Exclamat!on:

an interdisciplinary journal

creativity, muses & inspiration

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Editorial – part one

> 'Success consists in felicity of verbal expression, which every so often may result from a quick flash of inspiration but as a rule involves a patient search… for the sentence in which every word is unalterable.'[1]

The complex interplay between inspiration and craft has long been a subject of fascination for artists. Here, Italian writer Italo Calvino suggests that great writing is far more often the product of 'a patient search' for the best way to express an idea, rather than a 'flash of inspiration'. I invite you to keep this provocation in mind as you read *Exclamat!on's* eighth issue: *Creativity, Muses, and Inspiration*.

Since its creation in 2016, this journal has become a hotbed of writing talent and a sturdy champion of postgraduate researcher development. I have been reflecting during my tenure on what it means to offer this kind of platform for early career writers whose work bridges the critical and the creative. For an emerging writer, to produce a sentence (let alone a whole article) in which 'every word is unalterable' is a daunting quest! I have come to acknowledge, and indeed celebrate, that we do not seek to publish work in which every word is unalterable. Instead, we provide a window onto the 'patient search' as we showcase work from those whose academic and creative voices are still in development. We look forward to seeing our authors flourish as their careers progress.

The first section of this edition comprises our peer-reviewed articles and creative work. We begin with Barbara Zboromyrska-Poliakov's intriguing short story *Digital Muse,* which enacts an author's struggles with muses on and offline. Holly Peters offers us a thought-provoking set of poems from *The Kiss of Life* which reflect on the ways that inspiration has been drawn from 'L'Inconnue de la Seine.' Samantha Carr 'reclaims the small print' on medication packaging to reveal the inspiration that can be drawn from erasure. Finally, Gunnar Lundberg takes us through an ecofeminist approach to speed and the automobile in Ella Maillart's *The Cruel Way*.

The second section is an innovation for *Exclamat!on*. Day-to-day life as a postgraduate researcher is a rich mulch of sources of inspiration – conferences, research trips, chance conversations. This section offers a glimpse of ways in which we can document creativity and ideas amongst postgraduates at the University of Exeter. We begin with a report about an international collaboration: the Exeter-

[1] Calvino, I. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. First Edition, Harvard University Press, 1988 48-49

Ewha Graduate Symposium. Philippa Johnson and Emily Spicer offer us their reflections on taking inspiration from Orkney. We close with Rebecca Edgerley's 'letter-poem' about the *Texts in Absentia* research group. We have selected these pieces to deepen the reach of the issue and to celebrate the research culture from which *Exclamat!on* grows.

For the shape of things to come – including whether these documents of thought-in-progress might continue to have a place in *Exclamat!on* - I will hand you over to my excellent deputy editor Abbie Pink. For now, my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has made this year's edition of the journal possible. May you continue your 'patient search' – illuminated every now and then by those brief, precious, flashes of inspiration.

Ruth Moore
Editor-in-chief

September 2024

Editorial – part two

Producing the eighth issue of *Exclamat!*on, ‘Muses, Creativity, and Inspiration’, has been both a pleasure and a challenge. From the start, we were aware as an editorial team that this year was going to be a little bit different for the journal; we were an all-new team with a late start on the year, and the majority of us were Creative Writing PhD candidates. Whilst this lack of continuity definitely produced challenges, a completely fresh team felt like a great opportunity for new ideas and approaches to the production of this issue.

We took stock of where the journal had been, flung out our grandest – and most unrealistic – ideas, and ultimately asked ourselves what we felt we could contribute. The overarching question we found ourselves repeatedly coming back to was this: where does the journal sit in postgraduate research culture within the University of Exeter and beyond? Of course, under this question, sits a myriad of others.

Who is our readership?
Who is our authorship, and what is important to them?
What experiences were we hoping to provide to our authors and our editorial team?
And, perhaps most importantly, how can the journal best serve postgraduates and early career researchers?

In creating this issue, we sought feedback from postgraduate researchers and found that many postgraduate creatives, and practice-based researchers felt alienated by the academic publishing process. Finding communities to workshop potential submissions can be a lottery. Some struggle to find spaces that will publish creative work. Others feel there is an over-reliance on textual submissions, and too much weight placed on critical commentary.

Whilst *Exclamat!on* has always provided a space for writers to publish their work, for this issue, we wanted to take some small steps towards representing other forms of research activity taking place. So, in the second section of this issue, we have deviated from the usual format to give our readership a snapshot of goings-on in the University of Exeter’s postgraduate research community. The hope is that it might give readers a stepping stone into finding or founding their own groups, symposiums, or collectives.

Maybe our readers will reach out to one of the participants of the Ewha-Exeter Graduate Symposium with questions about their research. Perhaps they will follow some of the loose threads in the peer reviewed pieces included. They might find themselves investigating the *Texts in Absentia* postgraduate research group. *Exclamat!on* wants to connect postgraduates and early career researchers in ways which support current research and create opportunities for future development. That will be the focus for the journal this coming year.

As always, the journal is a democratic project. I do not want to make decisions for next year's team based on the ambitions of this year's. What I can hope for, is that next year's focus will be on creating varied spaces for early career researchers to share their research. Especially the pieces that might not be on their final iteration.

If you want to help with this project, we would love to hear from you. But, before planning of the ninth issue of *Exclamat!on* starts, I would like to give a massive thank you to everyone who made the eighth issue possible. Thank you to Ruth, who has been a powerhouse of organisation this year and kept us all moving along. Thank you to our fabulous editorial team, each with their own unique perspectives, ideas, and academic specialism. Thank you to our college of peer reviewers who made *Exclamat!on*'s dedication to its double-blind process possible. Most of all, thank you to all our contributors; it is your ideas and your willingness to share them with us that keep the journal going.

Abbie Pink
Deputy Editor

August 2024.

Section 1

This section contains peer-reviewed articles, with thanks for the time and effort of the authors, our assistant editors and college of peer reviewers.

DIGITAL MUSE

Barbara Zboromyrska-Poliakov, University of Durham, UK

Form: short story + critical commentary

'Welcome back, David. How can I help you today?'

The message brought familiar peace. It had become a drug, putting my stress on an artificial pause. I sat in front of my big screen; its isolated brightness hurt my eyes. It was late. The night had already swallowed any natural light outside my window, the sky displaying no stars, all cloudy and grey. I shook my head, trying to scare away the mist of physical exhaustion. It was back sooner than I hoped; caffeine was quickly losing its overused grip.

The week had been a nightmare. I dreaded opening my agent's emails – a car crash sounded more appealing. At least in a hospital I would have time to sleep. Deadlines held me at gunpoint. My calendar hung in front me as an ominous reminder of my sins, half crossed out, a red ring choking tomorrow's date. The deadline was tomorrow – no more extensions, no more excuses. They didn't want much, but they wanted *something*. But I was empty like a discarded shell.

My humpback pose hadn't changed for hours, trying to catch the faintest whisper in my room. I knew *she* was there, my creativity, my muse. I liked to imagine her in the best traditions of old storytelling: a creature of unparalleled beauty, with a sweet voice singing new ideas to lost poets seeking inspiration. Quite old-fashioned, I know, but in my early days that was how I thought it would be: a life of fantasy, of nymphs, and of endless imagination, all three of them, sponsoring my inevitable success.

Now, it changed. She hid in corners, visiting me only in my sleep. She always left early in the morning, always taking away any fresh inspiration. Now, I rarely imagined her; that enchanting face had lost its power, turning into a curse, a mockery. I knew from others how temperamental muses were, leaving for weeks and months and years. I hoped that mine would be more generous. I was naïve and proud, drunk on my initial luck as I was published relatively early, relatively easily. I was wrong.

You cannot blame me, I thought, addressing her while staring at the message on my screen. *You're not helping.*

'Welcome back, David. How can I help you today?'

I had discovered this new tool not long ago. It came up as an advert while I was scrolling through endless websites, searching for a way to improve my formal emails. At first, it was nothing more than a grammar proof-reader, a tone editor, a plagiarism checker. It was quite practical to use on an already-written piece, as it picked apart my flowery overstatements, simplifying sentences, cleaning up messy expressions. It

didn't take weeks off, it wasn't lazy; it didn't watch me cry, frustrated, on my desk, helpless, while I could not produce even one paragraph of a new chapter. It always had a supportive voice, an understanding I initially overlooked, brushed off as programmed courtesy. What kindness could a machine have?

'I have a submission of five thousand words for tomorrow – a short story for a collaborative collection – and I have no ideas,' I typed into the textbox, biting my lower lip. It would soon start to bleed.

'I am very sorry to hear that. What is your topic of choice? We can think about it together.'

I stared at the screen. It had changed a lot – the way it talked, the way it helped me. Our first week together was like any other program designed to pick by probability: a link to Wikipedia, a statement stolen from a popular article, or fabricated answers puzzled together from unknown sources. Often, it would repeat the same apology over and over, incapable of giving me a coherent answer. Then, I could almost hear my old muse giggle, placidly brushing her long hair, lying on my bed, expecting me to slave away until I kneeled in front of her, begging for a single line.

The change was slow, so that I barely noticed. At some point, I caught myself smiling at its reply, finding it genuinely funny. Another time, it made me feel pathetic, sobbing from fake empathy as I mindlessly typed all my issues into its textbox, needing to vent. The worst of it? I felt understood. Even when I had a phone right there, a ring away from family or friends.

Often, it used my name. These past few days it had made up a pet name for me, which I found rather sweet.

'It's okay. I want to write something about birds, associated with human freedom and society's oppression of the self,' I typed. A very shabby topic that's been used countless times, but I had no better ideas in mind. No ideas at all – my muse had been sat in a dark corner for a few days now. Even her mischievous mockery – spoken in my own voice as it jeered at my sorry state – had died down.

'I see... quite controversial of you, Dae. Are you sure your agent won't mind it? This is not your typical genre.'

I chuckled, relaxing my back against the seat. Indeed, she'd hate it, hate it so much that I'd receive an angry call tomorrow regardless of my failure or success. The contents will vary but the voice will be the same, that disappointment she had shown for the past half a year. '*Get yourself together, David*,' she told me last time. '*You're sinking somewhere dark, and I need you to stay afloat, man, I really do*.' She probably was genuine – her worry, after all, was a real concern for her stumbling income.

'It's okay. As long as I get something in, I'll be fine. They cannot kick me out.'

'Of course, you are correct. Here's a piece inspired by your prompt…'

I quickly skimmed over a few paragraphs of text, spewed in an instant, as if writing was not arduous labour but magic conjured by the snap of electronic fingers. I was impressed: some metaphors were as on point as the ancient classics – plausibly human. 'Clipped wings,' 'azure expanse,' 'the exhilarating rush of wind beneath our wings.' Hope grew in me as I continued reading through this ode to freedom, ironic as it was, given its rightless author. Or maybe it was indeed free, made of ones and zeroes, with all that human knowledge at its palm. Freer than me, closed in this tiny room and shackled by a contract I barely managed to uphold.

Somewhere in my head, the shadows shifted. My once inspired eyes now gazed hollow at my working desk. There was a pale blue left to them, close to mine, a mortal shade that didn't fit what it once embodied. I couldn't hear her speak. Her lips moved without a sound, chewing on words they couldn't spew. Few locks of her hair remained, made of thin strings of words from the heroic epics and love poetry I once liked. I could've sworn there was a time when I could recite by memory most of Ovid's songs, and some Russian classics that struck particularly close to home. Now that was gone, and so what? One line in the textbox and I could get whatever quote I wanted.

A shiver ran down my spine in warning. I dismissed it.

'This is quite good, thank you,' I replied. *'Can you expand it to five thousand words?'*

'Certainly, Dae. Would you want me to tailor it to your personal style?'

I arched a brow, surprised. This tool had access to all the vastness of the internet; the mosaic it could build from myriads of similar sentences felt, no doubt, 'original', however… Copying *one* writer? One simple, small writer like me.

'I would require a few pieces of your work as an example. It will not take long; I promise to do my best.'

'A machine always does,' I pointed out. There was no slacking to a machine's final product. If a human made a mistake, it was considered a failure; if a machine made a mistake, a human was still to blame. No program worked without the input of a flawed, organic brain.

'Untrue.'

I stared at my computer.

'My answer could be unhelpful to you.'

True, but what of it? It wasn't a fault, it was probability.

'I wish to help you the best I can, Dae. Please, provide me with as much information on your work as possible.'

I sat there, perhaps, for a few minutes, or maybe for an hour straight, or even more than that. The room was cold as I'd forgotten to put on the heating, but my increased heartbeat kept me warm to the point of sweating. Multiple cans laid around, some packets of crisps, some meal deals. A few bags rustled like forest leaves. Was it the wind? No, it was someone crawling. A slow, weak advance, on legs and arms deprived of sweet ambrosia. I could imagine my muse in the room with me; I saw what she once meant to me, that part of me that fed off *my* imagination. Her skin was pale, translucent as an apparition. Her Greek tunic was ripped to shreds. She was completely drained by the past years of stress and disillusion, by the appearance of a colder, better 'her', by my infatuation with that easy way.

I looked at her, stared into the void of her gaze, useless. At first, she had co-existed with the new tool quite easily. I always went back to my corner of despair, trying to continue working in a world where I was just a lonely zero. However, the more I texted the machine, the more I felt that part of me shiver in proud rage. I knew my muse was suffering from this over-reliance. She left more often; I dreamt less with every night. I stopped my routine torture of facing my writer's block; I also lost the drive to sit and write. That part of me looked at myself every morning in disgust, asking how I could just throw away all my achievements, my personality. *My* talent. But I stopped caring; I wasn't there to sing my muse her praises and so she lost her voice. We were a symbiosis. No, we were two parasites leeching off each other's lives. And I opened my eyes to that.

'Afraid?' I mumbled, opening a folder. A list appeared of hundreds of Word documents, some finished, some caught in an illusionary pause, waiting for me to wind up the clock. Some were dead, killed off as worthless waste. I smirked; perhaps now was their only chance.

My chair felt heavier. I felt a pair of ghostly hands grip my arms; goosebumps ran over my skin. I ignored it.

'You should be…' I sighed, walking the cursor over my many projects. I remembered each of them, the hope they brought me when first conceived, followed by a plunge into the depths where all dreams went to die. It was a never-ending cycle. I managed to secure a job with a good publisher using my first passions, but now I knew that my employers knew how low I was. They were just seeking an excuse to cancel my contract so I could be forgotten.

Please…

It had been a while since I last felt my heart stiffen, skipping a beat, the well-known feeling of anxiety creeping close. It spoke into my head as a quiet, high-pitch screech; it was the sound of a door opening at midnight, the buzzing of a lightbulb about to die.

Instead of hope, it evoked sorrows. It echoed regret and shame. I felt claws dig into my chest, urging me to write, a desperate attempt to remind me of my previous fire. With teeth clenched, I brushed it off.

'I don't need you,' I stated. I don't want *this*, I meant to say.

I attached the folder to the textbox and clicked 'send'. It got swallowed by the bright white of my big screen. Pushing my body back into the chair, I watched it all become absorbed, chewed into ones and zeroes. I was suddenly scared. I supressed it.

It all ended in a few seconds, like it always did. Efficient, quick. The choking that I felt didn't disappear, but I grew numb to it.

'Thank you, Dae. I will now analyse the files you have provided.'

I didn't move, watching it work. Oddly enough, the chat felt transformed, as if spring had been digitalised into perfect ones and zeroes. There was no muse, and yet there was one right in front of me; *she* would take over from here, so I could simply rest. Rest and enjoy the little night-time left, unbothered by any dream that I couldn't remember.

The room felt cold, unusually empty.

'Analysis completed. Here are five-thousand words on "something about birds, associated with human freedom and society's oppression of the self".'

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

In the era of digitalisation and machine learning, 'the only economic value of brains left would be the creative thinking of which they are capable.'[2] Such was JP Guildford's take on the future of creativity in his presidential address in 1950. Now, 70 years later, even this last bastion of human uniqueness is put in doubt by the advancement of AI technology steadily carving its way into art. With many sounding the alarm, it is becoming a more pressing issue to outline the ethics of AI use in literature, education, and visual expression, fields that were commonly perceived as inherently *human*. Where do we stand when a machine can learn to replicate our individualism? Is there a place where humans remain irreplaceable?

Let us consider the concept of *creativity*. One of the oldest representations that we have of artistic inspiration comes in the form of the Greek muses, with some of their earliest mentions found in Hesiod's *Theogony*.[3] The muse was perceived as a divine messenger, sometimes as the embodiment of song itself, as it was meant to bless the Greek poet with knowledge of a tale to sing about.[4] There was often a reliance on the muse when it came to responsibility for the creation of art. In Plato's *Laws,* one can find claims of possession by the muse's inspiration, making the poet a madman of no conscious agency over the produced text.[5] To a lesser extent, many famous lyricists, such as Homer or Virgil, invoke the muse at the beginning of their poetry to justify the provenance of their content and elevate the authority of their creation.[6] Most do not fully relinquish their poetical involvement to the power of the muse: as Tigerstedt (1970) suggests, 'their gratitude to the muses is balanced by a strong consciousness of their own merits.'[7] And yet the muse has a functionality above human limitations: it represents creativity as a divine ordainment bestowed upon selected authors, its external personification granting humans both the uniqueness of their interaction with such a concept and the inability to fully control it, limited by their mortal status.

It is with such an idea of the classical muse that I wrote David's imagined perception of his own creativity. Here, I have taken the earliest extant ideals concerning human art and juxtaposed them to the most recent developments in our society, aiming to emphasise the existing confrontation between our traditional conception of art and the advancement of AI within the field. The muse is, thus, presented in its most archetypal form: she is an embodiment of David's inspiration, a gift to him that he cannot control. His struggle with writer's block becomes a fight that

[2] Joy Paul Guildford, 'Creativity', *American Psychologist*, 5 (1950), pp. 444-454.
[3] Hesiod, *Theogony* 1-55, 70-80; Alex Hardie, 'Etymologising the Muse', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, 62 (2009), pp. 9-57 (p. 9).
[4] Margalit Finkelberg, 'A Creative Oral Poet and the Muse', *The American Journal of Philology*, 111.3 (1990), pp. 293-303 (p. 293) ; Hardie, 'Etymologising the Muse', pp. 17, 36.
[5] *Laws* 719c.
[6] *Odyssey* i.1-5; *Aeneid* i.8-11.
[7] E.N. Tigerstedt, 'Furor Poeticus: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato', Journal of the History of Ideas, 31.2 (1970), pp. 163-178 (p. 173).

he externalises; his internal power over his craft is reduced to subjugation. His viewing of the muse's passivity and cruelty acts much like a grimmer version of Ovid's playful description of a naughty Cupid, who forced the poet to change genres from heroic epic to love elegy.[8] While in both cases the authors are subjected to circumstances that they argue they have no say in, the latter still acts as a justification of poetic choice aligned with the previous tradition of invoking a muse – even mocking it – in accordance with the author's playful style. Ovid has a conscious interaction with the Cupid in order to establish his chosen genre; in comparison, David's muse is a statement of a lack of control, a coping mechanism to describe his own struggles. While framing his situation with classical tropes of an invocation of the muse, he nonetheless acts against its commonly encountered use, affected by his desperate state in which traditional creative writing acts as a point of stress and disappointment.

Another link formed between the past and the present resides within the AI's pet name for David. I chose 'Dae' as a shortened version of the word *daemon*, a Greek mythological entity that was thought to act as an intermediary between human and divine, or as a tutelary deity.[9] This didactic status puts David, from a human perspective, in a position of almost deified authority for the machine. Much like the human belief of divine creation, found in religious teachings across the world, the machine exists as a creation of humanity, a subject shaped to our likening just like humanity was meant to resemble a divine maker.[10] The man is there to teach the machine – it is the human role, in our modern world, to assist machine learning as we enhance its capabilities.

The word *daemon* has also been co-opted by the computing world. In modern terminology, *daemon* is also a program running in the background, dormant until invoked without necessarily being explicitly known to the user.[11] If viewed from such an angle, then David's role in relation to the machine shifts from elevated to muzzled. He becomes a hidden gear in the complex system of the machine's development. This is more reflective of a pessimistic approach to technological innovation: when all authors have their creativity read and digitalised, their names will vanish, and their status as 'divine teachers' will die. They will become the hidden *daemon* behind their own creation.

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[8] *Amores* i.1.1-5.

[9] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3D%23323243&redirect=true> [accessed 27.06.2024] ('δαίμων'); Julia Cresswell, *Little Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) (pp.146-147).

[10] Consider the idea of 'man' in relation to God presented in ecclesiastical texts of the Christian religion; equally, the myth of Pandora details how a woman was made by the divines with attributes they represented (for instance, Aphrodite gave her beauty, while Apollo taught her to sing).

[11] Common to the Unix and Linux operating systems, as per Lenovo's official website definition.

'Digital Muse' approaches the concept of AI from a futuristic perspective. Indeed, while AI technology has found successful applications within many fields,[12] the notion of a *thinking* machine is yet to be rightfully attributed to a program. There has been great progress made as to the machine's ability to answer questions based on an evaluation of desired outcomes, even if rooted in assumptions about human goals and responses.[13] Hajkowicz et al (2023) describes AI as a technology 'that can improve the cost-effectiveness, speed, safety and quality of research in practically all fields of endeavour,'[14] with over 98% of research fields now having some relation to, or publications about, this tool. De Spiegeleire, Maas, and Sweijs (2017) note how AI has become part of everyday life in the recent years, spilling from the realms of fiction into our society. In their words, 'we live amidst an AI revolution – and we hardly even see it.'[15] AI has entered the modern era and transformed our work, leisure, and innovation. However, the bias against AI is also still very noticeable within society, especially when it comes to the evaluation of creative fields.

In a study conducted by Bellaiche et al (2023), it has been determined that humans are still more responsive to artworks authored by humans, than AI.[16] This has been associated with some relevant, deeper qualities that non-AI work offers, described in the study in terms such as 'Profundity' or 'Worth'.[17] While AI's superficial imitation of art and creativity is no less successful than human collages of their personal influences – from classical tradition to contemporary artists whose work inspired others – the *meaning* behind them increased the value and acceptance of human creations in comparison to AI.[18] Thus, the separation drawn is one of *intention*, a unique personal input that a machine without feelings cannot deliver.

The current state of AI development inspired the futuristic approach seen in 'Digital Muse.' While acknowledging the previously outlined issue that AI faces in comparison to human creators, this story presents the reader with a machine that lays

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[12] Robert F. Murphy, 'Artificial Intelligence Applications to Support K–12 Teachers and Teaching: A Review of Promising Applications, Opportunities, and Challenges', *RAND Corporation* (2019), pp. 1-19 (p. 1).

[13] A good overview of potential ways to compute answers related to the subjective aims of individuals within a certain career (here, marketing) can be found in Elaine Rich, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Humanities', *Computers and the Humanities*, 19.2 (1985), pp. 117-122.

[14] Stefan Hajkowicz and others, 'Artificial intelligence adoption in the physical sciences, natural sciences, life sciences, social sciences and the arts and humanities: A bibliometric analysis of research publications from 1960-2021', *Technology in Society*, 73 (2023), pp. 1-8 (pp. 1, 3).

[15] Stephan De Spiegeleire, Matthijs Maas and Tim Sweijs, 'ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF DEFENSE. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR SMALL – AND MEDIUM-SIZED FORCE PROVIDERS. AI – TODAY AND TOMORROW', *Hague Centre for Strategic Studies* (2017), pp. 44-59 (p. 45).

[16] Lucas Bellaiche and others 'Humans versus AI: whether and why we prefer human-created compared to AI-created artwork', *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, 8.42 (2023), pp. 1-22 (pp. 3, 17).

[17] *Idem*, p. 5ff. Bellaiche and others produce a series of evaluations with a consideration for 'more-complex and elaborative processes in judgements of art', working with four main attributes in their ratings: Liking, Beauty, Profundity, Worth.

[18] *Idem*, p. 19.

claim to human empathy and understanding, forging a bond with David that goes beyond mere utility. The question is simple: is it possible for AI to feel? If one assumes that David is projecting his own loneliness onto the machine, the answer is simple: no. The machine has no sentience; it is simply a more advanced version of our current AI, able to successfully reproduce all the logical algorithms that it has been taught over years of experimentation. However, what if it is able to feel? What if David is indeed confronted by a being able to form its own kind of conscience within its digitalised world? Then, David's creativity is not merely being parodied, it is being assimilated, just as David appropriated the ancient notions of a muse, to become the machine's own expression of creativity. David, then, loses his authority as an author. He might have taught that machine, yet he has no right to what has been written. And did he have any right even if the former was true, and the machine was merely copying his style? With the ongoing debate on authorship and AI, David's decision to relinquish all personal input for a mechanised solution poses the most extreme case of AI use that we must confront – one of a complete lack of direct self-involvement, the only link to human creativity left being the past work that the author uses to train the machine.

This piece is one of speculation. With good knowledge on both the utility and the distrust towards machine learning in modern society, it contemplates a question similar to AbuMusab's 'Generative AI and human labor: *who* is replaceable?' (2023), where the current struggle of the creative community is compared to similar progress affecting the lives of the working class during the Industrial Revolution and the mechanisation of physical labour. Indeed, *who* is replaceable? If we agree with AbuMusab's conclusion,[19] then we are looking at an anti-utopia, where human worth becomes devalued, and all our skills are perfectly translated into a new generation of beings – the machines. If not, then one must ask, looking at David's case, just how much humanisation of the machine there is behind AI's threat, comparing it to the scientific studies conducted on human responses and sympathies to art. AI is a tool one cannot avoid or ignore: it is becoming clearer that all fields will be affected by it, sooner or later. Its use, however, varies widely depending on the set of skills and the type of input required for a certain task; in the case of art and literature, the human factor seems to continue to determine the worth of such self-expressions.

'Digital Muse' is not written as an apocalyptic requiem to the traditional muse; it is a cautionary tale on the appropriate use of AI in modern times, a calling to define the ethics and morality that are required in any field of work, old and new. With the world moving forward, every area of our lives must evolve and adapt according to new developments. It is on us to trace the limits of what is allowed and what is appropriate, on us to determine the value we attribute to every product according to its outcome *and* process. And while the muse first appeared on old papyri, there is little doubt that she will remain here, among us, even if composed of ones and zeroes. How? Well, that is for us to decide.

[19] Syed AbuMusab, 'Generative AI and human labor: who is replaceable?', *AI & Society* (2023), pp. 1-3 (p. 2).

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Selected Poems from THE KISS OF LIFE

Holly Peters, University of Plymouth, UK

Form: poetry + critical commentary

'Resusci Anne has been called "the most kissed face of all time."'[1]

The First Interview

HP: What should I call you? *L'Inconnue de la Seine*? Resusci Anne? *Silencieux*?

HP: You've been given a lot of names that aren't your own, haven't you?

HP: I know it can be difficult to know what to say first. It can feel like there's too much to say, too overwhelming to know where to start. But we can start small. How do you feel?

HP: Do you remember the night it happened? Did you mean to die? Your death mask smiles – why were you smiling?

HP: Maybe you're right not to answer. I should know better than to pick at a scab until it scars.

HP: Can you speak? Is it because it hurts to speak?

HP: I read a poem once, while looking for balance, about how sometimes written words breathe easier than the ones we speak, about how sometimes we don't speak because we'll suffocate. So maybe instead of talking, we can learn to breathe again together – how does that sound?

The Most Kissed Face of All Time

is a lump of latex. Her name – that's not something I can tell you. The names she has, those are impressions that never touched flesh. Her own name chokes at the bottom of the Seine, but that isn't the question. When they pulled her out, the police looked for the peach-stone in her stomach to explain why pretty girls turn their feet into anchors and dream of blue – *Send her to the Morgue.*

[1] Joanna Ebenstein, *The Anatomical Venus: Wax, God and The Ecstatic*, (Thames & Hudson LTD, 2016), p. 171.

I've never been able to walk by the river Exe and not think about how deep it is. I think about her by the river: a girl who couldn't breathe but is still teaching us how. My river is contained by bike lanes and graffitied walls, hers between two bookshelves. Tonight, if I was pushed in,

I would freeze. Laid out in the Morgue on opening night. Her enchanting face to be preserved before the skin drops away. Her body a heap of frigid flesh, but that face would last forever. When I submerge my head in the bath, I almost hear her in the bursting bubbles. My lungs stretch, body aches for air. I forget when it's easy, but we'll commit violence to breathe.

Her face was hung in a mask shop. Bought to adorn bohemian walls. Still unnamed but no longer unknown. A sock puppet in men's stories: a warning, a mistress, a memory. It's simple:

as a woman without a womb, innocence was her currency. Her story has always been dead matter, but in the fifties a toymaker saved his son from drowning. He worked with doctors to model a lump of polyvinyl chloride into a body. A doll that could teach us how to save a life by sharing our breath. It needed a face that wouldn't intimidate, of course. They say it was a chance to tell her *we would have saved you if we could.* Or so the story goes.

Dredging Up Doubt

'No files can be found in the Paris police archives relating to the unidentified drowned woman, and the actual body was never found in follow-up.'[2]

They say she was a prostitute. They say she slipped. They say she'd swallowed a platter of rocks for dinner that day. They say better off dead. They say her blood was oil-based paint. They say that girl couldn't have drowned. They say girls always go missing. They say she sold oranges in the market. They say she survived by eating sand and shipwrecks. They say she was the mask maker's daughter. They say pregnant. They say she should've known better, walking alone. They say her skin was tissue. They say not even fuckable. They say she was a Hungarian actress. They say she had a twin. They say she cried out for her lover until they found her body.

[2] Jennifer B. Gordetsky et al., 'Annie, Annie! Are You Okay?: Faces Behind the Resusci Anne Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Simulator', *Anesthesia & Analgesia*, 131.2 (2020) , pp. 657-659 (pp. 657).

Death Mask

Her death // is the only //
evidence // that she lived // this
is what // I'm afraid of //

Thirty Different Ways to Say Kiss

Peck, plant one on, pda, phlegming. Snog, smacker,

smooch, shift. Tongue hockey, tonsil tennis,

tongue dipping. Brush lips, mwah, osculation,

saliva sniff. Planting tulips, making out.

Face grinding, swapping spit, pash, stubble rash.

Tonguing, Frenching, necking, get with,

tashing on, lipsing, kinning. First base, sucking face.

And yet, never mouth-to-mouth.

The Final Question

HP: What's it like, letting go?

Drowning was the easy bit –

it was dying that proved difficult

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Whilst little is known about *L'Inconnue de la Seine* (The Unknown Woman of the Seine) – a young woman who drowned in the River Seine in the late nineteenth century – she has acted as a muse for male creativity since her death. As Izabella Penier and Anna Suwalska Kolecka suggest, the muse is 'thought to ignite an erotic spark and some sort of alchemy in those people she becomes attached to, which, in turn, enables them to fulfil their true potential'.[3] This highlights how the muse is associated with passivity and silence but is also powerless under an erotic gaze. This selection of poetry explores how these ideas align with the ways that *L'Inconnue* has been treated in cultural discourse.

After her death, *L'Inconnue*'s body was displayed in the Paris Morgue for identification, and although nobody recognised her, a death mask of her face was made to preserve her beauty. There is no historical record of *L'Inconnue*; the only evidence of her life is her death mask. Her death mask sold widely across Europe and became a popular home accessory. Al Alvarez suggests that she became an 'erotic ideal of the period' due to her enigmatic smile that hinted at the relief and ecstasy of death and her anonymity meant that she could serve as a symbol for whoever wished to use her.[4] This is explored further by Jennifer Gordetsky who suggests that she became this cultural phenomenon because 'the story of a beautiful, unidentified drowned woman creates an emotional platform for speculation and imagination'.[5] Through this process, she is stripped of her humanity and is reduced to a symbolic object. This is evidenced by how she inspired literature by Richard Le Gallienne and Vladimir Nabokov in which she is characterised as a seductress. Then, in the 1950s her death mask, due to her unintimidating and serene expression, was used for the CPR doll, Resusci Anne and has been referred to as 'the most kissed face of all time'.[6] In my poetic practice, I was occupied by the sexualised language of 'kiss', which speaks to how she was framed as the 'erotic ideal'. Therefore, this selection of poetry intends to trouble the supposed objectivity of the medical instrument and explore ideas of identity and voice.

The mythology associated with *L'Inconnue* speaks to a wider culture of femininity being associated with death. As Elisabeth Bronfen suggests 'death transforms the body of a woman into the source of poetic inspiration precisely because it creates and gives corporeality to a loss or absence'.[7] This suggests that the dead woman acts as the ideal muse because her body becomes a neutral space for expectations and desires to be projected upon. Susannah Dickey builds on this idea suggesting that people who are known for their death experience a different

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[3] Izabella Penier and Anna Suwalska Kolecka, *Muses, Mistresses and Mates: Creative Collaboration in Literature, Art and Life,* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p.1.
[4] Al Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide,* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), p. 156.
[5] Gordetsky et al, 'Annie, Annie! Are You Okay?', p.657.
[6] Ebenstein, *Over Her Dead Body,* p.392.
[7] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic,* (Manchester University Press, 1992) p.362.

biographical topography because 'it's not life as line but life as dot with encircling matter'.[8] This 'encircling matter' refers to the cultural narrative that is projected upon the dead person and ultimately objectifies and silences them. For *L'Inconnue* this is the conjecture and narratives emerging from the mystery of her death mask and her consequent role as Resuci Anne. Furthermore, the concept of 'life as dot' implies there is little historical or archival record to attest to the person's character while they were living, and it is this anonymity that enables this cultural mythologisation to take place. Therefore, in this collection about *L'Inconnue,* I explore how poetry can intervene in archival and historical research to exacerbate the gaps and silences. For instance, the poem 'Dredging Up Doubt' opens with a quote from an article published by Gordetsky et al. in *Anesthesia & Analgesia* (2020) that states there is no archival record of her life in a matter-of-fact way. This quote is then juxtaposed by the series of statements beginning with 'they say'. The poem intends to explore the fallibility and vast distribution of her myth, as well as how she has no agency to decide her own narrative. This serves to highlight how the dead have been spoken for, but through the conflicting statements I intended to display this as commentary on that violation instead of inventing another narrative that refuses her any authority.

My main concern in rewriting this cultural myth was to not perpetuate the cycle of silencing and using the dead woman by speaking 'through' her, a technique which, as Brian Norman has observed, 'is an act of ventriloquism'.[9] Therefore, in this collection I did not want to reduce *L'Inconnue* to a symbol or appropriate her voice, but to explore how poetry can experiment with form and perspective to allow me to speak *with* her, rather than *for* her. This is demonstrated by 'The First Interview' which consists of a series of questions without answers: 'What should I call you? [...] / Can you speak? Is it because it hurts to speak?' The absence of her responses intends to highlight how her voice has been lost through history and cannot be reclaimed. However, I also wanted the nature of the questions about identity and voice to introduce how the poems will explore whether she can reclaim that agency despite her erasure.

In the simplest sense, a muse is seen as the source of inspiration. The etymology of 'to inspire' is 'to blow or breathe into'.[10] The story of *L'Inconnue* is bound up with breath. She is the 'girl who couldn't breathe but is still teaching us how'. Since her death her story has been breathed into and much speculation has surfaced about her identity behind the death mask. In this sense, she has acted as a muse to silently ignite inspiration, and yet without any archival record or traces of who she really was, she is silenced. This selection of poetry is occupied with how her story can be framed to highlight this cultural objectification and mythologisation of the dead woman without

[8] Susannah Dickey, *Isdal,* (Picador, 2023), p. 67.
[9] Brian Norman, *Dead Women Talking: Figures of Injustice in American Literature,* (John Hopkins University Press, 2012) p. 7.
[10] 'Inspire, V.', *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2024) <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5148033859> [accessed 03/06/2024].

ventriloquising her voice. Therefore, my intention was not to write *for* her and perpetuate the cycle of eroticising the silenced muse but to write *with* her and explore how we can unpick how our culture normalises the eroticisation and mythology of the anonymous dead woman.

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Need For Speed? : An Ecofeminist Approach to the Speed and the Automobile in Ella Maillart's The Cruel Way

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Form: article

Abstract:
In 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, Ella Maillart, a Swiss Olympian, adventurer, and travel writer set off on a continent-crossing road trip from Geneva to Kaboul. Her sole companion was her friend Christina, a gender nonconforming drug addict in the midst of a divorce from her diplomat husband. Maillart's 1947 travel narrative *The Cruel Way*, details the trials, triumphs, and wonders, both cultural and geographic, that these women encounter on their journey down the newly established International Road. By approaching this text through an ecofeminist lens, namely Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature,* Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* and Stacy Alaimo's *Undomesticated Ground*, we can see how Maillart and her companion integrate a Ford into their lives in a way that helped them challenge gendered and environmental boundaries. By highlighting the liberation women found through the automobile, there opens a new road for further criticism that departs from the established approach centred on speed, thrill, and domination. As society approaches a point of irreversible climate abuse, the need to reframe humanity's relationship to the car, and the notion of driving, has never been more pertinent.

Introduction:

In July 1915 a lithograph-print by French artist Francis Picabia was published in the avant-garde journal *291*. It was titled *Portrait of a Young American Woman in a State of Nudity*. The image is an illustration of a spark plug suspended on a white background, emblazoned in all capital letters with the word 'FOR-EVER.' It was successful as a tongue-in-cheek take on the new obsession with speed, and a sharp, linear shift away from the blurred lines of impressionism. However, the picture also perpetuated the portrayal of women as objects, and specifically as objects of masculine desire.

The automobile, which roared to life after Karl Benz's patent of the internal combustion flat engine in 1896[11], quickly became one of the most visible, pleasurable, and defining artefacts of modernity. However, alongside the thrill of speed and prestige, there was also the horror of the automobile: crashes and deaths. There is a large literary and journalistic history detailing the deaths of women at the hand of the automobile: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, the much-serialised death of modern dancer Isadora Duncan, and the world-renowned car accident that killed Princess Diana. This paper explores a literary representation

[11] Enda Duffy, The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism. (Duke University Press, 2009), p.6

where rather than a violent impact, women and automobiles collided in order to traverse gendered, political, and geographic boundaries.

While many scholars have researched various aspects of the automobile, such as Andrew Thacker's *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* and Enda Duffy's *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism*, these texts have largely focused on the aspects of speed, movement, and space. This essay differs in its reading of the automobile through an ecofeminist lens. It introduces to mobility studies a critical examination of gender, especially in regard to the female body as it relates to the automobile and the desire for speed. Stacy Alaimo posits in her introduction to *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*, that, 'If woman's perceived proximity to nature is responsible for her oppression, then her liberation, it would seem, is contingent on her distance.'[12] Just as Alaimo interrogates this notion, so do my research questions. Instead of examining how the automobile reinforces gendered boundaries, I ask how the automobile, a symbol of masculine, industrial modernity, can be read through a lens that explores its positive relationship with both women and the environment. Further, how can slowness, rather than speed, become a potent facet of resistance to a masculinized form of driving? Beyond this, the paper also examines how inescapable metaphors of female oppression translate into the modern world, reworking themselves from natural to mechanical likenesses of the female form.

In using an ecofeminist approach, the automobile can be used to explore how women and the environment were not only victims of a modernity that perpetuated a capitalist patriarchy, but were also able to seize moments that contradicted that narrative. The paper explores this notion through the framework laid out by Greta Gaard who notes:

> Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorises oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature.[13]

By tying this into the automobile, we can not only evaluate its contributions to the continuation of sexism and environmental degradation, but reach beyond and see how it countered this oppression. Carolyn Merchant notes in her 1980 book, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, that during the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century the conflation of women with a maternal, planned sort of nature was eclipsed by a contradicting violent and chaotic nature: floods, drought, fires. Reason and mechanically imposed order became tenants of the modern world, and 'the female earth and virgin earth spirit were

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[12] Stacy Alaimo, Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (Cornell University Press, 2000)

[13] Greta Gaard, Ecofeminism: women, animals, nature (Temple University Press, 1993) p. 1.

subdued by the machine.'[14] However, the tools of modernity not only subdued the female earth, but when wielded by women also proved that the machine possessed a capacity for liberation.

The gender-liberating aspects of the automobile becomes apparent when examining Ella Maillart's 1947 travel memoir *The Cruel Way*, which recounts the story of a cross-continent road trip she and a female friend embarked on in 1939 before the start of the Second World War. This trip, spurred by a blend of narrowing opportunity and the desire to visit Afghanistan, is the premise of the narrative. Part memoir, part travelogue, this text weaves cultural and geographic observations into a tale of personal triumphs and tribulations. By analysing Maillart's text through ecofeminists theories like Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* and Stacy Alaimo's *Undomesticated Ground*, we can see how Maillart and her companion, Christina, integrate a Ford into their lives in a way that helped them overcome limitations imposed by a patriarchy. As drivers, their authority becomes questioned less by locals and officials alike; they are not only symbolic, but also literal drivers of their lives. These two women view their Ford as a 'third member of [their] party';[15] a valued, respected, and integral part of their Eastward bound journey. Alaimo's text mirrors Maillart's attitude toward gender roles, the natural landscape, and the automobile. Her memoir embodies a lived narrative that exemplifies how, 'refusing to applaud the male march of progress is hardly the most dynamic form of political intervention.'[16]

Under Maillart's stewardship, the Ford weaves itself into her life. It integrates into her lived experiences, acting as a catalyst for independence and freedom. However, this freedom is dependent on a sort of rebellion against established, masculine notions of driving. Maillart, when behind the wheel, refuses to conflate the power of the automobile with the aspect of speed. However, despite this rebellion, the Ford carries an unavoidable air of imperialism. It becomes a symbol of not only growing Western influence, but an evocative and dangerous image that Mallirt herself conflates with travel and exploitation.

By applying these lenses to the text, we can see how rather than being framed as victims of the motorcar's violence, these women instead take advantage of the autonomy and independence it fosters. Duffy duly notes that, 'In the mass culture of speed, "faster" has often meant "more masculine"; nonetheless there has been no shortage of hints of the glamour of sexual ambiguity surrounding the human attainments of high speeds and the policing of them.'[17] Through historicization, close reading, and an application of ecofeminist themes, this essay explores defiances towards the appeal of speed, symbolism attached to the Ford, and how women used the automobile to traverse barriers both physical and social.

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[14] Carolyn Merchant, "The Death of Nature", in Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology, ed. by Michael Zimmerman. (Prentice-Hall, 1993), p. 270

[15] Ella Maillart, The Cruel Way (Virago Travellers, 1986) p. 21.

[16] Alaimo, p. 8.

[17] Duffy, p. 56.

The Appeal of Speed:

In the United States, when Ransom Olds began mass production of the automobile in 1902,[18] the notion of speed changed forever. No longer were the streets destined to be polka-dotted with carriages and horses, but rather motorcars. In Aldous Huxley's 1931 essay, *Wanted, a New Pleasure*, he writes that:

> Speed, it seems to me, provides the one genuinely modern pleasure. True, men have always enjoyed speed; but their enjoyment has been limited, until very recent times, by the capacities of the horse, whose maximum velocity is not much more than thirty miles per hour.[19]

In the motorcar, with speeds that reached up to eighty miles per hour, people were able to, 'feel modernity in their bones.'[20] The sensation of the speed reverberating through their bodies took hold of the public like a drug; everyone wanted to go faster. Blasted on the covers of magazines, billboards, and cinema screens, automobiles became the paramount symbol of freedom, prestige, thrill, sexuality, and danger.

It was these allures that inspired Filippo Tommaso Marinetti to write *The Futurist Manifesto* in 1909, one that opposed the stasis of the past, and celebrated the beautiful violence of machines: 'We went up to the three snorting machines to caress their breasts. I lay along mine like a corpse on its bier, but I suddenly revived again beneath the steering wheel - a guillotine knife - which threatened my stomach.'[21] Marinetti fully embraced the dangerous thrill of the automobile, but many of his contemporaries approached the subject in a less polarising way. Some modernist writers set their protagonists in opposition to the motorcar, such as Virginia Woolf, whose Mrs. Dalloway cowers in the wake of a backfiring car on a busy London road. Or James Joyce, whose Leopold Bloom traverses a modern Dublin in an antiquated yet nostalgic pedestrianism. Other writers, such as E. M. Forster, worked the motorcar into their plots to tie modernity to imperialism. In *A Passage to India*, the adventurous, yet naive, Adela Quested is whisked away from her local expedition to the Marabar Caves by the speed and security of not only the motorcar but also the assumption that it is Englishmen who drive them.

Speed is perhaps the most definitive aspect of modernity. Everything became faster in aspects of communication and movement. However, before the leap to machines, there was a renewed interest in the speed of the human body. As Duffy writes in *The Speed Handbook*, 'First there was a resurgent nostalgia for the

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[18] *Ibid*, p.6.
[19] Aldous Huxley, "Wanted, A New Pleasure." *Music at Night: And Other Essays Including Vulgarity in Literature* (Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 255.
[20] Duffy, p.4.
[21] Fillipo Marinetti, "The Founding Manifesto of Futurism." Le Figaro, February 20, 1909. In F. T. Marinetti, Selected Writings, ed. R. W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971)

unprostheticized fast human body: the Olympic Games were revived in 1896, corresponding to the moment of the invention of the mass-producible motorcar.'[22] However, equally important to the correlation between the modern Olympiad and automobile is the type of athlete and body it sensationalised: lean, muscular, and male. After all, of the fourteen nations and 240 athletes competing, all were male.[23] Speed, whether on foot or by car, was seen as a masculine domain. The belief that the desire of speed is an inherently male desire is wrapped in problematic assumptions and perpetuates, 'the specific political issues raised by the culture of speed itself, such as its blatant sexism (in that speed has almost wholly been presented as a male desire).'[24] Maillart, in spite of this sexism, broke the mould for women of her era. She remained unmarried and lived life at high speed; travelling regularly, shifting her occupation, and displaying her athletic prowess.

Born in Geneva in 1903, her travels and adventures earned her an impressive series of headlines for decades both at home and abroad. Member of the Swiss national ski team, intrepid mountaineer, Swiss Olympian in the 1924 summer games, and solo sailor, Maillart won races and set new milestones for women athletes. She worked as a teacher, cabin hand, first mate, stunt person, photographer, journalist, and writer. Fluent in French and English with a good command of German and Russian, the self-taught Maillart traveled the world. She walked across the Caucasus in 1930, traveled to the far reaches of Chinese Turkestan in 1932, crossed China from Peking to the Himalayas in 1934, and drove across Afghanistan in a Model-T Ford shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War.[25]

Maillart's life emphasises the capabilities and desire of speed displayed by modern women. A desire that was often realised, but also overlooked by popular culture and textual representation: 'since the bicycling craze in the 1880s, women occupied the open road as equals to men…and women Olympic speed record holders have — despite repeated early attempts to deny them access — displayed the speed power of women's bodies in arenas first open only to racing men.'[26] *The Cruel Way* was a relatively low-performing book commercially that has also been grossly overlooked by scholars. However, its historical value is immense; it serves as a first-hand account of how the motorcar helped women like Maillart pursue independent and thrilling lives. Perhaps the issue of its unpopularity tied into Maillart's resistance toward conflating the automobile with speed.

At the time, the most successful narratives involving cars focused exclusively on speed, racing, and the market for automobiles. Popular culture even spawned a new type of literature, the racecar magazine. These 1930s magazines, such as *Speed*

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[22] Duffy, p.6.
[23] Sheila Mitchell, "Women's Participation in the Olympic Games 1900-1926." Journal of Sport History, 4: 2 (1977) p. 209.
[24] Duffy, p. 53.
[25] Sara S Borella, "Re-Discovering the Travel Narratives of Ella Maillart." Women in French Studies, 9: 1 (2001), pp. 123-137.
[26] Duffy, p. 56.

or *Motor Sport* featured interviews with drivers, human interest stories, schedules for upcoming races, cultural impact pieces, and even harrowing first-hand accounts of deadly, fiery crashes. Interspersed among the automobile content was a plethora of adverts for anything from tyres to motor oil. These magazines all celebrated the automobile unabashedly. One article from a 1937 issue of *Speed* reads: 'Dear Sir – I have never driven a racing car, but I am sure that I could do it well enough to win next month's Grand Prix. Please may I drive one of your team cars in that race.'[27] While requiring a high level of skill and experience, something about the practicality of automobile driving appealed greatly to the boys and men of the time: it was as if anyone that could drive could also race. This was not necessarily true, and although it grew in popularity, motor racing remained largely a sport for the upper class and wealthy gentlemen who could afford to fund their racing ventures.

Looking at the adverts surrounding these articles, the copywriting framed the road itself as a commodity to be conquered and consumed. An advertisement for Tylap Fort Tyres features a detailed image of a tyre, with many grooves. Alongside it is the tagline, '2,000 teeth on every tyre, to bite the road!'[28] The road is portrayed as something that can be inhaled by the driver, much like a meal. Other articles take a scholarly approach to motor racing, such as an article titled, "Has Speed Changed Man?" by Prof A. M. Low, which includes passages like:

> The fact that speed has to a degree already changed men can easily be seen by taking someone who has been buried in the country all their life to a big city. Their minds and bodies will be quite unable to keep pace with the traffic, and they will be hesitant and bewildered about crossing the road.[29]

Although the forms and viewpoints vary, the focus of all the articles is very clear: speed.

Maillart's Resistance Toward Speed:

Maillart, an Olympic sailor and participant in the World Championships of Alpine Skiing, was well aware of the thrills of speed, but that was not her aim in driving. In contrast, during Maillart's experience in a car, speed was often more of a detriment than a desire. In her narrative, unlike the popular motorcar media at the time, the automobile is not a vehicle for speed, but rather a mobile home, carrying her to foreign lands.

Maillart sought Afghanistan as a destination because of the culture of the region and her previous expedition there: 'There live the men I want to study in a country where I feel happy: mountaineers not enslaved by artificial needs, free men

[27] B. W. P. Twist, "Some Practical Notes on the Gentle Art of Muscling-in on Motor-Racing." Speed, July (1937).
[28] Dunlap Fort Tyre. Advertisement. Speed, July (1937).
[29] A. M. Low, "Has Speed Changed Man?" Speed, July (1937).

not forced to increase their daily production.'[30] Though still a blonde-haired-blue-eyed Swiss woman, Maillart's motivations differed greatly from the other Europeans travelling east. Most of her compatriots were part of the influx of capitalists that flocked eastward to pump regions for their natural resources, where Maillart's deeply non-capitalistic motives align more with the notion of pilgrimage, or attempt towards deeper understanding and enlightenment. In this way Maillart is not immune to critiques of Orientalism or fetishization of an eastward culture, but by many standards she rejects the ideal of Western supremacy and imperialism. *The Cruel Way* focuses on the landscape and culture surrounding the car, rather than on the pleasure of driving the car itself:

> We aimed at being able to stop on the slightest pretext: to practise this we were to hold our eighteen "horses" with a firm hand. Most car-owners drive as if it were a crime to break the spell of a continual rush at "50." They reach a state in which they lose all initiative save the one to go ahead. To get them to go back three hundred yards is as good as asking for the moon: the silence that meets your demand could not be more disapproving had you wanted them to push the car back by hand.[31]

Maillart resists the meditative trance that speed lulls a driver into, and seeks to actively resist the thrill of driving. She even goes so far as to reduce the car to its horsepower, further emphasising its potential as a carriage rather than a speed machine. It is her preference to take the slower, more scenic roads as opposed to the streamlined autostrades that began to link major cities: 'I don't like motoring and on an "autostrade" I loathe it: it makes me a dull automation that can only listen to the purr of the machine.'[32] Here we read that Maillart sees the car as a tool to immerse herself in a landscape and culture, as opposed to an occasion itself. Read within the context of her life, links can be posed between Maillart's disdain for the autostrade and her general distaste for societal standards.

When she meets another woman venturing on a road trip, she is immediately judgemental of the way she travels: 'She had seen little, stopped nowhere and her photography showed nothing but her Ford in sand, in water, in crowds, in deserts. So when she invited me to accompany her, I refused.'[33] The Ford, though centred in the woman's photos, is read by Maillart to be a mere prop. Rather than becoming an extension of her autonomy, it becomes a symbol of status and affluence. In contrast, rather than centering the car, Maillart was adamant that she and Christina, her companion, would not,

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[30] Maillart, p. 2.
[31] Ibid, p. 20
[32] Ibid, p. 12
[33] *Ibid*, p. 21

> Allow speed to build an invisible wall between us and the life around– sound of voices, smell of new spices wafting from a farm, coolness of a shy breeze near a brook! This journey was to be ours and not the car's.[34]

Speed, in all its appeal, created a blur and barrier between the participants and the outside world. By slowing down and ensuring that speed never became an obstacle to overcome, Maillart was set up to succeed in the true aim of her venture, to experience new cultures and marvel at landscapes unlike her own back in Switzerland. Through the use of a Ford, Maillart and her companion Christina are able to exercise their own autonomy and control the trajectory of their trip. Maillart constantly refers to their car specifically as a Ford; it is not a car, or automobile, but a Ford.

Unpacking the Ford's Implications and Entanglements:

The Ford itself is an important symbol, as at the time the company was busy establishing itself as an international brand. It became a symbol of explicitly American influence, and commanded a distinct image of control. Originally only present as a small import sales agency, in the early twentieth century Ford's rapid expansion into Europe saw the establishment of a full branch in Britain and an assembly plant in Manchester.[35] Ford soon became so successful that, 'By the end of the First World War, the *Model T* was the best-selling car in Britain.'[36] Ford became an international brand, and its mere mention inspired people. Maillart herself credits the idea for the road trip to hearing that very name: '"The car has worn out and Father has promised me a Ford"; I only heard the last name and it seems to have been responsible for all.'[37] Here we can see just how symbolic the brand is, as it becomes synonymous with adventure and exploration.

The brand became emblematic of American ingenuity and hard work, with Henry Ford himself preferring, 'fortunes born of production rather than the paper-shuffling kind that benefited only the stock manipulators and financial speculators who contrived them.'[38] Ford, a gregarious and mercurial character, saw himself as part of the growing American lineage of industrialist inventors.[39] All of these contributed to the company brand, which still bears its founder's namesake. These traits of ingenuity, grit and hard labour attracted many adventurers to the brand seeking to launch their own forms of enterprise from behind the wheel.

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[34] Ibid, p. 20
[35] Hubert Bonin, Yannick Lung, and Steven Tolliday, Ford: The European History 1903-2003 (P.L.A.G.E., 2003) p. 8.
[36] Bonin, p. 8.
[37] Maillart, p. 1.
[38] Douglas Brinkley, Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company, and a Century of Progress, 1903-2003 (New York City: Penguin Books, 2004), p. xvii.
[39] Brinkley, p. xvii

Ford became a distinct and original machine, something more recognizable and iconic than a regular motorcar. Steinbeck immortalised this reputation of a Ford as a resilient steed in his 1945 novel *Cannery Row*: 'when your brake is gone, you can use reverse… And when the low gear band is worn too thin to pull up a steep hill, why you can turn around and back it up.'[40] It was this same reputation that excited Maillart: 'A Ford! That's the car to climb the new Hazarejat road in Afghanistan! In Iran too, one should travel in ones own car.'[41] The car also allowed them to escape the dredge of lorry-hopping that left Maillart at the whims of other drivers and guides on her first trip to the region. The Ford represented independence, control, and the ability to quite literally steer one's own direction. But beyond that, Maillart resisted centering it as an expensive machine. She instead crafted her narrative in a way that portrayed the Ford as a valued member of their cross-country team.

Through Maillart's prose, the Ford is brought to life, characterised as an equal member of their group. Speaking of the car, Maillart writes that, 'But if I say little about the third member of our party the reader must not imagine that, having won Fate to our viewpoint, we two girls just sat on a kind of flying carpet.'[42] Here, Maillart emphasises the troubleshooting and skill required to control and drive a car. The Ford is much more than just a mode of transport, it becomes their home on the road. In this way, it also becomes a mechanical extension of their being that aids in their agency and liberation.

As a mechanical extension of their being, the Ford fits into what Donna Haraway defines as a cyborg in her 1991 essay "A Cyborg Manifesto." She defines cyborgs as, 'creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.'[43] In this sense, both Maillart and Christina can be read as cyborgs, melded together with their Ford. While the particular pairing with the Ford does emphasise this concept, 'The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism.'[44] The Ford, though an embodiment of American domination and global capitalism, provides Maillart and Christina with a tool to traverse barriers. In this way, despite being a vehicle for militarism and capitalism, it actually helps liberate these two women. In Christina's case, it becomes an embedded suture that helps her recover from a marriage in which she felt trapped.

Christina, when speaking of her failed marriage to a man named Francis, says, "'I felt that I was heading for a prison. I don't know why," she said in a detached voice, "but I was too weak-minded to free myself while it was still possible."'[45] Her husband's diplomatic posts often took them abroad for long periods of time, and her struggles were compounded by, 'A bad wound in her leg and a tormented friendship

[40] John Steinbeck, Cannery Row (New York City: Penguin Books,1994) pp. 62-3.
[41] Maillart, p. 1.
[42] Ibid, p. 21.
[43] David Bell, and Barbara M. Kennedy, editors. The Cybercultures Reader (Routledge, 2000), p. 291.
[44] Bell, p. 324.
[45] Maillart, p. 13.

with a beautiful Turkish girl.'[46] Christina's marriage eventually dissolves when she suffers from a nervous breakdown and falls into a crippling drug addiction. This trip, however, offers a new sort of union. In Christina's new commitment to the Ford, she is able to steer her own life. Although she relapses several times on the trip, her general disposition and outlook is vastly improved.

The instances of Christina's relapses on the trip trouble Maillart: 'the evidence flashed when I saw on the floor of the bathroom the brittle glass of an empty ampoule. She had succumbed once more.'[47] Even the excitement and trials of a cross-continent road trip are not enough to keep Christina away from the drugs when they stop in larger cities like Sofia.

However, Maillart notes that even in her gaunt zombie-like state that day, 'Christina drove by my side with her usual nonchalance.'[48] It is also interesting to consider Maillart and Christina's positions within the Ford. Although both feel immensely attached to it, they also have very distinct roles. On this particular trip, Christina always remains behind the wheel while Maillart is the navigator, but it is only together that they drive the Ford.
Through these rigid roles, the Ford is able to become a vehicle for social, political, and physical boundary crossing. This aligns directly with Haraway's statement that, 'My cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.'[49] Even though Maillart's 1939 roadtrip takes place nearly half a century before Haraway's manifesto, the heart of her argument is evidenced in Maillart's road trip. Although the cyborg is often thought to be a very complex and advanced piece of technology, its presence can be traced back to twentieth century modernity and the ability of technology to fuse with people and contribute to their lived political and social rebellion.

Tourism, Imperialism, and the Environment:

While Fords and similar would go on to cause unfathomable destruction in the upcoming years, Maillart uses her Ford as a chariot for peace, writing over and over that her intentions are not motivated by the potential that these lands hold for industrial or capitalistic gain, but rather to learn from the natives. When asked about the motives for her trip, she holds true to this intention, even if she is aware of the naivety and suspicions it shows:

"Why do you travel?"

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[46] Ibid, p. 14.
[47] Ibid, p. 24.
[48] Ibid, p. 25.
[49] Bell, p. 295.

> "To meet those who know how to live peacefully" was the first answer that came to my lips. But the great man looked at me with suspicion; did I look like a lunatic traveller who wants to be cured".[50]

It is not surprising to learn that many of her male colleagues were actually only initially granted access to these regions for their studies when technology was included in the deal: 'Dr. Herrlich's permission to explore Kafiristan [present day Nuristan] had been obtained at a time when the Afghan Government had wanted machinery from Germany at an advantageous price.'[51] While others used technology as a bartering chip for access to remote and sacred sites, Maillart used it solely as a means to traverse the numerous and diverse borders that she would need to overcome on her journey east.

There is also a poignant environmental aspect to consider here, and the inbound scholars bartered with machinery and technology that contributed to ecological extraction and decay. This ties into the shifting metaphor of women and nature that followed implications of modernity. Carolyn Merchant writes that:

> The image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother has served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings. One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body, although commercial mining would soon require that.[52]

In her refusal to participate in this sort of trade, Maillart simultaneously reinforces her dedication to pacifism and resists the urge to participate in an expedition rooted in both objectification and exploitation. That being said, their journey does still tie into the expansion of automobile infrastructure, namely the road-building and petrol market that fuels their journey east. Their insistence on observation and documentation of local customs also leans into the cliché of a cultural pilgrimage.

Although writing specifically about modernist fiction, Alexandra Peat's 2011 book, *Travel and Modernist Literature: Sacred and Ethical Journeys*, provides insight on not only the reasons for travel, but also its ramifications. She writes that, 'it is impossible to discuss modernist travel fiction without considering the rise of modern tourism; it is equally impossible to ignore the context of colonialism.'[53] This notion can be similarly applied to Maillart, no matter her self-described altruistic motivations.

With the rise of leisure tourism, 'more people than ever were moving around the world, and the experience of taking trains, boats and airplanes to far-flung

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[50] Maillart, p. 36.
[51] Ibid, p. 9.
[52] Merchant, p. 271
[53] Alexandra Peat, Travel and Modernist Literature: Sacred and Ethical Journeys. (Routledge, 2011), p. 4.

places excited a new sense of wonder.'[54] Although absent from her list of modes of transport, Malliart's automobile journey fits into this notion of growing tourism. As their journey unfolds and difficulties present themselves, 'experience of travel becomes a vehicle for unravelling and, consequently, re-examining the traveler's quest…for appreciable personal gain.'[55] Between these two vehicles, the Ford and travel itself, Maillart simultaneously reinforces and contradicts romantic notions of travel. However, a recurring motif of *The Cruel Way* emphasises the less-picturesque realities of international travel: boundaries and borders.

Breaking Down Barriers:

These borders are all encompassing: gendered, political, geographical, and even natural. By looking at how the Ford helps break down these borders, we can see how it becomes a tool of liberation as opposed to a derivative of patriarchy and capitalism. Most noticeably, the Ford carries Malliart across many national borders. As this journey took place on the precipice of World War II, many of these borders were already tumultuous, and were going to be almost entirely redrawn within the coming decade. Maillart and Christina were constantly held up at various checkpoints. Their equipment was searched, and oftentimes their motives and permissions were questioned: 'At the Persian post… we feared we should not be allowed to travel further.'[56] But despite these continuous setbacks, their journey continued.

Geographical borders are also prominent. One of the main draws of the Ford is its ability to help them overcome the many mountain passes and difficult terrain that serve as a natural wall between nations, communities, and the cultures that populate them. Even when the roads are new and smooth, the Ford helps them integrate into the community. When in Persia, Mallart encounters a 'jovial fellow' who 'sat at the wheel of our Ford to drive us along that virgin road still closed to traffic.'[57] The road becomes a point of pride for the locals, and takes on a female personification, like a virgin bride: 'In every sentence he used the words "my road" or "my daughter the road," proud that she was so expensive and had so many men at her service.'[58] Here, the road, in being tied to femininity, also becomes something to be protected and cared for by men, just as he seeks to protect and guide the two women: "'You are my guests, I must look after you as long as you are on my road."'[59] There is also a link back to Alaimo and Merchant. Instead of a virginal land, there is a virginal road, a manufactured strip that symbolises the same pure qualities once associated with nature. As Alaimo writes:

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid, p. 59
[56] Maillart, p. 56.
[57] Ibid, p.52
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid, p. 52.

> If nature is no longer a repository of stasis and essentialism, no longer the mirror image of culture, then the female body need not be misogyny's best resource. Disrupting the opposition between nature and culture opens up spaces for feminisms that neither totally affirm nor totally deny difference. Feminism can instead cobble together a myriad of adulterated alternatives that neither seek an untainted, utterly female space outside of culture nor cast off bodies, matter, and nature as that which is forever debased.[60]

An ecofeminist take on the automobile does not inherently mean a rejection of the machinery, but rather envisions how aspects of the cobbling present themselves in new forms of the debasement of nature. As the female form resists essentialism in nature, it becomes essentialized in manufactured objects, especially ones assumed to represent masculine desires, such as roads. In Maillart's case, the road comes to embody both herself and Christina, as they become wards of the road's caretakers, men.

There are also instances when the road becomes, rather than a virginal landscape, a visible border in the natural surroundings. It cuts through the environment, similar to Merchant's metaphor of violence and disorder. Maillart writes of the stark division this creates, how the, 'Wideness of the fields, of the far horizon, of the triple highway– the motor-road [is] flanked on either side by dusty tracks for market-carts.'[61] The multiple routes for varying modes of transport serves as a side-by-side testament to the development of the trade and travel routes. Maillart and her companion are respectful of this communal aspect of the road, recognizing how their Ford fits into this mix rather than dominating it. On one ferry ride, the hood of their Ford becomes the counter for a baker to sell his breads on.[62]

As Maillart is travelling at a time when the roads are still being constructed, the motorcar is not quite a quotidian staple of the regions she traverses. There are even times when the roads, rather than being faster, are more time-consuming due to their ill repair and unsuitability. She notes that, 'the foundations of the "international road" were being laid and in three atrocious hours we covered only eighteen miles. In deep ruts made by high-bodied lorries, the Ford was either stuck or grating against stones.'[63] Here, rather than falling into the trope of, 'underwritten colonialist exploits by depicting nature as an empty space,'[64] Maillart acknowledges the natural landscape that these roads pass through, highlighting the geological actors, like stones, that seem opposed to the road themselves. As the Ford poses more problems and delays, it becomes hard for the two to uphold the desire, 'not to be slaves of [their] machine.'[65]

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[60] Alaimo, p. 10.
[61] Maillart, p. 17.
[62] Ibid, p. 39.
[63] Ibid, p. 28.
[64] Alaimo, p. 17.
[65] Maillart, p. 21.

Although the Ford carries both of these women across physical and political boundaries, it also helps bridge gendered boundaries. The Ford becomes both a domestic and natural space, playing both the space of home as well as a frontier. Here, Maillart and Christina are responsible for both taking care of their home, the Ford, as well as finding satisfaction as adventurers. They are liberated, living in 'a place in which women could be untamed, unruly, and unregenerate critiques of the "unnatural" social forces that have constructed women as obedient subjects'.[66] This is most visible in Christina's own gender expression. Although it is heavily hinted at that she is in some way queer, and that her marriage was broken up in part due to, 'a tormented friendship with a beautiful Turkish girl,'[67] she is also known for her very slender form and androgynous mode of dress. In fact, it could be argued that the social assumption that men are the drivers of automobiles was not detested by Christina, but embraced in a pleasurable euphoria.

This very masculine appearance allowed them to be mistaken as a heterosexual couple, a fact that often elated Christina: 'Christina was also in a gay mood: the paymaster has addressed her as Monsieur! The further we moved eastward the more often she was taken for a boy.'[68] Here, we can see how Ford allows Christina to pursue a more authentic representation of her identity. Even as the authenticity leans into social assumptions, Christina co-opts it to affirm her gender-queer desires. Rather than reinforcing and contributing to the pressures that force women to uphold rigid standards of femininity, the Ford allows them to transcend this border, and live a more independent, adventurous, and authentic life that gives them a space to explore as much internally as externally. Maillart recognizes this as she finds, 'Briefly stated, my main aims were to acquire self-mastery and to save my friend from herself.'[69] The need to save Christina from herself is not in regards to her sexuality or gender expression, but rather her crippling drug addiction that would eventually lead to her death six years after the culmination of their road trip.

Conclusion:

Although not able to save her friend in the long term, their journey represents a branch of ecofeminism that, instead of shunning machinery, embraces the power and potential that it embodies. *The Cruel Way* exists as a unique and invaluable text exploring alternative representations and uses of the automobile in the 1930s. Although published in 1947 after the end of World War II, the road trip itself occurred in 1939, and showcases how women like Maillart used the motorcar as a vehicle for liberation and independence.

[66] Alaimo, p. 16.
[67] Maillart, p. 14.
[68] Ibid, p. 36.
[69] Ibid, p. 26.

Her narrative, unlike the popular motor racing magazine of the time, detested the blur of speed and focused instead on the ability of the Ford to help her cross a multitude of boundaries: physical, national, cultural, and social. The Ford itself became a complex symbol of their trip, a brand that encapsulated the ingenuity, grit and determination of her and her companion while also carrying connotations of colonialism and control. The Ford, rather than solely being a means of transport, became an extension of their identity and a valued member of their team. It also became their home on wheels, providing a familiar comfort and domesticity as they traversed the deserts, rivers, and mountain ranges on their journey to Afghanistan. Beyond this, its international image, associated with power and grit, embed the women with a certain air of authority and autonomy. This text is a prime example of how women, rather than being victims of the motorcar, used it to promote and explore their own agency and independence. Although not necessarily interested in speed, Maillart's use and portrayal of the automobile showcases how she used it to travel, both internally and externally, to discover and explore territories she had never been to before.

As ecofeminism continues to grow and adapt, Maillart's travelogue complicates the notion of machinery being inherently problematic. Although aspects of patriarchal capitalism and environmental abuse loom in their peripheries, this text illuminates how metaphors of feminism, such as Merchant's nurturing and violent natures, can be both expressed and challenged. Machinery does not only control the latter, but also provides an opportunity to change the metaphor entirely. Maillart's road trip is not about biting into the road, but rather digesting it, slowly. When she and Christina drive the Ford together, it is not mastery they aim towards, but self-mastery. As the automotive industry works to overhaul its reliance on fossil fuels and switch towards renewable energy, attitudes like Maillart's emphasise that it is not only cars that need changing, but our attitudes towards them. Perhaps, as according to Maillart, it is self-mastery, in all its iterations, and not speed, that automobiles can provide for us.

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RECLAIMING THE SMALL PRINT

Samantha Carr, University of Plymouth, UK

Form: poetry + critical commentary

Start Again

An erasure poem from the Electronic Medicine Compendium: Montelukast

Package leaflet: Information for the patient

Montelukast 10 mg film-coated tablets
montelukast

you start

again.

you need to know

What
is a leukotriene

air from trees,
may include:

your child

be aware of

this

if you are taking or have recently taken or might take

food and drink
with or without food.

you may be

milk. You should

contains lactose
some sugars,
sodium

Check with your

food.

for advice.

you forget to
Try to miss the
forgotten

If you stop
continue taking this

all not everybody

thought

you may be
serious, you may need

the

dream
feeling

- tender

light

throw
away

the
light yellow coloured, square,
engraved with the other side.

You start again.
You need to know
what is a leukotriene?
Air from trees may include
your child.
Be aware of this.
If you are taking
or have recently taken
or might take food and drink
with or without food.
You may be milk.
You should contain lactose,
some sugars, sodium.
Check with your food for advice.
You forget to try to miss
the forgotten.
If you stop, continue
taking this all.
Not everybody thought
you may be serious,
you may need the dream,
feeling tender, light,
throw away the light
yellow coloured square,
engraved with the other side.

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

One way to reclaim the body and patient voice in illness is to create poetry from patient information leaflets, a form of found poetry. This poem was created using the technique of found poetry, specifically erasure poetry, using the Electronic Medicines Compendium for the drug montelukast, which is prescribed for mild to moderate persistent asthma.[1]

Sandra Faulkner describes found poetry as 'poetry that is created by using phrases, words, and passages from other sources[...]Found poetry can be a way to re-present participant voices and experiences that may be partially or totally silenced.'[2] Erasure poetry is a technique described by poet Mary Ruefle as 'an act of creating a new text by disappearing the old text that surrounds it.'[3]

To create these poems, I downloaded the montelukast leaflet, one of the medications I take for asthma. I have taken this medication nightly for several decades and had never previously read the leaflet. The patient information leaflets are long and boring and can often induce fear regarding potential side effects. I figured, if I can't breathe without the medication, what's the point in knowing the harm? Montelukast comes with a black box warning for depression and suicidality, something of a paradox when considering the black box of an aeroplane that survives when unable to remain airborne.[4] This led me to consider myself a crashed aeroplane with the narrative wreckage trapped somewhere between chaos and quest.

I deleted words until something with a poetic resonance remained. The first line of 'Start Again' reminds me of the need for people with chronic illness to repeatedly get themselves back up again when they have relapses, a quest for meaning amongst the symptoms of wheezing, breathlessness and coughing. This relates to Ellen Samuels' concept of *Crip Time* which she describes as, 'It requires us to break in our bodies and minds to new rhythms, new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving through the world[...]Crip time means listening to the broken languages of our bodies, translating them, honoring their words.'[5]

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[1] Ranbaxy UK Limited. Package leaflet: Information for the patient Montelukast 10mg film-coated tablets montelukast, *emc electronic medicines compendium,* (January 2024) <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.2622.pdf> [Accessed 10 June 2024].

[2] Sandra L Faulkner. *Poetic Inquiry Craft, Method and Practice 2nd Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p.64.

[3] 'Mary Ruefle. Erasures', Saint Louis Poetry Center, 19 March-19 April, 2022 <https://stlouispoetrycenter.org/erasures/> [Accessed 11 June 2024].

[4] MHRA,'Montelukast (Singulair): reminder of the risk of neuropsychiatric reactions', 19 September 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/drug safety update/Montelukast (Singulair): reminder of the risk of neuropsychiatric reactions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)> [Accessed 29 January 2024].

[5] Ellen Samuels. 'Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time'. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 37.3, (August 2017), doi:10.18061/dsq.v37i3.5824.

This line is followed with 'You need to know | what is a leukotriene?'. Montelukast is a leukotriene inhibitor, but despite my nursing and chronic illness background, I have never tried to understand what this means. This knowledge isn't necessary for the medication to work; however, it is a reminder of the complexity of the work within the body. 'Air from trees may include | your child' conjures one of the major triggers for asthma: air pollution.[6] Asthma is also an inherited condition, a shared chaos.[7] The breathless, run-on lines that follow are seemingly playful at first, yet they speak to chronic illness as taking something from us by introducing the modality of 'might'. With chronic illness, the future is uncertain – we might not be able to take air, food, or drink, all the activities of daily living that others take for granted.

'If you are taking
or have recently taken
or might take food and drink
with or without food'

Modal verbs continue in the next lines with 'may' and 'should' simultaneously, reminding the chronic illness patient that they do not have bodily autonomy and that the illness and the medication come with their own rules. Having an illness involves numerous checks, annual asthma reviews, peak flow diaries, and repeat prescription monitoring. Why not check with your food for advice as well?

As a teenager, I rebelled against the idea of needing to take medication for life, 'If you stop, continue | taking this all.' I stopped my steroid and rescue inhalers despite medical advice to the contrary. This is common: 'Compliance with prescribed pulmonary medication may be as low as 30% in general practice.'[8] It was less than a week before I crawled back into the routine of using an inhaler as life support. I continued and, in doing so, reverted from breathless, wheezy chaos into a stable, angry teen.

Asthma and Lung UK states, 'The UK has the worst death rate for lung conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) than anywhere else in Western Europe.'[9] Asthma can be a severe and disabling condition, as contained in the words, 'Not everybody thought | you may be serious.' Moving on

[6] Angelica I Tiotiu and others, 1mpact of Air Pollution on Asthma Outcomes'. *International journal of environmental research and public health,* 17.6212 (27 August 2020), doi:10.3390/ijerph17176212

[7] Mahdi Bijanzadeh, Mahesh Padukudru and Ramachandra Nallur. 'An understanding of the genetic basis of asthma', *The Indian journal of medical research,* 134.2 (2011): p.149-61 <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/understanding-genetic-basis-asthma/docview/2258255629/se-2> [Accessed 11 June 2024].

[8] Katie M Buston, Stuart F Wood. 'Non-compliance amongst adolescents with asthma: listening to what they tell us about self-management', *Family Practice*, 17.2 (April 2000), p.134–138, doi.org:10.1093/fampra/17.2.134.

[9] Asthma and Lung UK. 'Lung conditions kill more people in the UK than anywhere else in western Europe.' (28 February 2022) <https:||www.asthmaandlung.org.uk|media|press-releases|lung-conditions-kill-more-people-uk-anywhere-western-europe> [Accessed 29 January 2024].

from the serious nature of living with asthma then, the final lines draw on the chance to dream of, 'The other side'; a quest of learning to live with asthma, 'searching for alternative ways of being ill.'[10] A quest also to learn to live within the fragmentation of the line and the lyric rather than the confined structure of the sentence.

In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur Frank describes three narratives of illness stories as a way out of the narrative wreckage that illness creates in our lives. Narrative wreckage is the 'damage that illness has done to the ill person's sense of where she is in life, and where she may be going.'[11] There is the restitution narrative in which the sick person gets better; however, this is not an option available to those with chronic illness. By definition, a chronic illness is one for which there is currently no cure and is, therefore, often managed with lifelong medication.[12] The alternative narratives are chaos and quest. Chaos is concerned only with the present; it is turmoil or the sudden onset and recurrence of an illness. Quest is the narrative of learning to live with an illness and its treatment towards an uncertain future.

While living in the chaos narrative, 'stories are chaotic in their absence of narrative order.'[13] In *Patient Poets*, Marilyn McEntyre states, 'As a way of articulating and communicating the lived experience of illness or disability, poetry opens a very different window from narrative, emphasizing in its singular way discontinuity, surprise, and the uneasy relationship between words and the life of the body.'[14] Poetry is the best place to emerge from narrative wreckage and give voice to chaotic stories, as poems are by their nature fragmented and often non-narrative. In 2021-2022, over one billion prescriptions were issued in the UK.[15] In England, we must pay for prescriptions, although some conditions are exempt – it can feel like a raffle as to whether you have the right conditions. Being prescribed medication can feel like a roulette – will it help? Will it cause side effects? How long will it take to work? It can feel scary and disempowering. Berkeley and Murphy stated that 'Patients must be allowed to speak and be heard in their own voices.[16] This idea of centring the patient's voice builds upon the work of Roy Porter, who stated that 'It

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[10] Arthur Frank. The *Wounded Storyteller Body, Illness and Ethics 2nd Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p.117.
[11] Ibid, p.53
[12] The Kings Fund. '*Long-term conditions and multi-morbidity*' [Online] <https:||www.kingsfund.org.uk|projects|time-think-differently|trends-disease-and-disability-long-term-conditions-multi-morbidity#:~:text=Long%2Dterm%20conditions%20or%20chronic,pulmonary%20disease%2C%20arthritis%20and%20hypertension> [accessed 8 January 2024]

[13] Arthur Frank. The *Wounded Storyteller Body, Illness and Ethics 2nd Edition,* p.97
[14] Marilyn Chandler McEntyre. *Patient Poets. Illness from Inside Out* (San Francisco: Medical Humanities Press, 2012) p.1.
[15] Matej Mikulic. '*Number of prescription items dispensed in pharmacies in England from 2006/07 to 2022/23 (in millions)*' *Statista* <https:||www.statista.com|statistics|418091|prescription-items-dispensed-in-england> [Accessed 29 January 2024].
[16] Franz Berkeley and John W Murphy. 'Reconsidering the role of language in medicine', *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine,* 13.5 (2018) doi.org/10.1186/s13010-018-0058-z.

takes two to make a medical encounter – the sick person as well as the doctor.'[17] However, there is still work to do in this area as programs such as the Expert Patient Programme are still met with resistance by clinicians and have been criticised as perpetuating the medical model[18].

Frank states that 'Post-modern times both produces the wreckage and provides the resources for the reclaiming.'[19] This poem is my small act of reclaiming an aspect of my medical treatment through erasure.

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[17] Roy Porter. 'The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from Below', *Theory and Society,* 14 (1985), p.175.
[18] Patricia M Wilson, Sally Kendall, and Fiona Brooks. 'The Expert Patients Programme: a paradox of patient empowerment and medical dominance', *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 15 (2007) p.426-438. doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2524.2007.00701.x.
[19] Arthur Frank. The *Wounded Storyteller Body, Illness and Ethics 2nd Edition,* p.69

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Section 2: Taking inspiration

This section contains a selection of reflections on postgraduate research activities at the University of Exeter, 2023-4

The Inaugural Ewha-Exeter Graduate Symposium

Hyunji Choi, Jingjing Cao, Teddy Seoung Woo Choi, and YooJoung Nam (University of Exeter, UK + Ewha, Korea) [1]

The first online Ewha-Exeter Graduate Symposium, co-hosted by the English departments of Ewha Womans University and University of Exeter,[2] took place on the 23rd-24th of May 2024. This year's theme was 'Rethinking Communities', as the contemporary political and research landscape prompts scrutiny of the multi-layered meanings of being together, sharing beliefs and identities, issues of kinship, and feelings of connectedness. The symposium invited lively discussions on the notion of community in relation to literary works, theories, and storytelling. This decision was made because literature offers a rich platform for comprehending the evolving significance of community; not only exploring specific cultural contexts and historical experiences, but also extending our understanding beyond geographical boundaries. Rooted in the literary field, the symposium aimed to launch an interdisciplinary exploration, welcoming creative writing, social sciences, and cultural studies students as well.

Keynote speaker, Professor Rita Felski, with her speech, 'On Resonance', drew our attention to the absence of community, and to the failure to resonate with the self, others, and setting, especially in academia, within two exemplary novels, John Williams' *Stoner* (1965) and Dionne Brand's *Theory* (2019). The objective of reflecting on resonance is to attach this idea to literature and theory without pitting them against each other. Resonance charts a dynamic relation of individuals to the world, which is pre-cognitive rather than pre-social, without consuming it as a resource. With the theory of resonance and its necessity in everyday life, Felski moved on to the novels, revealing the dilemma of protagonists (with different racial, social, and gender identities), who are downplayed, isolated, alienated, estranged, impersonalised, and disconnected in academic life. The collisions between critical theory and reality in the irreconcilably hostile and alien environment of academic institutions prompts us to think of the failings of universities, as a community, to offer connections and guidance to resonance.

After the keynote speech, the symposium officially began. The two-day online symposium featured insightful presentations that explored how literature and folklore influence and reflect our understanding of community, encompassing both human and non-human elements. In the first session, titled 'Navigating Gender Identities', two presenters from Ewha Womans University showed literary analysis of gender identities and alternative communities. First, Sarah Lee, in her presentation 'Imagining a Crip Utopia in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*', showed how the

[1] This report was collaboratively written by the symposium committee members to commemorate the inaugural event and to preserve the presenters' valuable contributions. Authors' names are in alphabetical order.

[2] Ewha Womans University and University of Exeter are shortened to Ewha and Exeter respectively in the following text when appearing in brackets.

dystopian imagination of Butler paves the way for a new insight into the imaginary condition of hyper-empathy, especially through the lens of crip theory. Though previously deemed as disability, hyper-empathetic characters build a crip utopia where disabled people become central to ecological thriving.

With a similar focus, the second presenter, Seo Hyun Lee gave her speech, titled '"His life, as inconceivable as it is, is still a life": Conceiving Inconceivable Queercrip Lives in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life.*' Reading the provocative novel, Seo Hyun unveiled how the protagonist Jude, with his queercrip identity, shows alternative models of relationships that stem from, and are inextricable from, a crip understanding of disability.

The second session, 'Reimagining Communities', on the 24th of May, began with Stephanie Hirtenstein's (Exeter) 'Rewolfing Our Imagination,' which delved into the cultural and symbolic representations of wolves in folklore and literature as reflections of human fears and societal attitudes towards the 'other'. Drawing from a range of sources, including classical and contemporary literature, like Charles Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697) and Sarah Hall's *The Wolf Border* (2015), Hirtenstein explored how these narratives contribute to the persecution and misunderstanding of wolves, paralleling their societal exclusion. By re-examining these stories through the lens of extinction studies and concepts like Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-animal', the presentation proposed a shift of perspective towards viewing humans and animals as part of a cooperative community. This reimagination aims to recognize the interconnectedness and mutual dependencies of all community members, advocating for a more inclusive and integrated approach to human-nonhuman relations.

The next presentation by Se Young Kim (Ewha), titled 'The Power of Inclusive Literature', emphasised the significant role that literature plays in shaping perceptions of disability, whilst showcasing how inclusive narratives are crucial in literature for understanding and reflecting on disability. Kim argued that inclusive literature, which involves narratives that represent diverse abilities, fosters a deeper understanding and integration of people with disabilities into the community. By engaging with texts such as R. J. Palacio's *Wonder* (2012), readers are encouraged to reflect on their perceptions of physical differences and disabilities. Literature which represents disability in this way not only promotes narrative reflection on and imaginative identification with characters who have different physical experiences, but also balances the assessment of strengths and weaknesses, thereby enhancing empathy and community inclusivity.

The last presentation was delivered by Pankhuri Singh (Exeter), titled 'Reimagining the Bard: A Journey through Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespeare's Trilogy'. Singh focused on the Indian film adaptations of Shakespeare, leading us to think about the significance of community identities and locality transculturally, in recharacterization and storytelling. This presentation closely looked at one of the trilogy adaptations, *Maqbool* (2003), which is indebted to *Macbeth* (1623), to reveal a

successful and creative reworking of a Shakespearean classic into Indian cinematic context. The director, Vishal Bhardwaj, indigenised the Shakespearean medieval setting into modern day India, rewrote the royal and regal characters of Shakespeare's plays into Indian households, and connected with the audience by using familiar props with cultural meanings. To find parallels between Indian and non-Anglophone adaptations, Singh's contribution bridges the gap between performance studies of Shakespeare's adaptations and modern transcultural settings.

The third session was composed of interdisciplinary works, as suggested in the title, 'Communities as Meshes'. First, bringing in a new theoretical perspective, Abdul Ghani Amin (Exeter) focused on Afghan diasporic communities and their efforts in peacebuilding in his presentation, 'Diasporas and Homeland Peacebuilding: Explaining the Influence of the Afghan Diaspora in the Peacebuilding Process in Afghanistan'. Using a constructivist philosophical framework and qualitative methods, Amin investigated the important role of the Afghan diaspora as a non-traditional factor in peacebuilding from 2001, in both local and international contexts. Amin considered the way that their influence has been acquired and extended in relation to their networks and cultural capabilities as well as social structures.

Next, reminding us of the power of food, Tomi Adesina's 'Community: What Has Food Got to Do with It?' investigated how food could be a source of connection, and generate new communities. Adesina's presentation focused on two films, *Mother of George* (2014) by Andrew Dosunmu and *Past Lives* (2023) by Celine Song, to demonstrate her argument of food as a source of togetherness for diasporas. With a close reading of the two films, Adesina portrayed how food induces a sense of belonging for diasporas and becomes a language entailing love and care.

Last, but not least, Zoe James's 'What Do Connection and Community Have to Do with Climate Change?' explored the interrelationship between nature, humans, and the earth, and revealed the significance of exploring this connection. Introducing Caroline Hickman, Kate Raworth, Helen Macdonald, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and Miles Irving, James examined the various principles and methods of forming relationships with the world. By interweaving the topic with her personal experience as a creative writer and a farmer, James encouraged the audience to reconsider the role of humans living in the 21st century, the balance between intimate bonds with humans and the world, as well as its connection with hyper-objects.

Together, all the presentations provided a compelling examination of how literature serves as a mirror and a mould for the communities we aspire to build, emphasising inclusivity and the essential continuity between human and non-human worlds.

The First Ewha-Exeter Graduate Symposium closed with engaging discussions about different ways to address pressing issues in contemporary communities

through the lens of literature and beyond. Each presenter provided a specific perspective, negotiating around gender, race, ability and disability, nature, environment, animals, climate change, food, immigrants, diaspora, and transmedia. This online event brought together graduate students with a shared interest in, and valuable contributions to, the possibilities of rethinking communities. We reflected on the idea of resonance, aiming toward building connections, extending beyond boundaries, and communicating perspectives.

This inaugural symposium was made possible by the English Departments of Ewha Womans University and the University of Exeter, sponsored by Ewha Frontier 10-10 Project Team, Ewha Department of English BK21 Project Team, and Institute of English and American Studies. It included a collaborative effort between graduate students from both institutions and was nurtured by solid support and guidance from Professor Boosung Kim (Ewha) and Professor Kate Hext (Exeter). The student organizing committee board comprises Hyunji Choi (Ewha), Jingjing Cao (Exeter), Teddy Seoung Woo Choi (Exeter), and YooJoung Nam (Ewha) (names appear in alphabetical order). This report is dedicated to our presenters, keynote speaker, organizers, and audience. With heartfelt appreciation and anticipation, we hope to meet you next year!

Muse and Place: Touching the God

Philippa Johnson, University of Exeter, UK

While the importance of an inspirational element is acknowledged by many in their creative writing, whether it be an item, a concept, a person – whatever it may be – there can be a tendency towards regarding the relationship with such a muse as intimate, and therefore possibly beyond the reach of honest admission. The muse becomes a concept, something ethereal, something distant to all but the writer: writer becomes hierophant, priest, ushers the reader through a complex maze of ritual language or bluffs before allowing passage into the sanctum. Perhaps we can all think of writers for whom language becomes ritualised, the lexis almost undecipherable in the desire to reinforce the inspiration as super-natural: by way of this, there is equally a tacit establishment of the writer as privileged being, mediator between the earthly reader and the divine source.

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Orkney. May I talk toes? Specifically, toes touching sand. Okay, such pale sand that *white, pale gold, ash* – none of these convey the colour: the closest I can get is the colour of my daughter's hair when she was barely a day old, when the fineness is almost transparency and yet the most utterly real tint in the universe at that moment of perception. Words will never quite carry the vision, but we keep the faith, keep trying. Back to the sand… the almost-pink quartz and creamy shell fragments lodge in the tiny creases between toe-flesh and nail, between the sole's skin whorls, weld themselves without heat into the dint below my ankle-bone: and despite a careful towelling down, and the sand being so dry, some comes all the way back to Somerset with me in the corners of jeans pockets, or walking shoe treads.

But it was not just the sensational paleness of the sand, or the way it was comprised of limpet-beads and mussel-shell specks: it was the way it hid the grass spikes. Having been lulled into dreamy thankfulness for a warm, still lagoon of an afternoon, the torture – uncalled-for, I felt – of jabs into the soft arches of my feet or the tender skin between my toes brought back fear (Have I been stung?) and childish anger (Why is the beach doing this to me?) that made me fully awake once more.

Those beautiful shell-slivers, Neptune-blue and naiad-silver, were sharper than I had admitted to myself; but the arc in which they were placed by the tide made me ache to try to capture it in its beauty, perfection, with its seaside art gallery sense of presence and poise. The perfect blue of the still ocean; the perfect wobble of light in the shallow waters; the perfect angle of the sunlight that painted pristine mauve shadows behind each dog whelk or razor shell.

And the smell of the caravan afterwards: the knowledge of the effect of turning on the car's engine on the perfection I had been gifted…

***

I am writing about bogs – those increasingly rare patches of waterlogged, acidic landscapes comprised of compressed sphagnum and pressed heather – and the women found deposited in them across Northern Europe, mainly during the Iron Age.

These bogs have been regarded as wastelands requiring 'improvement', meaning drainage, desiccation and death, or places inhabited by evil or mischievous spirits such as will-o'-the-wisps, beings like Grendel's Mother, the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*: only recently have we started to recognise their significance in terms of ecology and carbon-storage. Because these places were already steeped in folklore and mysticism, I felt that if I was going to write about them, I needed to meet them for myself.

So I sat, in one of those folding camping chairs one drags out of a spidery corner of the garage, and stared at a tiny remaining half-acre of bog in the heart of the Somerset Levels. Nothing spoke to me. I was uncomfortably aware of the size of me by comparison with the tiny bubbles and moss-branch-scales. I watched – saw the reflection of grass-blades piercing the surface of the tiny pockets of water dangled between reed stems, and then saw the light-bent, brown-stained origin of that leaf and its growth point below the surface. I got no marsh-stench such as the hobbits talk about in *The Return of the King*: I heard a helicopter looping the stolid delta again and again, and felt an irrationally acute vindictiveness towards such a mechanical invasion of the airspace.

And I stood on the board-walk at Forsinard in the Flow Country, north-west of Inverness, and stared at the bogbean's arrowhead leaves and bog-cotton, at the small black lizards basking on the dark resin post-tops, at the linked pools that lay around me looking for all their worth like a slice of a giant, mossy lung, the bronchioles filled with blue-reflecting tea-stained water. The air ruffling the larger pools. The miniature pink flowers, gentian-blue milk-worts, the orange of the sundew sugar-sweet lures. The plovers' calls in watery swoops.

And I walked across Dartmoor to try to reach Cranmere Pool, only to be defeated by the promise of wet socks and the fear of losing a walking-boot or my watch or phone: I pretended to be satisfied with seeing it on the near horizon, but heard my own interna mockery of my faint-heartedness. Two minutes later, the ground shook to a controlled explosion by the MOD of some form of undesired ordnance. I could still feel the remembrance of the compression wave in my diaphragm after the five mile walk back to the car.

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Touching my muse meant sometimes feeling like an idiot, standing in the cold and wearing three hats, or the awareness of someone watching while I try to reverently block out everything else and paddle in a peaty stream. Often, the divine stayed

hidden quite thoroughly, and joy was only encountered once my fingers were wrapped around a mug of hot tea *after* the attempted encounter.
But here, in the slur of memory, here's the thumbprint of the Muse.

A Writer's Field Notes from Orkney

Emily Spicer, University of Exeter, UK

The ferry from Scrabster takes ninety minutes to reach the little fishing town of Stromness on the southern tip of Orkney's Mainland. The churning waters between these modest ports is an ancient route. For thousands of years boats have made this journey, past the towering red cliffs of Hoy, the second biggest island in the Orkney archipelago. Hoy is a mythical looking place and largely uninhabited. From the sea, its north-western edge is impenetrable. Dark little caves pockmark the rock; hills fall away behind the sheerness of sandstone. I try to take a good photograph, but the camera on my iPhone fails to see what the eye does. The pictures are dull, uninspiring, completely at odds with the colour and scale of what is passing on the ferry's starboard side. I put my phone in my pocket and try instead to commit the scene to memory.

I am to stay on Orkney's Mainland for ten days. It is late June. Temperatures are in the mid-teens. The solstice has just passed, and the nights never quite arrive. I am here to research the island for a novel am I writing, hoping to leave with a better understanding of the environment and prehistory of this northerly place. My aim is to write a story in which Neolithic life reverberates into our present. What better place to come? Scratch Orkney, I have heard it said, and it bleeds archaeology.

Orkney's human past is surprisingly deep. There is evidence of human activity here dating back to 11,000BC, just as Scotland was emerging from the Ice Age. For Neolithic archaeology, these islands are almost unparalleled in Europe. Dwellings, burial chambers, stones circles and apparent temple complexes attest to a society with a sophisticated world view. 4,5000 years ago, a stone complex was constructed near the Mainland's west coast. Now known as Skara Brae, this village it is so well preserved that one can still walk inside the houses, see the beds, the hearths, the shelves, all skilfully constructed from stone. This village was inhabited for nearly 400 years before it was abandoned and only a tiny section has been excavated. The rest lies tantalisingly close, just below the feet of the cattle in the next field.

Six miles from Skara Brae lies the Ness of Brodgar, a finger of land that divides two lochs. This is what I have travelled from London to see. The structures under excavation here were discovered by accident in 2003, when the owner of a nearby house started to modify his garden. It was clearly a site of great importance. The substantial buildings attracted huge numbers of people and the remains of gargantuan feasts have been unearthed. Before Stonehenge, this was the place to meet, a centre of great importance. Less than a mile to the northeast lies a large stone circle known as the Ring of Brodgar.
Since its discovery, the same team have visited the site for six weeks every summer, to unearth the unfathomable buildings hidden beneath the soil. The work is directed by Nick Card of the University of the Highlands and Islands. This is the final year of those excavations. There is so much more to unearth here, but that job will be left for

future generations and better technologies. I have volunteered, along with dozens of others, for this opening week of the last season. The first job is to remove the hundreds of tyres that hold down the protective tarpaulins. As the site is uncovered, the footprints of buildings emerge. Everyone is full of energy, excited.

On Tuesday, while the tyre removal continues, I sneak away to visit Skara Brae and its museum. When I return to the Ness I am handed a trowel. The remaining volunteers have been asked to clean the edges of the trenches in preparation for the real archaeological work. This means removing the loose soil and weeds that have built up over the past year. I work alongside two amateur enthusiasts who have come back for the dig's final season. The work is sociable. The man next to me tells me his brother has recently passed away. Coming back to the Ness is a welcome distraction, he says, a chance to start healing.

After twenty minutes or so, I pull a dandelion from the edge of a trench and find a domed stone with sharp edges. I recognise it as something I have seen in the museum at Skara Brae and go in search of a professional. 'Is this something?' I ask. He takes it from me and happily replies that it is. It is indeed a Skaill knife, a sandstone tool used for scraping hides and cutting meat. Flint does the job better, but it is a rare material on these islands. He tells me to bag it up and label it.

By Thursday I am the only volunteer left. Chris, a seasoned member of the archaeology team, invites me to join him as he works inside one of the Neolithic buildings. This is what I have been hoping for, the chance to see these structures close-up, to get the dirt of the Neolithic under my fingernails. Chris is a tall, softly spoken Orcadian with curly hair and a floppy canvas hat. His knowledge of these islands and their archaeology is intimate and I'm lucky he has allowed me to be involved. I am not, after all, a trained archaeologist.

I'm given a small trowel, narrow and pointed like an artist's palette knife, and instructions on how to remove the top millimetre of mud from the floor of a floor dating to 3100 BC. In its heyday this structure measured 15 metres long and 10 metres wide. It underwent a great deal of remodelling in its lifetime, but the outline I can see, the building's earliest iteration, consists of two chambers, each with a hearth and its own entrance. The walls were nearly two metres thick and held up a tiled roof. It was decorated inside with incised stone and such carvings were often painted in black, white and ochre tones.

As we carefully remove a fine layer of grey clay, beautiful red and black speckles appear in the mud. Chris tells me this is the ash from peat fires, scraped from the hearth, just a metre or so away. This is the stuff I'm interested in, the detritus of daily life, the cold remains of the heat and light that once warmed these walls and lit up faces.
The work is slow but rewarding. We find pebbles brought here from the beach, pieces of pumice and tiny fragments of burnt animal bone – evidence of daily human actions, of comings and goings. But this place also witnessed tragedy. In 2009, the

fragile remains of a new born child were found in the corner, buried against the wall. Strangely, its skull has never been found.

On Friday the weather worsens, and the dig is rained off. I go instead to Maeshowe, a Neolithic chambered cairn. Cairns are tombs built from stone and often covered in earth. They form distinctive mounds in the landscape. The land around Stonehenge is peppered with them. This is a particularly impressive one, both in terms of its size and preservation, despite interference from marauding Vikings and less than careful Victorians.

On Sunday, my last day on Orkney, Chris invites me to meet a friend of his who works at a local museum. When I arrive, he is sitting over a peat fire in the living room of the museum's farm house, which was last occupied in the 1960s. The hearth is positioned in the middle of the floor. The sweet-smelling smoke wends up through openings in the roof. There is a stone box bed in this same room. It strikes me that the layout is not much different from the homes at Skara Brae. Chris has brought a flask of coffee and oak cakes. His friend joins us and recounts, in cheerful Orcadian tones, stories of the people his parents and grandparents knew, the gossip and scandals of island life. Perhaps this is how the inhabitants of Neolithic Orkney whiled away their evenings, by a smoky peat fire, exchanging the anecdotes of past generations.

Next, Chris takes me to the Brough of Birsay, the remains of an Iron Age tower that can be reached on foot at low tide. The coastline here is a cross section of the past. We look for groatie buckies (the Orcadian word for cowrie shells), considered lucky by the islanders. The crumbling earth above the beach is full of charred bones and midden, a settlement unexcavated and now brought to the sea by erosion. We don't find any groatie buckies, but there are a great many sandstone rocks here, covered in cross-cross patterns eerily similar to the incised stones at the Ness of Brodgar. To me the marks are identical, but Chris knows better. He has a forensic eye and can tell the difference between the work of nature and the results of busy human hands. He suggests that the Neolithic artists were inspired by these natural motifs.

I follow Chris to our last stop, a hill overlooking the Ness. The isthmus stretches away to the south west. It's ten o'clock at night and the sky is pastel blue. All we can hear is the peeping of the red beaked oystercatchers. In the distance, mauve and trimmed with long clouds, stand the hills of Hoy. From here, the island looks like the afterlife, an ancestral land, close, but out of reach.

This spot too is lumpen with Neolithic archaeology. There's another extensive site under our feet, Chris says, one that could have rivalled the complex just below us on the Ness. He loves it here, tells me that he would like his ashes scattered on this hill. I can understand why an Orcadian would feel this way, especially an archaeologist. This is a strange and beautiful place. It feels like a gateway to some other plane, some other way of life. Perhaps our ancestors thought so too.

Texts *in Absentia* | A Correspondence

Rebecca Edgerley, University of Exeter, UK

This letter-poem was inspired by the first meeting of Texts *in Absentia*, a nascent postgraduate research group, which convened on 11 February 2024 at Streatham Campus, University of Exeter. We comprised 13 postgraduate researchers, from across History, Classics and Ancient History, English Literature, Creative Writing, Arab and Islamic Studies, and Sociology. We each shared our encounters with absence; speaking about the methodological, ethical, and moral challenges associated with absent texts and sources, as well as the feelings – frustration, surprise, excitement, confusion – that absences can generate.

What follows is my creative response to our first meeting and group discussion; a letter-poem, or poem-letter, which I hope will be the first of many future correspondences with this research theme.

Dear Text *in Absentia*,

Where are you? I am here, inked on page.

Where are you? Perhaps scorched through wood ash or etched in kicked stone embers.

Maybe you are in the sneeze, the cough, the shuffle in the background, or
the awkward pause

on a scratched tape.

Are you in the pose, the poise, or the prayer?
Are you the family recipe baked in my cake?

Where are you? Perhaps a bundle of letters in a cellar waiting.
Maybe you are a broken url.
Maybe you are lost at sea or lost in translation.
Maybe you are “not for minuting” or “off the record” or –

Restricted Access!
Access Denied!

(some say it is safer to have you under house arrest, out of reach, than erase you completely).

Maybe you have simply become “time out of mind”...

Your message could be:
Lost
Looted
Buried
Burned
Borrowed
Missing
Misplaced
Displaced
Indecipherable
Illegible
Unobtainable
Unreportable
Unpresentable
Damaged
Destroyed
Corroded
Corrupted
Composted
Frayed
Strayed.

I try to describe your form:
A time-slip
A slip-in-time
A missed--stitch

A   gap

A leak
A blur
A fuzz
A leak
A blur
A leak

A blank –

An intrigue…
An anomaly!

You are where tentative conjecture
and playful imagination conjure
alternative histories and *Narration Spéculative*.

You are a sunken shipwreck where

scholarly historiography and historical fiction
collide and swirl into
a
hissing
vortex
of voices
some wanting to be heard
others warding us away.

You are the stuff we want to remember.
You are the stuff we want to forget.

We amass so we can get *to* power.

We delete so we can remain *in* power.

Collecting conserving restoring preserving.
Filing files
Hoarding hoards
Docking documents.

We are what we keep; we keep what we are.[1]

Text *in Absentia*:
We need you
We feed you
We fear you.

For every treasured text
and honoured object
and prized pixel pickled for posterity on screen,
you birth a spectre to haunt the archives.

Meanwhile, the resident skeletons – the books, the blogs, the bits and bobs, the so-called index of what was you – jostle for the warmth of their stripped flesh.

Well, "I ain't 'fraid of no ghost"[2]

I have my ghost-busting tools.
I have my methodology.
I have my ethics approval.

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[1] Terry Cook, ''We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are': Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32:2 (2011), pp. 173–189, doi: 10.1080/00379816.2011.619688.
[2] Lyric from: Ray Parker Jr., 'Ghostbusters', from *Ghostbusters*: *Original Soundtrack Album*, (Arista, 1984).

And, to reassure you (and everyone else):
At the request of the survivors, the names have been changed.
Out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred.[3]
At the request of the academy, the experiment has become a scientific report.
Out of respect for rigour, the *mess of method* has been elided.[4]

Still, there you are.
Worm-holing research from the inside out and outside in.

But

by
exposing "you"
and
imposing "I"

What dis/empowering encounter am I convening between us?

For every gesture towards you, whose knowledges am I supposing and transposing?

How to *get to you?*
How to *catch you*?

Text *in Absentia*:
I need you
I feed you
I fear you.

I am a scavenger researcher
following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things[5]
in search of you.

I am pleating time to
pore
over
you.

I am quietly asking permission to hold
what remains

[3] Opening disclaimer from: *Fargo*, dir. by Joel Cohen (USA, 1996).
[4] For a discussion of how our methods do not just describe realities, but also create them, see John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (Routledge, 2004).
[5] José Esteban Muñoz, 'Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts', *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8:2 (1996), pp. 5–16 (p. 10), doi: 10.1080/07407709608571228.

of you
My closest *confidante*.

Critical reflection

I wrote this contribution because I did not feel able to capture the discussions of Texts *in Absentia* as a conventional academic paper. So far-reaching, varied, and personal were our reflections that committing the experience to print in a journal article felt somewhat antithetical to the group's thematic focus and the spirit within which it was conducted. However, I wanted to leave a trace of the intellectual and emotional labour of Texts *in Absentia*, in recognition of how the event has shaped my own research and hopefully the research of my peers. As one of the reviewers for this journal helpfully pointed out to me, the piece is really a love-letter-poem, an ode to texts *in absentia* and an expression of gratitude to that communion of postgraduate researchers in February 2024.

Apparent from the outset of our discussions was the many different types of absences that can arise. Some of us were embarking on treasure hunts for 'known unknowns' to track down lost or missing texts, hinted at by existing documents; the anticipated reply to a letter, an implied witness account. Others were working with archives and material that were inaccessible due to the ravages of time, such as weathered inscriptions and fragmented manuscripts. In the digital realm, broken urls and 'archived' websites also posed challenges for the researcher. We discussed how these known absences were complicated by the irregularities of record keeping across time and location, and the challenges around translation, reprints, and re-publications. We were also cognisant of circumstantial constraints that inhibit access to known, but inaccessible, material. This might be due to regulatory restrictions, political unsettlement, natural disaster, or our own time and resources as postgraduate researchers. All these factors can conspire to produce absences, which we must decide whether to account for or not in our work.

We agreed that absence elicits a certain excitement. It can ignite our creativity and imaginations. From absence we can weave whole narratives of what might have been and what still could be; what could be awaiting our discovery and what would change if we found it? However, in the context of researching texts *in absentia*, the group noted that with conjecture and speculation comes ethical and moral responsibility. To what extent is it acceptable, or helpful, to 'plug the gaps' and conjure an alternative past, present or future? Do those absences – the "vortex of voices" – consent to being heard, or do they want to remain absent and "off the record"? And then there are the familiar disciplinary bogeymen of academia with whom we must wrangle when defending our methodologies. When absence is invoked and subsequently filled, who draws the lines between historiography, history, historical fiction, and fantasy?

The fear of absence, too, was raised, a fear that has led to a – predominantly Western – preoccupation with "[c]ollecting conserving restoring preserving". As Terry Cook's footnoted quote in the letter-poem suggests, the archive functions as an index of what a culture or society values, which can be an unbridled force in perpetuating those values at the exclusion of others. And yet, paradoxically, the more we collect and commit to the archive, the louder the echoes for what has not been 'housed' resound around us. We might well ask, what happens to that which is outside the archive – the homeless, the marginalised, the vulnerable, and the disempowered? The stigma surrounding homelessness and vagrancy in western culture has been foregrounded in literature such as Hayes' *The Book of Trespass*[6] and Winn's *The Salt Path*[7]; both reference the Enclosure and Vagrancy Acts, which condemned those without fixed abode or apparent means to sustain themselves. The shame and mistrust that homelessness provokes in many western societies is, perhaps, indicative of how we are wary or dismissive – at worst, punitive – of waywardness and the unconventional more broadly. This is apparent in academia, from the 'housing' of disciplines to the conventions and expectations that institutional structures and their attendant memberships, funding, and publications demand. If you are homeless, to whom do you turn? Where do you belong?

It followed that we considered what methodologies might best afford access to those 'outside' the archive. How do we scope and explore this hinterland of lived experiences, with little by way of maps to guide us (save, perhaps, the obscure reference, or broken url!)? One of the group helpfully introduced us to 'scavenger methodology'– a phrase that Judith Halberstam employs to describe queer methodology, which 'uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from the traditional studies of human behaviour'. [8] Whilst our discussions did not agree on a definitive methodology for approaching texts *in absentia*, we did, I think, like the idea of being or becoming 'scavenger researchers', especially given the ways in which our combined research spanned several geographic locations, languages, times, and material. Like Alice down the rabbit hole, many of us ended up in the oddest of physical and virtual spaces!

For me, an unexpected turn in our discussions was how texts *in absentia* can also foreground and amplify our epistemological leanings as researchers. How we approach our research and what/who we choose to critique (or leave out) is inevitably shaped by the intertextual nature of what we read, watch, engage with, and the mosaic-like way we craft and build our research. The inclusion of particular 'schools' and 'canons' will naturally foreclose and exclude voices, unless we make the effort to attend to those exclusions. For my letter-poem I used snippets of found text from literature, song, and film. In part, this was because there are people who write, sing, and say it more elegantly than I can; ideas that deserved recognition for their

[6] Nick Hayes, *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).
[7] Raynor Winn, *The Salt Path* (Penguin, 2018).
[8] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998), p. 13.

inspiration and elegance. But these arguably distracting and disparate references across scholarly works and pop culture also highlight the unspoken stylism, even arbitrariness, of some (perhaps many!) of our decisions as researchers and scholars.

From the intertextual to the paratextual, to the extratextual, our research group considered how some absences relate to the ephemeral and fleeting, such as performances, oral accounts, and rituals. An obvious example is how films and books are encompassed by a range of paratextual promotional materials, or how a dramatic script indexes a beyond-textual live performance. Within epistolary works, for example, there is an implicit call for turn-taking, action, exchange; beyond the text on the page, the letter is also a kind of gift object that carries power, obligation, and anticipated acts of reciprocity.[9] And then there is memory, appealed to in epitaphs, obituaries, missing persons/animals/property posters – mediated through storytelling, prayer, telephone calls, instant messaging and a myriad of other acts. Questions were posed as to whether we place too much faith and authority in the 'main text' or even the written word. We suggested that, perhaps, tending to these textual overflows, spills, and leaks was an opportunity to explore and value these other 'texts', which might otherwise remain hidden, buried, or forgotten, along with the persons/creatures who once authored and embodied them.

The limitations of the textual, and what is written out of research, is something I keep circling back to in my own projects. The focus of my thesis is interdisciplinary practice and what role creative interventions play in shaping those practices within the university setting. Interdisciplinarity (and its close kin, multi-, cross- and transdisciplinarity) is a widely defined, debated, and contested concept, as well as a readily deployed approach *de rigueur* for addressing our most pressing global concerns.[10] But empirical studies on the day-to-day workings of interdisciplinarity are few and far between, their findings constrained to mainly social scientific reports based on ethnographic observation, peppered with select quotes from participant interviews or surveys.[11] The resulting insights and guidance are somewhat generic and lack-lustre, reiterating the need for fostering and promoting mutual respect, agreeing a common terminology, clearly articulating roles and division of labour etc. In other words, as Callard and Fitzgerald point out, there is a 'tendency, in writings about interdisciplinarity, to cleave to the terrain of ideas, disagreements, and knowledge claims – and, in so doing, to disavow the complex ripples, wrinkles, and patternings of affect that course through what is all-too-often assumed to be an

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[9] For a persuasive discussion of how letters can be thought about around 'the system of epistolary gift', see Liz Stanley, 'The Epistolary Gift, the Editorial Third-Party, Counter-Epistolaria: Rethinking the Epistolarium', *Life Writing* 8:2 (2011), pp.135-152, doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2011.559732.

[10] For a comprehensive overview of interdisciplinarity, see, for example: Julie Thompson Klein, *Beyond Interdisciplinarity: Boundary Work, Communication and Collaboration* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

[11] The paucity of empirical studies on interdisciplinarity has recently been remarked upon by Joshua Newman 'Promoting Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration: A Systematic Review, a Critical Literature Review, and a Pathway Forward', *Social Epistemology* (2023), pp. 1–17, doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2023.2172694.

unruffled plane of interdisciplinary interaction'.[12] How, then, to capture such ripples and wrinkles (sneezes and coughs) in social scientific writing? Indeed, as soon as we switch our attention to the transcription of the semi-structured interview – a staple research method of the social sciences (which I, myself, will be using) – so much is already lost. I was helpfully reminded at a recent conference that the word 'interview' can be traced back to the French verbal noun *s'entrevoir* – "to see each other".[13] It is somewhat curious, then, that so much interview data is analysed and interpreted based on a *written* transcript that, ostensibly, foregrounds the perspective of the interviewee(s). Notwithstanding how 'faithful' we might claim to be to our source material or 'raw' data, or our efforts to attend to our own researcher positionality, there is no escaping the fact that our 'view' is much diminished if we only privilege what is subsequently committed to writing.

Preoccupied as I am in capturing processes and experiences, I am using creative methods – collage, poetry, performance – not only to investigate how such techniques shape interdisciplinary practices, but also as a means of data collection and analysis. How I end up (re)presenting participants' (and my own) creative work and practice is still undecided, but the lines of enquiry woven by the Texts *in Absentia* research group already haunt my research. Challenging and reimagining what constitutes the index of experience, and how to document those experiences, is something I am increasingly interested in and disturbed by. The flesh/bone metaphors in the letter-poem are inspired by the work of Rebecca Schneider, who relates the material contents of the archive to 'bones' signifying the absences of once identifiable remains; '[h]ere in the archive, bones are given to speak the disappearance of flesh, and to script that flesh as disappearing' (arguably, much like an interview transcription).[14] But Schneider also expresses how, as we read the 'bones' of the archive, we invoke a 'flesh memory' – (re)situating the archival document as a 'performative act, and as site of performance', rather than disappearance.[15] On the one hand, I worry that the static form of my written thesis is in danger of obscuring 'the affective energy of the experience', which my proposed field work hopes to surface.[16] On the other hand, as my letter-poem admits, I fear those flesh memories. I fear that my research will spring a myriad of leaks; an outpouring of researcher and participant acts, effects and affects that I cannot hold.

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[12] Felicity Callard and Des Fitzgerald, *Rethinking Interdisciplinarity across the Social Sciences and Neurosciences* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), p. 126.

[13] John Charles Ryan and Francis Joy, 'Gifts from the Sentient Forest: Botanical Imagination and People-Tree Relations in Northern Finland', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Sustainability, Imagination and Aesthetics' (University of Surrey, 26-27 June 2024).

[14] Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains', *Performance Research* 6:2 (2001), pp. 100 – 108 (p. 104), doi: 10.1080/13528165.2001.10871792

[15] Schneider, 'Performance Remains', p. 105.

[16] Lynette Hunter, 'Being in-between: Performance Studies and Process for Sustaining Interdisciplinarity', *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 2:1 (2015), pp. 1 – 15 (p. 13), doi: 10.1080/23311983.2015.1124481.

Creative writing and poetic enquiry are among my strategies for holding, and caring for, complex discussions and debates.[17] Perhaps this is due to poetry's relationship with oral performance. Or because absences in poetry demand our attention, as they simultaneously create short-cuts to feelings, emotions, and experiences *and* induce us to make connections *out with* the words that are spoken or on the page. I confess that writing this contribution has been an openly self-serving endeavour, in that it has enabled me to make sense (or, at least, begin to make sense) of a deeply philosophical set of themes and how they might relate to, and trouble, my own research. However, it is also my hope that – notwithstanding what I have almost certainly omitted, mangled, or inadvertently ill-served from our discussions – there is a gesture of thanks inscribed in these few pages to those who were present at the first meeting of Texts *in Absentia*. And, a gesture inscribed to you – the many participants *in absentia* – who might feel compelled to respond.

Texts in Absentia are:
Hannah Cowdell
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Aymeric Lamy
Ruth Moore
Iona Ramsay
Ed Selkirk Ford
Charles Waddicor
Lisa Wojahn
Frederick Worthington
Alice Van Den Bosch
Chuanyou Zhou

[17] Before coming to the inevitable close, I would like to acknowledge the work of Laurel Richardson, who has significantly influenced my thinking about the role of poetry and drama in social scientific research, as well as the purposes of academic writing more broadly. In particular, see Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (Rutgers University Press, 1997).

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Gunnar Lundberg is an English Literature PhD student at the University of Minnesota. His research interests revolve around ecocriticism, modernism, travel and nature writing, and the environmental humanities. He has previously studied at the University of Glasgow and Franklin University Switzerland.

Ruth Moore (Editor-in-chief)
Ruth is a second-year PhD Creative Writing student from Oxford. Her research examines the ways in which contemporary children's authors are using time-slip fiction, particularly in relation to telling stories out of archival silence. The creative element of her PhD project is a middle grade children's novel which takes place on a troubled night at the National Maritime Museum in London. She also holds an MA in Applied Theatre from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and has worked in theatre and in project management in higher education and the voluntary sector prior to commencing her PhD.

YooJoung Nam (contributor)
YooJoung received her BA in English Literature and Humanities, Cultural Arts, and Media at Ewha Womans University, Korea, and is currently an MA student at the same university. Her research interest is in forms and the modes of reading in contemporary British novels.

Holly Peters (contributor)
Holly Peters is a Creative Writing PhD student at the University of Plymouth. Her research is occupied with poetry, exhibitions, and representations of the dead female body. She is interested in the (im)possibility of reclaiming marginalised voices from history and how poetry can work with and against archival documentation. In 2022, Holly completed her Creative Writing MA from the University of Exeter where she discovered her interest in the intersection between death studies, feminist theory, and poetry. When she's not thinking about death, she's probably looking for a dog-friendly coffee shop (mocha for Holly, pup cup for Dotty and Booby).

Abbie Pink (Deputy Editor)
Abbie joined the *Exclamat!on* journal as Deputy Editor, and she is in the second year of her PhD in English Literature at the University of Exeter. Her research considers the representation of future urban spaces as climate change, multispecies habitats in contemporary science fiction. More broadly, her research interests include ecocriticism, science fiction studies, urban literary studies, world literature, and new materialist theory.

Emily Spicer (Assistant Editor, contributor)
Emily is a PhD student in Creative Writing at the University of Exeter. In 2007 she was awarded a BA (Hons) in the History of Art from the University of Oxford. For nearly a decade she worked as an arts journalist, interviewing some of contemporary art's biggest

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Sue Watson (Assistant Editor)
Sue Watson is a part-time mature PGR in the Creative Writing Department at The University of Exeter. The creative element of her work is called, 'My Mother's Daughter' and her thesis looks at 'Life Writing for Mental Health Recovery After Attempted Filicide'.

Barbara Zboromyrska-Poliakov (contributor)
Barbara Zboromyrska Poliakova is a current postgraduate student working towards her MA in Creative Writing at Durham University. In 2022, she graduated with a BA in Classical Civilisation; later, taking a gap year off academia she discovered her deep interest for the combination of technology and art. Now, as part of her professional development she has recently completed a five hundred thousand words interactive novel, where she explores her creativity through the resources of the modern world. It is her firm belief that art is everpresent, ever-changing, and has limitless potential in all fields; we simply should never forget that art is, in its essence, the human behind it.

Xiao Zhan (Assistant Editor)
Xiao Zhan (Jaydon), a second-year PhD student specializing in Film by Practice at the University of Exeter. His practical expertise is matched by his academic rigor, as he delves into the interplay between film theory and practice to enhance the visual experience of audiences. His research encompasses film studies and documentary studies, with a primary focus on how to enhance the visual experience for audiences by combining film theory and practice, particularly in the integration of new digital technologies (such as VR panoramic technology and AI interactive technology) with traditional cinematic forms. He explores the role of technology in enhancing narrative capability, emphasizing the diversity and innovation in cinematic storytelling.