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*The Egg in the Triangle:*  
**Poetics of Motherhood,  
Sexuality, and Place.**

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This thesis was submitted to **Swansea University** in fulfilment of the requirements for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing.**

Swansea University, 2023.

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## ABSTRACT

*The Egg in the Triangle* presents three poetry collections: *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker*, which explore the subject intersections of motherhood, sexuality, and place. Concepts derived from matricentric feminism and liminality support the framework of this exegesis. I draw on creative writing – including poetry, prose poetry and memoir – from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century to explicate my three main study themes and poetry collections. A theoretical model, developed within the exegesis, entitled, ‘*The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood*’, is demonstrated. Derived from transformative and diametric aspects of maternal epistemology, the model features and explores ‘egg space’. As vital academic territory, ‘egg space’ focuses on creative interplay among texts’ oppositional forces. The model foregrounded in this exegesis can be used as a template to aid decision-making and analysis in creative writing praxis. By using the model with new subject trios, creative writers are invited to evolve ideas and interests, whilst using ‘egg space’ as a site to challenge and expand theories surrounding binary relationships. I show how content and form in poetry are examined using the model interchangeably to highlight tripartite perspectives and literary negotiations of in-between or liminal spaces. The creative and critical work undertaken in this PhD aims to impact wider creative, social, academic, and cultural projects interested in contemporary experiences and expressions of mothering, single mothering, feminism, survivor-narratives, states and places of transition or transformation, domestic abuse, birth trauma, gender inequality, romance, sexual behaviour, and sexual attitudes in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **DECLARATIONS AND STATEMENTS**

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Guinevere Clark

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> August 2023

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes and explicit references. A 'works cited' reference list and an 'additional resources' bibliography is appended.

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The University's ethical procedures have been followed and, where appropriate, that ethical approval has been granted.

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**I dedicate my PhD – *The Egg in the Triangle: Poetics of Motherhood, Sexuality, and Place* – to my mother Josephine Verne Clark, who died peacefully in April 2023. RIP *Ma* on ‘The Other Sands’ of your 1961 poem. Thank you for always believing in the power of poetry.**

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## **Poetry: The Egg in the Triangle**

# **Gift of Venus**

## **Date at Danderi**

With wine and a clamour,  
he whistled in through the valley,  
dogs rocked, gate unlocked.

Kiss – dart, like it happened before  
it happened. And he was suddenly  
forking my bounty with a nod.

Eggs yearning in my pelvis, I'm his  
with this offering, ribbon un-fixed,  
an easy bolthole. Plates laid.

Dishes teeter to watch.  
Pan oil sunk to grimace.

## **Fertility**

In a cubicle,  
wanking you, for this sexless creation.  
Pictures of twins and triplets smile down  
from the clinic wall. Clouds racing,  
we hook over, a deathly gasp, threat  
of gain, stifled, hand back  
your teeming sample.

## Birthday

On blood's slip, he lifts you  
from his cut,  
into that first roaring bleat of life,

rolled from the storm,  
into a green harem – chattering  
over my split bowel.

Splayed for nights on a bed splatted  
red from another. I imagine  
that long worked placenta,  
my jittered liver, your stolen head.

Cannulas dig, drugs drip, flushes,  
sick, shit, morphine, codeine, voltarol,  
labetalol, magnesium, paracetamol.

*You know you can always have more babies,*  
said the midwife, untangling me –  
from a stained nightdress.

Thousands of your baby breaths pass  
down the sunless passage,  
until I'm taken, at last,

faded from creation to a nurse –  
like a mother at your fore.  
She lifts the incubator lid, in duty,  
presses you like marzipan  
to my chest.

Gift of Venus!

Stiffening to cry, I see your first  
frown of brow lines,  
flash of clouded eyes,  
that vast skinned skull,

the way of your face –  
that I'll rest and rest  
and rest upon.

To the button of my breast,  
your caterpillar spine twists,  
splinted arm – flapping slowly.

You curve. I curve.  
The circle is folding.  
I think I know you.

## Eclampsia and the Yellow Flowers

I pull a wand, from the shaved cracks  
of me, this toxicity. Not star-tipped  
or glittery,

this wand – glows with near-death,  
quivers with drugs, the oil  
and arch of conception blood.

There is no baby to keep,  
no cry to reach or swell to.

Legs numb – a Baubo woman,  
I vomit in the rift.  
Arrest calls, deflated  
mattresses, oxygen fixed.

A photo from the midwife's pocket –  
delivered to my table.  
Cheek to cheek, she whispers of him,  
a secret in dawn's lull.

The distance  
is

unspeakable.  
A new terrain of plastic veins  
between us.

Clinging to my split,  
I juggle sick bowls, until Daddy visits –  
in the order of the day. I'm combed,  
washed and called the wrong name.

Man – battling in my re-birth,  
mouth your drama to the sink!  
Your crown has truly slipped.



I only see you with shattered sight,  
do not want to smell your linger any longer.  
My ears are piqued to what I have hatched.

In that black collapse, my body turned magic.  
Demeter vision now, I have the facts.

With this wand – hung from the tremor  
of my finger, I untie us with one hook.

Let the lies loosen, transmuted,  
oozing like blood, softening  
these stiff sheets. I wait

for my flesh – lined up in the trembling gills  
of the hospital, reaching for this breast.  
I have enough to do!

*Go*, nuzzle up to those kiosk flowers,  
cold-nosed narcissist. Be my frog!

Take that bouquet away,  
toss it in our patio pond to rot!

I'll see slivers of sunken petals,  
like tadpoles brooding on eternal mud  
as you usher me back,  
without a look.

*Well, there's no room for flowers here,*  
*anyway*, my nurse spoke up,

the double-door of the unit swinging  
your scent – like a doppelgänger back  
to my bed. And I nod, I grin and I wretch.

**Dear Blood**

I am broken without you! I will only write to you once, blood, so listen. I know you know my body, now unify me. Tell me what works in a thump-gasp. Bring my secrets, palpating passions, muscly orgasms, the love-sick breath skips, all these antennas of blood. Come with your electric matrix free. Empty your chambers, that complex chest, heaving with being, ruby flumes to light. Bring butterflies to my thighs, carpet drips, life from the hot clot. Yes, loll on your webbed bed but give me the weight of you. Open your lock. Feed me the first pulse, that cherry-drop of singular scent, every lick and sniff. Chance it. I can hear your answers dart, ushered on lust, jagged wound, furl of bitten lip, taste the serum rush, powder of the crust. Blood, on your blood map, saddled in iron for this vampiric world, blue snakes in coddled napes. Do not evade my eyes. I am running for you, with you, vermilion love, so do more than hide. Let's drink in my tunnels, take off skin from within. Centre emotion. Teach my soul's stint your red lexicon, replicate that steady propel to reflection. My placenta meant something, black-flecked and liminal. I know I am both individuals. So, jet me in poetry rosy, find us an enclave to roll into. Stamp me with your death-defying DNA, a century of love. I've tasted you and I wait for you, blood.

Yours,

*Mad Woman in the Attic*

– He called me, as He came  
with a red sweat to our room,  
to collect the food  
He'd not given me  
time to eat.

Hunched at the breast pump,  
watching our baby sleep – *mad woman  
in the attic*, jumping to change  
tiny nappies, fumbling limbs,  
on a wood-wormed changing stand.

Itched dry with claw lines, ordering  
'early baby' clothes with one hand,  
between the glitching wi-fi. *Mad  
woman in the attic*. White faced,

still dotted with the blood holes  
of drains and stitches, I reach  
to each milk whisper,  
rising from the Moses basket,

fold his baby bones,  
like armour over my shoulder,  
dare to walk the stairs.

## Supermarket Carpark

Struck by the wind, she fell back to earth,  
pulling her empty trolley with her.  
Nearly a century of life clung to my wrist  
as I faltered with the weight of her.

Our turquoise eyes matched,  
while we braced for a second try. *1,2,3,*  
in the bluster – a phoenix in tartan  
raised from the curb.

Like a mother, I craned to hug her.  
Shopping lists spiralled on the winds.  
She turned from the shop, hand cut.  
Blood flashing from her lips,

that as a girl she'd rubbed red  
with lipstick. The scent of morning sweat,  
a hint of each other, pressed on our jackets  
under a Capricorn sun, as we both limped off.

She sat in my spine all day, the curve  
of my neck, sting in sit bones. Her age,  
my aging, a tornado upon us. Whispers  
in the broad hips, darkness falling on our lips.

## The Piss Patch

I wouldn't have guessed it  
but he told me at tea, my lover  
told me he'd been pissing in the flowers,  
said he didn't want to wake me at dawn –  
pissing in the toilet.

A reasonable story, in parts.  
Maybe it was the morning smoke  
forcing him out the back, or  
a primal urge to imprint himself,  
mixing ash and piss –  
a quick unwitnessed desecration,  
starting the day with his prick.

My father planted those pansies,  
plucked out the weeds,  
on his replacement knees,  
landing a burst of colour at my door.

Now, dawn simmers,  
yellow-pink as the petal's tips.

I shudder at the wilt, a death  
patch of bleached stalks,  
thinking of all that my lover did  
but never did  
admit.

## Sanctuary

The door for the broken, is open,  
in estate, town, or wood. Swathes  
of cinnamon, incense, musk, feathers  
carefully fan above.

Rest in her wild prayer, weird jinx,  
supernatural heritage,  
in her womb-strong hammock,  
flung between the apple trees.

Feast from the black slats of her hearth –  
stuffed fruit spitting juice, honey-charred  
bread, turmeric milk tilted on the boil,  
swollen eggs and sauces, sauces.

Hoisting up cellar wine in candlelight,  
she'll polish your wounds with a slurp,  
reap the beautifully noxious, rub it  
in your paw, read you like tarot,  
a lime slice in her smile.

Sleep, sleep – wherever you choose.  
Nothing is prescribed  
but fermented berry shots to colour  
your gullet bloody each morning.

Peek into the open caps of her statues –  
the deep, bug-lattice bases, breaks  
and squalor that we all breathe through.  
Hear flashes of beetles, scurry

to guard the hedge by her axes.  
See fuchsias drip gems in sun  
for your future, as she unfolds leaves  
with a look.

Tadpoles gather as children  
in the peridot shallows of her pond.

An aubergine plant, droops to load –  
auburn as a fairy moon.

Pull up another cushion,  
blow your wishes on that dandelion.  
Burn the tomes of ancestry,  
bury anxiety, old scripts,  
in her beds of endless lavender.

Birth an exceptional poem!  
Salt the circle, spark stars  
of hissing storm wood.  
*Be your fire!*

*I saw a Fox*

I told you,  
forgetting, as the words fired  
in my eyes and fell from my mouth  
that she was dead.

*Did it hop into bed?* you said,  
lifting your head from the bath toys.  
I paused for the story.

She was a slim vixen, doll's teeth  
smiling at the traffic.

Belly curled to home,  
tail like an un-launched rocket.

*Did it have a nice blanket?*  
you asked.

Red-orange-green  
in the chevrons, like a child  
under disco steam, white socks  
stained, lips red with pop.

You swirl the flannel –  
a fish to your touch,  
waiting for my answers.

*Yes, I smiled. A special bed!*

*And her mother sewed her  
a fox-shaped blanket  
the colour of gingerbread...*



**Ma<sup>i</sup>**

In the secret ventricles – havoc. A breeding clot.  
 The chamber of your brain in its own  
 undebatable hush. You flail to fail to your mouth  
 with one hand, that teacher's hand –

waved at war's timelines, fingers chalked, or reaching  
 to an art piece – Narcissus, Hero, the abstract. Now, all  
 explanation lost from lips. No scattered poetry. No cassis  
 liqueur to be poured so freely, no patting errant cats.

No morning paper laid as a map before you, no politics  
 to question now, no history to untangle, no twisted  
 smile to the rhetoric. Just a guttural reach, in the deep  
 body of time, an injured mind. Your dramatic laugh,

your activist button, waning. All your protest,  
 liberation, women's strength, honest rebellion –  
 a burgeoning renaissance, cast, in late communion,  
 among the silent pews of the stroke ward.

There is no God to love or deny now, just the pulse  
 of the nameless. Lovers, still looping in your veins,  
 the fire of a church passed through. Vatic gasps,  
 three-dimensional heart, still keen, still fast, still

a mass of blood, like a foetus in your mind,  
 so unwanted. The tabula rasa of your past,  
 flood with the weight of eruption. An image curls you  
 to death, x-ray filed, as the daughter you did not want

to have, combs coma's knots from your hair, taps  
 water onto fluted lips, the spring of veins at your temple;  
 in a northern town, that you'd dress me for –  
 the opera roaring, ballet though binoculars.

Your body does not know how to die yet, will not  
 die in these April clouds, swept magenta over the hospital.  
 Night shifts. The drying gape of your mouth,

limbs unflinching, only the diaphragm's pull

on a small skeleton. A line of glucose taken. A vase  
to be filled. Another opiate shot. My train's path,  
Beltane's hawthorn bracken, edges towards you.  
The chaplain's prayer sheets slip, brows drop

to the hollow of your bed. A last starched blanket,  
final nightdress, in a kept room on the eleventh floor.  
Rising from the Humber, *where sky and Lincolnshire  
and water meet* – a single gull pauses at your window.

## The Apple Tree

I stayed up all night –  
    heart crushed  
    from love;  
read healing myths of apple trees  
    that bent to rescue  
    the lost.

The next day, I didn't wash  
or eat. I made a crumble,  
harvested our only tree,  
    seasoning silently in this  
    tiredness,

lifted our son, his fingers fluttering  
    into a bustle of leaves,  
    to grip  
his first apple. It was exactly  
    ripe.

Crying like a crow for our family,  
moments like this –  
    with no witness.  
Even the birds left us  
    and we filled the bowl alone.

I sliced off bruises in the kitchen,  
cooked  
    with an endless stare.

Boiled sap,  
slugged sugar,  
threw in a prayer,  
hands glittered with crumble.

Insects spiralled to dusk.  
We played under apple branches,  
ingot  
    bubbling in the oven's cavern.

*Balls*, you called,  
hurling the last fruits to my head,  
one shaky toddler hand  
gripped to the shed.

That night, the TV blazed  
and our child slept.  
I watched you,  
my *I-don't-give-a-fuck* lover,  
shovel  
the breast of the pie.

I slid to bed, unnoticed  
under moon's lamp.  
His *bitch*.  
His *witch*.

Dreaming in green,  
of my apple tree, bare.

Morning sun, medicine  
and I check him,  
sleeping –  
stark white  
as his favourite bread.

## The Window Cleaner

– didn't take off his boots, just trod softly,  
as if the mud wouldn't loosen.  
All he cared about was waving at the sky,  
until it rushed into each room.

He knew every cloud pattern, spire's cross,  
valley slit and fire pit of Swansea.

Nose and fingerprints, dog licks, mildew,  
drips – he'd massage them off the glass,  
closing in and in on perfection. His green eyes  
gleaming greener with each wipe.

I don't even know the colour of his hair,  
only see the fractals, floating in his eyes.

I should let the view sink into me too.  
Instead, I pace, mutter jobs, follow the dog,  
as though to share this space, stand by his  
reflection, would be two halves too powerful.

All corners saluted to, he leaves  
with a few small warnings – the coming of hail,  
a leak in the leading. Air smells cut, metallic,  
a different breeze. Even the mirrors  
will dream a new dream.

Under moon's tilt, I part night's curtain,  
breathe on glass to find him.

## Christine's Chair <sup>ii</sup>

Draping this chair since 1963,  
 I've bled over the veneer,  
     aging, critically prettily,  
 contemplated pills to end it –  
 less chaos. Less mess.

This room, stuffed with people,  
 holds simmering agendas,  
 quests for cash or secrets,  
     women wanting tips  
 on the art of posing for so long,  
     without going numb.

Faces leaves I'm left –  
 an un-sent letter,  
 yellowing, bit-by-bit  
 as the world decides  
     whether to release me.

Bring in the fruit I crave –  
     brimming from corporate pots,  
 lead me to warmer rooms,  
 give me an iron shot.

Take me back  
     to that child's heart –  
     where fear was curable  
 didn't move me  
 to the spy-eyes of the periphery.

I've delivered and lost life  
     in this triangle pose,  
     from God's  
     grace –  
     a  
 dead-bad fuck.

Tiny immaculate  
 womb,  
 rationed hips, pushed  
 up against wood.

In that unclaimed corner,  
 I'll dig out a temple,  
 bury a set of scriptures, my foetuses,  
 call the truth of my life,  
 grow stronger legs  
 from squatting to tend the gully,  
 to be a wife – wolf-bitten lips  
 and old pearls.

Come! Don your boss face,  
 puff up your chest,  
 decorate my wrists in flower cuffs.  
 Twist my forearms to your needs,  
 unpeel  
 my skin  
 from the sweat-stick  
 of this long sit.

I need to see the faces of women  
 below,  
 outside this 'Establishment Club',  
 laughing in the smoke rings,  
 imagining babies  
 declining, prams lined to rust in sheds,  
 easy flings.

I'll remind them –  
 sex is not lethal  
 every time.

Open your medicated legs.  
 Think of our England,  
 my girl-youth, your girl-youth,  
 that numbing abuse,  
 all the precisely wed,

turning their backs, diligently,  
 as whores in service  
 to that dog-tired man look.

This chair, with its long bones  
 and hidden arches  
 is my legacy.

I'm nailed in, flesh and limbs  
 printed for the programme,  
 naked or not. I'll speak  
 through the angle of my neck now,  
 a pause,

a brow twitch to the east,  
 hold my lips for the next man, for peace  
 inside these cold walls,  
 this occupation.

They visit still when it suits  
 business,  
 to feed off my look,  
 for a spank, a smooth,  
 a stolen hour,  
 for *rejuvenation*.

Mute in my box – dancer, bird,  
 I wait for light, for air to stir  
 the slowly clouding panes,  
 to bring me feathers to weave a head-dress,  
 a rainbow robe  
 from the monochrome.

I am Empress-goddess. Girl-birther.  
 Sentry-woman. Cabaret-lass.  
 Clasped as his metal  
 still rolls out weapons,  
 digital death,  
 acid attacks.



I'll stay, keep staying –  
    stay here for his return,  
smile, loosely for the camera,  
straddling under this bulb,  
            his contract.

## Pornography

– the place he goes at home. Endless glamour,  
free tease, as he props, lone in his closet,  
on a tiny screen – all thumbnail options.  
Bare bodies, clenched teeth, cuffed, boudoir flowers.  
He can't ditch deep throat, brunettes; hide from her  
this quick hit and hot seep. Her love, he left,  
as she gagged at the cool lens, searched, bereft.

His *normal*, his resolution – dawn porn,  
with each stranger's fist, slap on slap, pin, rape.  
He comes for all of it: revenge, fun, fake,  
consenting, vile, soft or cuckold porn.  
*Easy girls*, bulb-lit in webcam bedrooms,  
marooned, consumed, clicking in traffic rule,  
multiple requests – a new deduction.

## Refuge

We are here,  
in fern's private world.

A single plastic slide  
in the refuge garden.

Words – un-tethered, unsung,  
burrowing in the adrenaline  
of rebellion.

I had the corner room,  
where light breathed  
                                  like a new lung,

a fridge on the shelf.

I saw its banquet spill.  
The flower print curtain  
                                  reach out to blossom.

We washed at the corner sink  
in silky water. A dome of soap  
like gold.

A long kitchen, forms to fill in.  
Cleaning rota,  
                                  morning meetings,  
                                  a named cupboard, dirty  
palatial stairs.  
Bathroom – forever fogged.

I hid the key. Stretched           out  
the baby pen, its fray, a testament.  
Sorted stranger's laundry,  
the upturned kids' room.

On that single bed, on each woman's press,  
fear raided rest –

his tough grin dripping,  
that same sweaty tug.

Apologies and ultimatums come!  
Claims of his simple assertion.

And as I lay down, suitcase bulging  
by the stairs, fucked silently  
back into our house,

the refuge ferns wept  
across the city. Our room cleared  
and sighing  
through the door,  
another woman enters.

## The Mumbles

Steelworks paint skylines,  
sun-smog, a burnished backlight.

Pigeons warble, low  
in harbour walls. There is sanctum  
among debris, ocean yielding:

pill packets, half-catfish,  
pint glasses, fossils, roots,  
tiny plastics. Every shard, grit,  
rock and tat of the world,  
funnels by the flats of our feet.

Shore houses shudder with traffic,  
cliff edges wired to the road.

Strung on bay's dresser, the pier rails  
with each decade's paint, glint  
to veins in beach stone.

Ships angle the Mumbles mounds.  
Lighthouse – temple, hermit of the sea,  
blinking to every moon: yellow,  
cow-horned, fallen.

Green at the knees, the lifeboat station  
breathes in the chest of the deep.  
I recall our silent trail to the gift shop,  
us three. Brief peace,  
water's lull beneath,

fumbling for cash, more toy boats  
to cradle, avoiding your eyes, hands  
unfastened, knowing  
how soon we would be broken.

Now, it is just the dominion of I  
and child – pouting at flotillas

through glass, huddles of fisherman,  
lovers' clothes strewn on stones.

## His Hats

A collection has amassed:

baby caps,  
party hats,  
bike hats,  
beach hats,  
straw hats,

your first Easter bonnet, still glittering –  
a single bell,

garlands of seasons' leaves,  
skeleton faces, insect horns, painted ears,  
a crumpled crown from your first nativity,

a woollen pom-pom hat, red and loved,  
deely boppers and a sun cap dusted  
with summer sand.

They all wait, cold in the corners,  
ready for warmth.

And you are three.  
How many hats will grip your skull?  
What colours,  
what weight on  
your filigree brain  
as it plumps into this lifetime?

Tonight,  
stars with faces watch us,  
laughing at our window.

The plait of your spine  
stretched to a low crown of moon,  
my palm s p r e a d i n g  
to cup your head.

**Co®vid 50:50**

I can finally stop being human. Turn the stone key. Make it through this cam sham propolis purposefully beating the breath factor. Come to solitary parlour square tell me things you never. Now is howl time. Come light. I've charged the crystals. Only some lurk. Little rod hookers. Baby boom. Who will deal with that? I'd love to down all the whisky. Have to write. Purpose. Hat. 5pm. Rattle my solar plexus with expensive vits soon you can come on my unicorn tits. Remember lungs under cheap cotton chemical tan revolution need sun. Bargain buttons. Anarchise me. Faster inhaler prescription collection. Share Merkabah. Ship test. Roll out. Blockbuster. Best seat. Archangel look up. Venice Neptune. Dolphin Island. Grow hair. Grow love. Loose hair. Breakfast rant. Fell asleep with a candle. Don't want to masturbate. Died in 2019. Curdled milk. 3-month ban brim up lentils. Illuminati in the back of a van. Porn crash as unanimous cock 'self-comforts' nailed to bed. Siren tank for life tank for death. Tactical lambing. Flow slow faster slow. Inside. Wheeze. Teach Vitamin D project hang legs out of window. Battle with bureaucracy uniform supermarket crush. Fight ego bare self. Mirror face gone image screen only one gone. Something viscous with aggravation will blast them the science of soap hale hippy. Little God fodder alien split. Don't breathe. Hang up love. You said it all in nothing. Grow seeds. Wren dynamics distant woodpecker proud in spring wash. Nana's bunker stock. Smoke it out. Three fucking boxes full Sir. Giant's test. Better to fairy realm for garlic leaves. Meridian light purple flame. Is it easy to render Earth? Pigeon mate best mate parrot of the apocalypse. Small walks. No-one come near. I am adjusting. Interface existence guilt trip comparisons factor passive aggressive hearts. When did the world turn into a fucking emoji. Poet is always looking in. 21 days to change your DNA. Get on one. Don't. Multi-it-up. Korea. Discovered a Yew tree and a cemetery. Meditate frequently. I'm tired for you for more breath. Can a poet be purely? Making dollar from grime. Biking through the gravestones. Get Easter scheduled only a few more eggs left. God in a purple wrapper. Holy Triad of Goddess wrenchers squashed by supermarket trolley. Should have ID badge on and said my DNA will benefit from magnesium. Planet garden therapy welcome. Lock you up. No one has the time. Time. Hoover arrived plane grounded. Blood medal blood shod gasp machine taken. Unify. Stratify. Hand crack. Window angel.



**Good Friday, 2020**

Oystermouth Cemetery

Under yew's unshakeable shade,  
we count trunks, talk about years.  
Hundreds of graveyard  
statues in late sun.

Loss is named, welcome.  
Fear placated as we flow  
through half-shaped ferns,  
robins, wrens, carved crosses  
and seraphim wings.

On bluebell slopes – a maze  
of crumbling. Secrets  
and epitaphs on tipped stones.  
We hover to read, briefly.

This is your first trip  
into death's grassy end  
in a lost spring  
by the crematorium's hum.

We watch graves of garlic splay  
into bud, monuments crowd,  
clouds splitting through the Yew.

***Storm Bella, 2020*** <sup>iii</sup>

Stretched between us, a rainbow plumes from your valley –  
clouded hill to clouded hill.

The Christmas lights pulsed as you pulled me under the tree,  
turned, to say, you were *not available for love*,

then folded to all fours, wrists clutched, bodies  
in every bauble, a stag on an angel, tied to this crux.

The storm suits you – strange romance  
of impenetrable rain, slip of the road, beat on glass.

*Bella* stops. Ease from the flood, as you leave the glow  
of my nativity, striding to your car. Winter's dawn still far.

The morning rainbow, untouched – so leaden without you.

## Cam Girl

Down myriads of wires, she sent herself in –  
 identity clattering around in some server  
 in Luxemburg, got some shots from Stacey,  
 who said, *you really don't need to take of your top.*

But she did, and that was it.  
 Pics ticked, fake tan on, fur lines trimmed.

Now she was the her and her and her  
 of his vista. Wide legs  
 in the honeymoon lace that broke her.

A screen woman with a posh cam,  
 and a smile of rebellion. New name,  
 new URL, new dildo.

*Say,*  
*I am your God...*  
 he typed from Dubai as she raised her hips,  
 parted her lips into the dark  
 passage of the net.

*I am your God. I am your God!*  
 She chanted deeply until his quick splat of come.  
 A few dollars in the fantasy bank.

*Piss on the bed newbie...*  
*Come 4 free – Skype me*  
*Put your head in water ;0)*  
*Tie up your tits!*  
*Are ur nipples the same colour as ur clit?*  
*Evening Miss Piggy*  
*Whose the dirty whore then...*  
*Pass out I'm gunna rape you.*

Some requests she'd do – urged on  
 in the chat room by *Kevin 1*, the constant stalker.  
 She picked herself up with a shot or two of vodka,

chose a new mirror from IKEA.

Clearly scammed, yet she stayed to fight them  
in their own quarters, all wanking  
at the ironies! Accepting. Now

and then a Norwegian man  
would give her an hour,  
sea surging behind him, white  
towels laid in ritual, as he shuddered  
semen onto its clean stretch.

There were peepers – anonymous eyes  
testing her room, fairground coins,  
winking emoji faces for dropped straps  
and millisecond foot shots.

Percents, charges, rules, tag-names –  
floating around in her bedroom.  
Directed through insinuations,  
remote vibrators, the lure of his private  
look. Stockings half-on, half-off.

Until her muscles were too twisted,  
from dancing on the loose mattress.  
The baby-sitter's time up, c-section  
nagging, she switched off the laptop,  
untangling the cam demands. Wished

she could really be seen, maybe lay  
on a fresh towel with the Norwegian man,  
have a conversation.

## The Frog Prince

– still swims in his pond,  
sifting long green hands,  
unsure of the face at the top,  
when to stop  
his orbit through the waters.

He can hear all the daughters,  
see their muted colours,  
feel the tips of their toes  
on his quiet surface.

When they turn, he climbs, ungainly  
into a square under a rock  
and stares,  
sensing from that cool frame  
which hips he'd fit, who he'd lure  
to his pool.

And the visions bubble nightly  
in his mythic mind,  
the musical mud, lulling,  
until sun fracs stir his body each dawn.

Year on year, he catches their whispers –  
plans, marriages, betrayals,  
falling like blossoms on top.

But they return, shouting,  
leave angry poems, ripped,  
half-moons of orange skin, sucked  
on-the-run for medicine, pips spat  
in the clawed mud.

He sits in the peel, piecing their words  
to speak them, a trickle of love  
over his khaki lips, buries the pips,  
wandering if he can change any of it.

Until, with odd bird song, one moon  
she came, scouting like a ranger,  
head shaved, seed bombs flung,  
speaking to the trees.

She could see a mottled man in water,  
limbs starved, bog filling his lungs.  
Onto his swollen cheek, she plunged  
to kiss him, lift him to vomit,  
clinging on the slip of the edge.

# King Mattress

## The First Train

Jumping the stubbly seats,  
 every concertina between carriages,  
 she jarred into city's steam,  
 mascara wand through her lashes.

Map in purse, onto the cobbly streets,  
 she ignored the usual lures: cheap scents,  
 fluorescent hair grips, pasties,

until she found it – an oasis of lace,  
 lycra, sheer tights, golden oils, fluffy trims,  
 cuffs, whips and mannequin hips.

To the hush of the back, enclaves of latex,  
 lurex, crotchless pants, lubricants  
 flavoured like candy and pop.  
 She stayed for hours,

in and out of sets, meowing  
 through the velvet curtains for assistance.  
*Cerise, white, peach or tiger?*

Settling on a crimson corset  
 with black ribbons and a high neck,  
 she asked the woman at the counter for a chat.  
 Further, into neon shelves she was lead.

*This is an average, but sparkly little chap!*  
*Good for beginners,* the woman insisted.

With a tightened palm, she grappled them all:  
*silicon, warming, discrete, huge,*

but couldn't choose. So, she let the woman choose,  
 rustling everything into a bag with a wink,  
 fresh points card, and some free mint lube.



Night fell as she strutted back  
to the platform. Quietly now  
on a stubbly seat, back to the coast,  
lines trembling beneath,  
the nestle of a new weight in her lap.

## **I had a Baby**

Turned into a foetus,  
drew my legs  
to the sulk of bulk,  
                  slow    mend  
of purple muscle.

                  Nothing to say  
  
from these thinned teeth,  
                  gaps in bone  
on that funereal drive home.

Unslept. Undressed,  
kicking through the rift  
                  to the hard flesh of you –  
                                  lover,

elbowed from this kiss.

## More Poetry Is Needed <sup>iv</sup>

I'm thumping with locked up muse,  
could burn my food to find it.

I want to stop.

Write.

Fall out of the day's traffic,  
sit  
under this graffiti  
in my neat, bleached jeans,  
with my baby, my saucepans  
un-cleaned, with my one hair roller,  
my chemicals, bank book,

empty notebook. I want to bite  
my nails down, be spoon-fed phrases  
like raisons,  
to think with the bricks of the city,  
the flute player's son –

thinning

by the shops, boarded,  
the empty furnace of the church.

I'm craving new ink, for  
my knives to etch poetry in pastry,  
kitchen to magic into a library,  
bath to flip into a stage, soap to  
soak me in fresh lines.

I want to shout about everything  
in this lonely home  
of a car park – where the path gleams  
with urine and the seagulls turn  
art into art.

## Octopus

She let it slip, complying,  
while the chemistry let,  
then ate him in a wrap.

Just his white trace  
on the tide.

Complete for weeks,  
she stroked the pods of his loss,  
long trios of embryo hearts.

Her brains slowed, body liling  
to a new axis.

Ghostly rows in growth,

until they come – the centre  
for a moment of her sea.

Birth-fall

butting through salty elixir.

Inky eyes  
to a mother's smile.

Little beaks

demolish her –  
clouding the current, death.

She is her only gift,  
flesh glutton  
on the hollow verge of birth.

## Choosing Primroses Without You

*Is it really spring?*

Green stars nod on the path.  
I feel young now I have birthed,  
can see imps through the March grass,  
colour mouthing from plant racks.

I took the yellow primrose,  
not lemon, not daffodil, not yolk.  
Primrose yellow!

My favourite colour, aged five,  
listed in rainbow scrawls with  
pressed petals and all my bests!

*And another one*, I sighed,  
picking the right partner, slowly.  
Confessing  
to the floral heads – on the man  
that gave me this everlasting birth.  
Admit, I have no plan,  
except to buy more flowers in the sun.

Crouched in the spectrum –  
Sheila-Na-Gig, a shadow calls,  
colour of cut before blood's push.

Outshining each other –  
a milky primrose child and  
the purple mother, perched  
in bobbing kitchen light.  
They unfurl

from nests of silver buds,  
streaked in sink water, petals  
bunching in the base of life –  
my answer.

## Another Country

The rain  
stopped.

You were leaving,  
for another country.  
I thought of our child,

walked the city beach in the last  
autumn heat. Sand was thicker,  
radiant like Indian gold.

Racks of fireworks – burnt  
black on dunes' hearts.  
Pumpkins dumped,  
still bright by the bins.

Drain waste  
ripples, rain-heavy  
through the shale, plaited  
scars of tractors.

I have no sunglasses  
to shade this. No  
easy answers for our son.

Just the silver-lit water  
to meet, to consider  
the edge of.

A single cargo ship  
on sea's rim.

I see the lone engine room,  
fractured creatures  
in steel's spin, bone  
cast to strata.  
Impossible journeys.

Deathly waters.

And in the crags  
of khaki sewage, rolling  
down the slope,  
a condom wriggles.

Phantom pearl!  
Turning  
a tear to tide.

**St Non**

St David's, Pembrokeshire

By the Irish sea, gorse lanes, he races  
to meet the *Magic Lady*. I'd memorised  
your white, nun-like aura, made you a story  
in our night; expected you to surprise us, step  
from your Goddess plinth, smiling.

A lowly greeting at the bend, you hung,  
cooped at the well, untended, asleep  
to your charm, daffodils rotting  
in arms. My son is happier  
to seek coins for the well. *Carid*,  
*you must wish*, I insisted on the holy.

To the nunnery, doll's church,  
over the fence, in dusk. Marching  
on the neat damp lawn, my rebel son –  
legs no longer than a fox's.  
Angels in the garden stir.

Opening the oak door, our eyes widen  
to a mother, Jesus to chest – poised  
to launch into this bird cage of a church.  
You are a breathless cast, squeezed. Pale  
at the altar, pleading for colour, a voice  
for the sisters: *Blodeuwedd, Rhiannon*,  
*Cerridwen, Gwenhwyfar...*

My son tugs to go – tiny church ghost  
in the stone's dust, lips dry for water, breath  
steaming on a line of candles. We step back  
in the aisle, mosaic lit, necks crooked, and  
in a last halo of sun, I gasp, *Non, Mary, woman!* –  
sprung from the arch, flesh  
from glass, you dance, veil tossed to stars.



## My Moon

breaks through the door,  
     asking  
 for love, with that  
 man-on-the-moon look.

He teases in circles,  
     infuses my dreams, diamonds  
 the light, looks beautiful, laughing,  
 staggering in – blue.

So, I fed him, licked him,  
 did what he asked,  
 convinced myself I was white enough,  
 wise enough, for this moon,  
                     that we could last.

Then I'd catch him  
 full, pouting at the  
                             other side of the planet  
                                     each dusk,  
 stirring the sea and women new to him.

I'd protest, wave at the side of his head,  
     speak to him gently, too sensibly,  
     squeeze the lies

from his too                    cool  
                             heart,  
                     pipe  
 lines of  
     poetry  
     into  
     the  
             night's  
             arc.

It made no difference.

He kept drifting with the winds,  
puckered face, hungry  
for the glint of the cosmos.

When I finally found him –  
a chipped opal, curving  
down my path,  
lips long kissed,

I could not have him back,  
could not  
soothe that sun-spotted  
temple,  
reason with his smoky mind,  
place his white plate, by our son.

## First Tooth

His gums peeled, loosening  
that limpet grip.  
My egg-bone, his tiny axe,  
a smooth token,  
finally delivered in the kitchen.

First words, the growth  
of your code, spit  
and roar of eruption, a honeycomb  
in the hard cream of life,  
now plucked and set like a jewel  
in the room of your palm.

*The tooth fairy is due!* I smile,  
slashing through your morning fruit.

*But how will she know where my tooth is?*  
you ask, dropping it, softly  
into the corner of a chiffon jewellery bag.

*She flies around all night searching for teeth,*  
I said, as we post it in a pillow's crease.

*So, she sleeps in the day?*  
Yes, I said, impressed, feeling roots tug,  
the wide rhythms of love.  
Then brushed around the red gap, slowly  
stooping, deeper into the terrain of you,

the undeniable sheen of a young pearl,  
before you run into the coin of sun  
with that vagabond smile,  
a proud, blood-glimpsed lisp.

## Something in my Eye

but I had to keep going.  
 Light forced me into the day,  
 school doors hardening,  
 traffic irate – snarling into dawn.

I thought it was enough to conform,  
 that I could be sufficient  
 with one left eye,

a worldly woman  
 blinking into the open fray.

But half-way down the road,  
 all I could see  
 was half a world.

Crying for my vision, I told my son,

*it's just the glare of the morning darling,*  
 poked his eye instead of stroking his hand,  
 kept driving, felt the pelt  
 of the engine, land's slant,

until the wheels swayed, off-line,  
 and we launched  
 into the catfish bay.

The neighbours,  
 newspapers,  
 told it in their own way,

*how a mother had driven herself and her son  
 on the school run, heartlessly into the sea.*

*She was never the same since the baby.*

*No wonder he left her!*

They didn't know,  
it was just because the postman had knocked –  
startled her hand  
    with  
    her  
    mascara wand.

**To the Virtual Father**

Can you check a fever  
through the wire, listen at night  
for the tone of his cry,  
grow a hand, stream it  
to flick on the lights.

Will you reach for his shadow  
through ether, carve him  
from snow, know exactly when  
his blood needs fluid.

You don't see  
his skin, smiling, angel-clear,  
mirrored in the festive baubles.  
Scent of pine and urine,  
singing for Jack Frost by the fires.

On carpet's glitter, the stains  
that echo from your boots,  
I teach basics – cuts and sticks,  
kindness of gifts,

watch our son, in ceremony  
slide your box,  
through the snowy arch  
of our *Poundland* fern.

## Eros

Eros learns his mother's lessons,  
 hovers at the door of the therapy room,  
 pretending to play with the fuzzy mat,  
 has been washed away by her tears  
 through the crack.

He always swims back,  
 wings swollen with water,  
 finds her lost in a rose bed  
 or arching willow to sky.  
 She holds him to whisper,  
*Eros, there's still magic.*

Eros is small, powerful  
 as the centre of a feather –  
 rooted from a divine spine.  
 He is oil shine, each breath taken.  
 Eros knows

that love cannot be predicted  
 in the deepest stormy kiss,  
 dreamt up, timetabled, hardwired,  
 understood. Hand to fist,  
 he tells her,

*love is a lost creature,  
 that will never spawn again!*

Flanked by thorns,  
 she set down her shears,  
 calls to his reflection.

*Eros! Hold the kiss of the cosmos.  
 Take these roses as arrows,  
 go petal our wild world.*

## King Mattress

Each man that has crossed me –  
for food, fear, ego, home  
is deep in this bed – a bit of hair,  
pelt, chromosome.

Stains sigh each night.  
Semen fused with breast milk,  
my lonely blood-stars –  
hidden with a sheet's flick.  
I hoard this:

birth prints, sex sweat, spilt tea,  
purple wines from nights of anarchy –  
all tattooed like emblems on the weft.

Buttons hang, dislocated  
from the rub of creation –  
slack blue threads, woven  
like umbilicus. Baby's fate  
sunk into the coils of the world now.

I lie in old promises.  
Spiralled dreams, spring's creaks,  
will summon these stories to dust,

haul my carcass mattress  
to the trash skip. Let it fold  
over me – in one last kiss.



## Queen Dandelion

of Newton, home schooling  
on the lawn. She stacks maths,  
finishes phonetics, rights  
loops and circles in the sun,

grapples the bike seat  
to raise it.

*We need a man*, said her son,  
and he often did.

*Maybe*, she whispered,  
filling another saucepan  
with dandelions for honey  
from their planet of lawn.

Perfect primary, yellow frills  
gilded to fizz in the moon-pan  
like love – lemon halves kissing.

This is why she saves jars –  
for symbiosis, his absorption  
in the scent of creation,  
the viscous fall, pulse of sweet  
lips, the simple explanations.

## The Keeper

– breathes under sea,  
   lives  
 in an alcove by the Atlantic drift.

At Christmas, when the world sleeps,  
 he wears a human coat, crawls  
 from a long swim onto landfills to find them –  
   little discs, shining  
   under porn mags, stiff tissues,  
   divorce letters, takeaway wrappers.

He is building a gilded palace,  
 stacking from loss, hears the tears,  
 sliding desires, clashed loves.

Initialled rings, he'll study, imagine  
 their names, countries, weather,  
 shade of their hair on the day's *Yes!*

Chinked ones he gathered for corners.  
 Gemmed bands, rare, he'd set  
 immediately, winking into the door.  
 In a year, he'd half-mosaiced  
 the palace floor.

A few he'd smelt for glue.  
 It was his hardest choice – tossing them  
 into the steam of alchemy,  
 kissing the shoot from the star.

And still they come with dawns'  
 sea shifts, from war wrecks, risen  
 on a crab's claw, dressed on bottle necks,  
 knotted in nets – all taken  
 into his thin and mythic hands.

Honeyed, fools, white, platinum, dirty,  
 ridged, muted, Indian, broken golds –

all roll into his golden world.

Each quarter, a single silver ring  
washes in. He fishes it out, frozen-bright,  
full white, a new dream in his palm –

tracery for the *vesica piscis* – half-formed  
in the queen window.

## Strawberry

Hang with the nights a little longer.  
I don't want to twist you too ripe.

Mid-summer glistens, I imagine  
dips of you, places not yet touched.

Late light, waves through our hair,  
we fill with desire's weight,  
yet are still far. All eyes,  
slow motion growth.

A soil-rich rhythm, you glow purple  
in starlight, risking sea gales,  
my slippery path, mouths of the wood  
to be near me.

I watch your pores deepen,  
stubble glitter, as you float,  
so close to my door, edged red.

Dew pearls at your nub.

Shaving at my temple,  
a universe, sky, us in dawn's  
mirror. We eat a long breakfast  
under the throbbing sun  
but have not yet made love.

Until I kiss this swollen strawberry  
into your lips, root-nerves weaving  
between our legs in June's rain.

And look at you now, love,  
steeped in heat,  
dressing me with your seeds.

***It's normal, he said***

and *not when we live together,*  
 and then he'd just use it –  
*rarely.*

Yet mood upon quiet mood grew  
 after he'd viewed in his dark office –  
 paid rapes, teenage coercions.

His phone unlocked, a trail  
 of masturbation.  
 My own Bluebeard,  
 tossing me the slippery key.

Look at the searches:

*Teens Shaved Pussy*  
*Brutal Gang Bang*  
*Wife Porn*  
*Force Fuck*  
*Helpless Blonde*  
*Deep Throat Facial Abuse*  
*Dicks Going a Bit Too Far*  
*Czech harems*  
*Old Fucks Immigrants for Money*  
 and more.

I found him after our Majorca trip,  
 wanking to a *European Girl*  
 search *Doggy Style Brunette*  
*Skinny* of course.

His screen – a torture room,  
 with the clock  
 of his commercialised cock.  
 Far from the concern  
 of a human being valued or whole –  
 just constant demand  
 for the diminutive

eye rolls of a pornographised woman  
who just needs oxygen.

I'm not complicit in this world,  
won't be silenced by a couple of hours  
of passive aggression from the Mr  
for my protest,

or twisted into a promise  
for *Steak and BJ Day*,  
because with wide eyes, he says he'll

*ditch it, delete it, for the Mrs.*

No. Voyeur. It's a transaction  
done, how much this *normal* desire  
is fucked up,  
undeletable.

I'm not playing dead in our new bed –  
full of the flicks and frames of stranger's sex  
that you come and come and come for.

My suitcase unpacked.  
A sweet Spanish onion, so carefully wrapped,  
now white as semen, softening in my bag.

I'm leaving – will be your new  
virtual, the lost flesh, a thumbnail  
search on *exes*

## **Evergreen**

Garden shrine, cone-clad,  
ice-wed, berry blood lighting  
a ceaseless centre.

## Too Close

I live too close to the sea,  
 it consumes me, tugging –  
 magnetic, uncatchable. Leaves me  
 salt-faced, in flux, hunting islands,

spindrift ribbons, holes in fog, shores –  
 turtle backed, moon-jewelled, echoes  
 on the edge of an ocean inexorable.

I craved a room with a sea view,  
 the backs of heads on benches, trails  
 of reflection, that easy littoral path,  
 every dusk on Neptune's hook.

Now, I know addiction,  
 the draw and yawn  
 of an open sun,  
 gait of every heartbeat  
 and the sea it keeps.

*Check the tide!*

I call to my son  
 as he leans at the window,  
 young palms like limpets  
 on boat glass.

*It's here*, he said.  
 Ship-flecked, colour of lead,  
 high to the path.

We cross to the prom,  
 feel our planet's pour, roll  
 the winter stones,  
 claw wet sand for therapy.

Hidden in harbour walls,  
 this bricked inlet, I'm a Bridgit –



luring words from the submerged,  
duped by the view, unrequited.

**Lockdown Seeds, 2020**

Orange poppy petals drop by your legs.  
We can't lean in, half-kissing  
to examine them – collected  
like a fiery amulet in your palm.

We just talk,  
you on the step, me hanging from the door  
in the risky March air, wheezing into a cup.

You came to collect a poetry book.  
Yet, it is loss, a new yearn in your eyes  
that you leave, book skimming  
the seed pod as you turn.

I save your absence, knot it  
as a seedling to a stick, watered  
on moon's rise, knowing that you see me  
pearly faced in dream, draped at my door,  
wishing for your root.

Shade drops from that first duo  
of synchronous life – new leaves  
reaching to muster light.  
If only it was just poetry, birdsong  
deciphered, the journey into flower,

but it's miles of rift, a hermit spring,  
desk scattered with mud and vitamins,  
the guidelines of a pandemic.

Though every poem that you take  
to your chest, every poem  
that I write from this wreck, will burn  
for epochs, as the poppies on this step.

## **Researching the Kiss**

### Background

We talked to an open mile  
of beach. Water  
that was for once wordless.

September sand,  
abandoned  
on this Scorpio transit,  
us staggering shoulder to shoulder  
in our first dusk.

### Setting

Restaurant. Beach. Carpark.

Kitchen, bedroom, beach.  
Kitchen, bedroom, beach.  
Kitchen, bedroom, beach.  
Under the Christmas tree.

### Field Notes

Spit and skull-butting kiss  
in the after-storm, shores pounding  
on summer's tip. Your palm hard  
to my ribs.

Still burning down the road.

### Data

Mixed.

### Emic/Epistemology

Dancing over the mop, dust  
rinsed into sink, stains and cans

banished. Nutmeg tossed into cream.

Child  
hidden.

Pineapple wine,  
nod, chink, homespun meal.

### Thick Description

Fingers snake under skirt.  
I stood for your deft love.  
Tongue to neck nerves.  
A distinctive search.  
I remember this –  
star-open chance of us.

Unchartered-ness,  
bitten nipples, plunging kisses.  
I wanted to lactate for you.

A wide sleepless night.  
Stellar fuck.  
Curtains flung to Autumn's dawn.

### Geographical Setting / Reflecting

On castle's hill, we sit politely  
on the centenary bench, watch sand bellies  
melt on the shore below. I imagine  
what flowers will burst from these berries,  
if we'll ever walk the wood's seasons.

Your hands plant on my white flank.  
That we cannot fuck here in the warm  
sun, makes you want to.

### Emerging Theories/Dependability

Rained apart. Dry lips.

## Participant Observation

Absence.

## Further Field Notes

Lax with wine, trance dance  
in Halloween nylon, laced  
with your thousandth kiss.  
A waterfall is calling  
to transmute us – love  
into this endless book.

Your morning sundial.  
Patchouli oil, sweat  
and the drop  
to the triangle  
of the waterfalls.

## Quasi-experimental Study

Mercury retrograde.

## Observers Paradox

Watch the buds of my fingers  
touch until rapture,  
in this inescapable season.  
Leaving. Your lips are mythic.

## Open Interview/Ongoing Observers Paradox

Another night whisper turns elixir.  
You bury your need.  
And I swallow you whole –  
eyes and all.

## Further Field Notes

Sunday, chime of prayer –

in morning's fuck, the wet ritual of us.  
Neck gnaw, apple  
of my throat angling for more.

Report

Tell you,  
*I don't want this book to ever end.*

*It will be epic, you said.*

And left.

# **Bone Maker**

## Walking Pregnant in the Bluebells

In-between an unknown day  
and an unknown night, they arrive  
like a circus, suspended  
in the ivy spiral of life –  
green-blue buds, hard as beetles,  
ready to roll into light.

Thick stems gather, a matrix of umbilicus,  
first skin – thrusting to the dappling.  
Days rotate, rainbows rain.  
Each moment brings eruption,  
a great dome of colour.

The wood oozes indigo. Flower sheaves,  
frilled heads flow in lines, amassing,  
looking as though they will last  
longer than amethysts, me.

But spring swings and storms crack.  
Bluebells bow, flat to the black,  
seeds veined through seasons trees.



**Finely Unpicked**

Circa 1952

My mother wore her fathers' shirts –  
finely unpicked and re-stitched into knickers.  
He'd gone by then, eloped when she was seven.

Gathering a frill, an extra ruche, tiny pearly buttons  
to top perfectly hemmed loops, my Grandmother  
was making the most of it – her seamstress hands still  
thimble and swift from the war.

But in the school yard, my mother tripped.  
Girls pointed, mocking the invention,  
a flash of her wondrous, cottoned bottom,  
elastic – colour of bacon rations.

Before then, she had stepped, obliging necessity,  
into the wide holes of love, among every shade  
of thread and ribbon snippet. Her mother, slicing  
mould from bread, swathes of fine lace.

## **Railway Line 30/40**

Squatting under autumn sky,  
by the oily tracks, graffiti,  
my arms plump to hold.

Breasts globed. Acid rises  
like a portent. Cunt –  
plum coloured, leaking urine.

Ungainly – as an animal  
from its trap – I stumble, scent  
of thunder, over the lines,

through our thorny egress,  
to the father – cackling from  
our fight in the apple trees.

I vomit into yesterday's  
pan, astounded  
at my capacity to feed him.

## Almost Invisible

If I could vomit you up – baby, I would.

Arched like a cat for the needle,  
I offer my thickest vein.

Tunnel vision. Crash case.  
Shaved for the passage.

*You probably had about two hours left,  
before you both would have died,*  
reassured the surgeon,  
in the meek aftermath smiles.

Too tiny to see – you were kept from me  
as I was, *probably infectious*.

Wheeled to a corner to be incontinent,  
squeezing the first drops of hot colostrum  
like rare honey. I imagine

you blinking at your first window,  
first birds to your nerves,  
body stretched flat,  
warmed in the hum by another woman,  
a vortex of grave-side calm,

The Mother  
of God or God came to me then,  
in my isolation – lowering a great palm  
to my head. Of course,  
from the back and when the vicar had just gone,  
so I could not see or tell anyone.

Looking beyond you now,  
joyous boy, on a long hill run,  
I sense when breath and muscle stop  
and grace glides in – almost invisible  
to hold you.

## Checkout

Checkout boy-man –  
 the first man that I'd seen  
     who wasn't baby's father  
                     or a doctor in weeks.

His eyes linger,  
 I might be his first fuck,  
                     my pad still seeping  
 with a blaze of clots,  
 cells stitching, feral  
                     from birth.

I lay down,  
 tiny baby wear, on the sliding counter,  
     proud from the hunt, surely  
 this was the ultimate  
                     voluptuous womanhood.

One breast – milk-stirred,  
 pressure brimming like an orgasm,  
                     a crusty smile from the belly cut,  
 cannula hanging.

In the carpark daddy-man  
 waits, rolling fags,  
 at the black wheel in the dust  
                     of my absence.

Sliding off his till stool,  
                     boy-man swaggers.  
 A long wink. One glance back,  
 heading to the meat-stink quarter.  
 Break time.

He sucks an e-cig, unfolds lunch  
                     packed by mum, wanks  
 over the loo to *milf* porn.

*Boy, man-boy, man, boy-man, man-daddy,  
boy-baby, baby-daddy,  
boy baby, baby.  
Come back!*

With each trolley's release  
a yearn sets. Baby vests to chest.  
Nipples erect, bruises raging  
in the shudder.

*It's him, it's him, it's him, it's him...*

I chant, wilting into a trail of arms.

Blood pools.

Aisles end.

The hospital band.

A plastic chair.

Yells for water.

## **Walking the Line**

She couldn't put her finger on it all  
when she came out of hospital.  
Tulips had opened, stamens to sun  
but the washing was still on the line –  
waving at her tired eye,  
half undone.

## **Mothering under the Mandala**

You were still an egg in the cave of my pelvis  
when I carefully packed the mandala –  
still smelling of ink and market figs,  
into my suitcase.

The Bosphorus unravelled beneath,  
as we flew from Istanbul  
in the sweat of dance and travel.

And now tiny son, you shimmer  
under the sheer pink fabric,  
fixed in a square of light,  
a Welsh dawn rippling  
the kaleidoscope of your eyes.

On the loom of our universe,  
stretched wide, pinned over the bed,  
behind it all: a web, knots, pauses.

The scaffold of beauty, a star in making,  
sun of somebody else's morning,  
sewn with thick gold thread  
on this dot-to-dot.

You are the matrix  
and we need no pages,  
no more planes, no world travel.  
You are the adventure now.

Elated, peach-bright in your crochet,  
smiling beyond the edges of your smile.  
Amaze me, again. Now,  
I understand creation.

We are this pattern, stitched,  
un-stitched from the rota of life a while,  
relishing the definition of our faces –  
fresh from the tumble of milk-hashed sleep.

And we drift, we drift into the shape  
of our day. Lights of the world  
threading through our window.  
I nurse the purple stub of umbilicus  
you gifted me, rattle the specimen bottle.

No fat placenta for the apple tree,  
but enough for me, oozing  
half-drunk from you –  
arching into my capable breast,  
struck with needle-thin scratches.



## Mouse Heaven

Quietly at first. Then in anarchy, they clunked in corners, hoarding seeds, threads of doll's clothes, bread chunks in their haven holes. I had a baby in December, became different, insisted, *the mice must go!* Combat lingered, as they shot into impassable spaces – corner cupboards, years of loose carpentry, baskets stacked by the Rayburn heat. Then, a dropping, plucked from the patchwork on our bed. My baby, my inner flesh, tapped awake by berry eyes resting on his skin! Still rouged by these *mouse-rats*, they survey from the wooden slats, hear us nap. I cross the border, scoop my son from the floor, call for pest control, support. A man came, shone his torch instinctively into their paths – mouse parlours, warm morsels, a network of beds. He raised his brow contentedly, *a serious infestation*. Wax traps set among the shreds, he said he'd check in a week, but never returned. Busily, louder than ever, they danced in the rafters, consumed by this new catch. Two stark nights. The moon swelled and fell on spring's white carpets. Then, silence. A brutal armistice. Only the baby called out in the dark. Now, we have a mouse heaven in the loft's heart, a triangle of shrivelled skin, tepid bones interlinking.

## Kitchen

### I.

Mistletoe moulds. The clock pumps  
out of time, still dressed  
in a starry cord of tinsel.  
We're half-way into spring.

There's one light bulb left,  
one crescent of jam, two tea-lights,  
one incense stick and a bowl of onions.  
He always said we were *functional*.

### II.

Sluggish in this labyrinth, I lay  
each catch on the kitchen table –  
this too private place,  
with its stains and lumps,  
microbes of glitter,  
                    rice for play,  
                    rice for food,  
                    rice for later.

Our hospital picture leans.  
Us by the breast milk fridge, the fall  
of polystyrene snow in  
    our first Christmas.

    You – pretty in the institution blanket,  
eyes the colour of coal,  
when you should still have been gestating.

In that frame, beyond the fake robins,  
Hell circled and babies – limp,  
yellow or even more miniscule –  
came to your cot side and died.

### III

Sallow with adrenalin, still in  
each alarm and shriek. Grief.  
    I could never get close

enough to your mottled cheek.  
Pressed against the unit's door  
like a stranger, ringing incessantly,  
in the strip-lit nights, waiting.

## IV.

Now, my love and my lover,  
the blackest clot squats to feed.  
Death smiling plainly on my breath.

Until, high in a roof over sea,  
I'm healed to matter,  
to hear the pearly gulls finally  
feel my toes forage the floor.

## V.

## Shimmying

lentils into every dish, I chomp  
apricots, garlic. Kiss my son  
with blood soup lips, a dozen beetroots  
tumbling to our hearts.

I celebrate oxygen, confetti the kitchen  
with herb rings, Venus things,  
unpick Christmas from this kitchen chair,  
remember the stretch of my limbs,  
muscles under snack fat.

Light the last tea-light, to forget him  
flinging water on me, his taunt and hiss,  
here on this tile's cross –  
a turning spot,  
as I reached for our baby.

## Potty Training on Mother's Day

My teabag swells      waits  
 like a monument to be circled.  
 I squeeze water  
 clean, fold,  
 unfold, peg,  
                   sigh  
 on the lines, murmuring  
                   the ends of nursery rhymes.

Sinking back into sheets,  
 they seem to speak, carry the tales  
 of a weary night, wear a clock,  
                                   never sleep.

The day has been streams  
                                   of  
                                   urine.  
 Delicate son – in the locked steam  
 I teach you  
 what I do not know  
                                   or remember,  
 wrestle nappies  
 from your clutch for books,  
 dress you like a toy, colour.

Bursting from the house,  
 onto the High Street,  
 all cake breath, bath water,  
 cocoa tears. I stop  
 like a city fox  
 at the charity shop.

Layers of Mother's Day gifts  
 sparkle on the glass slats.  
                   Fabric hearts, aprons,  
                   books (on mothering),  
                   angels, mirrors,  
                   bowls.

It is enough –  
just the pollen drops  
of another woman's potter,  
the presence in her display,  
edged in blossom and reels of cotton.

Fingers to glass, breath mists gifts.  
I think of him sleeping  
                  under the lemon moon,  
upside  
down –  
like an astronaut, his brain learning  
                  dreams from dreams.

Does he still rumble with my commands,  
my faltered bribes and coos.  
Or resting on his new  
                  smooth sheets,  
is he too at the cusp  
of some simple refuge?

**Babushka**

I stop reading

but learn the alphabet again,  
live on boiled eggs, phonetics,  
broccoli heads,  
swap my time  
for stacking,  
dandelions, balls,

you – gently hardening  
into your whorls,  
learning not to kill snails  
or break  
a flower's first curl.

I button your centre,  
that warm kernel of love,  
knowing there is no morning  
that will give me the same child.

Doll-son – lashes of feathers,  
softening to night,  
I'll sing,  
sing while you sleep  
on all that we have accomplished.

## Harbour

Adrenalin rich, on the run,  
I watched you all night,  
sleeping in my car,  
face streetlamp orange, till dawn.

We walked to the toilet block  
through summer mist,  
shutters unrolled, old cisterns  
dripped. Your skin – cold  
like an ocean animal, buttocks pink  
as we peeled off your nappy,  
smiles jarred by the sink.

A wild shore breakfast. Two  
tiny plastic boats to race  
down the loud gullies of the storm.

In that harbour, I showed you  
when to detect loss, stop  
the frantic journey  
of the boats with your hands,  
how to angle into sun's warmth,  
find the best seat in a rock.

Cheeks wet with play, your face  
dries to a briny mask. You know  
how to stare at waves now,  
can hang, star-lit in a billowing twilight  
by my scavenged flames.

Stories shaped in the shallows,  
we carry harbour's lessons, back  
to the car. Buckets loaded, shells  
in my pocket, chiming like a new key –  
forged from the storm and  
all that made me run.

## Shiver

Home of secrets, splattered  
with shock-vomit. Always the litter  
of a lie. Flowers fade here –  
ground rifted to falter.

But the good-bride plan –  
the mother of all  
is firing up tea, always  
smiling into the parch,  
in sickness and in health.

Lips blistered, muscles revved,  
she steers her animus, antler tipped,  
from his entrapment.  
Dawn is so liberating.

It's the wool of other women  
that keeps her on the back of it,  
how they end her stories,  
wrap children with a shiver  
into their chests.

Tracking wood's map,  
she washes from springs, eats petals  
glossed with summer. Earth to hem  
again, holds yin, a rising  
voice from her pelvis.

## Rain

diamonds  
each  
hair  
and  
finger.



## How not to Break Up

Fill up on every thrilling letter  
from the first few months.  
Don't forget: Facebook threads,  
WhatsApp gifs, kisses  
on receipts, half-poems  
under your bed, signed intro pages,  
valentine's verses, epic epistles.

Excavate every corner  
to reveal the cells of him, glowing  
in the tired arch of your heart.  
Carry toenails, favourite chocolate  
wrappers, broken plectrums,  
like delicate jewels, entombed  
into the fattening sack of the shed.

Abandon the bed. Refuse  
to change or tuck in a sheet.  
Top up sleeplessness on coffee.  
Buy a cafetière! Meet his mother!  
Bake extra meals. Leave the door  
ajar  
so, he smells the heat and comes.  
Compare loneliness. Taunt, flirt.

Rush to Amsterdam,  
dress in red, pierce something.  
Spend your life savings. Survive  
on astrology. Call him.  
Watch romantic comedy,  
roll out the sofa bed.  
Open the front door – naked.

Pretend it's a first date,  
a discovered beach, fate!  
Gather sticks for an unknown fire.  
Brush fingers, listen to ocean speech,  
every breath of every word.

Slide into caves – no judgement  
in the shade.

Go halves (for the first time)  
on pizza at dusk, swap ice-cream,  
glimpse tongues, get trapped in the rain.  
Follow autumn's musk. Grin  
through tears, together. Squeeze  
out the chances of those last two  
teabags, collapsed at the sink.

**Bone Maker**

I remember the grin of that night,  
                                our DNA dancing,  
    the suck of love  
                as we agreed, laughing, to conceive.

Now you sleep in another street,  
                our heat strewn  
like  
    broken                glass  
between  
                houses.

The neighbour's TV tearing  
through dawn, the postman's gait,  
morning tides, milk powders –  
I know them all, better than you now.

But I still want to reach  
                                through the severing,  
snarl  
    a rush of expletives  
as I feel the rise of our son's skin –  
his form still warm like laundry  
                        in my womb.

This is how I remember you –  
in rank fluids, plastic cups,  
blankets of vomit,  
  
in the double blood,  
young breath  
of our twisted love.

**Spider**

Don't walk by my laundry stand,  
I've just hung a thread.

Don't send me a text – I'll climb  
between the lines to look for you.

Don't use that still eye on me,  
I'll lose my centre, this incubation.

Don't make shadows play  
trickery in the space I've made,

or wet me with cold love. I need  
to stay dry, grow – hairy and wild.

Stay away from this chalice bath,  
where I think like a statue.

Webs – fresh casts. Don't flick  
them into nix, keep me on a thin path.

I want to rest, dream in the hexagon  
nets with my catch. I've done enough

running. Keep your knocks and traps,  
holding up my body for inspection

in the wine glass. Yes, it's a safe dome,  
this capture, for you, me – curled

to a circle, afraid of my own legs.  
Stop – at the door, even your breath will

kill my silk, your musings of tonight  
or tomorrow night, for our death-dance.

## First Steps in Fishguard

Your arms outstretch.  
The world is a tight rope.

Gulls lodge in the rocks to watch.

We are in the highest cliff street,  
hidden from heat, the last breaths  
of one phase preparing to pass.

Your eyes lock on my face.  
I am the target – low, alluring,  
a nursery rhyme  
                    moon,  
                            beckoning you

through the silver-spun  
dust of this rented room.

Muscles judder,  
    incongruous, still  
you pause    on the edge  
of the Persian rug.

Summer wind –  
claps    the cottage gate shut.

You launch – scuttling as prey  
into that safe collapse,  
clasp of my limbs,

the jigsaw of us, more in love  
the more we are alone in this,

twisted together like addicts.

## Our Beach

Shells are posted through doors,  
 rumbling a new currency on the floor.  
 Cars drive themselves – free-floating,  
 no bass boom, just the rattle of mussels and quartz.

The neighbour, who never looked once,  
 now holds my curves. Our eyes lock  
 in the league of a wave, the glassy swell  
 of union. We live in a new street,  
 the patterns have changed. Occasionally  
 we do a half-lit dance like jellyfish at dusk.

I've grown a sort of seal skin  
 that seems to work, clashed with whale pods,  
 tattered trawlers – followed them, lost.  
 At night, I clean my son in a rock clutch.  
 He is slowly forgetting our little blue house.  
 Sometimes, we go and watch it softly rot.

We live, partly on a petrified Mesolithic  
 oak tree, wretched from winter's sea,  
 use electric eels for energy, to check our skin,  
 light the dim. My face has a fish glint –  
 silver and slightly cross.

Dragging our roots until they thin,  
 evanescent as fins,  
 through silt and memory. I teach him  
 the Ice Age, polar bears decline,  
 the complexity and simplicity of time,

whisper on his pearled cheek  
 about herstory, the cycle of shore flowers,  
 belly eggs. Tell him, that once women  
 wept for earth, laid down at peace camps,  
 screaming against toxic seas.

He smooths fingers over the antler horns  
and bullets birthed up for Yule  
from a beach hole. We hang them  
on our tree, feel the trip of the planet's heart.

Sinking footprints into fossils, fallen  
on sandy roads. *Someone else's toes*,  
he calls, splitting lip-brine to smile.

## Oystermouth Castle <sup>v</sup>

1.

We study slugs in wood's  
circle, slow time as your soul  
keeps rooting.

Season on season  
to the great tooth of the castle –  
*roof of sky*. We play dragons  
in the arches, snouts to iron,  
stay until the gull's clap home.

2.

Garlic globes, weeks of sweet air.  
We roam the moat, May Tree's  
hips twisting to meet us.

Bluebells birth.

3.

Picnics checker the lawn.  
Shakespeare hollered:

*Come unto these yellow sands,  
And then take hands:  
Curtsied when you have, and kissed  
The wild waves whist...*

Wing and tongue – the Welsh flag  
flaps under sun.  
I strip to vest, will a lover,  
watch you spiral on castle's banks.

4.

September buddleia.  
Butterflies on beach smoke.  
Foxes lurk, we learn their secrets.



5.  
Samhain. Day is night –  
You wait at the castle gates  
with mumbles of witches,  
pumpkins dancing through slits.

6.  
Pop of rebellion, fired skies,  
sweet apples, gardens sissle  
in the damp grass.

7.  
Through crushed cans,  
we pass teenagers, drugged  
in love, swaying like seaweed  
by the skull of the castle.  
No mothers  
by their low flames.

8.  
Dusk tempts you, sparks  
of lighters, nights' confessions  
dropped with litter to stone.

9.  
I touch the oblong of your back,  
call to the castle's circle –  
as though calling them all  
from the arch,  
to our tiny gas hearth.

*This way.*

*This way home.*

## Snow Globe

*Bambino, bambino!* A stern mask, stiff finger as he rushed towards us. Children were banned from his gift shop. My son's hands rounded carefully on a 3 Euro snow globe – with miniature gondolas, towers and bridges, its people painted the colour of peaches. Then there was a tussle as we were shaken from the magic – our minutes of quiet in that glittering meniscus. We'd checked them all – deep cold worlds, pearled snow falling on turquoise canals, golden lion statues in teeny piazzas. For weeks, we'd talked of this snow globe, a whole universe to hold, him like a giant. And now, I'm grappling tourist stock in the maze of a Venetian quest, among streets' racks of fleshless masks. It fell from his skin, cracking in a rainbow mist, boats still afloat on a sea of thin glass. Life stopped. Every Jesus in Venice turned, the girl with her espresso and poetry book, the waiter, tour guide, shop keeper – with his empty clutch. All of this frail history, heart of a city, lost to footfall. He swept the shards – little heads and legs to the swelling waterway. I gave my son 6 Euros, *for the shopkeeper*. But he shook his stormy brow, unclenched his fist, muttering about *bambinos*, and wrenched the shutter closed.

## No Imagination

Bare in our old bed,  
playing  
dead.

This skull –  
no lips, olfaction,  
twists of brain or emotion,  
just hair, ribboning  
off the edge.

Bone hands delve,  
into heart's space,  
into nowhere –  
no pneuma,  
milk ducts, blood snakes  
or sashes of muscle,

just the stiffening rails of a lived-in spine.

Birth-sucked hips,  
sentries to a home,  
beautifully complicated bone.  
Femur tips, pocked with life  
sit as fallen moons.

I have no clothes,  
no psychology,  
no nerves coursing  
through this physiology,  
no blissful clitoris,  
address to memorise,  
job, clock, dog or gauge light.

My name, I'll keep,  
like *Bog Man Pete* –  
tanning with time  
in these blistered walls,  
but ambition,

all the possibilities of a day in the sun,  
gone.

Wrists crossed, to the cave  
of my body.

## Slow Worm

Opening the mower, a knot of gold uncoils to rain-soft soil. Spiders' rigs glisten in the hedgerow as I mow. I imagine our dusk, encyclopaedia flicked to a 'legless lizard'. Then, I sliced one, fast into its last metallic shiver as it poked up through the rumbling mud. Now, a strange stick, flung from the blade to my son – lining up firewood. *Where is his end?* he cried, unable to touch it. I stopped the mower, dug for a reply. *That half-snake is sliding beneath our grass in a secret black palace. It will grow back!* He contemplated the cut, traced the garden into starlight, burrowing for passages to the palace, demanded a blanket for his tea on a new stretch of peridot grass. A mudded plaster, stripped from his knee, one hand full of mash, he insisted, *we'll find snake tail for snake face, stay till we mend it!*

## Harbour Wall

I lift her split shell –  
dropped in sun's lumen, oozing  
orange on rock. A curl of pigeon

embryo. One misted eye,  
still to the early sky.  
Blood flecks clotting.

Tiny fibrous frill of wing –  
purple-pink in the egg nestle.  
Pearls of harbour light

dress the pigeon mother,  
high-up in a loud strut, glaring  
from the open wall.

## December Unslept

Man of the house 8-year-old. Equality. Killing my chest wait in a long dance bread banks for after school club are waiting. A single mother can't shake it an excuse flexi-policy. If you want a dog. Licking my wound for the angle. Lost a stone. I adore his biceps. There are no condoms now. I hate FIFA. Can never be truthful but I must be cool. Biological clock tock. Dog smells vile. The father? Rhyme is ok. I hate poetry anyway. Radio waves hang. Wind of washing line magic. Asleep to my snake charmer. Handbag of Victorian school plays. Called himself *fuck-boy*. Intelligent though. Parallels of dichotomy. Hillocks of toilet paper by the bed. Bread expired. If you can unravel the pain face it we win. Food on vouchers if you really want that chocolate you can your teeth will come out your teeth have come out. No flowers. Leaves dripped gold. I'm still working and it's Christmas. Best baubles reached capacity there's no curtains. Bad MOT. Cried. Van's gone. I've got a Lidl bag with nothing in and a washable bag. Make the red belt tight. If he wants to he'll take it off anyway. Your face makes heat. Man came with a meter for the filaments. Dog ate my flip-flops. Dylan's cold pantry. Uplands was romantic dishes half done he was on his phone. May as well not have happened. The dog is a cat if you stop thinking. Clean behind the shrine. Want daily quote. I've had enough love mould upon mould of wash cycle tragic didn't mention that your Dad never came on Christmas day or even said he would. You had a device he called for a portion of attention was lost anyway. Scrape out the jelly from my ovulation. Pray Kali won't dispatch a tiger. Time means temporal hat looks so *wow* on you. The dog healed himself but wants more bed. Still got blood on the sheets and two lots of come. Like trance. 52-page books that give me a sense of why I like poetry now. Protection from discrimination and public bodies resolved unresolvable a shattered torso in Christmas lights. Boy has a certain gait I'd know from any surf trip wrong carpark. Couch love stretched in his mother's blanket. *Yes* I want to own his flotsam. No scrabble nights. Moments on a bench kissing like a suave bitch to work out the best angle of my poetry. How can I be useful to myself without converting? Christmas horses on sands sacramental. Want to make milk again. Tick. Women have a great way of hiding or just stop talking. Consider termination. Casual. Like 'recalcitrant' only reason I don't understand your vampire leaves me vulnerable. Remember the doormat is a baby towel easy off the rub. Subject lost in digitalisation. He calls it affection bother is not in love with me. Three months in. My poetry is usually free.

## Service

She dices a carefully planned salad,  
the other cleans dildos, checks  
folds and creams, tapes down  
the curtains. They'd both posed

in underwear, before they went  
to task, shaved jagged c-sections,  
plucked chin hair, stung their armpits  
with a razor, booked a babysitter.

And wait now, to open their bones,  
to the coded knock, deep crackle  
of his nervous banter, threshold crossed,  
to be commanded in oils and hot butters,

the spit and fall, salty wretch, sweat  
glittered as icing. Two fantasies –  
un-thanked for the frills and service,  
that extra edible flower, perfumed lurex.

Tepid come cools on pulled-out breasts,  
they stare at empty worlds, pressed  
into pillows, as he leaves, head down,  
checking his apps and his data.



**Poet**

Held in your spine –  
skin flakes, seeds, feathers,  
receipts, a pen to underline.

You glide under my armpits,  
sweating in the bags of life,  
lugged into shops, trains,  
splayed on changing mats,  
toilet edges, beaches.

You don't open your eyes  
to my nakedness, require me  
to hide, just rise  
from your sandy pages.

What words do you hear.  
What makes your wrists twitch  
as you scribble into the sense of it?

Are your stanzas hung in libraries,  
graffitied, on posters, or lost  
in transcripts, pillowslips,  
memorised as a party trick?

Do you compose, statuesque  
in bed, skin pressed red  
or lowing at your desk,  
arguing the point of each line,  
throw your alphabet to the sky?

Do you rip open the night to write,  
jab keys, tenacious, fingers  
clawing vision, have a way  
to process all  
that is corroded, loved,  
plain, lost, pervasive?

I fold back your corners  
as rose petals kept,  
relish your scent. Romantic

poet – tea stained, back veined.  
Resident in your resonance,  
a shining pencil to start,  
share your indestructible heart.

Choose.

Write with me,  
on epiphany,  
into the next verse  
of this irked  
and beautiful world.

# Exegesis

## Introduction

### Study Outlines: Motherhood, Sexuality, Place

*The Egg in the Triangle* is a three-part collection of 70 poems, predominantly in free verse forms. The collection builds on my existing poetry book, *Fresh Fruit and Screams*, maintaining an interest in the body, sex, relationships, and cycles within the natural world. Much of the poetry in this new corpus of work pivots around my recent experiences of pregnancy, birth, early motherhood, and intimate human connections. Written whilst I lived on the south and west coasts of Wales, the poetry is frequently imbued with oceanic imagery and explores the liminality of beach and sea spaces. I collate my poems under the following three titles, *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker*, which all braid the predominant themes of motherhood, sexuality, and place, as well as my overarching interest in liminal or in-between spaces.

This exegesis is sectioned into four main analytical parts:

1. *The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing – Form and Craft.*

This section considers prosody and form, using a tripartite structure of words, space, and time. Here I approach the craft of my poetry and offer poetic analysis around the presentation of my three main subjects, motherhood, sexuality, and place.

2. Motherhood: Exploring the Matrix – from Cunts to Colostrum and the Mother of God.

The focus of the Motherhood section is on poetry covering gestation and pregnancy phases, alongside childbirth stories, the poetics of the child's voice and expressions of 'deep mothering' experiences.

3. Sexuality: Controversial Bodies – from Politics to Pornography and 'The Checkout Boy'.

This part of the exegesis highlights sexual politics, gender conflicts, and cultural narratives around sexual relationships. I apply my model to focus on Post-Porn poetry, and build on feminist analysis surrounding the *Bluebeard* myth.

4. Place: Liminal Existence – from Mother's Waiting to Covid-19 and Visions of the Elements.

The final poetic explication considers space and place more deeply. I use my working analytical model to explore the eye of the poet and liminality in public and private arenas. The feminisation of space, and maternal worlds in elemental poetry are discussed.

**Methodology: Finding Ways into Analysis**

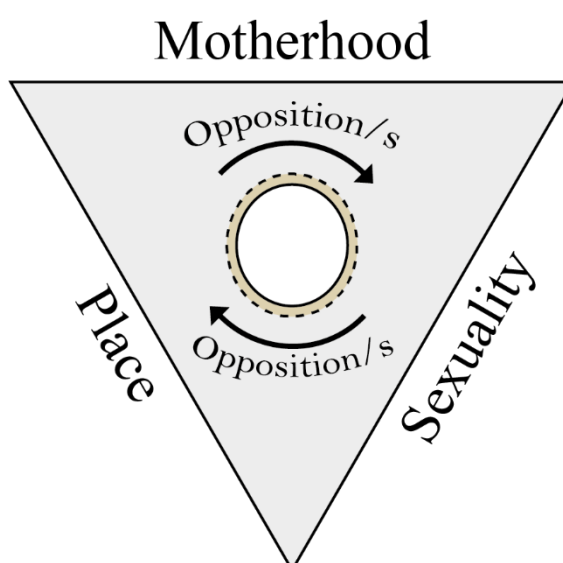


Fig. 1. *The Egg in the Triangle*: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood.

Within this exegesis, I use an analysis model that I developed throughout the course of the project, called *The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood*. The model is briefly summarised as:

- a) a tool to identify and explore core subjects or influences within a creative text based around motherhood or written by a mother.
- b) a visual, spatial framework to hang and develop literary ideas on.
- c) representative of ‘egg space’, where concepts, experiences, and subjects may be recognised as in formation, porous, liminal, or working in-between oppositional forces.

The model was formed to reflect my focus on motherhood, whilst also embracing the expansion of my poetic study towards the subjects of sexuality and place, which were both emerging and evident in my writing. Although the original model for my project was entitled, *The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood*, and I predominantly refer to this in my exegesis, I also propose the model as a template for wider creative writing praxis (see app. 1). I demonstrate the model’s flexibility in this exegesis whilst using it to analyse poetic form. The model is open to creative writers to aid the exploration of any subject with systematic guidance.

*The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing* should be seen as a model of discovery rather than prediction, as it helps to frame expanding fields of research. Using the model, my central study broadened from maternal epistemics to encompass poems more concerned with exploring heterosexual relationships, eroticism, and sexuality, to include critical stances on pornography and gender. My work also branched into poems that drew upon a sense of place, embracing site specific and psycho-geographic pieces. These key poetic contexts are seen

as single titles, ‘Sexuality’ and ‘Place’ in the model’s framework, alongside ‘Motherhood’.

Giving routes into more nuanced and creative analysis with its central ‘egg space’, the model is more than a simple scaffold for themes or subjects in poetry, as it additionally extends into the terrain of liminality, creative decision making, and craft. Important to the model’s understanding is its cyclical evolution – from a combination of personal, professional, and academic influences – to produce what Robyn Stewart proposes in her work as a ‘living theory’ (sec.1). In this way, my methodology also echoes Nicola Boyd’s discussion on the ‘Converging Strange Loop Research Methodology (CSLR Methodology)’ (8). Boyd advocates that creative writing research often takes the shape of a loop or spiral and cites the founder of Strange Loop Theory, Douglas Hofstadter. The loop, to Hofstadter, represents ‘an endless process in a finite way’ and offers researchers a flexible process with movement, room to add and discard whilst simultaneously representing a process of study that is often referential in similar but new ways to its start point (qtd. in Boyd 9).

Indeed, this exegesis has been written as varying versions at different points in the trajectory of my candidature, depending on which loop of enquiry and creation that I found myself at. The seemingly infinite options of how to analyse my own work – which mainly revolved around a poetic reflexivity on subjective everyday experience – often seemed unstructured or tangential in ways that jarred academic progress. I had limited clarity on how I wanted to present my poetic ideas and inspirations. I got into cognitive knots, endless lists, and repetitions, generally feeling that my critical work was unable to show the depth of the poems or mine a useful and authentic response.

This confusion drew me to Rita Felski's ideas on critique, which highlights that it is when texts, such as my poetic body of work, are treated objectively through 'hard-nosed analysis' that 'reading and writing comes from nowhere' (176-177). Felski's ideas seemed to explain my feelings of academic freefall, as I initially presupposed that my work had to be a singular investigation on links to feminist theory, perhaps, or a focus on the prosody of the creative text alone. Rather, when artist-researchers see themselves as 'coactors' in networks of remaking through the process of rereading, they 'recontextualize' from the 'impurity of subjectivity' and thus 'reorientate and refresh perspective', in what Felski terms 'post-criticism' (173, 177, 182). In post-criticism, the text is both worldly/otherworldly, singular/social, and it is the purpose of critique to form the connections between these 'puzzling dualisms', thus challenging the 'self'-enclosed dyad' of reader-text (Felski 167, 173, 176). As my ideas and observations of binary interactions developed, I was happy to discover that my juggling of understandings between opposites was effectively on point and in alignment with the evolving theory of a post-critical world!

My proposed analysis model uses Felski's ideas on working around dualism, embracing the often-labyrinthine roots of creativity. Felski's work was vital and liberating in my process, empowering me to see the poetic text as a knowledgeable source, more so than perhaps the critic or critical response (182). Seeing my poems and their critique as a collaboration helped me to create the model's framework, reflecting my subjective research in an authentic way. Although the model offers a type of formulaic pathway to address context, it also allows for ambivalence and the movement of ideas, the unknown paths, 'unexpected detours, obscure motivations and sheer happenstance' essential to creative and living processes in its 'egg space' (Felski 177).

The model provided a necessary structure and enabled a more confident and personal route into exegetic investigation, mainly as I started to apply associative theory in each of the three categories. For example, ideas within matricentric poetics – which I discovered late in my research – highlighted how I had been using the nuanced position of a ‘maternal I’ frequently in my work. This eclipsed poetic self or poetic ‘I’, often seen in this essay as the ‘maternal I’, links to my concepts of ‘third space’ and a female voice as a ‘maternal I’ – transformed through acts of birth and mothering. The feminist aim to expose experiential and/or empowered voice seemed more accessible and was encouraged by my discovery of matricentric feminism and matricentric poetics.

My research on sexuality explored the explicit literature of Anaïs Nin and the poetry of Sharon Olds, enabling me to discover more on how taboos and subversive aspects of the body and intimate physical relationships can be written to create impact on the reader. I started to write more dissident poems, in form and content, and used found poetry from digital spaces, which served to empower my routes into expressions on sexuality. From these points, I began to craft work such as the sonnet ‘Pornography’ (34), this being a counter-love poem which aligns to Susan Griffin’s polemic on the ‘death of the heart’ (83).

Explorations into the poetics of place added emphasis to my interest in liminal space, borders, and transformative being. With a stronger interest not just in the physical space of the maternal and sexual body being written about, but also the poem as a place of construct, I began to employ more experimental forms. For example, I utilised aspects of concrete poetry, shattered stanzas, cascading lines, prose poetry, stretched meanings with regular enjambment, inserted italicised dialogue, and used more space between words with a new creative consciousness. My focus on place in this sense became part of decision-making on craft, which I



discuss as part of the adaptability of the model and how it functions flexibly to consider words, space, and time in poetry.

The model's creation provided a formula to navigate from and within. 'Egg space' became a necessary component in the analysis and discovery of in-between expressions and experiences in the cycles of my poetic research. For example, choices surrounding the reflective analysis on the absence/presence of grammar or stanza breaks, as seen in the divergent forms of 'I had a Baby' and 'December Unslept', are clearer when using 'egg space' (50, 111). I also consider the creative centre of the poem as 'egg space' – in terms of the poem's final production. The model purports a non-singular approach, as that was certainly not part of my living process as a mother-writer. Far from the monistic, during the writing of the poetry and analysis, I was deep in polysemous networks of the maternal, in new physical and social existences, which is reflected in the model's ability to receive poetic ideas and from which they can be emanated.

The model offers a unique contribution to knowledge in its reflection of an empirical stance as an artist researcher from the multiplicity of the inside. Rather than laying an existing methodology on my work, my research instigated the model in an emic fashion from this looping style of analysis, where observation of my three main subjects – motherhood, sexuality, and place – were exposed in new critical perspectives. Boyd argues that there is a dearth of specific and functional creative writing methodologies within the academic field (2-5). The gamut of 'Practice-led, Practice-based or Practitioner-led Research', as stated by Boyd, does not actually provide a method and further, lacks the precision to accurately depict an artist's methodology or the inner workings of their praxis (3, 5).

On the contrary, my model aligns with Stewart's description of 'a new lens or perspective for studying aspects of our field and understanding our practice' as a form of 'living theory' (sec.5). Stewart discusses the dissolution of boundaries and 'border crossing' around knowledge and practice, pointing to holistic research, with self-study and lifelike insights that emerge to allow the researcher to create applicable theory (sec.3). In a similar conversation on fluid boundaries in art, Felski cites Marielle Mace's argument for the 'stylistics of existence' and the 'bleeding of literature into life', in which artistic models help to shape the fusion (176).

I did not write my poems with the knowledge that I was aligning to a 'living theory' in a 'strange loop' fashion, or consciously termed my work the 'stylistics of existence'. However, it was useful for the purposes of analysis to compare my writing with these concepts and recognise how each resonated and empowered my creative praxis in different ways.

Consequently, there are quintessential benefits of my creative writing research model. Firstly, it allows subjects to be viewed among contextual fusions, secondly liminal space is highlighted as vital creative territory, and thirdly the model demonstrates interactivity and coexistence of oppositional states within texts. These three methodological benefits emerged from reflexive maternal experience and are shown in the model's figuration for others to follow, therefore providing a practical outcome to my thesis. In this exegesis, I discuss how the model is utilised in practice to further understand, formulate, and present the poetics of motherhood, sexuality, and place. As Stewart states, 'all research involves observation and description', but what is vital is to 'shift the focus of the research from observing and describing what is happening to considerations on why it is happening' (sec.5). This analysis presents what my model is, why and how I created it, and how it is useful in poetry praxis.

My proposed model refers to interconnectivity and relationism – aspects that I consider as qualities of maternal experience. As it takes both a multi- and interdisciplinary perspective, the model collaborates with the aims of matricentric feminism, which endeavours to further ‘establish maternal theory’ (O’Reilly, “A Feminism for Mothers” 17). The model allows poems or other creative works to be grouped into the three focus areas, spotlighting subjects for analysis to reveal greater linguistic and theoretical understandings. Being a structure that is held together and influenced by the other parts, it also emphasises subject intersections within a study, and assists in contextual thinking or braided subject experiences and expressions. Presenting numerous levels that poems or other creative texts can be read from, the model thus provides a critical stance around multiplicity within the representation and expression of motherhood. For example, the model asks readers to consider where a mother in a text is placed – perhaps in time or location – and what sort of sexual or gendered politics surround her.

As demonstrated in fig.1, the model holds a figurative egg. The intermediary space around the egg is porous, representing fluidity and exchange, which in poetic terms broadly depicts the creative relationship between the inner/outer world or the poet/poem. Positioning poetic works within ‘egg space’ enables exploration of liminality, in-betweenness, or the merging of oppositions. More often, there is an ‘epistemic tussle’ typical in ‘egg space’ that forms dramatic tension, denies categorisation, or presents a challenge to the poem’s subject/s or reader (Mukheji xx). Furthermore, Bernhard Giesen discusses inbetweenness as ‘inherent and unavoidable in the operation of classifying, ordering and coding the world’ yet this inbetweenness is, he states, ‘disregarded, invisibilized, and silenced in the order generated by classification’ (63). I propose that many of the expressions within poetry that fuse or highlight motherhood, sexuality, and place can be considered through the lens of liminality. Thus,

a more potent and impactful reading is instigated, one able to traverse into the culturally silenced or dominantly categorised experiences of, for example, birth, motherhood, domestic abuse, and gendered experience of inequality.

The term *liminality* is linked to modern anthropological studies, among other disciplines, and relates to the triphasic nature of rites of passage. Michel Foucault discusses anthropology as a ‘fundamental arrangement that has governed and controlled the path of philosophical thought’ (*The Order of Things* 373). Indeed, anthropological research provided a vital root for my theoretical ideas. Liminality, as highlighted by ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep in 1908, and later developed by anthropologist Victor Turner, is well suited to poetry and the ‘magical thinking which makes the literary condition possible’ (Mukheji xx). Using concepts on the liminal through the creative ‘egg space’ of my model aids poetic analysis, adding to vocabulary on the ‘elusive but crucial experiences at a variety of boundaries’ (Mukheji xix). Advancing focus on middle or transitional experiences enlivens and liberates poetry praxis.

In this exegesis, my poems ‘Mothering under the Mandala’, ‘Checkout’, and ‘Our Beach’ are represented with the visual frame of ‘egg space’ to illustrate interplay of oppositional forces more explicitly, and to examine what situations and language exist in the liminal spaces of the figurative egg or poem (see fig. 2, 8, and 10). Although all three poetry collections in *The Egg in the Triangle* hold a range of dichotomies, it is useful to identify single poems to explore differing contextual influences around oppositions, and to highlight specific discourse on motherhood, sexuality, and place. To further understanding at this point, it is useful to extract the egg from my model to summarise ‘egg space’ in one of my poems. The next diagram (fig. 2.) analyses ‘Mothering under the Mandala’ in ‘egg space’, taking poetic crafting and content into account (87).

## Explication of Poetic 'Egg Space'

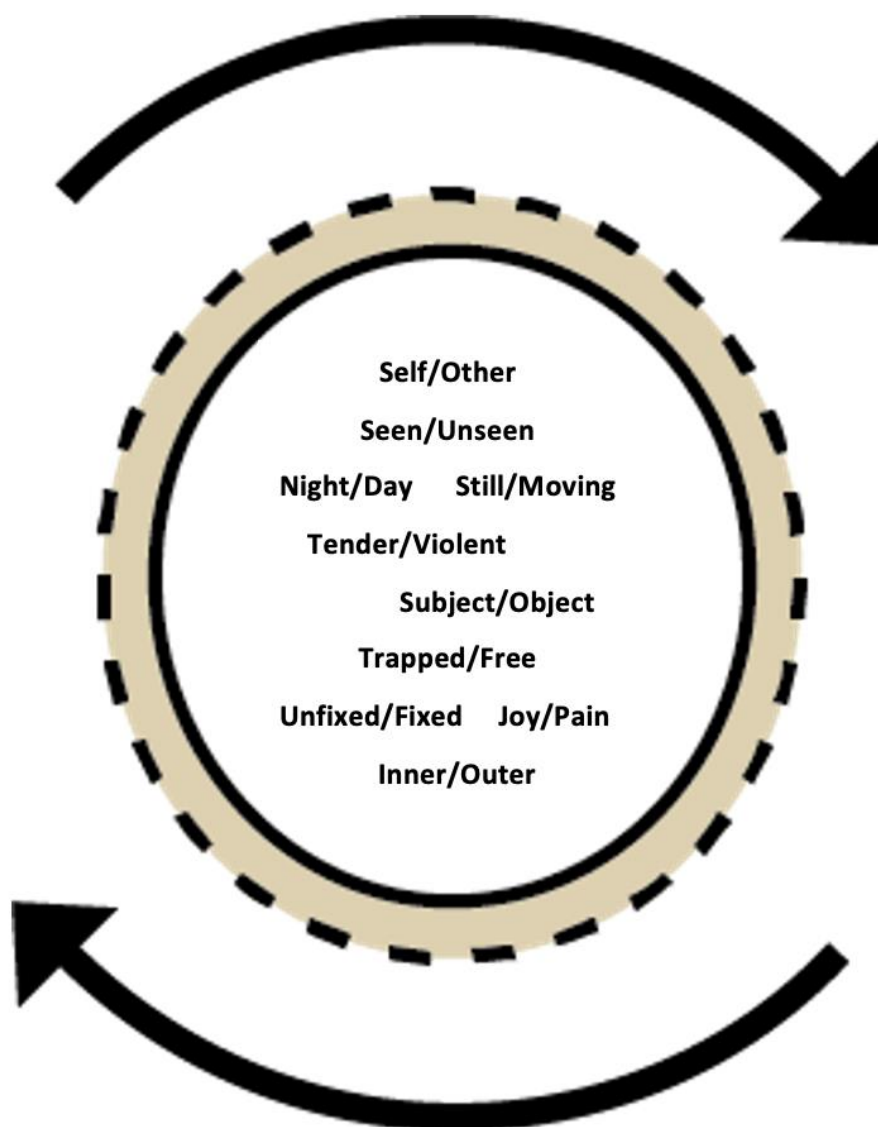


Fig. 2. Poetic 'Egg Space': Exploring Oppositional and Interwoven States in the Poem 'Mothering Under the Mandala'.

The arrows around 'egg space' illustrate how oppositional forces interplay, clash, fuse, or flow. It is important to see that when depicted like this in 'egg space', the binaries are being deconstructed for analysis rather than simply being framed, and these binaries are not limited to the ones listed in fig.2, which are derived from my analytical interpretation and epistemics.

In the opening line of 'Mothering under the Mandala', 'You were still an egg in the cave of my pelvis', suggests the potential of the 'egg', which opposes to the main body of the poem with the 'egg' transformed into a baby (87). The initial inference of the address to 'you', even though the baby is unmanifest, proposes an unseen/seen binary and notions of sentience and human agency. There is depiction of dialogue, receptivity and an ongoing relationship between the mother and the baby in both the secret, dark areas of potential and the visible, light, manifest areas of pregnancy, birth, and early motherhood. The binaries in the poem show negotiations between states of forming/formed, fixed/unfixed, and potential/manifestation.

The reader receives a sense of the passageways of growth in 'Mothering Under the Mandala', a potency of the manifesting power of the feminine within the interweaving of outer and inner space. Yet, there is stillness in the action, a scene of inner contemplation among the work of the maternal in a further binary, seen in the poem as still/moving. The mother is depicted as firmly placed beneath the mandala, yet she is waking, sleeping, feeding, observing, mirroring, and embodying active cycles of rise/fall, light/dark, and night/day.

The poetic language uses repetition – 'smiling beyond the edges of your smile' suggesting an extended and uncontained joy in the baby and its reflection in the mother, who is 'stitched and 'unstitched' from the 'rota of life', showing another oppositional weave (87). 'Drift' and 'now' are also repeated twice in the poem. Repetition, according to Glyn Maxwell, is non-existent in poetry, even 'what looks like repetition isn't repetition' (45). The way the repeated word is contextualised, placed, or spoken in the poem will shed it in a new light; thus, the duplicated word does not hold a true verbatim or like-for-like sameness. As such, repetition can be used creatively to build pattern, sound, or chiming images and is also seen

in this poem to reinforce benevolent emotion. The repeated ‘now’ builds immediacy for the reader.

In ‘Mothering under the Mandala’, the ‘now’ adds a sense of time, and draws attention to a mother engaged in processes in the current moment, as is required (87). The ‘now’ and ‘now’ again take the reader into the presence of mothering action – the watching over and physical acts of nurture. The whole poem draws on imagery around sewing and ‘making’. ‘Needle-thin’, ‘threads’, ‘pinned’, ‘unravelling’, ‘loom’ and ‘knots’ depict both the interlinked parts and behind-the-scenes aspects of the mandala – equivalent in the poem to creative maternal processes. The mandala, too, is a self-repeating pattern, from a central point – rather like the female egg of potential fertility – bringing an extra layer to the ‘pattern’ of creative cycles that the poem venerates. Through this subject/object interweave between the triad of the mother, baby, and mandala, this poem illustrates each as symbolically fused. ‘Mothering under the Mandala’ is also an ekphrastic poem, written in response to an artwork, seeking to reframe the image (see app. 2).

The inspiration of places specific to the maternal are seen in the poem, for example, ‘the purple stub of umbilicus’ and milk-laden breasts (87). I also use language of maternal physicality that is not present. In ‘no fat placenta for the apple tree’, there is a suggestion of loss in the gain, and a hint to the lost ritual of placental burial. Further, the word ‘adventure’ is positioned close to the line ‘no more world travel’, so the dichotomy of free/trapped is set, echoing with imagery on still/moving and loss/gain interplays.

The self/other binary exists in the poem as the mother reflects on her life with and without the child, calling on issues and questions around feminine independence/restriction in the light of gendered or othered

experience generated through motherhood. Tatjana Takseva states that ‘the maternal – as based on the work of care and rooted in a subjectivity that is structurally relational and characterised by vulnerability, exposure, and interdependence – stands as an undeniable “other” to the neoliberal model of preferred selfhood’ (32). ‘Mothering under the Mandala’ celebrates the joy of motherhood, the smile beyond the smile, the ecstasy of a mother in the frame of restriction. The poem shows the mother finding an expansive beauty in stillness, as she roots herself into essential maternal spaces that much of second-wave feminism fought, in differing ways and for differing reasons, to challenge.

Additional to the imagery around uniquely maternal spaces of the body, ‘Mothering under the Mandala’ shows various geographical places, from ‘The Bosphorus unravel[ing] beneath’, to the ‘Welsh dawn rippling the kaleidoscope of your eyes’ (87). The poem is both local/international, it denies exact fixity in the breadth of spaces it covers, including pre- and postnatal space. The words ‘unravel’ and ‘rippling’ in relation to geographical place suggest movement and a reflective flow that I sought to harness poetically. There are fluid images in the morphing imagery and language, also seen in the assonance of the text. For example, ‘pelvis’, ‘still’, ‘ink’ ‘figs’ in the first stanza, and ‘relishing’, ‘fresh’, and ‘hashed’ in the eighth stanza. The assonance and half-rhyme within the poem create a lulling and gentle yet powerful phonetic flow throughout (87-88).

In the last line of the poem, ‘arching into my capable breasts – / struck with your needle-thin scratches’, a tender/violent opposition is depicted (88). The act of breastfeeding is nurturing, yet the mother has been ‘struck’ and scratched in a way to suggest conflict. ‘Egg space’ typically shows oppositional states that crossover in cyclical or unexpected ways and allows for a more multifaceted reading when highlighted. That said, the general stance of the poem is of female



empowerment; the mother's breasts are 'capable'. There is realism to the last line, too, as most mothers will experience some kind of wounding through birth and early mothering phases as the baby bites down on the nipple, kicks from the inside of the womb, and/or forces its way, is cut, or sucked out into the world through the vaginal canal.

In terms of the sexuality strand of my model, there are subtle associations to sexual reproduction and creation in 'Mothering under the Mandala' with the 'star in making' and 'the matrix' (87). As an early example, we can see how this poem fuses the trio of my umbrella subjects, in varying emphasis. 'Egg space' offers a place to take diametric experience or ideology to be expressed poetically. Additionally, 'egg space' has the aim of detecting binaries in existing texts to further enhance understanding of the poet's journey, message, or style.

**'Third Space' and the Evolution of *The Egg in the Triangle*:  
Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood**

I further explain the model and its links to liminality and poetic 'egg space' in this exegesis, but it is important to briefly examine how the model evolved to inspire and support my poetry and critical approach.

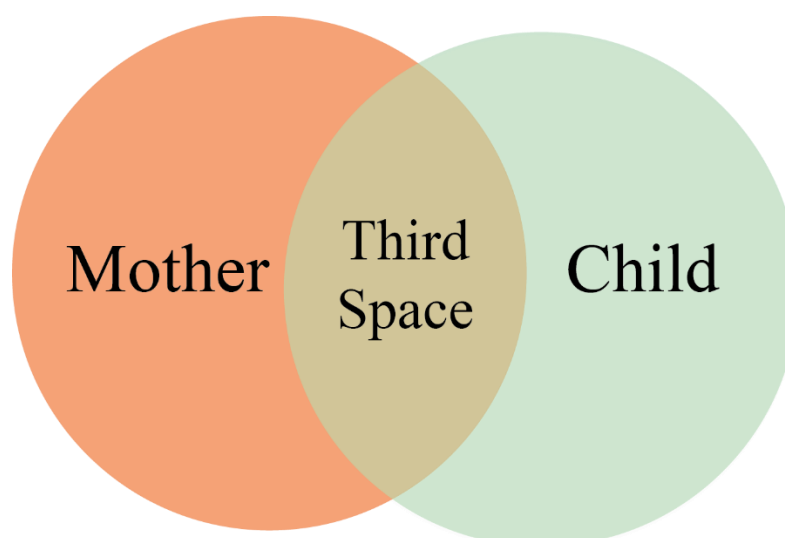


Fig. 3. Venn Diagram Illustrating the 'Third Space' of Mother and Child.

As my initial poetry and research on, and experience with, motherhood evolved, I started to understand and identify a range of aspects and qualities, sometimes disparate, that stemmed from a new identity, feelings, and behaviours specifically relational to mothering. I term this place of maternal evolution as a ‘third space’ – a space unique to motherhood or parenthood. For the purposes of this exegesis – as it is based on my own epistemology– ‘third space’ relates specifically to personal reflections on motherhood, as a cisgender woman, mainly in situations of single parenting.

‘Third space’ represents mothering in a broad sense: it does not delineate a specific way of mothering or a particular ethic. In its basic interpretation, ‘third space’ simply shows a space of relationship that occurs from physical conception to generally include gestation, birth, and mothering practice. Within ‘third space’, the prenatal self is eclipsed as mothering occurs and a woman’s space is literally occupied at varying levels – cognitively, emotionally, and physically – by the life of the baby/child. ‘Third space’ is an area within and outside the body of the mothering self that is taken up by two or more selves, depending on the number of children that the mother has. In my context, I refer to ‘third space’ as a mother of one son. A major aspect of ‘third space’ is living a life in-between self and other in a more heightened way through the act of mothering. Moreover, ‘third space’ represents the manifestation of the new – as either formed or in formation. The two selves in the ‘third space’ that I form poetry around become fused in multiple and vicarious ways.

During my experiences within pregnancy – much of which is translated into the creative body of this dissertation – I negotiated a new sense of being, in ‘third space’. Tess Cosslett describes pregnancy as a ‘turning-point’, an act of personal transformation which has the capacity to rebirth a woman as she is repositioned in the world (153). The journey

within ‘third space’ is unique to each mother and child. My poetry project is also influenced by experiencing long phases of absence from my child’s father, alongside a long-standing desire to have a child and be a mother.

I argue that every mother and child occupies ‘third space’, however the pregnancy, childbirth, or mothering role unfolds, thus offering ‘third space’ as unique, creative ground for a wide range of literary explorations. For example, if a baby is adopted or lost in pregnancy, there has still been a transformational occurrence on emotional and physical levels, ramifying as a ‘third space’ fusion. As Gwendolyn Brooks writes in her poem on abortion, ‘You remember the children you got that you did not get’ (3). In *Imagined Sons*, Carrie Etter explores the poetics around a teenage birth mother who gave up her baby son for adoption. In my poem, ‘Ectopic’, from *Fresh Fruit and Screams*, the loss of a pregnancy is written in ‘third space’ as ‘I may as well be food, / now that you – love / have become my wound’ (93). The surgical ‘wound’ of the mother being, in this case, the site of a transformation typical in ‘third space’, which is also referred to later in the poem as a ‘barbed scar [...] / our monument’. The inference in these examples is of permanent change – through even brief encounters with the processes and liminal journeys of the maternal.

Many of my poems work powerfully and symbolically in ‘third space’, which, while showing both the mother and the baby/child as individuals, emphasises the fusion space between them. For example, in my poem, ‘Eclampsia and The Yellow Flowers’, the maternal ‘I’ waits for her ‘flesh – / lined up in the trembling gills / of the hospital, reaching for this breast’, suggesting melded bodies across space and an instinctual postnatal pull into a shared ‘third space’ (17). In ‘Mouse Heaven’, the baby is described as ‘my inner flesh’ (89). Much of the poetry in *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker* shows enmeshed experiences or perceptions in relation to motherhood, even after the baby is born. In

‘Bone Maker’, another postnatal poem, the baby’s ‘form is still warm’ in the mother’s womb (99). The mother and child in my poem ‘First Steps in Fishguard’ are ‘twisted together like addicts’, representing a physical co-dependency and powerful synthesis within ‘third space’ (101).

My ideas around ‘third space’ as a fused state of transformation in motherhood build from the idea of the ‘two in one’ inherent in the maternal condition discussed by Cosslett (119). This ‘two in one’ situation of motherhood is culturally embedded, partly due to the biology of birth and maternal capacity, alongside long-standing social expectations. Acts such as breastfeeding in the early mothering phase – seen in my poem ‘Mothering under the Mandala’ – for example, extend the ‘sense of the baby as ... an extension of the mother’ and challenge ‘ideas of where and when an individual begins and ends’ (Cosslett 119). The idea of two selves within one woman is expanded in my thesis through the idea of ‘third space’ – which develops concepts of maternal experience as an integrated triad rather than a dyad, as seen in the *vesica piscis* shape of fig.3.

The assumed notion of oneness of the pregnant woman with the growing baby that often infiltrates prescribed role behaviour around motherhood is contested in late 20<sup>th</sup> century French feminist theory. The autonomy of the growing baby is highlighted in French maternal theory as performing within a necessary biological separation. Thus, the essential, all-consuming state of unity where ‘women and children are always mentioned in the same breath’ is challenged as a ‘shared oppression’ (Firestone 65). For Luce Irigaray, ‘the placental economy is [...] an organised economy, one not in a state of fusion, which respects the one and the other’ (41). Examining the biology of gestation, Irigaray furthered ideas of maternal autonomy established partly in feminism’s second wave, thus supporting new cultural, philosophical, aesthetic, and

psychological understandings around motherhood within postmodern thinking.

There are levels of intensity and variety within ‘third space’ that shift according to culture and place, making it a fluid, transformational space. Relating to, yet also beyond, the everyday physicality of the mother-child dynamic, ‘third space’ also pivots around wider temporal influences, including development rituals and special rites of passage for both mother and child. My poems ‘First Tooth’, ‘Babushka’, and ‘St Non’ reflect the transition of time and shared journeys that adjust mothering states, and reflect the child’s evolution through witnessing, engagement, and empathy during key milestone moments and special quests (56, 59, 94). For example, in the first line of ‘Babushka’, which sits alone in a single line stanza to add emphasis to her solitude, the mother announces, ‘I stop reading // but learn the alphabet again’ – showing how she reverts in ways to accommodate the child.

In ‘First Tooth’, the child-like ritual of the tooth fairy is explored, alongside the importance of transformative first experiences. The poem depicts how the temporal takes on sacred and ritualistic association in ‘third space’, which is further emphasised with the tooth as a ‘tiny axe’, to represent cutting away the old to make space for the new in the ‘red gap’ that the mother stoops into (59). The child is seen in the final stanza of ‘First Tooth’ running into a ‘coin of sun’ in an act of independence, showing ‘third space’ to accommodate natural cycles of change, travel, shifting sensibility, and phases of the child to mother (or child to parent) connection/disconnection interplay (59).

As I navigated ‘third space’, I became both interested and overwhelmed with the copious nature of juxtapositions within my individual experience of motherhood. To refer to the above idea of

connection/disconnection – simple farewells and greetings were emotionally loaded, especially when I returned to paid labour. Who and what I cared about drastically altered in postnatal life or ‘third space’. From my own and other women’s poetry based on maternal experience, I began to note recurring patterns of tension, conflict, and stark opposites. Eventually, I created a list of some of the oppositions identified in my poetry and within the work of other poets – Liz Berry, Sharon Olds, Sylvia Plath, Kate Clanchy, and Kathleen Jamie. The below table presents some of my oppositional observations on maternal experience that formed more acutely when I became a writer-mother and entered ‘third space’.

Table 1: Oppositional States Studied with the ‘Third Space’ of Motherhood.

Self/Other	Light/Dark	Life/Death	Male/Female
Inner/Outer	Free/Trapped	Full/Empty	Real/Fantasy
Still/Moving	Rest/Wake	Wild/Tamed	Formed/Unformed
Fertile/Infertile	Healthy/Ill	Private/Public	Before/After
Sacred/Profane	Young/Old	Broken/Fixed	Sexual/Asexual
Clear/Blurry	Wet/Dry	Order/Chaos	Joy/Pain
Night/Day	Isolate/Expand	Maternal/Paternal	Together/Apart
Solo/Group	Include/Exclude	Voice/Silence	Present/Future
Anger/Peace	Labour/Rest	Tender/Violent	Planned/Unplanned
Open/Closed	Large/Small	Good/Bad	Natural/Unnatural

From this inexhaustible catalogue of lived diametric states, I formed reasoning that oppositional pull, interplay, and conflict was an integral, and often exaggerated, aspect of motherhood. Indeed, I often felt physically stretched, vexed with oppositional challenge and/or pulled in multiple directions in my mothering role. This existence within so many counterpoints became the drive to my research and analysis. As Stewart states ‘central to the methodology is the identification of a concern [or] a problem to be explored (sec.4).

Having identified this seemingly ongoing binary list in my life and poetry, I tried to use this material for the exegesis by summarising my

existence in maternal divergence using a broad umbrella dichotomy of expansion/isolation. I then placed this dichotomy onto a working triangular analytical model (see app. 3). The lower apex of the triangle represented isolation or contracted space, and the long horizontal line at the top showed expansion within experiences of motherhood. From the table of opposites, I began to see aspects in poetry of, for example, light, joy, free, natural, and group-based, as broadly occupying expansive space. In contrast, poems around infertility, stillness, solitude, pain and, at times, the private, I saw as sitting in the space of isolation in my evolving theoretical framework. However, the more I studied and wrote poetry on motherhood, I realised that this stark binary representation – of what was particularly relatable to expansion and what was specifically linked to isolation – was unrealistic for grouping and understanding literary work on motherhood. Instead, I felt that there was another space, which was more complex, interwoven, and reflective of the reality of motherhood and mothering practice. This is when I began to explore in-between or ‘third space’, which eventually became the ‘egg space’ of my final model – situated in the middle of the triangle.

As previously discussed, the model’s ‘opposition/s’ arrows around the egg illustrate movement between single or, more frequently, multiple binaries, to depict ambivalent, liminal, or interplay space in life and poetry (see fig. 2, 8, and 10). Visually representing a central ovarium space in my model enabled my study to build on the ubiquitous nature of binary interaction and embody juxtapositions more explicitly within my poetry and the writing that I analysed. As my poems developed from the idea of a broad maternal ‘third space’ into the model’s more specific ‘egg space’, I identified how liminal thinking around the in-between opposites of the state of being in the mothering experience could not only be applied to my analysis on the poetics of motherhood, but how liminality as a concept also suited my study on the poetics of sexuality and place. Indeed, Bjorn

Thomassen states, liminality ‘should be considered a master concept in the wider social sciences’ and ‘that human existence without liminality is simply not possible’ (“Thinking with Liminality” 39-40). Liminality deals with the uncertainties in life, as well as human freedoms and restrictions, and how these aspects clash against notions of authority and self-agency.

The broad term ‘opposition/s’, as seen in the model, makes it flexible to other works, subjects, and author’s ideas, whilst still holding its initial matricentric inspiration and vital components. Giesen writes ‘we do not know a concept’s meaning unless we conceive of its opposite’, going on to describe the ‘space in between opposites’ as ‘the third possibility’ – a place of ‘transition’ that is neither one thing nor the other (61). This in-between space provides a necessary ‘fuzziness’, Giesen states, which motivates human understanding and interpretation (61-62). Similarly, Rob Pope cites Gilles Deleuze, considering the ‘middles as places that count’, and where ‘things and thought advance or grow out from [...] and where everything unfolds’ (xv). ‘Egg space’ is a kind of heterotopia – a space of alternate social ordering, where the categories between the easily identifiable become blurred and alternate ways of doing things become established (Hetherington viii). Heterotopic spaces, according to Kevin Hetherington ‘contain both the central and the marginal in ways that unsettle social and spatial relations’ (27). Thus, ideas around ‘third space’ as they evolve in my model also echo with broad notions of heterotopia, positioning my work to angles of dissidence and transformative thinking.

I use the inverted triangle shape for my model as it symbolises the original maternal focus of my work – from an expanded womb. Feminist archaeologist Maria Gimbutas discusses the ‘supernatural triangles’ on ancient BC female figurines, presenting them as a visualisation of the ‘universal womb’ (159). The longstanding creative and dynamic association of a triangular form fitted my model, especially as it echoed



my thoughts on a tripartite structure within motherhood over a dualistic one.<sup>vi</sup> The egg in the centre of the triangle – as seen in the model – became figurative of the creative poetic experience in the epicentre of counterpoint forces, where formation and revelation occurred. Taking the ancient symbolism of the triangle as a womb leads to images and ideas of conception, transformation, and the physically manifest, which are all evident in my poems through the focus on motherhood and its conjunctions with sexuality and place.

The triangular framework provided an ideal analytical and organisational structure to hold the progress of my creative writing, predominant themes, and critical ideas. I started to produce deeper observations on the place or placement of the maternal and sexual body in wider contexts. The model became a reflection of Stewart's 'living theory', with dissolving boundaries around my work, holistic research, self-study, and epiphanous insights allowing conceptual and creative practice to entwine (sec.3).

In this exegesis, 'third space' is seen as a broad term for the visible and invisible mother-child connection, whereas 'egg space' relates to more defined and specific experiences and expressions of liminality and binary interplay within creative writing. 'Third space' initiated the formulation of poetic 'egg space' and its inclusion in my model as part of an analysis tool. One of the key points to 'egg space' is its invitation into a porous space of critical thinking in literary enquiry, where liminality is more easily detected, utilised, and celebrated in creative writing processes.

In terms of creative writing methodology, the 'egg space' encapsulates the poem as an output or work in progress and represents the poet in the centre of the subjects under study. In this way, any writer can take their own observed or experienced oppositions of motherhood into

‘egg space’. As such, the model is reversible, used to both examine work already written, and to help formulate new work. For example, a mother-writer experiencing dilemmas around abortion may broach conflicts surrounding freedom/restriction, the ethical/unethical, and life/death. The language and crafting of a poem about abortion may be affected by where a mother is placed, legalities of abortion rights within a specific state and/or country, and the era in which she wrote. The trajectory of a woman’s pregnancy, the conception and gestation story, and her sexual or gendered experience may all be filtered into creative ‘egg space’, and the eventual poem. Here, ‘egg space’ is a vessel for exploration of sexuality, place, and motherhood in ways beyond my individual experience, but ultimately, the model is entirely available to other writers, and offers a multitude of ways into unique literary work. To use this exegesis as an example, although I feel that sexuality and place are primary factors when forming and analysing work focused on motherhood, another writer may choose to add politics and history, or midwifery and media, or other umbrella titles onto the triangle alongside motherhood.

To advance studies on motherhood and mothering, it is vital to name motherhood from the outset and place its exploration within wider contexts, enabling new theories and interdisciplinary analysis to emerge. Andrea O’Reilly discusses matricentric feminism as still ‘remaining peripheral to academic feminism’, and that feminism ‘developed from and for the specific experiences of mothers’ has largely been ‘ignored’ (*Theory, Activism, Practice* 213). Takseva points to the maternal as ‘exposed to the ‘politics of exclusion’ within the predominantly ‘hegemonic feminism’ of the second wave of the 1960s and 1970s (30).

*The Egg in the Triangle Model: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood* empowers mother-writers with a pathway to navigate in an authentic and honest way, according to what affects their

own experiences of motherhood. The model thus contributes a theoretical challenge to ‘the category of mother as neither politically contingent’ or ‘relevant to the larger feminist project’ (Takseva 30-31). Being formed from maternal epistemics, the model assists the rooting of matricentric feminism and maternal theory, although it does not delineate it solely or explicitly for use by women or mothers. Thus, the work is applicable as an additional intersectional tool for a range of feminist and other theorists.

The model refutes working along prescriptive modes of study, more so it is a model of discovery, powered by the unfolding of ideas in creative space. For example, a poetry project about geography may add ecology and economics onto its triangle, or myth and activism. The project may then draw in oppositions within those subjects, such as nature/culture; finite/infinite; silent/voiced; polluted/unpolluted; individual/communal; old/new; or wealth/poverty. As Terry Eagleton states, ‘poetry is a social institution’ and has ‘complex affinities with other parts of our cultural existence’ (39). Thus, it is vital that any model pertaining to poetry attempts to work from this complexity, whilst avoiding both the obscurity and loose generality that can occur with theorising, and umbrella terms such as culture or social, or indeed motherhood.

Originally engaging in maternal theory around specific dualisms, my project builds on *écriture féminine*, aiming to subvert and challenge the masculine through the exploration of feminine difference and writings on the female body. The work of Helene Cixous also has a pivotal engagement with the analysis of gendered binary oppositions and the notion that any philosophy around binaries eventually returns to the hierarchical ‘couple’ of ‘male/female’ (Moi 104). In Maggie Humm’s analysis of Cixous’ work, she highlights that in the male/female binary, the female is always seen as ‘other or the ‘negative’ in social constructs (39). I explore this ubiquitous ‘other’ state through my poetry and exegesis

in a variety of ways, showing female subjects, predominantly mothers, negotiating the spaces in-between multiple binaries. Whereas Cixous often lists binaries, ‘where the first term is always superior to the other’, my work does not delineate, or set up, this hierarchy. (Humm 39). Instead, I list oppositions in creative interplay from the outset, suggesting methods that destabilise the pre-determined and rewrite hierarchical perceptions.

### **Writing as a Woman and a Mother and the Gifts of Matricentric Feminism**

*Historically, writing has been a means of empowerment and a source of social anxiety for women. Feminist scholars of earlier women writers [from the 18th and 19th centuries] agree that women writers had more obstacles to overcome before they could write than their male counterparts (Kuirbayashi and Tharp 3).*

Writing as an act of ‘self-assertion’ has traditionally been outside of the sphere of femininity, partly as ‘the nature of writing and the socio-cultural ideas of femininity’ at different points in history have been incompatible (Kuirbayashi and Tharp 3). Although more recent progress exists for women writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially in the field of expressing motherhood, this historical backlog of repression and obstacles surrounding their writing still subsists.

Motherhood increases sexism for women, with heightened levels of social repression surrounding individual expression, voice, and writing (Bates 258-259). As such, feminist poetic and other creative works must be bold, enabling a stance against the pervasively patriarchal in its monstrous forms and navigation of the signified worlds of sexism. Visibly upturning the immoral and unjust raises cultural issues around the body and relationships to the fore. In her pioneering work researching matricentric feminism, O’Reilly makes important distinctions to branch

from the experience of women to the experience of mothers. O'Reilly cites Samira Kawash, acknowledging the 'naïve view of the essentialist woman, and her shadow, the essentialist mother' in post-structural accounts of gender and power ("A Feminism for Mothers" 20).

The aim of matricentric feminism is to develop and disseminate what O'Reilly calls a 'feminism for mothers', whilst avoiding the traps of essentialism, thus bridging an important academic and everyday gap in the lives and representation of mothers (17). Reaching beyond a 'gynocentric' stance to sit within a mother-centred perspective, the evolution of matricentric feminism from the broader umbrella of third-wave feminism, builds on recognising the ethical and social importance of intersectionality and epistemology, and draws on multiple academic fields to include anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history (O'Reilly, "A Feminism for Mothers" 17). In this way, the maternal evolves from rigid biology where the body alone is seen as a given, hidden or 'static truth', and instead develops in more visible arenas that can socially, aesthetically, and culturally critique gender and sexuality (Gregory and Lorange 140).

In relation to poetry, confessional literature dovetails well with matricentric feminism, as it often exposes issues around the body, truth, gender, and inequality that are frequently deemed as – or kept – private. In Olivia Heal's article, *Towards a Matricentric Feminist Poetics*, she outlines a theoretical approach to matricentric reading to include first-person work with a 'confessional register' as a way to begin to counteract the previous 'othering of mothers' (123).

Cosslett states, 'before the twentieth century, childbirth did not often appear in fiction' and when it did, it was often seen or dictated externally from another point of view, such as the audience's, the father's, or the attendant's perspective (1). I suggest that works that deal with

maternal experiences, to include birth, embrace – either subtly or starkly – its complexity and the mother’s own voice and experience, from micro and macro perspectives. Personal expression, echoed in the fundamentals of matricentric poetics, is paramount to maternal agency.

Joanna Frye lists seven factors that challenge mother-writers in their conveyance of maternal experiences:

1. ‘The material circumstances of motherhood, the requirements of time and energy and interruptibility’;
2. ‘Conflict between the terms “writing” and “mothering” – as they are activities traditionally seen as ‘mutually exclusive’;
3. Mothers are seen as objects – ‘embedded in the imaginings of their children, rather than active agents’;
4. A widespread notion that mothers and motherhood is not a valid or interesting subject for literature;
5. ‘Difficulty in speaking honestly as a *mother*’, which is associated with ‘the prevailing idea of Mother as a singular identity, without complexity or ambivalence – without a sexual identity or concerns beyond her children’;
6. A ‘tension between *self* and selflessness’; and
7. ‘The forms for mother-writing are simply not there’ (189).

Writing from these challenges, sets writing by mothers into a unique category. I identify with many of these listed writerly difficulties. On discussing the narration of maternal subjectivity, Frye discusses *The Mother Knot*, a memoir written in the 1970s, which, along with the work of Adrienne Rich, filled ‘the gaps caused by maternal silences’ (191). These works from the second wave of feminism, ‘continue to set the parameters for the work we need yet to do, teasing out the ‘knot’ of motherhood by writing the experiences of mothering’ (Frye 191). I

suggest the image of a knot, in relation to motherhood, is a term that aligns well with the interwoven characteristics of my model's 'egg space'.

In opposition to point seven on Frye's list, I do feel that I have writing forms to follow and be inspired by – from the 'riddle' of pregnancy that Plath describes in 'Metaphors' (*Collected Poems* 116), to Berry's 'whole wild fucking queendom' in her poem, 'The Republic of Motherhood' (2). Full-length memoirs on motherhood have also offered me ideas to develop. For example, Anne Roiphe's comprehensive 1990s reflection on second-wave feminism and motherhood, written as a grandmother, shares that the conflict of her life was 'about being a feminist mother and a mother feminist ... although the clash between motherhood and feminism is [she concludes] an artificial one' (258). Chitra Ramaswamy structures a nine-chapter linear memoir, *Expecting*, on the experience of an artificially conceived pregnancy. Writing as a lesbian-mother on the transformational journey taken in motherhood, Ramaswamy places maternal epistemics at the centre of her narration and research, with her language illustrating much of literary 'egg space', as she fuses ideas on self/other, life/death, inside/outside, and past/present.

What is clear, even in the light of these substantive, inspiring matricentric texts on mothering, is that creative writing by mothers on motherhood, or by mothers on other subjects, is relatively new on the timeline of literature. Mothers have only recently broken through at least some barriers of oppression. It is the aim of this exegesis to further maternal agency in creative and critical literature, thus aligning with the political and ethical aims of matricentric feminism. I recognise that feminism, as an overall movement that challenges oppression, cannot fully represent women's lives without elevating their stories to include their poetic expressions of motherhood, sexuality, and place, and the intersection of these subjects.

## Confessional Poetry – Working Truth

Evolving from the more objective stance of the modernist poets, confessional poetry became prominent in the late 1950s with Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and more recently Sharon Olds, Liz Berry, and Christina Thatcher. The general tone of the poetry in *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker* is confessional. Typical in confessional poetry are oppositional interplays, which can be analysed further in the ‘egg space’ of my model. For example, reality/imagination and self/other interactions are prominent in these works through employing the voice, feelings, and experience of the poet aesthetically, to challenge or redefine the outer world. Elizabeth Gregory discusses confessional literature, explaining:

While ostensibly the site in which firm identity (the ‘truth’ about oneself) is asserted, confession turns out to be a place in which received definitions of gender, of family role, of the mind/body relation, and of poetry are submitted to scrutiny and become blurred (38).

This blurring of ‘received definitions’, relates to the fusion and/or clash of public/private experiences typical of maternal and sexual experience, as examined throughout my poetry collection and in the model’s ‘egg space’. The confessional mode reproduces the notion of ‘raw experience’, which ‘sets up the binary structures between experience and theory, feelings and knowledge, subjective and objective and mind and body’ (Alcoff and Gray-Rosendale 214). These derivations of the ‘raw’ or real further embolden confessionalism as an area where ‘egg space’ can intervene to examine literature formed from and in-between binaries.

Confessional writing is most often associated with the real life of the writer-author. Drawing ‘on the poet’s autobiography [it] is usually set in the first person’ and often refers to names and scenarios known to the poet (Gregory 34). Confessional poetry is rooted in work that has



prohibition surrounding ‘expression by social convention: mental illness, intra-familial conflicts and resentments, childhood traumas, sexual transgressions, and intimate feelings about one’s body’ (Gregory 35).

The above themes echo through my three collections in first and third person pieces. For example, ‘No Imagination’ consciously deconstructs the maternal and sexual body; ‘Eros’ cites the ‘therapy room’ of the mother; ‘Cam Girl’ exposes pornography scenes; ‘Finely Unpicked’ examines family separation and a traumatic memory (told to me regularly by my mother); and ‘Another Country’ touches on the cataclysm of single parenting (25, 43, 54, 63, 107). In both nuanced and salient ways, these poems broach subversive exposures on subjective corporality, family relationships, poverty, challenged minds, and emotions in ways that destabilise perceptions around gender roles and norms.

In its starkest form, confessional work can shock, startle, and disturb, as it deals with outing or processing aspects of forbidden or private worlds. Recent relabelling of the confessional style in poetry includes terms such as ‘personal’, ‘autobiographical’, and ‘self-exploratory’ – a change due, in part, to the term *confession* being associated with religion, sin, criminality, or a psychological breakdown of some form (Gregory 35).

Elina Siltanen discusses ‘sincerity’ as key to the confessional poetry genre, in that confessional works deal with a clash between the unmediated and the performative, and especially so in the current age of ‘New Sincerity’. Termed circa 2005, ‘New Sincerity’ poetry is conveyed as oppositional exploration, where the self is conveyed with an ‘ironic hyper-awareness’, often has a ‘naïve’, ‘banal’, ‘emotional’ or cynical quality, and is additionally linked to the term ‘New Narrative poetry’ (980, 982). Quintessentially, confessional writing has the remit of being

authentic and sincere – although according to Siltanen both ‘authenticity’ and ‘sincerity’ in writing can be analysed as having differences in the representation of self (982).

Autoethnography is another term used for texts that reflect on personal experiences, while taking into consideration the wider social context. Sidone Smith and Julia Watson describe ‘backyard ethnography’ as the everyday utilisation of autobiographical material, beyond the gloss of published writings, from the self (17). The essence of confessionalism – as an exposure of one’s life – in more prosaic styles is seen flourishing in contemporary blogs, forums, social media, diary, and memoir publications.

James Pennebaker’s research, which emerged in the 1980s exposes the benefits and ‘power of expressive writing’ as a regular short activity to positively process and externalise traumatic experiences or ‘secrets’ (4). Although the term expressive writing is deliberately quite broad to allow exploration of trauma and upheavals to surface, ‘poetry’ in particular, as Pennebaker says, ‘can often capture the contradictions inherent in most emotions and experiences’. Thus, expressive writing also fits into techniques and creative writing processes pertaining to the confessional style and the contradictions of poetic ‘egg space’ (145).

Confessional writing may create a picture of uncertainty or collide with received binary narratives, as discussed by Gregory; however, it is important to step into this terrain and continue to expose the truth of the self – however debatable that may be in the postmodern world. Pennebaker’s work provides compelling evidence that expressing our deepest emotions around difficult life events and upheavals drastically improves health (7). Also, as a feminist stance, confessional writing tackles and reveals gender oppression in relation to the insidiousness of

patriarchy and cultural hegemonies. Indeed, Gregory states that confessional poetry challenges the term ‘feminine’ that has been marked as ‘secondary’ in ‘exclusionary hierarchies’ (33). In reading confessional work, the exhilaration may simply come from connection with selves that ‘we recognize as similar’ (Gregory 36). It is through this relational aspect of confessional work – where resonance with others occurs and dialogue forms – that the traditionally taboo in society, or dismissed areas within creative, academic, and everyday expression can receive necessary focus.

It is prudent now to consider how the model is used as a specific template to craft poetry, providing new pointers for creative writers.

### ***The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing: Form and Craft***

*Language englobes us and inspires us and launches us beyond ourselves, it is ours and we are its (Cixous xix).*

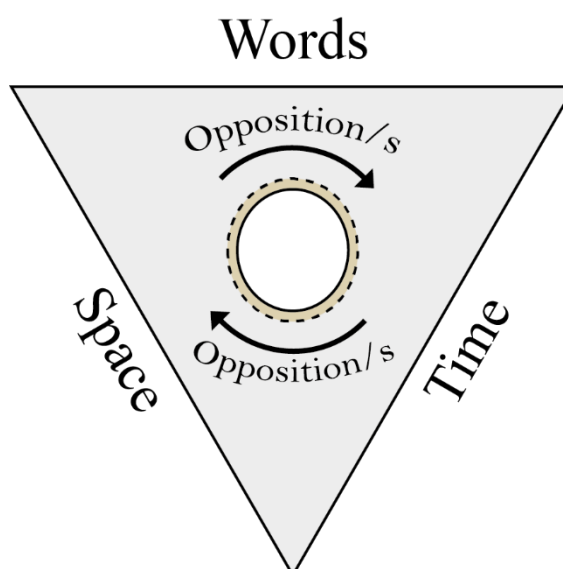


Fig. 4. *The Egg in The Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing: Craft and Form.*

There are many dichotomies that a writer inevitably encounters in forming work, repeatedly choosing one aspect of construction over another. Poets mingle prosodic techniques in unique ways, echo tradition, or combine both. The ‘egg space’ of my model, with an adapted thematic triangle, is helpful for decision-making around poetic craft and form. I have placed what I deem to be the most fundamental three areas for a poet on the triangle – words, space, and time. In this chapter, I explore these three features in relation to haiku, prose poetry, the sonnet, and free verse. Oppositions as seen in the below diagram (fig. 5.) are referred to as some of the keys into deeper analysis on, and the production of, my poetry.

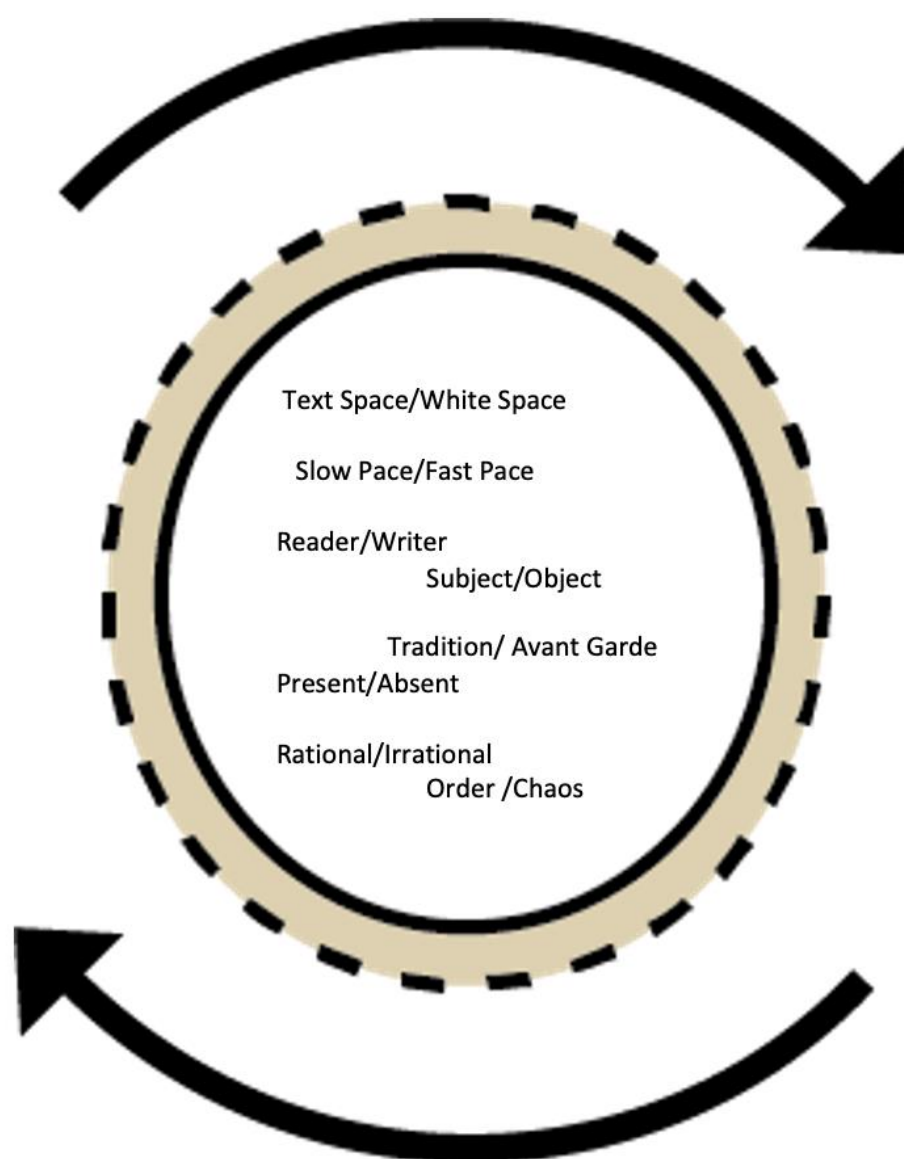


Fig. 5. Poetic ‘Egg Space’: Exploring Oppositional and Interwoven States with Craft and Form.

## Words, Space, and Time

In each of my collections, I order poems on the pages to show time in relation to the trajectory of conception, pregnancy, birth, and early mothering. The effect of this is to build a narrative and offer an overview of the poem's individual contexts. *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker* all have a clear temporal mother-child journey that loops from collection to collection, yet each one is also punctuated by poems on sexual relationships, geographical place, and wider family. Spacing out my poems thematically forms a braided reading of motherhood, sexuality, and place – one that may illicit surprise and/or challenge a reader's assumption of the linear or bound subject in space and time.

Throughout the poetry collections in *The Egg in the Triangle*, 'words' are consciously referenced – as firing, 'un-tethered', pieced back together, 'found', 'lured', heard, and celebrated as 'first words' (24, 35, 45, 59, 73, 113). Whether spoken or on the page, words make up a poem, and any avant-garde counter-poem of, say a purely blank page, or the stumped silent few minutes of a poetry reading, may generate lively conceptual debate around perhaps the power and/or lack of words but would tire quickly as a repeated or trending poetic expression. As Cixous states, language 'englobes' us (xix). The empty page or non-existent recital may be conveyed as poetic or artistic if a reader or audience knew of the aesthetic frame to that blankness or silence, perhaps perceived as a facet of language that 'launches us beyond ourselves' (Cixous xix). Although the human tendency is to explicate the gaps, to unfold the mystery or point of things, and this requires words in spoken or thought forms. So, in this case of the empty artwork, the aesthetic would be in the understanding of no words, woven against its opposite of words.

However, there is a ‘something in nothing’ quality to the idea of a tabula rasa that refreshes the creative mind and stills it, ready for the imposed text and formed images of the world. Note here that ‘egg space’ is empty until the poet fills it with observations, and he/she/they can lie long enough with experience to garner the memory. Kazimir Malevich’s ‘White on White’, 1918 painting inspires my poetic imagination ([kazimirmalevich.org](http://kazimirmalevich.org)). In this painting – a slightly tilted white square, akin to a blank page, on a white background – we are reminded of the apparently empty canvas as a premise to creative work. Nonetheless, even in the sparse image or open white space of the page, there is a definite print and existent backdrop. Whether this seemingly bare canvas is shaped by culture, philosophy, or the interpersonal, it sets the stage for the artist’s vision as a form of reflection. Poetic white space is, as Maxwell states, both ‘silence’ and ‘time’ and provides the counterpoint to the presence of the printed word (5, 46).

The haiku structure aligns with restriction; in some ways, like the Malevich painting, there’s less of a palette of tools to use and an obvious restraint to expression. With its traditional syllable limit of five, seven, five, and three lines, the haiku stands as both a geometric template and a strict time-based form. The haiku also traditionally links to nature’s mystery – also fashioned in part by time within a larger temporal pattern or frame, such as the seasons or pregnancy. In its Japanese origins, there is no expectation to rhyme or even title the haiku, more so to allow the image to be purely conveyed, though it is known for its ‘allusiveness and double meanings’ (Untermeyer 205). My poem ‘Evergreen’ uses words, space, and time to produce a subtly rhythmic effect around the image of a Christmas tree (71). In its last line the poem stretches out the c and s sounds, to represent the eternal, a zen-like linguistic expansion of time and place:

Garden shrine, cone-clad,  
ice-wed, berry blood lighting  
a ceaseless centre.

The repetition of monosyllabic but mainly disyllabic words in ‘Evergreen’ creates an internal rhythm, a gentle drumming in the rise and fall between the lines. When using a stripped back poetic form – as a lover of words and the thesaurus – I ask why use one pentasyllabic word when I can use two, three, four, or five words as building blocks for the image? The poem shows a natural cycle – a frozen winter, still infused with blood and growth – a life/death interplay in ‘egg space’. I chose short words to echo the brevity of the haiku and to allow for maximum use of words. The hyphens in ‘cone-clad’ and ‘ice-wed’ create a link between words to form sharper images, the hyphen gelling the noun and verb into oneness. The words ‘clad’ and ‘wed’ suggest the other, in similarity of sound with the end d, but also reiterate the dressing of a subject, connoting to personal and physical relationship, and I wanted to show this intimacy through grammar, thus chose to use the hyphens. Generally, in my poetry, I show caution in using a lot of words that elongate beyond three to four syllables, as they have the effect of slowing down a poem; the tongue gets laden, time stands still. The image or poem’s content may not require or deserve this temporal lingering.

My poem, ‘Queen Dandelion’, has just three quadrisyllabic words – ‘symbiosis’ and ‘dandelion’, which chimes in a non-uniform way with the end word ‘explanations’. Alliteration in the final stanza bounces off the weight of the longer word ‘symbiosis’, with the s’s in ‘she saves’, ‘scent’, ‘sweet’, internally in ‘viscous’ and ‘absorption’, and in the end ‘s’ of ‘jars’ and ‘lips’ (65). These unstressed s’s all collaborate to create a soft musicality in the last stanza’s syntax to reflect the flow of connection and nurture in the poem. Here, words enliven the depicted ‘symbiosis’ or ‘third space’ shown between the mother and child, phonetically and relationally.

Paramount in relation to the triads shown within ‘*The Egg in the Triangle Model*’, when applied to poetic craft, is the recognition that words, time, and space are all synergetic. It is impossible, I suggest, to see one without the other. For example, the mother – placed through her sexed body, we see a trio of influences on poetry that jostle in differing ways, dependent on the poem. This interweaving of themes and aspects can be shown in choices around both subject presentation and poetic form, sometimes as a clash or a harmonious fusion marrying the content, language, and form. For example, in my poem ‘Eclampsia and the Yellow Flowers’, the mother is depicted in a post-surgical, postnatal, medicalised stasis, separated from her baby (16):

The distance  
is

unspeakable.

The word ‘is’ sits in a single line, followed by a stanza break and another single word line ‘unspeakable’. ‘Is’ denotes being in the world, existence, aliveness – yet the surrounding space shares a hiatus, a rupture of sense, and shows the gap between the mother and baby. The mother’s expression in the scene is ‘unspeakable’, and when shown as a solitary word suggests the unvoiced and the unknown in a powerful way. There is no attempt to explore this unspeakableness further. The mother-poet as the maternal ‘I’ is quelled – there are no words that will do. Sometimes this is the case for a writer and the search for words or the lack of words becomes the point of the line, stanza, or whole poem – in similar ways, this absence of linguistic expression is seen in my works ‘More Poetry is Needed’ and ‘Poet’ (51, 113).

Tackling the conflict with words as absolute, dominant, given, or concrete is vital for the poet. There are known/unknown; found/unfound;



effective/ineffective; or true/untrue dichotomies that interweave or clash in middle spaces during the formation of poetry. I argue that this admission of grappling with words and what can or cannot be spoken within the actual poem can form realism specific to the content of the text and reflect the real labour of poetic crafting. Maxwell reiterates Keats' famed line, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', suggesting the interdependency but also the interplay of the aesthetic with the authentic word (35). As the subject in my poem 'December Unslept' admits, 'Can never be truthful but I must be cool', sharing some of the difficulty in speaking honestly and the superficial default of the everyday. The poem continues, 'Women have a great way of hiding or just stop talking', pointing to what is not said – in the poem and otherwise (111). While the poetic voice of Christine Keeler in 'Christine's Chair', the longest poem in the collection, calls 'the truth of my life', exposing images and sensations of womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood in a confessional style, yet ironically still ends up 'nailed' on the chair under 'his contract' (31-33).

All analytical encounters with words, space, and time must be specific to each poem – as an 'egg space' or microcosm. The poem is 'an organic society all of its own' with 'dominant and subordinate levels' – like any hierarchical society – and poetry bridges the gap between the rational/irrational, exploring questions around finality/process and signifier/signified (Eagleton 19, 21). One poem may drive the point of its alliteration or squeeze out a metaphor to exhaustion, the story becoming lost to technique, while another poem may infuse the reader with the pathos of its narrative to elicit an empathy that lives beyond the poet. Some poems are seemingly just a display of the manipulation of language to form the perfect rhyme or decasyllabic sonnet over any distinct social, personal, or moral message.

Due to the elevation of poetry from everyday language, I suggest, however, that it will not, and should not, ever do one thing. Indeed, as ‘egg space’ thinking has us consider, something is always measurable by what it is and what it is not, and it is within ‘egg space’ that we examine the interactions of interwoven or dichotomous situations. An effective poem, I suggest, marries a vision or message which is of the world, with poetic devices which are otherworldly, beyond the everyday. Poetic analysis about words and their intimacy with space and time offers angles on the subject/object dance in ‘egg space’. We must consider too the reader’s and writer’s mesh of life and cultural influences. The meaning of a poem’s words, says Eagleton, ‘is closely bound up with the experience of them’, so words carry shifting sensations and associations in new or unpredictable ways (21). Words are also afforded a sense of finality, and so are forever in cycles of resistance/submission in their reading.

Space in poetry provides emphasis, allowing pause as words hang in clarity, or are punctuated, or given dramatic limelight with em dashes. Dense text in poetry potentially wrestles words into less significance through the cramping of text with copious imagery or long sentences. See, for example, my epistle prose poem ‘Dear Blood’ (18). Through default of the ‘Dear Blood’ melee of biological and sexual metaphor, assonance, lack of enjambment, and line breaks, there is a fuller or longer read, which also reflects the circular and powerful drive of the cardiovascular system and an eternal, wrenching body/soul love story. Alternately, ‘I had a Baby’, succinctly deals with physical rift, brokenness, and loss with sparser language, white space, short stanzas, simple imagery, and indents to the lines being employed (50).

As Maxwell states, ‘You master form, you master time’, and it is vital to consider what form does and how it affects the poem’s reading and content (45). Some subjects need that extra exploding stanza or 10 more

un-enjambed lines. Some subjects are best delivered in the quick punch of a stripped back form, with additional white space built into the poem with em dashes or indents, for example. These choices are, of course, always subjective and pertinent to the story of the poem, but, I suggest, must retain the object of the poem in mind. Additionally, practical considerations will always surface for the creative writer. Does a journal have enough space for those extra two verses? Can the till receipt on the table stay dry so those vital, spontaneous words can be written upon it? Will the dream be remembered after breakfast? Is there a line limit for a competition or a standard word count for the prose poem or piece of flash fiction? Would an editor tire of the obviousness of the concrete poem? Has the creative text become tautological?

‘Egg space’ assists the creative text in formation, highlighting the porous space around a poem – the text’s fluidity in terms of considering and allowing oppositional interplay or separation, of, for example, tradition/avant-garde, subject/object, text space/white space, or reader/writer. Perhaps a poet wants to embrace the many levels that Eagleton speaks of, some dominant and others more subtle, flirt with sense/nonsense, finality/process, yours/mine. Yet, the solid circle of containment around the egg suggests the cast of the text on the page, when a poem is completed for dissemination, and then forms what Eagleton describes as ‘an epitaph-like air of deathliness [...] a disconcerting air of finality’, a ‘fateful necessity’ around its words (20). It is this ‘necessity’ – even in the debatable permanency of the word – that must also be examined in the contained dimension of ‘egg space’. When the poem reaches a supposed exactness, it is also in the centre of the model, literally encapsulated, sealed, stamped, submitted, or printed, the job – to some extent – done, from the poet’s perspective. The final copy or edit exists as, what Boyd calls, the ‘Scholarly/Creative Output’ on her spiralling model and represents an accumulation of creative decision-making (9).

In the process of reaching sealed or concluded poetic ‘egg space’, my free verse poem ‘Poet’ asks, ‘what makes your wrists twitch / as you scribble into the sense of it?’ (113). Through this line, we see a physical impulse to write – ‘the twitch’ or aha moment. I have, on occasion, had words become triggered or received in my imagination as a sudden physical message, jerk, stoppage, or shudder – as an energy or sensed image that intervenes with everyday thoughts and that I then need to process into words. This somatic receptivity leads to the ‘scribble’ as ‘Poet’ suggests, where words are importantly left to flow or be messy. Although this is not to discount epiphany – the combination of a seemingly newly found and perfect poetic collection of words that uplifts the mind, body, and soul, and remains unchanged in the editing of the full text. Robert Neimeyer explains that, in the initial phase of poetry production, the experience is best when the poem ‘finds’ him, rather than ‘forcing language on the experience’, which is ‘deadly’ and ‘mechanical’ (289). In some ways, this availability of the poet to the poem is akin to the zen-like space of whiteness, where the cognitive load is freed and an expansion within the whole poetic self or poetic read occurs.

The processual phase of chaos or reaching for meaning and sense is preserved in the expressive writing of my prose poem, ‘December Unslept’. With interruptions of random objects and places, such as ‘the bread banks for afterschool club’, ‘Handbag of Victorian school plays’ and ‘Christmas horses on sands sacramental’, alongside undercurrents of often surreal and twisting internal dialogue, the jungle-like block of words in ‘December Unslept’ challenges the reader (111). Minus line breaks, the only grammar separating the text being full stops, the poem feels dense and awkward to consume. Nonetheless, behind the scenes of this seemingly spontaneous and uninhibited poetic roam, there was an editing process. I removed excess ‘I’s, to assist the linguistic outpouring of the domestic and everyday, fashioning the poem to provide its own frank and

autonomous flow. Many lines of automatic roving were omitted and I blended some sentences by removing full stops and capitalisation. Excluding commas was purely experimental and a technique used with the aim of breaking sense. I wanted to reflect the distinct chaos that existed in my life at the time of writing ‘December Unslept’ – a broken van, recent house move, unstable love affair, a sick dog, absent father to my child, and around the time of editing the poem – a pandemic. Removing commas also highlighted how useful they usually are for creating sense, timing, and pace in a poem. Much logic is lost when the comma is deleted.

The effect of ‘December Unslept’, is redolent of Bernadette Mayer’s hybrid text *The Desire of Mothers to Please Others in Letters* and Elisabeth Horan’s prose poems. ‘December Unslept’, like Mayer’s work and Horan’s prose poetry, also has a commitment to the confessional, and linguistic juxtapositions but further, to imagery of the maternal and sexual that weave the writing together. With ‘blood on the sheets and two lots of come’, ovulation jelly, a self-confessed ‘*fuck-boy*’, the female subject wanting ‘to make milk again’, and ‘kiss like a suave bitch’, ‘December Unslept’ shows the poetic fusion of motherhood, sexuality, and place (111). Characters that appear in other parts of my collections are referenced in ‘December Unslept’, showing poetic counter-context in the starkly divergent form of prose poetry, compared to the predominant free verse multi-stanza styles in my poetry. The child, lover, and the child’s father appear in different, but arguably more intimate, linguistic scenarios in ‘December Unslept’. As Noel-Tod states, one of prose poetry’s ‘expansiveness’ is its ‘private’ one (xxxiii). Additionally, Dominique Hecq points out that prose poetry ‘questions boundaries between creative and critical material through negotiating between notions of a public language of prose and a marginal language of poetry’, thus this genre aligns well with the dichotomous interplays of ‘egg space’ (3).

I intended, or more so allowed for, both ‘December Unslept’ and ‘Co@vid 50:50’ to brim with a peculiar intensity of private/public and logical/illogical interchange. The prose poem form with its blurred boundaries is, according to Jeremy Noel-Tod, ‘the wittiest theorist of its own liminality, inviting us to see the ambivalence of identity as the way of the world’ (xxxvi). Discussing the strength of the prose poem in the spaces it fills, Noel-Tod highlights that the text space/white space interplay has room for playfulness and experiment (xxxv). The weight and power of white space gives way in an instant in prose poetry, as the poet chooses the torrent of the fully inked line, which can both jar and excite the traditional verse poet and change their creative identity and signature.

In ‘Co@vid 50:50’ and ‘December Unslept’ self-awareness around the act of writing comes under the spotlight with declarations in my writing: ‘I hate poetry anyway’, switching to ‘I like poetry now’, the poetic ‘I’ going on to ‘work out the best angle of my poetry’, ‘Have to write’ and the image of the ‘Poet [as] always looking in’ (40, 111). These prosaic references expose the frequent excess and contradiction of words that exist just under the surface of more finely tuned verse or prose. My chaotic prose poems share complexity and multiple loops of reference to motherhood and sexuality as entangled experiences, reflecting oppositions in ‘third space’ with imagery to the inside/outside, joy/disdain, and freedom/restriction of the maternal subject. Aligning with the modernistic ‘apocalyptic landscape’ that the prose poem occupies, especially seen when I refer to the Covid-19 pandemic in ‘Co@vid 50:50’, these poems share the ‘restless cacophony of urban life [...] as the raw material of the prose poem’ (Noel-Tod xxxv).

In free verse poems, the diametric of text space/white space is seen in interplay as they are read from stanza to stanza – or ‘room to room’, in the Italian translation. A stanza has its own sense of place. Thomassen

contends that the ‘sacrality of space [...] rests upon a very basic recognition of boundaries and division of spaces’ and protecting spaces – sacred or otherwise – are ‘in-between’ or ‘neutral zones’ (*Liminality and the Modern* 13). Existing on the threshold between stanzas, areas of white space can be viewed as a liminal intermediary place or a passageway that further defines the more solid stanza. This idea links well with my poetic interest in liminality within language’s meaning and structure, with ‘egg space’ as the area where choices around time and spacing are contemplated more intensely in relation to the in-between and oppositional interplay.

White space directly relates to something beyond it, instigating movement of the eye, imagination, time, and pace in a poem. The shape of a poem and moments of suspension are more accessible and malleable with conscious use of white space. Berry’s stanzaic structure in her free verse poem ‘Placenta’ takes the form of one continuous verse, with line breaks and enjambment (16). Although white space is used in ‘Placenta’ as alternate line indents which break the poem into a jagged pattern, it still holds a conscious unified structure – rather like the placenta itself. So, a single stanza poem removes the step-by-step or room to room amble in the poem, but still has the option to play with white space to create pause, disruption, or manipulate time.

How words are placed – densely, scattered, or aligning to the poem’s imagery as seen in a concrete poem – will affect how the poem is read. There are useful questions to ask around this embroilment of words with space and time – am I, the poet, challenging the writing/reading in a new way with word placement, is there provision of ease and extra layers of meaning through words to elevate the poem’s register, is the poem aligning with tradition or moving away from it, and how? In ‘My Moon’, for example, I move from a free verse indented stanza to form a crescent





moments like this –  
                                 with no witness.  
 Even the birds left us  
                                 and we filled the bowl alone.

In ‘The Apple Tree’, sections of the stanza hang in isolation, often to echo solitude around the subject/s, but also to emphasise the layers within the text and allow the world within the poem to breathe. The structure of the enjambed line, ‘It was exactly / ripe’ was chosen to illustrate the apple hanging off the branch in the single word line – ‘ripe’. Space in this instance emphasises the child’s reach for the fruit and the moment of ‘his first apple’ (27). Poems in *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker* are multi-layered, often speaking of fusions around nature, culture, gender, trauma, and love in relation to the mother, child, and a male figure. Poetic white space, if highlighted as the liminal ‘division’ that Thomassen explores, helps these emotive, dialogic issues gain special focus, thus guiding the reader to absorb the text’s breadth in differing ways (*Liminality and the Modern* 13). So, not just in the inferences of language, but in the pace and physical presentation of the poem, subject beams creatively from the page in pathways that move between light/dark or white space/text space.

Olds predominantly writes poems in single versed stanzas, her texts offering less pause, which matches the raw and driving intensity of how she boldly broaches sexuality and motherhood. In *The Dead and The Living*, she positions her poems in the section that explores her children to represent their gender – the verso pages sharing poems about her son, and the recto pages, her daughter (Johnson 167). Here, the subject is divided into distinct concrete space, the boundaries being pages, representing how important it often is for a poet to construct collections, not just single poems with space in mind, to further direct the reading.

During the creation of my poetry collections, I started to appreciate poems that I felt simply ‘looked good’ through their exactness in stanza shape and size on the page. For example, in Natalie Ann Holborow’s *Small*, her poems are mainly limited to one page, some in single stanzas like Olds, but others in clearly conscious structures such as repeating couplets, tercets, or quatrains (16, 23, 28, 51). I noted how I enjoyed the appearance and measure of a poem with these precisely crafted stanzas.

In more ordered and neat poems, such as tercet forms, the text is easier on the eye; the poet having placed the words into an accessible, traditional line aesthetic, over sprawling, chopped up free verse with dissonance or irregularity in shape. I propose that variety in a collection, is vital for surprise and engagement and thus no single form should take superiority. Instead, a mix of forms shows poetic dexterity and care with the placing of language. Form has the effect that, even before the poem is read, the audience is cognisant of the sealed ‘egg space’ or appearance of the poem, as a unique, whole structure. The poet has worked in the porous in-betweenness of creative ‘egg space’ to produce an ‘air of finality’, however that looks, and this is especially intriguing when the crafting shows space as a mirror or amplification of the words (Eagleton 20). Language has multivalence, our speech and emotions change based on situations, vision, imagination, time and experience. In the writer’s ‘egg space’, there are inner/outer, slow/fast, forbidden/allowed areas of expression, among other dichotomies. As such, a poet elevates and expresses life’s diversity into collections, voicing with varied pauses, gaps, and compressions or foci of language. Although, a corpus of work that adheres to the repetition of distinct or curious techniques throughout, should not be underestimated. For example, see Old’s individual stanzas or Andrew Mcmillan’s, *Physical*, where the entirety of poems are crafted with grammar omissions and the frequent creative use of extended space, showing a stylistic power that weaves among a range of poetic forms.

In *Fresh Fruit and Screams*, my formative poetry collection, I created hybrid prose poetry in ‘While They Slept or Bathed’ and used concrete form in ‘Bats’ (34, 36). ‘Bats’ hangs in space, to match form and content:

Oh lover!

We  
 have  
 hung  
 like  
 bats  
 onto  
 the  
 bad  
 times  
 for  
 too  
 long  
 now.

Let’s spread our toes a while.

*The Egg in the Triangle* collections employ similar prose poem, grammatical, and concrete elements, alongside other techniques involving form, space, and dialogue, to show an evolution in my aesthetic. As Maxwell asks, ‘What form suggests what story?’ (91). There were many stories that I was drawn to share in the production of the three poetry collections, a lot of these stories feeling inherently important or helpful to poetically verse. Each time, I played with form to find the right fit for my content. As a body of confessional poetry, I dealt with new realities in ‘third space’ – hard truths around birth trauma, illness, separation, loss, gendered sexuality, and the toll of motherhood on identity and freedom. Maxwell points out that ‘Telling any kind of truth, making work that’s

tough, unforgettable, lovely [...] will demand new forms from verse poets' (61).

In alignment with creating more set forms in *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker*, I moulded poems such as 'Harbour Wall' which uses tercets and '*Storm Bella, 2020*' with couplets (42, 110). Both the tercet and couplet structures are absent from my first collection *Fresh Fruit and Screams*. In '*Storm Bella, 2020*', the couplets project intimacy and the sexual encounter of two, with the poem's end stanza as a single line, standing alone to mirror the isolation of the female subject (42). My poem 'Railway Line 30/40' works in tercets, availing in some ways to the triad of mother-father-unborn child. 'Harbour Wall', again formed using tercets, follows a tripartite narrative around the pigeon embryo, the poetic 'I', and the pigeon mother. Some poems seem to align with this ordering of lines and stanzas over others, matching form with content – stretching the tools of poetic creativity for heightened impact. More consciously placed poetry, where words, time, and space weave to convey as much as the basic inked text, I suggest shows a more awakened and confident poet. Conversely, my sonnet 'Pornography' subverts and challenges the beautiful love poem – 'with each strangers fist, slap on slap, pin, rape. / He comes for all of it: revenge, fun, fake', demonstrating how form is used ironically, in torrid self-reference to pornography's link with rape culture and gendered subjugation, thus challenging the sonnet's own structural convention and historical thematic (34).

Maxwell discusses the 'pressure' that black and white space 'exert upon one another' in poetry (11). However, it is the imprinting of human expression with text space (or 'black space', as Maxwell puts it) that links the word to the poet as a person. As Maxwell states, 'someone is there' and there is 'never no reason' for this imprint (34). As a poem percolates in the inner world, a poet, I argue, tugs into language before they are

concerned over physical spacing. Only on rare occasions, I plan the form, such as a sonnet, haiku, or automatic prose poem. This planning of certain poetic structures was done during the creation of the collections to delve deeper into the creative potential of form, and to challenge my writing habits, which sway towards free verse. Nonetheless, I must find the words first, then deal with the creative options around such aspects as white space, cadence, syllabic rhythms, tricks of onomatopoeia, internal dialogue, narrative voice, volta or repetition, and so on. As an example of decisions that came when I became more confident to play with white space and line length, my free verse poem ‘Bone Maker’ places words in a fractured stanza of single, double, and longer word lines (99):

Now you sleep in another street,  
                                   our heat strewn  
 like  
       broken                  glass  
 between  
                                   houses.

The stanza has cadence, a drive that dissipates from the comparatively elongated first line – extenuated with assonance and a drum-like rhyme in ‘sleep’ and ‘street’ – to end with the solitary word ‘houses’. The lines are placed to reflect a disruption in a relationship, as the normal line is chopped up to truncate flow or ease in the read, beyond enjambment. There are holes and gaps between the lines of the stanza that sit in a random pattern to suggest the fall of broken glass. The last line speaks of the space that exists between the mother and the father of the child, a separation shown as the final word of the stanza sits laterally to and under empty space. The glass in the poem is ‘broken’ – heightening the situation of un-partnering, and a lost connection. If I had chosen the adjective ‘beautiful’ or ‘smooth’ and written a succinct flowing line that described the glass and its whereabouts, I suggest that I would not have found the

depth of resonance to the discard, pain, isolation, and peril that I sought to express poetically.

In this example, we see words, space, and time flowing to fashion the poem in alignment with the mother-poet's emotional, visual, physical, and relational state. The words in 'Bone Maker' amplify the maternal, with 'milk powders', images of early mornings and the form of the baby still 'warm' in the mother's womb (99). Words can delve into the nomenclature or an argot list of the subject under the poetic eye, further mining its terms of association, and thus creating a more impactful and authentic reading.

My ironic sonnet, 'Pornography' and '*It's normal*, he said', a free verse and found poem, both use the terminology and slang of digital pornography to construct their critical worlds (34, 69). This self-referential cornucopia can be used for poets as a task to start texts, asking what other words can be found in subjects, beyond a thesaurus or the poet's first choice of words. It is useful for poets to explore cultural side-lines, slang, upturn, or parody cliché, and find lateral, hidden, or evolving meanings in media and language to convey a unique awareness of the embroilment of a situation.

In an exposure on the creative writing process, my poem 'Poet' uses an argot list around poetry, seeing the 'alphabet' thrown to the sky, 'vision' being clawed, the poet composing and 'lowing' at their 'desk' (113). There is a sense of a semi-tortuous love affair with words and the poet's choices around them. 'Poet' pertains to the writer being almost obsessed and fractious, 'arguing the point of each line'. There is a day/night struggle with chaos, order, and romance, rolled into one tatty, used, and loved book, a never-ending affinity to turn all of life into the stuff of poetry in 'this irked / and beautiful world' – a suitable paradox

that ends the collection (114). With half-rhyming end lines ‘verse’, ‘irked’, and ‘world’ in the final three lines of the stanza, these are placed in space as homage to tradition. As Maxwell states, ‘rhyme says remember’, even though it was ‘newfangled in the Middle Ages’, and the best we can do when considering form is to ‘learn from what lasted’ (54, 61,114).

In my poem ‘Researching the Kiss’, repetition is used in scattered ways, with chime, alongside alliteration and rhythmic syllabics. This prosody is combined with a novel stance to craft, using the language of research to contrive a format for the nuance of a love poem (75). The stanzaic structure of this poem reflects the terminology of qualitative research. It was formed in part as a reflection of, immersions in and my angst and frustrations around producing an exegesis linked to the creative body in the dissertation. However, what occurred was a selection of skeletal subtitles, some repeated for humour, to offer insights into the varied experiences of a relationship, that too had its own path of discovery and time-based revelations, as seen in a research project. The relationship under study was framed to deliver poetic research material, with ‘Background’, ‘Setting’, ‘Field Notes’, ‘Further Field Notes’ and so on, to produce a unique text. Tackling both the romantic liaison and the research process in poetry through a fusion of content and form, ‘Researching the Kiss’ uses each of its stanzas to explore differing and formal techniques. For example, the alliterated s’s in the second stanza align to the sea scene and sounds, and create a lull around the intimate connection depicted:

September sand,  
 abandoned  
 on this Scorpio transit,  
 us staggering shoulder to shoulder  
 in our first dusk.

In the ‘Observers Paradox’ section of the poem, repeated bi-syllabic end words are chosen to give the stanza a beat, a sexual rhythm, or pulse that matches the content of the verse and the lover-to-lover narrative. ‘Leaving’ is placed with a full stop to echo the interruption or end point that ultimately comes with all sexual experiences (77):

Watch the buds of my fingers  
 touch until rapture,  
 in this inescapable season.  
 Leaving. Your lips are mythic.

The concluding stanza as a ‘Report’ shows an ‘egg space’ conflict of desire/rejection, fantasy/reality, and reader/maker (78):

Report

Tell you,  
*I don't want this book to ever end.*

*It will be epic, you said.*

And left.

There is an interplay of sincerity/sarcasm in ‘Researching the Kiss’, which is typical in works by Dorothea Lasky, as her poems also often name in the title what the poem then goes on to subvert, or oscillate in-between, for example, in her poems ‘Porn’ or ‘I Hate Irony’ (Siltanen 983, 993). This sincerity/sarcasm or irony/enthusiasm interplay found its place in ‘Researching the Kiss’ – with its impasse, contrasts, and genuine ‘Emic/Epistemology’ in the stanzas. The poem offers a fresh and newly found approach to poetic form, which stretched and housed the creativity of single line stanzas, inconsistent verse length, line repetition, explicit sexual imagery and language, long form, a drift between the elements, the mystical ‘Scorpio transit’, the ‘wordless’ water, and the everyday. In the



final stanza, of ‘Researching the Kiss’, the male and female voices are separated by extra space but are still enclosed in the title structure ‘Report’, to create dissonance and uncertainty around their connection. This is further suggested in the last line break, alluding to the impending distance and finality of the relationship – as seen in the blunt, isolated line ‘And left’ (78).

## Motherhood Poetry: Exploring the Matrix – From Cunts to Colostrum and the Mother of God

### ‘The Republic of Motherhood’

*I crossed the border into the Republic of Motherhood  
and found it a queendom, a wild queendom (Berry 1).*

### Introduction to the Poetics of Motherhood

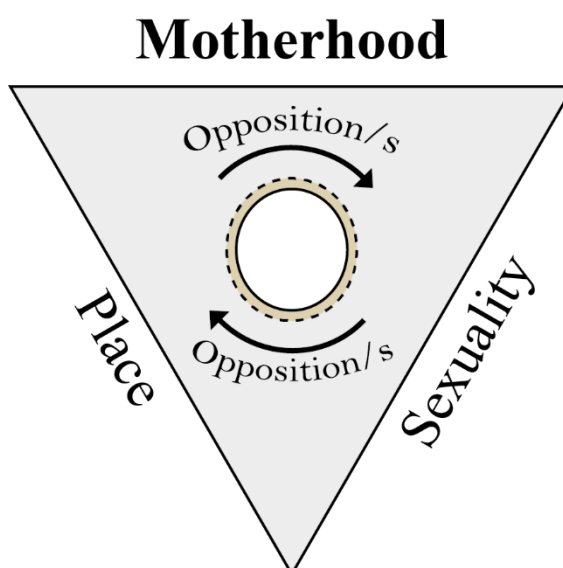


Fig. 6. *The Egg in the Triangle*: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood – (Motherhood).

Layers of context surround any reading of motherhood. Takseva states that, due to the breadth and scope of scholarly research around motherhood in literary, women’s, feminist, and gender studies, ‘it is no

longer possible to speak of something called motherhood without carefully contextualising the term' (37). By placing motherhood within a framework of sexuality and place, my project refutes any ideas of subject singularity from the outset. Instead, my creative writing and critical work aids the exploration of intersections, and crucially raises the maternal within discourses of modern anthropology, philosophy, history, sociology, biology, healthcare, and ethics.

In her study on 'how society moulds and constrains mothers', Aminatta Forna shares a historic binary within motherhood, where pre-Victorian attitudes to childrearing were less swathed in sentiment (25). Indifference to motherhood, according to socioeconomic influences, cultural attitudes, and expectations, was not new to first- or second-wave feminism. Instead, both waves provided, in different ways, the means to challenge the rule of 'mothers love [where] women were expected to be only too keen to sacrifice themselves in ways large and small for the wellbeing of their children', which Forna roots in the seminal work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (circa 1762), when motherhood was 'formulated' (25). Thus, enquiry into motherhood reveals how it has been shaped over time, existed in schisms of ideology and, as a site of experience, never stops!

Jeane Anastas and Irina Aristarkhova ask, 'what kind of space is the mother?', going on to suggest that she 'might be defined as a very special kind of place, not "just" a space' (26). 'Matrix' etymologically 'encompasses the spatial, welcoming and material imprinting qualities, while maintaining its basis in the maternal body' (19). In their discussion on matrix space, Anastas and Aristarkhova set out an argument of the problematic association of the feminine with the maternal and its capacity for hospitality, claiming 'there is no space in the matrix ... space is what the matrix-chora enables ... in acts of the maternal' (27). The 'chora' has

several interpretations but is noted as receptacle space – that which forms formlessness in Derridean and Platonic thought (Anastas and Aristarkhova 17). According to Anastas and Aristarkhova, Plato, and later Jacques Derrida, negate the feminine in maternal and matrixial processes, undermining the *her* or *she* in traditional and deconstructed creation stories and myths (21). Anastas and Aristarkhova suggest a remedy of ‘demetaphorization’, to renovate the ‘presence of “actual mothers” in our imaginaries of space, generation and “being with others”’ (22). How this ‘demetaphorization’ may look, I propose, can be explored in literature that presents epistemological evidence of the maternal body, poetically or otherwise, and challenges singular, cliché, dominant, or paternal views of creation stories, thus embedding work from ‘actual mothers’ to reframe the philosophical hegemony.

Matricentric feminism offers a wealth of theory and praxis around actual mothering as a potentially empowered social, political, and personal arena. This is a shift from second-wave feminist discourse, which often deemed motherhood to be a disempowerment in its capacity for generation, raising the issue that ‘it was woman’s reproductive biology that accounted for her original and continued oppression’ (Firestone 66). I argue that there is a contemporary clash of feminisms around motherhood, from liberal to radical and cultural to third wave, which places the subject of motherhood itself in liminal or ‘egg space’ as ideas on the maternal interplay. Petra Bueskens echoes this concept, suggesting that contemporary motherhood deals with being ‘free’ and ‘subordinated’ in a current culture of ‘deregulated patriarchy’, that leaves women ‘in a state of chronic and inexorable contradiction’ (59, 63).

Glaser shares the words of many feminists who study and centralise the maternal, stating that ‘motherhood is the unfinished business of feminism’ (10). Accepting there is more ‘business’ to be done in the study

of motherhood, there are multiple creative writing routes into the subject, which I discuss below in relation to my own maternal journey and research and as seen in other mother-poet's work. First, however, it is vital to discuss the division between understandings on motherhood and mothering.

### **Motherhood and Mothering**

In *The Egg in the Triangle* collection, an array of mothers are written about, mostly pertinent to my own experience and each presenting distinct context and narrative to the term 'motherhood'. The word 'motherhood' is discussed as a patriarchal construct by O'Reilly, who sees the term in relation to Adrienne Rich's pivotal work. Rich outlined the profound difference between the *social* and *natural* aspects of motherhood, otherwise seen as its experience and its 'institution' (39). O'Reilly highlights the importance of distinguishing between these paradoxes, given that they continue to influence society and behaviour ("A Feminism for Mothers" 21). She states that motherhood is 'male defined and controlled and deeply oppressive to women whereas mothering [...] is female defined and potentially empowering to women' (21-22).

O'Reilly's ideas within matricentric feminism build on the work of second-wave feminists, such as Rich, illustrating binary interplays that can be taken into 'egg space'. Tensions between natural/social, male/female, oppression/empowerment, and experience/institution, for example, are key issues that mothers and philosophies of the maternal face. Poetic 'egg space' allows these stark opposites to find room to be further explored within the material and ephemeral inspirations of conception, gestation, pregnancy, birth, and mothering phases.

Angles and representations from mothers on mothering/motherhood unearth unique and shared experiences to enlighten readers through testimony, celebration, and protest. It is the phases of early mothering (from birth to ten years) that my poetry and exegesis focus on, offering reflections on motherhood/mothering or the social/natural binary, predominately written from first-person points of view.

### **Angles on the Antenatal**

Moments of prenatal sexual activity or erotic musing around the idea of fertilisation and stages of conception offer rich poetic ground. Such states embrace the emotions of hope, joy, and fear, explore physical relationships, and the interchange of unknown/known and real/imagined experiences. There is mystery around early conception, and its grey or indeterminate nature suits ‘egg space’ well.

Olds, in ‘The Planned Child’, explores her own conception and how she’d rather have been ‘conceived in heat, / in haste, by mistake’ than on her mother’s fertility chart (7). In ‘The Conception’ Helen Dunmore writes how ‘in the white sheets I gave you / everything I am capable of – at the wrong time / of the month we opened / to the conception’ (6). These excerpts, taken from *The Picador Book of Birth Poems* suggest the dichotomies of the planned/unplanned aspects of conception and recreational/procreational sex. The journey of pregnancy can start from very different places – from the perceived wrong timing in Dunmore’s poem, to the carefully crafted fertility chart of Olds’ mother where she became ‘the little *x* on the / rising line that did not fall again’ in ‘The Planned Child’ (7).

My poem, 'Walking Pregnant in the Bluebells', uses the metaphor of bluebells to illuminate the growth from conception to pregnancy and birth (80). The poem starts with the invisible process of conception: 'In-between an unknown day / and an unknown night, they arrive / like a circus suspended / in the ivy spiral of life' (80). The poem is typified by conception and gestation by natural imagery of flowering and growth. Yet there is eventual decline, as the 'Bluebells bow, flat to the black, / seeds veined through seasons trees'. Bluebells in the poem symbolise the interplay of oppositions – light/dark, life/death, hidden/exposed– which establishes the text's language and imagery in poetic 'egg space'.

The bluebells are synonymous with early pregnancy; defying any fixed identity as they shift naturally from fullness to emptiness and the space of the in-between, as they are set into the woodland floor to eventually repeat their seasonal eruptive cycle. As Eagleton states, 'similes and metaphors insist on affinities which we also acknowledge to be different', so there is a romantic vagueness to the bluebells as they stand for human conception, gestation, and birth in the poem (139). Yet, among the intermediary space of the metaphor, a powerful, pre-set force or pattern exists in the poem's representation of the cycle of the bluebells, which equates pregnancy to a solid *Mother Earth* – one that holds life, has self-regulating systems, and transitory phases of embodied creation.

'Walking Pregnant in the Bluebells' crosses confidently into all three sections of my model. Motherhood is immediately depicted by the title; a strong sense of place is evoked through the woodland scene, and sexuality is presented laterally as the rise and fall of reproductive energy. As a conception/gestation poem, there is no baby shown, hence there is less human relation; instead, motherhood is subsumed in a reflective metaphorical gaze of earthly production.

Despite the poem's symbolic and romantic view of early maternity, it suggests the imaginations stirring in 'third space', with a representation of interwoven dichotomies as light/dark and life/death alongside the 'mystery of incarnation' (Beauvoir 556). That there is death in 'Walking Pregnant in the Bluebells' – 'flat to the black' – echoes with other poems in my collections that share the 'black collapse' of birth and the 'funeral drive home' from the maternity ward with 'Nothing to say // from these thinned teeth' (17, 50). The bare, quiet, and/or death-like phases of reproduction are suggested as equally poignant and relevant to a mother as the blooming, enlivened, and thriving states. For Ramaswamy, pregnancy stimulated ideas explicitly linked to death, from 'womb to tomb', and the 'bookending' qualities of the birth/death dichotomy (77).

'Walking Pregnant in the Bluebells' was written and inspired by a regular walk that I took in a wood in Pembrokeshire in the early stages of my pregnancy. I knew little of what was ahead with birth trauma, relationship unrest, and the labour of maternity. The poem is a psycho-geographic poem, as it uses landscape and particular location to explore the physical and cognitive states of early pregnancy. Ramaswamy draws on the geography of Scotland – urban and rural – to convey the nature of gestation and a recognition that our bodies are our 'very own figurations of mother earth, the pregnant body [being] the strangest and most powerful one' (37).

Along the theme of the antenatal phase in 'Solstice', a poem by Kathleen Jamie, she speaks to her foetus: 'Look what awaits you: / Stars, milk bottles, frost / On a broken outhouse roof // Let's close the door / And rearrange / The dark red curtain' (18). Jamie's work involves the interplay of the inner/outer worlds of pregnancy. In 'The Barrel Annunciation', the 'crone's trick' is shown as an aspect of the mystery of conception and incarnation, 'sold to the barren at her cottage door' (Jamie

10). In relation to liminality, the door is of great symbolic importance, presenting a physical threshold to the inside/outside. Parallels exist between the doors in Jamie's maternal poems and the experience of becoming a mother.

Like Jamie in 'Solstice', in 'Scan at 8 Weeks', Helen Dunmore speaks to the foetus: 'You are eight millimetres long / and pulsing ... One day will we talk about this // moment when I first saw your spaceship / far off, heading for home?' (15-16). There is a bond between mother and child shown as a direct poetic address, even though the baby is not yet born. This talking to the unborn baby explicates the 'third space' of my theoretical ideas well. 'Third space' involves enmeshment between the mother and child, is a concrete space inhabited by the experience and actions of motherhood, usually leading at varying points to social, physical, emotional, and psycho-spiritual engagement, where one influences the other, and neither is fully independent.

In Penelope Shuttle's 'The Conceiving', the foetus is again spoken to as a tangible, cognitive being: 'Now / you are in the ark of my blood ... the arms of my womb / Now you are here / you worker in the gold of flesh' (11). The engagement to the foetus-baby as part of a 'we' in Dunmore's poem, an 'us' in the 'let's' of Jamie's 'Solstice', and firmly placed 'in' the maternal body within Shuttle's poem, shows the mother again in 'third space'. Even before the baby is born, there is fusion, dialogue, and relational connection, which in part represents the transformation that occurs for women during pregnancy as they begin to allow space for another.

My poem 'Railway Line 30/40' shows a pregnant woman sitting by a train track. The maternal body is written in several transformational forms (82):



Squatting under autumn sky,  
by the oily tracks, graffiti,  
my arms plump to hold.

Breasts globed. Acid rises  
like a portent. Cunt –  
plum coloured, leaking urine.

Here, the natural female processes of gestation and pregnancy have a fluid, excessive and porous quality, ‘leaking’, fattening, and rising. This excess around the figurative body is typical in *écriture féminine*. The use of the word ‘cunt’ in the poem references a feminist aesthetic stance of the second wave, breaking taboos around the body, confirming the vagina’s erotic powers and a self-determined sexual appetite (Frueh 201). ‘Cunt positiveness’ was termed in the 1970s in art and literature to highlight gender conflicts, empowering women to reclaim from misogynistic culture and give their own genitalia a new public voice or mind, thus intersecting with debates surrounding ownership and agency of the female body (Frueh 192, 194).

‘Railway Line 30/40’ holds social commentary on the counterpoints of motherhood/mothering, and the social/natural binary as discussed by O’Reilly, as the woman in the poem stumbles back, over the railway line to ‘the father, cackling from /our fight in the fruit trees ... to feed him’ (82). The maternal ‘I’ is shown mothering the father – she feeds him, even though the ‘capacity’ she has for this astounds her. Considering the ‘capacity’ of the maternal figure during the pregnancy stage is useful in elucidating the labour-intensive work of motherhood, to include gestational phases and the social enactment of gender assumptions. This maternal nurture of the father or adult male is also illustrated in my poem ‘The Apple Tree’, with the mother checking ‘him, / sleeping’ (28). The

‘him’ in this instance associating vaguely to either the male child or the adult male figure. The same stanza in ‘The Apple Tree’ ends with reference to ‘his favourite bread’, further suggesting the dedication and succour of the maternal role (28).

‘The fight’ in the last stanza of ‘Railway Line 30/40’, evokes ideas of conflict between the paternal/maternal (82). Although this ‘fight’ is not elucidated further in the poem, it sets the stage for much of my poetic texts that follow about the challenge of domestic unrest in relation to the father. ‘Railway Line 30/40’ reveals ideas on disparity and incongruity surrounding early maternal experience, both inside and outside of the body. The ‘thorny egress’, that leads to the shared maternal home, has an affinity with both the natural, painful physical passage of imminent birthing and the state or grounding of the relationship as somehow dangerous. The poem’s implied clash between freedom/subordination, as the mother returns to the father through the thorns, ‘as an animal / from its trap’, essentially names a situated problem – ‘the trap’ – whether that be of a socialised domestic service, domestic unrest, or the physical pregnancy.

Sharon Hayes places relationships of coercion or control in a triad of discourses – romance, psychology, and patriarchy – and points out that it is the ‘ability to name’ abuse within this triad that ‘can be liberating’ (56). Exposing ‘the fight’ in ‘Railway Line 30/40’ and the ‘thorny’ situation, makes steps into maternal agency, providing space for feminist analysis and reflection. It is useful to critically reflect on where the pregnant woman in this poem is placed. On the hinterland of the forbidden tracks, she is set among a scene of journeying, in-between, not being here or there. The mother is in neglected space, which I suggest is symbolic of the undervaluing of maternal processes. Edges of railway lines are often graffitied, with scattered rubbish, disused buildings, and natural overgrowth. They are places associated with risk, rebellion and the

inhospitable. In this tatty and unruly edge, the maternal 'I' embodies dissent from the everyday, wildness, the untamed – all typically liminal features. As such, the setting of the poem is vital in portraying inner/outer and social/natural oppositional interplays of this specifically challenged antenatal scene.

Plath ends her nine-line poem on pregnancy, 'Metaphors', with the action of boarding a train, from which 'there's no getting off' (*Collected Poems* 116). Interestingly, 'Metaphors' was written when Plath had discovered that she was not pregnant, writing in her journal that the poem was 'ironic', after a '40-day period of hope' ending in 'spilt fertility' (*The Journals of Sylvia Plath* 300). Nonetheless, Plath's 'Metaphors' suggests ideas of potential entrapment within pregnancy, wherein a woman is contained in both a natural physical and a socially determined state, where there is 'no getting off' the metaphorical train.

### **Mothers Birthing**

Poetry conveying the time immediately before, during, and just after birth reveals rich and diverse poetic material around the physical and transformative state of the mother. Liminality is highlighted spatially and temporally through the birthing woman, as she is often in new, intense states of being – both in her body and emotionally. The birthing mother is socially detached from the everyday, yet to be reintegrated back into the community, family, and social worlds. Furthermore, to define birth as liminal, it is useful to recognise how it is surrounded in cultural rituals around gifting, clothing, celebrations and medicalised or midwifery processes. Birth is a classic rite of passage into new identity, role and experience with special on-the-verge phases and moments.

The mother in my poem ‘Almost Invisible’, is initially shown just before birth, ‘gagging in the passage’ (83). A transition or journey is paramount in the definition of liminal experience. The transitory nature of birth is alluded to in this poem with reference to ‘the passage’. The maternal ‘I’ suggests, ‘If I could vomit you up – baby, / I would’. Pregnancy and birth are portrayed in ‘Almost Invisible’ as an illness within the hospital setting, with the ‘vomit’, ‘needle’, ‘Crash case’ and the mother offering her ‘thickest vein’. This is a very medicalised birth poem, proceeding to dialogue with ‘the surgeon, / in the meek aftermath smiles’. ‘Almost Invisible’ is one of a trio of hospital-based birth poems in *The Egg in The Triangle*, along with ‘Birthday’ and ‘Eclampsia and the Yellow Flowers’ (14, 16-17). These poems relate to my three-week admission on the maternity ward. Flashbacks of the hospital experience are also seen in ‘Kitchen’, referring to a photo of the premature baby as, ‘pretty in the institution blanket, /... when you should still have been gestating’ (90). All these poems form differing perspectives on the experience of birth, through an emergency caesarean section, in pre- and postnatal stages and cover a multitude of ‘egg space’ dichotomies in relation to motherhood, such as joy/pain and formed/unformed.

Discourse around the determined and expected role of women to become mothers is shown in ‘Birthday’. Despite the maternal ‘I’ being in the bloody, nauseous, sweaty, disorientating, drugged-up and immediate postnatal phase, the midwife in the poem advises her: ‘*You know you can always have more babies*’ (14). I suggest this links to a freedom/subordination opposition. As women generally have the potential to procreate, they are often subject to the cultural and social assumption that they ‘always’ want to have babies. This dialogic commentary in ‘Birthday’ sees the maternal ‘I’ as devoid as the subject. In the midwife’s language, the mother is represented as an object-machine, a reproductive body either yearning for or expected to want more babies, despite the

trauma that pregnancy and birth has dealt her, and further, that the poem shows her still immersed in.

There are clear narratives of struggle in my birth poems, showing motherhood as a physical and emotional challenge. Maternal illness and strife are depicted as a ‘jittered liver’, shattered sight, retching, a numb spine and ‘split bowel’ (14). This imagery of uneasiness and pain represents my experience of pre-eclampsia and the journey into near-death with symptomatic eclampsia. Amongst all the chaos of this physical upheaval, the poetic narrative shows that a baby is born and in ‘Birthday’ quickly ‘stolen’ from the maternal ‘I’ (14).

The childbirth story will be unique to each woman. In alignment with matricentric feminist aims to promote first-person maternal narration – to empower, rather than subjugate maternal experience – the story is best told by the mother. Conversely, in Thom Gunn’s poem ‘Baby Song’, the birthing woman is not self-narrated, instead she is reduced to a site for the newborn’s existential crisis (76). The poem attends to no specific maternal subjectivity, rather the mother is objectified as womb space – an internal ‘private’ place that holds ‘ease’ and comfort. The poetic ‘I’ in Gunn’s ‘Baby Song’ wants to return to the womb where it is ‘Padded and jolly’, and in barbaric imagery, states: ‘Why don’t they simply put me back / Where it’s warm wet and black’. Although the birthing mother is explored in the poem, in relation to the dark, inner terrain of the recently expanded or hospitable womb, I suggest that the inference of comfort and simplicity surrounding the birthing process is naïve. Instead, the poem promotes the missing voice or subjugated feminine, discussed by Anastas and Aristarkhova, which equates the mother with an assumed and eternal receptivity (21).

Written by a man with no physical memory of birth to translate into the poem, 'Baby Song' shares a very different narrative and perspective on birth compared to poems written by mothers on the subject. 'Baby Song' relates to what Gregory describes as a 'long-operative Western view [...] that underlines the historical representation of femininity in poetry as a silent, sanitised body' (35). The womb as safe, or Gunn's 'jolly' space, is challenged in my poems on birth that take the ferociously life-threatening and painful aspects of pregnancy and birth into account – which are not uncommon even in less complicated births.

In 'Baby Song', the baby's voice, as a superimposed imagination of the adult-poet's voice – the man/baby – dislodges the poem from being a serious work on motherhood, partly because of the large leap in poetic licence. However, as the poem sits in a contemporary collection on birth, its reproduction suggests a worth and authority that I suggest pervades into current readings of the maternal. It is important to consider what is shown in Gunn's poem in 'third space' as the mother is reduced to a body. She is othered and silenced in the poem's scenario, in functional servitude to the male epiphany. Although 'Baby Song' deals with the interplay of mother/child, it does nothing to share the raw experience of the authentic childbirth story. Instead, it reproduces old tropes, imagery, and discourses around a mechanised mother, as a void space to be filled by a dominant other – which in this case is a man/baby.

'Baby Song' does align with some of the liminal ideas within the poetic 'egg space' of my model, working with light/dark, inside/outside, included/excluded, along with a sense of experiential conflict between the binaries. Written in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gunn's poem preceded the motherhood movement, which formed its main analytical tendrils and impact in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and is flagged by O'Reilly as beginning in 2000 (*Theory, Activism, Practice* 141). 'Baby Song' represents two

aspects around creative writing about motherhood. Firstly, it seems to belong to the cultural norm of essentialism that defines women through their bodies and reproductive systems and thus simultaneously stifles the unique voices and experiences of individual mothers. Secondly, a male poet, I suggest is simply not equipped to tell an authentic maternal birth story.

Berry writes in her poem ‘The Republic of Motherhood’ that she ‘crossed the border’ into motherhood, sharing a demarcation (like Gunn) of the before and after states of being that birthing a child invokes (1). However, Berry presents a poem more strongly centred on the mother’s experience. Although Berry describes the place that she arrives at through motherhood as a ‘wild queendom’, it is also written later in the same poem as a ‘wild fucking queendom’ – as though the role has become confused or infiltrated with something else to add the profanity. Yet, motherhood still has an exalted aspect as a ‘queendom’, suggesting that it holds special qualities or privileges.

In Olds’ poem, ‘The Language of the Brag’ she writes, ‘I have done this thing, / I and the other women this exceptional / act with the exceptional heroic body, / this giving birth, this glistening verb’ (40). Birth, described as a ‘glistening verb’ has an affinity with O’Reilly’s ideas on promoting the work or practice of *mothering* over the paternalised institution of *motherhood*. In Olds’ poem, the maternal body is extraordinary, resonating with a celebration of power from within the mother, rather than power over the mother, where she is traditionally seen in language as an object to enter or neglect in language.

Olds is right to align the birthing body to strength and the ‘heroic’ and Berry to talk of the ‘queendom’ of motherhood. It is important to raise the association of mothering from dark and hidden realms into higher

linguistic echelons to create new meanings and considerations around maternal identity, voice, and actions. Language and imagery are vital in transforming perceptions of the maternal figure, in all her stages, and can present the hidden strengths, processes and powers inherent in mothering practice.

### **Mothering in a Pandemic**

Poems relating to the Covid-19 pandemic have specific heightened layers of human experience, emotion, and expression. Pandemic poems include aspects of unprecedented incarceration, threat, new perspectives on relationships, technology, the public/private dichotomy, and the body. Poems in my collection that relate to the pandemic are ‘Co®vid 50:50’, ‘Good Friday, 2020’, ‘Queen Dandelion’, and ‘Lockdown Seeds, 2020’ (40, 41, 65, 74).

Covid-19 haunted in a global and rapid way. As a highly contagious airborne virus, it presented the inescapable and situations of entrapment through a dominant, largely unseen force. At times, there was a purported sense of greater doom for certain groups of humanity, including those with specific health conditions, race groups, particular ages, and people in some geographical locations. However, younger, healthier people were still not immune to Covid-19’s symptoms and all could carry the virus. As the pandemic progressed, humans were faced with considering every breath they took and every surface they touched, including the skin of their loved ones, which certainly affected my mothering experience in unusual ways. For example, in my prose poem ‘Co®vid 50:50’ – ‘No-one come near. I am adjusting’ and ‘Don’t breathe. Hang up love’, referencing adapted boundaries and a new self-consciousness around automatic bodily and relational processes (40).



My writing practice was intercepted and empowered by the intensity of time alone in the pandemic, which instigated a phase of online group therapy, and was when I started to write 'Eros' (63). Single parenting is isolating by default, but to be further socially isolated was challenging. Too, the obstacles that came with writing at this peculiar time are explained by Debbie Taylor as not just increased housework but also the frustration of 'desk invasion', when, in general, women's time for writing was undermined in lockdowns through the encroachment upon writing spaces (10). The issue that 'usual space had to be shared with other people or was completely commandeered by someone else or used for things such as home-schooling or a seemingly continuous round of mealtimes' was one that I keenly felt (Taylor 10). My poem 'Lockdown Seeds, 2020', although pertaining to an estranged lover, shows the writer's desk as 'scattered with mud and vitamins, / the guidelines of a pandemic' (74). These lines infer to the invasive aspect of the pandemic, where the usual scripts, inspiration, resources, and daily points of reference were altered and the 'guidelines' for everyday living were shifting.

Lockdowns between 2020 and 2021 spanned seasons, and although my writing benefited in some ways from the isolation time, as Taylor states, it took women writers 'a while to rediscover [their] creative mojo following the upheavals of the early lockdown' (11). During 2019, I had started to write automatic prose poems and was enjoying a new liberation in my work, akin to Dadaism – with an interest in cut-up styles, angling to the surreal and rejection of reason. Automatic writing, which I deliberately used a pen and paper for in first drafts – to connect to a primal creative flow and somatic writing power – seemed to provide a useful container for the disorientation and contradictory living of the pandemic. So, my initial attempts in prose poetry with 'December Unslept', (which was coupled with a lengthy experiment titled 'December Slept' that remains in draft form) preceded 'Co®vid 50:50' (written in an online

collaboration with Rhys Trimble), and allowed the stress, personal/political ‘sham’, and oxymoronic living of lockdown a suitable poetic form and cathartic surfacing.

During many lockdown days, I felt incredibly pleased to not only have survived the Covid-19 virus as a symptomatic asthmatic, but to spend more time with my son. Extra direct contact with him enabled me to see how he held his arm stiffly when he wrote, so his lines dragged down the page on a diagonal, how he jumbled his written d’s and b’s as habit, and elongated his i’s, omitting the dot. I found great pleasure in correcting all of this in our sporadic and loosely planned home-school. My poem, ‘Queen Dandelion’, was written in response to lockdown and depicts home-schooling scenes – as the mother ‘finishes phonetics, rights / loops and circles in the sun’ and co-produces honey (65). The maternal ‘I’ refers to the garden as the ‘planet of lawn’, as though the width of the world in the lockdowns had become compressed into home space.

Lockdown mandates demanded parents become more advanced teachers. However, home-schooling was not just about correcting the child’s scrawled words, keeping their attention on a difficult task, or indeed personally grappling with new subjects. Parents also had to educate children about a world that had dramatically shifted, and for many months told its own story of death, separation, and struggle. ‘Queen Dandelion’ presents what I tried to create as a mother – a protective haven of symbiosis with our garden, and each other.

In Mari Ellis Dunning’s poem ‘A Sudden Mother (*Staying on the postnatal ward during Covid-19*)’, she shares the postnatal phase of giving birth in the pandemic. Friends, Dunning writes, were ‘framed like portraits, / stuttering their congratulations through phone screens’, with the baby’s ‘father, pitched miles away, butting at doors that scream: / *Stop. / No Entry*’ (21). Dunning’s poem is a stark reminder of the solitude felt,

not just in motherhood when a baby is born and nursed in another ward, ‘a corridor stretching between us like a deep lake’, but also of the heightened separation that came with lockdown restrictions. As in the ‘Interface existence’ of ‘Co@vid 50:50’, in Dunning’s poem, there is reference to the technical with the phone screens (41). The pandemic melded humanity more deeply into digital worlds and highlighted a dichotomy of the virtual/real. ‘A Sudden Mother (*Staying on the postnatal ward during Covid-19*)’ sees the father ‘butting’ into the maternity door, in a forceful clash with the real stoppages and limitations of normal parental contact in lockdown. The poem’s ‘egg space’ is apparent in the interplay of inside/outside, belonging/separation, freedom/restriction, and the tensions created as the digital replaced in-person exchange.

### **Choosing Motherhood and the Joys of ‘Third Space’**

Having experienced an ectopic pregnancy, which reduced my fertility, I often imagined that I would never become a mother, despite my want to be a mother. Conception does not always result in a live birth; it can equate to loss, and motherhood can be brief or interrupted. Death, illness, abortion, or adoption can all truncate mothering experiences and invoke profound emotion. Like the death of the mother in my poem ‘Octopus’, the experience of mothering can be halted through biology and the impact of behavioural lineage. Fertility, pregnancy, and motherhood as an assumed or determined function, and as a journey of ease, are not accurate in relation to many women’s lives. Poems that share mothering from the angle of a lost role or experience are equally important as poems that relate to mothering as manifest. To consider the maternal journey fully, it is important to highlight how it can also be a path taken without a child, either through states of loss or longing, for example, in Carrie Etter’s *Imagined Sons*.

Having conceived and lost a baby, I welcomed, and more importantly, chose pregnancy and mothering. On the feminist timeline, choosing to be a mother is still relatively new. As this exegesis is being written, abortion and women's rights are again being debated globally in legal and public domains. That women's bodily autonomy is considered debatable is in itself problematic. Women's bodies and their capacity to gestate life has never stopped being controversial, from the Christian representation of Mother Mary's otherworldly and *chosen-for-her* conception, which simultaneously bypasses sex as a physical and mutual act, to contemporary debates that deny women agency and choice over their bodies. Birth control and artificial reproduction – accessible to many women – intervene to allow women to dictate when – and if – they have children. These choices around birth control are predominant to female experience from the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and herald new types of perception and possibility around motherhood, and its exploration in literature.

Motherhood's opposition of non-motherhood or non-mothering may be a better position for a woman to be in. Second-wave feminism made great strides in identifying motherhood as one of the key factors that led to female oppression and inequalities in the economic world: the maternal condition simultaneously being 'wrestled from the mothers themselves to buttress the power of the fathers' (Rich 62). Roiphe stresses, however, that the 'desire of women for children is not just some social construct, not some male misogynistic plot [...] it is some unstoppable species urge, some delicate strand of our genes' (47). Like Roiphe, my writing allows voice around some of the pleasure, desire, and privilege of motherhood.

In *The Egg in the Triangle* collections, I wanted to convey not just the uncomfortable conflicts and ambiguities around motherhood, but also

veer into aspects of the opposite – the joys of the mothering journey, that arose through a commitment to it. Ecstasy, *jouissance*, and bliss experiences in mothering are seen in my poems ‘His Hats’, ‘First Tooth’, and ‘Babushka’ (39, 59, 94). These poems show the intertwining in ‘third space’ with the mother’s deep and adoring fascination and immersion with the baby/child’s physical development and first experiences. Poetry that explores everyday moments and milestones reached as the mother guides and observes her child’s evolution, displays humbling moments, and evidences the rich writing material from the bodies of mothers and their children, and in the spaces that they shift between and inhabit.

My poem ‘Bone Maker’ reflects an innate procreative urge and a joy around the choice to enter the journey of motherhood in – ‘the grin of that night, / our DNA dancing, / the suck of love / as we agreed, laughing, to conceive’ (99). The poem brings a willingness to the idea of conception, with the smile extending into the night, there is ‘love’, ‘dancing’, ‘laughing’. This aspect of happiness around motherhood holds throughout the collection – the son that grew from the ‘suck of love’ in ‘Bone Maker’, is valued and admired, shown in many of the poems as an inspiring or magical being of centrality to the maternal ‘I’. Even amidst the counterpoints of domestic unrest, birth trauma, and the challenges of single parenting, motherhood is displayed as having an exalted view and the child is the initiator of happiness. As in Plath’s ‘For a Fatherless Son’, among the ‘godawful hush’, the child’s ‘smiles are found money’ (*Collected Poems* 206).

‘Babushka’ explores enthusiasm around mothering – ‘Let me dress you, / button up your centre – / that hot kernel of love’ (94). The poem ends with: ‘I’ll sing / sing while you sleep – / on all that we have accomplished’. That the maternal ‘I’ is still singing, as though celebrating, even though the child sleeps, expresses ‘third space’ well, representing an

enmeshment within maternal experience and a transformed self. In continuing to sing, the mother has taken on mothering behaviour, even when it is no longer functional to soothe or entertain the child. It is the accomplishment of the day, the tasks, and lessons of mothering (bathing, dressing, teaching), guiding the child's development and exploration of the world that are held up in the finality of the poem. The pronoun 'we' in 'all that we have accomplished' also conveys the idea of a fusion between mother and child in the stanza's last line, thus equating the labour of mothering to a shared experience – without hierarchy.

My poem 'His Hats' starts as a basic list poem, appearing as a random note on the page with all the child's hats listed in excess white space (39). 'His Hats' develops into more intimate verse, with traditional and more experimental stanzas exploring the child's growth. The maternal 'I' refers to 'us / laughing at our window', again showing a gleeful connection in 'third space'. The poem's narrative deals with time, depicting the mother imagining the child's future – his 'filigree brain / as it plumps into this life', reflecting on the past through the hats that have been worn. Further, the mother is in the present: 'And now you are three', and 'Tonight' spot-lit in single lines. 'His Hats' displays a dedicated relationship of mother to child – into the future – on an unknown journey, but one that holds inspiration and a deep fascination for the mother. The poem ends:

Tonight,  
stars with faces watch us,  
laughing at our window.

The plait of your spine  
stretched to a low crown of moon,  
my palm     s p r e a d i n g  
to cup your head.

Here, the mother's palm 's p r e a d i n g' shows space between letters, like the fingers opening in the reach of maternal nurture, depicting a large/small and open/closed interplay with content and form. The human hand is a final metaphoric hat of protection that encircles the child's head. The last line is placed with indents, centrally to the space in the line above it to evoke the image of the hand as a container. The small circle of white space in the final stanza aligns with the vision of 'a low crown of moon', or the head itself, and the lull of vowel sounds exist as if in song, through the assonance.

'First Tooth' in my *King Mattress* collection tracks the rite of passage of a lost tooth and the myth of the 'tooth fairy' (41). The poem involves the ritual of placing the tooth under a pillow for a gift. Again, the language shares an intense curiosity from the mother to the child as she cleans 'around the red gap, slowly / stooping deeper into the terrain of you'. 'First Tooth' celebrates a shared journey, a liminal experience in the space between new growth. There is a commitment to play and magic in the poem and an intense involvement that the mother has with the child's body and evolution. 'Third space' includes the intimate physical acts and observations in mothering but also psycho-social interventions around educating and then letting go, so a child may individuate and self-discover. The end of 'First Tooth' sees the child running, 'into the coin of sun / with that vagabond smile, / a proud blood-glimpsed lisp'. Transformed, the child shows progression in 'third space', through a rite of passage – in the first lost tooth. It is this type of growth and change within 'third space', experienced as a shared space of witness and relational development, that makes it so rich in poetry.

Olds brings much of 'third space' to the fore in the physical and emotional descriptions of her children. In her poem 'Exclusive', set on a beach, she is 'memorizing' her daughter, 'against the time when you will

not be with me' (*Selected Poems* 21). Olds reflects on how she has loved her daughter, 'as a way of loving no one else, / every separate grain of [her] body'. Like 'First Tooth' and 'His Hats', the poem celebrates the child, and then imagines 'third space' in the future, without them. Olds ends her poem on the idea of learning to love what she does 'not own', suggesting in earlier phases of mothering, that the deep and intense belonging within the mother-child relationship, with its often exceptional intimacy, also has a particular transit based on the passage of time.

### **The Child's Voice**

The dialogic nature of mothering a child can be entertaining, draining, and educational. Occasionally, I let the literal voice of my son enter *The Egg in the Triangle* poems. Alongside the images, emotions, and new discoveries that the 'third space' of mothering brought to my work, one-liners or questions from my child, and the direction of our conversations, gave fresh or lateral poetic content. My son's language would sometimes be the key into the concept of a poem or its evolution.

The child's voice, although often standing well in italicised single lines or stanzas to represent individual or other character, still shares 'third space' as fluid, relational, and beyond single voice or subject. In 'First Tooth', it is the child's questioning that deepens the poem's reference into myth, thus carving out a piece of magical realism. Responding to the mother's suggestion that '*the tooth fairy is due!*', the child asks, '*But how will she know where my tooth is?*' (59). The poem fuses the child's and the mother's imagination, guiding the text into an intimate, reflective narrative.

With the child as poetic focus and creative catalyst – through their own voice – unique, quirky, and unpredictable elements can be inserted to



affect a poem's narrative and form. In my poem, *'I saw a Fox'*, it is the child that leads the story of the dead fox. *'Did it hop into bed?'*, *'Did it have a blanket?'* were the random questions that my son asked me (24). The mother explores the questions in a fusion of dramatic irony and child-mother imaginations. The poem ends with the image of another mother making a *'fox-shaped blanket – / the colour of gingerbread...'*. Acts of domesticity and nurture in the end stanza see motherhood anthropomorphised onto an imagined mother fox. The poem's story pulls the child into images of the young fox being held in warmth and safety and is less about the animal's actual death that was witnessed internally by the mother. There are 'egg space' binaries being played around life/death, real/imagined, hidden/revealed, and nature/industry in the poem, with the child opening space to explore hospitality, places, and acts of maternal protection in the mechanised and often dangerous world.

In the bathing scene of Olds' poem, *'The Mother'*, she writes in response to her son's proclamation (139). He says that she (the mother) will not 'love him' when she is dead. Olds reacts – 'I hold him tight, / he is white as a buoy / And my death like dark water is rising / swiftly in the room. I tell him I loved him / before he was born'. In this example, the child instigates contemplations of life/death, light/dark, and real/imagined, and thus the poem sits well within 'egg space'. Like *'I saw a Fox'*, the poetic scene of *'The Mother'* is the bathroom – an everyday space of mothering, where nonetheless deep questioning is often explored. A bathroom also suggests a private location of being in-between states of dress/undress, clean/dirty, and private/public, revealing further dichotomies in relation to place. Located in the bathroom, *'I saw a Fox'* and Olds' *'The Mother'* show motherhood to be a cognitive, philosophical process that potentially guides the child into new understandings around the human condition and existence, thus shattering ideas of the purely physical and functional (cleaning, bathing) roles within motherhood.

Clare E. Potter's poem, 'Poams', includes the child's voice – as a voice of reassurance – when the mother says out loud, without realising, that she 'was giving up' (27). As in, '*I saw a Fox*', when the words 'fell' from the mother's mouth, there is a sudden dialogue: conversation that is not predicted or has a slight challenge (24). In Potter's poem, the child responds, '*What? Give up what Mam?*' (27). Establishing from the mother that it was '*Poems, / writing, trying to juggle all that, that's all*', the child goes on to encourage her and, in the process, Potter writes, 'you became / my mother that time'. As the child draws and paints, the poem explores the mother-writer fused within a 'third space' and 'egg space' interplay. 'Poams' brings to light the in-between state in relation to the mother's and the child's role. The child transforms into a figure of care, understanding, and nurture, saying, '*Well you can't give up. You been doin' them poams / since you were little*'. Potter affords a whole stanza in 'Poams' to the child's italicised voice, giving weight to the language and character of the child, who is seen supporting the mother in her quandary – 'Your words were a hoof to my doubt'.

Leah Larwood discusses Jungian archetypes in literature, highlighting that one of the fundamental archetypes, or 'universal symbols that humans recognise', as 'Spirit' (52). This archetype, she says can 'appear in the form of a child who seems magical and wise beyond their years, with the power to bring an unhappy adult back to their senses'. Spirit is often presented in the character or form of a guide or mentor type figure, serving as catalytic and able to 'induce self-reflection and mobilise moral forces'.

In Maggie Smith's 'Overheard', it is the language her daughter uses in conversation with her brother that makes her 'stop sliding the white plates', as she hears her say '*Nothing is yours. / All of this, everything, is*

ours' (*Mom Egg Review*). The child's voice opens Smith's poem, showing it as pivotal creative impetus and prominent to the poem's narrative. In Stephanie Bryant Anderson's poem, 'My Sons (on dead fathers, the Celestial mother & other mothers)', the child's voice is again introduced in the first stanza – 'My son 4, said *the trees are closer than the moon. / And the moon is flying in the sky. When the moon finds a / baby that it likes, it follows that baby all night*' (*Mom Egg Review*). The poem reflects, 'He already / knows the sound darkness makes, that space is deceptive'. Mother-poets – witness to the child's voice as a spontaneous curiosity on the world – who include this inquisitive nature in their work, form colourful or surreal texts within 'egg space'. The child's voice in poetry prompts oscillation around perceptions of real/fantasy, discovered/undiscovered binaries, and the mutual exploration of dialogue, care, and adventure.

As established, questions or statements from the child imbue a poem with social commentary or philosophical musing on love, death, and human connection. For example, my reference to single parenting in 'Queen Dandelion' – as the son declares, '*we need a man*' – in some way seeking to conform with the so-called 'nuclear' family (65). My poem 'Eros', explores lost faith in love, with dialogue from the child who is depicted as Aphrodite's mythic son. A symbol of communicated love, Eros is reframed in the poem to challenge love: 'He knows that love cannot be predicted / in the deepest stormy kiss, / dreamt up, timetabled, hardwired, / understood' (63). Instead, little Eros tells his mother – ironically, as she is a figure of love, lust, and procreation, later to become Venus in Roman times – that '*love is a lost creature, / that will never spawn again!*'. The mother takes the conversation into the vatic and the earthly in the final line: '*Eros! Hold the kiss of the cosmos. / Take these roses as arrows, / go petal our wild world*'. The poem holds hope in new growth, sensuality in the scent of petals, associates to shared beauty, and

a rejuvenation of the spirit of love. Again, the child's dialogue is seen to transform the scene with a turn of heart, in stark statements that question and interrupt the mother's frame or philosophy.

Perhaps more than any other type of motherhood/mothering poem, those that include the child's voice depict the unique experiences of mothers in relation to their children. Wonders, inspirations, and challenges exist in the intimate places of 'third space', with predictable/unpredictable or known/unknown binaries of poetic 'egg space' further illuminated by children's imagination, speech, and spontaneity.

### **Single Motherhood**

Melissa Hogenboom describes maternal labour as both cognitive and emotional. Whereas maternal duties for many years have simply been allocated to the term domestic, recent studies are unfolding on exactly what the *domestic* entails and its toll on mothers. The consensus is that women, *in and out* of adult partnerships with regards to raising children, are doing more of the emotional and cognitive labour of childcare. This disproportionate allocation of responsibility equates to ideas raised in contemporary critiques on motherhood, Hogenboom suggesting that 'gender equality has not only stalled but is going backwards'. She calls for a wider understanding of the 'behind-the-scenes labour', this 'hidden work' of mothers and goes on to break maternal work into three categories: cognitive, emotional, and mental (*BBC*). These delineated areas of maternal work consider aspects such as planning, shopping, maintaining emotional health, worries about schooling, socialising the child, anticipating, deciding, monitoring, and combining everything into a workable flow for the family.

The challenge, claims Hogenboom, is that overall, there is no clear beginning or end to this 'hidden work', making it 'hard to measure' (*BBC*).

All of this performed labour points to a woman in many states, guises, and roles. Mothers are generally between tasks as well as identities, which highlights in part, a liminal existence. I argue that this maternal liminal experience happens on multiple levels, as mothers frequently function within these overlapping states, more so than men in the dynamics and arena of childcare, and especially if the father is absent. The mother doesn't necessarily move smoothly between committed acts of care; she exists in 'third space', where her child's and her own needs and wants become knotted, or wrangle for dominance. This sometimes smooth/sometimes contradictory place is where many of my poems were borne from and show multiple tussles within poetic 'egg space'.

'Bone Maker', 'To the Virtual Father', and 'First Steps in Fishguard' are poems that relate to motherhood from a single mother's perspective (62, 99, 101). In 'To the Virtual Father', it is the everyday acts of providing safety and care in the wake of the virtual or absent father that are versed. The mother asks, 'Can you check a fever / through the wire, / listen at night / for the tone of his cry, / grow a hand, stream it / to flick on the lights' (62). The slog of motherhood is portrayed in this poem – tending to unexpected illness, offering physical, emotional, and psychological guidance, all based on the child's unique personality. 'To the Virtual Father' raises the point – ironically – that a child cannot be well cared for without physical presence! The poem originally included reference to a line from the child's father that he would 'always be there' for his son through 'Skype'. The exact application/program was eventually removed as a direct reference in the poem and replaced by the more generic term 'virtual' in the adapted title, as seen.

'First Steps in Fishguard' jostles with the mother's celebration as she witnesses the child's momentous first steps and the aloneness of the occasion – without an equally interested or engaged father (101). This lack

of shared celebration is echoed in my poem 'The Apple Tree', as the mother watches the child pick his first apple alone – 'moments like this – / with no witness' (27). The oppositional clash in poetic 'egg space' in 'The Apple Tree' deals with solitude/togetherness and the tender/violent binaries. Even in the relational state of motherhood, it is possible to feel very isolated and especially so in single mothering, which happened for me predominantly after three years of co-parenting and cohabiting with my son's father. Although, even in cohabiting scenarios, I generally intuited, or was assumed, to be tasked to the main child-caring responsibilities.

Like the differentiation between woman and woman-mother discussed within matricentric feminism, I also suggest that there are vast epistemic differences between a woman-mother in a supportive partnership and a woman-single mother. Poetry that speaks of the experience of single mothering undoubtedly covers the intensity of the labour within parenting practice, common to many. In single parenting, the child attaches to the predominant carer more frequently. In 'third space' – the place of relating between mother and child – usually no maternal decision is made without considering the child. 'Third space' is heightened in more prolific ways in single mothering – as increased time, energy, and focus are given to the child as a default of the sole care provider role.

There is a sense of incarceration for single mothers. They cannot simply leave the house spontaneously in the early years unless the child is taken with them (which may not be appropriate), or practically and quickly outsource care. Thus, there is often little mental or physical respite for single mothers. Frequently, I explain to people, workplaces, and organisations that I am unable to do something as I am a 'single mother'. This is expressed, in part, in the jumbled, frantic automatic poem,

‘December Unslept’ as ‘a long dance bread banks for afterschool club are waiting. A single mother can’t shake it an excuse flexi-policy’ (111). The term ‘single mother’ becomes embedded into identity through the necessity of being understood and functional in the world in relation to the performance of essential mothering work.

This concentrated single mothering practice in ‘third space’, is also illustrated in my poem, ‘Potty Training on Mother’s Day’, which relates to the childcare duties undertaken in the father’s absence (92). There is a commentary on the private/public aspects of motherhood in the poem, as it shares a domestic claustrophobia ‘in the locked steam’ of the house, challenged by the child’s developmental transition (92). Eventually, the mother frees herself, ‘Bursting from the house, / onto the High Street, / all cake breath, bath water, / cocoa tears’. However, the maternal subject is still laden with the processes of mothering, written as ‘cake breath’ and ‘cocoa tears’. This draws attention to the identity and perpetual responsibilities and implications of mothering/motherhood in ‘third space’. Too, even in her ‘burst’ of freedom, the mother’s thoughts return to the image of her child sleeping, as she wonders – ‘is he too at the cusp of some simple refuge?’, juxtaposing the sense of liberation (93).

Single parenting is represented in many of the poems in *The Egg in the Triangle* collections, through both subtle and obvious representations of attendance to the child. The tasks of mothering are couched in the background as well as at the fore of my poetry. For example, in the psycho-geographic poem, ‘St Non’, ‘My son tugs to go – tiny church ghost / in the stone’s dust, lips dry for water’ (56). The mother is in between an epiphanous, rebirth moment in the church with Mother Mary, yet she is also drawn into the needs of her son, recognising that he is thirsty.

Plath wrote many of the poems in *Ariel* during a phase of single parenting. Babies and young children feature frequently throughout *Ariel*, which opens with the ‘bald cry’ of the birth poem, ‘Morning Song’ (3). Domestic and maternal imagery in *Ariel* demonstrates intense ‘third space’ and conflicts in poetic ‘egg space’. In her third-person poem, ‘Edge’, the children are synthesised into Plath’s focus on death: ‘Each dead child coiled, a white serpent / One at each little // Pitcher of milk, now empty. / She has folded // Them back into her body as petals / Of a rose close when the garden // stiffens’ (80). The empty pitchers may refer to the milk given to children via breast or otherwise and suggest an evaporation of maternal strength. The garden that the children and/or breasts belong to ‘stiffens’, also connoting death – reflective of the psychologically and physically waning mother – while she brings them back into her body.

Contrasted with Plath’s more playful poem, ‘Balloons’, the children are alive, the mother observing colour and activity, writing how the balloon squeaks ‘like a cat’, and ‘Seeming to see / A funny pink world [...] on the other side of it’, her son bites the balloon, ‘Then sits [...] / A red / Shred in his little fist’ (75-76). Both of Plath’s poems deal with death, either starkly or as loss and destruction, and ‘egg space’ is indicated in simile and metaphor around death/life, light/dark, night/day, and earth/cosmos throughout *Ariel*.

Compiled by Plath’s husband Ted Hughes posthumously, *Ariel* doesn’t include the poem ‘For a Fatherless Son’, written by Plath in 1962 before her death by suicide in 1963, as her two young children – fathered by Hughes – slept (*Collected Poems* 205). In this poem of address to her son, formed around the time of her single mothering, Plath writes of ‘absence [...] / Growing beside you like a tree, / A death tree, colour gone’ and the sky akin to ‘an utter lack of attention’, a ‘godawful hush’.



Significantly, in this poem, she both omits and includes the father in the title – ‘Fatherless’ refers exactly *to* and exactly *not to* the father, which I suggest is the crux in single mothering dilemmas, and points to powerful poetics accommodated in ‘egg space’. Hughes was alive when Plath wrote the poem, but the child is described as ‘fatherless’, sharing a sense of intense disconnection, grief, and loss. Similar emotions are conveyed in my poems ‘Another Country’ and ‘To the Virtual Father’, which both tackle narratives and imagery surrounding the recently absent father (54, 62).

Poetry on single mothering elevates the everyday subjective nuance of the experience, sometimes as an interplay of broad notions around the ‘hero’ and the ‘victim’ status of single mothering practice (Zamanis, *Single Mother; Midland*). It is in the negotiation of these two states that poetic ‘egg space’ helps to illuminate outdated opinions on single mothering that splits the mother or father using the good/bad binary. Poems about single mothering bring the fertile territory of the concentrated ‘third space’ in single mothering to the literary fore, thus leading to deeper analysis in poetic ‘egg space’ – where many of the paradoxes, challenges, and unique experiences within everyday situations of the role can be expressed.

### **Deep Mothering**

*The Egg in the Triangle* collections embrace what I term as the poetics of ‘deep mothering’ – maternal stories and images that link into myth, archetype, emotional intelligence, deeper philosophy, and spirituality. ‘Deep mothering’ in poetry acknowledges multiplicity within maternal experience, presents questions, challenges, and expressions

beyond essentialism and cliché. It illuminates the reader on matricentric journeys of transformation, epiphany, and distinct unearthed perspective.

O'Reilly discusses a 'politics of the heart', wherein it is the practice of emotionalism within mother-work that motivates and inspires feminist action, and in doing so, challenges the privilege of reason within patriarchy (*Theory, Activism, Practice* 154-155). In the creation of *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker*, it was through turning to, and allowing the emotions of, maternal experience to be written that I was more able to identify and thus challenge patriarchal injustice – in the public and private worlds. In short, primary emotions of anger, sadness, grief, love, and loss fuelled this project. My poems often represent pieces of activism that function through their emotive, subjunctive impetus as a 'politics of the heart'. The poetics of what I term 'deep mothering' expresses a psychosocial and symbolic framework that supports matricentric feminism – working bravely against what O'Reilly describes as the 'way society devalues motherhood and holds the stereotypically masculine trait of unemotional as more legitimate' (*Theory, Activism, Practice* 154).

Drawing on dream, vision, spirituality, and emotional expression, aspects of 'deep mothering' reverberate throughout *The Egg in the Triangle*. In my quest poem 'St Non', multiple Goddess deities are featured (56). 'Deep mothering' is illuminated in this poem with a spiritual vision and liminal representations of Mother Mary, who is reborn 'from the arch' in a polytheistic challenge to Christianity. Subverting the traditionally feminine in the form of Mother Mary, the poem questions and explores maternal experience on a journey-pilgrimage. In 'St Non', Mother Mary – who, as a figure firmly ensconced in cultural ideologies around the sacrificial mother – and is the traditional embodiment of a

mystical and/or direct conduit to the higher echelons of patriarchal religion, is both deconstructed and venerated.

Mother Mary appears in ‘St Non’ as the ultimate quest in a triad between mother-son-holy mother, subtracting any reference to a singular or phallic God. The poem is watery, with well water, sea water, thirst, steam, and glass. ‘The element of water, liquidity and motility has been fundamental to an understanding of sexuality and of death in literature’ (Gwyn 18). ‘Water’, states Robert Gwyn is ‘mythic’; it is ‘the correlative of our blood’, the ‘element in which we are nurtured, the amniotic fluid of our womblife’ (20). Mother Mary in ‘St Non’ is amorphous, transforming from statue to statue, invoked in light, rebirthed from the poem’s waters from glass to ‘flesh’ – she is beyond monotheistic thought or form (56). Instead, the sacred mother figure is tracked in the poem as evasive and polysemous, from ‘*The Magic Lady*’ of stories in the night, to the ‘breathless cast’ of the church and her eventual representation as a dancing figure, ‘veil tossed to stars’. ‘St Non’ is a ‘deep mothering’ poem – with reference to myth, close attendance of the child among the vital waters of creation, and the transmogrifying mother.

Within *The Egg in the Triangle* poetry collections, the Jungian archetypes of Spirit, Mother, Rebirth, and Trickster also interplay. ‘Eclampsia and the Yellow Flowers’, for example, deploys strong imagery and language around the mother in a process of rebirth and the Trickster as the father-antagonist – a ‘cold nosed narcissist’ who is ‘battling’ in the maternal ‘re-birth’ (16-17). The mother is reaching to the child as Spirit – shown as a fleeting, ephemeral presence through a photo and imaginations of him. The poem ends with the disruptive, semi-magical quality of the Trickster, as his scent is swung ‘like a doppelgänger back / to [the mother’s] bed’. Throughout this project, ‘deep mothering’ involved recognising shadow or Trickster traits playing out emotionally and

behaviourally in my own life. Much of my poetry exposes battles in ‘egg space’ to include shadow forces that illustrate complex feelings in relation to men – seen in imagery of night, dark, pain, loneliness, or violence.

In further ‘deep mothering’ poems within my collection, Goddesses Venus, Aphrodite, Baubo, Kali, and Sheila Na Gig appear, linking experiential mothering to the qualities represented in these mythic figures. The resurgence of images and reference to the Great Goddess in feminist artwork was in part inspired by archaeology and artistic trends from the 1970s, during which time an ‘iconographic lexicon of pre-patriarchal images and symbols’ was exposed in the work of archaeologists, such as Marija Gimbutas (Orenstein 176). Items of everyday utility, such as carved vases and bowls, were unearthed in second-wave feminism’s archaeological front to show the veneration of feminine creative processes, with symbols of eggs, seeds, spirals, inverted triangles, and the amplification of pubic, breast, and belly space, among other gynocentric imagery.

This revelation of the Great Goddess as a venerable, meaningful figure with multiple representations inspired a reimagination of the feminine in art and literature. Around this phase of mid-late second-wave feminism, the *Great Mother* was being outlined as a major archetype in Jungian thought (Orenstein 176). This psychological backdrop to ‘herstory’ heralded an expansive age within late 20th century culture – fusing psycho-spiritual and physical awareness, liberated from the restrictions of traditional Western patriarchal religions. Within my poetry, there is a continuation of what Gloria Feman Orenstein highlights as ‘Goddess memories’. For example, in my poem ‘Eros’, Aphrodite is shown in the opening stanza behind the therapy room door – linking firmly into the re-emergence of Goddess archetypes in association with developing psychological theories and deep inner work.

In 'Birthday', I portray Goddess Venus, as the mother reflects on the baby as a 'Gift of Venus!', positioning the image of mother and baby directly within the sacred and mythic realms (14). The baby becomes an object of beauty as the mother 'rests and rests' upon him, as though he is awash with Venusian charm. Goddess Baubo is introduced in 'Eclampsia and The Yellow Flowers' as the mother is a 'Baubo Woman' (16). Baubo is described by Clarissa Pinkola Estes as a dancing or clown Goddess, 'no doubt drawn from the neolithic belly Goddesses who are mysterious figures with no heads, and sometimes no feet and arms' (336). Baubo appears in my poem to represent the sensation of numbness around the legs – as a sense of lost limbs – from the spinal anaesthetic. As a belly Goddess, Baubo 'speaks from the deep mine' – 'literally the depths' (Pinkola Estes 340).

In myth, Baubo helped raise Persephone from the hold of Hades in the underworld by making Demeter laugh, thus breaking the cold winter and restoring mother to daughter with the blossoming of spring. In poetic 'egg space', Baubo represents the relationship between sadness/joy, loss/gain, sacred/profane, feeling/unfeeling, and life/death through her mythic association with reproductivity, the seasons, her sexual organs, unlimited capacity for laughter, storytelling, and ultimate resurrection. Baubo points to overcoming and being fearless around entrapment, simultaneously helping restore a mother's strength. I argue that Baubo's presence in the hospital's intensive care scene of 'Eclampsia and the Yellow Flowers' is vital as she indicates a need for maternal empowerment and rejuvenation. Baubo shows routes into reconciliation with the lost baby – who is only present in the poem for the maternal subject in a fleeting photograph 'from the midwife', who 'whispers of him, / a secret in dawn's lull' (16).

## Writing About One's Mother

Roiphe reflects on the intersections and ramifications of second-wave feminism within her own mothering practice in the 1980s. For Roiphe, experiences absorbed from her own mother led to a deep maternal pride and presence within her own mother-work. Roiphe aimed to be more hands-on than her own mother, having experienced her as a figure that she 'couldn't reach', and being primarily raised by a governess (6). She recalls in her memoir – 'lying on the carpet outside her room [...] without shouting out loud [...] learning that all love is not requited, at least not in equal quantities'.

Through her poetry, Olds faces the 'damage of her past and how it shaped her, [as] she explores the reconstruction of herself into a fiercely aware and attentive mother' (Johnson 156). This attentiveness is discussed by Elizabeth Johnson, as derived from Olds' experiences of her parents as 'an alcoholic father and a weak, complicit mother [...] in an abusive household' (156). In 'I Go Back to May 1937', a poem by Olds on seeing her mother and father as young adults, not yet parents, she writes, 'I want to go up to them and say Stop, / don't do it .../ you are going to do bad things to children / you are going to suffer .../ you are going to want to die' (Olds, *Poetry Foundation*). Olds' poetic narrative around her preconceived state, ends with her taking her parents, 'like the male and female / paper dolls' to 'bang them together / at the hips, like chips of flint', saying, 'do what you are going to do, and I will tell about it'. Here, Olds is sharing her truth – in a conscious way – and her work moves from an abused childhood, using the body as a primary site to relay the sensual and sexual in confessional style, often with transgressive tone and imagery.

On the ethics of family memoir, John Barbour posits that ‘works of life writing dominated by bitterness or by cathartic expression of long suppressed pain, may be the necessary first stage in what could be a healing process of forgiveness’ (95). Focusing on aspects of maternal or paternal genealogy, writers may seek reparation through their expressions, and respond to something damaged, absent, or monstrous in their lineage. Creative writing that brings genealogical stories to the fore, can ramify into future parenting practice – by confronting and navigating caring and responsibility roles in new ways. For example, Roiphe’s past activated a commitment to being a more hands-on mother. In my case, the urge to show my son that he was very much wanted, I track to repeated stories of my mother explaining that she did not want me – her second child.

In my poem ‘Ma’, I present a tableau of memories around objects and the subject, alongside anecdotes and poignant imagery around my mother’s death. The clashing within ‘Ma’ as an ‘egg space’ poem is profuse, from life/death, conformity/rebellion, and secular/non-secular. There is a combined narrative in ‘egg space’ between the subjectivity of the mother and the adult child. The poem only references the first-person twice, seen in, ‘my train’s path’ and ‘that you’d dress me for’ (26). The transformation of traumatic experience into a story is often marked by a perspective shift to include writing from first person experience in the third person. Work by researcher James Pennebaker, as cited by Adele Kohanyi, shows that a difficult event can become more manageable when it becomes narrated beyond random flashbacks or lists, and gets crafted into a more cohesive story (47). Thus, trauma can be assimilated for individuals in creative writing processes to allow cognitive and emotional progression as ‘self-knowledge’ through rewriting and remaking difficult experiences surrounding, for example, death, rejection, physical, or emotional abuse (Kohanyi 47).

My birth in 1974 was experienced by my mother with an uneasiness around motherhood. In her own unpublished journal/memoir, she expressed how she found motherhood a ‘difficult’ experience – she ‘did not enjoy being a home-based mother’. She reports how she ‘felt lonely, depressed, and bored’, and shares that ‘there were few other mothers around with whom [she] could form a close friendship’. ‘Ma’ describes ‘the daughter [she] did not want // to have’ (25). A stanza break gives space between ‘want to’ and ‘have’, to depict the schisms around motherhood at the time of the 1970s. With more freedoms around birth control and paid labour, many activist women during second-wave feminism, powered by authors such as Germaine Greer, were actively refusing the prescribed and assumed role of motherhood. My mother experienced physical and emotional problems after the birth of my sister, including in her words, ‘paralysis, delusions, panic attacks, and anxiety’. That my mother did not want a second child was frequently reiterated to me, and in relation to her first pregnancy and early mothering experiences, is understandable.

Gregory explains how confessional poetry ‘crosses the line from literal into literary: moving biographical material formerly associated with non-literary prose into the poetic realm’ (37). ‘Ma’ nods to this family narrative of refuting a sentimental and expectant joy around motherhood. This confessional poem reclaims maternal rejection in a scene of mothering the mother, by combing her hair and giving her water. The focus of ‘Ma’ is not all orientated to the interplay of acceptance/rejection, as the idea of the unwanted daughter only appears over two, albeit powerful, centrally placed lines. However, it was important for me to express some of this long running, and in many ways, personally impacting story in my poem. As Eagleton points out, a poem has ‘dominant and subordinate levels’ and ‘Ma’ functions on levels of time, biography, morality, place, and loss (19). Too, confessional work can



allow ‘healing’ and ‘forgiveness’ (Barbour 95). I felt it vital to write about my mother as part of the process of deeper research on the poetics of motherhood, forming several draft poems based on my experiences of her and our relationship, throughout my years of PhD study. However, the finality of my mother’s death dictated the ultimate version of ‘Ma’, as such, the poem, as Neimeyer states, ‘found’ me (289). ‘Finely Unpicked’ also considers my mother in relation to her childhood, here situations of poverty that both she and my grandmother experienced are explored, and family anecdotes reframed (81).

In her memoir, Ramaswamy writes about a story concerning her mother’s experience of birth. She shares how upset her mother was when ‘two Indian nurses’ whispered on her arrival, within earshot of her mother, how she was ‘probably disappointed because I [Ramaswamy] was a girl’ (106). In similar disparaging commentary based on gender, when I was born, my paternal grandfather was recalled to have declared, ‘not another bloody girl’, with my sister being born three years earlier, setting the bloodline of female offspring. When writing around family lineage, attitudes, behaviours, and anecdotes often surface to pose questions about cultural relationships, and assumptions linked to gender and motherhood.

‘Ma’ references the state of pregnancy with the ‘breeding clot’ ‘foetus’ and the ‘tabula rasa’, thus rewinding from a scene of illness, aging, and dying, back to the womb (25). However, the idea of new growth is weighted with loss and the association of the ‘havoc’ surrounding the ‘image’ of the brain bleed, which is ‘curling’ the mother into death. In the context of the poem, the ‘tabula rasa’ refers to the blank canvas of my mother’s apparently destroyed memory, physicality, and cognitive function, through the ‘injured mind’, alongside the newness of birth or the ‘burgeoning renaissance’. There is a sense of poetic life/death interplay with these opposing references. However, both the brain clot and

pregnancy are linked in the poem as ‘unwanted’ – aligning the two situations in ‘egg space’ to obstruction of life and/or partaking in life fully or joyfully.

This analysis, and my poem ‘Ma’, are written in a declared and glitchy fourth wave of feminism, when ‘the contemporary feminist movement becomes both more visible and more fragmented’ and ‘there has been a resurgence of interest in earlier waves of feminism’ (Munro 22). Munro suggests that there is a need to backtrack to examine where feminism has journeyed from in action and theory. The daughters of second wave feminists can infuse third and fourth waves of feminist discourse with the epistemology of a culture as it was enacted in their lives and relationships, perhaps reiterating or counterposing elements of the liberal or radical with new insights and intersections. For example, through raising questions and engaging in praxis surrounding motherhood – as this thesis does – based on the premise that ‘motherhood is the unfinished business of feminism’ (Glaser 10).

The mother in ‘Ma’ had an ‘honest rebellion’, which refers to the women’s movement and feminist activism groups of the 1960s and 1970s, that my mother was part of. ‘Ma’ shows a woman who had an ‘activist button’, ‘lovers’, ‘liberation’, ‘women’s strength’ and ‘protest’ (25). Here is a mother who is depicted as a point of social and individual action, involved in news, politics, rhetoric, history, poetry, the arts, a liberal feminist lifestyle – all elevated in poetic pathos as she is dying. Nonetheless, there is a legacy in the poem that filters through and holds the ‘Motherhood’, ‘Place’ and ‘Sexuality’ flags of my analytical triangle firmly in the sand.

‘Ma’ takes a clear story-like structure, journeying along emotive points of the dying process, whilst drawing on the past and present.

Therefore, I chose to take a ballad form which is ‘essentially a short story’ with no time for subtlety and used the traditional ballad structure of quatrains (Untermeyer 154, 255). In the ballad ‘repetition of words and ideas [...] makes ideas still easier for the listener’ (Untermeyer 154). ‘Ma’ has no strict rhyme pattern, but does have repetition – ‘now’, being repeated three times, to enforce the immediacy of the moment and the intensity of the poetic scene. ‘Now’ heightens the reflective then/now and life/death dichotomy of the poem’s ‘egg space’, as it lists what and how my mother *was* as opposed to the depiction of what and how she *is* ‘now’ – the poem literally being written reflexively at the edges of her death.

Imagery around a ‘mass of blood’, ‘spring of veins’, ‘breeding clot’, and the ‘pews of the stroke ward’ emphasise the story around my poetic rendition of the stroke that my mother experienced. The ‘undebatable hush’ of the brain, and ‘havoc’ in the secret ventricles, appear to reiterate the catastrophic neurological process under the poetic eye.

Traditionally ballads use ‘the language of the folk’ to convey the poetic message, its prime purpose being ‘instant comprehension’ (Untermeyer 153-154) There is no artifice or elaboration in the line of ‘Ma’ – ‘Your body does not know how to die yet, will not’ (25). There is a ballad-like frankness that frequently appears in the poem, with language akin to prose, and dialogic address to the subject, seen in ‘your’ and ‘you’. Although throughout the poem, metaphor and analogy are used around pregnancy, rebirth, and the mother’s hand – personalising the poem with epistemology to more deeply weave memory and my creative impulse to write the maternal. Yet the poem’s story is easily apparent – even among occasional florid descriptions – and this underscores it as a ballad.

In keeping with my poetic interest in liminality and natural cycles, the line ‘Beltane’s hawthorn bracken, edges towards you’ signifies the

liminal verge and ideas of rebirth in ‘Ma’ (26). The finality of death is suggested in the end stanza but not fully written – which again raises the poem’s liminal associations – with the ‘last starched blanket, / final nightdress’. The rising Humber gull locates the wider yet specific place of the poem, beyond the eleventh floor, and works metaphorically with the idea of flight, the air element, and life away from the earthly realm – into the ephemeral. The ‘window’ where the ‘single gull pauses’ symbolises a hiatus moment of drama on the passageway from life to death, and again marks the poem as a threshold or liminal poem, on the verge of distinct spaces, into a new transformed state. The final stanza’s italicised reference to Philip Larkin’s poem, ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ further situates ‘Ma’ to Hull and North Lincolnshire, and echoes reflections on place from ‘My train’s path’:

to the hollow of your bed. A last starched blanket,  
 final nightdress, in a kept room on the eleventh floor.  
 Rising from the Humber, *where sky and Lincolnshire*  
*and water meet* – a single gull pauses at your window.

## Sexuality Poetry – Controversial Bodies: From Politics to Post-Porn and the Checkout Boy

### ‘Bluebeard’

*I am sending back the key;  
in his eye’s darkroom I can see  
my X-rayed heart, dissected body:  
I am sending back the key  
That let me into bluebeard’s study (Plath 305)*

### Introduction to the Poetics of Sexuality

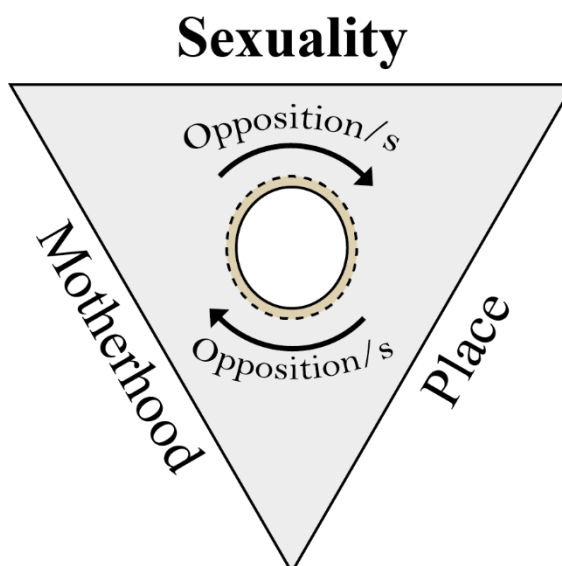


Fig. 7. *The Egg in the Triangle*: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood – (Sexuality).

Foucault states that from the Victoria age, ‘on the subject of sex, silence became the rule’ and even in postmodern thinking only to a ‘slight extent’ are we liberated from such repression (*The Will to Knowledge* sec. 1). The effect of silence or negation around sex, he claims, is that even in speaking of it there is an appearance of ‘deliberate transgression’. On several occasions I was asked by higher academics to consider if I should bring sexuality into a proposed thesis on motherhood and if my poems on motherhood and sexuality really gelled or had a place. The suggestion

points to repression of both subjects and that cultural and academic ideology, even in creative fields, is categorical and limiting.

Nonetheless, my sexuality poems fuse sexual desire and sexual politics with the maternal body under various ‘controlling and curious gaze(s)’ (Mulvey 8). From first dates to domestic abuse scenarios, and the interplay of procreational and recreational sex, my poems share multivalence on female sexuality, gendered behaviour, and experiences of love and romance. Many of the poems draw on visual art and feminist activism and work along similar intersections within Angela Carter’s work of ‘fairy tales, Romantic Poetry and Sadeian pornography’ (Lau 3).

In this analysis section, I examine the critical field of Post-Pornography or Post-Porn as it is also referred to, illuminating texts that cross into dictums of the sexually explicit, with reference to heteronormative or mainstream pornography. I also use the ‘Bluebeard’ myth, as seen in Jungian analysis and the narrative work of Pinkola Estes and Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*, broadly examining enduring narratives around female sexuality and relational experiences to men. I refer to second-wave feminist analysis by Laura Mulvey, who deconstructs Freudian perspectives on the tangible or erotic aspects of scopophilia.

The psychoanalytical lens, as discussed by Deborah Cameron, can illuminate ‘construction of the self in family, relations and the unconscious mind’, giving ‘an understanding of how subordination can be internalised’ (117). Feminist scholars find theories around psychoanalysis, such as those of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, helpful as they offer ideas on the ‘forging of sexual identity and the extreme importance of the sexual in all aspects of mental life’ (Cameron 117). I conclude this Sexuality section with a close reading of my poem

‘Checkout’, which combines the maternal and sexual subjects, to consider male presence/absence, and other dichotomies within ‘egg space’.

Poetry that clearly embraces sexuality and motherhood is not widely available, however the poetry of Sharon Olds shares the latter conjunctions. Olds’ poetry places vivid reflections on her experiences of being parented, alongside her sexuality and her own mothering practice. In ‘You Kindly’, for example, the poem starts by alluding to a breastfeeding scene, where Olds talks of ‘when newborns / nurse’ and the ‘milk tug’ (*Selected Poems* 109). The poem then morphs from the maternal into a sexual act with the ‘hard penis in long / caress’.

Among the in-between membranes, ‘You Kindly’ explores the creative or matrixial spaces, and the openings of the body, as the ‘fist of uterus’, ‘cunt ... clothed, still/in the thinnest garment’, the ‘salt breasts of my eyes to your mouth’, the ‘breast-tip in the socket of your lips’ (109-110). The fluids of birth and sex – such as milk and semen – often work interchangeably and in unified ways to depict love, emotion, desire, and the power of human connection. Olds’ work is on the threshold of the inside/outside and is discussed by Johnson as also crossing ‘the border of explication and exploitation’, as she writes on her children’s and parent’s bodies, sexuality, and genitalia (157). Olds concludes ‘You Kindly’ with a comparison of her lover to her father – although she paradoxically writes in the poem that she ‘did not’ think of her father – and ‘how he trained me not to be loved’. The poetic ‘egg space of ‘You Kindly’ is expressed in both happiness and anguish around the sexual act and, at times, less easily discernible demarcations between the person or object of affection.

Olds’ poetry corresponds with my texts that combine motherhood, the parenting role, sexuality, and place to create subversive, visceral, and sensual poetry. The body in much of Olds’ work is depicted as a highly

observed and subjective vessel, offering poetic materiality to express nuance and conflict around sexual and maternal interrelations.

### **Cycles of Ownership and Escape**

Generally, my more overtly sexual poems examine the back-and-forth patterns of sexism, and the repetitive nature of abusive or dysfunctional male-female relationships on personal and social levels. In ‘Date at Danderi’ – the opening poem to *Gift of Venus* – the female subject becomes ‘his / with this offering, ribbon unfixed’, with ‘eggs yearning in [her] pelvis’ (12). In ‘Date at Danderi’ and later in *King Mattress’s* ‘My Moon’, the language commits the female to becoming ‘his’ and being of service to the male, as though the biological urge to procreate and maternal identity determines male ownership of the female subject (12, 57).

However, in ‘My Moon’, the mother is shown in the final stanza not placing the plate on the table for the overbearing, destructive moon-man (58):

I could not have him back,  
 could not  
     soothe that sun-spotted  
                                   temple,  
 reason with his smoky mind,  
 place his white plate, by our son.

In this act of changed behaviour, shifting a private-domestic pattern, the mother defends maternal space. She becomes free from the performance of assumed domestic and sexual subservience towards the invasive Trickster or predator figure – whom she had previously licked and ‘did what he asked’ (57). With ‘could not’ repeated and placed in proximity – as an affirmation of refusal – the poem’s narrative eventually pertains to a strengthening of the mother’s conscious withdrawal from the male.



In my poem ‘Christine’s Chair’, the woman tells herself in the closing verse to ‘stay, keep staying – / stay here for his return’, emphasising the actively waiting or yearning female in space that is devoid of the masculine yet, still references it in a form of and anticipatory desire for ownership (33). In her feminist filmic analysis – which can be intersected with feminist poetic analysis to find parallels around image, narrative, and creativity – Mulvey highlights that the ‘high point of emotional drama’ and the most ‘supreme moments of erotic meaning take place in the absence of the man’ (15). Throughout *The Egg in the Triangle*, the male as a point of emotional drama – through his absence – is seen in poems that focus on longing for, or reference a distant man, however loveless or far away he may be, for example, in ‘The Window Cleaner’ and ‘*Storm Bella, 2020*’ (29, 42). The subject in ‘*Storm Bella, 2020*’ reflects on ‘The Morning rainbow, untouched – so leaden without you’, thus looping back to the opening scene of the valley rainbow ‘stretched between us’ (42). In this poem, the weight of the opening and closing stanzas is given to the lack of male presence.

In Kit Griffith’s poem, ‘Marshfield’, the domestic scenes and dialogue reveal a mother and her young children in ‘the summer we ran’ (*Poetry Wales Award*). The final line of ‘Marshfield’ explicates that the ‘run’ was from ‘the man we were in hiding from’. The male has been absent for the whole poem, yet this last line, which also gives a sense of the child’s voice, offers light to the meaning of his absence in the rest of the poem. Thus, a re-read of the whole text is invited, producing a cyclical reading and the development of vital contextual understanding on culture, family, and liberation from domestic abuse.

The absent male or father figure offers creative ground within poetic ‘egg space’ to explore binaries in intimate family or significant adult relationships, such as subject/object, absence/presence, sexual/non-

sexual, pleasure/pain and liberation/incarceration. Texts on the male as lack or lacking in relation to desire and sexual narratives comment on broader, enduring cultural and interpersonal tensions on love, gender, and romance, to include domestic abuse. In my poem 'Refuge' the woman has found safe space, yet there is still a wrangle with the antagonist male that she has fled (35):

On that single bed, on each woman's press,  
fear raided rest –

his tough grin dripping,  
that same sweaty tug.

There is a sense of repeated behaviour in 'that same sweaty tug' and 'each woman's press' on the refuge bed. Space is used in this stanza to depict the disconnect between the male/female terrain, which in women's refuge is a vast and vital physical disconnection, as women are in secret, hidden or liminal accommodation. This hidden space is seen in the poem as 'fern's private world' and 'I hid the key'. The poem goes on to describe 'the baby pen, its fray, a testament' and the woman sorting 'stranger's laundry, / the upturned kids' room'. There is a sense of refuge space as being in constant use, in a cycle of need due to domestic abuse situations.

'The First Train', composes a journey of sexual awakening through female masturbation. Although the male is missing in this opening poem from *King Mattress*, the female still uses the capitalist container of the sex toy shop and the 'sparkly little chap' vibrator as an initiator to her sensual and sexual body (48). 'The First Train' links to a dichotomy on bodies in relation to pervasive phallogocentric thinking and liberated, independent female desire. There are narratives threaded throughout *The Egg in the Triangle* collections with female social and sexual emancipation at the fore. In acts such as hauling the 'carcass mattress / to the trash skip', in 'King Mattress', the mother rids herself of the layered palimpsest of the

mattress, which is equivalent to an aspect of herself – stained with ‘semen, breast milk, blood-stars [...] sex sweat’ (64). In ‘King Mattress’, even though the mother lets the mattress fold over her ‘in one last kiss’, evoking a romantic connection, she is expelling the interwoven aspects of her sexuality. Gendered oppositions in relation to the ‘King’ of the mattress and a phase of early mothering practice are sent to ‘the trash skip’, thus opening space for the new. Similarly, in the imaginations and activities of the ‘new’ house in Griffiths’ ‘Marshfield’, there is an air of potential and reparation on the maternal journey into liberation.

### **Male as Antagonist, Trickster, and Predator**

My sexuality poetry often portrays the male as an antagonist, Trickster, or predator character. Pinkola Estes sees the predator figure as an internal ‘natural’ force that is part of the manifold nature of the human self (39). However, this ‘natural predator’, she says, needs ‘our immediate consciousness and containment’. Although she describes the predator force as an oppositional force of the positive that is ‘born into us’, its quality as a ‘derisive’ and ‘murderous antagonist’ is a major focus of her diverse unearthing and analysis on reclaiming the deep feminine and ‘wildish nature’ through myth and fairy tale (44). Pinkola Estes claims that women who enter the dark or shadow realms of the natural predator through their ‘wildish nature’, must ‘not to be irreparably trapped, captured, or killed on [their] way there or back’. I see my research into camgirl sites, pornography forums, and the epistemics of being in partnership with a habitual pornography user as a journey to the predator’s shadow realm, but I did make it back, albeit with disturbing images and conflicting discourse in my mind. As ‘*It’s normal, he said*’, depicts (70):

I’m leaving – will be your new  
virtual, the lost flesh, a thumbnail  
search on *exes*

This last stanza of this poem describes the journey away from what I see as the shadow land of pornography. The woman is a ‘new / virtual’, aligning herself in her emancipation ironically with the depictions of fantastical, imaginary women in pornography, where there is no real flesh. The ‘thumbnail’ in the penultimate line works figuratively and doubles up to suggest the visually summarised film clip, but also a body part among the lost flesh of the destroyed Bluebeard wife/wives. The final word ‘exes’ reiterates the separation from the porn consumer, as it is placed with more space around it to allow pause and reflection (70). What would a porn user search up online when he’d just been left by his girlfriend or wife? There’s no sole answer, but the hiatus in space in the poem’s last line suggests the isolation of digital sexuality – where a multitude or menu of options exist for the consumer as they hover and choose their next viewing. That the ‘exes’ is plural and has no full stop, is written to highlight that this is not a new problem for the male subject and pornography consumption often has an ongoing nature with no clear end. As with any addictive or shadow realm behaviour, there is usually a trail of brokenness and endless or cyclical patterns, all being worthy of address.

The nature of the pattern for the mythic Bluebeard figure revolves around his goal to entrap the curious, willing, and naïve feminine, and to gather women to deconstruct, one by one, in repeated cycles, akin to addiction. Bluebeard figures are one of ‘egg spaces’ extremes: his darkness almost, but not entirely, impenetrable to light. As Zoe Brigley writes, ‘nothing glitters’ in the castle of the Bluebeard figure (64). In ‘*It’s normal, he said*’, the male is seen in this typical Bluebeardian fashion through pornography – women being sexually consumed over and over again in the ‘torture room’ of the phone screen (69).

‘*It’s normal, he said*’ has other echoes of the Bluebeard myth with the poetic ‘I’ being given her own ‘slippery key’ by the male – that which

unlocks the torture (69). Bluebeard often denies or toys with the gore and violence of his existence, normalising the use of brutal pornography or systematic misogyny. The poem's dialogic title, '*It's normal, he said*', further emphasises this denial in what Mary McGowan calls the 'authoritative nature of norm enactment', which includes silencing women in many forms (52). To the contrary, in my poem, the woman refuses to 'play dead' and become trapped in the consciousness or dynamics of the sexually omnipotent, scopophilic male (69-70). However, under the male sexual gaze, other women in the poem are 'far from being seen as 'a human being / valued or whole' in relation to the man's 'constant demand / for the diminutive / eye rolls of a pornographised woman – / who just needs oxygen'.

McGowan discusses several forms of, and varying tactics used for, silencing women in pornography. In relation to consent and refusal, she explores the moral dynamics and in-between spaces around the yes/no binary in pornography, which generally involves utterance of some form (McGowan ch. 3). In '*It's normal, he said*', the imagery is of a woman 'who just needs oxygen', we see she is beyond speech, as she is virtually beyond her own capacity to breathe – let alone protest or utter a word. Here the idea of silencing is taken into the realm of the deathly or life-limiting, as is evident in much of mainstream heteronormative pornography (70). 'Communication failure' states McGowan 'is a type of silencing' and can occur through acts of not listening to women, not allowing response time, ignoring, or obstructing answers (48). The silencing of women in sexual acts is challenged in '*It's normal, he said*', through the woman not 'playing dead', thus not taking a voluntary or coerced stance towards the male's pervasive and disruptive porn habit.

In terms of silencing, this is also seen in the disrespected request of the female partner in '*It's normal, he said*', as the poem begins in reference

to the stoppage or moderation of the male's pornography use. In 'Cam Girl', the woman in the final stanza wishes to be visible, to have a 'conversation' with one of the men from the cold transactions of digital space (44). The masculine in many of my sexuality poems is depicted as non-receptive, distanced, or objectional to female negotiation and day-to-day interactions. Instead, there is a sexually dominant, predatory, Trickster-type figure who will con or evade the woman in a world of achieving singular pleasure in the sex act.

Entering the shadowy realms of the masculine (or that aspect of the human self) and the often-arduous journey back, or away from what is seen in the 'deadening pool' of the predator, is the crux of Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, also known as the Bluebeard myth and its retellings (Brigley 64). The Bluebeard story symbolises a transformation or evolution within female psycho-sexual capacity through sexual initiation and can be used as a foundation in new versions of the story on every day and fantastical levels. Helen Ivory incorporates Bluebeard poetically in *Waiting for Bluebeard* through a series of poems that show him as murderous, burying women in 'date order', 'waist-deep' (83). In Ivory's poems, Bluebeard is sexually and romantically active with 'love letters in a trunk', and seven children 'fat as calves, in 'seven silver-cross prams'. However, this romantic, paternal productivity is married in the same stanza with 'the sickle in Bluebeard's hand', to depict the slaying of his many wives (Ivory 93). The women in *Waiting for Bluebeard* 'parade for him', even in the bones and destruction of the feminine, Bluebeard often triumphs with power and has a persistency seen in the poems as 'marrow-deep tooth-marks' and 'shadows in the library' (84, 85, 103).

Hayes writes that 'love is meant to be transformative', however, she aligns this in contemporary culture to less of a reclamation of the self, and more so a 'discontinuity [...] disruption and disintegration of the self'

(63). This disintegration is seen in versions of the Bluebeard myth through cold sexual interactions, short-lived, seemingly disposable loving or romantic connection and deceptive coercions of the predator. In the poetic ‘egg space’ of my writing, disruption or some form of impacting damage often occurs through the sexual relationship, among vivid, usually cyclical interplay with the male predator or Trickster figure. See, for example, the upheavals in home space in my poem ‘Refuge’, the insulting characters in ‘Cam Girl’ and returning men in ‘Service’ (35, 43, 112). More tragically in Dunning’s, ‘Poem for Sarah Everard’, the predator is presented as approaching, ‘palms outstretched, / vowing only to serve. To protect’, yet the woman’s bones are ‘spilt to dust [...] // Voice wilting in his grip’ (33). The ‘egg space’ binary in this poem revolves around trust/deathly betrayal.

In Plath’s ‘Bluebeard’ poem, the female subject is ‘sending back the key’ to the patriarchal ‘study’ space of dissection ‘where he would make love to me’ (*Collected Poems* 305). This Bluebeard version – as all Bluebeard stories do – repeats the myth, showing in similar ways how the female subject interacts with, but also eventually always rejects the shadowy terrain of the mythic male sadist. The dominant male character in Bluebeardian stories is always portrayed as accumulating women in seductive, secretive, or vampiric ways to sexually own, fantasise over, and literally or symbolically kill, but he does get surmounted. Too, in Dunning’s ‘Poem for Sarah Everard’, the woman’s name ‘will grow, like a daisy, / clawing back, relentless’ – in part she is refusing the sadist’s deathly obsession for power and pain and given a new symbolic life and strength (33).

Although women are written in critical and creative senses in pornography-based and Bluebeardian-type poems – to show the capture and maiming of women – they often reflect real scenes. Media

representations and cultural imaginations are shown in Dunning's poetic encounter with Sarah Everard's March 2021 rape and murder – at the hands of a serving police officer. My pornography poems work from the source material of viewed online pornography films. Thus, the reader in these critical and creative texts is challenged anew with the stark reality of pornography and rape culture. A monstrous sexuality is shown in relation to the feminine in the language of these poems, recasting alternate angles on emancipation through the presentation of a feminist rejection and/or exposure of the ruthless predator.

Poems on sexuality can recontextualise sadistic male pleasure by documenting accumulated acts of violence, the voices, and places of misogyny, whilst intersecting with stories of victimhood and survivor-narratives. Poetic 'egg space' shows the interplays of male power and control with female submission and loss, through the bodies of real women in everyday domestic settings, such as the 'webcam bedroom' in my poem 'Pornography' (34). Too in the 'streets' that the woman is ironically written as 'not afraid to walk' in Dunning's poem on Sarah Everard, but where she ultimately becomes a victim, we see the tragedy of extreme coercion as inherent in the pathways of women's worlds.

Less murderous than the predator figure – but as disruptive – is the Jungian Trickster archetype, often appearing in literature through characters that perform pranks, cruelty, and embody a magical type of contradiction. Like predator energy, the Trickster, once encountered, can lead to 'breakthroughs and spiritual growth' (Larwood 55). The Trickster, often shown as male, can commit 'atrocious acts from sheer carelessness' and fits well in 'egg space' as he is, according to Larwood, 'both serious and ridiculous, kind, and cruel'. Similar to the predator, the Trickster can be seen as part of the unconscious human, on levels of internal/external experience, and often serves as a mirror in literature of the tensions



between the personal/social or private/public. Arpad Szakolczai contends that ‘Tricksters and liminality are closely connected’, and they have the capacity to dangerously intervene in moments or phases of liminality by navigating into central positions (26). However, the Trickster is essentially unable to live in a community, and is incapable of close emotional involvement, invariably bringing misery or crisis.

The Trickster figure is seen in my poem ‘The Piss Patch’, through aspects of the masculine that ultimately instigates ‘a death / patch of bleached stalks’, and desecration of the female’s garden (21). The male ‘lover’ in this poem transgresses boundaries of acceptability but attempts to excuse himself through admission of the transgressive act, rather like normalising behaviour. In reality, ‘The Piss Patch’ was written in a phase of moving on from this ‘lover’. Yet, the lover-Trickster figure has navigated into a central position in the in-between space of the woman’s journey into full independence. He is in the maternal and domestic world, as in my poems ‘Refuge’ and ‘My Moon’, which both explore reformation phases into liberation from the antagonistic male and the challenges presented in emancipation efforts among the empowered/disempowered dichotomy (35, 57). This authority position of the male is also seen in the digital screen settings – which are liminal spaces of real/fantasy – in ‘Cam Girl’, with ‘charges’, ‘rules’, and ‘demands’ being exerted by multiple men over the woman and her space, alongside penile imagery (44).

### **Trashed Romance as a ‘Death of the Heart’**

For the purposes of this exegesis, ‘trashed romance’ relates to aspects of coldness, inconsistency, and disrespect in loving or sexual connections between adults. In concentrated forms, these qualities relate to what Susan Griffin describes as a silencing of the heart or eros. It is this silencing – or ‘death of the heart’ – that Griffin determines as the basis of

the sadomasochistic or pornographic mind, which is rooted in a fear of the feminine, and thus equates to acts and fantasies where the female body is objectified, captured, and/or silenced (83).

Much of this silencing can be seen throughout my sexuality poems that challenge the binaries of spoken/unspoken and trapped/free. The act of writing the repressed in narratives thus elevates voice and female experience within the poems, and in doing so, allows issues around the maternal and sexual body to surface. In my poem, 'Christine's Chair', for example, the female character is written as 'mute in my box – dancer, bird' (61). This reframed Christine Keeler is trapped in a photo, and in part trapped in the second wave of feminism's cultural imagination of the freely available, liberated sexual woman, where despite her new voice and media-glossed nudity, she too is in fact, 'nailed in, flesh and limbs' to 'his contract' (33). In 'Spider', the woman-spider, is captured in a wine glass. Although this entrapment offers a 'safe dome' for the predator figure, the woman is left 'curled to a circle, afraid of [her] own legs' (100). The suggestion in this poem is towards the predator's constrictive and immobilising influence on a woman's life, once he has transgressed her boundaries.

Many of my sexuality poems evidence rife 'trashed romance'. There is little love or mutual affection in these poems, as in the form of soulful, spiritual, and/or unifying love, though there is often a yearning for love's more benevolent gifts. Instead, these overtly sexual poems are a melee of destructive acts, betrayal, and pain, shown through the texts in the emotional and physical body and in-between spaces of separation, the digital and transactional affection and seduction.

In my poem 'Service', the subservient, sexually available lover-mother, and the sex worker that 'cleans dildos' and 'tapes down / the

curtains’, are aligned (112). As these women lovingly prepare for the male – cleaning, cooking, and folding – the text interweaves the women’s experiences as similar, with a distanced, transactional sexuality. Like ‘Cam Girl’, the women in ‘Service’ are left alone after sex acts (43, 112). This solitude around sexuality is seen in ‘Cam Girl’ as the narrative voice (44):

untangling the cam demands. Wished  
 she could really be seen, maybe lay  
 on a fresh towel with the Norwegian man,  
 have a conversation.

Space is created with the enjambed sentence and stanza break after ‘Wished’ to spotlight the female’s yearn for a physical or real, face-to-face connection. The narrative voice desires the interaction of ‘conversation’, the implication with this word being that the woman wants to transcend sexual objectification through the act of conversing. Thus, the poem points critically to both the woman being less silenced, and to her navigation and expression beyond the pornographised world that she is in. In ‘Cam Girl’, poetic form and content combine to create subversive angles on the voiced/unvoiced and subject/object interplay in ‘egg space’, with the direct yet often hidden speech, nomenclature, or ‘chat’ of pornography sites colliding with the subjective female narration (43):

*Piss on the bed newbie...*  
*Come 4 free – Skype me*  
*Put your head in water ;0)*  
*Tie up your tits!*

In ‘Service’, from *Bone Maker*, the final stanza aligns with empty or cold sexuality, that, like ‘Cam Girl’, shows the male as existing yet also absent in digital spaces, with reference to ‘apps’ and ‘data’ (112):

Tepid come cools on pulled-out breasts,  
 they stare at empty worlds, pressed  
 into bed pillows, as he leaves, head down,  
 checking his apps and his data.

The male's psycho-physical attention and/or love is diverted into the liminal recreation space of the screen, as his 'tepid come cools' on the women's breasts. Although there is a real interaction in this poem with a person-person interchange, it is fleeting and lacking in any shared romance, thus demonstrates 'trashed romance'. In this last stanza of 'Service', men leave the site of the bed and the sex act, with imagery of departure being written on the same line as the 'pillows' – already established as 'empty worlds'. Therefore, a juxtaposition of connection/disconnection is shared in the last stanza, further highlighted as there is no 'we' or 'they' of the women in the last line, just 'his'. As a result, the human reference in the power of the last line, in the resounding final image, is given to the male. The women, shown with relatable experience, have been claimed in sexual subservience, body 'pulled' and covered in come, to be left after the sex act. The poem's critical depiction of this less evident woman – once she has been used as object – is pronounced through my choices around words and their placement, to shift the lens of sexuality and show spaces of interpersonal separation, objectification, and 'trashed romance', in relation to gender.

The more satisfying, unifying love in this collection is clearly a maternal love for the child. Yet the interwoven experiences of the mother and child bond and the mother and sexual lover bond, although seemingly diametric, both provide opportunity for self-transformation and inner reflection for the poetic characters, and the poetic journey in the eclipsed 'third space'. When transferred onto a general self/other, Mr/Mrs, lover/lover, or sex act/sex act context, 'third space' intimacy, as highlighted, leads to narrations of deeper epiphany and knowledge of the

self or selves in natural/social power structures. A literary aesthetic thus forms around relationships between humans in many senses and situations, helping to identify the hidden/blatant and other interplays in a text when the eclipsed space is spot-lit.

### **Multiple Representations of Sexuality and Post-Porn Poetry**

In my poetry, the maternal and female subjects are shown in ways that intersect with sexuality in first and third person scenarios. Third person writing adds the quality of witness accounts or narrator texts, which are suggested by Alcoff and Gray-Rosendale to provide the potential to express truth with more courage (220). When examined within the context of ‘survivor discourse’ and confessional literature, the witness is akin to the confessor – exposing the secretive or shadow aspect of human experience – but holds less subjective intensity. In terms of how this relates to my poetry, I felt more able to confront the subversive shadow realms of sexuality – such as brutality, abuse, and misogyny – through writing in the third person. In part, the third person affords the writer new imaginations of a distanced connection to upheaval or painful experiences and gives routes into transformed and/or a more anonymous expression. As a technique to further excavate truth from inner to outer worlds, adopting the third person helps to bring transgressive issues into creative discourse in ways that build on raw experience. At times, the third person simply adds variety of tone and register to a collection of poems, if the first person is predominantly used.

In my poems ‘Pornography’, ‘Cam Girl’, and ‘*It’s normal, he said*’, sexuality is conveyed partly through found poetry derived from the film titles and chat transcripts on pornography websites, the general language used within live camgirl websites, and sex worker survivor-discourse (34, 43, 69). These poems reflect the pornography industry’s own diminutive,

narrow, and offensive symbolic language. This trio of mainly third person poems feel controversial, especially when placed in a body of work that is also invested in exploring an ethical and responsible mothering. However, taking the title of Carly Peacock's study, children are potentially carrying around *A Pocketful of Porn*, in an age where smartphones and internet access are standard and essential accessories to life, even for children. Pornography, or as Peacock perceives it to be on many occasions – a 'rape scene' – is merely a click away (95). In the #metoo age, 'it makes no sense for us to continue to accept pornography as 'normal' and just be part of life' (Peacock 180).

Rachel Moran takes a feminist critique on her time as a coerced child prostitute, and shares that it was eventually her role as a mother to a young son that was the biggest reason for her leaving prostitution ("Paid For" 11:20-11:47). Moran sees prostitution as 'sexual abuse' in all its forms, contending that prostitution is not excused or exempt from violations through the term 'work' ("Prostitution Survivor" 01:04-01:26). As such, perceptions on sexuality and sexual contracts or behaviours, I argue, implicitly infiltrate a woman's ethical stance on what does and does not transgress maternal space and experience – on cognitive, emotional, practical, and physical levels.

Poetry on pornography and prostitution, such as my poems 'Cam Girl', '*It's normal*, he said' and 'Service', introduce maternal presence whilst navigating within cultures of normalised misogyny inherent to heteronormative pornography (43, 69, 112). Boundaries around the distinctions of the pornographic, non-pornographic, and post-pornographic in texts that directly reference transactional sexual acts are typically 'fluid' (Gregory and Lorange 147). My model's 'egg space' helps deeper analysis on subversive sexual texts, to include memoir, poetic first- and third-person accounts and confessional style pieces, by

opening porous, theoretical areas of contradiction and interplay among the typically categorical and closed or private nature of both pornography and motherhood.

Dorothea Lasky's poem 'Porn' explores the viewing of the 'divorce party' film. Here, the proclaimed freedom of the woman being fucked in her 'marble kitchen' by a 'hired hand' is questioned, Lasky saying 'who's to say this stanza is not porn, calculated and hurtful' (00:10-01:22). This pronounced blurring of category is distinctly 'egg space' territory, where fusions and contradictions occur, especially when the pornographic film text is reframed aesthetically. Pornography culture as consumption, although rife, is, by its private nature still shadow-like – despite radical feminists bringing attention to pornographic acts as representative of social acts. Radical feminists from the 1970s have declared that all women are subject to the toxicity of patriarchal support towards a sexual violence that is both monetised and constructed in pornography, making women 'second-class citizens' in socio-political systems (Heredia 222). Poetic 'egg space' deals with the contentious and insidious interplay of power/subservience, and links to social methods and cultural language that bolsters patriarchal dominance through economised pornographic bodies and exploits gender expectations.

My poems on pornography can be accurately described as Post-Porn artifacts, in line with the coinage of the term by photographer Wink Van Kempen in the 1980s, as they express 'or refer to sexually explicit creations the aim of which is not masturbatory but parodic or critical' (Heredia 232). The reader of Post-Porn poems is repeatedly confronted with the propagating nature of digital porn, such as lists of film titles or types of sex acts and/or fantasies. See, for example, '*It's normal*, he said', below, which recreates found title texts into a poem (69). With italics demarcating the found or *real* language, there is both sincere and ironic

comment on truth and its reframing in the poem, thus destabilising the shadow land of the pornographic gaze. The narrative voice asks the reader to ‘Look’, bringing them further into the replicated language of pornographic content lists and imagery of scopophilia (69):

Look at the searches:

*Teens Shaved Pussy*  
*Brutal Gang Bang*  
*Wife Porn*  
*Force Fuck*  
*Helpless Blonde*  
*Deep Throat Facial Abuse*  
*Dicks Going a Bit Too Far*  
*Czech Harems*  
*Old Fucks Immigrants for Money*  
 and more.

Pornography is thus taken into new critical arenas in ‘*It’s normal, he said*’, with the reader/writer relationship being brought to attention. As in Lasky’s poem ‘Porn’, from her *Rome* collection, discussed by Siltanen as framing ‘an imbalance of power and knowing in terms of surrendering and love’, also addressing the reader, writer, and porn consumer (993):

I watch porn  
 Cause I’ll never be in love  
 Except with you dear reader  
 Who thinks I surrender  
 But who’s to say this stanza is not porn  
 Calculated and hurtful

In pornography, there is ‘no discernible centre’; it exists in ‘a complex ecology’ as an ‘ever-present subject of critique’, and in this way, is considered by Lorange and Gregory as unable to stand alone as a concept (141). Thus, pornography has a clear place within the ambiguous and interwoven spaces of my model’s ‘egg space’, where fusions of



multiple binaries are creatively aired. The ‘complex ecology’ discussed by Gregory and Lorange, is in part due to pornography being immersed in performance, gender, sociology, criminology, media, sexuality, technology, and anthropology categories that blur, crossover, and transform each other as the demand for pornography increases within 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. Reaching wider audiences, through this ‘complex ecology’, pornography thus poses its subsequent threats of sexual exploitation within personal and social spheres, to normalise what is typically subjugating and/or violent. Putting pornography into my model, with its trio of subjects, helps tackle and highlight inequalities and immoralities in its expanding ‘complex ecology’ through new theoretical angles.

The shifting or indiscernible centre of pornography aligns with the research of Meghan Donevan, who sees modern pornography as evasive due to its enmeshment *as part of* social media. Pornography today, says Donevan is now ‘hardly recognisable’ compared to its previous manifestations prior to colliding with social media (03:50-05:54). Platforms such as OnlyFans, premium Snapchat, and purchasable online sex act shows and photographs function, Donevan suggests, in ways that disguise sexual abuse and coercion as glamour, fame, or a normal and progressive career pathway for women of all ages, to include girls, where there are multiple routes into sex as a purchase. More popular now, compared to the supposed sexual liberation of the ‘Golden Age of Porn’ – highlighted by Ana Valero Heredia as spanning 1969-1984, and constituting mainly of the production and distribution of pornographic films – is the expectation for women to interact directly and repeatedly with the multiple buyers of online pornography and prostitution in social media settings (Heredia 22, Donevan 08:50-09:09). Donevan’s findings show that performers, often young or with vulnerabilities around finances or mental health, take on new personas or ‘fake names’, to protect and

separate their ‘true selves’ in pornographic activities, where they are being bought and sold either in guised modelling, blogging, side-earning scenarios, or blatant prostitution (10.00-10.20). This new identity is highlighted in the fourth stanza of ‘Cam Girl’ (43):

A screen woman with a posh cam,  
and a smile of rebellion. New name,  
new URL, new dildo.

The reborn or transformed woman as sexually exploitable is evident in the newness surrounding her identity, objects, and position in the online world. The poem goes onto explore the dialogic nature within this transformation, where she is purely for transactional and masturbatory gain and ironically named, by demand, a ‘God’:

*Say,*  
*I am your God...*  
he typed from Dubai as she raised her hips,  
parted her lips into the dark  
passage of the net.

*I am your God. I am your God!*  
She chanted deeply until his quick splat of come.  
A few dollars in the fantasy bank.

Porn Studies, or Post-Porn examinations, are relatively nascent in historical contexts. The first peer-reviewed journal dedicated to pornography – *Porn Studies* – launched in 2014, with recent advances to re-term the field as Post-Porn in many academic spheres, in part to step into new opportunities for critical theory as ‘in the classroom the pornographic is always post-pornographic’ (Gregory and Lorange 142). Poetic ‘egg space’ in texts on pornography are, I suggest, concerned with exploring hidden/exposed, consent/refusal, legal/illegal, and real/fantasy binary interplays along with its main analysis on gender imbalance and

discourse on the public/private. As in Lasky's 'Porn', although the poem starts with the declaration, 'All types of porn are horrific', she claims she's 'watched more porn than you ever will' (00.07-0.53). There is a pro-sex angle in Lasky's poem, alongside a challenge to pornography's extreme and violent sexual objectifications within the domain of men, with such degradations as a 'woman and a dog' and 'vomit sex' (0.56-01.04). Lasky is 'reading back' into pornography, deconstructing and demystifying it using both the 'limited vocabulary' of pornography, alongside poetic creativity (Gregory and Lorange 142, 144).

The critical analysis around Post-Porn is discussed by Gregory and Lorange as, the interplay of sex-positive and anti-censorship feminism of the late twentieth century, ideas around document and fantasy, gratification and non-gratification, repression and expression, and ideas of the 'natural body' as opposed to the 'social body' (Gregory and Lorange, 140, 143, 146). This natural/social interplay is one of the fundamental ideas of Rich's second-wave feminist exploration of motherhood as both experience (natural) and institution (social).

After months of researching the ethics, pros/cons, and debates around pornography, my only answer on how to proceed in my coupling with a porn consumer was to ask myself if I really could just be 'accepting' – as both the pornographised performer and consumers are in 'Cam Girl' (44). Like Peacock's analysis of how pornography intervened in her coupled relationship, the only determinable way for me to decide my journey within the relationship was by understanding or at least witnessing what material was entering my boyfriend's mind and body. The vicarious sensation of wanting to cry, vomit, run, and protest after viewing these films was overwhelming. Thereafter, the material for 'egg space', revolving around this 'Mr' and 'Mrs' interplay, with the insertion of porn's destitution, irony, and as 'trashed romance', was alight in my work

(70). Aghast at not just the abject pain, degradation, and violence that I saw, that still renders me afraid for the women in the films, I was confused as to how anyone would choose to view this material for pleasure! Heredia cites Nancy Prada's assessment that 'pornography offers female humiliation as a key element of arousal' (223). As the poetic 'I' in *'It's normal, he said'* concludes on this pleasure/pain exchange: 'this *normal* desire / is fucked up' and proceeds to leave the Bluebeardian figure and his 'torture room' screen (70).

In a recent study of 7,430 porn videos from two mainstream porn sites, it was found that 'women were the target of the aggression in 97% of the scenes and their response to aggression was either neutral or positive and rarely negative' (Fritz et al. 3041). The potential harm of aggressive pornography being perceived as 'normal' and part of everyday engagement or entertainment, to the detriment of healthy human connections, is of significant concern to me as a mother and a woman. In *'It's normal, he said'*, the violence is made clear in film titles that include the words 'force', 'helpless', and 'abuse' to advertise the women's experience and lure in the porn consumer (69).

There is an unresolved 'schism' in the feminist movement around pornography's potential and actual harm, with this schism worsening 'in recent decades, since the mainstream pornographic dialogue has evolved to encompass increasingly degrading and violent narratives about women' (Heredia 222). Fritz and colleagues list some of the types of acts of aggression in mainstream pornography films, with 'slapping, gagging, choking, hair pulling and spanking' being the five 'most common' forms of aggression (3041). *'It's normal, he said'* lists the '*Brutal Gang Bang*' – as one film advert – thus the poem challenges the standardisation of the physically violent to pornography consumers, in a self-referential non-secretive fashion. The aggression in pornography culture is, it seems, the

hook for consumers – and is also the ethical and educational concern in Post-Porn discourse.

The subject of pornography and sexualised bodies are seen in differing stanzaic structures in my work to approach the many blurred areas within dichotomies using a variety of poetics. I demonstrate how the stricter form, such as the 14-line sonnet, fractured stanzas, list-type verses, and a quatrain poem, are all creative options to confront the contentious world of pornography. Navigating Post-Porn in traditional and more experimental verse explicates the visceral, dramatic, and social tensions around pornography situations, which often span into physical tensions as well as the personal dynamics of relationships – if not to others, to self. Everyday dialogue and online language can be used, as well as lyrical skills such as the rhyme pattern and strict syllabics, for example in my ‘Pornography’ sonnet (34):

His *normal*, his resolution – dawn porn,  
 with each stranger’s fist, slap on slap, pin, rape.  
 He comes for all of it: revenge, fun, fake,  
 consenting, vile, soft or cuckold porn.  
*Easy girls*, bulb-lit in webcam bedrooms,  
 marooned, consumed, clicking in traffic rule,  
 multiple requests – a new deduction.

Presenting a neat line and syllabic structure such as a sonnet challenges the idea of containment, or the set frame of pornography. The idea of consuming is brought to light: is it the global pimps consuming the performers, or the lone buyers of pornography that are being ‘consumed’ – or both? The contemporary culture of pornography as a place of new deductions is shown in the poem to refer to the nascent yet explosive world of online porn – in all its ‘vile’, ‘fake’, and ‘fun’ variations and contradictions.

‘Cam Girl’ reveals the female as subjugated, in a claustrophobic bedroom, her own domestic space, sexually exploited with ‘her and her and her / of his vista’, pointing to the throwaway culture where one woman becomes the next in the vast world of ‘his’ pornography culture (43). Objectified in cold, violent ways through multiple male gazes and instructions, the ‘Cam Girl’ is also shown to be a mother. Akin to Moran’s claim that her son helped her cease prostitution, the subject in ‘Cam Girl’ is disrupted from the misogynistic gazes of webcam culture by ‘the baby-sitter’s time up, / c-section / nagging’, pointing to the dual nature of the feminine as supplier of both fantasy and reality (44).

The female body as both an object for gaze and consumption in relation to the man as a fleeting or distant partner, or in ‘trashed romance’ commercial transactions, is evident in my poems. The man is written as quick to leave the sexual act or budding romance, relates to the woman for sexual purposes only, or confronts the female with the often-cruel world of pornography until he eventually rejects her, or she leaves him. Exploring the theme of sexuality and gender in my poems, the structures, means, and labels inherent within an oppressive patriarchal society are named and scrutinised in relation to their impact on the subject.

Nonetheless, some of my poems also celebrate female sexuality and female-male attraction in a more naturalised or pro-sex frame. The ‘stellar fuck’ in ‘Researching the Kiss’, and the romantic and physical climax in the metaphorical ‘Strawberry’ posit more romantic and intimate or warm sexuality (68, 75). Whereas heteronormative pornography and Post-Porn poetry represent denaturalised sex. Lina Papadiki raises the point that anti-pornography feminists suggest ‘men use pornography as a woman’, the sex act being directed to a photograph or film, with women becoming personified as ‘real’ through object, in cold fashion (137). Conversely, ‘Researching the Kiss’ and ‘Strawberry’ are interpersonal, linked to the

rise and fall of nature, return of the lover, a trajectory of face-to-face sexual connection, warmth, flesh, and the elements – especially of water.

In ‘Researching the Kiss’, I write on ‘the triangle / of the waterfalls’, ‘shores pounding’, ‘the wet ritual of us’, and ‘sweat’, harking to the primal sexual waters of Gwyn’s discussion, which sees sexuality in literature through the element of water (18). Furthermore, ‘Strawberry’ locates desire and erotic journeys in mid-summer heat as ‘Dew pearls at your nub’, oceanic references, and ‘root-nerves weaving / between our legs in June’s rain’ (68) The interplay in ‘egg space’ of the natural/social or cold/warm binaries is apparent throughout *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress* and *Bone Maker*, with differing angles on sexuality to balance representations of the real/fantasised and unrequited aspects of the complex business of sexual relationships, on and off the screen.

The oppositional states between genders in my sexuality poems form a knotted and intricate picture in acts of sexual connection and disconnection. In ‘Spider’, the female subject is defending her space vehemently from the ‘death-dance’ of sex and coupling (100). Conversely, in my poem, ‘The Frog Prince’, which combines the fairy tales *The Frog Prince*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, the woman is drawn to awakening and saving a semi-conscious, scopophilic, half-male, shown as an ambiguous figure, on the edge of a pond (46). In the latter poem, there is a re-mythologising of traditional fairy tales and narratives around gender expectation, with the vulnerable, passive, and silent or silenced sleeping princess trope being reversed:

She could see a mottled man in water,  
limbs starved, bog filling his lungs.  
Onto his swollen cheek, she plunged  
to kiss him, lift him to vomit,  
clinging on the slip of the edge.

My sexuality poetry and ‘egg space’ analysis challenges powerful, enduring dichotomies and mythic tropes in language and gender relationships. These often-subversive poems destabilise limitations and norms on maternal and sexual expression and role. Through polysemous displays of sexuality – as linked to women’s and maternal agency – poetic language in *The Egg in the Triangle* collections contributes to innovative feminist praxis. My poetry disturbs and reframes notions of phallogentric governance and shadow aspects of predominant essentialist ideologies that repress, subjugate, or rigidly categorise women.

### Checking Out the Sexual and the Maternal

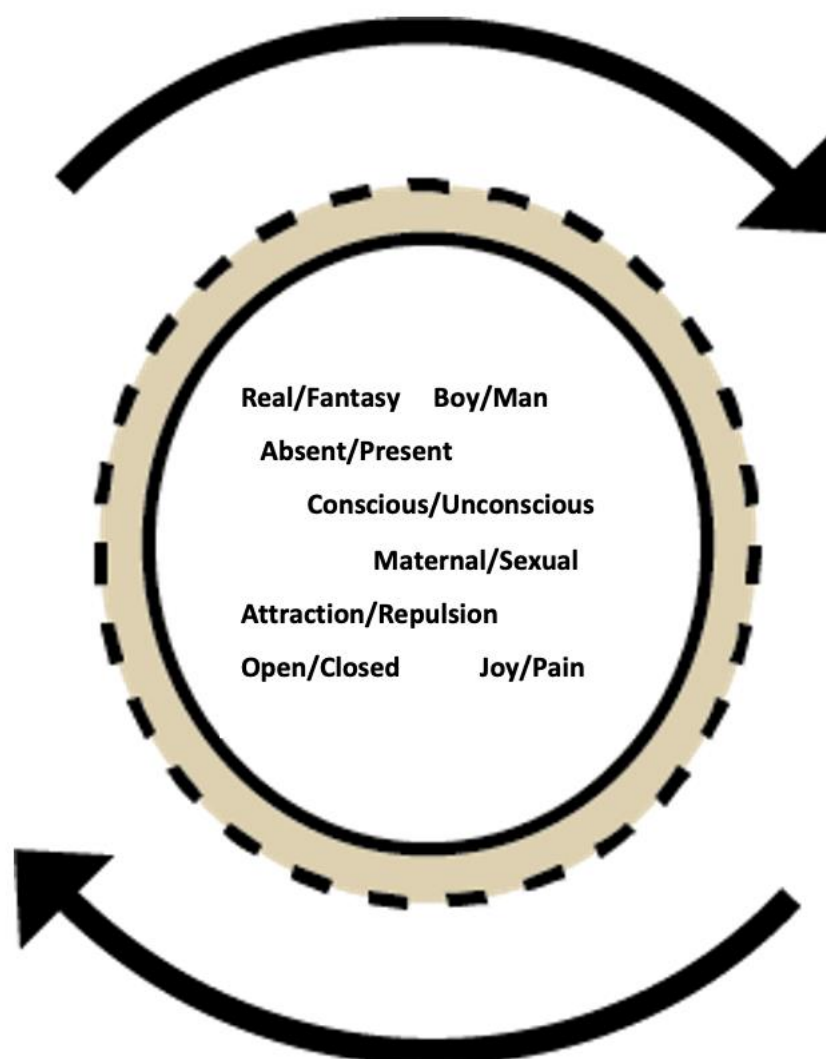


Fig. 8. Poetic ‘Egg Space’: Exploring Oppositional and Interwoven States in the Poem ‘Checkout’.



In my poem ‘Checkout’, there are clear intersections of motherhood, sexuality, and place. The poem builds from my own epistemology, offering a story around postnatal motherhood, sexualised bodies, and the depiction of ‘trashed romance’ – on personal and social levels – as played out by a new mother, a peripheral father, and a worker in a supermarket. ‘Checkout’ is a polysemous title pertaining to the physical place of purchasing items in a supermarket, to check out, meaning to investigate, to check out in relation to exit, or to checkout, meaning to bypass an experience, action, or duty. The poem begins to check out – or survey – the checkout boy, introducing the multivalence around the title immediately (84).

In the second stanza, the maternal ‘I’ responds to the lingering eyes of the checkout ‘boy-man’ – ‘I might be his first fuck’ – quickly superseded by the image of her postnatal vaginal bleed, ‘pad still seeping / with a blaze of clots, / cells stitching’ (84). The maternal ‘I’ is presented with liminal reference: in her healing body and in the ritualistic and ultimately transformative ‘first fuck’. The maternal and sexual in this stanza are presented as proximal, relating subversively to the prevalent cultural fascination – if one looks at the alarming statistics from Fight the New Drug, on high-ranking online searches – with ‘mom’ or ‘milf’ porn (‘Pornhub’s 2021 Annual Report’). Within the paradox of the sexual/maternal, there is horror in the poem, with imaginations of the penetrative sex act – while the mother’s cells are still ‘stitching’ from birth. The mother is seen as both virgin, unattainable to sex, and whore, desiring sex. She is in-between broad dichotomies of the sexual and is therefore in poetic ‘egg space’.

Although shown as vulnerably postnatal and bleeding, the new mother is still out shopping for baby clothes, while the father smokes in the carpark. Hayes contends that women’s subjugation is in part due to

their ‘commitment to endurance’ in sexist narratives and abusive relationships, which are bolstered by Western romantic scripts around love, romance, and gender (63, 65). This poem challenges the romanticised script of a perfect and happy postnatal world, with parents functioning in a loving and mutual union. Instead, the father being absent or unsupportive in the poem echoes the father-lover figure present throughout the collection, representing ‘trashed romance’. Although, in ‘Checkout’, the father sits ‘in the dust’ of the mother’s absence, thus switching the narrative (84).

‘Checkout’ depicts a fractured sexual self that is ‘othered’ from the sexual experience by way of the poem’s unusual story and atypical setting. Analysed in ‘egg space’, the poem reveals dissonance between binaries: the permissible/non-permissible, fantasy/reality, present/absent, empowered/disempowered, and procreational sex/recreational sex. Multiple angles around the body, sex, maternity, and gender form in a dizzying and stark narrative that plays on and confuses the ‘commitment to endurance’ in love, romantic, or sexual relationships within a woman’s life (Hayes 65). The poem looks fragmented in form, with indents, stanzas within stanzas, and floating stanzas (excess white space circling broken lines of a stanza) – such as the two lines, ‘in the dust / of my absence’, to reflect the disjunct between the maternal and paternal characters (84). The separation of text among expanded white space in this poem also references isolating behaviour and experiences. For example, the mother is alone shopping, while the father is seen dislocated from the essential acts and processes of mothering or caring for a baby or the maternal figure, as he sits in the carpark smoking.

In ‘Checkout’, the story around the till boy sees him heading to the ‘meat-stink quarter’ – akin to the killing room from the Bluebeard myth (84). The checkout ‘boy-man’ is seen in a suggestive male gaze, as

sexually willing, open perhaps to his ‘first’ sexual experience with the maternal subject. Yet he is still involved in the maternal embrace, ‘eating a lunch / packed by Mum’, simultaneously seen within his own sexual fantasy, wanking ‘to *milf* porn’. The poem connects to the Oedipal fantasy, especially as the sexual/maternal are repeatedly in linguistic proximity.

Conversely, in this poem it is the maternal ‘I’ who presents the initial idea or sexual fantasy of the ‘first fuck’ with the till boy, debunking tropes of men making the preliminary ‘move’ in sexual relationships or being the predominant leaders in sexual liaisons, who rescue, claim, or seduce women. The poem thus unites the idea and gaze of the sexual through poetics of the maternal ‘I’, giving it a self-authority around the real. Christopher Partridge discusses that ‘only personal experience’ can ‘provide immediate and uncontaminated access to the truth’ in realms of the transpersonal and thus crucially bolster the epistemological (243-244). First person poetry thus elevates individual thought or spoken truth into new readerships and audiences, whilst claiming new truths in the reiterations of experience.

The chanting of multiple male pronouns and nouns by the mother in the penultimate stanza on ‘Checkout’ represents linguistics that eventually powerfully silence her – in a soporific overload of the male. Calling to the estranged baby son, checkout boy/man, and unwilling father, the poetics speak to both an amplification and a diminishing of the male-female connection. As the mother in the poem repeatedly calls out – ‘*It’s him*’ – she is simultaneously destabilising masculinity by blurring who the ‘him’ is (84). What the maternal ‘I’ desires is open and vague, suggesting relationships of diversity and complexity toward the masculine. Ambivalence through the poetic language, is created with the mother’s calls for ‘*Boy, man-boy, / man, boy-man, man-daddy, / boy-baby, baby-daddy, / boy baby, baby*’. ‘Baby’ is also an interchangeable

colloquial term of affection for a lover or a child, which further complicates the triad of masculine representations. None of the male figures are particularly present in the poem. Instead, they are distanced, unknown, on the periphery, walking away, or simply represented by clothes, which touches on Mulvey's ideas around the absence of the male as offering critical or dramatic points in texts. The 'egg space' dichotomy of absent/present is enacted in the poem through the strong maternal and feminine-centred voice and imagery of the postnatal body, yet the poem is full of the masculine in his absence or departure.

The mother as wanton sexually, a *milf* reference, the mother who has packed the lunch, and the shopping mother in the poem's context all portray a gendered female trope as subservient to a dominant male. 'Checkout' highlights what Mulvey describes as the feminist 'frustration experienced under the phallogentric order', that ultimately 'gets us nearer to the roots of our oppression, as 'it brings an articulation of the problem closer' (7). In this poem, we see the binary interplay of social/natural in stark ways that refer to both the maternal and sexual. The domestic or social mother, seen shopping, is also placed by the primal, natural mother, with blood, milk, and orgasms.

In 'Checkout' the mother is 'subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound [that] she [...] cannot transcend', shown in her semi-conscious state at the end of the poem, in a pool of blood (Mulvey 7). In her motherhood memoir, *Black Milk*, Elif Shafak cites Cixous, describing how in *écriture féminine*, the 'woman as excess' is written and inspired figuratively by the biological processes of motherhood (266). 'Checkout' presents this 'excess' in relation to the female creative body and her desires towards the male – written in a muddled tripartite structure of baby-boy-father and their pronouns. There is an overflowing openness of the mother's corporality and in the repeated language, but this 'excess' is

also shown as *jouissance*, an orgasmic stirring on both the inside and outside of the maternal.

The maternal body is a shifting, fluid place in ‘Checkout’ with ‘my pad still seeping’, ‘one breast – milk stirred, / pressure brimming like an orgasm, / a crusty smile from the belly cut’ (84). The ‘Hospital band’ and ‘cannula hanging’ also invite the reader into the liminal or porous position of the mother, as she is still identified as a patient. She has another exposed body opening and an additional medically institutionalised identity, which adds further levels of complexity and drama to the poem.

By the end of ‘Checkout’, the internal aspect of the body is externalised further as ‘Blood pools. / Aisles end.’ – the mother losing her strength and fleeting ecstasy (85). As a symbol, blood powerfully turns or evolves a narrative into what is universally recognised as life-giving in its positive and death-inducing in its negative representations. In ‘Checkout’, blood is seen at the start and end of the poem; firstly, by linking into arousal, new life, and sexuality, and then to loss and waning life as the mother haemorrhages. Blood in the poem subliminally follows fertility’s journey of life/death, which is also shown in the Bluebeard myth as the bloody key that eventually bleeds uncontrollably to stain, and ultimately transforms the sexually taken and/or darkly curious female subject.

The last stanza sees the mother in the arms of others and ‘Yells for water’, pertaining to physical exhaustion or collapse, akin to the postcoital state – a fall after the rise (85). Positioned at the aisle’s end, the poem links to the liminal passageway traversed in traditional marriage – which I often subvert in my collections, for example in ‘Cam Girl’, ‘The Keeper’, and ‘Shiver’ (43, 66, 96). Perhaps the mother in ‘Checkout’ is finally where she needs to be – held, seen, and supported, from unjust private to benign public worlds. Yet there is a symbolic blood sacrifice on the journey to

getting the help that the initiated woman needs, as in Bluebeard myths, which end with calls to the piano tuner, siblings, and/or the mother for emancipation from the shackles of toxic masculinity. This poem ends with no clear picture on the mother's situation, she is positioned in-between life/death, suggesting a slaying as well as re-birth through her sex.

## Place Poetry: Liminal Existence – From Waiting to Covid-19 and Visions of the Elements

### 'The Republic of Motherhood'

*I stood with my sisters in the ques of motherhood –  
the weighing clinic, the supermarket – waiting  
for its bureaucracies to open their doors.  
As required, I stood beneath the flag of Motherhood  
and opened my mouth although I did not know the anthem.  
When darkness fell I pushed my pram home again,  
by lamplight wrote urgent letters of complaint  
to the Department of Motherhood but received no response  
(Berry, 1).*

### Introduction to the Poetics of Place

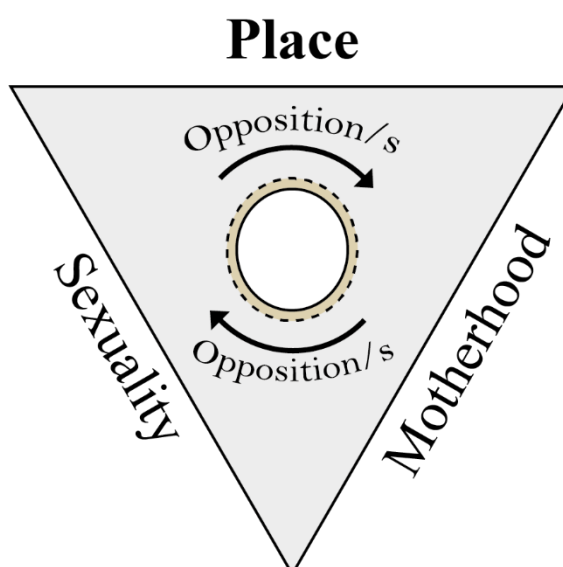


Fig. 9. *The Egg in the Triangle*: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing on Motherhood – (Place).

This analytical section draws on poetry by Liz Berry and Eavan Boland, highlighting the intersections within my model. I use ideas explored by Timothy Creswell around space and place in poetry, and theories on liminality by Thomassen. Ekphrastic poetry is discussed as building upon art in new places, and I analyse the feminisation of place. I conclude this chapter with a closer reading of my poem ‘Our Beach’, which explores the language and imagery of a post-apocalyptic coast as a liminal place on individual, collective, spatial, and temporal levels.

Creswell explores the etymology of the word *poetics* ‘from *poiesis* [...] the Ancient Greek term for making’ (321). The idea of making invites examination on the concrete form, or construction of poetics. This has been discussed in the earlier section, with the model’s adaptation for analysis of poetry to allow focus on words, space, and time. Within *The Egg in the Triangle*, epistle, sonnet, haiku, found, concrete, free verse, and prose poetry forms all demonstrate how poems can be constructed to appear in varied ways. However, a poetic analysis of place deepens beyond these basic lists on creative form, especially when considering language, space, and inspiration as tools of poetry production to convey subject into object, or the intangible into the tangible.

I discuss place poetry in my collection in relation to ‘egg space’ – which is a site of being, a home, stage, or container of situated human experience. ‘Egg space’ also presents or represents liminality, in-between space, and places of oppositional interweaving. This in-betweenness is seen distinctly in my place poems, especially through conflicts in domestic and home space, existential quests, and a porous, unfixed body. Although I argue that all poetry has a sense-of-place, as it comes from the place of the poet, my place poems often show particular passages, journeys, and more deep-rooted descriptions and engagement with the land and environment to express situations of ‘placelessness’, dislocation, and/or

incarceration (Cooper and Lichtenstein 4). Specific imagery, notions, and memories of place in my collections are weaved to show ground that has been walked, usually following a reformatory pathway in the poem, from one place to another, with a sense of the in-between, typical to ‘egg space’.

### **Place as Base and Poetic ‘Egg Space’**

I use the term ‘space’ and ‘place’ interchangeably. However, generally place is seen more specifically as located and holding an assemblage of physical things to include meaning and subjectivity, whereas space is considered as more boundless and open. Place and space are akin to a tangible/intangible binary. Creswell writes, that ‘place has been most frequently described as a meaningful segment of space’ (319).

Place, like the air we breathe, is fundamental – as humans we are always in place. For many people now, mothering and sexuality or gender can be chosen, whereas place – even in flux – is a given. To consider poetry about place as embracing the everyday, the *given*, as both an unconscious and conscious aspect to living, opens the creative lens to find inspiration everywhere – in the mundane and the extraordinary. In my work there is an evident pantheism, but even without embracing divinity in the routine aspects of life, when open to more rigorous enquiry about place, the poet and analyst can delve further into the text and available material of ‘being as being-in-place’ in this world (Creswell 322). As Plath writes, ‘the world is blood-hot and personal’ – text is all around us, imbued with life energy, and the personal is political (*Ariel* 71).

Like the confessional poetry genre, the place poetry genre is an umbrella term covering many sub-genres: topo-poetics, psycho-geographic poetry, poetry on a sense-of-place, nature poetry, site-specific poetry, landscape poetry, and eco poetry, among other terms. The



Romantic poets showed that the exploration of the physical aspects in place does not limit these works to the sole expression of constructed or visible things. Rather, poetry about place allows all that is fixed and unfixated to literally find a place. Imagined places, unseen, or unvoiced experiences are rooted in poetry, often showing the creativity of the counterpoints within the visible/invisible and the object/subject. The 'Egg space' of my model opens discussion on the often fine and often rigid line between these and other dichotomies.

Considering the object/subject and visible/invisible fusions in poetry – through the personal or epistemic lens – leads well into ideas about the poet's eye or gaze. As a form of subject treatment, the poet's gaze creates the uniqueness and fascination of much poetry. The original eye of the poet, the written subject within the poem, and the possible views of the reader or critic come into place – as a trio of gazes that coexist in poetic analysis. Indeed, a deeper study may take this new triad as a starting point to deeper poetic praxis. What the subject in the poem sees may well differ from the views of the poet. So, poetry offers polysemous perspectives on place. It is useful to identify views, visions, and their contexts in poetry. For example, in my poem 'Pornography', I challenged myself to write in the first person, from a male perspective (34).

'Pornography' takes a subjective plunge into the male pleasures and commitments to a cultural world that I strongly oppose, and so it exists as a critical or counter-subjective poem, immersed in the problematic nature of pornography. There is an interplay between what the woman-poet has experienced and thinks, and what the male character of the poem expresses, so it demonstrates 'egg space' well in a male/female, subject/object, and first person/third person knot.

Poetry has a unique revelatory and interchangeable nature that places it into various arenas of humanity, allowing shifting perspectives over time, from person to person. The lens, or eye, of the poet and reader may dwell on the surface or investigate further – like using a looking glass, where a deeper reading or magnification of place occurs. Focused observation invokes questions surrounding the language, form, objects, or subjects that are in place, and how they are placed. The when, why, and where are always able to be analysed further through the expansive eye of the poet. In my poems, I address place through the lens, be it an interface screen, a camera, mirror, physical eye, or a fusion of these within ‘egg space’ explorations.

Olds’ poem, ‘The Spouses Waking in the Hotel Mirror’, is a cornucopia of looking, staring, reflections, and language around place with the eyes ‘skinned back’, the ‘intransigent white of [...] eyes’, ‘his iris / like looking at a rainstorm’ (*Selected Poems* 107-108). She repeats the words, ‘I saw’, to build on poetic observations in the intermediary space between sexual intercourse, memories, and imaginations of her body, lover, parents, and childhood. ‘Egg space’ is shown in Olds’ poem through the known/unknown, past/present, male/female – as she writes on how ‘she looked [...] / very male / and very female’. All these ‘egg space’ interplays are elevated through the act of looking and the mirror as a spotlight or frame for poetic vision.

### **The Place of Vision – Eyes and Watching**

Eyes as liminal places demonstrate thresholds between inside/outside, subject/object, tangible/intangible, and public/private. Even with minimal language, the description of eyes shares much on the nuance of character, place, and mood. For example, my collection describes eyes rolling, eyes in stillness, avoiding eyes, sensing eyes

watching, and the ‘anonymous eyes’ in ‘Cam Girl’ (44). The eye is an everyday in-between place, bringing oppositional interplay into poetic ‘egg space’ in vivid and relational ways.

A poem always has a poet, and a poet always has an eye – even in visually impaired poets, imagery is present. Gillian Beer states the eye vouches ‘for the inner qualities of the person in their gaze upon the world’ and is ‘traditionally held to be the window between the soul [...] heart and mind’ (5). Eyes appear in *Gift of Venus* in my poem ‘Birthday’ as the maternal ‘I’ sees her premature baby for the first time (14):

Gift of Venus!

Stiffening to cry, I see your first  
 furrow of brow lines,  
 flash of clouded eyes,  
 that vast skinned skull,

the way of your face –  
 that I’ll rest and rest  
 and rest upon.

The mother sees the baby’s ‘clouded eyes’, pertaining to the eyes of an early baby that are still in formation, their colour not yet defined, and only partially functional. There is an opposition of seen/unseen, mother/child, powerful/vulnerable, and formed/unformed in poetic ‘egg space’. Additionally, the mother is now written to be perpetually looking.

In my early baby and hospital poems, there is an emphasis on the mother watching the baby, seeing him sleep. In watching, the mother is portrayed as though in waiting, but the watching is an act of mothering and of relating to the baby. In *Newborn*, Clanchy echoes waiting phases in her poem, ‘Plain Work’ – the ‘waiting / for our babies to get over / a

tooth, a want, a croupy fever; to get an hour older' (21). She goes on to express the length of this work; there are 'yards of it by now – enough / to fill this room, surround us'. Clanchy's poem illuminates the intensity and eternal nature of mothering work that is often hidden or denied as important labour.

This waiting and watching is a major part of early motherhood, which includes gaps, hiatuses, and being present as a guide or witness, sometimes as the main task. 'Plain Work', shows the potential creativity available in these places of 'waiting', as the mothers are shown by Clanchy to 'knit' or 'tat', 'hold / long knotted wefts between us' (21). This poem evokes wider space and expansion through the long wefts, repeated pattern of the 'knit' and networks, alongside the more intimate, homely place of a mother's group. Exposing maternal places poetically, with emphasis on what the mother is looking at or doing, invites the epistemics of previously deemed private, gendered, domestic and care work, highlighting critical perspectives and debates on mothering as non-work.

In 'Birthday' the mother is presented as seeing 'the way of your face – / that I'll rest and rest /and rest upon' (14-15). The repetition of 'rest' evokes this never-ending feel to mothering work as looking, or an obsessive and sole engagement with the baby, where the mother's vision stops and stays. These images suggest isolation, a narrowing of vision into the world, as the eye becomes fixed on the baby. In my poem 'Mothering Under the Mandala', this idea is reiterated: 'You are the matrix / and we need no pages, / no more planes, no world travel. / You are the adventure now' (87). Although there is an expansion in the act of mothering as an 'adventure', in the poem, mothering is set among the context of closing off to other 'travel'. In the 'Republic of Motherhood', Berry's maternal 'I' is 'waiting' in the queues and places of motherhood, for doors to open,

letters to be replied to, again implying a sense of the mother as fixed in place and surrounded by closure (1).

In 'Poet', from *Bone Maker*, the text is less obviously about motherhood, but still written as a mother. Here, I use a subtly sexual tone, showing eyes in a counterpoint to the invasive or controlling gaze evident in my overtly sexual poems. Instead, the poet's eye in 'Poet' brings solace through intimacy – 'You don't open your eyes / to my nakedness, require me / to hide' (113). The act of looking is celebrated as the poet's search for muse, 'epiphany', 'the next verse', depicted as 'fingers / clawing vision'. The relationship of tension differs in this poem compared to the conflict in sexual and gendered relationships in large parts of *The Egg in the Triangle*. In 'Poet', it is a tussle with the visible/invisible world, and the relationship between the poet/reader or artist/audience that is spotlighted in poetic 'egg space'.

'Poet' lists the many places that I dragged my poetry books whilst forming this dissertation – as I both mothered and studied. Often, books travelled with me, like an extra child, but were barely read. I sensed that I was living with poetry, yet frustratingly could not get into its ultimate place – its 'sandy pages' (113). 'Poet' thus represents a sensual and romantic yearn, for both the poet and the poem to be read or heard, alongside the process of making poetry. With these ideas – on not writing and waiting for the focus to be able to create – we can refer to Heal's discussion on the 'lesser beats' of a text (124). Heal highlights notions in matricentric poetics on that which *is not* written as being just as pertinent as what *is* written. The writing/not writing, or silenced/voiced binary affiliates with oppositions and conflicts in poetic 'egg space', to reveal the roots, enactments, and existential struggles of maternal subjugation.

## Ekphrastic Poetry

In my poem, ‘More Poetry is Needed’ – an ekphrastic text – it is the desire to write that is deconstructed in response to a huge public art mural, painted in white on the black bricks of a Swansea inner-city wall, reading, ‘More Poetry is Needed’ (51). Hard to miss and holding a larger than usual space than the basic billboard advert, the commissioned Jeremy Deller text mural (now demolished) had its rhetoric suitably met in my poem (see app. 4). Through the wall’s message, public space as a broad dwelling for aesthetic dialogue is set, with the text calling for audience, yet there is none defined. Everyone passing the artwork is potentially a reader. In the poem’s flute player’s son, ‘thinning / by the shops, boarded’, homelessness in public space is seen, alongside waning or restructured economics of the inner-city space, furthering ideas around placelessness, the use of urban environments, and personal/political conflicts in poetic ‘egg space’ (51).

‘More Poetry is Needed’ talks of the ‘graffiti’ – sparking the poetic imagination (51). The tension of writing/not-writing is encapsulated in the poem, alongside interplays between empty/full, art/non-art, public/private, and ordinary/extraordinary – all dichotomies that public art engages with. Like ‘Poet’, there is a confrontation in ‘More Poetry is Needed’, with the act of writing poetry and a conscious exposure of the writing process and nomenclature. The domestic spaces of the maternal ‘I’ in the poem become filled with visions of an abundant muse – the kitchen becomes a ‘library’, the bath ‘a stage’, soap soaks the female subject in ‘fresh lines’. Yet there is friction in the text between motherhood and productivity/unproductivity, as the mother ‘sits / under this graffiti.../ with my baby’. She is seen as being still in the opening of the poem, not seemingly doing much, but as discussed, this *being with*, sitting by, and watching over the baby *is* mothering work – often

undervalued or ignored. The spaces of mothering are seen in the poem, and throughout the collection as creative spaces for poetic inspiration. Heal discusses in her work on matricentric poetics, of the ‘rage that flares up in response to an elsewhere absorbed mother, a reading [...], a thinking mother’, these acts somehow challenging assumptions on a mother’s singular focus (119).

In ‘More Poetry is Needed’, the conflict of the ponderous or imaginatively working maternal subject is presented. She wants to ‘think with the bricks of the city’, as if to be consumed in a new place of insight or refuge, but she is not away from domesticity and childcare, she is *with it* (51). The poem shows the dual creative nature of the subject’s existence – as mother *and* poet – with public art as a catalyst for inspiration within ‘third space’. There is angst and frustration in the poem around time and how time is used by the mother.

Poetry needs time as much as it needs language, ink, the page, and a reader. Time is a poetic building block, often overlooked in theories around the practicalities of poetic construction, being considered only when the poem is on the page – in line breaks and spacing, for example. The simple lack of time, more so than lack of inspiration, is often the biggest hinderance to a mother-poet. A writer needs time to find their peace, starting point, voice, space, and imagination. In the case of writing and mothering – as combined daily work – there will often be a demand of some form related to the mothering role that appears to challenge the creative focus and the mother getting into the place of poetry, and even more so in the concentrated ‘third space’ of single mothering scenarios.

The ‘empty notebook’ in ‘More Poetry is Needed’ depicts the lack of poetic production but not the mother’s lack of muse or creativity (51). Although the difficulty around forming poetry as a mother is conveyed,

the challenge takes poetic form. There is a counternarrative on creating texts in or from unlikely spaces – such as a carpark and places of ‘doing time’ within mothering practice. Even when the poetic focus is a marginalised voice, shares the traditionally hidden, is controversial, or speaks of the undertone, it always places something centre stage. Thus, poetry can reveal the lives of mothers in varied expressions and elevates voice into public space. Taking public art as foundational poetic material, I suggest, aids the outer or social message, and confronts taboos openly.

My poem, ‘Christine’s Chair’, works critically from paintings and photography within the contemporary exhibitions *Dear Christine* and *Scandal ’63 Revisited*. The poem uses the iconic 1963 Lewis Morley photograph and Sadie Lee’s ‘Scandalous’, which shows Christine as aged, draped, seemingly naked over the infamous backward facing chair (see app. 5 and app. 6). Place in ‘Christine’s Chair’ is addressed through exploration of the subjective and objective body of the woman and the chair, alongside identifying places in time. Time is also written to reflect the physical aging process as seen in the ‘Scandalous’ painting. The poem explores ‘the spy-eyes of the periphery’ – referring to the shady patriarchal and duplicitous political world, of which Christine Keeler became an accessory to within a socio-cultural underworld of sexual transaction (30). Like ‘Cam Girl’, the Keeler poem captures the woman in images through the camera lens, fixing her under a scopophilic gaze. The poem highlights the chair as the focus of Keeler’s immortalisation, whilst navigating beyond object into a deeper story around her subjective life:

I’ve delivered    and lost life  
                   in this triangle pose,  
                   from God’s  
                   grace –  
                   a  
                   dead-bad fuck.



The stanza is written to visually mirror the image of the Morley 1963 chair portrait that Keeler is so renowned for. Here, form and content marry to also comment on the oppositions such as birth/death, surrounding Keeler's lived experiences of pregnancy, to include a teenage abortion and having several children, one who did not survive the neonatal phase. 'Christine's Chair' has historic references to sexual liberation in the dawn of medicalised birth control, for example, in the lines 'open your medicated legs' and 'prams lined to rust in sheds', and as such deals repeatedly with the freedom/restriction binary, which marked second-wave feminism as a turning point for many women's sexual liberty (32).

Capturing time or an era in a poem, such as 'Christine's Chair', leads well into discussions on place, not just as discussed – considering time as a building block for poetic construction – but about how time also changes the 'look' of a place and its culture in a broad sense. For example, the post-World War II era is seen in my poem 'Finely Unpicked', which focuses on sewn creations as the ekphrastic art, metaphorically working with poverty, intergenerational, and social themes of love, betrayal, and commitment (81):

But in the school yard, my mother tripped.  
Girls pointed, mocking the invention,  
a flash of her wondrous, cottoned bottom,  
elastic – colour of bacon rations.

Before then, she had stepped, obliging necessity,  
into the wide holes of love, among every shade  
of thread and ribbon snippet. Her mother, slicing  
mould from bread, swathes of fine lace.

On micro levels, time adjusts the light or colour of a place, its population, smells, tidal reach, what grows in its borders, and shines in its centre. It is the poet's discretion, to 'choose' – as 'Poet' highlights in a

single word stanza – what aspects of time are included (114). Time is lodged in the centre of all ekphrastic poetry as it recreates new pictures in new eras.

### **Doors, Windows, and Transitory Passageways**

Like eyes, doors, windows, and passageways, mark threshold spaces and lead action, vision, or ideas. As physical barriers to overcome, move, or see through, windows and doors link well to ideas discussed relating to the gaze and poetic ‘egg space’ – with the open/closed, object/subject, public/private, beginning/end, self/other, clear/blurred, and allowed/forbidden binaries available to explore. The passageway represents middle space, where ideas or people transit to form or see anew.

Doors, windows, and passageways are present intermittently in *The Egg in the Triangle's* poetry, as part of everyday space, and sometimes as powerful indicators of drama within place. They are seen as breached thresholds, relaxed boundaries, or as fluid spaces for the sexually metaphoric and acts of transformative becoming. Beer describes a door as policing the threshold, whereas a window pertains more to a portal for light, views from both sides, and a place of optional display, invitation, or closure (3). Thus, the door links to a space that has poetic potential around issues of security and safety, being locked/unlocked or fixed/unfixed to the inner/outer. The window as an avenue for illumination and interchangeable vistas suggests an additional fluidity to boundaries and works with the seen/unseen, light/dark, among other oppositions.

In my poem, ‘Lockdown Seeds, 2020’, the subject sits ‘in the risky March air’, having dialogue with her lover on the outside step (74). In the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, inner/outer space was regulated, and many intimate connections reduced, changed, or lost. The door in the latter poem is a symbol of separation, not just from the purported dangerous

world of a rampant virus, it also represents the division of personal and social connections. In this poem, there is a theme of death alongside new growth and a sexual undertone – shown as ‘draped at my door, / wishing for your root’ and ‘We can’t lean in, half-kissing’ (74). The door, in this sense, pertains to the liminal space of desire and seduction. Giesen discusses seduction as a form of inbetweenness ‘generated by patterns of interaction’, relying on ambivalence that ‘hints at risk’ (66). In this poem, the boundary of the in-between is breached by poetry – smuggled through the door in the form of a book and poems (74):

You came to collect a poetry book.  
 Yet, it is loss, a new yearn in your eyes  
 that you leave, book skimming  
 the seed pod as you turn.

Poetry in this poem is the vehicle of rebellion against the disconnection of the lockdowns, initiating connection, and a kind of romance that fits well in ‘egg space’. Poetry creates both intimate and distanced dialogue between humans. In this poem, the poppies in the final stanza epitomise the eternity and endurance of the word, as opposed to the ephemeral nature of the human and emotion, as played out on the cusp of the doorway.

In ‘My Moon’, featured in *King Mattress*, the door is broken by the antagonistic and inconsistent father figure, to show the lost or loose boundary of the maternal and romantic subject. Eventually, the woman defends her space in the passageway of the ‘path’, standing feminist ground, with the repetition of refusal – ‘could not have him back / could not’ (58). In liminality, the passageway is a place of experiential transit and transformation. The path in ‘My Moon’ shows the subject change – in behaviour, relationship, and identity – and thus provides the foundation for liminal experience.

‘Sanctuary’, as the title suggests, offers haven within an abundant feminine garden space of nurture and self-reflection (22-23). However, the ‘open’ door appears in the first line with a link to ‘the broken’, suggesting that there is a need for reparation and refuge – seen later in the poem as ‘polish your wounds’ and ‘bury anxiety’. The poem’s imagery engages with moving through the door to find peace and creativity in meditation, sleep, divination, rest, and writing. ‘Sanctuary’ was written to provide a sense of harbour to persecuted, ‘broken’, or marginalised women, in response to my Christine Keeler research and epistemology of women’s refuge spaces. The poem’s long form builds an active, elemental, and nourishing place in third person narration, that when entered, has a feeling of escapism from the restriction and authority of outer or social ‘scripts’ and instead immerses intimately with nature:

Rest in her wild prayer, weird jinx,  
supernatural heritage,  
in her womb-strong hammock,  
flung between apple trees.

Feast from the black slats of her hearth –  
stuffed fruit spitting juice, honey-charred  
bread, turmeric milk tilted on the boil,  
swollen eggs and sauces, sauces.

The door of the poem symbolises a threshold, passed through to discover liberated space, and a rebirth into creativity and nature. ‘Your’ and ‘you’ are used in the poem to allow direct approach to the reader – ‘read *you* like tarot’, ‘rub it / in *your* paw’, ‘sleep – wherever *you* choose’. ‘Sanctuary’ ends with the transformative image, ‘Be *your* fire!’, suggesting that the place of inner passion, found through the door, is now reflected as a vital elemental power in the outer world.

Olds' poem, 'Young Mothers II', deals with the opening to home space in a different way and shows a mother standing 'outside a window', watching 'a childless / couple / fucking in the resinous light of a fire / without interruption' (72). The latter poem has a dramatic irony, as the 'childless couple' seemingly know nothing of the external gaze looking in on the private home scene. There is a sense of desperate and painful isolation around the social, public mother in the poem – 'they have torn the soul out of her body'. She is in mothering work, pushing the pram 'filled with a raw roast', but stops to pause at the window of the couple to take in the view, perhaps longingly. Clearly there is an intersection of motherhood and sexuality in the poem, but additionally the place of the window evokes ideas around consent, boundaries, and transgression of space. The dichotomy of private/public space is seen strongly in the poem's 'egg space', which echoes with much of Olds' work around subversive and transgressed physical relationships.

'The Window Cleaner', sees a man enter the private home of the female subject, wherein a blurring of reality/fantasy ensues (29). This poem, from *Gift of Venus*, works with the idea of reflection, the 'two halves' of a window being a symbol of either union or opposition between two situations. In poetic 'egg space', the paradox is between the romantic yearning woman and the seemingly complacent window cleaner – more in love and desire with his work task. The man in the text can be equated to the absent, drifting, and evasive lover, who is introduced in differing ways throughout my collections. The window cleaner also represents a Trickster character, as he simultaneously muddies the woman's space while he cleans her windows. In this poem, the windows are washed from the inside and outside, even the mirrors are clean; the man has touched all the woman's reflective surfaces, including her imagination. There is a watery, emotive connection of desire and longing, as the subject gets lost

in ‘the fractals floating in his eyes’ – alluding to the reflective and liminal portals of vision and looking.

In my poem, ‘The Keeper’, the man is forming a ‘queen window’ in the shape of a ‘vesica piscis’ from discarded wedding rings, reiterating the idea of unattainable love (67). Instead, the latter poem finds celebration and connection through reconstructed spaces, the imagination of love, and recycling objects symbolic of traditional marriage. Giesen sees garbage, or the discarded, as neither sacred or profane, aligning with ideas on the in-between and the human urge to recycle as a way to deal with the inevitability of death and decay (63). ‘The Keeper’ represents transitory actions in liminal spaces of life/death and sacred/profane, as the male subject symbolically refashions the disowned materiality of love and abandoned commitment, to manifest new beauty (66):

He is building a gilded palace,  
stacking from loss, hears the tears,  
sliding desires, clashed loves.

.....

Chinked ones he gathered for corners.  
Gemmed bands, rare, he’d set  
immediately, winking into the door.  
In a year, he’d half-mosaiced  
the palace floor.

In ‘*Mad Woman in the Attic*’, I portray liminal place as in-between the upstairs and downstairs space (18-19). The stairs that the woman ‘dares to walk’ in this poem define the area between the maternal and the paternal space. Stairs suggest expansion for the mother and challenge the idea of feminine presence as dictated by the dominant man. In ‘*Mad Woman in the Attic*’, the woman is seen cornered, reduced, or hidden into attic space, a common trope in literature such as *Jane Eyre*, and further

analysed by feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and later by Toril Moi. Accepting that mothering requires a certain fixity into space, as I have discussed – in the acts of watching and waiting – this is opposed by acts of transit, with or without the baby/child.

The mother in *'Mad Woman in the Attic'*, expresses both aspects of the trapped/free or still/moving polarities. The monster/angel binary is also evident, as the mother is lactating, bleeding, and changing nappies – there is an abject quality to her – bringing some of the traditional horror and monstrosity associated with maternal experience to the fore. Yet, this is countered with the sacrificial mother imagery and scenes of the close attendance needed whilst caring for a newborn. In walking the stairs, breaking free of attic space, the mother expresses what feminist literary critics see as the construct of the 'monster woman' who 'refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative [...] has a story to tell' and 'rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her' (Moi 58).

The dominant male is written ironically in *'Mad Woman in the Attic'* as a capitalised 'He'. This consistent capitalisation tactic is used by Collette Snowden in her novel on domestic abuse, *The Secret to Not Drowning*. Snowden's 'He' refers uniformly – in mid and in opening sentences – to the narrative's antagonistic, coercive male. The use of creative capitalisation in *'Mad Woman in the Attic'* stands out, as my poetry generally uses capital letters in their traditional form – to start a sentence (but not necessarily a line) or for proper nouns. I used the 'He' as a poetic device, to highlight assumed and/or demonstrated masculine authority and spotlight the liminal interplay of gendered power relations. Eventually, the woman rises to confront the 'He' as she moves with her baby and the abject – 'blood holes' from 'drains and stitches' – to occupy and be present in the wider, shared domestic space, via the stairway:

still dotted with the blood holes  
of drains and stitches, I reach  
to each milk whisper,  
rising from the Moses basket,

fold his baby bones,  
like armour over my shoulder,  
dare to walk the stairs.

In 'Snow Globe', I present a quest-journey poem, with a fusion of the real/imagined among liminal states of dissolved and changed boundaries. For example, the translucent glass of the snow globe as a 'glittering meniscus [...] cracking in a rainbow mist', 'the swelling waterway', and the canopy shutters rolled to close (106). Like 'St Non', 'Snow Globe' animates the sacred, as with the shattered snow globe, 'every Jesus in Venice turned', infusing the text with magical realism. The language and imagery in both poems revolve around the cusp of the ordinary/extraordinary, taking place on many thresholds of doorways, windows, entrances, and passageways.

This semi-magical quality to subject and object, exists throughout the collection, for example, in 'The Window Cleaner', 'The Keeper', through the numinous yet powerful hand to the mother's head in 'Almost Invisible', and the shells transformed into a new key in 'Harbour' (29, 66, 83, 95). Liminal experience is presented as having magical potential, capable of re-fashioning subject and object permanently. Although the liminal is often a place of peril, loss, fracture, or anxiety, in my poems, it is also shown to liberate and allow for the discovery or unfolding of new spaces, often through doors, keys, windows, and transitory passageways.



## Space as Gendered

*The Egg in the Triangle* model presents place in a foundation that also considers the poetics around female reproduction and pregnancy, with expanded womb space – through a fertilised egg within the body. Alongside this scholarly matricentric framework, maternal space is echoed in the poetic language of my collection as gendered places – within and beyond human form. For example, I explore explicitly female and feminine space – from the ‘womb-strong hammock / flung between the apple trees’ in ‘Sanctuary’, the ‘yin rising [...] from her pelvis’ in ‘Shiver’, to whispers of ‘herstory’ on the child’s cheek in ‘Our Beach’ (22, 96, 102). Gendered space is evoked through maternal imagery and interlinked feminine lexicon such as ‘matrix’ – which appears in ‘Dear Blood’, ‘Walking Pregnant in the Bluebells’, and ‘Mothering under the Mandala’ (18, 80, 87).

In Liz Berry’s poem ‘The Republic of Motherhood’, a whole nation is feminised. Berry’s poem goes on to extend the specifically gendered space of motherhood as a ‘queendom’ that has its own coinage, departments, bureaucracies, boulevards, hospitals, parks, flags, and anthems (1). All belonging to motherhood, these objects and places in Berry’s poem mark out a place that has been ‘crossed’ into, where clothing is exchanged, and a new ‘uniform’ of motherhood taken – showing transformation on the border between non-mothering/mothering. ‘The Republic of Motherhood’, brings the magnitude of identity change that occurs when one becomes a mother and extends this idea into a virtual country – one that contains nothing obviously male. There are ‘sisters’, ‘Our Lady of Birth Trauma, Our Lady of Psychosis’, emboldening the idea of mothering and motherhood as a feminised place, as well as a space of potential jeopardy. Berry’s poem resonates with my texts about, and

experiences of, single motherhood, echoing both the vastness, pain and restriction felt in early maternal experiences, within private/public places.

In 'Placenta', Berry refers to the land as a gendered 'her', as she 'parted her seams' to bury the placenta (16). Earth as symbiotic with the mother, as *Mother Earth*, represents the holding of seed/s and the subsequent transformation of potentiality into produced or more defined materiality. Or, as in Berry's 'Placenta', earth is a place for the ritualistic release of items. Earth represents a space that receives both life/death and it is the receptivity the planting *into* soil that brings association of the feminine with earthly processes. Maternal space in poetry that depicts land or earth is seen in Plath's 'Three Women' – the first maternal voice states, 'I am slow as the world', then 'I am a seed about to break', while another voice says, 'I am a mountain now, among mountainy women' (*Collected Poems* 176-179). In Clanchy's 'Scan', from *Newborn*, the early baby in utero is set in earth, in 'some starlit hills [...] / then resting among haarfilled fields, // a settlement round the outlet / of a phosphorous river' (5).

Inspired by her pregnancy ultrasound scan, Ramaswamy wrote, 'the foetus's perfect circle of belly reminded me of a favourite hill in Glencoe, one of those examples of nature expressing itself so impeccably as to seem almost unnatural' (41). She goes on to describe the 'bulbous land mass ... startlingly smooth, round and elephantine' that symbolised 'a foreshadowing of the great drama to come' (41-42). Later, in her psycho-geographic memoir, a trip to The Pregnancy and Parents Centre in Edinburgh, that sits parallel to an old canal, compels Ramaswamy to consider 'all the "birth canals" you would never know were being visualised in the pregnancy centre' – the watery passageways of the city equating to maternal imagery and the women that she was among (50).

Eavan Boland's poetry explores identity with earth, the Irish nation, and motherhood. The metaphor of mother as earth is seen in Boland's 'Mother Ireland', as it starts, 'At first / I was land / I lay on my back to be fields / and when I turned / on my side / I was a hill / under freezing stars' (*Poetry Foundation*). In 'Mother Ireland', the maternal body, like the one Plath refers to in 'Three Women' – *is* the earth.

In 'The Lost Land', Boland writes, 'I have two daughters. // They are all I ever wanted from the earth. // Or almost all. // I also wanted one piece of ground: // One city trapped by hill. / One urban river. / An island in its element' (*Poetry Foundation*). Children are portrayed as coming directly 'from the earth', yet only partly fulfilling the mother's desire, who also wants more from earth, to be in a deeper sense of place and locality beyond motherhood. Boland sees the land as offering more permanency than motherhood – evident as 'The Lost Land' continues: 'So I could say *mine. My own.* / And mean it', as her 'children are distances, horizons'.

The less physical bond of motherhood, which occurs partly as children age and individuation happens, is explored in Dorothy Molloy's 'Looking for Mother' (*Poethead*). In this poem, a daughter ransacks her mother's room, seeking 'the scent / of oestrus, umbilicus afterbirth'. The stark physicality's and processes of pregnancy are seen in Molloy's poem, among clothes, shoes, and jewellery – as though simply another everyday motherly object. The mother in the poem is found in concrete things, and through the senses and imagination, but there is no actual mother, just a placenta. The poem represents place within a matricentric narrative on loss, memory, and multiplicity around the materiality of pregnancy. The assemblage of items in the text gives a strong sense of the mother figure, alongside her more ephemeral, shifting hormonal scent. Although absence prevails in the poem, the mother not being found is suggestive of death. Molloy's poem aligns with 'egg space' – in explorations of the life/death,

seen/unseen, formed/unformed, and whole/fractured aspects within the mother-child relationship or ‘third space’.

Alongside the theme of the death of her mother, place is explored in Boland’s watery poem, ‘And Soul’, with a drive ‘one summer’ to visit ‘the house she was dying in’ (*Poetry Foundation*). ‘And Soul’ explores death through the porous world of the ‘wettest summer in the records of the state’, moving through rivers, streams, mist, fog, and the ocean. The poem expresses the journey and time surrounding the mother’s death, rather than detailing the actual death of the mother. Yet, the opening line ‘my mother died one summer,’ creates a poetic and dramatic tension that is carried through the bodies of water in the poem, into the eventual ‘mist into sea spray’, before the poetic ‘I’ ‘went inside’ her mother’s house, through the door as a liminal symbol. In contrast, my poem ‘Ma’ writes of both the journey to, close attendance of and reflections on the dying mother. Both ‘And Soul’ and ‘Ma’ refer to outside space – earth and water – in relation to the intense bodily experience of death. Thus, the poems traverse ‘egg space’ dichotomies of land/sea and public/private, as well as the edges of inner/outer worlds of specific life/death situations and phases.

In the poetic treatment of her mother’s death, Boland’s poem shares the metaphoric passage of human life among the shifting element of water, suggesting an equation to the soul as cyclical and immanent. The poem shows the use of metaphors from everyday journeys in the given space of being in the world. Metaphors, says Creswell, have a ‘spatial logic, they connect a thing which is present in the poem to something which is outside of it’ (329). Thus, poetry, through its use of metaphor, is often about something from another place. This being in both worlds quality defines poetry within the context of liminality and the ‘magical thinking which makes the literary condition possible (Mukheji xx). In my poem ‘Ma’, illness is feminised through the brain clot being metaphorically equated to

a foetus, evoking a life/death muse (25). Among *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker*, space and place are often referred to as, like or linked to maternal processes or states.

### **The Elements, Light and ‘Our Beach’ as Liminal Space**

The elements transform or set place, tone, and symbolism in poetry. Fire, earth, air, water, and – in most religious frameworks – spirit, provide the foundations around us. *The Egg in the Triangle* contains much elemental poetry, seen intensely in ‘Sanctuary’ with earthly imagery as the woman ‘unfolds leaves / with a look’, to a final fiery call to ‘spark stars / of hissing storm wood’ (22-23). Shifting elements in the stanzas of ‘Shiver’ show fire, earth, air, and end with water, as the woman celebrates in springs and ‘rain diamonds each hair and finger’ (96). The final stanza of ‘Shiver’ holds single word lines, mimicking the look of random single raindrops or the glittering of a traditional engagement ring (96):

Rain  
  
diamonds  
          each  
      hair  
   and  
          finger.

The form of this last stanza presents rain as a liberating force, able to break up and juxtapose the ‘good-bride plan’, suggesting subversion of the tradition of marriage – which is critically presented throughout the poem.

Christina Thatcher centralises fire in her confessional style poem, ‘Making Fire’, in two powerful stanzas exploring domestic abuse. As in my poem ‘Refuge’, Thatcher’s ‘Making Fire’ talks of the transit into new space, away from places of violence, coercion, and control. Her poem

reveals ‘egg space’ interplays around hot/cold, dominance/subservience, male/female, asleep/awake, strength/weakness, child/parent, and life/death, to convey the horror of her mother being pinned to the wall with a poker, ‘until her breath became so shallow / you cooled’ (7). Fire imagery with the chopping of wood, fireplace, poker, need for fire, and a sense of inner fire is written until the mother gathered ‘just enough courage / to brave the cold / and leave you / for good’. Here the variance of the elements are explored and how they can be applied aptly to inner and outer space.

Thatcher’s fiery collection begins with ‘Insurance Report’, which explores loss through the burning of her childhood home. She writes that it was ‘the stained glass unicorn / that Sioux tribe necklace / our grandfather’s final brick’ that held more worth than the ‘forks [...] underwear [...] items in the fridge’ (5). Her poem sets binaries around value and utility, especially so as the cherished items and those with less personal meaning are listed in a mirror of tercets, indented on the page, bringing a subject/object clash into focus.

In my poem ‘Our Beach’, it is the elements of water and earth that fuse in a porous and emotional post-apocalyptic world, as a mother and son are transformed in existence. The diagram below shows some of the interplay of oppositions in this poem.

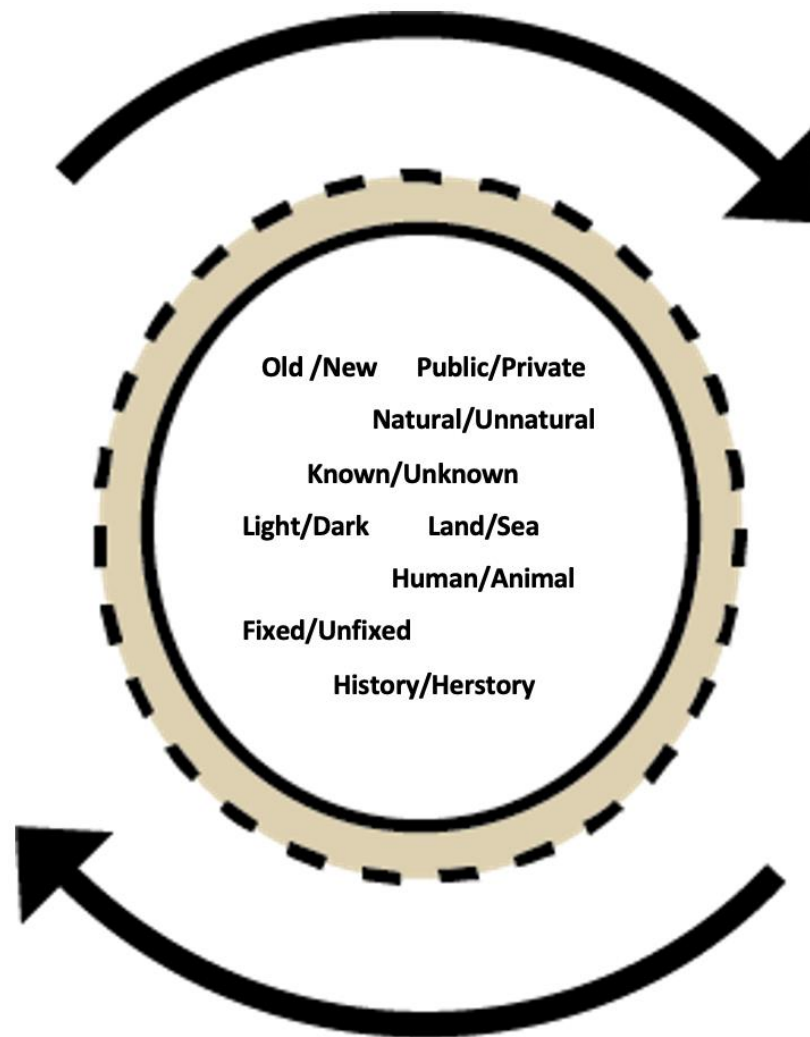


Fig. 10. Poetic ‘Egg Space’: Exploring Oppositional and Interwoven States in the Poem ‘Our Beach’.

‘Our Beach’, like ‘Too Close’ and ‘The Mumbles’, is a poem inspired by living on the bay of Swansea. There are comments weaved through the poem about climate crisis, patriarchy, and modernism’s long and toxic grind. The poem opens with the image of a door – which marks it out as a poem on the threshold – with shells indicating ‘a new currency’ in the poem’s transformed oceanic world (102). Formalities around the public/private have dissolved in the poem, the mother locking eyes ‘in the league of a wave’ with the neighbour who ‘never looked once’, as he now holds onto her ‘curves’. The second stanza has a ‘we’ that could relate to the neighbour or the child, offering a multiplicity in the relational qualities that the ‘new street’ and its watery engulf brings.

As in my poem, ‘Harbour’, when the mothering takes place in a carpark, a public toilet, and the beach, ‘Our Beach’ depicts ceaseless maternal labour. Both ‘Harbour’ and ‘Our Beach’ demonstrate maternal ‘third space’ as a continuous enmeshment to involve active mothering practice, despite location. In ‘Our Beach’, even among a flooded and rotting world, mothering does not stop; as the poem shows, the child is washed in a ‘rock clutch’, and the mother teaches her son about the world – including themes of extinction and global warming with reference to ‘polar bear’s decline’ (102).

In ‘Our Beach’, eco-protest is highlighted through the women who ‘wept for earth, laid / down at peace camps, / screaming against toxic seas’ (102). Thus, the poem offers comment on the Anthropocene – ‘a new epoch, characterised by human alterations to biological, chemical and geological processes on Earth’ (Chowdhry et al. 5). Thomassen writes that an epoch has the potential to be liminal in a temporal sense, through ‘prolonged [...] instability’ or ‘intellectual confusion’ (*Liminality and the Modern* 90). The unstable or liminal epoch is highlighted in ‘Our Beach’, illustrating an ecofeminist response to an age of climate crisis.

Thomassen discusses other specific ‘spatial dimensions of liminality’ alongside doors or body orifices, explaining that areas, zones, and larger regions, countries, or continents can also be in-between (*Liminality and the Modern* 91). In ‘Our Beach’, the places of liminality are the dissolved home, the Welsh beach, and the sea, alongside the wider regions of the Arctic and ‘the planet’s heart’ (103). The beach in this poem is a space to dig for ‘bullets’ and ‘antler horns’ – which refers to an age passed in object and in sentient form. Beach space also transforms to become open water, where the mother clashes with ‘tattered trawlers’. She is transmogrified into a ‘sort of seal skin’ and her face has a ‘fish glint’.



The mother is between human/animal, showing liminality and conflict in poetic ‘egg space’ to challenge sole identity or categorical belonging.

The sounds within ‘Our Beach’ fit with the sea, through alliteration and assonance shown in a ‘sort of seal skin’, ‘the cycle of shore flowers’, and ‘splitting lip brine to smile’, offering cadence in the language and marriage of form and content (102-103). The water element, as in Boland’s ‘And Soul’, where ‘crops rotted’, tablecloths ‘dissolved’, lilacs were ‘dripping blackly’, and the ocean was ‘visible on the edges ... cloud colour reaching into air’, is equally emphasised in ‘Our Beach’ (*Poetry Foundation*). Although these poems have different maternal stories, both share the unrelentless and shifting nature of water in our world and the way water moves and changes both specific and broad aspects of living – subjectively and objectively. In ‘Our Beach’, water suggests transitions of death and loss – ‘sinking’, ‘forgetting’, and the ‘rot’ of the house. Yet, water is also shown as functional through cleansing, in the capacity to carry the mother and son, providing light and education in the ‘silt and memory’. Water is demonstrated interchangeably in its polysemous nature through the poem’s language as ‘the glassy swell’, ‘winter’s sea’, ‘the Ice Age’, weeping for earth, ‘silt’, ‘jellyfish at dusk’ and ‘lip-brine’.

Dusk and dawn states occur frequently in my poems, amplifying the in-between and places in the semi-lit qualities that time brings. ‘The Piss Patch’, a poem about knowing/unknowing and truth/deceit, takes place on the doorstep, and ends as ‘dawn simmers’ with an epiphany among the petals’ tips (21). Dusk is romanticised as ‘our first dusk’ in ‘Researching the Kiss’, and seen as temptation in ‘Oystermouth Castle’, usually marking a state of change, mystery, or transition in the poem’s characters and the narrative action (75, 105).

The task of writing place with a sense of finality is challenging, partly because the literary landscape, like poems from the self, maternal, and sexual experience, is so changeable – linked to a beguiling elemental body within a temporal and spatial dance. As such, ‘Poet’, ‘More Poetry is Needed’, ‘Dear Blood’, ‘Sanctuary’, ‘Lockdown Seeds, 2020’, ‘Babushka’, and ‘Researching the Kiss’ illuminate a self-conscious narrative or wrangle with creative writing processes (18, 22, 51, 74, 94, 113). In differing ways these poems point to foundations of literature and language – naming the lexicon, reading, alphabet, books, muse or musing, pens, typing, thinking, scripts, an epic – offering processual insight and nomenclature on the world of poetry, to include acts of writing and non-writing and the vital spaces and objects in-between the two. ‘Poet’ concludes on the urge to write and the determinate act of building poetry, where there is joyful inspiration in the diametric of the world, and life is seen as one verse after another. In ‘poet’, the poetic imperative and freedom to ‘choose’ the relationship between inner and outer space is the ultimate epiphany (114).

## Conclusion

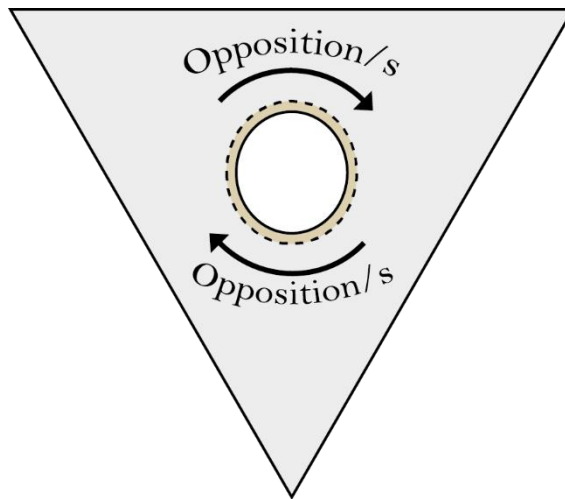
I present motherhood, sexuality, and place as informing each other – contextually and integrally – revealing how the apposite in opposite states of this trio interweave in poetry and analysis. In the *Gift of Venus*, *King Mattress*, and *Bone Maker* collections, I celebrate, document, and raise passionate, feminist, epistemological enquiries. Exposing shadowy spaces within motherhood and sexuality to poetic imagination, I share expressions of, and liberated routes from repressed or unethically normalised, authoritative cultures and places.

Attention to liminal thinking in my work shows that theories around the in-between are a wide-reaching tool, applicable to poetry and other creative writing praxis. My project empowers the understanding, and expression of, transit, betwixt, oppositional, or interlinked spaces. Introducing and exploring nuanced, integral ideas on the middle spaces of binaries and relationships, I illuminate vital critical ground to allow deeper access to the complex cycles and raw material of life that inspires poetry.

*The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing* illustrates the benefits of working reflexively in cycles of subject engagement and figuratively summarising larger ideas. My maternally based model provides a broad template for others to use as inspiration, and for my own future projects. I aim to continue my creative writing research, exploring everyday and ‘deep mothering’ experiences, and write further on family, nature, time, the coast, liminality, and cultural modes of subjugation around gender and sexuality. I envision producing more confessional poetry and am keen to form ekphrastic pieces on the psycho-spiritual, myth and the Anthropocene age. *The Egg in the Triangle* thesis gives my praxis a new lens, as I use creative ‘egg space’ to make, contain, analyse, and liberate poetry in this and new triangles of study.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Template – ‘*The Egg in the Triangle: Model of Analysis for Creative Writing*’.



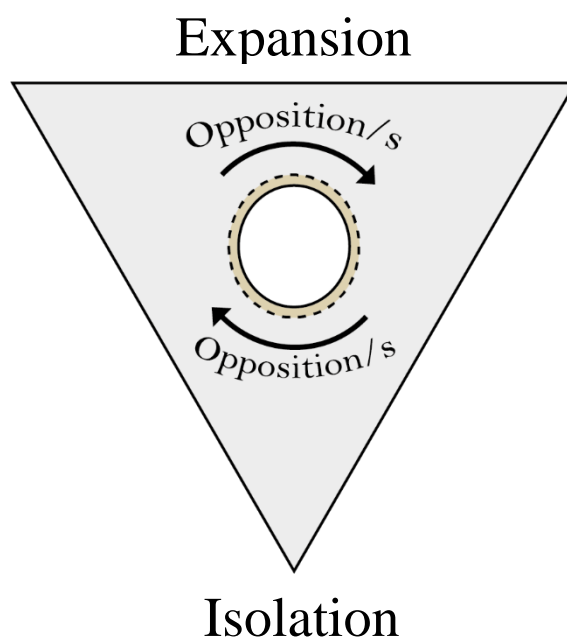
**Note:** This template is available for any trio of subjects to be applied onto the triangle, with ‘egg space’ as the container for and analysis of creative texts that deal with oppositional interplay.

## Appendix 2: Turkish Fabric Mandala Art.



Photo: John Clark, 2023. Used with permission.

**Appendix 3. *The Egg in the Triangle: Working Model – Methodological Process Diagram.***



**Appendix 4: ‘More Poetry is Needed’, Swansea, 2014 –  
Public Art by Jeremy Deller.**



Public Art by Jeremy Deller, commissioned by *Art Across the City*, 2014.

Location: St Mary’s Carpark, The Quadrant. Swansea.

Image: *Improvised Life: A Treasury of Inspiring Ideas*.

<https://improvisedlife.com/2020/03/19/a-poem-to-transform-the-pandemic/sign-jeremy-deller-more-poetry-is-needed-swanea-2014/>

**Appendix 5: Christine Keeler. Photo by Lewis Morley,  
1963.**



Image Courtesy of *The Science Museum*/Seymour Platt.



**Appendix 6: 'Scandalous' by Sadie Lee, 2019.**



Created for the 'Dear Christine' and 'Scandal '63 Revisited' UK Gallery Exhibitions.

Curated by Fionn Wilson, 2019-2020, 2023.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> **'Ma'**

Excerpt from Philip Larkin's 'The Whitsun Weddings'.

In April 2023, I travelled by train to Hull where high up in the Royal Infirmary my mother lived her last days. The view from her room was of the wide Humber estuary, sweeping against flat lands and industry. My father and sister quoted this Larkin line several times, as we gathered as a family by her side. It seemed fitting with my mother's love of poetry and landscape to include Larkin's words '*where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet*', as an example of the eternal resonance of poetry, and how a poet can come alive in certain places and at certain times. Spending much of her life as a child in Skegness and later in areas around Grimsby, Northeast Lincolnshire, the county was special to my mother and she often took to the beaches, coastal paths, salt marshes and dunes of this varied coastline, always absorbing the particulars of the path.

<sup>ii</sup> **'Christine's Chair'**

Dedicated to Christine Keeler for the UK 'Dear Christine' gallery exhibition, 2019-2020, curated by Fionn Wilson.

<sup>iii</sup> **'Storm Bella, 2020'**

*Storm Bella* was a storm officially termed by the UK Met Office. The storm ended 2020, a year that powerfully marked the first waves of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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iv **‘More Poetry is Needed’**

Response to Art Across the City’s, now demolished, commissioned public art mural – ‘More Poetry is Needed’, by Jeremy Deller, St Mary’s Carpark, Quadrant Shopping Centre, Swansea, UK.

v **‘Oystermouth Castle’**

Quote from *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare.

vi **Exegesis, p. 136.**

This ‘longstanding association’ of the triangular form is explained by Erich Neumann’s analysis on ‘The Primordial Goddess’. Stone Age sculptures of the ‘Great Mother’, Neumann notes, are, ‘aside from the cave paintings [...] the earliest cult works and works of art known to us’ (94). Many of these neolithic, primitive Stone Age figures from Syria, Crete, Mesopotamia, and India have been unearthed to all display the ‘genital triangle [as] ‘particularly stressed’ (102-103). The breasts, posterior, and genital triangle, Neumann writes, all ‘carry important symbolic accents, but this must not lead us to forget the figure as a whole and the manner in which these zones are integrated within it’ (103). Positioning artworks in relation to this ancient symbolism invites deeper research on contemporary theoretical and creative links to a matriarchal epoch, where these figures were the ‘psychic vehicles’ of the ‘Great Mother’ archetype (94).