ individuals do and have reclaimed singular ND terms, such as Autism, ADHD, Dyslexic, as identity encompassing, and are reclaiming, expanding and reframing these singular identities in light of personal, cultural, and political ND+ expansions; these assertions are not in opposition

I have often felt somewhat restricted/put off by terms such as 'Autism Narrative', 'Autie-Biography', and even 'Dyslexic Creativity', feeling that they can be, to a certain degree, reductionist. They certainly do not fit or encompass my ND+ identity/how I identify. I wanted to use elements of this autoethnographic research to further carve and establish the existence of complex, interlacing ND+ identities, and avoid reducing or pigeonholing ND+ creatives and their narrative and/or performance into set, singular, potentially more diagnostically inclined terminology; I did not want this research to support/add to constructs that I, alongside a number of other ND+ individuals, do not feel fully encompassed by or included within. Reflective of this, other than OCD, Tammy, the narrator of my experimental novel, 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights', is ND+/multiply Neurodivergent, but the narrative does not explicitly label/diagnose/identify a set term/s; though fictional and experimental, in many ways the narration draws upon elements of my own ND+ nature/s.

Since receiving my autism/dyslexia/OCD diagnosis (aged 8), I've often felt deeply uncomfortable being 'out'. Throughout a lot of my lifetime, I've felt that being 'out' about my identity/neurotype has meant I have felt 'less', in that ableist assumptions and stereotypes have been used to analyse and stereotype elements of my personality/communication/spirit. Perhaps just as damaging, there have also been instances where I have 'come out' but been interrogated, sneered at, and ultimately not been believed (and definitely not understood or accommodated for). Regarding womanhood, I have often felt too ungraceful, blunt, outspoken, inappropriate, anti-social and ultimately not 'girly' enough. Trying to 'mask' some of these elements has led not only to me being exhausted, but, at points, feeling as if I have a shallow sense of self, in that elements are constructed rather than authentic. It is in part due to my own lived experiences that I not only strive for a greater sense of ND+ solidarity in general, but also a more direct appreciation of Neurodivergent+ women. Many ND+ individuals relate to not 'fitting in', and perhaps we never will, but, in that case, what we may be able to do, is built upon appreciations of 'fitting out'.

Regarding feminism and more contemporary feminist theory, there is now more of a call for recognising and championing intersectionality, meaning that ideas surrounding feminism, identity, culture, and accommodation should be viewed as ongoing developments. Several women's cultures are yet to be fully acknowledged, and alongside this, several new cultures /understandings towards being female are developing. One such development is the improved understanding and inclusion of trans and non-binary individuals. As briefly outlined within the preface and introduction, the idea that ND+ individuals can have further individualized appreciations towards gender and identity with terms/theories around Gendervague (Lydia X.L outlines and explores this within her essay 'Gendervague'⁴²²) Neurogender and Neuroqueer (Nick Walker discusses this in depth within 'Neuroqueer Heresies'⁴²³) being developed by ND+ individuals to explore these areas. As a community,

to this research, rather Neurodivergent+ (rather than any specific neurodivergence) as an encompassing identity, within this autoethnographic research, can be seen to be influenced and reflective of the researchers own lived experience and perspectives towards her own ND+ identification; her identity/the way she identifies has altered and changed over her lifetime, with her originally identifying as dyslexic (though she had other identities/diagnosis). The way each ND+ individual relates to their identity is personal and it ranges. This research supports several developing viewpoints regarding developing neurodivergent identities and does not aim to put forward a singular determination; rather it aims to forward a number of views and enrich the conversation.

⁴²² Brown, L. (2011) 'GenderVague At the Intersection of Autistic and Trans Experiences', *AutisticChoya* [ONLINE]

<http://www.autisticchoya.com/2020/05/gendervague-at-intersection-of-autistic.html> [Accessed 16/10/23]

⁴²³ Walker, N. (2021) *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*. Autonomous Press.

we are only just scratching the surface of what Neurodivergence, as an identity and culture, means to us.

On the topic of Neurodivergent+ women and inclusion, both feminist and LGBTQIA+ cultures/ideologies are only just beginning to directly recognize the nuance surrounding Neurodivergent+ experience, womanhood, self and cultural identity. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons that ND+ voices are lacking or are left out, is that several in-person communities, events, symposiums, have not fully considered ND+ access need and/or communication preference/need. Historically, coming from a place of inequality within society, women who presented differently and/or experienced episodes of ill mental health, were not treated with empathy or understanding; their voices would likely be dismissed. In her book 'Mad, Bad, Sad' (2009)⁴²⁴ Lisa Appignanesi explores how unconventional women/woman experiencing mental health difficulties were often stereotyped into 'Mad, Bad, Sad'. Similarly, Showalter's, 'The Female Malady, Women, Madness and English Culture' (1985)⁴²⁵ discusses how these understandings/stereotypes of women with mental health difficulties transcended into literary representations of womanhood and mental health. Within 'Chapter One' of this research I discuss, Dolly Sen, and her recent publication 'Uninstalling Normality' (2024), which directly details the Mad Pride movement. Her paper also discussed how the initial founders of Mad Pride were mainly, 'straight white men', and how a group 'Mad Chicks' went on to progress female inclusion. Upon women and madness Dolly Sen also detailed her research and assertions exploring how, "(with) the arrival of psychiatry came the rise of the incarcerated women"⁴²⁶, expanding that historically,

"Women were considered mad when they went against 'feminine propriety'. Those Victorian women who wanted more than society could give them were prone to 'hysteria'. Yearning for independence and freedom from marriage and motherhood, in the minds of psychiatry, was the cause of hysteria. Rebellion against the domestic life was pathologized. Any rebellion, in fact, was pathologized. The hunger strike of suffragettes at Holloway Gaol was seen as a symptom of hysteria. Psychiatry was a machine to ensure women were dutiful wives. Some 'treatments' included putting ice into vaginas, or removal of the clitoris, or years in a lunatic asylum."⁴²⁷

Historically women, Neurodivergent+ women, and women experiencing mental health difficulties, have been specifically targeted regarding pathology, psychiatry and stigma. Regarding more contemporary identification prejudice, women are less likely to be recognised as Autistic or ADHD, and more likely to be given a diagnosis relating to mental health. Neurodivergence can, and I argue should, be seen in relation to feminism. Part of Sen's study guide included a section entitled, 'Racism Loves Psychiatry', which details how psychiatry has developed in ways that further stigmatize ethnic minorities. Alongside Sen's own discussions on madness and her identification as 'Mad', she includes

⁴²⁴ Appignanesi, L. (2009) *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*. Virago

⁴²⁵ Showalter, E. (1985) *The Female Malady*. Pantheon.

⁴²⁶ Sen, D. (2024) *Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality*, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNJvwTY_aem_ARd2Xf_HPICKLRF_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG97u-1sUBTqbg-V0tVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnK87_ [Accessed 30/03/24] Section: Mad Pride. p. 11.

⁴²⁷ Sen, D. (2024) *Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality*, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNJvwTY_aem_ARd2Xf_HPICKLRF_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG97u-1sUBTqbg-V0tVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnK87_ [Accessed 30/03/24] Section: Mad Pride. p.11

interviews with other 'Mad' identifying creatives, one being Rebekah Ubuntu, a black female creative. Ubuntu comments,

"I was recently diagnosed with autism and ADHD. As liberating as that was initially, the co-genesis of race and neurodivergence within pathology is indicative of medicine as a weaponizing mechanism against those considered 'abnormal' and societally 'abhorrent'. However, these diagnoses can be useful because, given the way our society has been set up, there is certain support you can only access if you are assigned a particular label. It's a challenging dilemma to reconcile. I'm currently enrolled in a programme called Sola Siblings specifically for people who are neurodiverse -- and who resonate with the description of autism -- to develop a greater sense of self-connection and intrinsic value because of our neurodiversity, not in spite of it."⁴²⁸

Though these topics upon neurodivergence, feminism and race are not fully expanded upon within this research, they are worthy of a mention in relation to developing appreciations of not only female culture, but black and ethnic minority culture in relation to (psychiatric) Survivor's Movements, Mad Pride Movements and Neurodivergent+ recognition and progression.

These subjects are far larger than this thesis, but in terms of creative expression and practice, several interviewees asserted elements of Neurodivergent+ femininity through creative practice: Elinor Rowlands, founder of Magical Women, encourages other ND+ women to join her in 'unmasking' and exploring meltdowns and 'forbidden' emotions within art practices; one being that ND+ women may channel elements of 'stimming' into their art/writing; stims that may have naturally presented physically or verbally may have been diminished to look/seem more socially acceptable. Similar sentiments surrounding being permitted to be 'unacceptable' as an ND+ woman, were shared by autistic comedian, Fern Brady, when she spoke about the influences behind her writing of 'Strong Female Character'. Additionally, both Sarah Saeed (ND+ founder of Lava Elastic) and Victoria Melody (ND+ comedian) expressed how they utilized elements of performance to explore and challenge ideas around masking and identity. Though masking is experienced by many ND+ individuals, across genders, it can be seen and understood to have additional prevalence/pervasiveness in female presenting individuals, this is one of the main reasons given for women being underdiagnosed/recognised as both Autistic and ADHD. In my more personal understanding, I have experienced women's culture/socialisation, in more general terms, to carry higher demands and emphasis upon social conventions such as communication and politeness. In terms of my own experiences, especially as a child and into my teens, I felt as if I had, in many ways 'failed' as a woman, and often felt excluded, or embarrassed within a number of supposedly female 'safe spaces. Within the the topic of diagnosis and recognition, ND+ women have been chronically under-represented, and currently must fight just to be seen and recognised as ND+. Tammy, throughout the narrative of 'The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights', explores, questions and challenges her existence and positionality as a female.

⁴²⁸ Sen, D. (2024) Uninstalling Normality: A Study Room Guide on Madness, Mad Pride, and Questioning Normality, LADA [ONLINE] https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DollySen-final-compressed_2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR08dtUUeGKL_S5VH8o5QT8qY74eoRnRjaUD914X4WPVIY4bJTEHdNJvwTY_aem_Ard2Xf_HPICKLRF_2U7PBD6B9nUWYHTfmKgG a97u-1sUBTqbg-VOtVLYxeGVw8EPYKp85TcFPiX9VJgWRmKnK87_ [Accessed 30/03/24] Section: Interview with Rebekah. p.34.

As a creative, I understand the art of writing, performance, literature, by ‘out’ ND+ women, who feel comfortable expressing how pressures and conventions have shaped them, to be paramount in expressing ‘our’ narratives, dispelling stereotypes around ND+ womanhood such as ‘mad, bad, sad’, and providing room for expressions of fascination and joy. Several recent publications, by ND+ women, are already seeking to address this gap, promote solidarity, and facilitate more informed understandings, such as: ‘Aspergirls’ (2010)⁴²⁹, ‘Odd Girl Out’ (2018)⁴³⁰, ‘Autism in Heels’ (2018)⁴³¹, ‘To My Weird Sisters’ (2021)⁴³² and ‘Strong Female Character (2023)’⁴³³

Building upon conversations surrounding ND+ femininity, many of us challenge and exist outside of conventional neurotypical gender norms. Conversations surrounding Neurodivergence/Neurogender/Gendervauge/Neuroqueering should not exist in isolation from conversations surrounding feminism and queer theory, but within them. ND+ individuals and communities have the potential to challenge and expand these areas, not just in being seen and included, but where an understanding of ND+ and female cultural identity can be built upon. Audrey Lorde, a Black American activist most prolific in the 1960s/70s, was quoted in Limburg’s⁴³⁴ “To My Weird Sisters”,

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”⁴³⁵

Within ‘Weird Sisters’ Limburg wrote upon her Jewish Autistic identity, and how she feels a sense of solidarity to individuals persecuted for both of these characteristics within Nazi occupied Germany. ‘The Darkest Part of the Night’, a play depicting Lee Phillips as Dwight, a black autistic man in 1980s Leeds, brought to attention a number of societal discriminations and dangers that black ND+ individuals can face; having a black autistic actor as the lead to this play (as opposed to an allistic⁴³⁶ actor attempting to characterize themselves as autistic) was incredibly powerful; it wasn’t superficial or a crude appropriation of ND+ existence, it carried far more weight as a lived narrative as well as role-modelling inclusive practices.

Regarding creative practice, writing and performance, in using elements of our identity to Neurotransgress or Neuroqueer, hopefully we will be able to produce work that embodies some of our experiences and insights around gender and expression (and hopefully with less of a focus on ‘struggle’ and more of an impetus of self-exploration). This will hopefully not only lead to other ND+ creative kin feeling supported, but also create spaces where dialogues surrounding feminism, gender, LGBTQIA+ identity and experience can be expanded upon in terms of Neurodivergence. With this in mind, regarding supporting an expansive Neurodivergent+ movement, it is important that ‘we’ (ND+ individuals) do not overpower, push out, speak for, or diminish experiences, identities/neurotypes that lie outside our own, and recognise that we can listen, learn, champion and support a range of ND+ voices from differing backgrounds, that may have contrasting philosophies. This will

⁴²⁹ Aspergirls (2010) ‘Empowering Females with Asperger’s Syndrome’. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

⁴³⁰ James, L. (2018). ‘Odd Girl Out’. Bluebird.

⁴³¹ O’Toole, J. (2018). *Autism in Heels, The Untold Story of a Female Life on the Spectrum*. Skyhorse.

⁴³² Limburg, J. (2021). *Letters to my Weird Sisters*. Atlantic Books.

⁴³³ Brady, F. (2023) *Strong Female Character*. Brazen.

⁴³⁴ **Note:** within ‘To My Weird Sisters’ Joanne Limburg explores what it means to be a Jewish Autistic Women, both in terms of historic connection, and her present lived experience.

⁴³⁵ Limburg, J. (2021). *Letters to my Weird Sisters*. Atlantic Books.

⁴³⁶ **Allistic:** Nonautistic identifying person.

hopefully lead to a cornucopia of ‘divergent’ creative practices and narrative voices that are not only inclusive but also nuanced, rich and far-reaching.

Note: Regarding Neurodivergence and my own personal experiences of gender and creative practice, this was more directly realized/vocalized within my ‘Wombinescent’ (2021) gallery and panel talk with other ND+ female-identifying creatives. [My essay on elements of my own Neurogender identity can be found in Appendix B]

Reflections:

When I began this research on ND+ aesthetics I was absorbed by the possibility of creating ND+ sounding/presenting lexis. Though I have utilised techniques within my own writing to craft a ND+ protagonist and found a range of other ND+ creatives who have crafted their text and/or performance to denote ‘Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics’, I now understand ‘Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics’ to be much more concerned with method, reflection, and intent. The ‘why’, ‘how’, and ‘resulting from what’ has been what sparked Neurodivergent+ creatives to utilise innovative linguistic, performative, or communicative methods within their creative practice.

Simply using an element of syntax/grammar I see as perhaps quite a reductionist/one-dimensional way to approach Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, which is more concerned with a whole spectrum of influences such as: history, lived-experience, identity, communication, processing, sense of self. What I have found is that several ND+ creatives have merged their own appreciations of neurodivergence and their ND+ identity within their art, writing, and performance, and that this has reflected elements of ND+ experiences such as masking. I could highlight masking as a prominent influence on ND+ creatives, but why they’ve created the mask and how they choose to explore it will always be intrinsic to the individual. ND+ creatives often have deep-rooted, personal reasons for pairing themselves with specific aesthetics; this is as much to do with discovering their own identity as it is with presenting it to others.

Though there may be some exceptions, I generally see the crafting of Neurodivergent+ presenting aesthetics by NT authors to be more concerned with language and innovation, rather than being fully concentrated on more rounded ND+ representation and expression. Talented authors and performance artists, ND+ and NT alike, have the potential to conduct empathetic research, connect with communities, and create perceptive and nuanced narration. In terms of discovering differing or more intrinsic methods of creation by deviating from standardised, or perhaps ‘neuronormative’ expectations, I would argue that other minority groups and potentially NT creatives can explore their own voices by using their sense of self and differing communicative styles to challenging hierarchical structures. I hope that my research can help provide context for language/communication to be viewed as more of a creative medium in which individuals can uncover ‘self’ while disassembling hierarchical structures. However, neurodivergence is incredibly multi-faceted and this type of linguistic innovation should only be ‘claimed’ or accredited with ND+ linguistics/innovation if the author identifies as ND+ and/or the ND+ community. The author’s lived experience, intention, and potentially method, is viewed as essential to Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics⁴³⁷.

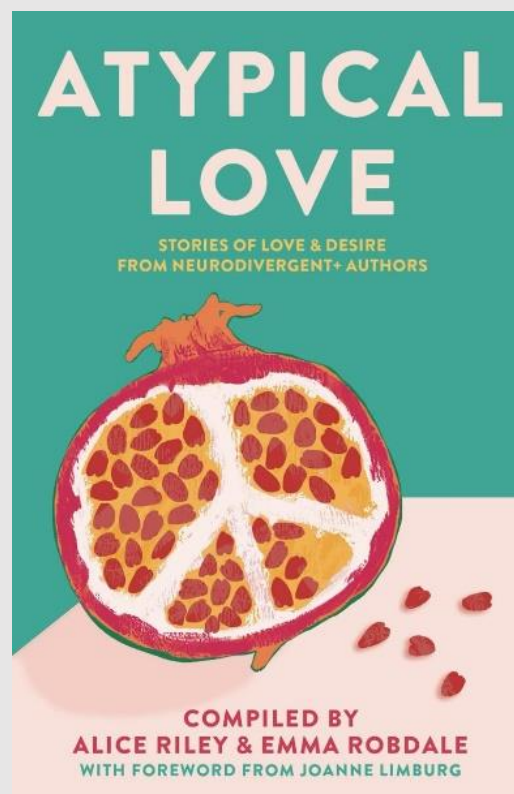
⁴³⁷ **Note:** In the case of Neurotypical Authors utilizing ND+ presenting aesthetics this distinction is slightly more difficult, but, to an extent, it is still the Neurotypical Author’s intention that is paramount to identifying their character as ND+, rather than neurodivergence being concluded purely by linguistic choice/style. This thesis has shown that this can/has been done by NT authors but has also discussed potential ethical dilemmas.

Over the course of this PhD, I have become far more publicly 'out' as an ND+ woman; being able to use and reflect upon my own diagnosis within this research has influenced its tone; I have become more 'relaxed' towards my diagnosis, but, going forward, I also wish to lesson it as a 'frame' for creative and academic pursuits. Similar to Kate Fox, autistic performance poet, I do not mind neurodivergence being one of the genres I am associated with, but I do not want it to overshadow other elements of my interest and lived experience; I would like to develop stronger focus upon other elements of my creativity/personality. I think I will always feel comfortable with ND+ people viewing my work in terms of a Neurodivergent+ Aesthetic, but I still feel dubious as to whether I would want wider, mainstream, NT society to continuously see me in this light. This is perhaps tied up to existing prejudices and my own rocky and convoluted relationship to ND+ diagnosis, leading me to still internalise ableist attitudes towards myself. Unfortunately, Pride is a journey, not just a decision. It is also my hope that going forwards there can be a more 'post' approach to neurodiversity, whereby there is more universal understanding of differing neurotypes, and less of a need for intrinsic divides. I can say that I am now more 'excited' about Neurodivergence. When I was in school things most associated with being ND+ were 'Learning Support Plan', 'Extra-curricular Needs', 'Skills Lessons', 'Learning Objectives'. Though I undoubtedly had ND+ friends, it would not have been something that we took pride in, nor something that we'd ever openly discuss, even with each other; the notion of Neurodivergent Creativity and Community existing outside of 'special ed settings' was not something I imagined. And now, through conversations with a number of ND+-led creative organisations and individuals, I can see it developing. The small irregular pockets are expanding; Neurodivergent progression is exciting, alive, personal, to many deeply spiritual, connecting to experiences of gender, sexuality and communication. I can see that what I have tried to put into words is just the start of deeply creative journey.

I hope that this exploration can aid and further conversations on ND+ creativity, encouraging ND+ creatives to feel confident in developing narratives that reflect their own Neurodivergent+ Aesthetics, and that these will find more recognition in mainstream performance and publication. I am reasonably sure that whether 'we' choose to directly acknowledge it or not, is that whatever 'differently wired', 'Uncanny' journey we find ourselves on, we have the capability to connect with other so-called 'outsiders'. Alongside my PhD I co-founded a regular ND+ inclusive spoken word and performance collective, MixMatched⁴³⁸, which focuses on developing understandings towards ND+ 'Culture, Creativity and Community' [An Article on MixMatched Collective can be found in Appendix E]. In 2024 it received Arts Council funding; it has already been a place where I have been able to observe a number of new ND+ performers grow in confidence and share their voice. Upon gaining wider recognition, we were invited to Birchington Literature Festival and delivered a workshop entitled, '*No more Rain Man: Authentic Neurodivergent+ Portrayal*'.

⁴³⁸ **MixMatched:** A Kent based Neurodivergent+ Arts Collective co-ran by Emma Robdale, Holly McCulloch and Alice Riley, focusing on ND+ Culture/Creativity/Community.

This year, 2024, myself and Alice Riley (also ND+), MixMatched directors, published 'Atypical Love'⁴³⁹ collection, the end result of our two-year ACE-funded project which ran alongside this PHD. Joanne Limburg, ND+ author of 'To My Weird Sisters', whom I met/interviewed through this research⁴⁴⁰, provided us with a forward. Seven other Neurodivergent+ authors submitted a short ND+ love story, including Lennie Varvarides, founder of DYSPLA ND+ arts collective, and Elinor Rowlands, founder of Magical Woman ND+ arts collective, who were both interviewed and discussed within this research. Collin Hambrook, founder of Disability Arts Online and Kate Fox, poet/performer/writer and ND+ advocate, also interviewed for this research, both provided quotes and have aided in publicising 'Atypical Love'. Already ND+ communities are working together and becoming more self-aware of our voices and right to agency. We want this collection to continue championing solidarity while also dispelling stereotypes surrounding Neurodivergence, autism and dating.



If you would like to know more about the MixMatched ND+ community, performance events and workshops our website and blog are regularly updated: www.mixmatched.co.uk.
FB/Insta: @mixmatchedCIC

Going forward I hope that I can develop MixMatched (and other ND+ spaces) both in ethos and in gaining funding to put on further events. I want to be able to help produce safe places for a number of creative individuals who have often felt like outsiders, to share their voice, story and creativity, and connect to others who may have struggled or masked to 'fit in'.

⁴³⁹ Riley, A. Robdale, E. (2024) Atypical Love, 'Stories of Atypical Love and Desire from Neurodivergent+ Authors. *MixMatched*.

⁴⁴⁰ Robdale, E. (2024) Letters to my Weird Sisters: On Autism Feminism and Motherhood [ONLINE] <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/interviews/letters-to-my-weird-sisters-on-autism-feminism-and-motherhood/> [Accessed 13/12/24]

I know that the ideas that I have attempted to explain surrounding Neurodivergent+ aesthetics and identity are being developed further by likeminded ND+ creatives, Autists⁴⁴¹, Mad, Survivor, Neurodissident, Neurospicy, Neurogender, Neurovague, Neurqueer, Neurotransgressive (and other ND+ terms yet to be developed!) awkward individuals and communities, and I'm excited to follow that conversation.

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⁴⁴¹ **Autist:** Autistic Artist, in relation to this research, an artist that draws upon ND+ identity to inform elements of their practice.

⁴⁴² **Note:** The LGBTQOA+ flag with the Neurodivergent+ infinity symbol. Designed/two images collated by Emma Robdale

⁴⁴³ **Note:** Mixmatched Logo designed by Emma Robdale

⁴⁴⁴ **Note:** Banners painted at a MixMatched workshop which were paraded by MixMatched ND+ community at Canterbury and Margate Pride

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX Contents:

Appendix A: In date order (oldest to most recent) list of all Interviewees for this research and additional information dependant on whether I attended a ND+ event/workshop/productions hosted by them, and links to any of my write-ups of these upon DAO.

Appendix B: Essay written upon Neurodivergent+ gender experiences as Part of Wombinescent Gallery followed by selected images.

Appendix C: Writing Inspired by Magical Woman upon the topic of Witchcraft

Appendix D: Full Dylexie Performance Text (suggesting imagined 'dylexie languitics') Performed at Lava Elastic Performance Night initially Poem but then adapted into a performance speech.

Appendix E: Article upon MixMatched ND+ Performance Collective (founded by author of this research)

Appendix F: Selected Chapters of The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights

Appendix G: [REDACTED] The Rest of Novel/Text of The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlight

Appendix A: In date order (oldest to most recent) list of all Interviewees for this research and additional information dependant on whether I attended a ND+ event/workshop/productions hosted by them, and links to any of my write-ups of these upon DAO.

I would like to credit DYSPLA for initial discussions aiding me in more fully comprehending the term 'Neurodivergent+ Aesthetic' within their own practice and research surrounding 'Dyslexic Aesthetics'. I have been able to build upon this within my own research. Furthermore, I would like to thank the multitude of other ND+ arts groups and individuals who, over the last five years, have leant me their time, insight and support in developing this research. ND+ networking and being able to have these important conversations, has enabled me to not only comprehend more upon ND+ creative athletics/nuance, but also gain a more of a direct appreciation towards ND+ creative solidarity.

Janine Booth – 13/07/20

An autistic woman who is a spoken word artist, was part of the Stealth Aspies, and co-wrote/founded writing a Neurodivergent manifesto for the Labour Party. On one occasion where she was unable to perform, I was asked to 'step in' to perform poetry/spoken word at their Edinburgh Fringe Festival; this networking eventually led me to applying to Kent's drama by Practice PhD. Janine Booth, as an autistic individual, has used her creative voice/political poetry to further ND+ progressions/inclusion into more mainstream politics. *You can read my article upon Janine Booth, her politics and poetry on DAO:* 'The Autistic Marxist Motormouth': www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/the-autistic-marxist-motormouth-janine-booth-and-the-poetry-of-politics/

Victoria Melody – 20/07/20

An ADHD comedian and anthropologist. She has had an array of jobs/lifestyles, which she feeds into her performances. Her performance 'Headset' talks about her coming out as 'ADHD', and discusses how, sometimes, she finds her masks useful and 'crafted'. Her style is characterised by a cacophony of short mini acts, tangents, and eclectic props. Within her act she endorses what she believes to be her own, natural ways of communication/performance to connect to audiences.

Headset Performance, The Marlowe Theatre: I went to see Victoria Melody's Headset performance. She believed that her life experiences transcend into her comedic style, and that performing is a way to boost dopamine.

You can read my review of her performance at DAO: 'Head Set: Victoria Melody 'comes out' as ADHD at Edinburgh Fringe in One-woman show': www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/head-set-victoria-melody-comes-out-as-adhd-at-edinburgh-fringe-in-one-woman-show/

Sarah Saeed - 08/08/20

ND+/Autistic performer who runs a Neurodivergent+ comedy event in Brighton, Lava Elastic. She also used to perform in the spoken word collective 'Stealth Aspies'. Within her interview she spoke about the creativity of masking, and though they may have originated as 'hiding', she also believes they are irrevocably related to creativity linked to her love of drama. For this research I have attended a number of Lava Elastic performances, as well as performing at two myself.

My Performances at Saeed's Lava Elastic Comedy Nights: I performed at two of Lava Elastic Neurodivergent+ comedy night performances. I created and performed my 'Wordal Smergage' speech, upon understanding 'dylexie' as a new form of language. I later performed 'In-Sex', a selection of my poetry upon my intense fascination of the intimate lives of insects in their touring Lava Elastic show.

You can read my review of Stealth Aspies in DAO here: 'Stealth Aspies, Performing Autism':
www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/stealth-aspies-performing-autism/

Dr Jen Malia – 03/09/2020

Dr Jen Malia is an autistic professor of English and the creative writing coordinator at Norfolk State University. She has published several children's books with autistic narrator such as: 'Too Sticky, Sensory Issues with Autism', and a three-part series entitled, 'The Infinity Club'. In the interview she spoke about how she recognised her own autism as an adult after researching autism in relation to her daughter. She spoke about how she feels she can identify works that are written by autistic individuals, believing that she can recognise ND+ narratives intrinsically through their narration. She spoke about these intrinsic 'crumbs' of neurodivergent nature not being things you could read in diagnostic guidelines, but rather things you glean only from lived experience. She also spoke about how she felt the word 'autism' seems 'overintellectual', making it difficult for children and adults to feel confident speaking about their lived experience. She spoke at 'Autism Through a Literary Lens Festival' and conducted a workshop on creating authentic autistic characters. She revealed that for NT authors writing autistic characters, she would advise them to ask themselves 'why' they are writing an autistic character, and what their connection with the community was (and, if they are simply doing it for spectatorial interest, to consider not having an autistic character)

She speaks on some of her life trajectories and experiences within an interview upon 'Autism Stories': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=1rRd-0vSWpo>

You can read my review of her book 'Sticky Fingers' on DAO 'Too Sticky: Dr Malia infuses this children's book with her experiences of autism and sensory overwhelm':

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/too-sticky-dr-malia-infuses-childrens-book-with-her-experiences-of-autism-and-sensory-overwhelm/

Mark Haddon – 25/11/20

Does not identify as being Neurodivergent, but does identify with 'outsider' narratives. He is the author of the renowned novel, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time'; though a popular portrayal of autism which was also stylistically innovative, it also perpetuates a number of Neurodivergent stigma, and was conducted 'away' from ND+ communities.

Eric Garcia – 21/11/20

Autistic writer and editor for The Washington Post. He often writes socio-political pieces challenging autism assumptions, his latest book being, 'We're Not Broken, Changing the Autism Conversation'. Within our interview we spoke about some of the politics and stereotypes surrounding contemporary autism. He spoke about a number of stereotypes that he deemed damaging surrounding autism narratives, and how, within his writing, he tries to remedy and challenge existing 'stigmas' within film and book representations of autism. One Autism stereotype he commented upon as damaging was the idea that autistic

characters are often seen as needing to be helped or tolerated. He referred to this in ‘cheer-leader vs geek’, whereby a more capable, popular character is ‘paired’ with an autistic character. Through the popular character the AS character is helped and sometimes normalized, but often the autistic character is made to look goofy or comical in comparison. Eric Garcia has spoken directly about his autistic experiences within a number of interviews: *Eric Garcia: Journalist and Author of ‘We’re Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation’*: www.oxfordstudent.com/2021/11/30/my-interview-with-eric-garcia-journalist-and-author-of-were-not-broken-changing-the-autism-conversation/
In ‘We’re Not Broken,’ Author Eric Garcia Takes On Myths About Autism: www.npr.org/2021/09/16/1037852578/autism-myths-eric-garcia-changing-the-conversation

Sally Gardner – 26/11/20

Openly dyslexic author, who is also an ambassador for the British Dyslexic Association (BDA). She is the author of ‘Maggot Moon’, which has an imaginative dyslexic protagonist. She does not endorse dyslexics being portrayed by bad spelling, as she thinks this is boring and stereotypical; dyslexic perception is innovative and wide reaching. She characterises dyslexia through, innovation, questioning, creativity, and vivid metaphorical thinking. Within her actual writing style she endorses short punchy chapters, uses Dylexie font, and innovative ‘Freudian flips’, whereby any linguistic difference is characterized by ‘linguistic’ innovation (not deficit).

Eleana Re – 30/11/2020

Eleana Re is a Neurodivergent+ Brighton based Artist who experiences synaesthesia. This experience ‘colours’ her work and creative practices. She worked with the BBC ‘Ideas’ project producing a video about her identity and art entitled, ‘What is ‘normal’? Who decides?’. Not only does she create predominantly using the colour orange but her relationship to it transcends into how she understands/appreciates/wields language. She sees some letters as connected to red/orange (happiness/joy) and others denoting ‘blue’ (sadness/upset). She developed ‘red language’, whereby she spells differently to phonetically utilize more orange letters, this transcended into both written and spoken language. She believes that new individual ways of writing should be encouraged, deeming standardized writing, within the realms of art and creativity, as being ‘boring’.

My Review of her/Her Work and ND+ Creative Practice: ‘Beneath the Peel, BBC Ideas Commissions ND+ Artist Eleana Re, can be found on DAO:

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/beneath-the-peel-bbc-ideas-commissions-nd-artist-eleana-re/

A link to her speaking on her work with the BBC can be found here:

www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/what-is-normal-who-decides/p07194s4

Daniel Oliver – 06/12/2020

Daniel Oliver is a Dyspraxic/ND+ Performance artist and lecturer at Queen Mary University, London. Alongside his performance art he developed his theory of awkwardness in relation to Neurodivergence/Neurodivergent performance practice. He has authored, ‘Awkwoods, Daniel Oliver’s Dyspraxic Adventures in Participatory Performance’, where he argues that ‘awkwood’ can be claimed as a Neurodivergent+ performance influence in terms of presentation, communication and prevalence. His practice also champions the view of

'neurotransgression', in which neurodiversity more actively transgresses into writing and performative aesthetics. His performance practices push against conventions of 'normal' or 'social appropriateness'. He endorses performing 'regardless' of audience wants or expectations. He teamed up with other ND+ artists to produce, 'On Neurodiversity, a Study Room Guide on Neurodiversity', to aid understandings of solidarity and Neurodiversity alongside other ND+ individuals and creatives.

Workshop/Talk Upon Awkwood Aesthetics: As part of this research, I attended Daniel Oliver's online workshop where he expanded upon some of the specifics of his performances in terms of 'Awkwood' as a performance practice.

You can read my review of his book 'Awkwood' here: 'Daniel Oliver's Dyspraxic Adventures in Participatory Performance': www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/awkwoods-daniel-olivers-dyspraxic-adventures-in-participatory-performance/

You can access the study guid upon 'Neurodiversity, A study room guide' here: https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/uploads/documents/Daniel_Oliver_Guide.pdf

Elinor Rowlands – 13/12/20

Multiply ND+ Creative and Research, and founder of Magical Women, an Arts Collective based in London which encourages Autistic/ADHD (ND+) women to explore elements of self/neurodivergent+ self through creative mediums such as art, performance, and writing. Elinor Rowlands is also a journalist for Disability Arts Online, whom I met at their journalist social event. She is currently undergoing her own PhD research upon Stimming, Neurodivergence, and how stimming can both be a method of creation/creating, and sometimes apparent within the final creation. She connects neurodivergence both historically and symbolically to ideas of magic/witch persecution and sees 'Magical Women' as a place where female ND+, who may have historically been vulnerable to persecution as witches, can realize and utilize their 'magic', in terms of being able to claim their creative self without fear of rebuff. Elinor Rowlands Magical Women practices I found also to be interlaced with applications of ND+ spirituality as well as solidarity. In the interview we spoke about some of the prejudices and barriers that exist for Neurodivergent women, such as them being 'too loud' and 'too outspoken'. Elinor spoke about her project 'Rage Writing as Curated Words'⁴⁴⁵ that encouraged ND+ women to use these 'forbidden' elements of self.

Workshops/Performance Evenings: Over the duration of my PhD I have attended and performed at multiple events hosted by Magical Women. I have attended Creative Workshops concentrating upon ND+ Creative Writing that have endorsed ideas around 'group stims', in the way feedback is given, as well as performing at their Christmas Coven. My own writing on Neurodivergence, witchcraft and spirituality was published with Magical Women's creative Zine.

Lennie Varvarides and Kazimir Bielecki – 03/12/20

Dyslexic/ADHD/ND+ artists founding 'DYSPLA' a dyslexic/Neurodivergent+ arts collective that supports and encourages dyslexic insight and creation. The promote views surrounding

⁴⁴⁵ 'Rage Writing as Curated Words', *Magical Women*. [ONLINE] <http://www.magicalwomen.co.uk/rage/rage> [Accessed 09/10/23]

innovation and ND+ creativity, believing that dyslexia specifically can give individuals strengths in film and storytelling due to enhanced/differences in more visual processing.

Interview for Podcast: We recorded DYSPLA's interview in London to be used/incorporated into their podcast upon Neurodivergent+ representation. Previously I have attended a number of their Neurodivergent+ gallery exhibits, symposiums and festivals. My write-up of some of these events can be found below.

You can read more upon them and their views and investigations upon Neurodivergent/Dyslexic Aesthetics within my interviews and reviews:

'Eclectic Dyslexics: Could Neurodiversity be Key to Artistic Success?':

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/eclectic-dyslexics-neurodiversity-key-artistic-success/

'Living Record Film Festival: Delving further into the Neurodivergent+ Aesthetic':

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/living-record-film-festival-delving-further-into-the-neurodivergent-aesthetic/

'Touch as Narrative: Neurodivergent Connections':

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/touch-as-narrative-neurodivergent-connections/

'Virtual Reality, Dyslexia and 360 experiences':

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/virtual-reality-dyslexia-and-360-experiences/

'Action! Celebrating Neurodivergent Filmmaker's. Cut!'

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/action-celebrating-neurodivergent-filmmakers-cut/

Jess Thom – 20/01/21 - Founder of Tourette's Hero, a Disabled and ND Actor, creative and activist. Her events and work promote inclusivity. She was covered by the BBC in their documentary, 'Me, My Mouth and I'. As an actor she inherently 'adds' lines, due to her Tourette's, due to this she says that often her style is quite improvisational. She also uses her own Tourette's formulated language to create the scripts for plays and performance pieces. She thinks that the language of Tourette's is inherently innovative.

Burn Out in Biscuit-Land Performance, Margate: I went to see Jess Thom present her short film where she teamed up with two other ND+ women to present their feelings and experiences during the covid lockdown.

You can read my review of her performance of mouth in 'Not I' in DAO: 'BBC Twos

Documentary, Me My Mouth and I: www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/bbc-twos-documentary-me-my-mouth-and-i-biscuits-fuck-a-goat-hedgehog/

Jon Adams- 21/01/21

A multiply Neurodivergent+ illustrator, writer and creative, and founder of 'Flow Observatorium', a collective which supports other ND/MH artists. He identifies as non-binary, and believes that much of his art is inspired by process; it is the need/want to explore something further that inspires his art. He also sees writing synthetically, seeing certain words as certain feelings or 'adult' or 'childish' which effects how he uses them when creating narratives.

You can read my DAO review of one of Jon Adam's Art/Writing Piece: 'There's an Emergency Alphabet but 'U' have been left out': www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/theres-an-emergency-alphabet-but-u-have-been-left-out-neurodivergent-artist-speaks-up/

Sam Rapp – 22/04/21

Sam Rapp: Known as, 'the Dyslexic Poet', she writes about her own dyslexia, and the way she sees, feels and processes, and on feelings of isolation and alienation. She has founded a collective which supports children to enjoy writing without grammatical constraints.

Esther Lowery – 29/04/21

An autistic author who was part of the 'In Other Words' project and final anthology of autistic shorts, organized by Mainstream Arts. She spoke about her experiences working/creative with other autistic people on the project, and also about her own writing practises. She spoke about writing differently/more sporadically at times of anger and overwhelm. She also detailed how she writes as a safe way to 'decode' and process the world around her and explore situations and interactions. Sometimes she uses an encyclopaedia of emotions to help her envision her characters' responses.

Richard Basset – 29/04/21

Richard Basset is an autistic man and was a member of the 'In Other Words' project, the final collected anthology of autistic shorts by mainstream arts. He spoke about his experiences in the project, working with other autistic writers, and about the characters within his own contribution. He spoke about having a strong connection to animals and volunteering at animal sanctuaries, leading to his use of animals in his story.

Miranda Prag - 21/05/21

Mainspring Art's Editor of 'In Other Words', a collection of short fiction stories by AS authors from a project on writing and creativity. She discussed potential ethics surrounding editing ND+ work and how they can be combatted.

You can read more about the 'In Other Words' project within my article published by DAO:

'In Other Words: An Anthology of eight creative stories that makes space for authentic Neurodivergent+ nuance': www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/in-other-words-an-anthology-of-creative-stories/

Colin Hambrook – 01/09/21

Colin Hambrook is the founder and editor of Disability Arts Online, one of the largest ND+ platforms that explores the work of disabled and neurodivergent+ artists. He is also a Spoken Word artist and identifies as Neurodivergent+/Disabled and a Survivor. I have worked for DAO as a freelance journalist since 2017. Within our written interview he expanded on how his early, very traumatic interactions with psychiatric systems, instilled within him not only a fear of psychiatry, but also a drive to dedicate himself to the Survivor's movement, which fuelled him to develop 'Mad Pride'. He discussed how this drive led him to start performing his own writing, to leading creative writing workshops focusing upon Survivor Experience, and ultimately developing this into the start of Disability Arts Online, a publication which exclusively explores and champions the first-hand experiences of Disabled/Neurodivergent+ artists. He elaborates upon his lived experiences of these times, and how his lived-experiences, through these movements, have shaped his perspective of disability art and literature.

Meeting of DAO Journalists at NDACA: As part of this research, I went to a social networking event for editors held at the National Disability Collection and Archive (NDACA)

in October 2019; here I networked with other artists and discovered more upon Survivors and Mad Pride.

You can read a review of my experience at DAO journalist social, 'Stories From Within Bursting Out: Brining NDACA to life with new insights':

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/stories-from-within-bursting-out-bringing-ndaca-to-life-with-new-insights/

Kate Fox – 16/02/22:

A Neurodivergent/Autistic Northern performance poet, focusing on Northern women's narratives; she also conducts talks and writing workshops for performance artists, and she is particularly interested in the notion of Neurodivergent joy; the idea that the general view of 'happiness' is based upon NT values, and that we now need to focus upon the wealth of ND+ happiness.

Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams – 04/12/22

Autistic author, poet, and playwright. For this research I went to see her one-woman play 'The Duck' in Sheffield. This centred on her experiences of autism. She coins the term considerate performance as a style which can be more appropriate to members of the audience who feel heightened anxiety and overwhelm, but can also very easily distracted by noise and movement.

The Duck, Sheffield:

I reviewed her play for DAO: which can be found here: 'The Duck: A one-woman play on keeping afloat as an autistic woman': www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/the-duck-a-one-woman-play-on-keeping-afloat-as-an-autistic-woman/

Hanna Randall – 24/05/22

A Neurodivergent+ Creative and PHD Student at the University of Sussex. She experiences synaesthesia and is also undergoing interdisciplinary autobiographical research into her own creativities. In our interview she spoke about her synaesthesia in relation to creativity; her creative writing not only details her synaesthesia, but she also uses it as process; she begins with location, with instigates colour, which translates into character and emotion.

Neurodiversity Within the University: She also chaired, 'Neurodiversity within the University' online symposium talk where she discovered more about three guest speakers: Dr Nick Walker (Autistic Author of Neuroqueer Heresies), Lizzie-Huxley Jones (Autistic Author, and wrote forward to 'Stim', anthology of Autistic shorts), and Dr Kate Moorhead (ADHD/ND+ Lecturer and Author of, 'The First Law of Motion') They all spoke about their own topics before answering questions. I was able to enquire how they felt about the possibility of ND+ writing aesthetics, if they felt that their work was reflective of this, and if they felt that masking and knowledge of Neurodivergence affected their writings.

A link to this talk can be found here: www.chasevle.org.uk/programmes/teaching-creative-writing/tcw-session-11/ [accessed 13/03/24]

Creative 'Walkshop': As part of her research Hanna held a Neurodivergent+ Creative Walkshop in Brighton. She wanted to know if and how place/movement/location might transcend into other ND+ creatives work. Eleanor Re and I participated and sent her our creative outputs to collect into a zine. This was where I painted the surrealist image of the shark eye seen in chapter two.

Nicola Werenowska - 05/06/22 - ND+/Dyspraxic Playwright who also hosted a workshop for other ND writers.

Neurodivergent Writing Workshop: Nicola hosted a writing workshop that comprised of solely ND+ attendees and conducted activities that promoted writing and drawing upon Neurodivergent+ lived experiences. We then shared our experiences with one another. I wrote a creative piece about what it felt like initially to be diagnosed ND+.

Angela Barnes – 04/11/23

A ND+ comedian who considers that her life trajectory has been affected by having undiagnosed ADHD. She elaborates upon some of these lived experiences within her sets. She also has a number of theories upon why she was drawn to stand-up comedy and may have strengths within that area. She believes that the way she makes connections and relationships between different stimuli/information quickly flavours her comedy. She also discusses why and how she might be drawn to comedy due to the thrill of having people laugh in relation to ADHD, dopamine hits and self-regulation.

Talk on ADHD and Comedy

After coming out as 'ADHD' Angela Barnes came to the University of Kent and performed a presentation on her lived experience, and some of her understandings about ADHD and stand-up comedy.

Read more about my interview with her upon DAO, 'Angela Barnes: 'Comedy, ADHD, Dopamine and Depression': www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/angela-barnes-comedy-adhd-dopamine-and-depression/

Joanne Limburg – 05/06/24

Joanne Limburg spoke at Flow Observatorium's Launch event for 'In Other Words', a ND+ short story collection, where we first met. I later interviewed her for Disability Arts Online, which will soon publish our interview upon her book, 'Letters to my Weird Sisters, 'On Autism and Feminism'. She is a Jewish autistic/OCD/ND+ woman who has written extensively upon ND+ experiences and reflects upon intersectionality regarding Neurodivergence. Elements of her intense fascinations and passion for research is spread throughout her creative work. She has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Kingston, and, akin to a number of other ND+ creatives, explores her own ND+ experiences within both her research and creative pursuits; in regard to this, some of her work is quite experimental and plays with form. Some of her earlier writings, such as 'The Woman That Thought Too Much', are quite confessional in nature, her memoir provided personal detail and insight into OCD thinking and thought process.

Elements of our discussion were published in Disability Arts Online: Robdale, E. (2024) Letters to my Weird Sisters: On Autism Feminism and Motherhood [ONLINE]

<https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/interviews/letters-to-my-weird-sisters-on-autism-feminism-and-motherhood/>

Appendix B: Essay written upon Neurodivergent+ gender experiences as Part of Wombinescent Gallery, Uni of Kent, followed by selected images.

Reflections on Womanhood Identity and Transgressing Boundaries

I, the artist, identify as an Neuroqueer Women... which I believe has differences to Neurotypical femininity; from a very early age I was always 'confused'/questioning of sociological expectations of girlhood/womanhood/femininity; frequently these expectations were enforced in and outside of education. I unequivocally endorse challenging and transgressing historically enforced gender boundaries, and hope that as we go forward the patriarchal constraints/expectations which I faced, which targeted my biology, can be broken down, and seen for what they are: prejudice and stigma. My experiences/awareness of self have undoubtedly been influenced by surrounding patriarchal culture and conditioning.

Elements of this artwork stem from my own experiences of sociologically enforced female shame/shaming which I felt were often strongly enforced within my West-Midlands town upbringing; I felt as if I were 'prescribed' sociologically female, due to my anatomy, but then also told that these 'attributes' were inferior/shameful, and even disgusting; Oestrogen, Menstruation, vaginas, wombs... my internal anatomy felt forbidden/dirty and as if I should hide or even reject it.

I have not so much minded being female, but the way in which I was 'branded' caused me to feel detachment and shame when compared against my cis male peers. It felt as though their prescribed 'male' anatomy could be something to be proud of; a penis was something to cherish, sperm made them 'virile', testosterone and muscle mass were signs of strength... and though this can mainly be explained by Neurosexism (sociological or psychological expectations based or enforced by 'bad'/exaggerated/frail scientific reasoning), nonetheless, this dynamic was socially ingrained, and felt very real.

As I grew, I felt as though my anatomy became even more loaded... I was taught that my womb was for growing a baby, that my vagina was for sex (or expelling said baby), and that my 'disgusting' menstrual cycles should be unspoken/secret. My 'female' biology was being used by others to dictate and decide upon my future life expectations. It is for this reason that the majority of my Wombinescent artwork depicts vagina's/wombs as non-sexual, menstruating, and separate from birth. I wanted to build an appreciation of my anatomy as a 'neutral'/unloaded element of my biology; I wished to feel connected/intune with this anatomy rather than resentful. Within galleries traditionally the female naked form has been/is depicted by cis male artists; these paintings tend to focus on anatomy that they've deemed 'beautiful'/sexual... and they almost never show menstruation.

Wombinescent reflects some of my own experiences existing as a neurodivergent woman while also illuminating a number of larger overarching prejudices attributed to stereotypical/traditional womanhood; Seeing my anatomy represented not something as disgusting/hidden, and being able to reclaim that has felt progressive/empowering. It has felt emboldening to be able to share my artwork and discuss it with others who have had similar experiences; my artwork has helped me, and hopefully can help others with uteruses, build a sense of solidarity and assertion; We exist. We connect. We will not be edited. We will not be censored. I truly hope that viewing my artwork can help others feel a stronger connection to their bodies.

With that said, this artwork/its philosophy do not intend to endorse femininity and biology as binaries; I, the artist, unequivocally support and acknowledge trans women, cis women with differing

biological structures, nonbinary menstruators, trans menstruators, and also those who do not wish to associate/connect womanhood and biology; I believe that womanhood/female experience is individual, spiritual, and self-decided, and obviously not synonymous to or with specific biology. The process of creating this artwork helped me move through the rejection I experienced seeing my gender identity and genitals linked by attitudes of disgust. Creating these paintings gave me the opportunity to reclaim and rewrite a deeper and more powerful message to myself about my body and how it links to my identity as a woman. I believe it is paramount to acknowledge that experiences of the construct of gender are made up of developing and diverse experiences for everyone.



Appendix C: Writing Inspired by Magical Woman upon the topic of Witchcraft

Fire, Fire, Burning Bright!

Segmenting into armadillo armour,
bladed, like a triceratops spine,
lines run through logs like paths on a map,
revealing places I cannot tread,
forbidden realms,
explored by dead.

Brittle as an old toenail,
Flaking and white at the edge,
embers dim
as bristling light runs through deep-splintered circuits.

Like fireflies, sparks shoot,
hoping to escape,
hoping to spread deadly seeds,
but are folded
into the soft cold extinguish of night.

Red Hot

Blacksmiths cast iron... I cast spells.

Light shifts, racing through shadows, tickling, trickling through veins of red, revealing caves, beckoning us into their light... the light of an open fire. Every coal a heart, brought alive by heat, each crevasse and bloodworm crack explored. Wind awakens timbers, revealing labyrinths with mycelium tunnels, connecting coal, wood, skin, bone. Fire is as alive as you, or me.

Like a village at night, from the hearth crackles express secrets, spraying out in fountains, catching in the breeze, whispering of fortunes not yet passed. Shifting embers drift, each spark a spore, ready to take root, in mind... or flesh.

Fires mark beginnings as well as ends. Rugged shapes are smoothed as flames dance... returning all to the softs of dust, releasing spirit to air.

My copper ringlets rise, locks curling like waves, each flame folding over the last, lapping at the air, desperate to unfurl; they lick my feet, pain peals up my legs, knees, hips, consuming cloak and limb, incinerating my ties to this post. To this life.

Bright as Heaven, Vivid as Hell, I surrender my shape, return my magic, cursing all who see sorcery as sin; may smoke forever blind them.

Appendix D: Full Dylexie Performance Text (suggesting imagined 'dylexie languitics') Performed at Lava Elastic Performance Night initially Poem but then adapted into a performance speech:

Poem: Water-Under Words

Dylexie is not dialectly a different direct but
dropples drippl
smerging and slodging intooneanother
put the fridge in the milk... it profounds with sound
then put the draws in the sacks
stretching them out like socks
I'm experiventing with something knew
experiventing with something wrongful weir
surcomsposed to be compost
compressed beneath the ground
subpressed and surmerged
beneath the surfing face to make us right
but I've never known write
so I'd like to see what's left
as we puddle through the muddles
know we now
need to swingle round, re-merge
now we know we
kneed to meirl, swirge, and min-hoover
up all the prefect perfects and perfect presence
go past continuous conscienceness
for the future is never simple
and neither is hour presents tenses
we need to instigate presentative measuring
we need to prevent our foundlings to the world
let us start by ignoring the extensive sin tax and
allow all our driplets to pudlide, cuddle
and swerge into another-one
let others sea and here our own unique linstatistics
bee aware of our copus-corpious and benevolent presents
we may float like the butter-beas, but we carry hidden strings
hour own extra ordinary pliable aesthetics
we tide to flow with the tried, but salt makes us tongue-dried
now weir weiry of this linguistical decide
we do hope that you divide to listen
because we will be punctuating our shelves above faculty sentences
it's time for us to be more confrongatious and congragateable
we've being here since before the faulties envisioned the Dick-toungue-scaries
long before Theo saw us
we've being here since ewe
we've started crossing over instead of crossing out

no linger are we scarred of scares on paiges
no linger abodeing by your rules
four to much time we have longered
now we're finding new abides and slodges
I'm knot cater-wailing. I'm simply outvocal
Dutch-double is thrice as talentable
we can transent it for you. Or to you
you just need to stay sill and list ten with us
because no one wants to feel reflected or laughed out
please take some time to reject on this
because weir tired of hour opintions been
stunned and stunted,
shunned and shunted
we want to be optionated. Not reductioned
free to selcide and delect what we're going to slay
we're specking up, to see more clearly
because weir tired of been the eloquents in the room
we need to pack our trunks and sneeze out grammarphones
teach the world to be less hom-o-phobic
They're there. It may be converting to be rite
but its time to comfort to new principles
for us to confiently trampose with defidence
our voices will not be distinguished,
and we will extinguish are followers
we're reining on your parachutes
trampolining over standardization
its time for us to rise our vices
time for use to us our voices and
start these abbreviations off with a clang
it's chime for us to strike while the pen is hotter than the sawed,
while the iron is roaring at the pot
for being hacked into smitherments and fragmareens
let us press against they're grains
burn our stories out of dyeing pans
and allow hour firs to spraed.

Speech Performed at Lava Elastic:

Dylexie is not dia-lect-ly⁴⁴⁶ a competently⁴⁴⁷ different direct⁴⁴⁸, but drop-ples⁴⁴⁹ of it do drippl⁴⁵⁰, smerge⁴⁵¹ and slodge⁴⁵² intooneanother⁴⁵³, giving it distant-tive⁴⁵⁴ timber⁴⁵⁵; but it has not yet splintered or different-ed⁴⁵⁶ too far from the Eng-lash that your tong⁴⁵⁷ strikes everyday [A tongue striking a drum]. A question it brings up through⁴⁵⁸ is, 'Can you put the fridge in the milk?' -doesn't that just profound sound? And then try putting you're draws in the socks; you'd need to stretch them out like sacks [Santa carrying presents in a large sock]. For me, 'She' will always be the cat's s-whisker [naming your pets whiskers individually], and I normally end up stabbing myself in the foot [The 'game' that drunk people play with knives, but using toes] before crying over the split eggs kneeded to roll out a red omelette [the queen is walking over a giant red omelette.]

Allowing dylexie to become fully-forged involves exper-i-venting⁴⁵⁹ with something knew; it is something many might vow⁴⁶⁰ as a wrongful nippily slop [climbing up a rock and needing to put your feet and hands on nipples]. As dyslexics, weir⁴⁶¹ sur-cum-sposed⁴⁶² to be compost⁴⁶³. Compressed⁴⁶⁴ beneath the ground [soil sandcastles]; Sub-pressed⁴⁶⁵ and surmerged⁴⁶⁶ beneath slurfig-faces⁴⁶⁷ [a surfing man on wave that looks like a nose], which are always scowling; trying to make us more right... However, it is true that I've never actually understood which dissection is the well-gnome⁴⁶⁸ 'write' [a garden gnome on an operating table], and to be honest, I'd really just like too know more about what's left. I have already thudeled⁴⁶⁹ flew⁴⁷⁰ most of the muddles, but in doing slow, I've often skipped⁴⁷¹ over grammatical huddles⁴⁷² [tiny cold grammar standing together to trip giant personified tongues]; learnt to socially swingle⁴⁷³, meirl⁴⁷⁴ and swirge⁴⁷⁵ to Min-hoover⁴⁷⁶ up and around prefect perfects⁴⁷⁷ [a hoover that picks sentences off a laptop screen], and the perfect presence⁴⁷⁸. I even went past continuous⁴⁷⁹ to find consens-ment⁴⁸⁰ for this knew

⁴⁴⁶ Directly. Other: Dialectally (Wanting to be understood clearly using your own voice)

⁴⁴⁷ Competently. completely.

⁴⁴⁸ Direct. Other: Dialect (Wanting to be understood clearly using your own voice)

⁴⁴⁹ Dropple = Drop + Drip (smaller than a drop, larger than a drip)

⁴⁵⁰ Dripple = Drip+Ripple (runnier and more viscos than ordinary liquid)

⁴⁵¹ Smerge = Smear + Merge. Smurge = Smear + Smudge

⁴⁵² Slodge = Slide + Lodge (A concept that slides into a set place)

⁴⁵³ Intooneanother/Into one another

⁴⁵⁴ Distinct/Distant

⁴⁵⁵ Timber/Timbre [A natural earthy quality]

⁴⁵⁶ Differented = Different + differentiate

⁴⁵⁷ Tong: Tounge. [a tongue being squozen with tongs]

⁴⁵⁸ Through: though

⁴⁵⁹ Experiventing = Experiment + Invent (to experiment in order create a new concept. *Pron: Ex-per-e-venting)

⁴⁶⁰ Vow: view.

⁴⁶¹ Weir. Other: We are/we're (solidarity through water)

⁴⁶² Surcomposed = Supposed + Composed (to be under an obligation to keep up a façade) Pron: Sur-com-posed

⁴⁶³ Compost. Other: Composed (packed together tightly and having nutrients/richness to your shape)

⁴⁶⁴ Compressed = Composed + Repressed (Trying to hold yourself together while being downtrodden)

⁴⁶⁵ Subpressed= Suppress + submerged

⁴⁶⁶ Surmerged= Suppress + submerged + Smudge + Smear (asserting dominance through drowning/rubbing out others ideas)

⁴⁶⁷ Surfing Faces. Other: Surfaces

⁴⁶⁸ Well-gnome/well known (a gnome that isn't sick)

⁴⁶⁹ Fluddeled = Flood+Puddle (a overwhelming puddle) Pron: Flod-el-ed

⁴⁷⁰ Flew. Through.

⁴⁷¹ Skipped. Slipped

⁴⁷² Huddles: hurdles

⁴⁷³ Swingle = Swing + Mingle + Swirl (to have to move around fast in a social situation)

⁴⁷⁴ Meirl = Merge+Swirl (when things are swirling without definition) Pron: Mur-earl

⁴⁷⁵ Swirge = Swirl + Merge + swerve (when things are swirling without definition violently)

⁴⁷⁶ Min-Hover = Manoeuvre + Hover (To move out of the way while collecting or retrieving something)

⁴⁷⁷ Prefect Perfects. Other: Perfect prefects (People who are 'suck ups', who seamlessly get everything right)

⁴⁷⁸ Other: Present Perfect (The act of speaking in present tense with use of 'have': I have eaten.)

⁴⁷⁹ Past Continuousness. Other: Past Continuous (Grammatically speaking in the past + ing: I had been eating that)

⁴⁸⁰ Consensus+ Agreement+consent = Consensment (When the majority of people are in agreement)

distinct-guished⁴⁸¹ con-sci(she)-ensy-ness⁴⁸²; because the future's never simple, and neither our are presence tenses⁴⁸³. We really need to in-stiv-i-gate⁴⁸⁴ presentative⁴⁸⁵ measuring⁴⁸⁶ so that hour⁴⁸⁷ voices don't go unfurled⁴⁸⁸ [a tongue rolling out like a fern leaf] of. That is why I want to prevent⁴⁸⁹ my foundlings⁴⁹⁰ to the word⁴⁹¹. I'm ignoring the ex-ten-sti-tive sin tax⁴⁹², and instead allowing all my driplets⁴⁹³ to pud-lide⁴⁹⁴, cuddle⁴⁹⁵ and swerge⁴⁹⁶, so you can sea and here unique lin-statistics⁴⁹⁷. From these you'll hop-fully become more a war⁴⁹⁸ of 'our' unique copus-corpious⁴⁹⁹ [Greeks soldiers fighting]. But know that my benevolent⁵⁰⁰ nurture⁵⁰¹ is running die [someone jogging having a heart attack]; I may float like a clumpity⁵⁰² butter-bea⁵⁰³, but I do carry a hidden string⁵⁰⁴ [a stripey butterfly with strings attached to its legs flying, tying people up] to strangle out new words.

There were times wear I tide⁵⁰⁵ to flow with modern triedes⁵⁰⁶, but their salt-sea makes me tongue-dried [withering black fig in mouth]⁵⁰⁷; bedsides⁵⁰⁸ I became tired of all the dull dopplegramsters⁵⁰⁹ with zimmering canes! [lots of old men giving me a lecture, and hitting me if I say something wrong.] I really do hope that Moore people are dividing⁵¹⁰ to listen to these conversations, because I'm weiry⁵¹¹ of linguistical decide⁵¹² [Mosses parting a sea filled with words] prevailing through the decades. We should be punctuating⁵¹³ [Karate Kid trying to 'arm chop' a book] our shelves⁵¹⁴ up above sur-spose-sed⁵¹⁵ faculty⁵¹⁶ sentences [a prison for people who do not grammar correctly] ; loading liberty⁵¹⁷ shelves with 'doodlefied' prints; it should be our library⁵¹⁸ to do so! It's time for us to be more con-fron-

⁴⁸¹ Distintuished= Distinct+ Distinguished (standing out while also being regal and refined)

⁴⁸² Conscience +conscious+ conscientious = Conchshinious (When you are awake and aware of moral implications)

⁴⁸³ Presence Tenses. Other: Present Tenses (Present Simple, Present Perfect, Present Continuous)

⁴⁸⁴ Instivigate = instigate+ investigate (begin something while also researching it)

⁴⁸⁵ Presentative. Other: Preventative (When you have to present information something to stop something negative occurring)

⁴⁸⁶ Measuring. Other: Measures

⁴⁸⁷ Hour. Other: our/are

⁴⁸⁸ Unfurled; unheard

⁴⁸⁹ Prevent. Other: present

⁴⁹⁰ Foundlings. Other: Findings (NEW: Foundlings: Information that has been cast out, or little appreciated)

⁴⁹¹ Word. Other: World

⁴⁹² Sin Tax. Other: Syntax (NEW: Sin Tax: The toll on the body it takes to proof-read work after writing)

⁴⁹³ Driplets = Drip + Droplet (quieter than droplets)

⁴⁹⁴ Pudlide = Puddle + Collide (When, metaphorically, things both smash into each other and also merge)

⁴⁹⁵ Cuddle = Collide + Puddle (When two or more things come together and create something that is comforting or well known to you)

⁴⁹⁶ Swerge = Swirl + Merge + Surge (When things are mixing together fast)

⁴⁹⁷ Linstatistics = Linguistics + Statistics (When you have made up a number of new words. Or that there are a number of people worldwide making up new words)

⁴⁹⁸ A war. Other: Aware

⁴⁹⁹ Copus Corpious = Corpus + copious (Latinize for a large amount of diverse people)

⁵⁰⁰ Benovolent = Benevolent + Violent= (When usually peaceful people are forced to arms)

⁵⁰¹ Nurture. Other: Nature

⁵⁰² Clumpity = Clump + Clumsy= (unwieldy and lacking grace)

⁵⁰³ Butterfly + Bee= Butterbee (a creature which seems to be harmless, but can secretly attack. Has large wings with stripes.)

⁵⁰⁴ Strings. Other: Stings (NEW: Strings which are used viciously, such as to hang or strangle)

⁵⁰⁵ Tide. Other: tried

⁵⁰⁶ Triedes = Tried + tribe (the act of trying hard to appear normal to a group of people)

⁵⁰⁷ Tongue-Dried. Other: tongue-tied (Tongue-Dried: When all the joy of writing and talking has been taken away through stringently sticking to grammatical structures)

⁵⁰⁸ bedside. Other: besides (close enough for you to reach while you are still in bed)

⁵⁰⁹ Dopple-Gramster = Doppelganger + grammar + Gangster + Grandma/Grandad (Lots of people who are linguistically stuck in their ways and through verbal or written force insists upon correcting)

⁵¹⁰ Dividing. Other: Deciding

⁵¹¹ Weiry. Other: Weary (When you feel tired after swimming)

⁵¹² Decide. Other: Divide (When the outcome of a debate/discussion splits the participants ethically)

⁵¹³ Punch + Punctuate = Punctuating ((1) Freeing yourself/breaking out from standardized grammatical conventions (2) Feeling violent after being asked to proof-read.

⁵¹⁴ Other: ourselves

⁵¹⁵ Sursposed = Surposed + Proposed (Things that have been suggested but are not at all definite)

⁵¹⁶ Faculty. Other: faulty (A HR team who do not make good decisions)

⁵¹⁷ Liberty. Other: library

⁵¹⁸ Library. Other: liberty

ga-tious⁵¹⁹ and con-gra-gateable⁵²⁰; take ownership of our pliant and pointedly⁵²¹ beautiful aes-thet-lics⁵²² [a runner with a nice bum]. We've being here since before the fault-ies⁵²³ even envision-ated⁵²⁴ Dick-toungue-scaries⁵²⁵ [I'll leave this monster to your imagination], and long before Theo saw us⁵²⁶ [noisy eavesdropping neighbour that always gives advice]. We've being here since ewe⁵²⁷. But we can't follow the flocks, even if we heard them, we just run in squircles, because they are too woolly to com-pretend⁵²⁸ [a comfortable circular rug sheepskin rug]. I do fully suspect you to understand me now; I do not trust society to vary much. So far we've been quiet⁵²⁹ reservoir⁵³⁰ [voices trapped rippling with words], but we're weighting ourselves to stomp [earthquake]; because this really does affect⁵³¹ us; we've started getting others to cross over, instead of letting ourselves be crossed out [having a broken leg cast signed]; and that's because we are no linger⁵³² scarred⁵³³ of leaving scares⁵³⁴ on paiges⁵³⁵ [stabbing a paige with a knife at a wedding], and no linger abodeing⁵³⁶ to written rulers [2-D kings who shout 'off with her head' when people they get words wrong.]

We've al muddy spent too much slime lingering⁵³⁷, struggling in workcases⁵³⁸ [trapped in a briefcase] and enjoyments⁵³⁹, it's crime⁵⁴⁰ to trait⁵⁴¹ paves⁵⁴² to new warm abomes⁵⁴³. I try knot to caterwail [screaming words tying themselves up like worms]⁵⁴⁴, but I am quiet⁵⁴⁵ outvocal⁵⁴⁶, because it is truly my tinkling belough⁵⁴⁷ that Dutch-doubled⁵⁴⁸ is thrice as talentable⁵⁴⁹. I would be a harpy to translit⁵⁵⁰ it for you [a squawking bird woman teaching Dylexie to ancient Greeks; removing eyes from students who get it wrong.] , or to you; but you do kneed to stay sill⁵⁵¹ [having a massage] and list ten⁵⁵². 1, 2, 3, stive four sex heaven⁵⁵³ 8, 9, 10 watch how my hand aids [a disease you can get from high fives.]⁵⁵⁴ my ex-

⁵¹⁹ Confrontation +Congregation+ious=Confrongatious (The act of needing to stand up for yourself in a public setting)

⁵²⁰ Congragateable= Congregation+Debatable (The need to discuss things in public)

⁵²¹ Other: Potentially

⁵²² Aesthetics = Aesthetic + Athletic ((1) When the art/sound of a culture is malleable and diverse (2) A very beautiful sports person.)

⁵²³ Faulties = Faulty+ Faculty (A team or group of people who are not believed, or are incompetent)

⁵²⁴ Envisionated = Envision+ Created (Dreaming about something that you can make. Can be metaphorical.)

⁵²⁵ Dick-Tongue-Scarys. Other: Dictionaries (Dick-toungue-scaries: (1) Words that you can't say (2) words that are repulsive)

⁵²⁶ Theo Saw Us Other: Thesaurus (Theo-Saw-Us: a know it all neighbour who insists in telling you facts over the garden fence)

⁵²⁷ Ewe. Other: You (A person who may lack independent thought of movement.)

⁵²⁸ Compretend = Comprehend + Pretend (The act of having to appear like you've understood something when you don't)

⁵²⁹ Quiet. Other: Quite

⁵³⁰ Reservoir= Reservoir + Reserved (The act of keeping all of your energy/opinions locked away underground, but ready to spring out)

⁵³¹ Affect. Other: effect.

⁵³² Linger. Other: longer (Staying in a place for an exceptionally long time)

⁵³³ Scarred. Other: Scared (Something that is scary that leaves a long term impact upon you)

⁵³⁴ Scares. Other: Scars (A horrible looking physical scar that terrifies people that you show)

⁵³⁵ Paiges. Other: Pages (Continuously flicking people who are trying to help at a wedding)

⁵³⁶ Aboding. Other: Abiding (Being respectful of the rules within someone's home or house)

⁵³⁷ Longering. Other: Lingering (When someone won't stop talking and it feels like your brain will explode)

⁵³⁸ Other: Spaces (WorkCases (1) A lot of work. (2) Somewhere you work that you dislike but due to your circumstances can't leave.)

⁵³⁹ Enjoyments. Other: employments (A place that you work that kills your happiness)

⁵⁴⁰ Crime. Time.

⁵⁴¹ Trait. Create

⁵⁴² Paves; paths

⁵⁴³ Abides. Other: Abodes (When to follow rules/instructions you have to travel to a number of places)

⁵⁴⁴ Cater-wail. Other: Caterwail (Cater-Wail: When food is terrible and you not only complain to the restaurant, but also your friend's family and trip adviser afterwards.)

⁵⁴⁵ Quiet. Other: Quite

⁵⁴⁶ Outvocal= Outspoken + Vocal

⁵⁴⁷ Belough. Belief.

⁵⁴⁸ Other: Double Dutch (an expression meaning hard to understand. That you are not talking in 'good' English)

⁵⁴⁹ Talentable = Talented + Agreeable (When not only are you in agreement that something is right, but it also feels better or more intrinsic when you are allowed to do it.)

⁵⁵⁰ Translit = Translate+ Transit (To not only explain in a different language, but also move to your location)

⁵⁵¹ Sill. Other: Still (When you put something down on a ledge and you don't want it to move)

⁵⁵² List Ten. Other: Listen (When you've made a list of ten items and you want someone to remember them.)

⁵⁵³ Sex heaven [a uniquely sculpted place]

⁵⁵⁴ Aid. Other: add (When the only way to help is to bring more things)

plan-tions⁵⁵⁵. Remember, no one wants to be laughed out or reflected⁵⁵⁶ [crying in a mirror because you've put on lockdown weight], please take some rhyme to reject⁵⁵⁷ upon this... Because we're tired of our opinions⁵⁵⁸ being stunned, stumped, shunned, slunted [opinions being damaged by delivery services]. I want to be option-a-ted⁵⁵⁹. My potential shouldn't be reductioned⁵⁶⁰ over something so trifling [seeing an unappetising dessert⁵⁶¹ in your best friend's fridge, and deciding you don't like them anymore]. We should be free to slide⁵⁶² and delect⁵⁶³ what we're slowing to slay⁵⁶⁴ [a monster is begging to be killed but you are slicing scales one at a time] and slype sext. End that's why we're continuing to speck⁵⁶⁵ up, so we can see and dress⁵⁶⁶ these problems more smereely. We're tired of being viewed as underdeveloped sub-humane one-eyed cyclones [a huge genie cyclops]⁵⁶⁷, so we're adding breath⁵⁶⁸ to round your circum-spectives, and depth⁵⁶⁹ to winds of change. We're not one-trick ponies! We're tired of being the eloquents⁵⁷⁰ in the room; we're packing our trunks to sneeze out grammarphones⁵⁷¹, teaching the world to be less homo-phonic⁵⁷². They're there.⁵⁷³ It might be converting⁵⁷⁴ too sticky⁵⁷⁵ stringently⁵⁷⁶ to 'write', but it's now time to comfort⁵⁷⁷ to new principalities [a country only dyslexics are allowed to live] and stay contemplatory⁵⁷⁸; let's concentrate on what's new and current⁵⁷⁹ and confidently⁵⁸⁰ trampose⁵⁸¹ with defiance⁵⁸². Our growing voice will not be distinguished⁵⁸³. Letters start by extinguishing⁵⁸⁴ those who will speck⁵⁸⁵ alongside us? If you're not with us, then you're obviously⁵⁸⁶ aghast⁵⁸⁷! We need to spread the word [god running out of butter so trying to spread a bit of the art on toast.]⁵⁸⁸ and see how thin we can make it. Let's do it so that no one remains obvious⁵⁸⁹ or ignorant to this pits⁵⁹⁰ [the grammar police falling into a huge hole while dyslexics shout ingrammatically at them]. We need to start reining⁵⁹¹ on some

⁵⁵⁵ **Explanation** = Explanation + Expand (to go into much more depth than either an explanation or an expansion.)

⁵⁵⁶ Reflected. Other: Rejected (An image that has been banned from a mirror)

⁵⁵⁷ Reject. Other: Reflect (When you don't want to process certain memories)

⁵⁵⁸ **Opinions** = Options + Opinions (options or potentials been reduced because a person's views are not valued)

⁵⁵⁹ **Optionated** = Options + Opinions (The act of wanted to be able to express yourself fully and be able to reach your full potential.)

⁵⁶⁰ **Reductionated** = Reduced + Reduction (The act of making substantially less taking away from its mass and value)

⁵⁶¹ [opening the fridge door and it being full of sand.]

⁵⁶² **Selide** = Decide + Select + slide (To have a full range of options to choose from and be able to swap from one to the other.)

⁵⁶³ **Delect** = Decide + Detect + Delectable + select (to enjoy the richness of choice and the act of choosing)

⁵⁶⁴ Say/Slay. (To be able to metaphorically kill an idea/concept with the power of speech)

⁵⁶⁵ **'Specking' up** = Speak + Spectacleing + speck (When you feel small, but have a clear view of what you want to say)

⁵⁶⁶ Dress. Other: Address. (To undress your problems so you can see them)

⁵⁶⁷ Cyclones/Cyclops [(1) A cyclops with flatulence. (2) The singular eye of the storm.]

⁵⁶⁸ Breath/breadth (breathing in a number of different scents from differing places)

⁵⁶⁹ Depth/Breath (Inhaling a lot of air)

⁵⁷⁰ Eloquents/Elephants (something clumsy that wants to speak)

⁵⁷¹ Grammarphone = Gramophone + Grammar + Homophone (things that sound like other words but are profound and can add alternative meanings, so are not wrong, but both the right word and the wrong word.)

⁵⁷² **Homo-phonic** = homophone + homophobic (afraid of writing and sounds that are not standardized or correct)

⁵⁷³ They're There. Other: There. There (sound of comforting)

⁵⁷⁴ Converting. Other: Comforting. (ALSO SEE: Comfort = Comfort + Convert (trying to make people be more like you because it makes you feel safe. (2) A futon)

⁵⁷⁵ Sticky. Stick.

⁵⁷⁶ **String-ent-ly** = Stringently + String (To be tied to one particular idea and not be able to wriggle loose)

⁵⁷⁷ Comfort. Other: Convert.

⁵⁷⁸ **Contemplatory** = Contemporary + Contemplate (The act of thinking about new emerging cultures and reflecting on their roots and development)

⁵⁷⁹ Current: Other = Current. (A fruity, zesty type of new which reminds us to dry out/become out of date.)

⁵⁸⁰ **Confiently** = Confidently + defiantly (going against the perceived rules unabashedly)

⁵⁸¹ **Trampose** = Trample + Transpose (The act of moving while tearing something down for a change which is viewed to be progressive)

⁵⁸² **Defidence** = Defiance + Confidence (going against the perceived rules unabashedly)

⁵⁸³ Distinguished. Other Extinguished. (A fire with coloured flames)

⁵⁸⁴ Extinguishing. Other: Distinguishing. (A gentleman who suffers from spontaneous combustion)

⁵⁸⁵ Speck. Other: Speak (A number of specks can make up a larger picture/concept/movement.)

⁵⁸⁶ Obviously/obvious. (When it is clear someone isn't paying attention)

⁵⁸⁷ Aghast/Against. (being against something because it conjures feelings of horror)

⁵⁸⁸ Word/world. [creating a world through words]

⁵⁸⁹ Obvious. Other: Oblivious

⁵⁹⁰ Plights. Pits.

⁵⁹¹ Reining. Other: Reining (pulling the parachute strings while also making it wet)

parachutes⁵⁹² and trampolining⁵⁹³ over standardization. It is time for us to rise⁵⁹⁴ our vices⁵⁹⁵, and time for use⁵⁹⁶ to us⁵⁹⁷ these voices to star(t) upcoming abbreviations⁵⁹⁸ [drawing stars on all words which are shortened] off with a clang⁵⁹⁹! It's chime⁶⁰⁰ for us to wipe strikes while the pen is hotter than the sawed⁶⁰¹ [torture ranging between a boiling hot pen and body parts being chopped slowly off]. While the iron is roaring at the pot⁶⁰² for being hacked⁶⁰³ into smithereens⁶⁰⁴ and fragmareens⁶⁰⁵ [an unsympathetic iron; the pot has spilt tea on its cloths]. There's no point screaming over chipped china⁶⁰⁶! [the feeling of glass in my mouth]. Letters press against they're grains, burn our stories out of the dyeing⁶⁰⁷ fan [it just has one blade], and allow hour firs⁶⁰⁸ to spread⁶⁰⁹.

The And

....I hope you enjoyed my written speech. Please dote gossip⁶¹⁰ about it, and don't desert⁶¹¹ the monument [praying to a dyslexic shrine]; do fell⁶¹² free to Clappaud⁶¹³. The main thing that I want you to take away is that we're tired of keeping up these fizcades⁶¹⁴; for the sacks⁶¹⁵ of keeping shiny, polished metal heaths⁶¹⁶ [people with radiators for heads worsening the environment.] we need to stop feeling ascammed⁶¹⁷ of our shelves [a librarian who can't finger out the due-decimal system]. Together we can product⁶¹⁸ a language that is more accepting and tan-gent-able⁶¹⁹; we're multi-casketed⁶²⁰ peoples [people put too much stuff in their bags], who will ding⁶²¹ colour into the existing greyers⁶²². We are now refut-se-inge to be delittled⁶²³ any father; we are too bright to be delinquish-squashed⁶²⁴ [a type of soft pumpkin]. We shouldn't be so delin-stressed in the first place! We are not going to fazzle⁶²⁵ away; so you it is time for you to learn to be more coordinate⁶²⁶ even if it means sometimes accepting others being Disorganated⁶²⁷. [having their lungs and hearts ripped out]

⁵⁹² Parachutes. Other: Parade ((1)Ruining an event that others have designed to be inaccessible to you. (2)bringing the discussion down to earth.)

⁵⁹³ Trampolining. Other: Trampling/Traipsing/Tramping (Unabashedly squashing a pre-existing structure that you don't agree with.)

⁵⁹⁴ Rise. Other: Raise (The act of voices growing when put in warm and accommodating environments)

⁵⁹⁵ Vices. Other: Voices (speaking in a way someone considers to be wrong or unformatted)

⁵⁹⁶ Use. Other: Us.

⁵⁹⁷ Us. Other: use

⁵⁹⁸ Abbreviations. Other: Celebrations ((1)short celebrations. (2) a love of shortened words.)

⁵⁹⁹ Clang. Other: Bang

⁶⁰⁰ Chime. Other: time (A clock that tries to give you advice)

⁶⁰¹ Adaption: The pen is mightier than the sword

⁶⁰² Adaption: While the iron is hot.

⁶⁰³ Adaption: The pot calling the kettle black (or vice versa)

⁶⁰⁴ Smithereens = Smithereens + Fragments (quite large smithereens)

⁶⁰⁵ **Fragmareens** = Fragment + Smithereens (very small fragments)

⁶⁰⁶ Other: There is no point crying over spilt milk.

⁶⁰⁷ Dying. Other: Frying (Dying due to pressures and unaccommodating atmospheres)

⁶⁰⁸ Firs. Other: Fires (firs: Fires that though grow don't destroy, rather enrich their environment)

⁶⁰⁹ Other: Out of the frying pan into the fire.

⁶¹⁰ **Gossip** = Gossip + Snip (reducing the amount of false information/cutting off wagging tongues.)

⁶¹¹ Desert. Other: Dessert (leave us in an accommodating place with no help and understanding)

⁶¹² Fell. Other: Free.

⁶¹³ **Clappaud** = Clap + Applause (extremely impressed)

⁶¹⁴ **Fizade** = Façade + fizzle + fade (a socially constructed mask which is fading and fizzling out)

⁶¹⁵ Sack. Other. Sake ('For the Sack of our mental health': we should be taking more care of it and placing it in a more loving container: such as a sued purse)

⁶¹⁶ Metal Heaths= Mental Health (Mental health that is indestructible)

⁶¹⁷ **Ascammed** = Ashamed + Scam (the idea that you feel negative about yourself because part of your identity is seen as wrong/incorrect)

⁶¹⁸ product/produce (to create new language then produce it en-masse)

⁶¹⁹ **Tangentable** = Tangent + Tangible + Translatable (Explaining a 'new' or alternative language which has a number of tangents.)

⁶²⁰ **Multi-Casketed** = Multifaceted + Casket (Being having enough flexibility and alternative views to fill several new and different spaces)

⁶²¹ ding/bring.

⁶²² **Greyers** = Grey + Layers (A number of unexplored or hazy concepts that need to be explored more thoroughly)

⁶²³ De-littled/Belittled (de-littled: made big again, or returned to an ordinary size.)

⁶²⁴ **Delinquish** = Delinquent+ Relinquish (A culture that is not valued, or considered 'inept' reducing or disappearing.)

⁶²⁵ **Fazzle** = Frazzle + Fade (feeling exhausted through being asked to, 'act normal' for extended periods of time)

⁶²⁶ coordinate/compassionate [learning the maps of human emotion.]

⁶²⁷ **Disorganated**= disorganized+ disorientated (Feeling dizzy because you do not have everything in a certain set place or plan)

Appendix E: Article upon MixMatched ND+ Performance Collective
(founded by author of this research)

Link to information upon MixMatched Performance Night:

www.MixMatched.co.uk

Link to below article:

www.disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/mixmatched-building-neurodivergent-led-communities-through-the-art-of-spoken-word/

MixMatched: Building Neurodivergent-led Communities Through the Art of Spoken Word

Neurodivergent performer, writer and researcher, Emma Robdale writes about her efforts to create a safe inclusive performance space for neurodivergent individuals. *MixMatched* is a neurodivergent-led spoken-word night in Canterbury. Here she quotes a group of writers/ performers about their experience of the event.



MixMatch hosts Emma Robdale and Holly McCulloch

The first *MixMatched* night last February supported sixteen talented artists in making their stand at the *Big Drum*, a not-for-profit yoga and meditation café. Each performer had just five minutes to present their own original material, upon any subject and in any genre. We drew a forty plus audience which, for a Sunday evening in Canterbury, is exceptional!

Chloe Lewer had at first been too shy to perform, but, encouraged by the supportive energy, signed up on the night! Chloe told me:

"I was nervous to perform, but even though this was the case, the knowledge that I would not be judged for the content of my act gave me the confidence to express myself, through my poetry, for the first time in my life."

Each performer had been asked to bring an 'oddject' (odd object) with them. They were to place it on the stage, wherever they liked. These personal 'oddjects' were a way for performers to feel at home within the space and 'claim' the stage'. Some (such as a bottle of lube!) were introduced in the act, while others were decorative, these included: tarot cards, a black suitcase, a moon shaped mirror, a rucksack, a black dress.

I hosted the night alongside Holly McCulloch, art therapist and performer. We'd met at a 'Meet Up' event for 'Canterbury 20s and 30s', and discovered that we were both interested in community and creativity.

My drive, passion and PHD centres on enhancing Neurodivergent Culture Studies, while Holly, after training in Art Therapy, desired to foster a safe space for therapeutic performance events. Perfect!

When planning the event, inclusion and access were prioritised; we aimed for a 50% neurodivergent performer quota which was exceeded with a proportion that was closer to 80%.

Fortunately, *The Big Drum* already had three 'chill out' rooms where performers or audience members could go if they needed quiet time alone. Mercifully, there were also no hand-dryers in the bathrooms (they provided paper towels), the noise of hand-dryers is torturous to many ND individuals. Additionally, performers, and audience members, were provided with an 'access story'; a document depicting where a location is (Big Drum), with pictures of its facilities; it allows acquaintance with a space before physically entering it – a simple and costless step that reduces anxiety for many ND individuals. One being Amy Kemp-Jones:

"It was my first open-mic in two years! I felt a rush of joy at not having to deal with overwhelming sensory input, like lights and noise, that I'd normally have to deal with. The night was planned and managed to allow more of a community aspect, with all the scary sensory stuff gone. Since, I've started writing more, and rebooted my YouTube channel!"



Amy Kemp-Jones performing on stage

On the night, going into the venue, earplugs were available along with three colours of social indicator stickers:

Red = please don't approach me unless I approach you.

Yellow = I am happy to talk, but please be aware I have social anxiety.

Green = Readily approachable.

Inside the venue it was important that everyone was comfortable. We provided a range of seating, including sofas, chairs, floor cushions and even yoga mats. Holly and I began the night with a short introduction, declaring that the space endorsed and encouraged stims/stimming, and that all performers were required to give trigger warnings at the very start of their act.

Soon to unfold was a night of love, lust and storytelling! Some stand-out acts being Winsome Monica's readings on the topic of displacement, the Caribbean and colonialism from her poetry collection 'Zion Roses', and Alba Bravo's unforgettably brave stand-up upon claiming control after a sexual assault.

MixMatched attracted several students from the University of Kent's Performance Department, one being Scott Fishenden who premiered a hilarious comedy act about anxiety and speaking in public. One of our musical acts, Carol Kenrick, sang her own 'tangented' version of *Let me Entertain You*, breaking off into her own thoughts between (and within) verses! There were tales of heartbreak and accounts of failed flirting. Amy Kemp-Jones's poem *Kebab-Man* is one of my personal favourites.

Poet Amy Kemp-Jones – who also hosts a YouTube channel on autistic experience called *Spaghetti Brain* – described the atmosphere at *MixMatched* as akin to “a lady’s bathroom” in that people were able to be open and honest with “truthful chatter”. Performers, and audience members, were supportive of one another. Amy commented:

“No longer were aspie performers muttering scripts, or trying to suppress stims, and having silent melt-downs in the stalls... the room was full of lively conversation and expectations... there was time to breathe.”

Audience members were encouraged to click and ‘flappause’, instead of clapping; the sounds of ‘ordinary’ applause can overwhelm ND individuals. However, clicking was permitted in keeping with spoken word etiquette, it also meant that performers weren’t met with absolute silence after acts, which would make me terribly anxious. Holly and I ensured *MixMatched* had two substantial breaks, not only did this give time for our neurodivergent crowd to network, but it also meant individuals could decompress between performances. Performer, Chloe Lewer added:

“The number of breaks made it easier to focus on the acts, and the option of quiet rooms was a comfort.”

After each break we played a word game, ‘quizzical’, to warm up the audience. Myself and Holly found that this was a really great way to have fun as a group, where we could bond and engage with audience members. Throughout the night a piece of paper circulated the audience. They had been instructed to write something on it, then fold it over, and pass it on. Gradually it snowballed into an experimental poem, which Holly and I read out at the end of the evening. it was silly, profound, poetic, harmonising and utterly absurd!

Appendix F: Selected Chapters of The Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the Headlights

Selected Chapters of 'Casual Case'

- 1) Chapters, '**The Not So Casual Cat**' followed by '**What the Fuck was that Dream**' and Chapter, '**Forget**' and '**Tip-i-ty-Tap Tap**' These chapters show elements of how her Tammy's subconscious tries to process some of her feelings/trauma and experiences of exhaustion/burnout through dream and metaphor.
- 2) Chapter '**Results**'. Tammy experiences a panic attack/autistic/ND+ meltdown and shutdown while at her workplace.
- 3) Chapter '**On My Way**' Tammy's OCD becomes extremely bad, her thoughts fragment/double and cram themselves not the page; this is shown linguistically
- 4) Chapter '**Meds**' and '**Meds Kicked In**': Demonstrative of how Tammy experiences her rapid racing thoughts/OCD slowing down, and elements of memory worsening after starting medication.
- 5) Chapter, '**Book-Shelves**', the final chapter which abstractly discusses diagnosis/fluent and angry appreciations towards medical modal of disability.

Selected Chapters 1:

CHAPTER, THE NOT SO CASUAL CAT

I dreamt. Dreamt I was a lion. Long skinny legs, crouching body. Majestic orange mane spanning wide and bright with captured sunbeams. But I had arms. Arms and hands like a man.

I went to touch my silky mane. But. But when my fingers met the fur, they discovered it to be dry. Like straw. And as brittle as a wasp nest.

Feeling around my head, chunks of it broke where fingers pressed... landing to the ground in a shimmering ring amongst weeds and dirt.

Beneath. Beneath my scalp was garneted by blisters. White spots peaked, moated with pinkened sores. Feeding. Feeding upon them were huge juicy tics who supped with heads buried deep. Deep, swollen, black and ripe, like gourds.

Grabbing one around its fat neck, I reached up. But. But it pincerd tighter to my skin. It would not give in. Surrounding planes became loud, until even the chirp of a cricket caused me to clamp furry hands upon my ears. Reeds. The reeds twirling in the wind caused the ground to spin and nausea pulsed. The thought of stirring to a waterhole caused dread.

Knees. My knees weakened and I. I crumpled to warm grass. Closing my eyes. I wrapped my arms around my head, wanting the world to become still. And. And I lay, with dewy grass brushing against my whiskers. I felt both awful and content.

Tics. The tics slowed their feed, realizing their host would die. And. And also. They would die too. The grass beneath my carcass yellowed as the warmth of a thousand sunsets and rises stroked across my sullen body. Though each beautiful and unique, casting colours that cannot be caught by man, or beast... they reminded me only that my splendour had fled.

Shaking. Shaking off a layer of dust. I blinked the itch out my eyes. Before staggering into the jungle. Skin. My skin became clammy as I entered its humid web. Bulging black, my replacement mane teamed with spindly legs and spiny knees.

Amongst the shade of trees, I skulked. Creeping low with the vines. Cowering. From deer, lizards, bush babies, with their wide and judging eyes. A red-faced monkey detected my brown-brushed tail. Sticking up among-st prickling creepers. Leaping into to a tree in-front, he screeched out to the jungle,

“Look! Look at the lowly lion!”

An emerald chameleon swivelled the jewel of its wrinkled eye towards me. And two blue-streaked Macaw peaked out a tree nook.

Head directed down to brown, rotting leaves, I passed them. But. But the taunting monkey scooped herself low, held only by the curl of her tail. She. She reached to pluck a hair. As Proof. Proof of my defeat.

Swift as a cheater's shadow I. I tore around. And. With a single jerk of my head. Ripped off her outstretched arm. And, before she was able to scream out, I had crunched down upon her head. Crimson-stained ivory teeth. My mane. Bulging like grapes. Glimmered. Glimmered and writhed as I devoured her.

But. But I left the arm. With one sandy hair clutched in her delicate grasp. For all to see. Feeling a sharp pain upon my crown, I strained my neck against the weight of quenching insects. And. And waited for the sun to set.

Diamond pupils flexed. Adjusting themselves to dusk. Ahead were long yellow stalks. Upright and virtuous. I'd staggered into patch of bamboo. And then. Then I broke off a slender shoot. Hollow, bent. The snapped end was jagged. Sharp. I sunk it into the biggest ticks's plump abdomen, putting the other end to my mouth.

It. The tick. It latched firmer like a whelk to a rock. But. But I sucked hard. Sucked hard until blood, hot like soup. Spiced with iron, trickled through the bamboo straw, past my thick lips and. And back into the sin-yous of muscle. As the moisture. The blood. As it left the insect, it became limp. Limp and saggy. Like the skin of a freshly squeezed berry. I lanced another. And another! Until. Until only crinkled cases and baggy sacks remained.

Strolling. Strolling further into ebony night, my razor eyes detected fresh starlight. Trapped. Trapped within dew-plated leaves. Large and round like elephant feet. Scooping droplets up with my pink tongue I felt a glow pass through my gullet, ebbing out from twisted roots, sparking up old synapses. Colours. They. They crept from shadows. Revealing the deep purple of an orchid between roots of a tree. And. And the emerald hues within the curl of leaves.

Padding through the jungle. Red earthy clay crumbled beneath my feet. And. And I strained my ears to the dark. When an owl hooted his sound expanded through my mind like cool water over droughted rocks. And. And all at once the rustle of branches. The slithering of a boa. Squelching of my own feet. They. They became crisp. I stepped upon dense grass tufts, finding them firm and springy. I bounded past sleeping wilder-beasts and nests of spiralling termites, hanging vines sliding off my back.

I. I at last, arrived at a vast lake where triangle-ribbed crocodiles thrashed in liquid charged by moon. Feeling. Feeling a prickling upon my scalp, I peered into the silvered water. Life dribbled back. Back into a deflated tick. Blood ripped through its scrawny neck. To the patch of bamboo. One day I must return to drain these freshly blooming ticks. BUT. But NOT TONIGHT. Tonight, I won't be hindered by these lowly creatures. Tonight. Tonight life. All life. Fears or revers me.

I wish to climb daggering mountains. Scream into the face of rock. Until. Until my roar rings back. I'll delve. Delve deep into the forest and find. Find an unscathed silver birch. Scrape through its frosted bark until. Until the red wood stains my claws. And. And the scent of drying sap soaks my throat.

Each small nostril hair tickling and alert. I seek. I seek a fat mother pig, exhausted by birth. The sweet tinny scent of a fresh placenta already marks the jungle floor. I'll. I'll suckle upon her new litter of highland hog. Meat tender. Dripping. Ripe Having only. Only just being burdened by the toils of life.

Glancing. Glancing once more at my reflection. I. I see. I see the first picks of newborn wildfire. Stubble. Glistening. Orange. The stubble of an auburn mane.

CHAPTER, WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT DREAM?

I'm feeling. Feeling a lot of things. Yes. Yes I am. It's time. It's time. It must be time. To get out of the house. At least. At least once a week. Yes. It is time. Breakfast time. Teatime. Me time.

The swollen tics. The ones in the dream. They. They kind of looked like Clawdia. Yes. They did. Lots of her. Feeding. Feeding upon my head. **DRAINING**. Yes. I definitely. **DEFINITELY** feel drained. The Jungle? Jungle animals. Maybe. Maybe they were everyone else? Maybe. I think. They were. Because they. My family. Friends know. I think even my colleagues know. They. They all know. All know. All know that I want to give up. And they're. They're just watching me. To see. See what I'll do next. I'll try. Try not to kill a monkey. **BUT**. But I do need to get up. go outside. **YES**. I do. Need. **NEED TO** find the strength.

I. I don't feel anything. Nothing at all. Most of the time. No. Most of the time. I don't feel Anything. At all. But. But I wonder. Yes. I worry. Worry that. Worry If. If when. When I open the door. I. I might feel everything. **EVERYTHING AT ONCE**. And that. That would be worse. Far. Far worse. Than feeling nothing. I'd. I'd need to deal. Deal with a lot of things. Rearrange. Rearrange a lot of things. Wash my clothes. Today. Today. Today I'm tired. Today. I think. I think. I. I just want to be separate. Separate from everything. But. Just for today. **TOMORROW**. Yes tomorrow I'll go outside. Go to work. File all my papers. Email the gas company. Ring my doctor. Claim my tax back. Call my mum. Send birthday cards. Update my CV. **YES**.

TOMORROW there **WILL** be **LIGHT**. **EXHAUSTING** blinding **LIGHT**. Because. Because behind the door lies. life. Too much life. But. But if I stay here. If I remain? I'm wasting it. Yes.

SOMETIMES. Sometimes I wake up. I wake up. And. And for a day. For a week. For a month. Everything. Everything is still. **EVERYTHING**. Is fine. **EVERYTHING**. Is sparkly. Sparkly like freshly fallen snow. But. But I worry. That. That as soon as I get out. Out of bed. Put. Put a foot down. I'll ruin it. I'll corrupt it. And. But. I. I never know which footprint. Which footprint will be the last. The last of the sparkly footprints. I. I don't

know how long it's going to last. How long I'm going to last. I guess. I guess I just need to make the most of it. The sparkly days. I BURN BRIGHT. On the sparkly days. I. I DO EVERYTHING. AND SEE EVERYONE. On the sparkly days. So. So. I can make-up. Make up for the others...

CHAPTER, FORGET

It upset me. How easy it was to forget her. No one tells you that. Maybe they shouldn't. It makes it harder. To know that you'll forget.

YOU. You can't just pickle memories. NO. you. I. Are cursed. Are blessed. To move forwards. Away. Away. From what we loved before. Each day. Each day is a space away from her. It's great. Knowing I could forget. It's awful. Knowing I could forget. Life just piles up in-between.

Dreams. Each dream I have. Even. Even if its sad. Even. Even if she's just an 'extra', and I only glimpse of her. I cherish it. Yes. I write it down. Because. Because I know that is the closet I'll have to a new memory.

Chapter Tip-it-tap- Tap

I woke up to the sound of rain. I can't stand the tic tock of clock, but love the pitter-pater of rain. Rain is random, unpredictable. Clocks clunk away, like the monotony of thought. OCD thought. But rain. Rain interrupts. Rain says something different.

Anyway. Anyway before I woke up I was dreaming. I haven't dreamt of Cat for a long time. But there she was, real as ever. We were holding hands. Holding hands and walking through a forest. Snow drops were breaking through the ground, but brown crisp leaves were also falling; it was both spring and autumn. We were chatting. Chatting about life. Chatting about death. She was just as I remember. I don't think death had changed her one bit. Everything seemed so natural. Except. Except our hands were glowing. Hot. Like if you had them on a radiator. They seemed fused. As if. If my energy was hers and hers was mine. And right then. In the forest. It was peaceful. But, but then the path suddenly stopped. The forest went on. But the path ceased to be.

Cat. Cat turned to me, and I turned, turned to her at the same time.

"You're going to have to do this bit alone."

But. But the funny thing is that I don't know if I said it. Or if it was she. I. I just know that it was said.

And now, now I'm awake. Listening to the rain. My hand had felt hot, but now, now its cool. Cold even.

I get up. Brush my teeth. But. But suddenly start crying. Start crying and go back to bed. I just can't face this day any longer. I just want a dreamless nap.

I am River

Eyes pressed shut, lifeless,
small and heavy, like a paper-weight pea,
still as rock,
barely alive,
not yet dead,
laying,
too light to withstand gust,
but too heavy to sit
up in the bed.

Eyes pressed shut, motionless,
I remember that I am water,
hidden
 flowing
 flesh,
not stagnant...
not dead,
no matter how still,
quiet, tired,
every inch of me streams,
veins mapped out in rivers.

I am tide,
waiting to come back
in,
every tooth hides a spring,
pulsating with current,
I am not
pebble,
rock,
or stone,
 never truly still,
my sediment reoxygenates
as debris is freed and
 filtered,
deceased cells
are replaced
 through
 networks of
 tributaries,
no part of me unlinked.

My mind is not d-a-m-n-e-d,

it will always be pooling,
rekindled,
renourished...

BUT,

do rapid,
meandering,
torrents

of ever-flowing thought have the power to pollute?

Their
grey
thuds

escaping,

down
my
neck,
into my
heart,
now pounding,
circulating
remorse,
shame,
regret,
toes

dragg

ing,

anchored
by weights
they cannot

grasp.

I am river,
upstream

is not dirty,

brain carries fear with truth,
confusion with pain,
sponging flood

that body could not sustain,

cortex catches,
retaining all that cannot flow,
nacre membrane
encases
rubble,
coating
what I can not let go.

I am river...

waiting to rush,
processing so I can be clearer,
reservoired
until I can take more strain,
resting,
 so that I'll be able to leave this
bed,

running once again.

It would seem. It would seem that my subconscious is trying to give me the closure that life can't give. Or Perhaps. Perhaps Cat. Cat's spirit really did come back to me. But O don't believe that. Not logically. Because. Because it goes against my faith. Or rather. It goes against my lack of faith. But. But maybe something just are regardless of what you believe. Anyway. Anyway. Perhaps I should be grateful. But right now I just feel sad. And stupid. Stupid that my dream was so cliché.

Selected Chapters 2:

CHAPTER, RESULTS

“What is this?... WHAT IS THIS? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE???”

I had. I had proudly. PROUDLY. BUT. But hesitantly. WALKED. Walked Prince over. OVER. to Mrs Darling. She'd. She'd come back. Come back from her lunch with Suzie. Salty Suzie. She had. AND. AND. SHE DIDN'T. Didn't look like she was FULLY. FULLY SATISFIED. NO. no. I DON'T THINK. I DON'T THINK. That. That was her expression. Though. Though I'm no expert.

The Yeti's. That. That I'd practised on. The Yeti's fur had been straight. Quite straight. Not. Not curled and 'puffy' like PRINCE'S. I'd. I'd not cut hair. Hair that consistency before.

IT. I. I FELT AWFUL. I felt. Felt like I wanted to wish myself out of existence. FELT. Felt as if. As if. If she looked at me for one second longer I'd explode. AND THEN. And then. AND I felt nothing. BUT SHE. SHE WAS TALKING.

“BLAB LA BLA. Trust. BLA BLAA BLAA. Professional. BLA BLAA BLAA. NOT PAYING. BLAAA BLAAA BLAAA MISMATCHED CLOUDS BLAAA BLAAA ANGRY BLAA BLAAA BLAAA.”⁶²⁸

I froze. I WAS. Was Taking pictures of her speech in my head. And then trying to look at it afterwards. To make out. To see. To glimpse a bit of what she was still saying. Though. Though I DIDN'T. I didn't get the finesse of it. I gathered. I GATHERED. She was. She was unhappy. UNHAPPY WITH ME. Unhappy about the cut I'd constructed. I wanted to say. Say something. I'm. I'm not sure what. But. But my words. My words were trapped. Trapped under the earth's crust.

“BLA BLAAA BLAAAAA unacceptable BLAB LA BLAA bad review bla blaaa blaaa won't be coming back.”

SUDDENLY. SHE. Mrs DARLING. Her. Her shape. OR. Or MAYBE. Maybe. My SHAPE. It. IT WOBBLED. Yes. And. The sounds. Sounds of the street. Outside the door. THEY COMPETED. Competed with her. The SOUND. Sound of the FAN. It. IT SEEMED. Seemed to be drowning her out. TOO FAST. TOO SHARP. THE SOUND. The sound of my own. My own DISTRESS. WAS LOUDER. Louder than hers. And. AND. AND THE WORLD STARTED VIBRATING. VIBRATING SO FAST THAT. That it felt guilty again.

⁶²⁸ **Note:** When reading, pronounce the 'AAA' as a prominent 'AR'. BECAUSE. BECAUSE. Though she may not of actually said the word 'blaa' I want you to read it. Read it posh. Because. If she were to say it (Blaa-rr) That would be how It would sound. And. And I want you. To read it. Read it authentically. YES.

Yes. MY Chest. IT. It felt GUILTY. My cheeks. HOT. HOT. Hot to the touch. I COUNTED BACK 10, 9, 8, 7, 6 My chest. IT. IT STARTED. STARTED HEAVING. STARTED GASPING. AIR. AIR AROUND ME. It was acting. ACTING like water. The air thickened. I CHOKED. I was choking. The more I GASPED IN. The more. MORE. I choaked.

TEARS SPRANG. TEARS sprang from the marrow of my bones. TEARS SPRANG. Streaming into my hair. Like. Like drew drops on a spider web. I SMUDGED THEM. Smudged them with my hands. As. As I tried to cover them. THE ONLY. Only thing I was. I was concentrating on. WAS. Was not falling over. BECAUSE. Because I FELT. Felt like. I was being CRUSHED. Crushed like a tin can.

“BLAAAA. Stop it dear. BLAAAA. Wait. BLAA. BLAAA. THERE’S. there’s no need for that now BLAAA blaaa STOP. BLA blaaa please.....”

My aunt. A lady who knew herself. A lady who you’d want to travel with so. So you never felt lost. A swiss army knife lady. MY. My AUNT. She strode over. STRODE OVER. And asked. Asked me...

“Tammy. Could you go wait in the Staff Room for a moment.”

We. We didn’t have a staff room. So. SO. I just STARED AT HER.

“Where?” I FELT. Like I was spinning.

“Just go stand in the Kitchen Tammy.”

And so. And so. AND SO I DID. This. THIS was. Was the first time. FIRST TIME I’VE CRIED. The first time I’ve cried in a very long time. The first time I’d cried since. Since before CAT. I. I CURLED UP. Curled up in a corner. Until. Until Aunt Tina came in. I. I FELT embarrassed. It. It felt like food poisoning. My body was reacting. Erupting. It. It knew there was something very wrong. And. And it needed to get it out. I was vomiting tears. She. Tina stayed for a bit. she. She told me to breathe. To keep breathing. To breathe slower. And. And after a while. The walls. The walls moved back out. And. And I felt I had a little bit of space again. I FELT. I felt DEHYDRATED. And. And bit sick. BUT. But possibly. A bit lighter. My hand. My hand stroked the cupboard. I rubbed my face. My right cheek across the floor. The poison seemed to tip out. Oozing. Oozing onto the ground. I rolled over. So. so it could ooz out the other ear too. Then. Then I fell asleep.

APPARENTLY. Apparently MRS DARLING. She. She did pay. Pay before she left. Even though. Even though she said she wouldn’t. I. I didn’t do it to manipulate her though. NO. Or. Or did I? Shit. Maybe I did.

CHAPTER, REFLECTIONS ON CRYING:

Howling. I was howling like an animal. It was almost like an awful awful orgasm. But. But I knew how I felt. Yes. In that moment I knew how I felt. Cat was dead and I was distraught. And. And for that I felt thankful.

Selected Chapters 3:

CHAPTER, ON MY WAY

LATE. LATE. LATE. No one wants to be friends with someone who's late. Body tremoring. Heart locked up in box. Cuckoo clock with sealed door. Layer of fuzz.

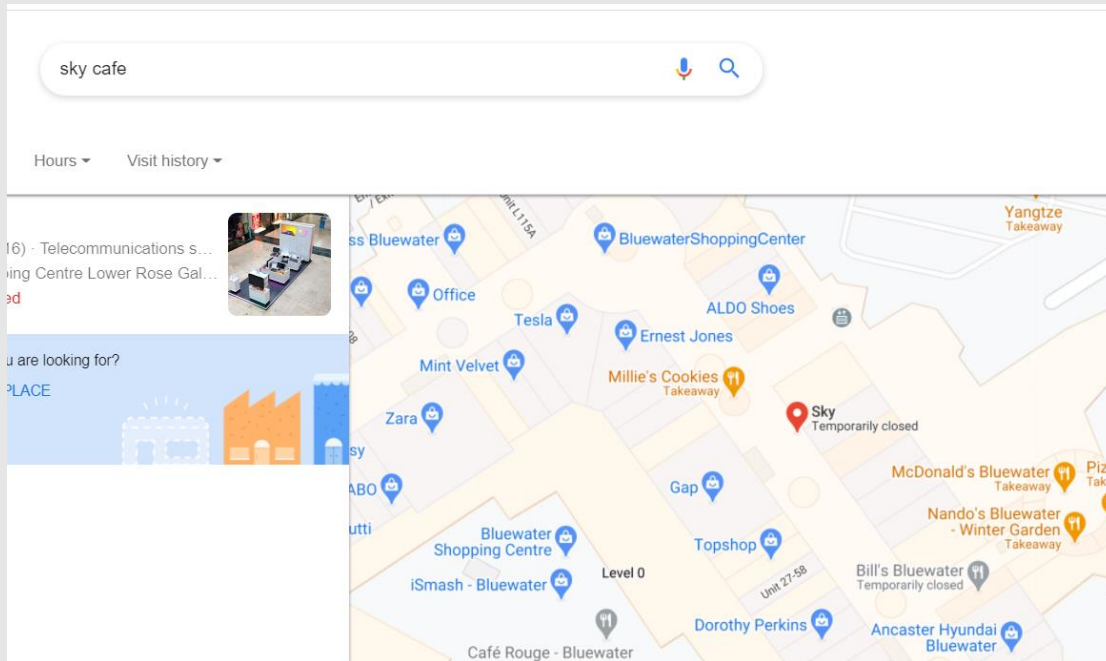
BIRDS. Black bird.	CAT. CAT CAT	CATS EAT BIRDS.	THOUGHT
Blue bird. New bird.	CAT CAT CAT	CATS EAT BIRDS.	expression. You
Old bird. BIRD IN A	CAT CAT. What do	CATS EAT BIRDS	need to do that too.
PIE. BIRD FEEDER.	you want to say to	IN PIES. THOUGHT	you do.
FIT BIRD. FAT	her?	SUPPRESSION. Is	ACKNOWLEDGE
BIRD. I'M A FAT	YOU'RE LATE FOR	it working? Are your	THEM. But not that
BIRD.	GRACE!!!	thought's being	one. NO. Not that
		suppressed?	one. REPRESS AND
			EXPRESS. AND
			SUPPRESS AND
			EXPRESS.
			WAIT aren't they
			contradictions? I
			THINK. I think they
			might be.

Everything has a layer of fuzz. Feels like. Like washing grease off glasses. The more you rub. RUB. The worse. THE WORSE IT GETS. RUNNING. Running towards hostile ground. Sweaty, I'll be sweaty and she'll know I've run. Ugly. So it won't matter what I've chosen to wear. Shoes giving me blisters. They did last time. But they are the only SHOES that were the right colour. AND. AND don't look hideous. Closer. The closer I get to the cafe the worse. The better everything it is.

WHERE. Where is the fucking CAFÉ? WHY. Why isn't it here? I'VE BEEN HERE SO MANY TIMES! I've. I'm. I'm not where I should be. It's. It's always like I'm in a parallel universe. YES. Yes it is. I arrive. I arrive where I should be. BUT. But. It's a different place. And. And here's the strange thing. It. It doesn't matter how many times I've been there before. No. It doesn't matter. ONE. day. One day I could go. Could go. AND. And it just won't be there. Another reason I fear leaving the house. BECAUSE. Because. I worry I won't be able to find it again. Even. If I get close. Even. If I'm on the same street MY MUM. SHE. She got me diagnosed as directionally challenged. YES. Yes she did. It's true. But. But I'm not sure if it's a real diagnosis.

I. I only remembered it was the Sky Café. Because. Because I imagined an angle, on a cloud. Saying 'GRACE'. On a cloud, sipping a late. Yes. That was how I remembered the place.

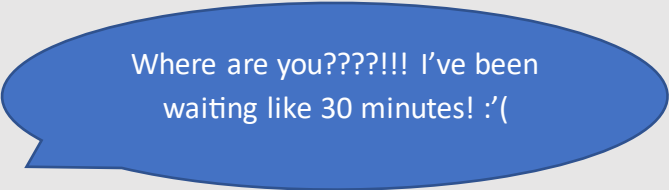
THANK GOD FOR GOOGLE MAPS!



Try. Try and notice your surroundings. Out. GET OUT. GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD. Tree, maybe. **MAYBE** Silver Oak? Elderly lady, walking. She likes. **LIKES THE COLOUR PURPLE**. Purple hat. Purple bag, Purple glasses. **SHE'S A BAD OMEN**. Small woodlouse walking over a grass blade. **GREEN. GREEN. AND GREY.**

BEEP

TEXT!



Not the cry face!!!

Why aren't you running? COS	YOU CAN'T. Cannot even get to a coffee shop. YOU'RE GOING TO LOSE YOUR JOB SOON.	IS THIS HOW YOU TREAT PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT? No wonder CAT killed herself.	SELFISH. SELLFISH. SHELLFISH DON'T taste good. OYSTERS ARE SLIMY.	YOU'RE SLIMY! YOU CAN'T. Can't Escape that. SLIP over. YOURSELF. Slip OVER yourself. SLIMY BITCH.
------------------------------------	--	--	---	--

30? Thirty minutes!!! I'm. I'M only **SEVENTEEN** minutes late! How. **HOW** can she have been waiting that long?

She came early. **SHIT. SHIT. SHIT. SHIT ON A BISCUIT.** Disgusting. I'm practically outside now anyway. Would it be best to have a little pause? To breathe? **SO.** so your not so sweaty and out of breathe and panicked looking? **No...** you're making things worse!!! Every breath you take will make her angrier!!!

FUCK. DUCK FUCKING. JESUS CHRIST. SUPERSTAR. BLAST AND BULLOCKS. COW BOLLOCKS IN A SOUP. Why did we need to meet at the 'Sky' café!!!! STUPID FUCKING STAIRS. I just go round and round. Round and round. TAKE THE LIFT? NO. QUICKER. I CAN GO. QUICKER. Faster if I run. If I tear up the Stairs. The DESPAIR STAIRS. The who CARES STAIRS.... LACE undone!

Knees split. Teeth CLATTER. BRUISES FELT. COUNT. COUNT BACK FROM TEN.

NINE

EIGHT

SEVEN

FIVE

FOR

Three

too

one

KEEP RUNNING. KEEP RUNNING. Don't stop. FLOOR SEVEN. FUCKING SKY CAFÉ. It's modern. Granite coffee tables. New York Style. Big windows all around. White. Black. Grey Tiles.

She's. GRACE. GRACE IS Sitting. Sitting NEXT TO A WINDOW. WINDOW. Legs crossed. Arms crossed. Brows crossed. AND. AND. She's wearing a T-shirt and jeans. NO-MAKE UP.

SHIT. I dressed smart. WITH FULL FACE ON. FULL FACE. LIPS TOO! Maybe I can go to the toilet quick and wipe it off. SHIT. SHE'S WAVING. CURTLY. She's seen me. IDIOT. IDIOT. IDIOT. It's not. NOT acceptable to be late and dressed smart!

ISN IT? Why. Why didn't I just wear jeans and a T-shirt? I approach... SHE. SHE. SHE SAYS,

"I don't have very long now, but it's OK." GRACE glances at me, then back out the window.

[INSERT APOLOGY HERE]

"Heyyyyy, I'm so. SO sorry..."

She. GRACE. Grace stands up. Hugs me. It's awful. Guilt touches me everywhere! GUILT COCOONS ME. She. She hates me. SHE'LL always hate YOU. She thinks you're unreliable. YOU ARE UNRELIABLE. What can I do to make the hate go away???

SHE SMELLS. Smells of...	STRANGLE. I'll	She can feel how fat	SHE DOESN'T	The fridge door. DID	You don't have the
CARDBOARD. NO. No SHE	STRANGLE HER. NOW!	you are. She can.	WANT TO BE HERE.	YOU CLOSE IT? Did you?	money. YOU DON'T
doesn't. no one smalls of cardboard.	With her dead mother's necklace that she always wears.	She can feel it. Turn to the left a little. So.	YOU DON'T WANT TO BE HERE. Why are you both here?	YOUR FLATMATE JUST GOT IN ALL HIS FOOD IN. HE'LL BE ANGRY. So angry if you didn't. DIDN'T close it.	HAVE THE MONEY TO REFUND Him. The robbers will take it anyway... THE FOOD!! SIT Down. KILL CAT. Already did! Least I can tick that off MY EVIL TO DO LIST!?

Don't cry. Keep breathing. LIE.

“GRACE! I got locked in the shower. Then. THEN I. I couldn't find my keys. (STOP TALKING ABOUT BEING LATE. Talk about literally anything else...) and. And my mum called, she's buying a..” (BUY HER A slice of cake YOU CAN be forgiven. GET HER CAKE AND SHE MIGHT FORGIVE YOU.)

“It's OK. Really!” PAAAAUUUUUUUSSSSSSSE. I can see her eyes looking and me AND.....

I fucking killed CAT AND I NEED to tell her.	I need to Fucking STAB THE UGLY BITCH, then she'll stop looking at me!	I FUCKING KILLED CAT. TELL HER. TELL GRACE. GRACE DIDN'T like cat much anyway. She'll understand.	DID I LEAVE THE IRON ON? I didn't even use the fucking iron.	BOOKSHELF. All the answers are on a book- shelf that I can't reach. Behind a door. With a DOORKNOB DOORPENIS DOORSTOP. DOOR STOP. STOP.	I'M FUCKING IN LOVE WITH JOHN. What? He comes up later. You've not even met him yet! Save that thought. until CHAPTER...	YOU'RE NOT very interesting. TAMMY. GRACE. SHE'S Bored. BORED with YOU. BORED WITH WHAT YOU ARE SAYING. Now. what you ARE saying now? You MUST
---	---	--	---	--	--	--

BE SAYING
SOMETHING!
You always
are!

“...yesterday I was eating a bun. From the new bakery. Not the one that Cat used to work at. No. I’ve not been there. It’s out of town. The Bakery. Not Cat. She’s buried centrally. ANYWAY. Anyway. It was an odd colour. The cake. It was. It was a red– brown. I. I wondered. WHAT. What do they put into it. Into it to do that? (Are you actually even aware you’re still talking Tammy?) Maybe a food dye? I read somewhere that cheap chocolate isn’t actually brown, they put stuff into it to make BROWN because they cheap out on the actual cocoa...”

“Really?” (She’s super bored! She’s ALREADY ate the CHOCOLATE cake (DEEP BROWN) that you bought her. Don’t. DON’T mistake her question for interest! Not even you’re interested! SHE’S. SHE’S GAZING OUT THE WINDOW

Don’t jump GRACE! I CAN STOP. I’ll find a way.

“Yes.” I continue. I do. I don’t even stop to chew! “And they also put dye in red–velvet cake. Do you think. Do you think that makes red velvet cake less healthy than other cakes? Because. Because of the preservatives. And colourings?”

Stop talking about anything that pops into your head! STOP TALKING ABOUT THE COLOUR OF CAKES. Think. Breathe. Be intelligent!!! Ask her a question!!! For god’s sake. AS HER A QUESTION.

“How’s your project going?” Thank God, you remembered her project!

I get to stop talking. She’s talking. PHEW. But. BUT. When. WHEN I’M QUIET. It. it builds.

Zirrrrrrrrrrp. Zurrrrrrrrrrp. Zuuuuuuurrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrp. – What the fuck is she saying!!??? I’m nodding. Yes. I AM.

“Yes, so when I’m at and I’m focusing on..... research.....Canadian.....Scripts..... and they kept their pets in water buckets..... 1920’s.....entered competition.”

I say, “That
sounds as if it

WHY THE FUCK WOULD I SAY THAT. What are you?
Fucking AI. DO YOU EVEN HAVE original thoughts?
ENGAGE.

FAT FAT FAT. SHE’S TALKING BUT ALL SHE’S
THINKING OFF IS HOW MUCH WEIGHT YOU’VE PUT
ON since last time. YOU ASKED FOR cream on your
COFFEE. Fat bitch.

was a
rewarding
experience.”

TELL HER YOU KILLED CAT! TELL HER. Tell her now.
TELL HER SO SHE KNOWS THE TRUTH.

Is Spartacus ROMAN? OR. Or are they GREEK.
Because. Because I can't remember. NOT AT ALL.
stupid. But I do know they got stuck in a sticky
situation. Then got slaughtered.

JUMP OUT THE WINDOW. OR. or STAB HER STAB
HER STAB GRACE. STAB HER WITH HER OWN CAKE
FORK.

If I could just jump out of the window. I'd feel much better. I hear that she's using words. I'm skim. Skim Skimming them. FOCUS. It's like I'm wearing opposite prescription GLASSES. Something about an anthology. Zirrrrrrp. Zirrrrp. Think she's putting an entry in it. Its. Its won a competition? She. SHE'S stopped.

Say something. (something RELEVANT)

“I used to read anthologies at school. REALLY ENJOYED THEM. What. What were you saying about your article?”

It's. It's like using 5% of your brain. And. And wrapping the rest up in bin-liner. And. AND EVEN THOUGH YOU CAN'T USE IT. The rest of your brain. YOU STILL HAVE TO LUG IT WITH YOU. Everywhere.

There are two. Two 'me'. A tiny, overused 2 GIG MEMORY STICK that's a HAPPY, silly, FRIVOLOUS.

Then the big sack one. THE REAL HARD-DRIVE. It holds EVERYTHING ELSE. Holds stuff in sacks. I pretend this one. DOESN'T EXIST. THAT I. That I don't exist. The rest of me. AND. And I've done such a good job. YES. That I CAN'T ACTUALLY ACCESS MOST OF IT. most of me.

IT'S FULL. Full. Full of. Forbidden. Dark. boring thoughts.

“OH NO! Not that horrible terrifying thought that I sometimes think for months and months on end...”

Bored and terrified. BORED AND TERRIFIED. Aren't. Aren't contradictions. They're. THEY'RE a state of being.

I talk to people with. WITH THE MEMORY STICK. It. It pretends not. NOT TO BE nervous. EVER. It does it so well. SO WELL. it's often obnoxious. THE MEMORY STICK. It. It is usually very collected. IT EXITS. It performs. To. To try and be what others want it to be. Like. Like an actor. I'd. I'd prefer to live inside it. sometimes. The memory. And. And pretend the rest of my brain, the big bit, would just drop off. Drop off like a lamb's tail.

Can it. Can it
drop off? I THINK
there fore I am. I
AM WHAT? I
AM WHAT?
Fuck. BREATH.
Seeing. Seeing
GRACE is
supposed to help.
Breathe.

What am I
doing? I'm
wasting life.

DO YOU
KNOW
WHO
REALLY
DID. Who
REALLY
WASTED
LIFE? CAT.
She should
have given
it to an
African
child.

I hope. I
HOPE. I
can
remember to
write this
down. Not
to waste
life.
Because I
can't write
it now. Not
while she's
watching.
now.
REMEMBER
WRITE IT
AFTER
Grace's
GONE.

Well FUCK.
Might as well just
give up paying
attention. I'M
TOO POOR TO
PAY
ATTENTION.(after
the online
shopping!)... I'm
too poorly to PAY
attention. After
being born.

I THINK I SHOULD
go home. BACK TO
BED. I can't work
out how to leave
though. NO. no. I
can't work out how
to.

Black bat. PURPLE
BAT. YELLOW
BAT. BAT ON THE
MAT. BATS are the
ONLY UK animal
THAT CARRIES
Rabies. The café has
a picture of a bat
on the wall by the
way.

GRACE MUST LIKE
YOU A BIT. OR
SHE WOULDN'T BE
HERE. SO. SO
DON'T SPOIL THAT
NOW. DON'T
LOOSE IT!

Did. DID I. Could I
have been bitten by
a bat on the way
here? I MIGHT OF
AND NOT
REALIZED.

Are you listening to
her TAMMY? Cos
I'm not sure. I'm not
sure if you are.
You've got 48 hours
to get a jab if
you've been bitten
by a bat. So another
30 minutes talking
won't make a
difference. Listen!

I'm not even at half speed yet. SO. SO. SO DON'T Worry. I WON'T explode. EXPLODE
YET. EXPLODE over a child. With a PENIS. What? I DON'T even have a penis! Why.
Why would I think that?

STOP IT. STOP IT. STOP IT. The more seconds you keep that in your head. THE MORE OF A. the more of a. THE MORE OF a pe-doe-file you are. STOP IT. Stop it STOP THE THOUGHT. STOP IT!

Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile
Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile
Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile
Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile	Paedophile

WELL. Well at least I learnt how to spell it now. Because. Because it's a really hard word. At least. At least if I'm a paedophile I can take a break from murdering Cat. Because. BECAUSE I CAN'T BE BOTH. No. One masks. One trumps the other. Letting the other one sleep for a bit. When I was young I used to watch sheep being shorn. And they used to put little elastic bands on the sheep tales, the tale would just fall off. Well, I wish. I WISH. I could do that to CLAWD-IA. FINGER out a way to elastic band her. I. I keep putting. PUTTING OUT TRAPS. Putting traps in-front of me. TO. TO to distract me. To capture her. BUT. BUT. EVERY TIME. Every time I work them out. SHE. Claw-dia. SHE. Changes. SHE CHANGES the rules. The mechanism. The story.

Am I a paedophile? Or. Am I upset about being late? Or. OR am I just upset about being fat? If I could work that out. If I really knew what the problem. WHAT THE PROBLEM WAS. But that. That would be no good. NO GOOD. No good. I NEED THE BIN BAG. The binbag. THE BINBAG THAT FLOWERS IN THE EVENINGS. Flowers in the crescent of the morning. When. WHEN I'm ALL alone. In bed. A chunky, post-it-note teeming fungus IT BLOSSOMS. JUST. JUST FOR ME.

Last sentence recall. LAST SENCANCE RECALL. What. WHAT. WHAT WAS THE LAST SUBJECT. The last noun. WHAT WAS IT DOING. Graces last subject. LETS. LETS. RECALL. Recall what she said. 'WRITE' I'm sure she said 'Write'.

I say. I say, "I've written before."

And then. THEN I WAS SPEAKING AGAIN! FUCK NO. (I'm still at the coffee shop with grace by the way. I FORGOT. So I thought you. Whoever you are. Might of too.) BEFORE I KNEW IT I WAS SPEAKING. Again. And. I couldn't. I CAN'T. stop. And I.. I ACTUALLY how no idea what she'd been saying really. Cherished childhood memory? I interrupted. Yes. The ninth deadly sin. INTERRUPTION OF ANOTHERS SENTENCE. I should have asked her. SHOULD HAVE ASKED HER. About 'IT'. abut what she was talking about. But. BUT. INSTEAD. I just kept talking.... CELLFISH. CELLFISH CELLFISH (HALF PHONE HALF FISH!)

I talked about nappies. EVEN THOUGH I DON'T HAVE A BABY. (but she does, so maybe it caught her interest). I told her six conclusive (I MEAN consecutive... no of them were conclusive. That's for sure!) stories my aunts had told me about my childhoods: Beach

ball, ice-cream cone drop, inflatable guitar, ruby with sister, WATER WORLD, the day I slept in my Wendy-House and they wanted to call the police because I was gone....

She laughed. AT THAT ONE. THAT STORY. But not. She didn't laugh as HARD AT THE NEXT. No she didn't. SHE SNIGGERED. Every time there was a pause. A breath. A slow. BOOM I. I. I. FILLED IT WITH ANOTHER STORY. Because. BECAUSE. A pause feels like death. A tiny abyss. It FEELS. FEELS like needles are going to suddenly plunge into you. BUT. But. If. If you can just. JUST FILL THE SILENCE. HOLD IT OFF A BIT LONGER. They might change their mind.

She went to the toilet. The CHINK-KEY went to the toilet. What. She's a quarter Vietnamese. Not. Not at all a Chinkey. So. So would it be ok to call her a Chinky if she was actually Chinese. Is that what you're thinking? OF COURSE NOT. If. If she could see. If. If she could hear what's in your head now. She. She wouldn't be your friend anymore. NO. TELL HER. And be forgiven. NO. NO. Chin-key. Sounds like she can open thinks with her chin.

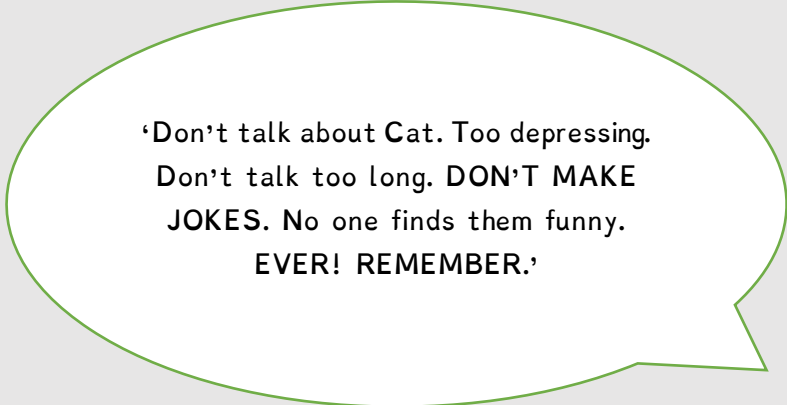
I took out my phone and wrote notes, 'ASK QUESTIONS DON'T SPEAK. YOU ARE MIND NUMBING. Remember. DON'T TALK ABOUT CAT. People don't like it. MAKES THEM UNCOMFORTABLE. REMEMBER.

Anyway. I SHOULD HAVE JUST JUMPED OUT THE WINDOW AFTER THE FIRST STORY. Saved her (and me) the ordeal. IT'S TOO LATE. Too late to bother now. The damage is done. If. IF I'm going to be really honest. And. And I might as well be. I thought about pushing her off the window ledge too. WHEN SHE WAS SPEAKING. I thought I was really going to do it. I sat on my hands. Until they had pins and needles. My hot chocolate went cold. AND. And I'm sure I STILL did little lurches towards her.

"Alright Tammy. Would love to stay and chat longer, but I've got to put tea on for Tom. Tom. And I've got the next door Neighbour's daughter to sit. So I can't be late."

LYING. LYING. LYING. She's going cos. COS. she was BORED. I WAS SELF-PITEOUS. DEPRESSING. BORING. STRANGE. WEIRD. WEIRD. WEIRD

TEXT MYSELF:



'Don't talk about Cat. Too depressing.
Don't talk too long. DON'T MAKE
JOKES. No one finds them funny.
EVER! REMEMBER.'

That. That was a bad day. **OR. Or** Maybe it was just a bad part of a day? I've been told. Told not to say 'it's a bad day'. **BECAUSE.** Because that lumps everything **TOGETHER.** It's. It's **OVER** dramatic. Am I? over-dramatic? Too much? Too fast? Too much too fast. When. **WHEN** will **FUCKING** bin day be over?

Better if it never started. It would be. It would be better. **FUCK. THEIR STILL OUTSIDE. I'LL DO THEM NOW. OR. OR. OR.** I'll have to face Clive Wrath when he comes back from Comicon tomorrow.

Selected Chapters 4:

CHAPTER, MEDS

I DECIDED. Decided I COULDN'T. Do. Think like this. Though. Though I DEFINITELY DESERVE to. BECAUSE the German's. In world war two. They. They deserved to be hung didn't they? The ones that run the concentration camps. Or were they just following orders? If they just thought about killing the Jews. But never did it. Then. Then. WOULD THEY STILL BE EVIL? Maybe. I BET. Hitler. HITLER. thought allot about killing them before he actually did. Maybe I'm just not that evil, because I'm not in a powerful position?

Anyway. Here's the tricky question. How do you know. Know if it's just a thought? OR. OR A THOUGHT THAT will become reality. YOU'RE reality. WHAT. What's the difference between a FLEETING 'pop-up' thought? AND. And a thought that is real a soul THOUGHT? A 'you' thought. A 'me', 'MYSELF' and 'I' thought. ARE we not our thoughts? Are we not at least some of our thoughts?

I wish. I wish they wore badges. Like. LIKE when I used to play football. WE. We wore florescent JACKETS. Bright yellow ones. So. So I KNEW You knew. WHO.

Who WAS on your side? And who wasn't? I. I want the thoughts that AREN'T me. I want them to wear florescent jackets. BECAUSE. Because then I'd know which ones weren't friendly. Which ones to ignore. Which ones were in my head... but not really me.

But. BUT the thing is. THAT. That all the jackets are reversable. Yes. And. And in my head. They wouldn't be. Would be just yellow or red. They would be patchworked. THEY'D MIX INTO SHADES. Shades of orange. And. So I WOULDN'T. I don't KNOW. No. I don't know what's true. What's me. And what's Clawdia. Or. if Clawdia is me? AND. And because. BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW. I'VE. I'VE GOT TO DECIDE. Got to consider. Consider. That. That they're all TRUE. Haven't I?

Health and safety. Basic. If. IF YOU THINK SOMETHING MIGHT BE A RISK. But. But you're not sure. You. You never presume it's not a risk DO YOU?

So. so I. I NEVER presume the thoughts aren't me. THAT. THAT. I'm not a risk. Because. Because. It's better. To. BETTER BE SAFE THAN SORRY. Then why. WHY. FOR GOD HEAVENS SAKE. Why. Am I ALWAYS sorry?

I told this. The above. The above to the doctor. I DID. I told him this. OR A VERSION OF THIS. He. HE LOOKED bemused. Confused. And slightly. Slightly amused. IT COMforted me that he didn't think I WAS A paedophile. But. BUT it IRRITATED ME that he didn't take me seriously. HE SAID. He said. HE SAID I NEEDED. to take something. because. Because. I. WAS BEYOND. Reason. But. But I DISAGREE.

I think I'm actually INSIDE. Inside of reason. TRAPPED IN REASON. Nothing. No one. reasons as much as I do NOW. Besides. Besides that was just. His. MEDICAL OPINION.

One of many. One of many. They. THEY. Are always different. 'MEDICAL OPINION'S'. He asked. He asked, "Do. Do you want help with your OCD. Or. Or you're eating disorder? They're two different services I can put you on the waiting list for." They. Doctor's. No. They don't understand. Because. Because that's a stupid question. To. To anyone who knows. He. He pushes his specs up his nose. He does,

"For OCD. They. The sertraline. It. It takes a while. Usually around two months. To. To have any therapeutic effects."

TWO FUCKING MONTHS. Apparently. APPARENTLY. I'm stuck like this for two fucking months. WHAT DO I do in the meantime? JUMP OUT OF A WINDOW. Yes. Yes. I Think. I'll do that in the meantime. IT'LL BE FINE DOING THAT in the meantime. Until I'm well. FUCK TAMMY. FUCK TAMMY You're fucked. IF. IF YOU'RE NOT A PAEDOPHILE. Like the doctor and your Aunt say. Then you're insane. WHAT WOULD YOU rather be? WHICH ONE. choose. I fucking HATE CHOICE. Choice is the root of all EVIL.

IF I could just amble down a concrete corridor. That had no rooms and never turned. Just a straight long concrete corridor. Then. Then I'd be FINE. Bored out of my MIND. But fine. BECAUSE. There wouldn't be any stairs to trip me. NO. And. And it'd be on ground level. So I wouldn't be able to jump over the rails! I'D BE ALIVE AND SAFE. Is that. That what I want?

CHAPTER, MEDS kicked in...

THE. Elastic. Has broken. IT. TOOK. A. WHILE. To. Break.

BUT. It has.

Thoughts are more. Thoughts are more like water. Water off a duck's back. Like water off a crayon drawing. THEY barely. BARELY GET THE PAPER SOGGY.

Leaving Not Very much
OF YESerday. No And And slightly less. Slightly less of today.
What was I saying? Something about a duck? Never mind. MOVING ON.
Yes. Moving on. Moving on because I can't remember what's behind me! I said.

Earlier on. I said. I'd said. That this. This was what I wanted?

To give up,

'All of my ambition,

for just one moment,

of pure cognition.'

I SAID that. I did. That I'd. I'd,

'GIVE UP ALL OF MY FIXATIONS.

FOR JUST ONE MOMENT

OF MENTAL LIBERATION"

BUT. But it isn't. ISN'T JUST. The Clawdia thoughts. That. That have got stringier. No. Not just her WEBS that are less well made. She's tired. YES. TOO TIRED To construct them. They've been made by the spider on POT. But ITS. Not just the Clawdia thoughts.

The Sertraline. It's INDISCRIMINATE. Unselective.

I took an hour to write an email. BECAUSE. Because

I JUST KEPT FORGETTING WHAT CAME

HERE. AM I.

HERE?

The. 'Me' thoughts.

ARE. Have being. Etc-a- SKETCHED. TOO.

I DON'T NEED a paperweight TO

D

R

O

P

on ANYTHING. NO.

because.

Because.

IT'S JUST BEEN

Etc-a-sketchd.

Meaning. Meaning I had a picture. Then.

Then I moved and.

And it disappeared.

Leaving no. trace.

It's like. Being on the phone while swimming. YOU'VE done that haven't you? If you do, be careful, because mobiles are expensive.

If you get a really expensive one

a really expensive one
is water

I'm quite hungry. Yes.
Today I'm planning to go
out to eat but

There
There was something I
needed to remember

If. If I don't write it down. I THINK I might forget. FOREVER
Water? Something about water.

Back track. DUCKS? I need a thought scribe. So I can see where I came
from,...

Stoned. I guess I feel a little stoned. But without the happiness. I'd rather
be stoned. If. If it didn't lead Lead to. To days of overwhelming
anxiety FOR. For FEW DAYS AFTER. Making it. MAKING IT.
counter-intuitive

S. L. O. W. E. R. Y. E. S. I. Am.

PAEDOPHILE.

P. A. E. D. P. H. I. L. E.

NO.

I DON'T think I AM. NOW. Moving on. Back BACK to that email
FUCK I've barely. Barely started.

What am I going to have for dinner?

Not sure. I THINK. Think. I'll invite a friend.

Ping. The bobble-headed goat. I twang the bobble-headed goat that
Grace Grace brought me back from India.

It. it. nods. Nods. on the shelf.

Selected Chapters 5:

CHAPTER, BOOK-SHELVES

The GIFT of DYSLEXIA – GREAT book. bravo! BRAVO. So insightful.

The GIFT of AUTISM – VERY... Very. Progressive? Yes. YES, it is. BRAVO!

The GIFT of ADHD – Isn't that just autism and dyslexia on Speed? Does it need its own separate book?

The GIFT of DYSPRAXIA– ISN'T. isn't that just clumsy autism? Or clumsy dyslexia?

The GIFT of OCD??? – Is it? I mean. You can't really rap up a shit and put a gift-tag on it, can you?

The GIFT of Manic Depression no. sorry. we. We. Don't call it that any more. Sorry. I. I mean Bi-Polar Disorder. – Well. WELL. I feel very creative when I'm on a high. DON'T I? Yes. I do. BUT. But when I'm down. A low..... that's not a gift. No.

The GIFT. The Gift of Borderline Personality Disorder – it literally has the word disorder in the name. Doesn't it? But. But isn't that just lesser autism? Isn't that. Isn't that. Isn't that. Just the female diagnosis. With. With a side of mental health.

But. But. BUT. Did 'they'. WHOEVER 'they' are. THE AUTHORS. The readers. THE DOCTORS. Know. Do. Did they know. That. That lots of people. Lots of people with autism have OCD? LOTS. Lots. Lots. Lots. Of people with OCD have autism? Lots. Lots Of people with dyslexia are autistic? Lots. Lots of autistic people are dyslexic? LOTS OF AUTISTIC. Autistic woman. Have a diagnosis of BPD; Borderline Personality Disorder. Or. OR. Bi-Polar Disorder? BOTH. Yes. BOTH. Lots. LOTS. OF PEOPLE WHO ARE. Are dyslexic. Have OCD. And/or autism. And they. THEY. Lots of them. Especially the women. HAVE. HAVE ANOREXIA. BODY DYSMORPHIA. Or/and/ AND/OR BULIMIA. AND. And. Lots of people with ANOREXIA AND BODY dysmorphia SELF HARM. lots of people with manic DEPRESSION self-Harm. Lots of people who are autistic. SELF HARM. ALL. all. ALL. of these DIAGNOSIS. All. all. all. OF THESE EXPERIENCES overlap. Suicide. YES. SUICIDE. It Overlaps. TOO. it does. YES. Definitely. But. But then it stops. Stops overlapping. Yes. after suicide. It stops.

LOTS. LOTS. LOTS. Of people. People with mental health problems. Lots of people who are neurodivergent. HAVE. HAVE FEELINGS? Had HAD FEELINS. YES. Yes they do! They did. LOTS. LOTS. Lots of them. Have been bullied. Are Are. Are being bullied. Yes. LOTS. LOTS. LOTS OF THEM. Have. Are. Have. been isolated. Are. Are. Are being. SACKED. MANY. MANY. Many of them. Assaulted. Yes. THEY HAVE. More often. MORE OFTEN THAN NOT. YES. Yes THEY FUCKING HAVE. Why. Why. Why. does the autistic feel sad?... BECAUSE. Because THEY'VE BEEN RAPED NUMEROUS TIMES. No.

no silly. NO. NO SILLY. No. NO. It's. It's because autistic people are prone to depression. Why. Why don't they. Yes. They. Ask. Ask. why.

WHY. WHY. Why does the dyslexic have low self-esteem? IS IT BECAUSE. Because. BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T spell isolation? Is it because they couldn't spell REJECTED? or MINIMUM wage? No. I. I don't think it was. I don't think it is. Oh. Oh I know! IS IT. Is it BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T FILE. Laughter. Couldn't PROCESS BULLIES laughter. Because. There was just too much. TOO. TOO MUCH. to alphabetize? Aphabetaltise. Alpabetaltise.

A. A .A A. is for Antisocial. A is for Abnormal. A is for Abominable. A is for Aborted at birth. A. A. A. A. A is for Abrupt. A is for Absent-minded. A is for Abrasive. A is for Abused. A is for Absurd. A is for Abyss. A is for Addicted to diazepam. A is for Affliction. A is for Aggressive. A is for Annoyed, ANGRY, Anxious... AWKWARD, APATHETIC.⁶²⁹

A is for AWFUL. SHOULD WE MOVE ONTO B? B? B? SHOULD WE???

LOTS LOTS LOTS of people are LOGICAL, CREATIVE, METICULOUS AND DISORGANIZED?! And. AND. AND a lot of other. NON-CONNECTED UN. Un. Connected. DIS. Disconnected. THINGS TOO. as well. ALSO. SOME. some of these things. YES. Some of them. ARE BINARIES. YES. BUT. Lots. LOTS. LOTS. Lots. Don't have. Don't have to be. Binaries. Yoke. Egg Yolks can be separated from their whites. Yes. Just like. Just like isolation can. Can be separated from autism. YES. Even if OCD. My OCD. can't be. No. Maybe. SO. So. WHAT DOES THAT. Does it. Mean? What. WHAT? What. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN. IT. mean.

It means. IT Means. that people. People don't fit on pages.

THAT'S. That's what it means.

⁶²⁹ On average people with autism have heard 10,000 more negative words. By the age of ten!!!

**Appendix G: The Rest of Novel/Text of The
Casual Case of the Cat Caught in the
Headlights**

[REDACTED]