

Invisible: handcuffs on a female poet

By

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Abstract

The thesis accompanies a series of poems '1-50'. Throughout the research an investigatory methodology is used. It is a study of my practice as an innovative writer. There is an analysis of the techniques and methodology used when I write poems. The thesis is structured into three areas. The first area examines why the work I produce is influenced by middle class white men. In order to understand the connection, my poems will be compared to the work of my peers. The second stage probes the relationship that women and men have with language. It examines the acquisition of language by women and men in a patriarchal society. These questions have been debated since the second wave of feminism, the thesis will explore if the notion is still relevant today. The final section questions why there is a lack of black linguistically innovative poets writing in the UK. The research starts with the post colonial poets and explores the use of patois and Creole in poetry.

List of Contents

Abstract

List of Contents.....	iii
Declaration.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Creative Piece '1-50'	1
Introduction	54
Chapter one.....	58
Chapter two.....	69
Chapter three.....	79
Conclusion.....	92
Bibliography.....	94

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Research at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Name of candidate: Cathleen Amelia Weedon

Signature:

Date:

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1

wooden object
a sense of self absorption
 oak trees that drip
recognised existence in
slanting shadows
 scars of the dark
i don't know her
lonely in the middle
whose passion spawned
an awful grind
 panic
pressed wild flowers
and i am adapting
do I know her

2

jar
ended here
an empty space
a blueprint will emerge
suspicious of her
 weakness
see-sawing on high heels
a theme of
 immoralities
the tension of womanhood
a guillotine crashing down
i know
a soul merged mosaic
 an empty jar

3

i who ought to
warn her off with staring eyes
allow myself to get
 lost in charged words
passed observation
eyes staring
a self portrait lily white in lock-down
considerate of human kind
 i am
in the depth of life
my soul on the surface
 i got the message
is this a
scary stranger

4

in bitter repartee
 lights shone
shaken too much too soon
a habit that would make
distance isolated
none the less let's press ahead
 i might confide
a sunless morning netted over sorrow
with wider plans she sees
and observes the usual forms
ensiled with tragedy
 the thin texture of her dreams
 ties of blood
timid slipped away

5

this madness is
imposed to observe
 delicate linen draped
 sparked a debate
a wreath of frosted daisies
short sighted eyes
freak shows under bright lights
 warm chestnut colours of
 an embalmed corpse
and I myself
unwrap the rags of
 passionate words
 a social offence
i don't really know

6

a room in darkness
dense black barbed wire
& visible from afar
a cacophony of cries
mimeographed on paper
teasing detail
a light bulb shattered glass
fragmented chaos
i heard
clown white faces
vision blurred blue
flames of red flares
who wears an eye
or dread

7

grown in darkness
 black ink on white
paper harmony & form
a painted mask
 this pink lip shaped bloom
speeding up
 slowing her down
a trumpet of muffled applause
began to feel peculiar
demotic fragments not confined
 a black shadow or silver glow
saw a masterpiece of thievery
 so
I ran

8

true identity and i
show signs of yielding
the bloodier rooms
eyes filled overflowed
of picturesque effect
this pour creature touted
petals pooled red
bare wood uncovered nails
often deeply damaged her
nerveless fingers open close
wet & white stretched
black lipstick & face
a tree fell motionless
I watched

9

twists of gold and silver threads
convention of silence
glossy twit hate
sparks fall down in beards
on the edge of irony
a toilet dolly wears electric blue
appeased the sweet ache of
her double personality
hollow eyes empty
pot of morning glories blossomed
brutal coarseness
I became
a bitter gift a
victory of self

10

object of passion
content until dissected
half crazy she bites the throat
prim flowers bloom in pots
exposed occasional bitterness
striking sky
softly spoken smile
sustaining willpower
I know i say
damped down faith
tender mockery
the swill of bile
feared
a room full of mirrors

12

bouquets subtle boredom
lost herself in reverie
meandering melodies massed harmonies
& a portrait of self reflection
sore a bitter revulsion her feeling
exposed as she sings to the moon
deserted hours discoloured by dawn
about to escape the intricate delicacy
& how the
wooden cut throats
intense revulsion that old debate
angry purple bruised the eyes of
morning glories essence
& each otherness

13

bloodstained ghost
elevated & she
 tossed trinkets to the crowd
 pained with hardship
sparkling glimpse of faith
eating its own tail
 a profusion of flowers lay
around early summer
 the valley elites
proliferated in luxury &
i dread
the machine made future
dreams
 are our slaves

14

a dandelion bending
oblivious
 face swollen with sordid dirt
 an intricate wax tableau
invaded by tension –
 intoxicating glamour
 stood next to her
the corpse young
a tinge of fear
from this oppression
 repressive climate mirrored
a veil of darkness half whispering eyes
 i tried to escape this
 life sized doll

15

fog and smoke laden air
unnerving new is hailed
a model of humility
absorbed her eyes
fixed the predator
filled with revulsion
a fascination with masks
residue of this nightmare
rule of right and wrong
reflects & sounds fictitious
major battles in the future
instinct lost
as cowardice
weaves this world

16

it works itself
air thicker than stewed tea
in demand you depend on
like cockroaches running
fragmenting stones & bones & feathers
hopelessly in debt
this woman her filthy apron
touch of paranoia
ascends out of view
had met as equals
through that ruse i did not know
I was lying
lightning ravishing the sombre
long resented

17

the noise traffic no
sense of peace or contentment
a huddle of men rush
 turn off the glaring lamp
bitter sorrow mingled
 silhouette winding in a
shaft of white light
indulging in dismal self mockery
 subtle
 wakened by a scream
 this barren sun burned desolation
with lavish eastern lights
trapped in a hold
 I heard the church bells

18

i saw flesh
the undercurrents of pain
sight sounds & smell
a disturbing presentiment
buried deep
under the ruins of the failing
heading into an era
shrugging and sleeping
in sudden shock
less dignity less value less
human sequin eyes
expressed resentment
be careful but
evade this mirror

19

colourless light of dawn
the same want of abundant life
 compassionate & gentle
on this oppressive morning
her veil firmly grasped
 like therapy are we
 switched off
 it is a conformity
from within out
 still sounds sad
the echoing chorus
restrained movement
 aloof from our lives
in a park tears in my eyes

20

no lace draped
time banished between
a decade defined and failed
moist whisper of rain
in a lugubrious moonlight
lost her power of control
charm smile and stylish suits
blotched with dirt and pretence
eyes large & absorbent
a clock ticks
quite remorseless
she shut the door
a big price paid
that silver hair and confident strut

21

pupil of his
 eye stuck
a mirror a sense of fury
white became the hunted
 victims of exile
 silenced
then a furious cry
puberty
 gurgled protests
building a glamorous picture
celebration or savagery
pastel coloured excess
she tried
 & jacked up moral
despite its daunting demands

22

to the human
eye of itself still watched
 unvarnished truth
wearing heads of bunnies
death's language pressed in brown ink
 a hypocrite
I didn't know
 bared her breasts
irrevocable silence enclosed a
poodle in a flowered bed jacket
political version a modern image of
an invariable terrain
 black lines of print
 on a dark earth

23

poison

 flowering mouths with
vicious tongues &
an imaginary fig tree
 semi-feral soiled creatures
unwittingly trapped
those that nourish
 a piece of dust
bright birds of unknown shapes
distorted bodies in
 a desolate landscape
 the principle of regression
I could see the light &
another time had space

24

red cotton twists
thighs cut like velvet yet
 depressed
 so wrong it's got to be a rite
her eyes held despair
 being dispossessed
like some torture table
 a human sacrificed
the principle of
a blue plum streaked in
blood assault on the senses
the wound will heal &
 needle threads a gift
 or just makes believe

25

a ripple
this surface pretending innocence
 bolted in & sedated
 ethnics living in
a museum of men
 that bothered
a single charred slipper found
illuminating amber sun in their eyes
this place
 an arrow shoots off
high living & new found freedom
how death is glorified
 to hide the broken
 i saw a different picture

26

tears wiped from her face
 i raised an eye brow of
 the institution & she died
provoked the same shattered exhalation
simultaneous interpreters
 speed up lives
 like a disc the moon stuck in the sky
 nobody wanted
plain English
myths popular in culture
her screams a universal language
 with no sense of balance
trying to distract

27

speak to defuse
the inadequate
confronted by a wall
& expressed anxiety
behind her dazed eyes
a strained woman
flamboyant symbols
as the sun leaves
dusty thick candles drip coloured wax
public image creates
daylight & ghosts sleeping
three dimensional lace casts
a circle of light in this
two way mirror

28

perfumed wet grass
reality exposed
a trajectory of sound
to have a double life
 she humanised & familiarised
 abstract from surroundings
a miserable life's
attempt to illuminate
the song ceased and left
 dazzled
i saw the world divided
the moans of its subjects
 earth stained and rootless
I crossed the boundary line

29

to exist
outside a mirror
 i looked
into the mirror
girl's eyes abused
 earth itself complete confusion
 i see a doll's eye smiling out
there the isolation
 buckled leather tangled brown hair
 milky light diffused from the half moon
migrant women trapped by
 choice less choices
 wild palpitation
drifting through their veins

30

bruised fingers brush
a beam of light traversed the wall
unprotected by the blinkers
even the trees
ceased had
to murmur her being poisoned
the question of a race
cabbage white butterflies flickered
being brainwashed
quiet abiding like a mini society
logic of the upper heavens
eyes lifted and full
bodies skin & hair
I won't spoil it

31

a garden of wall flowers
innocent trusting expressions
so sweet & saintly
sadness of neglect
an electric shock flared
a little alley of women
stood on the edge of an abyss
the sound of a tap running
grown resilient
complete yet untouched for years
an alarm clock would rouse
the diseased and damaged
clack clack of the knitting needles
an unfair comparison it hurt

32

profile a beautiful woman
like sweet wedding cake
innocent intent
sculpted but quite disturbing
a defect in our language
eyed me kindly
aggrieved and
no wonder it stained
a white paper stippled
wilted by time & life &
public scalding senior
through the mirror
face of a foetus so
I saw

33

 sea of fertility
 living with a womb
 burdened by a sobriquet
the savage &
barbaric in red purple repose
her hectic glittering eyes sore
 the reflective solo
 dropped a stitch
 on the edge of slippery as
 the sea fish dried they
returned her
 a proper place
visible on a wire
& poisoned

34

unkind eyes burnt
 her
brown she succumbed
as arms flailed fiercely
mirrored lips warm throbbed
 & smiled like a host
 in the mirror anti-twin
turned away from me as
I turned
 deserted by the
left in the dark
 a game is hinted
 as if
coerced characters lack this

35

mouth pressed
a surface of glass
continued with sudden force
a fertile sprawl so multifarious
the light was black
a perfect set up for a
true neurotic immigrants
from that political darkness
confusion but for their faces
could I settle in either
layer upon swirling layer
peeping through the window
a huddle of sick people
thickly splattered they stray

36

speed this inertia
of the eye
 dead dissected
turned into human weeds
flowers that distilled inexpressible colours
 the smooth white path at
 my feet blurred
as the gloomy plied their trade
 an arbitrary spread of umbrellas
a field swarming with moving germs &
 colours battered and faded
her fluid in the atmosphere
 did not transmit saintly & thin
as the blade of a knife

37

a mirror reflected time
crowds of people
declared ambitions
vivid a sense of being played to
a mass in dirty grey
sounds self-conscious
staccato as the needles crashed
an identity of their own refused
undimmed by endless imitation
she alone withdrew
the light on it self
relation to water
& blood
& the moon

38

bare heels on the floor
the snake opened its clockwork jaws
no escape the sinister
crashed through the glass splintered
playing in a pack of identical cards
even on the worst estate
her mirror impregnable she
descends then disappears
slumped like a corpse
the ageless withered crumbled away
like a pale veil separating two
bloody minded
drowned in absurdity
& this cluttered space

39

under layers of paint
her face in the mirror looked
sick menial jobs an emotional loop
 vile diligence of
a well groomed sulphurous light
 layered over longing
grief & tension
 told to trust in Jesus
in spite of a hypocrite
 with repressed emotions and
 a desire to plunge the
barefoot doll into space
i'm English &
 never satisfied

40

amongst the clutter
a small doll in-house
with sumptuous displays
 & conspirators in the basement
 the room blued into view
 probing the psyche shows sorrow
 their eyes
unravelling like knitting
a hundred faces in a funhouse mirror
 hopes dashed poor thing
a worker's strike registered
 palms up more pills
power off brush strokes over her views
as yellow lights illuminate

41

a happy land
 eyes wide open
product of a diseased mind
 debilitated by neighbours
 wailing loudly
the second hand missed
a second hand severed
 tongue cut out
in spite of age and weakness
this neat green field looked artificial
violence when the blade struck
 spilt contents on the floor
i was not beguiled by
barbarity this British stage

42

emaciated eyes staring
hiding yet revealing all
 suffering in this bloody journey
 torn between the cull & a trigger
people conventions & all mixed up
of violent words it's true
 and it's heavy
 a wrong turn here
end less human cruelty
she an object to be wanted
 clean white linen
 but surely it's rape
 in a camp for homeless
their sense of outrage alert

43

a russet coloured moon
i watched it disappear
crushed velvet
 estranged eyes veiled
improved by shock treatment
 i can't escape this dream of
 friends in a commune
tormented and slightly dim
 whispering
 bushes with access to clean air
she had been crying
 trusting who ill-advised
on a ledge the fourth floor
don't understand who is the other?

44

raindrops on the back my hand
under the dark arch of a bridge
 absurd and doomed
 it gets worse
this red drop is it blood
a green dome on the lawn approached
 mistaken ruse & more lies
 we begin to argue
no wild or disquieting noises
the well heeled in handsome red brick
 had been plotting
a hopeless start then failing in
space to make sense of this chaos
 told me to jump

45

burning cheeks pressed against
who in human in form but
the pounding of a heart
sounds under the line silenced
dark rocks of a cliff face
banished poverty from its habitual
place a uniformity their
gleaming skeletal wished for wings
with tongue and teeth and a rasp of beard
eyes widened and stare garnet coloured
can't see who's who
absolute absence of light
dragged by waving
arms & jumping

46

that face lay beneath a mask
a wire to bite I shut my eyes
unprepared
for a wingless flocking of ravens
watching me in
the gilded mirror assessing eyes
what terrible thing had i done
and violently staged
this innocent yet confined life
the person in the mirror paralyzed
a white faced woman in a mad hat
i began to shudder before a race
defenceless isolated from
fear of a kind for I felt both

48

the end a dark corridor
 pale grey eyes look
flying just the poor
reflections discoloured the
 iridescent mirror
dropping dead of exhaustion &
God knows they suffered
here intersections of flesh upon flesh
parrot cages & dress makers dummies
non-native a van load of shame
the perfumed lilies
 she sniffed a jar full of
 candy wrappers
orange peel and seaweed

49

innocent flowers long ago
the silk cord dangled her neck
she trod a muddy path
 a piano perfectly in tune
 a big cage in the basement
their political turmoil
 corpses I can smell the blood
sparkling like semi precious stones
 fluttering feisty women
 & men to spare
scrubbed the stain more vivid
 it grew
a cultural war to reclaim
 reluctant eyes veiled

50

this time it was it was not fancy
hands go limp a crucial second
his long black corporate socks
shadowed a reality of life
the flowers nodded like bright children
drop out the race
hand brushed her breast &
women sitting up and knitting
tut-tutting on time online
the hook-up culture
a mass of lilies exhaled
eyes opened in the dark
a trail of human exposed
as big as his her ego

51

while still the soft flakes float
with bitter sorrow mingled
they kneel & kiss this native earth
a tangle of thorns faded
relapsed into blank silence
seething crowd kicking
suspension of reality
this place of privilege
monologue of a foreign resistance
her character an admirable eye
glances between velvet curtains
starve or work
she stumbles on a stagnated society
angry she shakes that doll

52

flowers grown by invisible gardeners
there is no question of forgiveness
solitary with windows boarded
a voice or a cave full of echoes
glorious & sunshine free
reframes our view of
a young girl carved a single pearl
the loss of joy who counts
the undeserving poor
stares with green inscrutable eyes
picture ourselves in the past
a box of coloured silks
i don't blame
but our bloodline

Introduction:

Linguistically innovative poetry (Lip) could be construed as elitist. It is an area of poetry that offers increased indeterminacy and discontinuity. The techniques used include a disruption in the text from which an imaginative link is provided thus producing ambiguity, the intention is to make new or to alter meaning. I was introduced to this practice as an undergraduate studying Creative Writing. Frequent visits to poetry readings like The Blue Bus and POLYply provided invaluable experience, however I was surprised at being the only black attendant. Even though the venues I attended were restricted to one area of London, I soon realized that the majority of readings were frequented by the same individuals. I was able to conclude that the Lip area of poetry is dominated by middle class white poets. As a poet who is concerned with the 'silencing of the downtrodden', this observation inspired questions that substantiate the relevance of this research.

The broad aim of this thesis is to explore and enhance my knowledge in the area of poetry that I practice. In doing so, the study will examine the affinity that I have with white male poets. As part of the process, I will interrogate the relationship that women have with language. The study will attempt to understand why there is a lack of black poets producing linguistically innovative or experimental poetry. In order to achieve my goals, I will adopt an investigatory methodology to my research.

The creative work that compliments the thesis is a series of fifty three poems. The title of the series is '1-50'. Indeed my aim was to write fifty poems, however the flow of text came to a natural pause once the series arrived at fifty three. My intention by the end of this process is to discard three of the poems.

The thesis is divided into three areas of research. The first chapter will explore my practice and my work as a poet. To date my writing has been predominately influenced by Tom Raworth and Sean Bonney. In Robert Sheppard's *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*, his introduction 'The Life of Writing' says, "Analysis does not distil that thrill; it turns it to knowledge." (Sheppard 2011: 7). Poems written by Bonney and Raworth will be analysed and compared to my own work which includes two earlier series 'angle' and 'long' and the current series '1-50'. In

his introduction to *Poems of the Millennium*, Jerome Rothenberg writes, “The most interesting works of poetry and art are those that question their own shapes and forms, and by implication the shapes and forms of whatever preceded them. (Rothenberg 1998 : 11). As a writer, I question the methodology and the style that I use, so as part of this study, I intend to examine how my poems are put together. With the poems in ‘1-50’ containing 14 lines, there will be a probe of the open verse sonnet.

With well revered female poets like Geraldine Monk, Susan Howe and Bernadette Mayer to choose from it has to be considered if the patriarchal system that was indoctrinated into me as a child and still dominates my life, influenced the choice of poets to which a strong affinity still exists. By making a connection with female writers, I have been able to question the derisive treatment of women that is apparent in the ‘angle’ series. The poems in question contradict my concern with inequality; the thesis will explore this area of my writing.

The debate on how language is used by women and men in patriarchal societies has raged on since the second wave of feminism. In the introduction to *The Feminist Critique of Language*, Deborah Cameron writes: “...its influence on public and academic discourse is such that it cannot be dismissed”. (Cameron 1992 : 1). With an abundance of polemic material to choose from, Chapter Two focuses not only on how language is used, but the acquisition of language and how we speak. Robin Lakoff’s *Language and Woman’s Place* was written in 1975, and although it has since been criticised for its lack of evidence, the book is still referred to as a starting point for sociolinguistics and gender. It is evident that her work is relevant today; there is an extract from Lakoff’s book printed in Cameron’s *The Feminist Critique of Language* (1999) and Jennifer Coates makes reference to Lakoff’s work in *Women, Men and Language* (2004). This second chapter will also examine the ‘women’s sentence’ as first described by Virginia Woolf. It will then move onto the French Feminist writers whose influential work continues to dominate ‘feminist theory’ today. This essential part of the research asks as many questions as it answers. The thesis will explore ‘Ecriture Feminine’, the term coined by the French Feminist critic Helen Cixous in her essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’. The essay is rich in language and her description of women and their treatment is intoxicating. My aim after reading ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ is to inject Cixous’s passion to liberate women, into the text of my poems.

Although Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray's work falls within the Lacanian framework, their opinions on the female sentence differed. Kristeva maintained that 'écriture féminine' undermined the symbolic order. Their opposing views will be examined and interpreted by feminist writers. The American critic Elaine Showalter explains that the feminist interpretation for each country differs; the English feminist criticism is essentially Marxist and stresses oppression. The French is psychoanalytic and expresses repression and the American feminist criticism is textual and stresses expression. She writes: "All however, have become gynocentric." (Showalter 1992: 249). This is a significant part of the research because it imparts the history of women's relationship with language.

Having explored the radical feminists that instigated change, the focus of the thesis switches to post modern female poets. In the 1970s there were a limited number of female poets being published. In the study there is a brief account of how the inaugural of female editors altered the position of previously silenced female poets. *Out of Everywhere*, edited by Maggie O'Sullivan is an all female poetry anthology. O'Sullivan published innovative writers who were excluded from the mainstream anthologies: "the poets here to my mind, have each in their own imaginative way committed themselves to excavating *language* in all its multiple voices and tongues, known and unknown." (O'Sullivan 2006 : 9/10).

In the thesis, I then turn to the artistic practice and performance writing of Caroline Bergvall where her cross media work is examined. Bergvall's repetitive style in 'Goan Atom 1' is synonymous to that seen in Gertrude Stein's technique. The study will identify 'Goan Atom 1' as being in the tradition of Stein's *Tender Buttons*.

There will be a brief account in the thesis of how the use of the body in writing text relates to the phenomenological work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The final chapter of the thesis will probe the assertion that there is a general lack of black poets writing linguistically innovative poetry. By starting with the post colonial Caribbean Diaspora, my aim is to analyse the style of poems produced by black writers. It will be relevant to ascertain if these poems can be compared to the poetry produced by the avant-garde white British poets writing at the same time. Because of limitations, the research does not delve too deeply into the inequalities that Black Americans experienced. Alice Walker, author of *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*, writes: "There are two reasons why the black woman writer is not

taken as seriously as the black male writer. One is that she is a woman.” (Walker 2005 : 260). My research takes into account the relationship between black male and black female American writers. Black American female writers demanded a literary criticism of their own. They were undervalued by black men and the white literary critics; their writing was not taken seriously and seen as deviant. The vindication of black female writers by black male writers goes back to the 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance movement is pertinent to this research because it forms part of the genesis of a black literary tradition. Zora Neal Hurston ignored the advice of her male peers and produced literature on black myths and folklore. Even though the books written by Hurston formed a part of black American culture, they were not well received in the black community. There will be a brief account on how the black academics and intellectuals were eager to forget their history.

The focus in the study returns to the UK where poetry written by black female writers is examined. There is an analysis of poems written by Amryl Johnson, Jackie Kay and Valarie Bloom. An important part of this study is to explore the use of West Indian dialect by black writers. The dialect is spoken but not widely written and it is suggested that the West Indian vernacular may have isolated those that used patois or Creole in their poems. Recognizing the use of Creole, Denise DeCaires Narain, the author of *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry* asserts: “...it resurfaces in Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s and becomes inextricably linked to articulations of black Britishness.” (DeCaires 2002 : 105). Of course not all of the black poets embraced the notion of writing in dialect. The thesis will explore the difficulties encountered by Johnson when attempting to use Creole. This section of the thesis will also include an analysis of Grace Nichols, whose canon spans several decades. As part of the study, my intention is to ascertain how the experiences delineated in the text of a black British poet in the 1970s compares today. Using Nichols' poetry, my intention is to recognize if acculturation has altered her style of writing. The final passage of this chapter turns to David S Marriott. Through poetry his writing cleverly tells the story of abandonment, loss and self-loathing. Although this thesis concentrates on the shared experiences of female writers, there is a reflection that emerges through Marriott's text thus making it imperative to briefly mention his work as a black male linguistically innovative writer.

Chapter 1

As a black female writer, how does my poetry compare to the white male poets from whom to date I have drawn the majority of influence? There is a long list of poets that have, and continue to impact my writing. Of course there are far too many to mention, however the selection of poets includes: Tom Raworth, Sean Bonney, Geraldine Monk and Allen Fisher.

Like some of my contemporaries, the text I use is sourced and foraged from an array of books, newspaper articles, magazines and my own journals. The found words are re-arranged using an initial process where a run of three or four words are collaged. Only two of the chosen sources are used at the same time. The preferred method is interrupted as the poems are edited and words from my own journals are intertwined. The intention is to produce poems that provide indeterminacies in meaning. In her book *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, the American poet, scholar and critic Marjorie Perloff writes: “For Rimbaud was probably the first to write what I shall call here the poetry of indeterminacy.” (Perloff 1993: 4). In other words a text or a piece of writing where meaning is undecided. Perloff explains that amongst others, the influence can be found in the works of Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams: “...an undecidability that has become marked in the poetry of the last decades.” (Perloff 1993: 4). This technique was used in my first series ‘angle’ and then replicated in my second series ‘long’. Interestingly the same method produced very different results. The poems written for the ‘angle’ series work in a frame that contains three stanzas. In the first stanza, the four lines tend to be of equal length. The four lines in the second stanza are shorter, the aim is also for equal length. This feature enhances the start of the angle. The third and final stanza works to a guideline where there are either four or five lines with few words. The form dictates that the final stanza provides a disruptive end to the poem.

By comparison, the ‘long’ series, exhibits a style where each line of the poem consists of an average of two to three words. The form is similar to Raworth’s ‘West Wind’. The rhythmic flow of the poem is controlled by limiting the number of words used. At times, the pace of the poem is altered when single words, or for example monosyllables are used.

past dreams
a different real

with body
an experience
there
a yellow building waits
description

(Raworth 2004: 355).

black sun of boredom
wholesale alien
nation
do
we
escape from
transparent eyeball

(c-weed 'long': 2012).

The same treatment can be found in 'long' where single words are also used to change the pace of the poem. I regularly insert spaces to create a similar effect. In the 'long' series, three spaces are used; in '1-50' there are three, sometimes six, spaces inserted to impede the flow of the poem. A political commentary, Raworth's 'West Wind' takes you on an extended journey, one of finesse that covers 20.5 pages. The poem is interrupted by line breaks and drawings. In 'long', the political exposition in each poem is written within a parameter of between 34 and 37 lines.

There are two distinctions between 'angle' and 'long'. The first is the aesthetic; the second is the way each series is communicated. For example although the language used in all of the poems is fuelled by anger, the poems in the 'angle' series are subsequently controlled by humour and irony. The poems in the 'long' series are a treatment of anger, they express a serious tone. There is a shared subtext in 'angle' and 'long' which is also replicated in my current series of poems '1-50'. Through my writing, there is a desire to give a voice to the silenced, and, to make it clear that the passive observer is aware of the injustice that surrounds us. As a woman I often feel silenced so through my writing the aim is to give a voice to myself and the other.

The 'angle' series sees the introduction of c-weed¹ as a subject, a silent observer, an oppressed observer; c-weed is unable to participate, c-weed watches the politicised turmoil from the sideline. It is difficult to distinguish between myself

¹ c-weed is the shortening of my name.

reading ‘revealing even greater ugliness’ the reader has to determine if there is a connection with the retaining walls as a shift in syntax implies.

tin made with impression
for its armless shape
bereft of all organs
owned four important oils
retaining walls
revealing even greater ugliness
a death to others
incapable of going

(Raworth 2003: 401). Raworth’s poems are neither named nor numbered. By comparison in my series 1-50, each poem is given a number from 1 to 50. However there are similarities in the techniques used, for example in poem ‘27’; from ‘1-50’, ‘the inadequate’ could be assigned to the line above, or the line below. A link is created between the three lines creating a syntactic indeterminacy.

 speak to diffuse
 the inadequate
 confronted by a wall
& expressed anxiety
behind her dazed eyes
a strained woman

(‘1-50’ : 27)

With a passion to experiment with language, rhythm and form, my ultimate goal is to find a platform from which to articulate a politicised text that deals with oppression and injustice. Influenced by Bonney’s *The Commons*, my poems are also concerned with the working class, immigrants and humans who are devoid of a voice. In ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, Helen Cixous, French feminist poet and philosopher, fervently describes the oppressed as having their mouths gagged with pollen. As I wrote series ‘1-50’ I noticed a recurring theme of the repressed, eyes staring, unable to speak, the mirror, a symbol of cruelty, through which the subjugated is not seen in flesh but viewed. Like Bonney, my writing is fuelled by outrage at political mendacity. In fact Bonney’s poems in *The Commons*, the poems I have written for ‘1-50’, and Raworths ‘Eternal Sections’ are linked by political commentary. If the content were compared, one would find an emphasis on a failed capitalist system and on oppressed people. An example that represents the three mentioned poets is shown.

He is the man or woman
sitting beside you,
bitter & false & snapped
inside every nation
such hawks & hounds, such ravens
o bitter statistics
the cuckoo is a pretty bird

(Bonney²: 2011).

above meaningless tragedy
or any other organ of government
predicting the prices
as long as this is observed
how things work in nature
to lose but their chains
by acquiring 'know-how'

(Raworth : 407).

the loss of joy who counts
the undeserving poor
stares with green inscrutable eyes
picture ourselves in the past
a box of coloured silks
i don't blame
but our bloodline

('1-50': 52).

As with Raworth's 'Eternal Sections', there are similarities that can be found between '1-50', and *The Commons*. For example, each of the 55 poems in *The Commons* contains 14 lines, with the exception of one poem that consists of 15. *The Commons* and Raworth's 'Eternal Sections' are described as sonnet sequences. In *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets*, there are eight poems from Raworth's sequence. Jeff Hilson, poet and editor of *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets* in his introduction writes, "In this anthology I admit to favouring poems which are part of longer sequences". (Hilson 2008: 16). When I wrote '1-50' my concern was with the content, the formation of language and using the poems as a tool for communication. Halfway through the series, I became aware that the majority of the poems contained 14 lines. Of course 14 lines does not only equate to a sonnet. Stanzas can be merged to form one poem that consists of 14 lines or a single stanza

² This is poem number 20 from 'The Commons'.

could amount to 14 lines. For example, Bonney's *The Commons* are sonnets in stanza form. As I wrote each poem, they came to a natural end at line fourteen. Of course when I realized the form that I inadvertently was using, I became more conscious. As I worked my way through the series, I ensured that each poem ended on the 14th line.

My decision to name the series '1-50' was born from being aware of an increasing desensitization to those who are marginalised, downtrodden or viewed as being inferior. French philosopher and author of *The Second Sex* Simone De Beauvoir writes: "For the native of a Country, inhabitants of other Countries are viewed as 'foreigners'; Jews are the others for anti-Semites, black for racist Americans, indigenous people for colonists, proletarians for the propertied classes." (Beauvoir 2011: 7). There is a sense of detachment between the poem and the number, as though the poems are interchangeable. Each of the poems could have any number, and could follow in any order. I see this as a depiction of dehumanization, who notices the 'other'? De Beauvoir continues, "...the majority imposes its law on or persecutes the minority." (Beauvoir 2011: 7).

Bonney's nostalgia and frequent mention of Woolworths alludes to changing towns and changing times. There are poems in '1-50' that are concerned with the transformation of large towns and where the failure of multiculturalism breeds opposition to acculturate. The extracts below are examples of how poetry allows interrogation of the mind:

intersected by pretty towns
but we are mouths
and strings of words
stupid
stitched into the language
that resting place
for exhausted shoppers

(Bonney³: 2011).

heading into an era
shrugging and sleeping
in sudden shock
less dignity less value less

³ This is poem number 40 from 'The Commons'

human sequin eyes
expressed resentment
be careful but

(‘1-50’: 18).

Although ‘1-50’ is a series of poems, they do not tell a story from a – z. Even though the poems could be shuffled and put in any number order, I have chosen to arrange them as they were written. Thus we find ourselves bound to the frames we are trying to escape from. Unless like Shakespeare’s sonnets, that are batched and each batch tells a story as Israel Gollancz explains, “Although the first one hundred and twenty-six Sonnets form one whole [sic], it is clear that they sub-divide into smaller groups, though in very few instances does a Sonnet stand by itself, unconnected with what goes before or what follows.” (Gollancz 1899: ix). Sheppard’s “Poetic Sequencing and the New: Twentieth Century Blues” in *Far Language* makes an argument for sequencing: “I wanted a ‘title’ that would allow me to order, re-order and disorder a text or a series of strands of texts in sequences, something that could be read in a number of ways.” (Sheppard 2002: 35).

As I compare my work to Bonney and Raworth, I think about the female writers like Geraldine Monk, Susan Howe, Maggie O’Sullivan and many others whose poems have provided a gendered identity. I particularly like:

You jerk you didn’t call me up
I haven’t seen you in so long
You probably have a fucking tan
& besides that instead of making love tonight
You’re drinking your parents to the airport
I’m through with you bourgeois boys
All you ever do is go back to ancestral comforts

(Hilson 2008: 124). This is one of the twelve sonnets published from Bernadette Mayer’s sequence. Like many of the sonnets published in the anthology, Mayer’s is written in free verse. This style is preferred by linguistically innovative poets who embrace sonnets; instead of producing the standard 14 line verse, they compose various line lengths. Hilson writes, “Mayer constantly pulls apart form and content to interrogate the gaping personal and hypocrisies we inflict on others and that in turn are inflicted on us.” (Hilson 2008: 12).

Looking back at the 'angle' series, similarities can be found with the form of what is known as an inverted sonnet. The poem that is referred to as Elizabeth Bishop's last poem is described as an inverted sonnet. With unusually short lines, this form of sonnet is a bottom heavy inversion of the standard sonnet. The angle poems are split into three stanzas with each verse having its own style. With a parameter of between 12 and 13 lines, the poems in the 'angle' series could be viewed as innovative sonnets.

unnamed enemies live rent free while slothful
Eurozone blurs the line pressures of poverty
Tories nostalgia vents violence as bad luck
generation sells babies from unclean poor

to rich who double dip in virgin
sent to far-off gulags as social
decay sacrifice sick in pursuit
of super weeds and profit

empire with pride
or oppression
inflamed greed
it's awful
c-weed

(angle)

Although there is still a form, the free verse and innovative sonnet is more inclusive than the original form of sonnets.

There were times when I attempted writing through the body. By using my own natural rhythm, I connected with the movement of my body and then to my sexuality as exhorted by Cixous in "Laugh of the Medusa". In "Writing as a Second Heart" she elucidates why she writes, "I need the incessant movement from body to symbol, from symbol to body; for me the two things are intrinsically linked. (Sellers 1994: 198).

brown she succumbed
as arms flailed fiercely
mirrored lips warm throbbed
& smiled like a host
in the mirror anti-twin
turned away from me as
I turned
deserted by the

('1-50' 34)

Veronica Forrest-Thompson's, *Poetic Artifice* an excerpt printed in *Poets on Writing*, succinctly sums up my use of the pronoun 'I', where it appears as 'I' or 'i' it differentiates between a particular person or is simply a voice: "Nor need the 'I' be thought of as a particular person. For the purposes of the poem the 'I' is simply a voice." (Riley 1992: 222). Throughout the series of poems '1-50', where the 'I' is used as a capital, it is a form of self awareness, or acknowledgment of my involvement in the poems as the writer. Although c-weed is present in the poems that I have written, to date, they are not confessional. In "Grasping the Plural" from *Poets on Writing*, Ken Edwards articulates: "...when one says 'I' one immediately hears the word, or when one writes it one sees it, and therefore it becomes immediately separate, it creates a different I. So that even before others are physically present, already writing is plural, necessarily." (Riley 1992: 23).

It is important to understand why there are poems in the first series 'angle', where there is an irony attached to the treatment of women as an object. The poems in question reveal a deprecating narrative that ends in ambiguity, as this extract from the first stanza in one of the later poems shows:

Asian women with uneven tempers and
 hairy armpits fight for rights of UK
 feminists picnic with teddies at No 10
 while poor permanent underclass barred

(angle)

The comical disparaging of women does not manifest in the 'long' series or the series of poems found in '1-50'. Instead, you will find in '1-50' that there is a discourse on the treatment of women.

Through writing poetry, I have been able to interrogate my role of women. I now recognise the disparaging depiction of women was necessary, as it enabled me to question why I disliked being a woman. There is a change from being hostile to discernment as seen in poem 32.

profile a beautiful woman
 like sweet wedding cake
 innocent intent
 sculpted but quite disturbing
 a defect in our language
 eyed me kindly

(‘1-50’: 32)

The American literary critic Elaine Showalter’s ‘Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness’ explains, “...every step that feminist criticism takes toward defining women’s writing is a step toward self-understanding.” (Showalter 1992: 263/264). I write about subjects that I find abhorrent. Through my writing I search for personal liberation and attempt to understand why it is difficult for women to achieve emancipation. Cixous says, “You must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing.” (Courtivon 1980: 250). With my perception altered, I question, which poets will continue to influence my writing.

In a world of multi-media the barriers that once confined a poet, and created taxonomic systems are less visible today than they were three or four decades ago. Of the future, Jerome Rothenberg writes, “Similarly, the boundaries between the arts have been dissolving, opening an age of blended media (“intermedia”) and hybrid forms of poetry and art.” (Rothenberg 1995: 10). As the liberation of verse continues, the ownership of words becomes corporeal as Perloff explains: “It is a commonplace that in the world of digital discourse, of the Internet, e-mail, cell phone, and Facebook, communication has been radically transformed both temporally and spatially.” (Perloff 2012: 4). By forwarding an email, an amalgamation of text can be created, the origin soon dissipates – the identity of the initial sender disappears. In fact when the internet is used as a way of communication, there is no certainty that the identity of the communicator is who they say they are in terms of gender or colour. In the introduction to *DEAR WORLD & Everyone In It*, Nathan Hamilton speaking on behalf of the title he edits writes, “The Anthology thinks using Facebook and Twitter a lot also makes people more aware of text and self performance.” (Hamilton 2013: 26). As Hamilton explains, neuroscience tells us the act of interacting with language or the reading of a text causes changes in the brain: “An art that creates new links between words, disrupts old links, reworks ideas, dismantles clichés, or received histories, or highlights latent biases in language.” (Hamilton 2013: 30). Although this anthology published more female poets than male poets, Hamilton inadvertently reminds us of the ‘latent biases in language’. In other words, unless there is a radical upheaval with the language we use, women will always be reminded of the genesis of language. Ann

Rosalind Jones succinctly writes: “Symbolic discourse (language in various contexts) is another means through which man objectifies the world, reduces it to his terms, speaks in place of everything and everyone else—including women.” (Showalter 1992: 362).

Chapter 2

‘Even in Russia, women are still very much women’ (Beauvoir 2011 : 3)

There are many contributing factors as to why I have an affinity with male writers. Cultural critic Cora Kaplan says, “Do men and women in patriarchal societies have different relationships to the language they speak and write?” (Cameron 1999: 55). Kaplan admits that the essay “Language and Gender” had grown from a body of work that had commenced in 1975. However, eleven years after its inception she expressed that the problems for women working within a formal symbolic language were still central: “Through the acquisition of language we become human and social beings: the words we speak situate us in our gender and our class. Through language we come to know who we are.” (Cameron 1992: 56). Although Kaplan’s research is almost thirty years old, the linguistic gender differences between women and men continue to be scrutinised. Jennifer Coates, a professor of linguistics and author of *Women, Men and Language* in the opening sentence of her essay ‘Language and Gender’ writes, “Do women and men talk differently?” (Coates 2004: 3). Coates explains that even though Robin Lakoff’s *Language and Woman’s Place* in 1975 was received with disapproving comments, it is seen as the foundation for sociolinguistics and gender: “its significance cannot be underestimated as it galvanised linguists all over the world into research into the uncharted territory of women’s talk.” (Coates 2004: 5). Coates speaks of different approaches to debating gendered language, she argues the binary distinction man-woman oversimplifies one’s thinking: “male and female speakers differ in many ways, but there are also many areas of overlap.” (Coates 2004: 217). So how do we use language differently to men?

According to Lakoff, because a mother is the dominant person in a child’s life, up to the age of five both boys and girls learn ‘women’s language’. This soon changes, by the age of ten they are split into same sex peer groups. Boys are able to continue with their learned ‘rough talk’, language that little girls are discouraged from using: “But it seems that what has happened is that the boys have unlearned their original form of expression and adopted new forms of expression, while the girls retain their old ways of speech.” (Cameron 1989: 243). Coates argues that further studies by William O’Barr and Bowman Atkins (1980 O’Barr and Atkins cited in Coates 2004 p.109) describe Lakoff’s theory of ‘Women’s Language’ as

inaccurate. Instead they rename what is associated with 'women's speech' as powerless language: "They argue that powerless language has been confused with women's language because, in societies like ours, women are less powerful than men...this is a result of their position in society rather than of their gender." (Coates 2004: 109).

Margaret Whitford, a prominent author on French feminism, a philosopher, linguist and psychoanalyst, in the introduction to *The Irigaray Reader* says "The use of the first-person pronoun, 'I', by women, does not necessarily indicate a feminine identity." (Whitford: 1995 4). Whitford expresses that men are more likely than women to take up a subject position in language, whilst women tend not to self represent. In her essay "An other space: a future for feminism?" Cultural critic Jane Moore explains: "Style is, among other things, a matter of inscribing the 'I' in writing: the politics of style, therefore, are the politics of gender also." (Armstrong 1992: 70). Michael Haslam knows about the politics of style when in his essay "The Subject of Poets" in *Poets on Writing*, he explains how he uses illusion to avoid getting embroiled in the politics of language: "I say 'it' when perhaps I mean 'I'. I pretend to be a modernist, and to have a tradition, and some company looking from my perspective." (Riley 1992: 73).

Even though this area of research looks at the difference in language used by women and men, it should not be overlooked that men continue to hold the position of power. In her introduction to *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir explains, "He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the other." (Beauvoir 2011: 6). Beauvoir argues that women have been compelled to assume the status of the other: "If woman discovers herself as the inessential, and never turns into the essential, it is because she does not bring about the transformation herself." (Beauvoir 2011: 8). Whilst men hold the position of power, it has to be considered that women are still viewed as the 'other'; in this regard there is a notion that De Beauvoir continues to be relevant today.

When Virginia Woolf analysed an array of texts written by women, she highlighted technical difficulties with the language. Woolf noted that the language did not fit women. In other words she believed the complexities in the make-up of language, and the form of a sentence did not fit the way women think. Woolf declared that women had to adapt and alter a sentence without losing sight of their initial intention. In her essay 'Women and Fiction' in *The Feminist Critique of*

Language, she writes, “It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman’s use.” (Cameron 1999: 50). Woolf asserted that women had developed their own style of writing which she described as the ‘female sentence’. She claimed that women had a desire to write in order to expose their ordeal: “Women are beginning to explore their own sex, to write of women as women have never been written before” (Cameron 1999: 51).

In her essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, from *New French Feminisms*, Helen Cixous, French philosopher and literary critic coined the term ‘*Écriture Feminine*’. ‘*Écriture Feminine*’ is a practice of writing, ‘in the feminine’ or ‘of the feminine’. Concerned with the use of rhythm and syntax, the term insinuates that this discipline of writing is practised by women. In ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, Cixous writes, “There has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity; exceptions so rare.” (Courtivron 1980: 248). However since it is a discipline of writing that is also based on feelings and experiences, there are indeed male writers whose work falls into this category and are therefore described as writing in the feminine. Cixous explains in ‘Sortie’, also published in *New French Feminism*, “For there are men who do not repress their femininity, women who more or less forcibly inscribe their masculinity.” (Courtivron 1980: 93). The American critic and editor of *The New Feminist Criticism*, Elaine Showalter, in the introductory essay writes: “L’écriture Feminine is not necessarily writing by women; it is an avant-garde writing style like that of Joyce, Bataille, Artaud, Mallarme or Lautreamont.” (Showalter 1992: 9). Radical feminist Cixous believed a link existed between *écriture feminine* and the female body. She pleaded that women should write and not hold back: “...let nothing stop you: not man: not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives.” (Courtivron 1980: 247). Both Woolf and Cixous compare the praxis to bisexuality. Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*, writes, “Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, anymore than a mind that is purely feminine.” (Woolf 2002: 128). Whilst Cixous explains: “...that writing is bisexual, hence neuter, which again does away with differentiation.” (Courtivron 1980; 253/254). Throughout ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, Cixous refers to the Lacanian theory that the phallus is the symbol of gender for which language is organised: “It is by writing from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is

reserved in and by the symbolic.” (Courtivron 1980: 251). “The Laugh of the Medusa” is viewed as more poetics than politics, however, with a clear manifesto; Cixous wanted to transform the rules of grammar. Incorporated in her ideas, was that women should have a language of their own: “To explode it, turn it around and seize it; to make it hers, containing it...to invent for herself a language to get inside of.” (Courtivron 1980: 257). Nonetheless, this view was not shared by all French feminists. Luce Irigaray, the French psychoanalyst and linguist, in ‘Linguistic Sexes and Gender’ – *The Feminist Critique of Language* writes “We would be taking a huge step backward if we abolished grammatical gender, a step our civilization can ill afford.” (Cameron 1992: 119).

Sara Mills, a Professor of Linguistics at Sheffield Hallam and author of ‘The Gendered Sentence’, observes in her essay that Woolf, Cixous and Irigaray were of the opinion that women’s writing is different to men’s. Mills notes that Julia Kristeva, philosopher and psychoanalyst opposed the opinions of Cixous and Irigaray. In fact Kristeva rejected *écriture féminine*, instead preferring to link women’s writing to the semiotic. She theorized the distinction between mind and body, which she referred to as the pre-linguistic stage of development. ‘The semiotic’ is connected with rhythms, tones and movement. Kristeva believed women had privileged access. Essentially her theory is that the ‘semiotic’ gives way to the ‘symbolic’ as Mills explains: “The semiotic is associated with the pre-Oedipal stage of unity with the mother, and is repressed into the unconscious on entering the symbolic order of the Father, the Law. (Cameron 1999: 69).

It is therefore viewed as a contradiction when Kristeva uses male writers, Celine, Mallarme and Lautreamont in her studies of the semiotic. Of Kristeva’s actions, Mills says “Perhaps we can understand this when she suggests this type of writing is available to all speaking subjects prepared to take on bisexuality.” (Cameron 1999: 69). Kristeva infers that all women and men have a certain amount of bisexuality. Mills declares that Woolf, Cixous and Irigaray asserted the same notion, she continues, “...[whilst] being unable to ignore the fact that men have written in this experimental fashion, and had in fact been more renowned for this type of writing than women.” (Cameron 1999: 70). In other words Mills argues that men were writing in a non linear fashion long before the inception of ‘the women’s sentence’ or ‘*écriture féminine*’.

Kristeva, like Cixous and Irigaray worked within the Lacanian framework, it is therefore surprising that Kristeva was averse to *écriture féminine*. She believed that it undermined the linguistic and the syntactical conventions of western narrative; in fact she maintained that the practice opposed the symbolic order. Cixous had a firm belief that language as it is used is patriarchal, a view that is shared by poet Adrienne Rich. In “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children” you can sense Rich’s frustration when she writes, ‘knowledge of the oppressor / this is the oppressor’s language / yet I need it to talk to you.’ (Gelpi 1975: 41).

In ‘Women’s Time’ published in *New Maladies of the Soul* Kristeva writes: “The ‘second phase’ women, who are primarily interested in the specificity of feminine psychology and its symbolic manifestations, seek a language for their corporeal and intersubjective experiences, which have been silenced by the cultures of the past.” (Kristeva 1995: 208). Mills assessed the views of Woolf and the French feminists then writes: “It is possible to see that all of them begin with a position of stating that female writing is radically different from male writing in terms of linguistic structure and content.” (Cameron 1999: 70). Mills concludes that the feminists neither define nor give examples of the male sentence.

Language as a discourse and the difference of its use by women and men continues to be controversial and has instigated a succession of debates. Without the polemics created by women like Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva and other radical feminists, where would women be today? It has to be considered how female poets in the last three decades have been transformed from a position of being excluded, even silenced from small press publications, to a position of producing the kind of experimental and innovative poetry that we have become accustomed to. Elaine Showalter, literary critic and feminist writer is accurate when in her review essay “Literary Criticism” in *Signs* writes: “Until women became their own publishers and editors, they had no alternative to compliance.” (Stimpson 1975: 439). She explains the situation changed in the 1970’s with the appearance of: “woman-controlled publishing houses and collectives.” (Stimpson 1975: 439). The changes enabled women to have a voice and self express on a platform even though there were invisible boundaries, a position that is slightly altered today.

When Susan Rudy visited ‘SAY Parsley’, a sound and language installation by Caroline Bergvall and Ciaran Maher, she summed up her view of the installation by describing her experience as ‘being inside’ and ‘inhabiting a long poem’.

(Jacket.org, 2013). . In ‘Canon to the left of us Canon to the right of us’ from *Poetic Licence*, Perloff affirms: “the ‘poetic’ of our time, is to be found, not in the conventionally isolated lyric poem....but in texts not immediately recognizable as poetry.” (Perloff 1990: 18).

Caroline Bergvall’s cross media work is concerned with explorative performance, language, sound and space. Bergvall’s cross-disciplinary work includes poetry and installations that inhabit poems. This practice is replicated by other poets and is a platform from which contemporary poets are influenced. For example Holly Pester works in an experimental and cross genre medium. Pester also creates performance texts. An example can be found in her poem ‘Distance vision test – a play?’ The poem is published in *DEAR WORLD & EVERYONE IN IT*. (Hamilton 2013: 102) The phonetic play on words means the poem works best when read aloud.

In Bergvall’s *Goan Atom* (part 1), there is a recurrence of words similar to Gertrude Stein’s discipline when she wrote *Tender Buttons*. Of the three subjects chosen by Stein, the repetition in food is synonymous to Bergvall’s work. For example Steins repetition of the word stick and sticking, produces a monotonous yet visual style: “Stick stick call then, stick stick sticking, sticking with a chicken. Sticking with an extra succession, sticking in.” (Stein 2008: 32). The technique is replicated in ‘Objects’ and ‘Rooms’. Bergvall restates the words enter: Enter DOLLY / Entered enters / Enters entered. The repetition and breaking up of body parts in *Goan Atom* alludes to a lack of identity. Not just any identity, a female identity; Dolly has no shape or form so she does not belong, she is ‘other’. As this excerpt taken from *Goan Atom* shows:

Woo pops
er
body partson
to the flo
ring the morning
it’s never matt
ers what goes back
on W
here Dolly
Goodolly
in a
ny shape or form

(Jacket Magazine, 2013). Dolly is fragmented, an object with no identity. Bergvall's depiction of gender encompasses feminism. Her exploratory use of language forms new meanings and creates new relationships as she plays with meaning, for example, 'herl eggs' when the reader engages and takes ownership of the written words, the words take on new meaning thus creating a new signifier as seen in the example given below.

from the trees with
herl eggs up in the air
while herl
eggs down
non the ground

(Jacketmagazine: 2013).

Bergvall's Goan Atom highlights how a female poets' use of language can differ to that of a man.

To date, the majority of poets that influence my work are men. For this reason the decision was made to experiment and choose books written by female authors. I wanted to ascertain if my writing would produce different results, and to discover if my language as a consequence alters. Here are two representatives.

self style new
this fragile state
too tarnished to
illuminate
social trends in
second hand smoke
envoys of beauty
the politicised minority
& light

(long)

blood stained ghost
elevated & she
tossed trinkets to the crowd
pained with hardship
sparkling glimpse of faith
eating its own tail
a profusion of flowers lay
around early summer
the valley elites

('1-50' : 13)

Even though the first poem is collaged with text taken from a male author and the second from a female author, my methodology for writing remains unchanged. Through reading research material, I discovered a sexual identity that I now know is equal to other western women. I found that women were writing of their own experiences, even their inadequacies of being born a woman. The essays that were written by feminists resonated with my own exposure. It became clear that some ordeals women share regardless of ethnicity. This discovery has enabled a link through my body to my writing. Cixous implores women to write through their body: “Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.” (Courtivron 1980: 2450). The significance of the body in relation to the self is commonly associated with the work of the French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In *Phenomenology Of Perception* he writes, “It was always observed that the gesture of speech transfigure the body... [It] is the body that shows, that speaks.” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 203).

Even though as a woman I am able to identify with other western female writers, the experiences we each gain and our diversities alter our view. In “Women-Amongst-Themselves: Creating a Woman to Woman Sociality” Irigaray asserts, “Two or more women who meet therefore look for the secret of their identity in one another.” (Whitford 1995: 192). As a female writer, my experience will be altered by the colour of my skin and because of the class into which I was born. Although we cannot deny both black and white women have shared experiences, intersectionality determines that white female feminism cannot wholly reflect my own experience. Toril Moi, a Professor of literature and philosophy, author of *Sexual/Textual Politics*, in ‘Women Writing And Writing About Women’ refers to three essays⁴ that she believes have shaped women’s relationship with their writing and says, “It is in other words society not biology that shapes women’s different literary perception of the world”. (Moi 2002: 52). Moi’s view is corroborated by the poet and philosopher Denise Riley. In ‘Bodies, Identities, Feminism’ published in *Am I that Name?* Riley asserts that feminism is unlikely to unravel and unify women’s experience: “But it is virtually impossible for feminism to unpick

⁴ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*. Elaine Showalter, ‘A Literature of Their Own’. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

The poet and critic Veronica Forrest-Thomson's *Poetic Artifice*, an excerpt printed in *Poets on Writing*, asserts that a statement is changed once it is immersed in the world of poetic context. She writes 'Every reader of poetry knows that statements are changed by their insertion into the poem' (Riley 1992: 222). In other words, the meaning of the text is not owned by the writer. Roland Barthes argues that the multiplicity of text is focused on the reader. In 'The Death of the Author' he writes, "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." (Barthes 1977: 148). This notion is corroborated by Helen Cixous in 'The Last Painting or the Portrait of God' in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*. She writes: "I am the awkward sorceress of the invisible: my sorcery is powerless to evoke, without the help of your sorcery. Everything I evoke depends on you, depends on your trust, on your faith." (Jenson 1991: 107). My intention as a writer is to intervene in the text, to give form and facilitate the content, in other words the socio-political themes for which I am passionate, but without the reader's collaboration it would all be lost. Robert Sheppard crystallized the theory in *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry*. Sheppard articulates that the writer is both present and absent: "once the poem is read the only agent in or around the text is the reader." (Sheppard 2011: 7).

In 'An other space: a future for feminism?' Jane Moore writes, "Feminists have always written from an other position and from the position of the other." (Armstrong 1992: 65). The position of the 'other' is systematically applied to feminists and other minority groups. There are other derogatory terms like 'sub culture' that are openly used to describe feminists and minority groups. In 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', Showalter says "All are struggling to find terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority" (Showalter 1992: 249). This inferior position for feminists and 'other' minority groups is governed by the symbolic order.

Chapter 3

So why is there a lack of black poets writing in the linguistically innovative area of poetry in a country that expatiates cultural diversity? By aligning my vision as a poet to other black female poets like Valerie Bloom, Amryl Johnson and Grace Nichols, my aim is to see if similarities can be found, either in the poems that we write, or in our identity. In order to understand the wedge that currently exists between black poets and innovative poetry, it is imperative to probe into the brief history of black British poets. The 1970s saw just a few black poets welcomed into the fold of avant-garde writers; it is essential to understand why after four decades the status quo has remained unchanged.

By the late seventies, the Caribbean Diaspora had created enough writers to produce the *Bluefoot Traveller*, an anthology of poems by West Indian poets. With a multiplicity of styles, the poems express feelings of self adjustment and of isolation. Poet and editor of the *Bluefoot Traveller*, James Berry explained in his introduction, that the poets were responding to life in British society: “They reflect their settled and unsettled condition, their insecurity and, also, an underlying explosiveness.” (Berry 1976: 9). The open form poems written by E.A Markham, James Berry and G.P.C Durrante revealed an avant-garde style of writing that shows vigour and optimism.

An Old Thought For A New Couple

She is not sure
if her failure
was important.

Death strikes
at his eyes again.
He puts on his glasses

and her smile returns.

(Berry 1976: 30). I have included the whole poem by E.A. Markham because of the uncertainty that the poem produces. The first stanza slips from present to past tense in the same sentence. There is ambiguity as the second stanza ends, and the reader is left to decide the ownership of the smile.

Of the twelve poets published in the *Bluefoot Traveller*, not one of the poets is a woman. Black female poets in North America suffered the same kind of

injustice. They were incensed by the notion of having black men as their third oppressor. Audre Lorde, a black female writer and civil rights activist, in her essay 'My Words Will Be There' from *Black Women Writers 1950-1980* says, "As black people, we cannot begin our dialogue by denying the oppressive nature of *male privilege*. And if Black males choose to assume that privilege....then we cannot ignore black male oppression." (Evans 1985: 267).

There was a slight improvement for black female poets when *The New British Poetry* was published. Of the twenty two black poets featured in the anthology, six were black women. Fred D'Aguiar's introduction to 'Black British Poetry' in *The New British Poetry*, asserts that it is difficult to marginalize a poet on the bases of racial origin or themes: "This is perhaps due to a shared commitment to a notion of craft, to being engaged in an art form which cuts across race and class." (Allnutt 1988: 3). D'Aguiar is indubitably right in what he says however his sentiment would not have worked in practice. This idea may have been too ambitious for a black writer when, at the same time middle class white women were struggling to get their voices heard. D'Aguiar tempers dream with rationale when he continues: "However, the realities of power, of social and economic inequality, do not disappear simply because a poet makes a bid for the imagination over and above group or class identity." (Allnutt 1988: 3). When you look at the four groups of poets published in *The New British Poetry* they highlight the proportion of contemporary black poets whose work was deemed relevant enough to be published in the same book as radical and at that time well revered poets like Denise Riley, Eric Mottram, Tom Raworth, Geraldine Monk and Robert Sheppard. However it should not be overlooked that the black poets were grouped together. For instance, in part II, which is the feminist part of the collection, there are no poems by black women. The poet Gillian Allnutt explains in her introduction to that section: "I 'gave away' the black and 'experimental' poets I would have included to other sections." (Allnutt 1988: 78). Allnutt articulates that the decision was made to ensure there were as many female poets as possible in the anthology.

There are many possible contributing factors why black women's writing is viewed as inessential. Black and white women in the UK and North America demanded a feminist criticism. Both groups of women were viewed as being different, in other words not the same as men, not only in terms of sexuality but as already pointed out in this thesis, their use of language. But how did the women

view each other? Toril Moi in 'Critical Reflections' writes "It is the content of her work that makes the lesbian critic's study different, not her method. Instead of focusing on 'women' in literature, the lesbian critic focuses on 'lesbian women', as the black feminist critic will focus on 'black women' in literature." (Moi 2002:85). Moi asserts that feminist criticism whether Anglo-American, black or lesbian presents the same methodological and theoretical problems. Substantiated in her introductory essay to *The New Feminist Criticism*, Elaine Showalter further emphasizes the difference between the two groups of women when she writes: "Do black women writers and lesbian writers have their own literary traditions which mainstream feminist criticism has neglected or suppressed?" (Showalter 1992: 12). By placing black women and lesbian writers in the same sentence, Showalter alludes that these women are outside of the white middle class tradition, in other words deviant. Barbara Smith's essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" which was published in *The New Feminist Criticism*, edited by Showalter, concurs this view: "All segments of the literary world—whether establishment, progressive, Black, female or lesbian—do not know, or at least act as if they do not know, that Black women writers and Black lesbian writers exist." (Showalter 1992: 168). Deborah McDowell, the American professor of literary studies and author of 'New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism' articulated a need to understand how much of black feminist criticism intersected with white feminist criticism. McDowell explains that white female scholars had been challenged to consider black female writers: "but will that require white women to use a different set of critical tools when studying black women writers?" (Showalter 1992: 191). It is clear the obstacles that existed when middle class white men were unable to critique the work of middle class white women, manifested when the same middle class white women professed they were unable to critique the work of black women. It was, however, the middle class white women whose voices were being heard. McDowell continued: "The critical community has not favoured Black women writers." (Showalter 1992 : 187). Of course the problem was not new; the struggle for black women to have their work recognised and understood was evident fifty years earlier.

The Harlem Renaissance, also referred to as 'The New Negro Movement', was recognised as having a militant edge. Formed in the 1920's the movement consisted of a group of black intellectuals and artists whose aim was to raise the profile of black afro-Americans; their aim was to assimilate with their white peers. Zora Neal

Hurston, one of the prominent women in the movement was amongst the first black scholars to research black folklore. Hurston travelled around the south engaged in extensive anthropological research on the oral cultures of African Americans, which included songs, dance, tales and a selection of sayings. She celebrated black culture at a time when most black scholars tried hard to deny or forget its existence. Henry Louis Gates wrote in the afterword for Hurston's biography *Dust Tracks on a Road*: "It is clear, however, that the loving, diverse, and enthusiastic responses that Hurston's work engenders today were not shared by several of her influential black male contemporaries." (Hurston 2006: 291). Embarrassed by their history, the intellectuals were keen to show assimilation. Hurston repudiated her peers and preserved an essential account of black American History. She established an identifiable literary tradition that is found in other black American writers, as explained by Smith, "... [To] incorporate the traditional Black female activities of rootworking, herbal medicine, conjure, and midwifery into the fabric of their stories is no mere coincidence." (Showalter 1992: 174). On the other side of the Atlantic, France in the 1930's saw a new movement that drew inspiration from the Harlem Renaissance. The term 'Negritude' was coined by francophone poet Aime Cesaire. Unlike their American friends, Negritude opposed French assimilation policies. In fact their aim was to promote the richness of African cultural identity. As with the Harlem Renaissance, the members of Negritude were literary intellectuals.

There is a variation in the language used by black British poets. Of the six black female poets published in *The New British Poetry*, Jackie Kay was the only poet who did not use patois or a West Indian dialect. Amryl Johnson submitted two poems. The first poem was written in Standard English.

The Identikit

I have broken step and faith
with the agony of a smile
which fits

On a street in Roseau
the laugh
a gesture
Without a second thought
I claimed them

(Allnutt 1988: 46). In 'The Identikit' Johnson seamlessly moves around the Caribbean, as though trying to find a place to call home. Throughout the poem, she

switches from the position of 'I' to a neutral composite when she writes: 'the laugh / a gesture'. Johnson's second poem published in *The New British Poetry* is, for the main part, written in Standard English; however, she includes a conversation that is written in a West Indian dialect. Denise de Caires Narain, author of *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: making style*, reviewed works by black female poets including Valerie Bloom and Amryl Johnson. She describes Johnson as the least likely to be involved with writing in Creole or performative poetry: "In her sustained use of Creole, she does demonstrate a commitment and facility to write and perform 'as a Caribbean woman', that is, if one accepts Creole as the definitive marker of Caribbean authenticity." (DeCaires 2001: 141). Johnson's unease writing Creole is articulated in her essay 'Coming out of Limbo' published in Susan Sellers *Delighting the Heart: A notebook by Women Writers*: "The frustration I felt was coupled with a strange sense of guilt and shame. Neither on paper nor verbally did I sound like a woman from the Caribbean. Where did I belong? Who was I?" (Sellers 1989: 202). Of all the poems published by black women in *The New British Poetry*, the above poem by Johnson is the only one that I can identify with. There are some similarities to be found and a voice that could intertwine with c-weed. Johnson appears to struggle with identity. It is a feeling I understand and one that often plagues, as I straddle two cultures and sometimes feel unwelcome in either. The first extract is taken from one of Johnson's earlier poems.

MISSIONARY

So you left me
lame
in your thoughts
and rearranged
trodden
beneath your morality
Before you reach the edge
turn once

(Sellers 1989: 202).

in a lugubrious moonlight
lost her power of control
charm smile and stylish suits
blotched with dirt and pretence
eyes large and absorbent
a clock ticks

(‘1-50’ : 20).

Although you sense vulnerability, Johnson reveals her skill as a poet. There is indeterminacy in ‘lame’, is the subject lame, or are the thoughts lame? In ‘Coming out of Limbo’ Johnson writes: “Poems of that period may have reflected the conflict but still seemed reluctant to hone—in on anything too specific.” (Sellers 1898: 202). I find Johnson’s critique of her earlier work harsh and unjustified.

The decision by poets to submit their work written in patois to *The New British Poetry* was perfectly acceptable because the layout of the anthology demonstrates the diversity of poets writing in the UK. Nonetheless, the long term impediment for the black female poet’s decision to write in West Indian dialect may have led to exclusion from many other anthologies. In fact, publishers with a wider readership not familiar with the vernacular may have rejected the poems on the basis that they appear difficult to decipher and are therefore written for a minority of readers. Fortunate poets like Nichols and Johnson were published through Virago books. When Virago was set up 40 years ago, the publisher’s ethos was to promote the work of women who otherwise may have been ignored. They were one of the new era publishing houses promoting the work of women who were marginalised by race, class or sexuality. Their intention was to publish feminist writing that would probe and interpret women’s experience, Virago as did Paladin, published poetry that was written in a West Indian dialect.

Lissen man, dis shet yuh mout yah
Nobody noh hurry mi,
Mi haffe meck sure mi get good tings
For mi wuk too hard fimi two quatty.

(Allnutt 1988: 15). Taken from Valerie Bloom’s ‘Longsight Market’ these lines demonstrate how much the reader has to work in order to connect with the words on the page and then draw meaning from the poem. DeCaires says, “Louise Bennett’s exclusive use of Creole in her poetry has been invaluable in creating a climate in which Creole language (and culture) is perceived as creative and complex, rather than as an inferior side kick to Standard English.” (DeCaires 2001: 105). The West Indian vernacular is spoken but not universally written. For the poets writing in dialect, they exercised skill and confidence. Johnson describes the trouble she encountered trying to write Creole, in ‘Coming out of Limbo’: “I did not feel confident, sure enough to attempt Creole in my writing.” (Sellers 1989: 202). With

no right or wrong way of converting Standard English to a written West Indian dialect, the angst faced by Johnson may have been shared by other poets attempting to write in Creole/patois. Radical poet Linton Kwesi Johnson fuses patois with Standard English; his poems are engaging and ultimately rewarding for the reader regardless of race or cultural background as demonstrated in the following excerpt.

Reggae fi Dada

di lan is like a rack
slowly shattahrin to san
sinkin in a sea of calamity
where fear breeds shadows
dat lurk in di daak
where people fraid fi waak
fraid fi tink fraid fi taak
where di present is haunted by di paas

di pain nite an day
di stench of decay
di glaring sights
di guarded affluence
di arrogant vices
cole eyes of kantemp
di mackin symbals of independence.

(Allnutt 1988: 50). The poem has rhythm; his use of alliteration enhances the flow as the reader moves from one line to the next. Kwesi Johnson provides a clear pictorial image as he draws you into the political turmoil on the Island. His meandering in and out of the West Indian dialect allows access to the poem.

Bloom and the other black female poets' use of West Indian dialect could be seen as a political statement. It has to be considered that the patriarchal system rendered them powerless and unable to alter their position. With no voice in the political arena they were silenced. By writing it their West Indian dialect, it could be viewed that Bloom and the other black female writers were asserting their cultural identity. Creole or West Indian dialect is often viewed as a language of excess. DeCaires argues, "But it might also be read, more positively in line with the French Feminist notion of excess, or plenitude in which the 'chaos' associated with woman's voice and body signals transgressively multiple possibilities for textual empowerment." (DeCaires 2002: 90). The only way for black female poets to have a voice and to reflect the socio-economic structure that they live in is to articulate in their own vernacular. Sonia Sanchez is a black American poet and author of

'Ruminations / Reflections' an essay published in *Black Women Writers 1950-1980*. She believes that a poet is the creator of social values: "Art no matter what its intention reacts to or reflects the culture it springs from." (Evans 1984: 415). The position for black women in Britain at that time mirrored the position of black American women. In other words they too were burdened by their position and marginalised in the civil rights movement. In her essay 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism', the feminist poet Barbara Smith writes, "Black women writers manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social and economic experience they have been obliged to share." (Showalter 1992: 174).

The latest collection by black poets demonstrates the shift in black female and male writers. *Red* is an anthology of contemporary black poetry edited in 2010 by Kwame Dawes. Each poet was encouraged to write about or engage with the word 'red'. Of the 80 poets published in the anthology, 45 of the poets are women. The decision to include more women in the anthology was not influenced by the book's editor being female. Four decades after the publication of the *Blue Foot Traveller* where women were completely absent from its publication, there are more black female poets published in *Red*. Throughout the anthology there is a distinct lack of West Indian dialect, patois or creole used by the poets. Included in the publication is a political poem by Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Five nights of bleeding' where his use of patois is limited: 'an the rebels them start a fighting / the yout them jus turn wild'. (Dawes 2010: 104). One of the poems that stand out is John Agard's sonnet:

SONNET #13

This red elixir of a waterfall
over rock of bone. Let's agree to call
it Blood. Yes, Blood. One syllable will do
for that river that runs in the veins of all
and washes over tradition and taboo.

They say the first drop spilled was all it took
to begin the first rose that can pierce thornwise
and seize the heart of passion's hook and crook.
Blood that crowns the sorrow of paradise
and scatter its petals of forgiveness.

See how it leaves its print on history's purest page.
This moon-blessed companion of life and death.

This wine that clings to a common vine of flesh.
See how it stains your cloth of joy as well as rage.

(Dawes 2010: 31). Agard's poem exhibits the traditional three stage sonnet provides an image and then a change of thought. As with other poems found in the anthology the context is political. With so few poets writing in patois or Creole, it has to be considered if assimilation has led to homogeneity or could it be that educated black writers would prefer to neglect a vernacular that is rich in culture?

Thirty years after the publication of *The New British Poetry*, it is relevant to ascertain if the dichotomy between black female poets and white female poets still exists. In other words has there been an acculturation which has altered the practice of black female poets. Grace Nichols has written of her experiences in Guyana, and of the angst faced adapting to life in the UK. Nichols published many collections over several decades. In choosing Nichols, my aim through her poetry is to consider how her practice as a writer has evolved. At first I will look at her earlier work, and then I will compare Nichols' later poems to my own to see if there is a correlation between our works. The following excerpt is taken from Nichols' 'Caribbean Woman Prayer' published in *The New British Poetry*.

Oh Lord
you know we is ah people
of a proud and generous heart
an how it shame us bad
dat we kyant welcome friend or stranger
when eat time come around
You know it not we nature
to behave like yard fowl

You know dat is de politics
an de times
an de tricks
dat has reduced we to dis

(Allnutt 1988: 65). Nichols writes of her exposure and the differences found when she moved from Guyana to the UK. Her use of 'we' emphasises that she is speaking for a collective. As she slips in and out of Creole, Nichols juxtaposes words taken from her Guyanian dialect with Standard English words; this helps the reader to find meaning in the poem. Nichols paints a political picture of how she views their lives in the UK.

Published by Virago, Nichol's *Fat Black Woman's Poems* is a collection that flits between her life in Guyana and England. The poems dart between being humorous and political. In her short series 'Sugar Cane' from the above title, Nichol's simple way with words is apparent as she uses the cane as a metaphor:

pain-
fully
he
comes
to learn
the
truth
about
himself
the
crimes
committed
in
his
name

(Nichols 1994: 58). The poems are light hearted and humorous, as in her previous poems, the depiction of a life through Nichols' eyes make them a pleasure to read. I was, however, unable to find one with which I could identify. In 2009 Bloodaxe published a collection of Nichols' poems; *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* is a sequence developed after Nichols' residency at the Tate Gallery. What started as a single poem inspired by Picasso's muse Dora Maar, turned into a sequence of poems that encompassed a part of the surrealist movement. Nichols titled the sequence 'Weeping Woman' however the individual poems are numbered from 1-20. Analysing the poems, I tried to find a link that would connect Nichols style of writing to that of my own.

16
My camera my third-eye
my Guernica witness –
turn my negatives into positives.
my floating foetuses into life.

17
I am no longer framed
imprisoned in that cocoon
that winds up
the silk of my spirit

(Nichols 2010: 17).

fiddling peer in plastic office
process flawed a dazed
lunatic raised her skirt
holding dead flowers &

(‘angle’)

freak shows under bright lights
warm chestnut colours of
an embalmed corpse
and I myself

(‘1-50’: 5).

Looking at the above extracts from Nichols’ poems and from that of my own, there is no obvious connection between our work and our identity. In fact I have beguiled myself into thinking that there might be. Nichols flits between Guyana, art and a biographical account of her life. As a poet she is well established; however, Nichols is not a linguistically innovative poet. This does not mean that Nichols’ experience as a female writer has not evolved enough to produce some shared experiences with white poets who are her peers.

My own journey into linguistically innovative poetry started as an undergraduate. Tom Raworth and Basil Bunting were names that I had not encountered in my occasional foray into poetry, likewise Audre Lorde and Denise Riley. Through access into academia, I was introduced to innovative poets who are not revered by the mainstream poetry scene. The above mentioned poets are not readily obtainable in schools and are not known by the general public. It has to be considered, should the linguistically innovative poetry scene (Lips) be viewed as a class or even elitist area that can only be accessed through academia?

There are two areas that need to be considered when analysing the limited number of blacks who enter into academia. The first to be looked at is the black family structure. In her essay, ‘White woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood’ Hazel V. Carby says, “Black family structures are seen as being produced by less advanced economic systems and their extended kinship networks are assumed to be more oppressive to women.” (Baker 1996: 67). This

immediately places a child at a disadvantage. As a result of their status, the academic expectations are low therefore limited pressure is applied and information is denied. A child may find whilst at home, due to a lack of knowledge, opportunities are often overlooked. Research on race and higher education (PSI, 1998) has shown that class and gender repeatedly shape educational opportunities and its outcome.

It is clear that the cycle in these family circles become a self perpetuating problem, one that continues to exist because of poverty. The second reason is due to the demographic areas that are populated with black children from working class backgrounds. These neighbourhoods are described as low achieving and the children tend to be from what are deemed as low ability backgrounds. This amounts to an unsatisfactory percentage of black children achieving the necessary qualifications that allow entry to universities. If the child makes the grade, they have to overcome any feelings of inadequacy; they have to work hard to fit in. The percentage of black British children that make it to further education corroborates their perceived socioeconomic status. According to a recent Equality in Higher Education report, eight years to 2011 saw an increase from 4.4% (2003/2004) to 5.9% (2010/2011) of black students attending university. Although there is an improvement of black children entering higher education, it is negligible even though the progression is in the right direction. The study is a further determinant to the lack of black poets being exposed to, or writing in the linguistically innovative area of poetry. This situation could of course be improved if all main stream universities taught innovative poetry alongside creative writing. A further report (HESA, 2011/2012) tells us that 44% of lecturers in the UK are women. The same report highlights the total number of black academics in the UK is 1.6%.

In his introduction to the *Bluefoot Traveller*, James Berry articulates how he viewed the life of a black poet forty years ago: “Around him white people are still dominant, still in control. He hardly participates in the evolution of his society. Demands are not made of his talents.” (Berry 1976: 9). The words written by Berry appear to be a paradigm of a black poet today. Even so there are few exceptions; we find one in David S Marriott, an avant-garde poet. His cannon of work is evidence that black poets can also be innovative. Marriott’s first book of poetry *Incognegro* imparts a story of black history. The language in the first poem ‘The Ghost of Averages’ sets the tone for the rest of the collection: ‘hard work, / hard even for a

nigga, but not you'. (Marriott 2006 : 3). This explosive style is not replicated throughout however the politics of enslavement, loss and separation is concurrent throughout.

The 'Secret' of this Form Itself

what emerges is an unmistakable symmetry
driving their buses
their trains, wiping away
all the blood and foulness of their arses,
making tea with sugar seeing
the chains and mutilations
done by cultured men
framed for posterity
on the horizon of an idea

(Marriott 2006: 191).

Marriott's *On Black Men* is a study of how black men see themselves and each other. In the foreword, Marriott writes, "...because anger embodies what we both hate and fear about ourselves; it reenacts the script of a life withheld by self-loathing, a life utterly surprised and confounded by the request 'dare to dream': that is, dare to work over the cultural dream of black masculinity." (Marriott 2007: ix). This thesis has focused on the inequality inflicted on women by men, yet it is evident that inequality shows no boundaries.

The poetry anthology *Dear World & Everyone In It*, edited by Nathan Hamilton, does not distinguish between black, lesbian or feminist writers. This is a positive progression that enables the poet to speak through their work and eliminates the need to put labels on individuals or groups. The introduction relates to the writers as poets, Hamilton's only discrimination is when he berates 'old' poets. It has to be noted that when the blurb on each poet is read, a high percentage are listed as academics.

It should be taken into account that until there is an increase of black students going to university and black academics, there will be a limited number of black poets exposed to linguistically innovative poetry and experimental writing. Even so it should be considered that the majority of blacks attending universities in the UK are only the second, possibly the third generation attaining formal qualifications. Alice Walker author of *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* says, "Unless poetry has mystery, many meanings, and some ambiguities (necessary for mystery) I am not interested in it." (Walker 2005 : 257).

Conclusion

This thesis has enabled me to research and enhance my knowledge of linguistically innovative poetry. My first objective was to comprehend why Tom Raworth and Sean Bonney influenced my work to such an extent. I started by comparing poems written by Raworth and Bonney with my own work. On reflection it is the politicised text of Raworth's 'West Wind' and Bonney's *The Commons* that caught my attention. My analysis presented three poets writing political commentary with indistinguishable form, the content is separated by the decades of which they portray. Through comparing Raworth's and Bonney's 14 line verse, the study has improved my knowledge of the open verse sonnet. By turning to the work of female poets like Bernadette Mayer, Geraldine Monk and Susan Howe, I discovered a network of female poets who wrote of experiences that reflected my own. At this point I realized why a selection of the poems in the 'angle' series was disparaging towards women. This awareness provided a gendered identity. It was compulsory to reflect on the methodology I used when writing 'angle', 'long' and '1-50'. The study has made me reflect on my writing and accentuated the areas that need amelioration. As a result I have decided not to reduce the poems in '1-50' from 53 poems to 50, thus making the title ironic. The series lends itself to an ongoing study therefore I have enabled the natural flow instead of adhering to what will be a mechanical end. Even though this is not an apologia to my question, the process has established why Tom Raworth's *Collected Poems* (2003) remains a source from which I continue to draw influence.

Having read essays written by an array of feminists, the debate on language was the most prevalent. Virginia Woolf's notion of the 'female sentence' and Helen Cixous's essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' presented an alternative view of my writing. The feminist writers provided the answers to the repression that I felt as a woman. My intention was to discover if men and women in patriarchal societies have different relationships with the language they speak and write? From reading Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* published in (1975) and Jennifer Coates 'Language and Gender' from *Women Men and Language* (2004), the question however relevant today remains irrefutable. Throughout this process I discovered a renewed enthusiasm for the way in which language is used. By

comparing the writing style of Caroline Bergvall's 'Goan Atom 1' to Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (2008), there is a sense that the surrealist movement that influenced Stein remains a paradigm decades later. The research enabled me to interrogate the relationship I have with language and to understand the complexities that surround the acquisition of speech.

When I started this process my intention was to discover why there are so few black poets writing innovative or experimental poetry. My intention was to compare the work by black poets to avant-garde white poets. *The New British Poetry* (1988) has provided invaluable insight, it contains innovative poems by black writers, E A Markham and Amryl Johson and their white peers like Tom Raworth and Wendy Mulford. The research led me to discover a rich cultural history of black poets in the UK. They had propelled from the post colonial Diaspora. Indeed my exploration revealed a group of poets, both female and male whose poems had been written and published in patois or Creole. This discovery has encouraged me to embrace the vernacular of my ancestors. It has made me realize that through assimilation I have neglected my history. Denise DeCaires Narain's *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry* (2002) argues that Caribbean women's literature is invisible; I would suggest that the use of the West Indian dialect is invisible. Zora Neal Hurston went against black American intellectual's advice and wrote about black folklore. The black academics and intellectuals were embarrassed about their history. Even so, American history shows a long generation of black academics, a position that is not replicated in the UK. This study has shown that there are a number of black poets in the UK as exhibited in the anthology *Red* (2010) however the poems tend not to be linguistically innovative or experimental. It appears that as the percentage of black students attending university increases, so too will the levels of linguistically innovative poets.

This research has made me realize that it is important to look back at history before moving forward.

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